

GOSPEL LEADERSHIP



**Implementing The Gospel
In Our Lives
In Order To Ransom
Ourselves For Others**

DICKSON

Gospel Leadership

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SERVANTHOOD LEADERSHIP

On one occasion when Jesus was speaking to His disciples concerning leadership, He spoke of the leadership that is characteristic of those of the world. He said that those in the world lord and rule over their subjects. But when He turned to the leadership that would be characteristic among those who followed Him, He said that such leadership should not exist. This teaching of Jesus should alert us to the fact that there is something different between what Jesus considered leadership among His disciples and that which is practiced in the world. As disciples of Jesus, it is our task to discover Jesus' principle of leadership that should be characteristic among us. There are key texts in the New Testament that reveal Jesus' concept of leadership. The conclusion to Jesus' teachings on this subject, and the disciples' practice of such in their lives, is that true gospel leadership is based on living the gospel in service to others. It is a leadership that is born out of one's relationship to the needs of his or her brother and sister in Christ. Contrary to the leadership that is typical of the world in which we live, leadership among Christians is based on living the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

INTRODUCTION

We live in a world wherein interactive relationships have once again been restored. This new generation of believers no longer views the church as a passive audience centered around the activity of a few performing leaders who do their stage act on Sunday morning, and then fade away until the next hour of worship. This new generation of Christians is interested in action. They want to live the word of God. They want to participate in the lives of others. They want to make Jesus come alive in their lives in their communities. It is a generation of believers who no longer want to be passive Christians who are locked up in a church house on Sunday morning, sitting as passive spectators of a lecture that of-

ten does not apply to gospel living.

It is for this reason that leadership of the past is having a difficult time in relating to this new generation of disciples. The new generation is educated, schooled in universities, online with the Internet, and trained in practical applications of what they have learned. They want to follow leaders who are actively involved with them in the work. They want to be set free to participate, not to be dictated to by lords.

Wise leadership will recognize the desires of those who want to get involved. Wise leaders will respond to those who have responded to the heart of God. They want to free themselves to become a part of Jesus' functioning body. In order to

do this, they realize that they too must become example disciples of Jesus. They must view themselves as proactive disciples who are heavily involved in the lives of others.

It is often a challenge for existing leaders to follow the example of gospel leadership that is examined and explained in God's word. It is a challenge to raise up leadership that stays involved in the lives of others. Gospel leaders, however, must see themselves as participants in the community where they live. On a daily basis, they must ignite the flames of leadership before those with whom they have contact. In doing this, they will better understand who Jesus was, both through His actions and through His teaching. These leaders will begin to understand the nature of being moved by the gospel of the heart of God.

Jesus had just finished washing the feet of disciples who had walked with Him for over three years. He stood wiping His hands with a towel that contained the trail dirt of faithful men who had signed up with Him because of His teaching concerning a new order of community. He had stooped to their feet, washed and wiped every toe with a towel. After seeing what He did as the Son of God, we will never look at a towel the same. The towel would forever symbolize gospel leadership that would characterize the disciples of Jesus throughout the history of the church. True disciples of Jesus would be "disciples of the towel." These first disciples would be such because they had cast their lot with the "God of the towel."

The occasion when Jesus washed the disciples' feet was the last time He would sit with them in the solitude of an upper room. The disciples who were there were certainly startled by this most humble act on the part of Jesus. He, their Lord and Teacher, had washed their feet. He then concluded this discipleship class by stating, "*If you know these things, happy are you if you do them*" (Jn 13:17).

The disciples did not really understand what had just happened on this last night together with the One they had faithfully followed throughout Palestine for over three years. Nevertheless, Jesus laid the groundwork that would change their lives. In just a few days from this event, they would never be the same again. The One they accepted as their leader would humiliate Himself on the cross.

There was something about what Jesus had done that would bring happiness to man for ages to come, regardless of the wretched environment one might produce for himself. To know "these things" that would bring happiness has been the quest of all those who claim allegiance to Jesus. Those who sincerely accept the lordship of Jesus in their lives have found the happiness that surpasses all understanding. They have found the abundant life after which all men struggle. They have found happiness through service.

Jesus knew His disciples would often be victims of a hostile world that was not their making. They would struggle in environments that would be antagonistic toward those who submitted to His

leadership. The fact that they would be called after His name would mean hardship and persecution. Nevertheless, in the context of John 13 Jesus promised a happiness that would not be influenced by the environment in which the disciples would live. It would be a contentment that would transcend the present; it would bypass the struggles of hostile societies of every age in the history of the world after Him.

Discovering what Jesus lived and taught has been a struggle for many Christians. It has been such because we are too often influenced by the societies in which we live. We live in societies that are too often contrary to the very core nature of the gospel. And too often, these societies are hostile to the implementation of Jesus' actions on the occasion of the upper room when He washed the feet of His disciples.

We live in a world of kings and chiefs, bosses and chairmen. Even more subtle are philosophies and world views of an unbelieving world that has no understanding of Jesus' practical example of gospel living. And so, we are often victims of our surroundings. We are held captive by what the world thinks and does. Such influences steal away our source of happiness by distorting our understanding of what Jesus was illustrating by a humble act of washing the disciples' feet.

Our task is to discover "these things" Jesus said would bring happiness. To know "these things" is essential to the very nature of what Christianity is. The act itself—the Son of God on His knees

washing the feet of men—emphasizes the importance of what we must learn concerning what Jesus did. "For I have given you an example," Jesus affirmed, "that you should do as I have done to you" (Jn 13:15). Jesus guaranteed that in following His example, and in knowing "these things," we would possess that for which all people struggle—happiness.

Our struggle is complicated because of the world in which we live. This world is full of arrogance, pride, selfishness, and a host of other attitude sins that find their way into our behavior as disciples of Jesus. Our task, therefore, is first to learn Jesus' secret to happiness. In order to do this, we must struggle through our own attitudes that we have learned from the world until we start looking for dirty feet. It is then that we will discover the secret to true happiness.

What seemed so natural for Jesus to do is often that which is so difficult for us to follow. Did Jesus humble Himself so low in washing the disciples' feet that we cannot bow with Him? Our culture demands that we stand erect. But Jesus said to humble oneself at the feet of one's fellow man. It is at the feet of others that we find those who are living the gospel. Paul said, "Let this mind be in you that was also in Christ Jesus" (Ph 2:5). And then he revealed the journey of the Son of God from the form of God to being nailed to the cross (Ph 2:6-8). If we would be disciples of Jesus, we must take the same journey. True happiness does not come without a cross.

We seek to be Jesus' disciple. However, discipleship comes with a price.

That price is discovering and conquering our own insubmissive attitudes that hinder us from learning and doing the things that Jesus said would bring happiness. We too often construct a form of religious churchianity that is based on following a form of self-imposed religiosity. We perform our religious rites, pacify our consciences, and then go away from our assemblies feeling the emptiness of a religion we have created after our own desires. We know that something is not there that should be. Nevertheless, after we have performed our religion, we convince ourselves that God is satisfied, and thus, we go on our way. In all this we have missed the heart of God that was nailed to the cross outside Jerusalem.

We must see Jesus with a towel in His hand, humiliated as the Son of God on the cross. We have a throne in our lives on which we want to sit. But He carries a dirty towel. While we sit on our thrones and seek to be seated above our fellow man, Jesus is on His knees. We desire others to go to their knees for us while we sit on our thrones. However, finding Jesus means finding a towel and searching for dirty feet. Our culture dictates otherwise. Nevertheless, we must struggle against those things that would dictate our behavior to be anything that is different from the towel in Jesus' hand. We must learn to be servants. We must learn to be slaves. If we would be disciples of Jesus, we must first learn the duty and life of gospel living.

This scares many. To seek to serve,

or be a slave of the needs of others, is not the pattern of life most would want to follow. The world cannot understand this simply because this gospel pattern of life is not of this world. But if we discover "these things," the things of gospel servanthood, Jesus promises a contentment in life that is beyond understanding. That which we all desire is simply to be happy, but true happiness comes from servicing others as Jesus, through the gospel, served us. It is the discovery of the heart of God in the service of Jesus for our salvation that brings happiness.

We seek to be a servant for Jesus. As disciples of Jesus, we seek to lead others by being a slave to their needs. Throughout our study of several key texts of the New Testament that deal with the principle of gospel leadership, we discover that the Holy Spirit dealt with both the positive and negative principles of leadership. It is our task to discover those principles of leadership that will lead to happiness in service. Once "these things" about which Jesus spoke in John 13:17 are discovered, then one is on his or her way to the abundant life. Once we learn these things, people will follow our leadership for they will see Jesus in our behavior. This is gospel living. It is our proposition, therefore, to understand that Jesus affirmed that true Christian leadership is based on servanthood. We follow those who have a happy life. We follow those who seek to minister to our needs. Since happiness is in service, then true leadership is in discovering the gospel of Jesus who served us.

Chapter 1

EXAMPLE OF GOSPEL LEADERSHIP

The entire Bible is about the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. From prophecy to fulfillment, to the implementation in the lives of men, the Bible must first be understood as an inspired document about the gospel. The gospel is the motive for the transformation of man and his preparation for eternal dwelling. Our lives, and specifically, the leadership among us and before the world, must be squarely rooted in the gospel of Jesus Christ. This was the sole intent behind what Paul wrote to the Philippians in the following introductory statement that he would explain in Philippians 2:

*Only let your behavior be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of your affairs, that you stand fast in one spirit, with one mind **striving together for the faith of the gospel** (Ph 1:27).*

The gospel is the standard by which we measure and conduct our lives. In this way, gospel living can be witnessed by others (2 Pt 3:18). It is the objective of the disciple of Jesus Christ that his or her faith be solidly founded upon the gospel of Jesus' incarnation, atoning death, resurrection and ascension to the right hand of the Father. Living by this gospel example is the first qualification by which we determine all leaders among those who have obeyed the gospel (See 2 Th 1:6-9; 1 Pt 4:17).

With the statement of Philippians 1:27 as the background, Paul led his readers directly into the model of the gospel mission of Jesus. The gospel was revealed through the leadership journey of Jesus from before creation unto His ascension to the right hand of God. Therefore, in following Jesus, this gospel journey must be the road map of the people of God on earth until they too, go to be with the Father.

The text of Philippians 2:5-11 is the most condensed account in the Bible that portrays the entirety of the gospel leadership example of Jesus, whose mission it was to bring us, through the gospel, into fellowship with God. This is the pattern of leadership by which every leader among the sheep of God must live. The journey of Jesus' gospel leadership sets the standard by which we judge our own gospel living, as well as, the aspirations of any who would lead God's people into eternity.

A. Gospel leaders live the mind of Christ.

*“Let this mind be in you that was **also in Christ**” (Ph 2:5).* The gospel of Jesus is the foundation upon which all Christians must think and live. The “mind of Christ” must be the criteria that directs their lives. Anyone who would seek to lead those who live the “mind of Christ,” must also think and behave as Jesus in His gospel mission to the world. We must

identify gospel leaders, therefore, by their gospel living after the mind of Christ.

B. Gospel leaders transition to a position of servitude.

Jesus “*did not consider it robbery to be equal with God*” (Ph 2:6). He was before creation in existence in the form of God as spirit (Jn 4:24). Regardless of being as God in spirit, He was willing to give up that which He had in order to enact the gospel plan of salvation (Jn 1:1-14). He considered the spiritual needs of those He would redeem to be greater than the position He enjoyed as God in eternity. He was willing to sacrifice His former status for the status of being a humble gospel servant.

C. Gospel leaders change positions for the sake of those they serve.

Jesus “*made Himself of no reputation*” (Ph 2:7). His action to become a servant was on His part desired and voluntary (See 1 Tm 3:1). The motive for His change was based on a heart response to the deplorable condition of people in sin (Rm 5:8). Gospel leadership must be generated from the heart. As Jesus was the expression of the heart of God to all people, so gospel leadership among the disciples must be the voluntary expression of the heart of those who live the gospel. Gospel leadership reveals the willingness of those who cannot stand idly by and see their fellow brothers and sisters suffer alone. They are willing to make any necessary changes in their lives

in order to help others.

D. Gospel leaders identify with the needs of others.

Jesus took “*the form of a bondservant*” (Ph 2:7). Jesus led the people whom He served from the bottom up to the Father, rather than from a position of exaltation. Gospel leaders serve on their knees with a towel in their hands. They are bondservants who have given themselves to the service of others, as did Jesus who became such in order to service our problem of sin. Gospel leaders lose their power of choice to serve themselves in order to be the bondservants of those who cry out for their help.

E. Gospel leaders identify with those they serve.

Jesus was “*made in the likeness of men*” (Ph 2:7). In leading us to Him, Jesus had to first come to us as we are. He did not stand off at a distance and instruct through words of revelation alone. That was the program of preserving those of faith before the incarnation. But God knew that our salvation needed a personal touch. Jesus was thus the Word, and of necessity, the Word had to become the flesh of those whom He would redeem (Jn 1:14). After the example of Jesus, gospel leadership is about becoming all things to all men for the salvation of all (1 Co 9:22). Because gospel leaders identify with the sheep, the sheep identify with them. There is no separation between sheep and shepherd.

F. Gospel leaders willingly identify with others.

Through incarnation, Jesus was “*found in appearance as a man*” (Ph 2:8). He did not put on a show of superiority by remaining in spirit. After the incarnation, there were no chief seats reserved for Him. There were no special robes or a crown for His head in order to stand apart from those He served. In order to identify with those whom He would serve and save, He was willing to change His appearance from spirit to man. He was willing to undergo incarnation in order to bring good news to those to whom He presented Himself as their bondservant. Gospel leaders, likewise, follow Jesus’ example to change for the benefit of those whom they serve. They are not people who remain aloof from the people. As Jesus, they know how to condescend to people of low estate (See Lk 1:47,48).

G. Gospel leaders humble themselves in order to lift others up.

Jesus “*humbled Himself*” (Ph 2:8). Incarnation meant humbling Himself to the dust of the earth from which He had created man (Cl 1:16). He humbled Himself by exchanging spirit for flesh, and the form of God for the position of a bondservant. He exchanged omnipresence for the confinement of a body. Jesus was not presumptuous among men concerning who He knew He was. But He served us who sat at His table of honored guests (Lk 22:27). Gospel leaders are willing to

humble themselves to be as those they seek to lift up out of the mire of sin. There is no pretense or presumption about them in their relationship with the sheep of God whom they seek to encourage.

H. Gospel leaders lead by obedience.

Jesus “*became obedient unto death*” (Ph 2:8). Gospel leaders can be identified by those, as Jesus, who would say to the Father, “*Not My will, but Yours be done*” (Lk 22:42). As Jesus sought to do the will of the Father, so gospel leaders are identified as those who have a high regard for obedience to the word of God. Gospel leaders respect the authority of the word of the Father in all aspects of faith.

I. Gospel leaders bear the cross of the burdens of others.

Jesus not only was obedient unto death, He was obedient even to “*the death of the cross*” (Ph 2:8). He practiced what He preached in suffering a humiliating death for the sake of those for whom He serviced redemption. All Christians, but specifically gospel leaders, are called upon by Jesus to bear their own crosses (Lk 14:27) and be immersed in the burden of leadership (Mk 10:39). Jesus was willing to pay the ultimate price in order to accomplish the destiny for which He had volunteered. He calls on leaders who would lead His disciples to pay no less.

J. Gospel leaders allow only the Father to exalt them.

“Therefore, God also has highly exalted Him” (Ph 2:9). The Holy Spirit said in another context in reference to gospel leaders, “Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God so that He may exalt you at the proper time” (1 Pt 5:6). Exaltation is God’s business. The self-exalted have not yet learned the mind of Christ.

Jesus led the way to living the victorious life. Because He now reigns through His resurrection and ascension, those “*who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the one, Jesus Christ*” (Rm 5:17). We now reign in life because Jesus was exalted by the Father to reign. To all gospel leaders, the Holy Spirit would give the following encouragement: “*This is a faithful saying: For if we died*

with Him [Rm 6:3-6], we will also live with Him. If we suffer, we will also reign with Him” (2 Tm 2:11,12).

K. Gospel leaders lead people to reign with the Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus was seated at the right hand of God in order “*that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is the Lord, to the glory of God the Father*” (Ph 2:11). Gospel leaders lead people to Jesus for the glory of the Father. They do not lead people to themselves. No narcissist can ever be a leader of God’s people. Egotism has no place among the leaders of the body. As Jesus led the people to the glory of the Father, so those who would lead after His example will do likewise.

Chapter 2

CHALLENGES TO GOSPEL LEADERSHIP

One is not born a leader. One may be born with abilities that are valuable in making a good leader, but those abilities are useless unless they are channeled into effective leadership. One may have the advantage of being born into a family or social environment that encourages leadership. If one is gifted with leadership abilities, then his or her environment plays a very significant role in the development of leadership skills.

One is certainly not born a gospel leader, for only when one obeys the gospel does he or she understand how Jesus leads according to the gospel. One may have the gifts of leadership, but never un-

derstand the concept of gospel living that is typical of being a disciple of Jesus. Jesus came with a concept of leadership that is often very different from the leadership that is dictated by the world in which we live. For this reason, if one’s focus is on the leadership principles of the world, then he will struggle with living the gospel leadership of Christ. Because Jesus’ concept of leadership is so different from the world, man’s ignorance of the gospel produces fertile soil in which the leadership styles of the world can be sown in the leadership that is practiced among Christians. We feel that this is a specific challenge to leadership

among the disciples of Jesus, especially in those cultures of the world where some very ungodly leadership behavior is commonly practiced in society.

We are not saying that all leadership skills in the world are useless for the church. There are some beneficial principles of leadership in the business world that are helpful for good leadership among God's people. Any good leadership principle that is beneficial in encouraging people to excel in doing that which is good should be incorporated in our lives. However, we are saying that leadership skills that are not based on the fundamental principles of the gospel that Jesus both lived and taught will often lead the leader into an unfortunate relationship with other Christians.

When we are discussing gospel leadership, therefore, we must **first** consider the fundamental principles that should guide all leadership behavior among the people of God. These fundamental principles of leadership are discovered in the New Testament. All good leadership principles that are exercised among Christians must be based on fundamental biblical principles simply because God is the author of that which is best for our behavior in our relationships with one another.

We too often have a carnal desire to rule over our fellow man. In most cultures of the world, this feeling is encouraged from childhood. In competitive societies we are encouraged to excel above our fellow man. We are encouraged to "climb the ladder" of success, "go for the gold," and "make that score." We

pride ourselves in the business world by bragging about how many people we have **under** us.

But Jesus had something different for us to consider. He turned the world of leadership upside down, which is really He turned it right side up. If we can understand and apply His principle of leadership, He will turn our lives right side up. As a Christian, therefore, it is imperative to understand the fundamental principles upon which Jesus based the leadership that would exist among His disciples. He knew that His disciples were going into a world of "power leadership." He knew that the influence of the world would influence their thinking. Therefore, He established in their minds some very important fundamental principles of leadership that would "regulate" leadership among the disciples.

In either discussing or teaching leadership, there is a very important principle that is usually violated when plans are made to teach the subject of leadership. We have seen this principle violated almost without exception among those who are seeking to designate elders and deacons among the disciples. What we do is begin first with studies of the epistles. We search through the epistles in order to find those prooftexts that identify the qualifications of elders and deacons, or whoever. Prooftexts are often taken out of the context of the gospel, and then interpreted in the context of our social environment in which we live. But if we are to understand gospel leadership, we must first understand the principles of the gospel through Jesus,

and then move into the epistles.

Jesus first taught fundamental principles and attitudes of the heart. He prepared the hearts of the disciples before the Holy Spirit delivered the prooftexts in the epistles. In order for us to do the same, **we must first study the records of the gospel, and then, study the epistles.** We must first study *Matthew, Mark, Luke* and *John* **before** we get to Paul, John, and Peter. In other words, understanding the gospel through Jesus is necessary before we can understand Paul. Understanding the gospel is essential before we can understand the nature of leadership that existed in the examples of leadership we see in Acts and the epistles.

We must always remember that Jesus is the **cause**. He is the reason for the behavioral response of the early disciples. He is the reason for Acts and the epistles. When we understand who Jesus is, and what He did, then we are prepared to understand why Paul wrote what he wrote and behaved the way we read concerning the behavior of the early Christians.

In order to understand the leadership passages of Acts and the epistles, therefore, it is imperative to understand first the fundamental principles of discipleship that Jesus delivered to the disciples. If we reverse this order of teaching in our quest to understand leadership, then we will invariably read into the leadership passages of Acts and the epistles the leadership principles of the world. When we read words as “rule,” “submit,” and “oversee,” we will have a tendency to interpret such terms from the culture

of leadership in which we live. Therefore, we must caution ourselves on this point. We must first understand the fundamental principles of leadership about which Jesus spoke and practiced **before** we get to Acts and the epistles.

The primary texts that establish Jesus’ principles of leadership are Matthew 20:20-28 (Mk 10:35-45); Mark 9:33-35; Luke 22:24-27 and John 13:1-17. In order to understand Jesus’ fundamental principles of leadership, these are texts on which we must first focus. John 13 is an illustration of what Jesus wanted the disciples to know concerning His leadership behavior as their Lord and Teacher. His illustration of washing the disciples’ feet was embedded in the disciples’ minds, for they accepted Him as the Lord and Teacher. When Jesus, as God, stooped to the feet of those He created, and washed their feet, He set forth the primary principle of the gospel that would forever characterize the nature of those who would be His disciples. His example of leadership on this occasion is the foundation upon which all leadership among the disciples must be characterized. This was an example of gospel leadership.

In order to understand the principles of what Jesus wanted us to understand, we must in some way identify the background upon which His teachings were delivered. We believe that when we understand the culture or environment in which the disciples lived, we will discover that they did not live in a social environment that is much different than that in which we live today.

When it comes to leadership in the world, not much has changed throughout history. Few changes have been made simply because the basic nature of man is the same. Struggles for power, pomp and prestige are always the same, regardless of the century in which one lives. There are some things about man that never change. And those basic human characteristics that are involved in leadership are always the same. The following points, therefore, are centered around some of these basic human characteristics with which Jesus had to deal when teaching the disciples concerning the subject of true discipleship:

A. The disciples' erroneous concept of an earthly kingdom:

Throughout the ministry of Jesus, it is important to note that many of the disciples were looking for a restoration of national Israel as it was in the past. It was the hope of many that Israel be restored as it was in the days of David and Solomon. Rabbis taught their disciples throughout Israel that the Messiah would come to deliver the nation from the occupation of foreign powers. The Messiah would be a king to lead them in rebellion against Rome, the occupying power at the time. The nation of Israel would have its glory once again and all Jews would live in the independence of their own state.

The disciples grew up in an environment of the above teaching and influence. When Jesus came, therefore, they first saw in Him a Messiah that would

restore Israel to her former glory. Rome would be expelled from Palestine. The throne of David would be restored. Jesus would sit on that throne and rule from Jerusalem. Even to the last few hours Jesus was with the disciples on earth, and prior to His ascension, they said, "*Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel*" (At 1:6).

In the disciples' conversations with Jesus concerning the kingdom, therefore, we must remember that during His ministry they were looking forward to this great restoration of national Israel. Their feelings concerning the physical kingdom of Israel are brought out very clearly in the context of several passages. In fact, these passages are often Jesus' response to power struggles that developed among the disciples. One might look at the disciples' misunderstandings concerning leadership as the foundation upon which Jesus' teachings on leadership were revealed. We have the teachings of Jesus on this subject simply because of the disciples' misunderstanding concerning who would be the greatest in the kingdom.

B. The disciples' desire to fill in leadership vacancies:

Whenever the accepted leader of a group announces his departure, there is an interesting feeling that occurs among the followers. **The followers begin to wonder, and often manipulate one another, concerning who will fill the vacancy of leadership.** This is a natural human ambition in every social structure among men. Tensions often develop as

a corporation seeks a new chairman. Tensions occur among employees concerning who will fill the vacancy of the departing supervisor. Tensions often spill over into outright war when the president of a country dies. This is the way we are.

Similar tensions occurred among the disciples when Jesus talked to them concerning His death and departure. They did not understand the nature or purpose of His death, but they did perceive that He would eventually depart. From His statements to them in the context of Matthew 20, Mark 9 and Luke 22, they assumed that something was up. He was leaving. Upon the basis of their misguided assumptions, they perceived that leadership structures after the world must be established among themselves in order to carry on with His supposed work to establish an earthly kingdom.

On all the occasions when the disciples disputed among themselves concerning who was the greatest, Jesus had just finished talking about His death and departure. On one occasion Jesus said, *“The Son of man is being delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill Him”* (Mk 9:31). Afterwards, the disciples privately *“disputed among themselves”* (Mk 9:33). On another occasion Jesus said, *“Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered to the chief priests and to the scribes, and they will condemn Him to death and deliver Him to the Gentiles”* (Mk 10:33). Immediately afterwards, James and John sought positions of leadership through their mother (Mk 10:35). Even during

the last few hours Jesus spent with His disciples when He instituted the Lord’s Supper, *“there was also rivalry among them, as to which of them should be considered the greatest”* (Lk 22:24). There is no difference between the disciples then and men today who scramble for positions in leadership among the disciples when the accepted leader indicates his departure.

Before we are too hard on the disciples for their thirst for power and control, we should look at ourselves. The early disciples were no different than we are today. Or should we say that we are no different than they were then. Our urge to be considered great and to rule over our fellow man is strong in our nature. **Understanding Jesus’ concept of gospel leadership first begins with our confession concerning our own ambitions.**

If we do not first understand our own thirst for power, then we will never understand what Jesus was trying to convey to the disciples when they manifested in their lives the same thirst for power. When we understand our own carnal nature in this area of human behavior, then we will begin to understand what Jesus said to the disciples on occasions when they disputed among themselves concerning who was the greatest or who should be in positions of control.

C. Difficulties in understanding servanthood discipleship:

Jesus’ discussions with the disciples on servanthood discipleship occurred on

at least three different occasions. On the road from Capernaum, they disputed among themselves concerning who was the greatest (Mk 9:33,34). Jesus responded with instructions not to follow after the example of the world. On the way to Jerusalem, James and John sought positions of leadership in the supposed physical kingdom to come (Mk 10:35). Jesus responded by saying that they would not lead among one another as the world lorded over one another. During the last few hours Jesus was with the disciples before His crucifixion, they rivaled among themselves concerning who was the greatest (Lk 22:24). Jesus responded by saying that those who would be great among His disciples would be those who served all the disciples.

From the occurrence of these three situations where leadership struggles were manifested in the disciples' thinking on different occasions, at least one thing is apparent. **Jesus' concept of leadership is difficult to put into thinking and practice by those who would persist in lording over men.** It is easier to understand, than it is to put into practice. However, for some it might be difficult just to understand. After all, Jesus was talking about a behavioral pattern of leadership that seemed to be completely contrary to what the world in which the disciples lived dictated one must do in order to lead people.

Jesus was patient with the disciples because they did not understand the gospel that was being revealed to them during His ministry, and would finally be realized at His ascension. Many years

later Paul revealed the leadership journey of Jesus from heaven to the cross (Ph 2:5-11). Once the disciples understood this gospel behavior, it would be then that there would never again be any discussions among them as to who was the greatest. They would learn gospel leadership only when the gospel was fully revealed. And that would not happen until seven weeks after the Pentecost of A.D. 30.

If one does not understand the principles of Jesus' teaching on discipleship today, then certainly the principles will not be carried out in one's life, for he does not understand gospel leadership. It is imperative, therefore, that in our study of discipleship and leadership, we must focus on what Jesus was teaching the disciples, and the example of His gospel journey. We must understand the nature of the servanthood that permeated the gospel journey of Jesus through His incarnation, atoning death, resurrection and ascension.

One of the reasons why the disciples had a difficult time understanding and applying the teaching of Jesus on leadership during His ministry was because of the impact that their culture had on their lives. For the same reason, we often have a similar difficulty in understanding these principles today. The same things that influenced their minds also influences our minds. However, we must keep in mind that we have the entire New Testament, and our knowledge of the gospel, in order to mold our minds around the gospel. Nevertheless, we live in cultures that affect our thinking, cultures that

practice leadership principles that are contrary to the leadership that must be

characteristic of the disciples of Jesus.

Chapter 3

INFLUENCES FROM THE WORLD

We need to be specific about the challenges we must overcome in order to adjust our leadership behavior according to the gospel. Once we identify what influences us from outside the body of Christ, then we can make corrections in how we can better lead by the gospel of Jesus within the body.

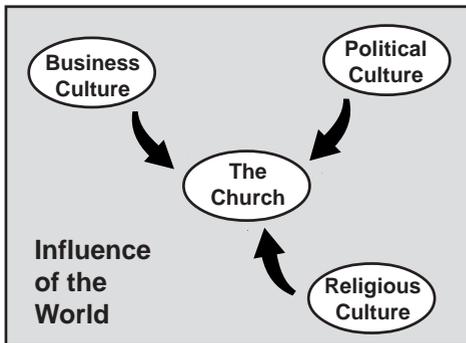
A. The influence of politics:

The disciples of the first century lived in a world of caesars, governors and kings. There was a hierarchy of power from the top to the bottom. Those involved in that world sought authority to rule over their fellow man. The leaders of the world existed because they exercised authority. Nothing has changed in the world since then.

The political culture of leadership of the disciples' day had certainly influenced the thinking of the disciples. They

sought for a “kingdom of this world,” a kingdom where Israel would be restored to her former glory. In this kingdom there would be positions of honor and power. When they said to Jesus, “*Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel,*” they were not thinking about lives of rags and poverty on a road from one preaching point to another (At 1:6). They were thinking about glory, honor and Israel’s restored power.

We are also political in nature according to the politics of the nation in which we live. We live in an environment in which we are constantly bombarded by politics. One would certainly be naïve if he believed that political thinking does not influence his or her own behavior in life. One would certainly be naïve to believe that such thinking does not make its way into the leadership behavior of the disciples. When we practice leadership among ourselves, therefore, our leadership sometimes digresses to the power struggles of “church politics.” We often end up doing that which happened to the disciples to whom James wrote the following:



Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain.

You fight and war (Js 4:1,2).

B. The influence of business:

The disciples lived in an economic world where individuals owned great segments of the financial market. There were masters over vast amounts of property and business. At the time of Jesus, it is estimated that about half of the people of the Roman Empire were slaves. Masters commanded. Slaves obeyed. No one wanted to be a slave. The dream of all was to be the one who gave the orders; the one who called the shots. And slaves gave no orders; they called no shots.

Slaves only served the needs of others. They obeyed the call of some master who had some need. When one was a slave, he had no right to choose. The slave's right to choose was taken by their owners. Slaves were left only with the right to serve the needs of others. Thus the difference between the master and the slave was that one had the freedom to choose and the other did not.

It is only natural that we all want to reserve our right to choose. We seek to always be free. Take this right away and we feel that our freedom is attacked. Choosing to become a slave, therefore, is very hard to do. But as we will learn later, Jesus has set us free in order to choose slavery. In the revelation of the gospel, Jesus chose slavery to our needs in order that we might be saved. The disciples of Jesus would eventually learn that in order to emulate their Master in their lives, they too would have to choose

slavery in order to serve the needs of others. They too would learn gospel leadership.

The influences of our business world today affect our thinking and behavior with one another. It is hard for one to step from the corporate business board room into any meeting among the members of the body without bringing the lordship principles of the board of directors into our relationship with one another. We have too many leaders today among the disciples who want to fire a church member as they would fire an employee at the factory or office.

C. The influence of religion:

This is probably one of the most deceptive functions of leadership behavior that attacks the leadership structure of the body of Christ. The mistake that young leaders often make is that they observe the leadership behavior of those who have already been infected with worldly leadership, and then copy the same style of leadership in their own ministry. They forget that religion is the product of those who have created a religious behavior after their own desires. And in the process of creation, religious leaders often form a leadership structure that conforms to the ways of the world. Once this happens, new leaders who go forth from this example of leadership follow in the steps of their predecessors.

The disciples of Jesus lived in a similar religious world of leadership hierarchy among the Jews. There were the chief priests and scribes, the Pharisees

and Sadducees. There were various groups of religious sects that had some type of authority structure that had been patterned after the hierarchal world of lordship. Religious leaders of their culture of authoritative hierarchy had traditional beliefs and burdens that they bound on the Jews. The religious establishment of Judaism enforced obedience to the traditions of the fathers. Those in command in the Jewish religious leadership were seen as individuals of position and power. They were not servants. They were the guardians of Judaism.

The disciples did not live in a world that was different from our own. We also live in a political world of presidents, chiefs and governors. We live in a business world of bosses and business owners. And unfortunately, we live in a religious world of popes, priests, pastors and clergy who assume authority over the sheep of God. Some in the religious world have succumbed to the hierarchy of leadership that is found in the world. They have conformed to the world and brought into their religion a form of religious authority that is patterned after that which is seen in the world.

Simon, the sorcerer, illustrates a mistake that many make in relation to the importation of world leadership baggage into the fellowship of the disciples. While in the world, Simon enjoyed a position in the community that claimed *“that he was someone great”* (At 8:9). To him, the people *“all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying ‘This man is the great power of God’”* (At 8:10). The community gave heed to him be-

cause of his deceptive tricks (At 8:11). However, here came Philip who preached the gospel and many of the Samaritans were subsequently converted into a new community of servants. Even Simon was baptized into this group, though at first he did not fully understand the nature of the church of God.

Simon eventually revealed his inner feelings when he witnessed the position and power of Peter and John.

Now when Simon saw that through the laying on of the apostles’ hands the Holy Spirit was given, he offered them money, saying, “Give me this power, that anyone on whom I lay hands may receive the Holy Spirit” (At 8:18,19).

Simon saw in what Peter and John did an opportunity to exercise his thirst for power that he enjoyed while in the world. He saw an opportunity to regain that which he lost before becoming a Christian. Thus, he was still thinking like the world in his desire to maintain a position of popularity and authority among the disciples.

Peter saw through Simon’s ambitions, and subsequently, he sharply condemned him for his worldly motives. Peter called Simon’s thirst for power and position *“wickedness”* and *“iniquity”* (At 8:22,23). Such harsh condemnation should alert us to the gravity of importing worldly leadership into the fellowship of the body of Christ. When we are discussing leadership in the church, we must be careful not to succumb to the attitudes of men as Simon lest we also be

found in “wickedness” and “iniquity.”

When many come to Jesus, they bring with them the same baggage of their culture that Simon brought. They bring the rivalry for position, the desire for greatness, and the yearning for recognition that is typical of many cultures of the world that encourage individualism and competition. The disciples of Jesus of the first century had some of these feelings and ideas that they maintained throughout Jesus’ earthly ministry. But then they changed dramatically after the Pentecost of A.D. 30.

When we come into Christ, we must not think that we immediately leave all the baggage of the world behind in an instant. When we consider the subject of leadership in view of the gospel of the Son of God, it is evident that the baggage of some leadership principles of the world have in many cases been imported from the world into the body. Too often we have conformed to the world by treating the church business as corporate business. However, we believe that Jesus has a message for us that is often contrary to the practices that we see in the world. Our task is to discover Jesus’ concepts of gospel leadership, and then incorpo-

rate these concepts into our lives as His disciples eventually did after the Pentecost of Acts 2. We must be on guard not to allow the world to dictate to us how we should behave in our relationships with one another.

Our dictionary we use to define discipleship is the Bible, not the world. If according to a biblical definition our leadership behavior is typical of that which we see in the world, then there must be a paradigm shift. Our thinking must be changed to that which Jesus defined as gospel leadership among His disciples.

One thing is certain in our efforts to define gospel leadership. The lording and ruling that is characteristic of the leadership that is in the world must not characterize the leaders among the disciples of Jesus. Jesus said such should not exist among His people. The irony of the matter is that those who are often the most adamant about having authority among the disciples are the ones who fail to obey the passages that teach that we must submit to one another. They seek for people to submit to them, but that they do not submit to others (Ep 5:21). True leaders know how to follow as they also know how to lead.

Chapter 4

AMBITIOUS LEADERS

(Mark 10:35-45)

By the time we come to the encounter of James and John with Jesus that is recorded in Mark 10:35-45, we do not know exactly how long it was since the disciples had disputed among themselves

while on the road to Capernaum (Mk 9:33). On that occasion when Jesus confronted them about their struggles among themselves for greatness, they at first kept silent. They must have assumed that such

struggling for greatness and positions of power was wrong. Nevertheless, Jesus instructed, ***“If anyone desires to be first, he will be last of all and servant of all”*** (Mk 9:35). This is the fundamental principle of gospel leadership that Jesus would again introduce in the context of James and John’s ambitious request. Servanthood was the position that Jesus took as the Son of God who humbled Himself unto the cross. This would also be the manner of behavior by which all who would follow Him must conduct their lives.

But this is a hard lesson to learn. It seems to be totally contrary to what society says we must do to be great, to be first, and to lead. The disciples’ first encounter with the fundamental principles of Jesus concerning gospel leadership did not initially sink in because the finality of the gospel had not yet been completed.

It was not long after the Capernaum road experience in Mark 9 that there was another power move among the disciples on the road to Jerusalem that is recorded in Mark 10:35-45. It was here again that the leadership principles of the world were still on the minds of the disciples.

In the context of Mark 10, Jesus had just talked with the disciples about His death and departure. Though the disciples did not fully understand what He was saying, they did sense that something was up. When a leader is going to depart, people assume that someone must fill his shoes. And in the context of Mark 10, it seems that James and John were thinking about shoes. They sought to get a head start in filling the shoes of Jesus

in the supposed earthly kingdom to come. So they took the initiative.

Now we must keep in mind in this context the disciples’ understanding concerning the kingdom. Their thinking was earthly, a kingdom that would be of this world. They certainly accepted Jesus as the Messiah. However, their concept of what the Messiah was to do was misguided. They had been influenced by the Jewish school of thought that assumed that the Messiah would restore Israel to her former glory. Israel would be an independent state, separate from any occupying forces. So in the context of James and John’s request for positions, they were thinking earthly, not gospel. They were thinking positions, not submission.

A. James and John take the initiative.

As children, whenever we want to get our way, one of the sure ways we suppose we can do this is to ask our mother to ask for us. This seems to be the case here. Matthew informs us in his account of this event that ***“the mother of Zebedee’s sons came to Him with her sons ...”*** (Mt 20:20).

Before we blame the mother for initiating the request, we must keep in mind that it was James and John who were undoubtedly behind the skirt of their mother urging her to speak for them. Mark identified the real source of the request by not even mentioning the mother. The fact that Mark does not mention the mother indicates that the real source for

the request was from the ambitious brothers.

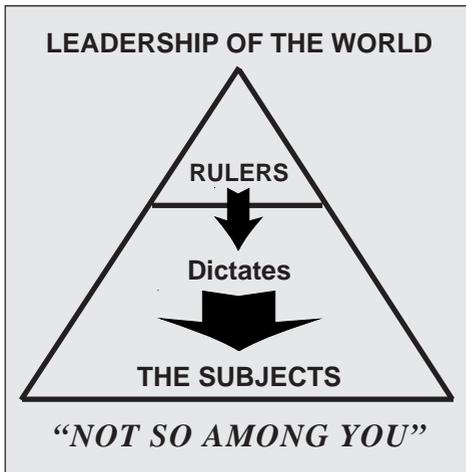
James and John had evidently asked their mother to approach Jesus concerning their desire for leadership positions in the supposed national restoration of Israel. It is in their heart to secure positions of commanding leadership before their fellow disciples had a chance to ask Jesus. The reason that they approached Jesus at this time was because He again had indicated His death and departure. They did not at this time understand the gospel of the cross, and His ascension unto the Father.

When we understand who James and John are, then we better understand why they took the initiative. Both James and John grew up in the influential household of Zebedee. They were in a fishing business with Peter and Andrew. Their father Zebedee was evidently known in the circles of the Jewish religious hierarchy in Jerusalem, for during the trials of Jesus, John recorded, *“Now that disciple [John himself] was known to the high*

priest, and went with Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest” (Jn 18:15). Since the young John was known by the high priest, he evidently had grown up in a family that was acquainted with the Jewish leadership. Therefore, we could assume that both James and John grew up in an influential family, possibly enjoying the privileges that went along with such families of status.

In conjunction with the text under discussion, it could easily be assumed that the two brothers had been somewhat spoiled by growing up in such a social environment. At least, this would answer why these two specific disciples sought positions in what they supposed would be a physical kingdom to come. Since Zebedee was possibly a leading figure in the community, then James and John would naturally desire to follow in their father’s footsteps. And since they were known by the religious leadership in Jerusalem, then when it came time to lead a rebellion against Rome, they would have the support of the Jewish establishment. James and John, with their mother, assumed that their approach to Jesus on the matter of leadership in the physical kingdom they supposed was coming, would naturally fall to them.

It is also ironic that after the establishment of the church in A.D. 30, James was the first apostle to be killed, suffering martyrdom at the hands of Herod (At 12:1,2). John was the last apostle to die. According to tradition, he died an old man in Ephesus after having written the letter of Revelation. Whether there is something significant to this, we would



not know. However, we would guess that John is possibly in his late teens at the time he and his brother approached Jesus in Mark 10.

Regardless of what may be our negative impression of the two ambitious brothers, we do know that Jesus saw in these two something that is not perceived on the surface. Jesus was able to look beyond the worldly ambitions of the moment and see the greatness of strong men that yet resided in these two young men. He saw leadership ability. He saw sincerity. He saw initiative. He saw heart. It was a time during His ministry when He was focusing on the motives beneath their sin of desiring leadership that was based on power, not gospel. It was a time to overlook their ambitions in order to fine tune their inner strength.

It seems that Jesus' approach to this misguided request for leadership by James and John was handled in a way we should imitate. Though the motives and aspirations of James and John were wrong, Jesus did not come down on them with force, retribution and humiliation. He was patient. He was instructive. In search for leaders, it is best to look beyond the first impressions one receives from youthful ambition.

The erroneous ambitions of the two young men was revealed in what they asked of Jesus:

1. “Teacher, we want You to do for us whatever we ask” (Mk 10:35). Here is the voice of two somewhat privileged children asking a father to do for them whatever they want. These two disciples

here behave as we would, seeking to have answered every prayer request we make to the Father. They viewed the other disciples as an opportunity to reign. Many today do the same because they have little understanding of the gospel leadership by which Jesus both lived and taught. The manner of the request of James and John does indicate that the two possibly knew that that for which they were asking was not quite right. At least, they had come to Jesus privately, fearing the retribution of the other disciples who eventually found out anyway (Mk 10:41).

The natural response to someone who would ask of us anything of us would be, “What do you want?” And what James and John wanted revealed their misunderstanding of what was to be. What was to be was a community of slaves. They did not know this at this time; however, they would eventually learn.

2. “Grant us that we may sit ...” (Mk 10:37). James and John were so typical of too many leaders today. The type of leadership they were seeking consisted of **sitting**. They wanted to sit on judgment seats and command others to do the work. They wanted to sit in the business meetings and make decisions for others to obey. They viewed leadership as a sitting position of authority, not a serving community of slaves.

What Jesus was about to convey to them would certainly startle their thinking, as it does many today who would be right behind the two brothers, asking the same question. James and John were here seeking positions. In their minds, these

were positions, or “offices” of authority to command. In the supposed physical kingdom to come, they were asking to be generals with authority to command. They wanted to sit on the right and left side of the king.

3. *Jesus clarified the leadership to come* (Mk 10:38-40). Keep in mind that Jesus responded to James and John with the **spiritual** kingdom in mind, while James and John were making requests with a **physical** kingdom in mind. It is important to keep this in mind as we study what was happening with the interchange in the conversation.

We must keep in mind also that James and John knew what was involved in leadership in a physical kingdom. In order to free Israel from her present oppressor—Roman—they knew that much struggle would be involved. War would rage. Men would die. As commanding generals, they would be responsible for sending men to their death for the liberation of Israel. Even they might die for the cause; after all, a host of early Jewish leaders had gone to their deaths through crucifixion in their struggles for freedom from Roman occupation. So before we are too hard on James and John, we must keep in mind that these two want-to-be generals knew what they were asking from the viewpoint of a physical struggle to liberate Israel.

This helps us understand the character and heart of these two young men. They were not young men of weak spirits. They were not beach bums Jesus picked up on the shores of Galilee. These were men of tremendous leadership char-

acter. Jesus knew that they must be such in order to do what they were going to do in the struggles of the spiritual kingdom to come. Jesus knew that the same courageous and strong character that is necessary in the hearts of generals, who lead men into carnal warfare, is also necessary to lead His saints in battle against the spiritual host of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore, in the context, Jesus spoke of the struggles that both James and John, as well as the other apostles, would have to endure in order to lead His disciples on to victory.

B. Jesus teaches gospel leadership.

Though James and John came to Jesus with worldly principles of leadership in mind, Jesus responded to them with the principles of gospel leadership.

1. “*Can you drink the cup that I drink ...?*” (Mk 10:38). The word “cup” is a metaphor that signifies the **portion** that is given to a guest at a feast. As a guest, one was expected to drink what was given to him in his cup. That was his portion. What Jesus was asking James and John was if they could handle the portion, or responsibility of leadership, that would be handed to them as leaders. It was a statement of Jesus that they did not understand at the time.

In order to enact the final stages of the gospel, Jesus knew that about which He was talking: “*Father,*” Jesus prayed not long after this conversation with James and John, “*if you are willing, remove this cup from Me*” (Lk 22:42). “*He*

prayed more earnestly. And His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground" (Lk 22:44). This was the road to gospel leadership that Jesus took, and certainly, James and John, though they had no idea what was ahead, would walk down in order to also must ransom themselves for others.

2. ***"Can you ... be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?"*** (Mk 10:38). Jesus also asked if they could be "immersed" with the immersion He was about to endure. Here is one of those times in the New Testament when the word *baptizo* carries with it the meaning of "overwhelm." Jesus was overwhelmed (immersed) with the responsibility of delivering mankind out of the bondage of sin. It was His burden, and soon it would be the burden of James and John to do the same by boldly preaching the gospel. They would soon discover that leadership is not about positions and power, but about being overwhelmed with the responsibility of preaching the gospel to the world.

The gospel cross was a tremendous responsibility that Jesus assumed before the creation of the world. It included incarnation, which assumed the pain of a man who was made in the likeness of all men. There was suffering. *"And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross"* (Ph 2:8). Jesus was asking James and John if they were willing to be overwhelmed with the possibility of death on behalf of others who needed to hear the gospel. They too would have to take up

a cross of crucifixion in order to lead (See Lk 14:27).

3. ***"We can ..."*** (Mk 10:39). This response reveals the inner character of courage and strength of the two disciples. They knew what it would take to be successful generals in a physical kingdom. They knew the tremendous responsibility of leadership and the burden of leading men into death.

We must not think that these disciples were ignorant of what it would take to run the Romans out of Palestine. Here we see their heart to lead, though their understanding of how and what they would lead is incorrect. Nevertheless, we must admire the inner character of these two zealous disciples. Jesus had made a good choice in these two gallant fishermen of Galilee.

4. ***"You will ..."*** (Mk 10:39). Jesus did not seek to correct their misunderstanding concerning their supposed physical kingdom, for He knew that they would need the same strength to lead in the spiritual battle that it would take to lead in a physical kingdom war.

Jesus responded to James and John's ambitious request for leadership positions by saying, **"Can you?"** Without any hesitation the two gallant and brave disciples answered, **"We can."** Then Jesus said, **"You will."** They would drink the cup of suffering and be overwhelmed with the tremendous responsibilities of leadership in leading the disciples of Jesus unto victory. They would suffer and struggle to lead a spiritual war against the wiles of the Devil (See Ep 6:10-20).

The burden of leadership that faces generals and kings in the physical world would soon be cast upon the shoulders of all the apostles. Though thinking that the kingdom would be physical, both James and John were willing to accept the tremendous burden of leadership that goes with the ministry of leadership. We must admire them for accepting such a responsibility. Such manifested their characters of steel in order to lead. Such revealed their desire to get on with the mission of Jesus.

We often wonder how we would

have responded to these two ambitious young men who were hiding behind the skirt of their mother. They were there seeking position and power and pomp. We believe if we were Jesus we would have been a little too quick to rebuke them for their selfish ambition. But not Jesus. He patiently dealt with the situation because He could see through the outward desires of the two young men in order to see the true heart of great men who only needed to be fine-tuned for a great commission.

Chapter 5

PRELUDE TO GOSPEL LEADERSHIP

(Mark 10:40-45)

In Jesus' gentle rebuke of James and John, upon their ambitious request to sit on His right and left hand in a supposed earthly kingdom, Jesus moved the two ambitious disciples into a new paradigm of leadership that was coming. It would be a new order of leadership because it would be upside down in comparison to the leadership of the world. It would be gospel leadership by which the great would emulate in their lives the gospel journey of Jesus to the cross, and eventually to the grave and on to the right hand of God.

In order to introduce this servant leadership, Jesus gave a preview of what happened through the giving of the Son for the revelation of the gospel for all men. *"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son"* (Jn 3:16). In reference to the gospel, God is

the giver. He gave His Son the responsibility of enacting the gospel, and now the Son knows that it is again the time for the Father to give the apostles the responsibility to enact the preaching of the gospel to the world. Their obedience to the gospel would be the foundation upon which they would lead all those who obeyed the gospel.

Jesus responded with all the apostles in mind. To the ambitious request of James and John in Mark 10:35-45, He said, *"It is not mine to give"* Jesus explained something that was hard for James and John to understand. He stated, *"But to sit on My right hand and on My left is not Mine to give, but it is for those for whom it is prepared"* (Mk 10:40). Such positions—in reference to a physical kingdom—for which they had asked were not given by the Son. In ref-

erence to the spiritual kingdom to come, the Father, through God the Holy Spirit, would give them the responsibility to function in delivering the word of truth (See Jn 13:16; 14:26). Their responsibility to function as Christ-sent apostles was given by the Father, for the Father was still king of the kingdom and head over all things during the ministry of Jesus on earth.

There is an order of authority in the Godhead revealed here that we do not suppose to understand. Paul wrote, *“But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God”* (1 Co 11:3). In view of the eternal incarnation of the Son, this order of authority places the Father as the giver of all authority (See Mt 28:18). Therefore, though Jesus had the authority to bestow upon them a kingdom (Lk 22:29), the original authority came from the Father. For this reason, Jesus said it was not His to give. (This statement of Jesus should be understood in the context of the permanency of the incarnation of Jesus. See *Biblical Research Library*, Book 73. www.africainternational.org)

Jesus said to James and John, with all the apostles in mind that it is *“for those for whom it is prepared”* (Mk 10:40). Luke recorded in a similar context that the apostles would *“sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel”* (Lk 22:30). “Thrones” is a metaphor for the position of responsibility. Therefore, these apostles would be given the responsibility to reveal all truth to the disciples of Jesus. Though Jesus’ re-

sponse to James and John may seem confusing, it is not when considered in the context of the time the Father had set for the establishment of the kingdom reign of Jesus. The responsibility to lead through the revelation of all truth was reserved for the **apostles**. This function in ministry was prepared for them. However, the time would be determined by the Father. The giving of the responsibility would be from the Father. What Jesus was simply saying to James and John was that they were asking the wrong person at the wrong time. And on top of this, they were asking for the wrong thing. There would be no positions for generals in the spiritual kingdom of Jesus. However, leadership responsibility would be given when the inner character of the apostles would eventually come to the surface in their behavior.

A. Jesus said that it was “for whom it is prepared.”

It is interesting to note that Jesus here speaks of the “whom” (the apostles) as if He were referring to other people than the apostles (Mk 10:40). The apostles were the ones for whom the “thrones” were prepared. However, from the time James and John approached Jesus on the occasion of Mark 10, to the time they were baptized with the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, they would change in character and thinking.

From the occasion of the Mark 10 incident, much changed in their behavior from rivalry among themselves to a time when they stood up for one another

before councils and kings. In Mark 10 they were immature leaders struggling to be born anew to be the gospel leaders we see in the book of Acts. And so we must be patient as Jesus with these young leaders who will eventually grow out of their rivalry to be mature men who would lead. It is imperative, therefore, that those who would be leaders in the future must clearly understand the leadership of the gospel. Until one has the gospel mind of Christ, he is not qualified to be a leader (See Ph 2:5). And at the time Jesus answered the ambitious James and John, and the rivalry that came from the apostles, the gospel had not been completed.

B. The disciples disputed over positions.

We do not know how much time passed between the actual approach of James and John to Jesus and the time when the rest of the disciples discovered that they had sought such positions.

Mark records, *“And when the ten heard it, they began to be greatly displeased with James and John”* (Mk 10:41). They were possibly displeased because they would covet such positions themselves. We do not think that they were displeased because James and John asked for the positions of being the slaves of others. We believe they may have been displeased because James and John got a head start on them for securing supposed positions of authority. Whatever the case, the other disciples were not simply displeased, they were **greatly** dis-

pleased. And this great displeasure resulted in another dispute among the disciples concerning greatness and position.

Herein is manifested all their misunderstandings concerning the kingdom to come and the gospel of Jesus. Such also illustrates the power struggles that are so common among leaders when leadership is being determined on the basis of position and authority and not gospel. **The pride of man flourishes when there is rivalry for position instead of servanthood.**

James and John, as well as the other disciples, were not thinking about being slaves to the needs of others, as Jesus was to them. They were thinking about “boardroom” leadership from the top. But before we are too quick to judge them, we must look at ourselves. Our own misunderstanding of the nature of gospel leadership is manifested in the level of disputes we have among ourselves in determining “who is in charge.”

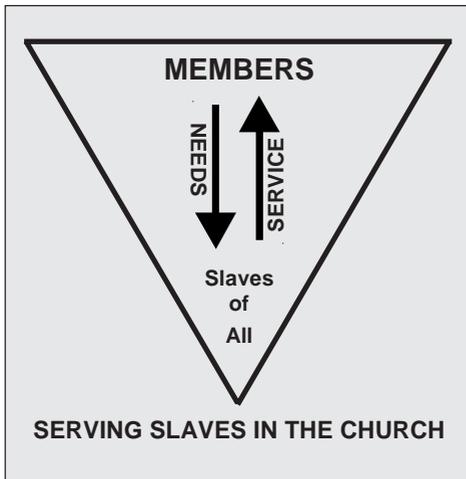
C. Gospel leaders serve.

In the context of Mark 10:35-45, Jesus clearly revealed to the apostles the gospel leadership of slaves. In the situation that developed after the disciples discovered the request of James and John, we can see all the disciples off in a group, fussing with James and John over their presumption to approach Jesus for special consideration.

Mark recorded, *“But Jesus called them to Himself”* (Mk 10:42). Jesus knew that they were having struggles among themselves. He knew that the

solution was for them to come close to Him. And so it is with us today. The closer we move to Jesus, the fewer the number of disputes we have among ourselves. The better we understand the gospel of Jesus, the less we will contend among ourselves over positions of leadership. It is hard to dispute for positions at the feet of the greatest servant of all.

1. **Lordship is in the world** (Mk 10:43). Jesus said to the twelve, “*You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them.*” There was no difficulty for the disciples to understand the leadership of the world. This was not the problem. What was the problem among the disciples at the time was expressed through the efforts of James and John to acquire positions of leadership and authority. When considering such ambitions, Jesus frankly stated, “*Yet it shall not be so among you.*” If we can only understand this one principle concerning leadership,



then most of our leadership problems among us would be solved.

In this context, Jesus identified the nature of the leadership that is in the world. Authority is invested in the leaders by either their own self-appointed power to rule (this would be a dictatorship), or the constitutional authority of the people (this would be a democracy). Regardless of the source of authority, the rulers of the world hand down dictates to the subjects of the kingdom. It is the responsibility of the people to submit to this authority in fear of retribution. The positions of the rulers and lords of the world inherently includes authority. **A lord is a lord because he exercises authority. If there were no authority handed out, then there would be no lords.**

Lordship leadership is carried out in the business world. The boss, or owner of the business, has total authority and control over the business. He directs or commands and the employees respond. The problem now comes when we seek to import this style of leadership into the decision making process of the body of Christ. Men have too often asserted authority and leadership in the church after the model of leadership that is in the boardroom of the business meeting of the corporation. But Jesus specifically said to His disciples, “*Yet it shall not be so among you*” (Mk 10:43).

2. **Gospel leaders in Christ** (Mk 10:43). There is something definitely contrary to the style of leadership we see in the world and the gospel leadership Jesus was revealing. Jesus was certainly

saying that the authoritarian leadership of the world will not be so among the disciples. On the contrary, He was saying that the great ones among His family of disciples “*shall be your servant.*” There would be only one Lord in the kingdom to come. Everyone else would be servants. When Jesus was made Lord, this meant that all His disciples become servants (At 2:36).

The word “servant” in Mark 10:43 is from the Greek word *diakonos*. The early Palestinian homes of Jesus’ day had servants (*diakonos*) in the house to care for the needs of the family. So it would be among the disciples of Jesus. **The needs of the people would be upon the shoulders of the servant leaders.** As servants, the leaders would respond to the needs of the people with service. **By their service, therefore, the leaders would lead those they serve.**

This “position” of leadership is certainly different from what the disciples had conceived in their minds. Instead of being “on top of the situation,” **they were to bear the burden of the needs of the group.** Leaders among the disciples would not be seen to be rulers over the people. Jesus said, “*Yet it shall not be so among you.*” The burden of leadership of the leaders among the disciples would be servicing the needs of the people. There would be no chiefs who would rule with dictatorial authority. There would be only servants who ministered to the needs of others. We cannot help but think that this concept of leadership surprised the disciples as it surprises many today who come to Jesus.

We have discovered that in the industrial/business world this is a hard concept to understand and practice. In the industrial/business world men are accustomed to being bosses, and supervisors and business owners. Employees are accustomed to obeying orders and following the directions of the supervisors. Everyone’s behavior in the business world is centered around lordship leadership.

Unfortunately, we are always victims of our own culture. However, if we think we can justify ungodly practices in the Lord’s kingdom simply because “this is the way we are,” then we believe we should reconsider the Founder of Christianity. He is the same one in John 13 who stooped to the disciples’ feet and probably washed even between their toes. This is the one who gave up being on an equality with God and humbled Himself to the cross (Ph 2:5-8). Gospel leadership is totally contrary to the leadership of the world.

3. Gospel leaders are into service (Mk 10:44). Jesus takes the illustration of servanthood out of the house and into the fields of the culture in which He and the disciples lived. He said, “*And whoever of you desires to be first shall be bondservant of all.*” The Greek word here is *doulos*. It is the word for slave. Slaves have no rights of command. They have no rights to determine how, when or what to do. They have no authority.

Most people know how to give service. They will **choose** to show up on a work day. They will **choose** what to do. They will **choose** how to do what they

have **chosen** to do. But by choosing, they have maintained control of their own lives and their own destinies. We know how to maintain control of our rights while seeking to do service to others. But is this the gospel leadership that was in the mind of Jesus when He used the word *doulos*.

Slaves do not have the privilege of choice. They simply give themselves to the service of others without choice simply because others have need of their service. Leaders as slaves in the kingdom do not have the privilege of choice. Their choices are negated by the needs of others. Slaves serve in response to the needs of the people. The nature of this service takes away their choice. They must respond to needs whether or not they feel like serving. When someone shows up at their door in the middle of the night, gospel leaders must arise and minister to the needs of those who are hurting. When the telephone rings, they must answer. Those who find it a burden to serve the needs of the flock, cannot be leaders among the disciples of our Lord.

Our problem is often having leaders who seek to sit on thrones in meeting rooms and give commands to subjects over whom they have placed themselves as lords with authority. These leaders do not see themselves as slaves in the fields laboring under the burden of needs that come down from the people. They see themselves in some kind of office as administrators of kingdoms they have set up for themselves. These leaders will often argue with Jesus on this point. They will argue simply because they have al-

lowed their culture to affect their concept of leadership.

We must never forget what Jesus said to the apostles: “*Yet it shall not be so among you.*” This statement should be the guard against all those who would seek to be leaders with authority and control. Whatever we conceive of leadership being in the world, Jesus says in this one statement that such will not be so among His disciples.

E. Gospel leaders ransom themselves.

“*For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many*” (Mk 10:45). Notice the words “for even.” Jesus had every right to call the shots, to demand service, or to forcefully lord over the flock. However, He “commanded” our submission by what He did. He came to serve, and by serving drew out of each of us submission and service to one another. Herein is the secret to gospel leadership. It is not by empowerment, but by example, by giving one’s self in loving service for the needs of others as Jesus gave Himself for us. Greatness in the kingdom comes through humbly serving the needs of others.

Because God so loved us, even when we did not deserve His salvational service, Christ ransomed Himself for us (Rm 5:8). The gospel message is about Jesus ransoming Himself for our spiritual needs. His example in serving our spiritual needs is the pattern after which those who live the gospel must serve the

needs of one another (1 Pt 2:21). Any who would lead after the example of the gospel, therefore, must see themselves as Jesus in leading the disciples here on earth.

As a leader, Jesus **ransomed** Himself for His sheep. Matthew's parallel account of this text brings out the application of the word "ransom" in reference to all who would seek to be leaders. Jesus said, "... *just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many*" (Mt 20:28). This is an interesting use of the word "ransom." To lead men to redemption, Jesus had to give of Himself; He had to ransom Himself from being on an equality with God for the sake of others. "Just as" He ransomed Himself for us, leaders must ransom themselves for those they serve. In a sense, therefore, we are not our own when we choose to be gospel leaders. We belong to those we intend to lead to victory. We are the "slaves of all."

In the context of our atonement for sin, the word "ransom" is used in the New Testament in the metaphorical sense that Jesus gave Himself for our salvation. In the context of Jesus' instructions here, another metaphorical sense of the word is being emphasized. It is used in reference to leaders who must ransom their time, energies and being for the sake of others. Gospel leadership infers that one must give himself or herself for the sake of others. Christian leaders have first given themselves to the Lord. Secondly, they have given themselves to serve the Lord's body.

Those who would be leaders must sacrifice their lives for the church. Slaves sacrifice themselves for the needs of others. Gospel leadership is the giving of oneself to the care of others who need guidance in wisdom, spirituality, work and godliness. Jesus ransomed Himself for us through the gospel, and thus Christian leaders must do likewise in ransoming themselves for others.

After considering these words of Jesus in Mark 10, we do not take lightly the responsibility of living the gospel in leadership of the body of Christ. It is easy to be a lord in leadership. It is easy to make decisions in a boardroom and hand down instructions for others to obey. It is not easy to live the ransomed life for others.

In a similar context when the disciples rivaled among themselves (Lk 22:24), Jesus made a most interesting statement: "*For who is greater, he who sits at the table, or he who serves? Is it not he who sits at the table? Yet I am among you as the One who serves*" (Lk 22:27).

Those who sit at the table are the honored guests. They are the important ones who are treated with service. They are the ones to whom special attention is to be given. This is where we would expect Jesus to sit. We would expect Him to sit at the table and be served by us. But sacrificial leadership involves serving those who are sitting at the table. For those who serve, every person they serve is as a special guest in their lives. As we were Jesus' special guests when He served us at the cross, in like manner,

Christian leaders look for special guests to sit at their table of service.

We often take pride in sitting at the table. We like the position, the honor, and the special attention. We like the “chief seats.” But then we see Jesus scurrying around serving our needs and others through the gospel. Jesus said, *“Yet I am among you as the One who serves.”* This is the Jesus we follow, the one who ransomed Himself for us. He is the One who paid the price that we might sit at the table of our heavenly Father.

Religions establish power structures “at the table” in order to maintain their existence. Since the authority of religion does not rest with the word of God, there must be orders of authority among the leaders of religion in order that the religion continue. Such orders of authority are totally contrary to what Jesus instructed His disciples: *“Whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all”* (Mk 10:43,44).

Chapter 6

THE GREATEST SLAVE OF ALL

(John 13:1-20)

Before the cross, Jesus spent the last few hours of His earthly ministry with His disciples in an upper room in Jerusalem. Every Sunday we remember what happened on this most significant memorial time (See Mt 26:26-27; Lk 22:17-20). However, what seems to have consumed much of the time during those last few hours He was together with His disciples was centered around a controversy that Luke records in Luke 22:24: *“But there was also rivalry among them, as to which of them should be considered the greatest.”* Jesus responded to this rivalry by saying, *“He who is greatest among you, let him be as the younger, and he who governs as he who serves”* (Lk 22:26). However, He also *“rose from supper and laid aside His garments, took a towel ... and began to wash the disciples’ feet”* (Jn 13:4,5). This was stunning, for the previous three and a half

years Jesus had instructed them concerning the nature and event of the gospel that was coming. Now it was time for an illustration of gospel living that would change their behavior forever.

In the context of John 13, we discover one of the most profound actions of Jesus that illustrates the very nature of His gospel ministry to redeem us from sin. What Jesus did on this occasion demonstrates the heart of God. It gives us an example of what Jesus expects of His disciples in their gospel relationship with one another.

What took place on this night of fellowship and betrayal was something that is most difficult to understand for those who are steeped in religion. We see God doing that which is so different than the life-style of self-oriented religionists. **In this upper room was the Creator of all of us on His knees washing the feet of**

those whom He created (See Cl 1:16). It is here that we actually see the heart of God on His knees washing feet. It was the ultimate demonstration of what Jesus would do at the cross. On this occasion He washed their feet, and then, on the occasion of the cross He washed their souls. The footwashing illustrated the coming soulwashing.

A. Jesus illustrated gospel service.

On that occasion in an upper room, the Passover meal had already been eaten. All the disciples were present. However, Satan had *“already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon’s son, to betray Him”* (Jn 13:2). Nevertheless, Jesus did something that would forever characterize the community of God’s people.

1. Jesus was aware of His deity (Jn 13:3). To begin his record of this event, John recorded that *“Jesus ... rose from supper and laid aside His garments, took a towel and girded Himself”* (Jn 13:2,3). Jesus said nothing to the disciples at the time. He simply carried on with that which would stun them.

During His ministry, Jesus knew that the Father had *“given Him authority over all flesh”* (Jn 17:2). But here we see this omnipotent Deity we worship demonstrating humble service to those He had created (Cl 1:16). Jesus was the Creator of the universe and man. Not only did He create man, He was also incarnate in the form of that which He had created (Jn 1:14). He humbled Himself even to death for the sake of the ones

whom He had created. This is the example of gospel leadership that Jesus wanted to leave with His disciples (See Ph 2:6-8).

2. Jesus manifested the service of God through the gospel (Jn 13:4,5). God in the flesh took the most humble position of doing a servile act toward those He created. The washing of feet was a commonly practiced custom of the day. Servants of the house were given the responsibility of washing the dirty feet of the guests. Somehow, this most common and courteous practice was forgotten by the host on this night. Because of some pride that was left in the minds of the disciples, that was manifested by their rivalry, Jesus took the opportunity to do what they had forgotten to do for one another, that is, the washing of one another’s feet.

This was a profound action on the part of Jesus. It was a moment in His ministry not to be passed over. It was a picture of the God of the gospel we worship. He is on His knees. He is washing the feet of those He created out of the dust of the earth. As opposed to the gods that religionists have so often created after their own image, the God of heaven seeks in this example to continue to serve.

So before Jesus are lined up twenty-four dirty feet, 240 toes. He had given no indication to them of what He was going to do. There was no opportunity for one to wash his own feet in preparation for what the Son of God was about to do. There was no time to clean toenails or put on a new pair of socks. There were just twenty-four dirty feet before Jesus.

Jesus was going to wash from their feet the substance out of which they were created. This was truly a remarkable event, one upon which faith is built and God is defined. The Son of God was living the gospel, and thus giving us an example of how we should live after the spirit of the gospel.

In order to inherit the heavenly environment, one must take on the nature of this serving God. One must become like Jesus and stoop to the feet of his or her fellow man with a towel in hand. Without a towel, no one will see God. Gospel lovers must remember what Paul wrote, *“Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus”* (Ph 2:5). The mind of the Son of God is the mind of a servant. If we would be sons of God, then we must serve as God did through Jesus.

On another occasion and in another way, Paul defined gospel living: *“Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another”* (Rm 12:10). Also, *“Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ”* (Gl 6:2). And again, *“submitting to one another in the fear of God”* (Ep 5:21).

B. Peter’s refusal to accept gospel service.

Peter was the first to object to Jesus’ washing feet, particularly his feet. But before we are too hard on Peter, we must look at ourselves. We must consider what would be going through our own minds if Jesus were coming down a line of dirty

feet and washing every foot. We would probably be thinking that kings do not do things like this. Kings ride in town on white horses, brandishing swords in order to lead all of us to victory. At least this is what these disciples, who were still looking forward to a physical kingdom, were thinking (See At 1:6). However, Jesus, their accepted King and Messiah, was on His knees with a towel and washing their feet.

1. Peter questioned Jesus’ actions (Jn 13:6). When Jesus came to Peter, Peter argued, *“Lord, are You washing my feet?”* We do not know how many disciples’ feet Jesus had washed by the time He came to Peter. We do assume that no one had said anything so far. Evidently, the disciples were totally caught off guard by Jesus’ actions. The One they considered too soon become their “king on earth” was now on His knees washing earth off their feet. To the disciples, something was wrong about this picture. Therefore, impetuous Peter could not contain himself. He blurted out what the others could not get out of their mouths.

2. Peter was reassured that he would eventually understand Jesus’ actions (Jn 13:7). Jesus responded to Peter, *“What I am doing you do not understand now, but you will know after this.”* Jesus was not instituting footwashing as a religious rite among His disciples. There was something deeper. The disciples **did understand** the practice of footwashing. Such was a part of their culture. They had personally washed thousands of feet throughout their life-

time. But Jesus was doing something here that they did not understand at the time, but would later.

In this case, Jesus was trying to teach something that was greater than the custom of footwashing. Before the finality of the gospel, the disciples were yet to understand the gospel leadership that was coming. Jesus knew that they needed a real-life illustration of the humble service of the incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection. Gospel living would be a paradigm shift in the character of millions who would later submit to the gospel.

3. Peter stumbled over his earthly kingdom concepts (Jn 13:8). As Jesus neared his feet, Peter burst out, “*You shall never wash my feet!*” In the Greek text Peter’s reply is a **double negative**. In other words, Peter was responding, “You will never, never wash my feet.” Peter surely struggled to envision the future “king of the restored national Israel” down on His knees washing the dirty feet of those who wanted to put Him on a throne in Jerusalem. If this were true, then Peter was thinking carnally; his thinking could not get beyond this world. But Jesus was teaching a spiritual lesson that would forever change Peter’s life. So Jesus responded to Peter, “*If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me.*”

4. Peter affirmed his stand with Jesus (Jn 13:9). Peter saw himself as having a part with Jesus in the restored Israel he thought Jesus was going to establish. Such seems to be the background of his irrational response to Jesus: “*Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and*

my head!” In other words, Peter was responding, “Lord, if washing my feet for initiation to be a part of this earthly kingdom, then I want to be completely in. Please wash my whole body. I want in!”

5. Peter was clean because of a submissive heart (Jn 13:10). Peter had to understand that the lesson that was being taught did not pertain to earthly kingdoms. Thus Jesus moved in this verse to take Peter’s mind off the physical and place it on the spiritual. Jesus thus said to him, with the rest listening in, “*You are clean, but not all of you.*”

In a spiritual way, therefore, Peter and the other ten were clean. But Judas was not clean. The eleven had purified themselves by submission to Jesus’ leadership. Jesus said to all of them, “*You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you*” (Jn 15:3). They were clean because of their submission to Jesus’ word.

6. Judas was unclean because of an insubmissive heart (Jn 13:11). Jesus looked past the rivalry of the hour among the disciples and the impetuous response of Peter. He knew their hearts. He knew they would learn the lesson of the illustration within a few days, for they would understand after His resurrection.

However, Judas would not learn. Judas’ inner character would lead him to carry out a betrayal scheme because he was not of the same submissive heart as the other disciples. In fact, John recorded Jesus’ knowledge of Judas from the early part of His ministry. “*But there are some of you who do not believe. For Jesus knew from the beginning ... who would*

betray Him Did I not choose you, the twelve, and one of you is a devil?" (Jn 6:64,70).

We possibly see now a reason for Judas' betrayal plot. He would not understand the gospel intent of Jesus' washing of the disciples' feet because his own personal thinking concerning kingdom reign positions. Judas was still thinking carnally of a kingdom of this world where the rulers "*lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them*" (Mk 10:42). He had forgotten that Jesus said, "*Yet it shall not be so among you*" (Mk 10:43).

C. **Jesus explained His servile behavior.**

John recorded, "*So when He had washed their feet ..., He said to them, 'Do you know what I have done to you?'*" (Jn 13:12). Other than understanding footwashing, we are sure the disciples had no idea what had just transpired. They could not understand the Son of God on His knees washing the feet of those He created. Admittedly, it is difficult for us to understand. Nevertheless, Jesus does expect us to understand. He expects us to understand because His action illustrated the very nature of gospel living. All those who would profess to be Christian must live by the example of His humble service. We must establish a relationship with our brothers or sisters in Christ that moves us to wash one another's feet in humble service.

1. **Jesus emphasized the spiritual**

significance of His actions (Jn 13:12). Jesus patiently waited until after washing all their feet before He brought their attention to the lesson of the hour. His statement, "*Do you know what I have done to you?*" emphasizes again the fact that He was not teaching footwashing as a religious rite. Jesus was teaching something far greater than the custom of footwashing. He was teaching gospel living.

2. **Jesus' humble servitude demands the same behavior of the disciples** (Jn 13:13). Jesus began His explanation of His behavior by referring to their consideration of who He was. "*You call Me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am.*" The disciples also considered Jesus to be the king to come of an earthly kingdom. To them He would be the Great One who would restore Israel's glory (See At 1:6). So they were at least right in their belief that He was **Teacher** and **Lord**. He was teacher in that He was their leader. He was Lord in the sense of being their Master.

But the disciples were wrong about the physical kingdom. Verse 13 here is reminiscent of a similar context and statement of Jesus in Mark 10:45. "*For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.*" If the Son of Man, Teacher, and Lord humbly stooped to wash the feet of those He had created, it is certainly reasonable to conclude that no Christian should ever exalt himself or herself above any other brother or sister to the point that service is not rendered. There would be no hierarchy of author-

ity in the kingdom to come. There would be only a community of slaves who were seeking to serve one another's needs (See Rm 12:9-16; Gl 6:2; Ep 5:21).

Herein is revealed the new order of gospel living that the disciples had such a difficult time understanding during the ministry of Jesus. What they did not understand was that they were becoming the initial subjects of a community of slaves, a community of people with towels in their hands looking for dirty feet. This was so different from the world around them that it was difficult to comprehend. Nevertheless, it would be by loving service that they would be known to the world as Jesus' disciples (Jn 13:34,35).

a. There is no room for orders of authority among God's people (Jn 13:14). Jesus said, *"If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet."* Jesus' logic is irrefutable. He is saying, "If God has washed your feet, don't you think you should wash one another's feet?" Only the arrogant and proud would dare answer in the negative. Only those who are bent on importing worldly behavior into the body of believers could misunderstand Jesus' point. We do not organize and run the disciples as a corporation. There are lords and rulers in the world of governments, but among the disciples there should never be such.

b. The brotherhood of disciples is a household of those who pattern themselves after the gospel of Jesus (Jn 13:15). Jesus said, *"For I have given you an example, that you should*

do as I have done to you." The example of what they should do for one another was not the illustration of footwashing that was used to teach the lesson. The illustration of humble servanthood by use of a cultural practice (footwashing) adequately taught the lesson that should characterize those of the community of God.

There is no place for rivalry among Jesus' disciples. There is no place for pride and arrogance. There is no place for hierarchical leadership. The church is a community of slaves, and slaves are busy with work. If slaves cease being slaves, then they start struggling over who is in control. Once our thinking is diverted from focusing on who is in control, then we begin to have rivalry among ourselves. Slaves do not focus on control. They focus on the toil of the task that is at hand.

c. The greatest among them should willingly serve the most humble (Jn 13:16). Jesus taught that *"a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him."* The Sender (Jesus) had humbly served the sent (the disciples). The Master (Jesus) had washed the feet of the servants (the disciples). Since Jesus was a servant who served them, then His conclusion was that those He sends forth must serve one another. They must submit *"to one another in the fear of God"* (Ep 5:21). Paul wrote to the Philippians of this gospel behavior, *"Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself"* (Ph 2:3).

3. Jesus revealed the heart to gospel living (Jn 13:17). Here is the key to happiness. *“If you know these things, happy are you if you do them.”* The text could be translated, *“Now that you know these things, happy are you if you do them.”* If the disciples did not now know what Jesus was teaching, then they most certainly would after Pentecost of A.D. 30. At least, after Pentecost there was no more rivalry among them. They were seen as example servants in the kingdom. By being such they enjoyed the result of servanthood, which was, *“Happy are you if you do them.”*

God so made our nature that if we do good to others we feel good ourselves. Servants reap the serendipity of their labors by harvesting the joy of helping others. Christians are happy simply because they are a group of slaves who serve others. They seek to serve the needs of man (Gl 6:10). And in serving others, they reap the serendipity which is happiness. Love that is expressed in service brings a happy heart (See Jn 13:34,35).

4. Judas failed to learn the key to gospel living (Jn 13:18-20). Judas never learned the lesson because he did not understand the heart of God that was revealed through Jesus. Both Judas and Peter failed Jesus in the final hours. Ju-

das betrayed the Lord for thirty pieces of silver. Peter denied Jesus because of a momentary lack of courage. However, the motives of Judas ended in his hanging of himself because his heart was wrong. However, because Peter was “clean,” his denial was only a momentary weakness of humanity. The repentant Peter stood later before an intimidating council and proclaimed, *“Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard”* (At 4:19,20). Peter had learned that the true heart of Christianity is not in what one would receive in a physical kingdom, but what one would give in a gospel sacrifice.

When one obeys the gospel, he makes a commitment to live the gospel. He comes into an environment where he considers his brother above himself, as Jesus considered us above Himself. He comes into a community of slaves who seek to serve the needs of others. He comes into a brotherhood of slaves who worship a God who took a towel and humbly washed the feet of those He had created. Jesus was certainly right when He said to Pilate, *“My kingdom is not of this world”* (Jn 18:36).

Chapter 7

GOSPEL SHEPHERDS

(1 Peter 5:1-7)

It is imperative that we base our understanding of the leadership passages of the epistles on the fundamental prin-

ciple of the gospel that Jesus spoke and lived during His ministry. Jesus taught leadership by servicing our spiritual

needs through the gospel (Mk 10:44). This is servanthood leadership that is grounded in personal relationships that one must maintain when one who has obeyed the gospel. Therefore, when we come to contexts as 1 Peter 5, we must first understand the nature of what Jesus taught to be relational leadership among His disciples before we can fully understand what Peter and the other writers of the epistles revealed concerning gospel leadership.

The context of 1 Peter 5:1-4 refers primarily to those who have been designated shepherds of the flock. The broader context would refer to anyone who would seek to lead the sheep of God in any manner. There is no double standard by which leadership functions among the disciples. By this we mean that any who would lead must lead in a manner by which the gospel is reflected in one's behavior.

Shepherds must manifest the behavioral characteristics of the gospel before they are designated as shepherds. Therefore, in a broader sense of application, Peter's admonitions in this context must be directed to all who would desire to lead. In the words of Peter, **if it is wrong for elders to lord over the flock, then it is wrong for any leader to lord over the flock.**

If it is wrong for the elders to lord over the flock of God, then certainly it is wrong for any member of the church to establish a lordship relationship with any other disciple. Biblical discipleship is a concept of "one **on** one," not "one **over** one." There is a great difference between

the two styles of relationship. The former allows members the freedom to encourage one another to stay focused on serving the Lord (Hb 10:25). The second encourages members to set up themselves as lords over one another, and thus, establish networks of control. By doing such, they bring one another into the bondage of one another's control. We must remember that there is only **one Lord**. This Lord is Jesus and He needs no competition from those who would set up themselves as lords over the flock.

1 Peter 5:5 admonishes those who sometimes have a difficult time continuing the submissive spirit of the gospel. In other words, the "younger," those who are often insubmissive to the older generation, are admonished by Peter to submit to the older. Peter even goes beyond the younger to all the disciples. **In their relationship with one another, all disciples must manifest a character of submission to one another** (Ep 5:21). Peter uses the word "clothed" as a metaphor in the context. Each member of the body must be dressed in submission. As opposed to a world that is dressed in arrogance, the members of the body of Christ must present themselves to the community as a body of servants who are clothed in submission.

The expanded context of verses 1-7 is an exhortation that Christians maintain a gospel life-style of humble service. They must manifest an attitude of submission as opposed to those who would practice lordship over the flock of God. Peter warned against any arrogance being manifested by God's shepherds. It is

evident that Peter and all the apostles had come a long way since the days of their rivalry for positions at the side of Jesus during His ministry (Mk 10:35-45). They sought lordship in the kingdom then, but now they are behaving as servants of the body. Though they had a hard time learning this lesson during the ministry of Jesus, they quickly learned it after experiencing the gospel of the cross. There is, therefore, no excuse for us today because we each have written copies of the gospel, and the example of those who lived the gospel in the first century.

As in the case of the readers of 1 Peter 5, some had turned from the servant motivation of the gospel. As a result, they were no longer gospel leaders, but had become lords. They had digressed from loving slavehood to lording masters who demanded service instead of giving service. They had moved from the fields of labor as slaves to the boardrooms of decision making. As autocratic leaders who assumed authority over the people of God, they behaved as those who would “run the church,” and not serve the church.

The above trend was what Paul had prophesied in Acts 20:30 in his warning to the Ephesian elders. ***“Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things to draw away the disciples after themselves.”*** The very thing that Paul warned against actually happened by the time Peter wrote. It happens always with those who lose sight of the gospel. When the “mind of Christ” is removed from our behavior, it is then that we start behaving as lords.

We believe we would be naïve if we did not think that this could be a problem with some in every age of the church. The fact is that before the church had existed for less than thirty years in the first century, lords had come in among the flock. If such happened in the first century during the personal ministry of the apostles, then certainly such can happen today. For this reason, it is imperative that we continually discuss and study this subject. We must focus on the New Testament contexts that deal specifically with lording over the flock of God.

The disciples of Jesus went from rivalry to servanthood. They went from desiring positions of lordship to serving as slaves. The longer they served, the more serviceable they became. Any who would be genuine leaders, therefore, will do the same as the apostles. They will function as gospel leaders if they do not forget the motivation of the gospel.

The word “elder” emphasizes one who is older in age. However, the word “shepherd” that Peter used focuses on what one **does**. The elder shepherds the flock. He looks over the needs of the flock. The word “elder” is used more times in the New Testament to identify these men than the word “shepherd.” However, the word “elder” is used when the Holy Spirit seeks to identify the presence of these aged men among the flock. When we speak of what these men do in their leadership, they shepherd the flock. They look over the needs of the sheep.

Therefore, when we come to the context of 1 Peter 5, Peter first identified those to whom he was directing his in-

structions. He then explained how they were to function in their relationship with the flock. The following discussion of 1 Peter 5 is the Holy Spirit's road map and dictionary for gospel leadership. In the immediate context, we discover between the lines that there was a problem of lordship leadership during Peter's day. Nevertheless, Peter wrote as if he were writing directly to many today who would also try to be lords over God's flock.

A. Peter admonishes shepherds.

Peter begins this admonition by directing the thoughts of his readers specifically to the elders. He concludes with instructions for all disciples.

1. "**Elders among you**" (1 Pt 5:1): The elders to whom Peter wrote were scattered throughout the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, the locations to which the epistle was directed (1 Pt 1:1). These were those older men among the disciples in these provinces who had devoted themselves to the ministry of the saints (See 1 Co 16:15,16). If they had acquired certain spiritual and physical qualifications as defined in 1 Timothy 3:1-8 and Titus 1:7-9, then the members of the body throughout these provinces designated or identified these men as "centers of reference" for humble service among them. As designated elders among the disciples, their service would be counseling, problem solving, spiritual direction, and specifically, teaching the word of God to the saints (See At 20:28).

The word "designate" in the translation of Titus 1:5, where Paul told Titus to "**appoint elders in every city**," is a better translation. The Greek word is often translated "ordain" or "appoint." Such renderings are fine, as long as we do not understand them in the context of our political and religious world that focuses on a hierarchy of authority. Unfortunately, we often view the designation of elders as an appointment to a political office in the church. And in doing this, our political motives creep into the function of the body.

In many cultures today, the words "ordain" and "appoint" carry with them strong political implications. When these words were used by Reformation translators, they were often seeking to bring political and authority connotations into the body. This is the very thing Peter is writing against in the context of 1 Peter 5. We need to be very careful with the use of such words. The words "designate" or "identify" carry with them less political baggage, and thus, are better words to use in order to convey the meaning of gospel leaders. Gospel leaders are functioning as servants of the flock before they are designated, or identified, by the flock.

Notice also that Peter says the elders (shepherds) function **among you**. Shepherds, as Jesus did, function among the sheep in order to identify with and know the needs of the flock. They must be with the sheep in order to smell like the sheep. In order to lead the flock, the flock must know who the shepherds are. Thus shepherds are designated to serve

only in an area where they can physically be among the sheep and the sheep can know them. They must be among the sheep in order to lead those who seek to serve.

The shepherd who seeks to be a leader, and yet is not among the sheep, is often focusing on some supposed office position as the shepherd. He is seeking dominance and control, not service to the needs of the flock. Therefore, the realm of the shepherd's service is determined by his ability to be among the sheep whom he can serve.

The fact that elders must care for the flock is evidence of the fact that they must be among the sheep. Shepherds cannot look out for those sheep of the flock that are outside their physical ability to visit and know. The inability of shepherds to carry out their responsibilities for sheep who are outside their area, limits them to a particular area of oversight. We believe Peter is saying that elders are not to oversee that which is out of their physical limitations to visit and know. This does not mean, however, that all the shepherds in a city know all the saints in the city.

When there is a plurality of shepherds in a city (At 14:23; Ti 1:5), each of the shepherds cannot know all the sheep of a large metropolitan area. This was especially true in the first century when the members of the body in the cities assembled in houses throughout the cities. The shepherds may have known all the places of assembly, but all the members may not have known all the shepherds, unless those shepherds moved among the

house assemblies, which thing they surely did. Since the Holy Spirit gave no information on the function of the shepherds among the house assemblies, we assume that He expects us to work this out for ourselves.

2. “Shepherd the flock of God” (1 Pt 5:2,3): The Greek word that is used here for “shepherd” means “to tend” or “to care for.” Shepherds care for the needs of the sheep (See Ps 78:70-72; Jr 23:1-4). Their leadership is shown by the manner in which they care for the needs of the flock. The function of shepherds is based on the nature and work of the shepherds of Israel whose duty it was to care for the children of Israel (See Ez 34).

a. The flock: This is a metaphor that pictures the family of God as a harmless and helpless flock of sheep. Pictured as such in a world of wolves, the shepherds' work is to protect the flock from the ravaging world in which the sheep live. Good shepherds recognize the defenseless nature of the flock. They realize that the flock must be protected against those who would scatter the sheep. Paul gave a warning for elders: *“For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock”* (At 20:29). It is the responsibility of leaders to guard the flock against those who would ravage the flock of God (See Ti 1:9-11).

When elders forget the gospel of the heart of God, they become the wolves by lording over the flock. In Paul's warning that he gave to the Ephesian elders,

he identified the source from which the wolves would come (At 20:30). It is certain that Peter was addressing in the context of 1 Peter 5 some of those who were taking their first steps into becoming ravaging wolves.

b. The flock of God: The flock belongs to God, not to any man. As a hired shepherd cares for the flock that belongs to someone else, so elders are responsible for that which does not belong to them. Elders must remember that the church does not belong to them. It belongs to God. Too often we encounter groups of disciples that have been stolen by some leader who thinks the flock of disciples belongs to him (See 3 Jn). Those who practice such lordship will eventually stand before the real owner of the flock and give account of their theft of the sheep.

Paul seemed to think that this would be a specific problem with the elders of the church, for he made a specific warning to elders in Acts 20:30. He stated to the Ephesian elders, “... *from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves.*” It would appear that elders should first look among themselves for those who would ravage the flock. At least this is where Paul places the emphasis of his warnings concerning those who would seek to draw away the disciples after themselves.

It is not that certain elders draw sheep away after gospel living. On the contrary, they do the opposite. They draw disciples away from Christ after themselves.

c. Serving: The work of shepherds is to serve, not to lord. They are

not rulers, but servants who minister to the needs of God’s flock. They must **serve** as overseers. Herein is revealed the nature of the work of the shepherds. Their work is one of service to the flock of God. Shepherds are identified by their labor in service to the needs of others. As Jesus through the gospel came to serve our needs, those who would follow Him as the Chief Shepherds must serve the needs of others.

It is important to understand that God gave the church the right to designate elders to minister to the needs of the members. Elders are not evangelists to the lost. They are ministers to the flock. Elders can be evangelistic (1 Tm 5:17). However, the primary focus of their work is to minister to the flock of God.

d. Overseers: The English word “oversee” is used to translate the Greek word in this text that means “to superintend.” We must be careful not to define this word after the manner of the world. Shepherds of the church do not superintend the sheep with lordship authority. Jesus specifically said that this manner of leadership **would not** be among His flock. We must remind ourselves of His statement concerning lordship leadership: “*Yet it shall not be so among you ...*” (Mk 10:42,43).

This statement of Jesus should caution us not to import the leadership style of the world into the church of God’s people. We should be careful not to bring in such worldly thinking through the world’s definition of words that are used by the world to signify lordship or dictatorship.

As a shepherd cares for a flock of sheep, so elders superintend the flock in order to protect the sheep from the hostile environment in which they live. To oversee means to look out for. The function of shepherding that Peter is describing in this context is something that the elders **do**, not something they are. What they do is to protect and care for the flock. They are servants who seek to care for and to protect God's flock in a hostile environment of wolves. They are to do this without behaving contrary to the nature of the gospel. The following are the three "nots" of oversight:

(1) **"Not by constraint"**: Shepherds must desire the work of caring for and administering to the needs of the sheep. Paul said that one must **desire** the work (1 Tm 3:1). In desiring the ministry of service, the shepherd has identified himself as a shepherd. Elders must be willing servants of all. They must not grumble when those who are in need knock at the door of their house. They must respond with willingness and care. Leaders who consider it a burden to serve the humble needs of others usually view their position as an "office." And in viewing their work as an office, they often turn to lording over the flock instead of loving over the flock.

Those who desire to be slaves to the needs of others usually do not have much trouble with servicing the needs of others. They qualify themselves as leaders because of their loving desire to serve. This desire to be a slave to the needs of others must be in the hearts of those who

would serve as designated shepherds among the sheep. It may be easy to desire to sit in an office and "call the shots." But it is not so easy to desire to be on call twenty-four hours a day to the needs of God's community.

(2) **"Not for dishonest gain"**: Those full-time elders who labor well, especially in teaching the word, are to be paid double. Paul instructed, "*Let the elders who direct well be counted worthy of double honor [pay], especially those who labor in preaching and teaching*" (1 Tm 5:17, RKJV). In our immediate context of 1 Peter 5, Peter admonished that elders not use the ministry of a shepherd as an occasion to extract more money from the sheep than that which is due them for payment and ministry as worthy servants. Paul gave one of the qualifications of an elder that he not be one who is "*greedy for gain*" (1 Tm 3:3). The occasion for this statement is that the shepherds are worthy of double salary.

Some have wondered why full-time elders should be paid double the wages of the ordinary member. The answer to this is obvious. The specific nature of the man who qualifies to be a shepherd moves him to be a giver because he has the heart of God. If he is a godly man, then he is a giver as God is a giver. When the poor and needy show up at his door, he cannot turn them away. He gives. He sacrifices. The extra salary that is given to the full-time shepherd is the church fulfilling their obligations to the needy through the medium of the shepherds.

Those who do not understand the

nature of a loving shepherd fail to see the above principle. If a particular shepherd was greedy, then he would greedily take advantage of the double pay. But it is not the nature of shepherds to be greedy.

Some members who fail to see the purpose and work of the elders often view others according to their own greedy character. Therefore, when they are stingy, they accuse others of being the same. They often hold back their contribution from elders who can lovingly distribute their money to benevolent opportunities of the entire body. In other words, the church cannot pay a good elder enough. He will not consume his payment upon his own lusts. He will always give to others. This is simply the nature of a good and godly elder. His “pure religion” moves him to take care of the orphans and widows (Jas 1:27). Gospel lovers naturally make gospel leaders.

Members of the body must understand that they have an obligation to support elders who minister in preaching and teaching. But elders themselves must understand that their ministry is not a job, but an opportunity for the church to work through them in servicing the needs of others. Those who are working for dishonest gain need to be discontinued as elders. It goes without saying that a greedy person has disqualified himself as an elder.

(3) “Not as being lords”: Elders have not been given autocratic rule, or dominance over the flock of God. They cannot have such rule simply because the flock does not belong to them. We must remember that Jesus specifi-

cally forbade this type of conduct among the sheep (See Mk 10:42-44; Lk 22:25,26).

Those who would seek to rule the flock of God after the manner of the world are stealing the flock from God through their autocratic dominance. The flock has only one Lord. That Lord is Jesus, and He has all authority (Mt 28:18). No man has a right to stand up and claim the flock of God by claiming to be a lord over the flock.

Lordship can be deceptively exercised in different ways. One does not have to be an elder in order to behave as a lord among the members. As will be discussed later, Diotrephes practiced lordship over the flock by assuming authority, and lordship cannot exist without the assumption of authority. The Holy Spirit said his behavior in exercising authority over the flock was evil (3 Jn 11). Lordship among the sheep of God is always evil because such a style of leadership is a direct attack against the authority of Jesus alone over the flock.

The roots of lordship can be identified in various ways. We must first consider our own personal relationship with the flock of God. We must determine if we are behaving as lords, or as servants. When all decisions are centered on one individual, then that individual is practicing lordship. When members are intimidated by the presence of a particular individual, then that individual must be careful not to take advantage of the people. When members think that they must ask for our permission before they can do God’s work in their lives, then

those from whom permission is sought are practicing lordship. When members are in fear of what we will do if they make a mistake, then someone is probably practicing lordship. If members are intimidated from freely interpreting the Bible for themselves because of the forceful opinions of another, then someone is practicing lordship. When we sit idle and are always asking others to get the job done, then we are either lazy or practicing lordship.

We must keep in mind that the character that is necessary for one to become an elder is contrary to attitudes of lordship. Leaders too often become lords after they have been designated leaders of the flock. One does not usually begin to be a lord of the flock when first designated an elder. He digresses into this function over a period of time. Paul said that lords would “arise” among the existing elders of the flock (At 20:30). They are first designated among the flock, and they sometimes take the opportunity to arise among the flock as lords. Once one falls into the pitfall of lordship, it takes repentance to be restored to the former behavior of gospel discipleship.

There are lordship tendencies in most men. After all, many of us live in an industrial/business culture wherein lordship is the norm in corporate leadership. Without qualities of “ruling” and “lording,” one is often not successful in the corporate world. It is very important, therefore, to recognize our tendency toward lordship leadership, and then, make a conscientious effort against such in our relationship with our fellow disciples.

Those who do not recognize the problem of our desire to rule over our fellow man often become the problem. This is especially true of those who live in industrial/business cultures.

3. *Shepherds must be examples.*

If leadership is not by lordship, then it is by the **example of gospel living**. The word “but” in the text of 1 Peter 5:3 contrasts the lordship leadership Peter condemns with the example of example leadership that he desires that shepherds exemplify in their lives. Jesus had instructed that those who would be great **must be the servants of all** (Mk 10:43,44). As Jesus ransomed His life for us, then gospel leaders ransom themselves for the flock of God. Peter remembered this fundamental principle that Jesus spoke on the road to Jerusalem. He here applies such to the example that elders must live among the disciples.

Elders lead by the example of their caring for the flock that belongs to God, just as Jesus cared for the church, that is His bride (See Ep 5:22-23). They are leaders in that the **sheep naturally follow the ones who care for them**. The elders’ leadership is judged by the willingness of the sheep to follow their loving servants. If the sheep are not willing to follow a particular shepherd, then naturally that shepherd is not serving the sheep. He has lost his loving care for the sheep; he has lost his gospel example. Such a one is here warned by Peter about demanding the “followership” of the flock by his dominance over the sheep as a lord.

We have found that many who have given up leading by servanthood example resort to lordship behavior. They move from servants to lords. In such a move, however, they disqualify themselves as spiritual examples for the flock.

4. The Chief Shepherd is coming (1 Pt 5:4). Peter wrote, “*When the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.*” Jesus is the Chief Shepherd and He is coming again. All elders must remember this. When earthly shepherds begin stealing God’s flock by lording over the sheep, they must remember that they will eventually stand before the Chief Shepherd and give account of their behavior.

To the Chief Shepherd they must give account concerning their attitudes and actions in relation to the flock. Those shepherds who have labored as faithful servants in caring for God’s sheep will be greatly rewarded. And for this reason, faithful shepherds look forward to the appearing of the Chief Shepherd. They look forward to the day when they can give the care of the flock over to the One to whom the flock belongs.

B. Peter admonishes the flock.

In 1 Peter 5:5 Peter turns to the responsibility of the flock with the shepherds. As a household of servants, Christians seek to be submissive to one another’s service. This is especially true in reference to the members’ submission to those who have dedicated their lives to minister to the needs of others.

1. The flock must respond with submission (1 Pt 5:5). Peter admonishes the flock to submit to the service and example of the shepherds.

Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.

Godly shepherds cannot superintend a rebellious flock. Submission must be an individual decision of each disciple. In relation to the ministry of Stephanas and his household, Paul instructed the Corinthian disciples to “*submit to such, and to everyone who works and labors with us*” (1 Co 16:15,16). Every member must manifest a spirit of submission to the service of those who seek to serve (Ep 5:21). The flock, therefore, is a membership of slaves who have submitted to one another’s service. It is not a house of arrogant lords seeking offices of power. Those who would be characterized by such proud behavior will be resisted by God. Peter gives the only recourse we must follow: “*Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God*” (1 Pt 5:5).

Peter deals with two specific groups when discussing the responsibility of submission. He deals with the younger in the universal church and the universal church as a whole.

a. Submission of the younger: Peter first admonished the group of younger disciples who were most likely

to show a spirit of arrogance and insubordination. Youth must submit to the older and more mature elders. Specifically, they must submit to the shepherds in order that they follow the example of the shepherds. Insubmissive leads one to reject the example of the shepherds. It is imperative, therefore, that youth learn a spirit of submission in order not to cheat themselves of learning from the godly examples of the shepherds.

b. Submission of the church:

The entire fellowship of disciples must submit to those who have been designated to care for their needs. After all, what would be the purpose of designating elders to care for the needs of the people if the people do not submit to their care? When a servant shows up at our

house, we must allow ourselves to be served by a loving person who seeks to care for our needs.

In view of Jesus' teaching in Mark 10:43-45, we must not understand this submission as that which is associated with the submission in the autocratic rule of kings, chiefs and presidents, whom we fear if we act in an insubordinate manner. We submit to elders who seek to be slaves to our needs. We, the body of Christ, have designated them to shepherd our spiritual needs. As the flock of God, we must submit to their tender loving care in spiritual areas of life where we are in need. We must not turn them away when they seek to care for us.

Chapter 8

GOSPEL VERSUS AUTOCRATIC LEADERSHIP

(3 John)

John's short letter to Gaius reveals the heart of an individual who had truly given himself over to living after the gospel of Jesus Christ. Gaius' gospel living subsequently became the occasion for the anti-gospel leadership of Diotrephes who sought to work against the heart of God.

The situation involved a brother named Diotrephes who assumed autocratic control over some disciples in order to stop the preaching of the gospel. This case illustrates a leadership behavior that is brought out in John's statement concerning Diotrephes' character. Diotrephes loved "*to be first among them*" (3 Jn 9). This is the character of

leadership that is totally contrary to the evangelistic nature of the gospel. When leaders love themselves, they become obstinate to that which moves one to be the servant of all.

Dictators as Diotrephes seek to exercise control, and thus, the brethren become the opportunity for them to carry out their desire to be first. The autocratic person relates to the people in a manner that submits the desires of the people to his own desires. He does not see himself in a position serving people as Jesus served us through the gospel, but above people in order that they submit to his desires. This style of leadership would

be the exact opposite to the gospel leadership that Jesus taught (Mk 10:35-45).

The contrast between gospel and autocratic leadership is brought out in this situation wherein Gaius was an evangelistic and benevolent member. We do not know where he was located, though there is no question that Gaius and others in his area were meeting in houses. We would assume that there was a cluster of house fellowships throughout the area. Since the Holy Spirit wanted the letter of 3 John in the collection of Holy Scriptures, and thus circulated throughout the disciples, we could assume that the problem that existed where Gaius lived also existed in other areas.

When we understand that cultural habits of the world often find their way into our function as the body of Christ, it is easy to understand how autocratic leadership made its way in among the disciples where Gaius lived. Such should also be a warning that the same happens in the church today. Church business meetings often become opportunities for power struggles. Elders' meetings often become corporate board meetings where dictates are made and passed down to the members. The social environment that prevailed among the disciples where Gaius and Diotrephes lived was not unlike our society today.

Regardless of the above struggles that may also exist among some today, we must seek to understand the true nature of leadership that emulates the behavior of those who have obeyed the gospel. Jesus established the foundation for gospel leadership by laying down His life

for us. The epistles fine-tuned the application of the principles and example of Jesus by which we can lay down our lives for others. In 3 John we have a real life situation wherein these principles were both practiced and violated.

A. **Autocratic leadership in the first century culture:**

As stated in an earlier chapter, Jesus cautioned His disciples about any autocratic style of leadership. In many social structures, it was a part of the culture in which the disciples lived. Jesus knew that such would eventually influence the behavior of the leaders among His disciples. Even while the disciples walked with Him on earth they struggled with this problem among themselves. We must continually remind ourselves of at least one principle that persistently seeks to destroy gospel leadership among the disciples: **The lust for control is difficult to overcome.** And because it is difficult to overcome, it is a cultural behavior pattern that is easy to move into the leadership of the church.

B. **Autocratic leadership in the first century church:**

Because autocratic leadership was the common system of leadership in the world of the disciples, it is not difficult to understand how some disciples assumed that such should be the system of leadership among the disciples. It would be easy for the early disciples to come to this conclusion since they perceived that

there would supposedly be a physical restoration of national Israel. But Jesus said to them concerning lordship leadership, “*Yet it shall not be so among you*” (Mk 10:43). This one statement should urge us to be careful not to bring in among the membership of disciples the lordship leadership that is in the world. There are dictators in the world, but only servants in the church. There are sovereigns in the world, but only slaves in the church.

Peter had learned the above concept well, for years after Jesus’ personal instructions to him on the roads to Capernaum and Jerusalem, he admonished those elders, who would function as lords over the flock of God, not to be “*lords over those entrusted to*” them (1 Pt 5:3). In 1 Peter 5, Peter was warning against that which he and the other disciples struggled during the ministry of Jesus.

Throughout the New Testament there are persistent warnings against the practice of lordship leadership. Jesus first dealt with the problem of lordship leadership among His disciples during His earthly ministry (See Mk 9:33-35; 10:35-45; Lk 22:24-27). After the establishment of the church, Peter also dealt with the problem in his epistle (1 Pt 5:1-5). In his personal farewell to the Ephesian elders, Paul also warned, “*Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves*” (At 20:30). There were also those in the Corinthian church who rejected the apostolic leadership of the apostle Paul. They challenged his apostleship, assum-

ing it for themselves (1 Co 15:7-10). Paul informed Timothy that some desired the position of being a teacher, though they did not know what they were teaching (1 Tm 1:7). Jude said that some became so arrogant that they “*reject authority and speak evil of dignitaries*” (Jd 8). Lordship leadership has always been a persistent problem among the disciples.

One is certainly naive, or caught up in the very problem itself, if he does not recognize that lordship leadership can be a problem at any one time in the history of the church. Our only guard against such leadership is to continually remind ourselves of the nature of the gospel. Gospel is about God serving our needs. Those who would lead by the gospel, therefore, must do likewise in reference to the needs of others.

C. **The persistence of autocratic leadership:**

Autocratic leadership satisfies man’s ego and thirst for power. Men have always had a problem with the “pride of life” (See 1 Jn 2:15,16). We desire positions so we can exercise authority over our fellow man. This is a cultural behavior of leadership that is encouraged in the Western business world.

We likewise strive for office in government in order to be in a place of authority. We desire to climb the ladder of success. The chieftain culture of tribal groups is too often brought in among the disciples. Small groups of disciples are scattered here and there with a “chief pastor” or a “chief elder.”

We live in a world of pride and power, pomp and possessions. It is a world that makes it quite easy to walk from the corporate boardroom into the church business meeting with an attitude of autocratic leadership. It is easy to walk from the chief's village meeting into the church meeting with an air of arrogance and a desire to lord over the flock of God. We treat the members with the same authoritarian principles with which we intimidate or whip the employees of a business into position and production. We justify ourselves by saying, "We should treat the Lord's business as business." But in the area of leadership, Jesus said, "*Yet it shall not be so among you.*"

The church should not be the opportunity wherein we express our desires to lord over our fellow man. The church is an environment wherein slaves are prepared for eternal dwelling in heaven through service on earth. And herein was the problem with Diotrephes in the house fellowships in the area of Gaius. Diotrephes was obstructing the fellowship of the church to the point that the outreach of the gospel was hindered. On the other hand, Gaius was exemplifying gospel living.

D. Gaius as a gospel servant:

John wrote a very brief letter to Gaius. In 3 John 13 he stated, "*I had many things to write.*" We would assume from this statement that John proposed to write an extensive letter concerning the problem Gaius was encountering. However, John wrote, "*I hope to see you*

shortly" (3 Jn 14). We wish John had written more. Nevertheless, regardless of the brevity of the letter, there are many principles that we can glean from what John wrote that will help us understand both to identify the problem that faced Gaius, and the manner by which we would be gospel leaders.

1. *The gospel function of the body* (3 Jn 1-8): Gaius was seeking to live the gospel of giving by financially supporting evangelists who were traveling among the disciples. Because of this support, he was facing "disfellowship" by the instigation of Diotrephes who had been allowed by the church to gain lordship control over the flock of God. Here is a case where a good brother (Gaius) wanted to live by the gospel. However, he was hindered by the autocratic leadership of a power hungry leader.

Even among disciples where there may be designated elders, this can be a problem. One elder over a period of time can sometimes gain excessive influence over the other elders, and thus, lord over the flock of God by getting his way. This seems to be what Paul warned against in Acts 20:29,30, for he warned that from the elders themselves there would arise some of them to draw away the disciples after themselves. If elders do not walk in fear of stealing God's sheep, then they will start thinking that the sheep belong to them. And when they start thinking that the flock belongs to them, they will draw away the disciples after themselves.

a. Gaius did a faithful work.

John expressed his joy over Gaius' faithful work of receiving and sending forth the "brethren" (3 Jn 3). John wrote, "*Beloved, you do faithfully whatever you do for the brethren and for strangers*" (3 Jn 5). These brethren, or traveling evangelists, had gone forth among the early Christians and testified of the hospitality of Gaius (3 Jn 3). John encouraged Gaius by saying that they "*have borne witness of your love before the church*" (3 Jn 6). They were informing other Christians everywhere of the "faithful" work of Gaius in living the gospel.

Gaius' personal missionary support is an excellent example in the New Testament of individual Christians taking it upon themselves to support mission work personally. Whether the church as a whole supports evangelistic outreach does not relieve the individual member from doing such on a personal basis. In this situation, Gaius evidently was personally supporting the traveling evangelists, though some in the region where he lived had been hindered from doing such by an autocratic leader (Diotrephes) who had "shut up the kingdom" to those who wanted to hear the gospel (See Mt 23:13).

Gaius' example to members who are in similar situations is very clear. Christians should continue their God-ordained responsibility of supporting evangelists who go forth to preach the gospel regardless of the ungodly direction of leaders who have long forgotten the mission of Christ. Members of the body have a God-commissioned right and duty to support personally the preaching of the gospel to all the world (Rm 10:15). They should

not allow any man to hinder them from accomplishing this work.

b. Christians are individually responsible for supporting traveling evangelists. These traveling evangelists about whom John refers had gone forth to preach the gospel. In defending Gaius' right and responsibility to support evangelists, John argues that we should support them for the following reasons:

(1) "*They went forth for His [Jesus'] name's sake.*" In other words, they are Jesus' men who are preaching the gospel to the lost. If we claim to be of the gospel of Christ, then certainly we should support those who proclaim the gospel of the One with whom we identify ourselves. Our support of world evangelists is a manifestation of our understanding the nature of the gospel, that it must be preached to every creature in all nations (Mt 28:19,20; Mk 16:15).

(2) "*Taking nothing from the Gentiles.*" When these evangelists preached to the gospel to the unbelievers, **they did not take up a contribution from the unbelievers.** John reasons, therefore, that these men must be supported. John concluded that it was necessary that **the believers** support them in order that they continue this work. It is the responsibility of Christians to support evangelists (missionaries) who preach the gospel to the unbelieving world. This is God's system of world evangelism. Paul instructed, "*Even so the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel*" (1 Co 9:14).

(3) **“We ... may become fellow workers for the truth.”** If we claim to have obeyed the gospel, then certainly we are to proclaim the truth of the gospel to the whole world. John encouraged Gaius and all who would support such men by saying, *“If you send them forward [Gr., “support”] on their journey in a manner worthy of God, you will do well”* (3 Jn 6). Many Christians are not doing well because they are not supporting the preaching of the gospel to the lost. Those Christians that do well usually have a strong evangelistic outreach.

Diotrephes would have nothing to do with preaching the gospel to others simply because he had lost contact with the meaning of the gospel. Those who forget the cost Jesus paid for their salvation, and the joy of their redemption, will often be weak in supporting the preaching of the gospel. If they have no joy in the Christian experience of living the gospel, then certainly they will feel no need to share the gospel with others.

Lordship leaders have lost contact with the nature of the gospel, and thus, as Diotrephes, they work against the preaching of the gospel. They see the body of Christ as an opportunity to carry out their lordship desires over their fellow disciples.

Diotrephes was paranoid. Those evangelists the church might support would only come in and disturb his “position” and upset his “office” of lording over the members. Therefore, in order to protect his ungodly practice as a lordship leader, he blocked any who might endanger his authority.

E. Diotrephes as a lording disciple:

Diotrephes lost sight of the gospel. We do not know how he was allowed to gain lording control of the disciples that was contrary to the gospel. We would suppose that the disciples around him were somewhat at fault. At least, the local disciples were not totally innocent. However, John does not blame the members for Diotrephes’ ungodly behavior. We are all like sheep without a shepherd (Mt 9:36). When someone takes advantage of our innocence, those who take control are the ones to be blamed, not the sheep. God will not hold the sheep accountable for leaders who take advantage of those who seek to live after the humble service of the gospel.

Regardless of how Diotrephes gained and exercised such dictatorial control over the local church, the problem existed at the time John wrote. Gaius was struggling with the problem, and Diotrephes was refusing to allow the church to receive and support the traveling evangelists. Anyone he found who was individually doing such he would excommunicate from the fellowship of “his people.”

1. *The sins of Diotrephes* (3 Jn 9,10): Diotrephes’ sins resulted from his opposition to the work of the gospel in the lives of Christians. His intimidation of others had stopped the effective evangelistic outreach, and Gaius was frustrated. It is God’s system of evangelism that the church financially support and

send out evangelists (Rm 10:15; 1 Co 9:14). However, Diotrephes was interfering with this gospel program of world evangelism. His interference involved a sinful attitude and behavior that involved the following:

a. Diotrephes loved preeminence. Preeminence means “to love to be first.” Autocratic disciples who love positions often use the church as an opportunity to carry out their personal love to be first before others. They often fail to be first among men in the world around them, so they use the innocent sheep of God as an opportunity to lord over others. However, the most common source from which preeminent leaders come is the industrial/business world in which many leaders live and work. These leaders are preeminent in their businesses. They often bring this attitude of preeminence in among the disciples.

As stated before, it is difficult to understand how Diotrephes gained such a position of control among the members. One answer may be indicated by his name. The name “Diotrephes” in the local custom of Greek culture was a name that was usually given to royalty or someone of social prominence. It could be that Diotrephes was a political or social figure in the community before he became a Christian. He may have been born of royal blood.

He was eventually “converted,” and thus, came into the community of members with great respect, but not actively obeying the gospel in his heart. He then took advantage of the respect of the mem-

bers. A similar situation happened with Simon the sorcerer (See At 8). He enjoyed prominence in the community, and then sought to bring this prominence into the fellowship of the members of the body (See At 8:18,19).

Uncontrolled respect possibly moved the members to put Diotrephes into a leadership position among themselves for which he was not spiritually prepared. The church may have done with Diotrephes that about which James warned the church in James 2:2-4. The ones to whom James wrote gave special respect to the “one wearing the fine clothes.” Because of this respect, they placed the rich in prominent positions among the members. Diotrephes’ love for preeminence, which he evidently had before becoming a Christian, encouraged him to accept the position that the members were willing to give him.

Prominent community leaders often have not learned to humble themselves under the mighty hand of God when they obeyed the gospel (1 Pt 5:6). They have a difficult time learning submission in order to live the gospel in their relationships with others (Ep 5:21). Combine this insubmissive attitude with the will of the people to have a “great one” lead them, and we have a similar situation John was addressing in 3 John. Paul cautioned that we “*lay hands hastily on no man*” (1 Tm 5:22). This would certainly be a principle to follow with any new convert. Obedience to the gospel does not necessarily mean that one has immediately grown from being exalted among men to being a servant of others (See 2 Pt 3:18).

It is true that few who are in high places will be called. Those who are in such places are too accustomed to being called “Rabbi,” “Teacher,” “Father,” “Doctor” or “Pastor” (See Mt 23:6-10). It is often difficult for those who have accepted the praise and position of the world to condescend to the humble status of a slave among those who have humbled themselves to one another. However, it is still Jesus’ principle that *“the greatest among you will be your servant”* (Mt 23:11). This does not always appeal to those who love to be preeminent among people.

b. Diotrephes did not receive John and the other apostles. When one is in a lordship position among local members, he does not want anyone around who will threaten or challenge his position. He does not want anyone who might question his behavior.

Diotrephes’ next step after assuming a dictatorial position was only natural. He did not want any apostle around. He did not want any evangelists around rebuking him for his sinful attitude and behavior that was contrary to the gospel. Those who love to be preeminent always feel threatened by others they suppose are of their same ungodly attitude. They project on others their preeminent attitude, and thus, their relationship with other leaders is always strained. The preeminent leader, therefore, always has a difficult time relating with other leaders.

c. Diotrephes slandered John and the other evangelists. The third stage of Diotrephes’ digression into lordship was again a natural move for auto-

cratic leaders. In order to destroy their opposition, they slander other leaders with malicious words (3 Jn 10). Diotrephes slandered before those whom he lead anyone who would endanger his position. He put others down in order to keep himself up. He may have called John a liberal or legalist or some other slanderous name. Those who lead by slander seek to deceive others into believing their slanderous lies in order to convince their adherents that their opposition is not of the truth.

Through slander, **autocratic leaders seek to lead a group of subjects against those they suppose to be “heretics” by keeping their following in ignorance as to what the accused really believes.** Diotrephes wanted to make certain that John was not invited for any gospel meetings or to speak at any local lectureships. Leaders as Diotrephes will seldom go to those they slander in order to seek the truth.

d. Diotrephes would not receive the traveling evangelists. One work of traveling evangelists among the disciples is found in Paul’s charge to the evangelist Timothy, *“Convince, rebuke, exhort”* (2 Tm 4:2). This was in the context of Paul’s warning of perilous times when *“men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers”* (2 Tm 3:2). This seems to be a description of Diotrephes. To the evangelist, Titus, Paul gave similar instructions: *“For there are many insubordinate, both idle talkers and deceivers ... whose mouths must be stopped”* (Ti 1:10,11).

We can understand why Diotrephes

did not want any evangelists conducting meetings for the local disciples or to speak to the members. He knew that if either Timothy or Titus showed up, he would be rebuked and his arrogant mouth would be stopped. From this situation, therefore, the members can identify those leaders among them who may be as Diotrophes. If these leaders reject or refuse evangelists to come by in order to teach, they may be protecting their positions and sparing themselves from certain rebuke. Those local leaders who bring an accusation against someone in order to block that person from being a visiting speaker, should be challenged as to why they are refusing the visiting evangelist from coming. They may not have gospel motives, and if so, then they are working against the gospel as Diotrophes.

We have also seen the “Diotrophes mentality” arise in leadership that refuses to allow traveling evangelists to stand before churches to report what God is doing among the Gentiles (See At 14:27,28; 15:3). These leaders are often afraid that the traveling evangelist will turn the minds of the flock toward the spiritual needs of the world, and thus deplete the local budget by supporting world missions. Whether it comes from elders or preachers, this practice is a digression from the gospel. It is an apostasy to shut up the kingdom to the millions of the world who need to have an evangelist sent to them with the gospel (See Rm 10:14,15).

e. Diotrophes forbade any members to support the preaching of the gospel. Diotrophes refused any out-

side influence to come among those over whom he had control. Such is the behavior of those who have forgotten the spirit of the gospel of Christ. They do not want to give the disciples the opportunity to hear someone who might disagree with their lack of gospel living. In this text, Diotrophes was discouraging the local members, as Gaius, from financially supporting those who were preaching the gospel, and thus Diotrophes wanted no gospel preachers among those whom he controlled..

f. Diotrophes put those who would accept the traveling evangelists out of his fellowship. Leaders, as Diotrophes, will not only reject their opponents, they will threaten those who would receive them. By intimidation, therefore, their tyrannical domination continues over the disciples.

Gaius and Demetrius were good brethren in a cluster of house fellowships that was suffering from the behavior of a tyrant. Gaius was undoubtedly suffering in the situation for he evidently wrote to John to ask for help. He may have possibly been on the verge of being “disfellowshipped” by a Diotrophes led coalition and accused of being a church divider. Or, it may have been that he had already been disfellowshipped from the fellowship over which Diotrophes had control.

Diotrophes leaders intimidate the meek by threatening them with “disfellowship.” It is a sad situation when the good will of fine-hearted Christians is held in check by the tyrannical threats of those who presume to be leaders.

John concluded by encouraging Gaius to continue his good work, regardless of the threats of dictatorial leadership. He encouraged Gaius to fellowship with Demetrius who had a good testimony of all (3 Jn 12). Gaius was encouraged by John to do what was right. Regardless of the consequences, we must live the gospel we obeyed. We must seek the fellowship of others who are also living the gospel.

In this particular situation, John was evidently coming soon to take care of the problem personally (3 Jn 14). We do not have the privilege of having a Christ-sent apostle coming and sorting out our difficulties with the rod of a Christ-sent apostle (See 1 Co 4:21; 2 Co 12:20 – 13:10). However, we do have 3 John and other epistles to give us divine guidance and instruction. We must “*preach the word*” and “*convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching*” (2 Tm 4:2). By the power of the word, evangelists must convict those who would steal the flock of God.

In Gaius’ situation, John did not tell him to go off and start another fellowship of disciples, unless we view John’s exhortation to associate with Demetrius to be such an exhortation. Since the members of the body were meeting in the

homes of the members, we would assume that John was encouraging Gaius to meet with Demetrius. Possibly John did not encourage starting another group because he was coming to deal with the problem.

Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “*For there must also be factions among you so that those who are approved may be made known among you*” (1 Co 11:19). In other words, Paul was saying that division which might occur among the disciples would manifest those who had the heart of God. It was not Paul’s desire that division occur. As a last resort, however, such would occur if some in Achaia did not repent. Thankfully, the arrogant members of Achaia who were in opposition to Paul did repent and the church was spared the division. Nevertheless, Paul’s point remains. Division will manifest those who are living the gospel.

Paul encouraged members to submit to one another in the fear of God (Ep 5:21). Members must bear one another’s burdens (Gl 6:2). “*And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ also forgave you*” (Ep 4:32). In this atmosphere of living the gospel there should be no cause for arrogant leadership or in submissive Christians.

Chapter 9

GOSPEL VERSUS RELIGIOUS LEADERSHIP

(Matthew 23:1-39; Luke 11:37-54)

When the gospel was revealed through Jesus, the religious leadership of the nation of Israel was in the hands of

religious leaders who had stolen the vineyard of God (See Mt 21:33-45). In the text of Matthew 23, therefore, Jesus ad-

dressed these leaders who were “*the scribes and the Pharisees*” (Mt 23:2). In the Luke 11 parallel account, Luke identified the scribes as the lawyers. They were the lawyers of the law.

Matthew 23:11 indicates that Jesus was directly addressing the multitudes and His disciples about the problem of the scribes and Pharisees. We would assume, therefore, that in the multitudes there were scribes and Pharisees who represented the establishment of their religious leadership. In Matthew 23 Jesus delivered a stern rebuke to the Jewish religious leadership concerning their attitudes and misguided religion that they had created after their own religious rites (See Gl 1:13).

Jesus delivered this judgment of religious leaders and their religion just before His crucifixion. He was at this time in His ministry stirring up the antagonism of the religious leaders in order to take Himself to the cross. He had the power to lay down His life voluntarily and to take it up again (Jn 10:17,18). By agitating the ungodly hearts of the jealous religious establishment, Jesus took Himself to the cross.

The context of Matthew 23, therefore, was Jesus’ intent to stir up the evil He knew was in the hearts of the religious leaders in order that they cry out to have Himself crucified. They wanted Him crucified because He threatened their leadership that was totally contrary to the gospel leadership that was about to be revealed (See Ph 2:5-11).

A. Jesus judges leaders of religion.

In Matthew 23:2-7 Jesus indirectly spoke to His disciples, but with the leaders of religion listening in on the discussion. But in verses 13-36, He directs His judgments directly to the religious leadership of the Jews. As an interlude between these two discussions, Jesus addressed the disciples directly again in verses 8-12.

Jesus’ pronouncements give us divine principles concerning the error of those who capture the religious consciences of people, and then reign over them as lordship leaders. The leadership style of such religious leaders, as that which was characterized by the scribes and Pharisees, would be a style of leadership that we would not seek to copy. In this text, we discover those behavioral principles of leadership that God would not have us believe or practice among His people.

Jesus’ condemnation of the religious leadership of the Jewish religion reveals concepts of leadership that are opposed to gospel leadership. This context represents all those things that are contrary to what one should do in leading according to the gospel.

Jesus identified two erroneous practices of ungodly religious leadership. First, He condemns those who steal the people of God by binding on the people religious rites that have no foundation in the Bible. Second, He condemns those who pompously parade themselves before the people as self-righteous leaders. In reference to these leaders of religion, Jesus handed down some very stern rebukes.

1. Lordship religious leaders like to hand down decisions (Mt 23:2). Jesus said of the religious leaders, “*The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat.*” They just **sit** there, enjoying the position of pomp and status. Those who would seek to lord over the flock of God desire a similar position as “Moses’ seat” from which they can give out commands to the flock. Their concept of leadership is to lead by command from chief seats. They do not picture themselves in service to the flock, but the flock in service to them.

Lordship leaders would ask Jesus for positions as did James and John while they were still in their worldly immaturity as new disciples. James and John requested, “*Grant us that we may sit, one on Your right hand and the other on Your left, in Your glory*” (Mk 10:37). James and John were only copying what they saw in the religious leadership of Judaism at the time. But they were wrong. After Pentecost, they stood, with the other apostles, and refused to submit to the commands of the Jewish religious leadership (See At 4:18-20).

2. Lordship religious leaders say and do not (Mt 23:3,4). Jesus said of the scribes and Pharisees, “*For they say, and do not do.*” Those who would seek to reign over the people often fall into the sin of hypocrisy. Religion is inherently hypocritical, and those who would lead religions must at times be hypocrites (See Mk 7:1-9). They do not consistently practice their own religious rites that they bind on others. Jesus admonished the disciples, “*Whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do.*” He said this

in view of the fact that the disciples would in a few months after this statement be delivered from the bondage of Judaism. Until that time, however, they were to simply keep the peace.

Jesus classified the scribes and Pharisees’ religiosity as an **evil work**. He judged, “... *do not do according to their works.*” By their works they were not doing what they preached. They believed that as long as they preached their religious rites, they could lay aside the commandments of God (Mk 7:8).

This is the deception of religion and the leaders who promote their own self-made religiosity. The religionist believes that as long as he maintains the correct religious rites that identify his religion, he can maintain inward ungodly attitudes. He trusts in his religious performances in order to supposedly sanctify his unholy attitudes. He has deceived himself into believing that God will judge him saved by his self-sanctification, but not according to the ungodliness of his heart. This is the opposite of the gospel leadership that springs forth out of gospel living.

Jesus obligated the disciples to obey the pronouncements of the scribes and Pharisees in so far as they should obey the Sinai law. However, to this law the religious leaders had added a tremendous burden of religious rites that became legal statutes that must be kept in order to be righteous (Mk 7:1-9). By forgetting the righteousness of God, they established their own (Rm 10:3). This certainly made it difficult to be righteous according to the standards of the scribes and

Pharisees. What Jesus was saying was that righteousness did not depend on keeping the religious rites of the fathers. In the context of the religion of Judaism, Jesus wanted the disciples to focus on being submissive in heart to the will of God.

Neither the disciples at the time, nor the religious leaders, could bear the heavy burden of the Jews' religious traditions. They could not obey all the traditional interpretations and customs that were bound on them as religious law. And because they could not keep all these traditions, they never felt justified before God. Peter later referred to this system of religiosity in Acts 15:10: "*Now therefore, why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?*"

In reference to the context of Matthew 23, there is a great lesson that applies to the religious world today. In order to be justified before God, the religious leaders assuredly knew that they could not perfectly keep all the law of God, plus their added traditions. Nevertheless, that did not keep them from binding their traditions on the people. **Legalistic leaders find it easy to lay burdens on the backs of people, when at the same time, they know that one cannot perfectly keep all these burdens in order to be saved.**

In the text of Matthew 23, Jesus flatly stated that they themselves did not keep all the laws. They failed to confess up to their own hypocrisy. They claimed to be righteous, while at the same time

they did not keep all the religious rites they bound on the people. They should have been preaching "*justice, mercy and faith*" (Mt 23:23). Instead of preaching a message of justice, mercy and faith, they sought to restrict the people in the bondage of their religious rites.

The problem with the scribes and Pharisees' concept of religion was not the Sinai law. The problem was in their traditions and their view of justification through law-keeping. They had long forgotten that one could not keep God's law perfectly in order to be saved, for in works of the law no one could be justified (Rm 3:20; Gl 2:16). But in addition to this, the scribes and Pharisees compounded the problem with their many religious rites. As a result, there was certainly no possible way for one to feel justified before God on the basis of law-keeping and the added burden of the many religious rites. The entire focus of the leadership of the scribes and Pharisees was completely different from the freedom of the gospel that was coming.

3. Lordship religious leaders love recognition (Mt 23:5-7). The works which they do, Jesus said, they "*do to be seen by men.*" As Diotrephes, some religious leaders **love to have preeminence among the brethren.** Such leaders love to be first by being identified with titles and diplomas that exalt them above others. The love of titles and diplomas places one in the company of the scribes and Pharisees, who loved to exalt themselves above others.

That which God meant to be only a token on the foreheads of the priests (the

phylacteries – Dt 6:8; 11:18), was broadened by the scribes and Pharisees in order that they could easily be noticed and exalted by the people. But the fact is that the phylacteries that were worn by the Jewish priests on their foreheads between their eyes was never intended by God to be so worn. When God gave the commandments concerning the manifestation of principles of Scripture in one's life, He used a simile. Notice what Moses wrote in Deuteronomy 6:8. *“You shall bind them [the Scriptures] as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes.”* Again he wrote, *“Therefore you shall lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul, and bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes”* (Dt 11:18).

In order to be seen by men, however, the priests sought to make a public show of their position by wearing an outward sign of identity. They thus literally rolled up portions of Scripture, and placed this roll in a small box and wore it between their eyes on their forehead. They literalized the metaphor.

This behavior is typical of those religious leaders who seek to wear robes and titles in order to be seen and exalted by the people. Instead of manifesting the word of God from the behavior of their hearts, some seek to manifest their position in their religion by some outward show in clothing or diplomas in picture frames on their office walls. The Pharisees wanted to be considered holy men by their dress. They wore phylacteries and enlarged the borders of their gar-

ments in order to be considered more righteous than others. If one were tempted to carry on with such self-exaltation as a religious leader, it would be good to review what Jesus said of such behavior:

a. ***“They love the best places at feasts.”*** These presumptuous religious leaders liked to be placed on the front seats of the assemblies. They wanted to be there, not only to be seen, but also to have their position of leadership reaffirmed before the people. Those “in front” were considered by the religionists to be their leaders. Because of their love for position, the leaders wanted to be placed where they could be seen to be leaders. Instead of being seen as servants and slaves who were actively engaged among the people as servants, they wanted to be in symbolic positions of leadership in public places where others would honor them.

Gospel leaders should not do those things that would present or exalt their work or position. It seems that Jesus was here cautioning us not to make a show of our accomplishments or position in order to exalt ourselves above our fellow disciples. Some preachers wear a robe to distinguish themselves from the flock. Some hang their diplomas on their office walls. Some like to be called “reverend” or “pastor.” On the other hand, gospel leaders just quietly slave away unnoticed.

b. ***“They love ... greetings in the market places.”*** The religious leaders loved to have public notice of who they were. And in this public notice, they

“love to be called ... Rabbi, Rabbi.” They loved the titles and degrees that would separate them from the common people. Their purpose for graduating from “the rabbinical school of theology” was to be considered a diploma-bearing leader of the people. By such they separated themselves from and exalted themselves over those they intimidated into following them because of their “much study.” While the followers admired their assortment of degrees, diplomas, phylacteries and broad garment borders, the leaders hypocritically laid burdens on the consciences of the innocent flock.

We must not miss the problem Jesus addresses here among religious leaders. When respect for leaders turns to exaltation, the opinions of the leaders are also exalted. Some leaders recognize this. Ungodly leaders take advantage of this over-exaltation of their opinions. They thus feel that their opinions are to be exalted above the voice of others. In this way, religious leaders hold the people captive by their dictates. They lead the people to believe that since they have studied the law for so long, and graduated with a diploma, plus written a book, they could not possibly be wrong. But wrong Jewish religious leaders were, for they made the religious rites of men the doctrine of God (Mk 7:9).

The leaders’ love for recognition moved them to do those things that would draw attention to their positions. They were doing what Paul said some elders would eventually do in the church. They led disciples **after themselves** (At 20:29,30). And when a leader leads the

disciples after himself, he does not have the well-being of others at heart. He is seeking to secure his own position with those he has deceived into accepting him as their spiritual leader.

B. Jesus proclaims servitude.

In verses 8-10 Jesus turned in His discourse to exhort His disciples. In these verses He pronounced three “do nots” in reference to leadership. He contrasted the religious culture from which they were changing to the gospel culture of the community of God to which they were headed. He cautioned the disciples, therefore, about bringing concepts of their past religious culture into Christian behavior.

1. *Servant leaders do not need public recognition, nor the position of being an authoritative interpreter* (Mt 23:8). Jesus said to the disciples, *“But you, do not be called ‘Rabbi’; for One is your Teacher, the Christ, and you are all brethren.”* The term “Rabbi” carried with it the connotation in the Jewish religious culture that one had leadership privileges over the flock. But Christians have only one Lord and King who has all authority (Mt 28:18). They must not exalt any man to any position of authority among themselves. Jesus would be their only Lord (Ep 4:4-6).

The apostle Peter illustrated this in his own life after the A.D. 30 Pentecost when he would not even dare trespass in this area when he went to the house of Cornelius. Luke recorded of this inci-

dent, “As Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him and **fell down at his feet and worshiped him**. But Peter lifted him up, saying, **Stand up; I myself am also a man**” (At 10:25,26). Both Paul and Barnabas also feared accepting such exaltation from the people. When they healed a young man in Lystra, the people cried out, “The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!” (At 14:11). They called Barnabas, Zeus and Paul, Hermes. However, Luke recorded that upon seeing what the people were doing, Paul and Barnabas “**tore their clothes and ran in among the multitude, crying out and saying, “Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men with the same nature as you”**” (At 14:14,15).

It is in the nature of gospel leaders to be terrified of accepting any admiration that would lead to their over-exaltation. Gospel leaders desire to be among the brethren as servants, not exalted over the brethren as lords.

Christians must always remember what Jesus said. “**You are all brethren.**” And as brethren, we do not have the right to exalt any one disciple above another disciple. The fact that we are all brethren is evidence that we are all the same in the eyes of God.

The problem with the designation of one as “Rabbi” was the acceptance of his teaching to have more authority than those who were not rabbis. Jesus was saying that we should not exalt any teacher’s interpretation of the law to be law. If we exalt someone’s interpretations to have special authority over others, such a practice leads us to accept the

deductions of men over the simple truths of God’s word. Opinions of the Rabbis of Israel became as authoritative as the plain declarations of God’s word. When this happens, we have made the “doctors” of theology (the scribes) the judges and lawgivers among us.

2. Servant leaders do not resort to the traditions of the fathers (Mt 23:9). Jesus said, “**Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven.**” The point Jesus addressed here is the fact that the Jewish leaders considered the religious traditions that were pronounced by the fathers to be binding. In fact, Jesus said that religious leaders “**reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition**” (Mk 7:9). Calling on the fathers for authority meant calling on authority in religion other than our Father in heaven. The religious traditions of the fathers must not be called upon as authoritative in matters of faith.

Jesus knew that the keeping of religious tradition was strong among the people. In fact, it was so strong that men considered the religious traditions of the fathers to be more important than the word of God. This is what happens many times in the religious world today. It is not wrong to do something traditionally. All of us have religious traditions, some of which came from our fathers. However, if our traditional way of doing something becomes the only way it can be done, then a religious tradition has become a religious law. Once this has happened, we have added to the word of God. We have become as the scribes and Phari-

sees to whom Jesus directed the message of Matthew 23.

3. *Servant leaders do not resort to their designated position of leadership in order to lead* (Mt 23:10). Jesus said, “*And do not be called teachers; for One is your Teacher, the Christ.*”

In the society of the early disciples of the first century, the teacher was considered a leader because of his position. What Jesus emphasized in the text of Matthew 23:10 was that Christian leaders are not to be followed simply because they have some title, or designated position. Titles assume that one has a particular position. But Jesus says that we are not to be given a title that assumes authority over others. Slaves have designations of ministry, but their designation does not come with any authority that would supplant the authority of the word of God.

C. *Servant leaders make the least show.*

Jesus said, “*But he who is great among you shall be your servant. And whoever exalts himself will be abased, and he who humbles himself will be exalted*” (Mt 23:11,12). Jesus here repeats what He taught and demonstrated throughout His ministry. “***Whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all***” (Mk 10:43,44).

Gospel leadership is by servanthood. The scribes and Pharisees ruled by invested authority, that is, because

they were “scribes” and “Pharisees” they thought their position gave them superior religious command over the people. They thought their teachings should be considered above the teachings of all others. After the manner of the world, they thought they could proclaim and the subjects were to obey.

Christian leaders lead by service to the needs of those they seek to lead. The burden of the group’s needs are on the back of the ones who choose to be great and first in leadership. The words “great” and “first” in reference to the leaders simply means great in service and first to serve. Their leadership is for the purpose of service, not show. Servanthood leaders should be honored for their service, not exalted (Rm 13:7). They serve simply because it is their nature to do so. The gospel of God’s heart has touched their hearts. Their service is gospel inspired, and for this reason, they do not seek the praise of men for being that which the gospel inspires every disciple to be.

The ones who would exalt themselves over others, Jesus affirms, would be made low in His coming kingdom reign. It was hard for the scribes and Pharisees to accept this reversal of roles among the people. Nevertheless, when one came to Jesus, regardless of his position in his former life, he had to humble himself as Jesus did through His obedience to the Father to go to the cross. The reason for this is that God “*resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble*” (1 Pt 5:5).

The nature of the world is to strive to exalt one’s self above his fellow man.

However, the gospel assumes submission to one's fellow man as Jesus submitted to our needs. **Unless one learns the spirit of the submission of the gospel, he has not learned the mind of Christ.** He cannot be a leader of those who are the church of Christ.

D. Jesus identified lordship leadership.

In Matthew 23:11-36 there are seven woes that Jesus pronounced specifically upon the religious leaders of Israel, but in general upon all leaders of religion. (Some manuscripts do not include the woe of the statements in verse 14 of the KJV.)

These woes are Jesus' judgments as to how religious leaders fail the people with their religion. It is interesting to note what Jesus says concerning their failure since their failure is a definition of what **God does not accept in the lives of those who would presume to lead His people.** By noticing where the religious leaders of Israel went wrong, we can guard ourselves from falling into the same erroneous style leadership.

1. The religious leaders became self-appointed guardians of the truth (Mt 23:13). Jesus proclaimed, "*For you [religious leaders] shut up the kingdom of heaven against men.*" The scribes became the stumbling blocks over which people fell in coming to God. They were originally intense students of the Scriptures. However, by the second century B.C. the scribes began studying and de-

bating the interpretations of the law instead of the law. They argued over issues. In these debates among themselves and others, it was easy to develop the attitude that only they could correctly interpret the opinions of the law.

The next step into religiosity was only natural. They began to feel that the ordinary Jew could not interpret the law for themselves. With this attitude came the self-exaltation of the scribes to be the authoritative interpreters of the law. What they said was what was bound on the believers. In this way, they shut up the kingdom by binding on the backs of sincere people their numerous interpretations of the law.

As leaders of the Jews' religion (Gl 1:13), the scribes were given great respect because they were responsible for maintaining the letter of the law in obedience to their interpretations of the law. As administrators of the law and members of the Sanhedrin (see Mt 22:35; Mk 14:43,53; Lk 22:66; At 4:5), they stood in the way of those who sought God through the simplicity of love, justice, mercy and faith (See Mt 23:23). They bound their interpretations and opinions on the consciences of the meek and lowly in heart. They made it impossible for one to feel good about serving God because they promoted a system of self-sanctification by which one would cleanse himself of sin through meritorious tradition-keeping and good works.

Those who would be self-appointed guardians of their respective religions today function in no less a capacity than the scribes of Jesus' day. When religious

rites and interpretations are elevated to the status of “church law,” those who may come from a different religious background are shut out when they do not submit to the religious rites and opinions of forceful leaders who bind on the adherents their interpretations.

Though a simple God-fearing person may seek God through the weightier matters of the law as love, justice, mercy and faith, he is often shut out of the kingdom because he does not conform to the opinions and religious rites of those who judge faithfulness to be conformity to their opinions. We must not forget that religion inherently excludes those who do not conform to the religious rites that define a particular religion.

2. *The religious leaders subjected men to their interpretive party opinions and religious rites* (Mt 23:15). Jesus said of these religious leaders, “*For you travel land and sea to win one proselyte, and when he is won, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves.*”

It was not wrong to proselyte someone to faith in God. But these religious recruiters were converting people to Judaism, not faith in God. True Old Testament faith was the right faith that was revealed to Israel from God. However, by the time of Jesus, this faith had been supplanted by the “tradition of the Fathers” (See Mk 10:35-45). It had become the religion of the Jews (Gl 1:13). Paul referred to this Judaism as the “sect of our religion” (At 26:5). It was no longer God’s faith for Israel, but a religion that had been over time fabricated by the Jewish religious leaders. It was to this reli-

gion that religious leaders sought to convert people.

By the first century, therefore, when one became a proselyte to Judaism, he became a part of this system of traditional religion that was foreign to the true faith of the Sinai law. The scribes and Pharisees were thus proselyting people to **their** religion and not to God. They were converting Gentiles to their rules and religious rites.

In the above scenario, proselytes were first condemned in their former religious beliefs of pagan idolatry. The religions from which they came were the meritorious invention of religious people. They were the invention of those who had created religion after their own desires. Unfortunately, when they were proselyted to Judaism, they were still under condemnation, for they had simply converted to another meritorious system of self-justification. All that had changed was that they switched from one system of meritorious religiosity to another system of self-justifying religiosity.

They converted from pagan idolatry to Jewish religiosity, both of which were religions that were created after the meritorious desires of man. They were, therefore, “*twice as much a son of hell*” in Judaism because they were led to believe that Judaism—the traditional religion of the Jews—was God’s revealed religion from heaven. But actually, it was the invention of the Jewish religious leaders who had accomplished what Jesus said of them in Mark 7:9: “*You reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition.*”

Gospel leaders will not allow their opinions and interpretations to be respected as law. They will not bind their opinions and interpretations on the consciences of men. They will always caution their followers to understand that opinions are from men, not God. And for this reason, when they go forth, they do not convert people to “church,” but to Christ.

3. *The religious leaders emphasized the trivial details of the law and failed to see the most important principles of the law* (Mt 23:16-22). Jesus then gave a scathing condemnation to all who would bind religion on the consciences of men. He said, “*Woe to you, blind guides Fools and blind!*”

In verses 16-22 Jesus referred to these religious leaders, the scribes and Pharisees, as “blind guides” who were “fools and blind.” And rightly so, for they believed that one’s oath was binding if he swore by the gold of the temple or gift of the altar, but at the same time, left their hearts unchecked. They taught that ungodly hearts could be overlooked by loyalty to the contributions to them who were the maintenance leaders of the religion. The temple and altar, that validated the gold and gifts, were to them secondary in their minds.

In this condemnation, Jesus pointed out the absurd and inconsistent theology that is common among most leaders of religion. The temple was much greater than the gold ornaments within it. The altar had a greater significance than the sacrificial gifts laid upon it. These religious leaders had reversed the impor-

tance of the temple and gold, the altar and the gift. To them the gold was greater than the temple and the gift was greater than the altar, for they loved the gold and gifts (See Lk 16:14). They had lost sight of what was greater because they sought for themselves both the gold and the gifts.

The religious leaders had lost sight of the weightier matters of the law. This is not to say that the lighter matters were not important. We must keep in mind that the “lighter matters” of the offerings were also the law. But the offerings were from man, whereas mercy, justice and faith were from God.

The weightier and lighter matters of the law are from God. That which is offered (gold and gifts) are not as important as that which validates the offerings of men. Our difficulty usually comes by not being able to distinguish between what is God’s business and what are our own attempts for self-sanctification through law-keeping.

4. *The religious leaders neglected the weightier matters of the law by concentrating on lesser matters* (Mt 23:23,24). Jesus judged, “*Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith.*”

Jesus said that they should “*pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin.*” However, the religious leaders made these “light matters” the weightier matters of the law, while they hypocritically neglected their hearts in reference to mercy, justice and faith. In doing so, they

“neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith.”

These are matters of the heart.

Paying tithes of mint, anise and cummin are outward appearances, which appearances can be performed while the heart is left unchecked. One can perform the outward demands of the law without having a heart of justice, mercy and faith. However, **one cannot have a heart of justice, mercy and faith without manifesting such through the paying of tithes, mint, anise and cummin.** This is the difference between gospel living and legalistic living.

The religious leaders emphasized **the legal outward** form of religion without concentrating on holiness of the heart. Their high regard for the lesser and legal keeping of the law led them to overlook their own unholiness. Their hypocrisy was in the fact that they thought they could conceal their unrighteous hearts by a legal performance of the law. Adherents to religion are always hypocritical in keeping their religion. This is true because religion is always self-focused. And when one is self-focused in his religiosity, his obsession is on his own performance of either law or rites in order to self-sanctify himself before God.

In this context Jesus emphasized that there are more important things of the law on which the believer must concentrate. In this case, justice, mercy and faith are more important in the law than tithing mint, anise and cummin. The principle is that all truth is good. However, **there is some truth that is more important and must be emphasized**

over lesser matters of the law. Inward heart matters are more important than outward legal performances. In other words, justice, mercy and faith (inward matters of the heart) are more important than tithing mint, anise and cummin (outward legal performances).

Jesus’ gospel point is that once the heart is corrected, the outward obedience to law will naturally follow. But when this emphasis is reversed, religion is born, and the adherents to the religion become condemned in their efforts to meritoriously justify themselves before God through religious performances.

Jesus had earlier illustrated this truth in response to the Pharisees’ unjust criticism of the disciples’ plucking of grain in the cornfields on the Sabbath (Mt 12:1-8). The Pharisees argued, *“Look, Your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath”* (Mt 12:2). Jesus reminded them of what they themselves considered a correct action on the part of David (See 1 Sm 21:1-6). David entered the house of God and ate the showbread that was lawful only for the priests to eat (Lv 24:5-9). In eating the showbread, David did violate the law. However, at the time there was a **greater law to be obeyed** in the historical setting of the circumstances. David was fleeing his enemies. It was more important that David, God’s anointed King, and his men, be preserved. Therefore, in their situation of starvation they had to eat the bread in order to survive. In this abnormal circumstance, this was the higher law that had priority over the lesser law that permitted only the priests to eat the

showbread. Nevertheless, it was difficult for the Pharisees, who had a legal understanding of obedience to the law, to comprehend this concept in relation to justice, mercy and faith.

5. *The religious leaders gave heed to ceremonial cleansing instead of inner sanctification* (Mt 23:25,26). Jesus judged the self-righteous religious leaders with the statement, “*For you cleanse the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of extortion and self-indulgence.*”

These religious leaders gave great attention to the ceremonial performance of their religious rites (See Mk 7:1-9). However, through self-indulgence they consumed the contents of the containers. In other words, their religious performance of purifying the containers was more important to them than the corruption of their hearts in how they acquired the contents. They thought they could sinfully acquire and consume the contents, and yet, be meritoriously self-justified by cleaning the container.

This is always the problem with religion. One is led to believe that he or she can be faithful to the rites of the religion, but at the same time, not struggle with his or her sinful inner motives. One can feel that it is possible to justify sin by a ceremonial performance of religious rites, but at the same time, fail to change one’s heart. Concentration on the heart is often forgotten in our zeal to self-sanctify ourselves through meritorious good works and keeping of religious rites.

6. *The religious leaders presented a self-righteous appearance before the*

public, but in their hearts they were spiritually and morally dead (Mt 23:27,28). Jesus judged their religious behavior with the pronouncement, “*For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men’s bones and all uncleanness.*” He then identified the curse of their religion: “*Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.*”

It was a common practice among the people to keep the appearance of tombs in a presentable order. This practice made a suitable illustration by Jesus of the true nature of the hearts of the religious leaders. According to their own standards, they appeared righteous through their own self-righteousness. But inwardly, their hearts were hypocritical and lawless.

The deadness of their morals and emptiness of their spirituality was covered over by their fine dress, robes and pompous religious behavior. They were preachers in fine suits and robes, but full of hypocrisy and sin. In reality, their outward pomp was used to cover the hidden sin of their hearts. They sought to hide behind their self-righteousness. Paul’s words are appropriate for all religious leaders who would do the same:

For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves to the righteousness of God (Rm 10:3).

7. The religious leaders publicly honored the fathers, but in action aligned themselves with those who had murdered the fathers (Mt 23:29-36). Jesus judged these religious leaders to be in partnership with the murderous religious leaders of their past.

Because you build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous, and say, 'If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets (Mt 23:29,30).

The religious leaders gave a pretense to honor the prophets of old who had faithfully stood up and preached against the religious leaders who led Israel astray. The religious leaders of Jesus' day gave honor to these faithful prophets by decorating their tombs. They were so arrogant and self-deceived as to assert, "*If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets.*" But Jesus said to them, "*You are witnesses against yourselves that **you are sons of those who murdered the prophets***" (Mt 23:31). They would not long after these words murder Jesus on the cross.

Those who had murdered the prophets were religious leaders who had constructed religions after their own desires. They did not know the difference be-

tween Baal and Bible. When the true prophets of God stood up against these religious leaders, they suffered the persecution of jealous leaders. The same was happening to Jesus at the time He was speaking these words. It was not the Roman Empire that was against Jesus. It was the misguided zeal of self-deceived religious leaders who were defending their own self-righteousness.

This seems to be a common occurrence throughout history. The attack against the people of God does not commonly come from unbelieving governments. The strongest attacks come from religionists who have morphed Christianity into a legal system of self-righteousness. Attack comes from those whose emphasis is on the lesser matters of the law. It comes from those who are more concerned with obeying their self-imposed religious rites than focusing on relationships with others through justice, mercy and love. It comes from those who have set themselves up as religious lords, and by their public proclamations, morally judge those who seek God through justice, mercy and faith.

In Matthew 23 and Luke 11, Jesus pronounced His most stern message against religion and those who promote such. **His message was against the religious leaders who continued the existence of religion in the minds of the people in order to preserve their existence.**

Chapter 10

GOSPEL LEADING SLAVES

The foundation upon which we determine all leadership in the New Testament is the gospel that was obeyed by the early disciples (Mt 28:19). There are specific principles of gospel leadership in their lives. We assume that there was something dynamic about the leadership of these first gospel lovers since they accomplished so much in so short a time. Understanding some of the principles by which the early disciples reached out to the world will enhance our leadership skills today.

A. Gospel leaders lead by understanding their mission.

As Jesus, who had a mission to this world (Ph 2:5-8), gospel leaders must have the mind of Christ as to where they are going. The New Testament gospel leaders had been given a specific and direct goal for their ministry. Jesus stated, *“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations”* (Mt 28:19,20). *“Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature”* (Mk 16:15). With this gospel mission of Jesus in mind, the early disciples set out to preach the gospel to an unbelieving world. The document of Acts is a narrative of the gospel function of these early disciples in reaching out with the gospel in their lives. *“And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ”* (At 5:42). *“And*

the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem” (At 6:7). *“Those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word”* (At 8:4). This was gospel living.

Those who would lead today, therefore, must understand the gospel mission of Christ that moved the early Christians into all the world. Jesus said, *“For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost”* (Lk 19:10). Gospel leaders will have this mind of Christ (Ph 2:5). And in having this mind of Christ, they will seek and save the lost. They will saturate their lives with the gospel of God in order to take into all the world a message of freedom from religion that comes through obedience to the gospel.

When one’s life is controlled by the gospel, every function of his or her life will be centered on accomplishing the gospel goal of Jesus. Therefore, gospel leaders are oriented toward bringing people into Christ through the preaching of the gospel. Their gospel conduct of life is characteristic of their Master who came to seek and save the lost.

B. Gospel leaders lead by self-examination.

Because of their obedience to the gospel, gospel leaders are always aware of the motives of their hearts. The mark of a good leader always begins with one’s

self-examination of his own heart relationship with the heart of God. Paul cautioned leaders to consider **“yourself lest you also be tempted”** (Gl 6:1). Gospel leaders do well to remember the words of the Spirit in 1 Corinthians 10:12. *“Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.”*

Gospel leaders make sure that they stand on the power of the gospel, and not on their own self-righteousness. In order to do this, they must *“not be haughty, but fear”* (Rm 11:20). Gospel leaders daily keep their hearts in check by reminding themselves that they are saved by the gospel, not by their own meritorious performance of law and good works.

Self-examination is a vital principle in conducting one’s life by the power of the gospel. Leaders must give an example in gospel living in order to encourage others to follow their example. In reference to regularly remembering the gospel of Jesus through partaking of the Lord’s Supper, Paul instructed, *“But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup”* (1 Co 11:28). Concerning our own motives for what we do, Paul also exhorted, **“But let each one examine his own work, and then he will have rejoicing in himself alone”** (Gl 6:4). Paul ended the Corinthian letter by writing, *“Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Prove yourselves”* (2 Co 13:5). Good leaders regularly examine their own lives according to the principles of the gospel. If they judge themselves in need of correction, they take action. Paul wrote, *“But I discipline my body and*

bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified” (1 Co 9:27).

Leadership involves looking to oneself in order to determine if one is living according to the gospel of Jesus. Leaders are to be what James said, *“Doers of the word, and not hearers only”* (Js 1:22). God was a doer in bring the gospel to us. We must respond to the gospel by doing for Him. The doer of the word looks into the “mirror of God’s word” and corrects his life. James said, *“But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, **this one will be blessed in what he does**”* (Js 1:25). This is the self-correction by which leaders self-examine themselves according to the gospel. People follow those who humble themselves as Jesus humbled Himself for us.

Good leaders take risks with others by allowing their lives to be corrected by the mind of Christ. Self-examination brings humility, and humility draws others to Jesus. People do not feel threatened or intimidated by a humble servant they know is constantly struggling to align his or her life with the gospel of Jesus.

C. Gospel leaders lead by loving as they were loved.

The church is a worldwide community of those who responded to the love of God for us through Jesus (Jn 3:16). It is a worldwide fellowship of slaves who live in gratitude of how God loved us.

Those who lead among this group are first in service and great in slavehood. They seek to love with the same love by which God loved them through the gospel.

Jesus established the underlying principle of gospel love among His disciples. He referred to this love in John 13:34,35:

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, as I have loved you [through the gospel], that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.

This is gospel leadership, and any who would lead God's people must pattern their lives after the gospel of love. Christianity is about relationships. It is not simply a belief in doctrinal standards. It is relational fellowship of people with one another through the power of justice, mercy and love. Those who seek to lead the flock of God, therefore, must excel in their relationship of love with those they seek to lead.

Leaders who love the flock of God will draw people to Jesus through themselves as Jesus drew the multitudes unto Himself through the gospel. When individuals express love toward their fellow man, people will respond. Leaders who express love will be rewarded with the following of those who want to be loved. People are naturally drawn to those who love them. And in the community of God, they will be drawn to those who serve with love.

Jesus said, "*I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep*" (Jn 10:11). Those who would shepherd the flock must give their lives for the flock as Jesus gave Himself for us at the cross. As God gave Jesus out of love for us, so any who would follow His example as a shepherd of the flock of God must also give themselves out of love for the sheep.

In fact, Jesus used the word "ransom" in reference to all who would lead His people out of love. "**Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many**" (Mt 20:28). As the good shepherd, Jesus ransomed His life for the sheep. **Just as** Jesus ransomed His life for the sheep, so also must those who would be good shepherds of the flock of God today must ransom themselves for the people. This is in Jesus' statement of John 15:13. "*Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends.*" Because of their love for the flock of God, and in appreciation for their own salvation, gospel leaders lay down their lives for the flock of God.

D. Gospel leaders lead by example.

Paul exhorted Timothy, "*Be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in purity*" (1 Tm 4:12). These are all characteristics of the gospel. When leaders live the gospel, people are encouraged to follow their example. **People naturally follow those who manifest in their lives the gospel that they obeyed and are seeking to live.**

We follow spiritual people because we see in them what we want to be. Therefore, if we characterize the gospel of Jesus in our lives, those who are seeking to be like Jesus will follow our example. This is the key to gospel leadership. Gospel leadership is not by demand or delegation, but by an example of Christ-likeness on the part of those who have given themselves wholly to Jesus.

Because of the above principle in the life of Paul, Paul wrote to the Corinthians, *“Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ”* (1 Co 11:1). He encouraged the Corinthians to follow the example of his gospel living. To the Philippians he also wrote, *“The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do”* (Ph 4:9). The Philippians saw the gospel in the life of Paul. As we see the gospel in others, we too are attracted to their behavior and their leadership. We naturally follow those who are spiritually what we want to be. When we see Jesus in the life of a fellow Christian, we want to follow the love of the gospel that is the aroma of Christ. The key principle that defines Christian leadership is **the aroma of the gospel of Christ**.

Paul encouraged that the center of reference for the life of every evangelist be the gospel. He wrote to Timothy, *“And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition”* (2 Tm 2:24,25). This is the nature of Jesus, and thus the nature of gospel leadership. The personality of the gospel leader attracts people in order

that they might be led in the direction of Jesus. This is the power that drew men unto Jesus. Jesus said, *“Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls”* (Mt 11:29). Jesus emphasized that it would be the gospel that would draw people unto Him: *“And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to me”* (Jn 12:32). Those who live in a harsh world of turmoil and contention will seek to be drawn to Jesus in order to find rest unto their souls. They will subsequently follow those who live according to the gospel behavior of Jesus.

E. Gospel leaders lead by service.

Paul exhorted the Corinthian disciples to be submissive to the leadership of the household of Stephanas. This is an illustration of the preceding point as the gospel was moved into action in the lives of leading servants. In 1 Corinthians 16:15, Paul wrote of the dedicated servanthood of Stephanas, his wife, and his household. *“I urge you, brethren, you know the household of Stephanas, that it is the firstfruits of Achaia, and that they have devoted themselves to the ministry of the saints.”*

The Corinthians **knew** the household of Stephanas. Those of Stephanas' household had been among the sheep. They had been ministering to the needs of the flock. The disciples of all Achaia, therefore, knew their dedication by which they lived after Jesus who dedicated Himself to us.

Paul's argument in the context of 1 Corinthians 16:15 is that the dedication to the ministry of the saints that was emulated after the dedication of Jesus to His people, should be allowed to function among the saints, and subsequently, followed. In other words, the saints should submit to the service of those who dedicate themselves to serve as Jesus served us (Mk 10:45). We submit for service to those leaders who have submitted to Jesus.

In 1 Corinthians 16:16, Paul gave direction to the saints concerning what their response should be to those who have dedicated themselves to the ministry of the saints. The saints should “*submit to such, and to everyone who works and labors with us.*”

There are those individuals who dedicate themselves to the ministry of the saints. The saints, therefore, must respond with submission to their service of love. If someone shows up at our door seeking to minister to our needs, then we must allow this humble servant to serve us. We must not allow our pride to turn his service away, which thing would be spiritually unprofitable for us.

This is the key to understanding the leadership example of gospel living that Jesus left the church. Leaders seek dirty feet. They have their towels ready, and are in search of those they can serve. In order to allow these individuals with towels to serve, we must submit to their service.

Hebrews 13:17 is a parallel passage to 1 Corinthians 16:15,16. The Hebrew writer wrote,

Obey those who rule [lead] over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.

As all passages in the New Testament that deal with leadership, this passage also must be understood in the context of Jesus' gospel ministry that Paul explained in Philippians 2:5-8. Therefore, we must first understand that Hebrews 13:17 is **not** a mandate that is exclusively directed to elders. **Nowhere in the entire chapter of Hebrews 13 is the subject of elders under discussion.** The passage is a general statement about the gospel leadership of all those who seek to live by the gospel. And thus, the mandate of the passage applies to every area where there are disciples who need care. This is a passage that speaks of the loving care that the sheep of God need throughout the world.

Since every Christian has obeyed the gospel, then every Christian has the responsibility of looking out for his or her fellow believer. Those who are strong must restore those who are weak. Paul wrote, “*Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual [strong] restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted*” (Gl 6:1). He continued, “*Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ*” (Gl 6:2). John encouraged, “*If anyone sees his brother sinning a sin which does not lead to death, he will ask, and He will give*

him life for those who commit sin not leading to death” (1 Jn 5:16). This is gospel living.

Christians have a spiritual responsibility to one another. As the community of God, they must take care of one another in the spirit of how Jesus took care of us through the cross and resurrection.

The translation “rule over you” in some versions of Hebrews 13:17 should be rendered “lead.” This definition is brought out in Acts 15:22 where the **same Greek word** is translated “leading” in reference to Barsabbas and Silas who were **leading men among the saints**. These two disciples were not “ruling” men, but leading men. This Greek word is used in Hebrews 13:17 in a context that refers to those who are also leading, though they are not necessarily elders as Barsabbas and Silas **were not** elders. Barsabbas and Silas were leading men in spiritual service and the work of teaching the word of God. Emphasis, therefore, is not on position or power in Hebrews 13:17, but on **the ministry of service**. Barsabbas and Silas were known for their **ministry**, not some position of authority.

We must be submissive to mature Christians who would lead through gospel service, for they are watching out for our souls. We must allow such dedicated servants to watch out for us, for this is profitable for our spiritual growth. If we do not, then we reject their loving service. **We cause them grief**.

If a leader comes to our door with an attitude of supposed “invested authority” to rule over us with the dictatorial

power of a lord, and we are insubmissive, his response to our rebellion is **anger**, not grief. On the other hand, if a gospel leader lovingly comes to our door in order to administer humble service, and we should by chance turn him away, he would go away with **grief** because his loving concern for us would have been rejected. Because the Hebrew writer used the word “grief” in Hebrews 13:17, and not “anger,” indicates that servanthood leadership is under consideration and not leaders with delegated authority.

There is a great difference between the leader who thinks he has been mandated with authority, and the one who has dedicated himself out of love to service the spiritual needs of the saints. The one who leads with dictatorial authority is behaving after the leadership of the world and has become a lord over the flock. The one who gives service out of love is a humble servant after the gospel of Jesus who came to be a servant for us. One leader would call down “ten thousand angels” on the rebellious. The other would simply take up his cross as Jesus took up His for us.

How one interprets the general principle of leadership that Jesus taught the disciples through His living the gospel, will determine how he interprets both 1 Corinthians 16:15,16 and Hebrews 13:17. If we interpret the passages from the viewpoint of one who seeks to be in service for and care of the flock of God, then our understanding of the passages is different from the person who sees leadership from the perspective of “office” and “authority.”

Jesus said, “*For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many*” (Mk 10:45; see Mt 20:28; Lk 22:26). Gospel leaders do not lead after the invested authoritarian leadership by which the world leads itself. Jesus said concerning such leadership, “*Yet it shall not be so among you*” (Mk 10:43). Gospel leaders lead by loving service because they seek to be of service to those whom they love, as Jesus loved us.

F. Gospel leaders lead by designation.

There are some among us who are leaders simply because they have been gifted in certain areas of ministry. And thus, by the consensus of the church, the gifted are designated for specific ministries. God has given the disciples the right to designate those individuals who are gifted for the spiritual growth of the church. The following are some of the specific ministries for which there are to be designated leaders because of their gifts:

1. Designation of elders: When a qualified man is doing the work of a shepherd, as well as being an older man in age, he can be designated an elder for his work. However, he cannot be so designated unless he first manifests in his life the qualities and qualifications of 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:4-9. An elder must already have both the physical qualifications and spiritual qualities before being designated an elder. In other words, the

church is benefitting from the person who would be designated an elder **before he is so designated**. His life manifests that he is living by the nature of the gospel message (See Ph 2:5-8).

One is not first designated an elder, and then, he starts doing the work of fulfilling the physical qualifications and spiritual qualities. His personal spiritual characteristics and ministry must qualify him for the designation. The designation to the work simply points the church in his direction as one from whom they must seek advice, counsel and leadership.

A second major point on this subject is the plurality of elders who would serve together. The concept of a plurality of elders in any region or city is manifested in the Scriptures because of the obvious practicality of the matter (See At 14:23; 20:28; Ti 1:5). Elders serve as a group in order to lead by the consensus of the disciples and fellow elders.

The Lord has established accountability for the leadership of the church. Elders are accountable both to one another and to those they serve. Designating a plurality of elders is important in order that one man not become a lord over the flock of God, or be overworked by those he serves.

When elders are designated, they are given leadership responsibilities to serve in teaching and spiritual guidance. In this sense, their mandate of leadership must be by the consensus of those who have designated them to be elders. The members in a particular region or city submits to the elders because they have been designated to be responsible for the

spiritual needs of the members. The members must submit to their service, for the work of the elders is to serve the members.

2. Designation of workers for specific works: In Titus 1:5 Paul wrote of the work of Titus. “*For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you.*” Titus was designated for a specific leadership task in Crete in reference to setting things in order according to the word of God. Since these were new Christians in Crete who had no New Testaments to guide them in the right way, Paul designated Titus to set forth (designate) those who were qualified according to the word of God to be elders.

As an inspired prophet of God, Titus had the responsibility of designating elders for the new disciples. This was necessary since there were no New Testaments to give the new converts instructions concerning the designation and work of elders. Titus, through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, had the responsibility to lead the new Christians according to the truth. Since the church now has the written word of God, we assume that this designation is no longer needed among the disciples.

3. Designation for special ministries: We view special ministries as those areas where a need arose, and the church chose certain individuals to fulfill the need.

a. Designated program leaders: In Acts 6 there was a problem con-

cerning a lack of contributed goods to some widows of the church in the city of Jerusalem. In order to overcome this problem, the apostles said to the disciples in Jerusalem, “*Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business*” (At 6:3). It was the choice of the church to select the men. The men were then designated as leaders over the business of distributing food to the widows. **Once the men were chosen, they had the responsibility and mandate by the consensus of the church, to make necessary decisions in this area of distributing the food.**

b. Designated messengers: It is significant in this context to review also the situation of Acts 15 concerning a problem of Jewish legalism. The problem was about those who were teaching the Gentile disciples that they must be circumcised in order to be saved (At 15:1). Luke recorded that Paul and Barnabas went to Jerusalem to meet with the **apostles and elders** concerning this matter (At 15:2).

When they came to Jerusalem, they were received by “*the church and the apostles and the elders*” (At 15:4). The **apostles and elders, with the whole church**, came together to discuss the matter (At 15:6). Discussion and decisions followed their meeting together. Luke then recorded the result of the meeting. He wrote in Acts 15:22, “*Then it pleased the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen [designated] men of their own company to Antioch with*

Paul and Barnabas.”

What transpired during this meeting was that the whole church of the city of Jerusalem was involved in what took place. In other words, the whole Jerusalem church was not left out of the decision concerning what to do. At least, the whole church was involved in sending out Paul, Barnabas and other men with the decision of the meeting. The delegation of men, therefore, went forth with the mandate of the disciples in Jerusalem to accomplish a specific tasks.

4. Designation for specific missions: In Acts 13 the Holy Spirit identified a specific mission (Acts 13:2). Though the mission and men were designated directly by the Holy Spirit, it was the church as a whole who laid hands on the two evangelists in order to give their consent to the mission and men who were to be sent out (At 13:3).

The designation of Timothy was similar to what the Holy Spirit did with Paul and Barnabas. In the case of Timothy, however, it was Paul who personally designated Timothy (At 16:1-3). Once Timothy was chosen by Paul, the elders laid hands on him in order to send him forth with Paul (1 Tm 4:14).

Paul asked the Corinthian disciples to designate certain men who would be sent out from them with the responsibility to take their famine relief contribution to Jerusalem. He wrote, “*And when I come, whomever you approve by your letters I will send to bear your gift to Jerusalem*” (1 Co 16:3). Concerning the contribution from the other churches,

there was also someone **designated** by them to go with Paul. “*And we have sent with him the brother ... who was also chosen [designated] by the churches to travel with us with this gift*” (See 2 Co 8:16-24).

G. Gospel leadership was by church consent.

Leadership among the disciples must be based on the majority’s acceptance of those who would lead. Though the church is not a democracy, but a monarchy with Jesus as the King with all authority, in many areas of function there are no New Testament mandates to choose leaders. If the majority of the church is behind those members they seek to follow, then it is the church stating that they will submit to the leadership of those who seek to serve. It is the majority, therefore, saying to the minority that they also must submit to the consent of the majority.

Paul exhorted the Corinthian church to take action against one of the members who was living in sin (1 Co 5). As a result of his admonitions to disfellowship this one from their assembly, the majority of the members followed through with his mandate.

It was a **majority decision**, not a unanimous decision, that resulted in disfellowshipping the individual. In 2 Corinthians 2:6 Paul later wrote, “*This punishment which was inflicted by the majority is sufficient for such a man.*” Therefore, the decision to disfellowship the man was a majority decision on the

part of all the members, and thus, all the members must submit to the decision of the majority.

It is evident that not all members went along with the decision. However, those who did not go along with the decision were not allowed to run the church. Their opposition to that which was right was not allowed to hinder the church from moving on by disfellowshipping the sinful brother. The minority, therefore, must submit to the decision of the majority.

At times, however, unanimous decisions were made in the New Testament. This is illustrated in Acts 6. When the idea was given for choosing seven men to make decisions concerning distribution to the widows, “... *the saying pleased the whole multitude*” (At 6:5). In this case it seems that the decision was unanimous.

Though we might believe that the apostles had the authority to actually choose the seven men for the job in Acts 6, they still allowed the disciples throughout the city to come to a majority consensus concerning the matter. The apostles could have lorded over the flock of God. But that was not what Jesus would have them do, and neither was it their desire.

It was not Jesus’ system of leadership to place the apostles as lords over the flock. It was only their ministry to deliver the truth to the church (Jn 14:26; 16:13). However, the apostles entrusted the church with the responsibility of acting on its own in carrying out God’s truth in the lives of the members of the body.

Identifying leadership in the church

rests on the shoulders of the church as a whole. One problem that often develops is when the leadership starts perpetuating itself. When leaders start appointing leaders, a digression into a synod of power has begun. When elders start appointing elders, a movement of self-perpetuation has begun where the church loses control over its leaders and the leaders lose contact with the church.

In these situations it is easy for the leaders to become lords over the flock of God. Self-perpetuating leadership is how the Catholic hierarchy began in the early centuries as chosen leaders or elders perpetuated themselves into a hierarchy of leadership. When leaders start making decisions independent of the body, they start leading parallel to the wishes of the body. It is easy to lord over the flock of God when the flock is not considered in the making of decisions.

H. Gospel leaders lead by vision.

Jesus pronounced our gospel goals (Mt 28:19; Mk 16:15). Because the leaders of the early church accepted Jesus as the Christ, they also accepted His gospel mission. That mission was to reach out and touch the lives of the lost of the world with the heart of God. When those leaders maintained the mind of Christ, they moved out with the mission of Christ.

Christian leaders, therefore, lead by the worldwide vision that comes from Jesus. They perceive the needs of the universal body of Christ, and the lost of the world, and then work toward fulfilling those needs. They can see where the

church should be going, and thus, work in the present to direct the minds of the members toward gospel goals.

At his conversion, Jesus gave Paul a gospel vision. Jesus said to Ananias concerning Paul, “*Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel*” (At 9:15). Paul knew his Jesus-given gospel mission. Throughout the remainder of his life he sought “*to testify to the gospel of the grace of God*” to the world (At 20:24). When leaders know their destiny, as Paul, they will always work toward the calling of that destiny. They will not be turned aside from where they know the Lord wants them to go.

To the Romans Paul wrote, “*But now no longer having a place in these parts, and having a great desire these many years to come to you, whenever I journey to Spain, I shall come to you*” (Rm 15:23,24). Paul was a man with a gospel vision. Throughout his life he saw himself making and accomplishing goals that would fulfill the course of his ministry that he eventually completed (2 Tm 4:6,7). What was great about Paul was that his performance matched his vision. He never lost sight of what he had to do. The God-ordained vision of his life continually directed him toward the accomplishment of his calling.

Good leaders have vision. Their

vision does not come to them after the manner by which God often communicated to Paul. However, they can pick up their New Testaments and read, “*Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature*” (Mk 16:15). Gospel leaders will respond to this Jesus-given vision and move the church in this direction.

Deborah and Barak sang, “*When leaders lead in Israel, when the people willingly offer themselves, **bless the Lord!***” (Jg 5:2). When leaders of the church take the initiative to fulfill dreams to the glory of God, the church will grow. Gospel leaders always have a vision for the church that is larger than any local assembly of disciples. Their vision is based on the principle of preaching the gospel of Jesus to the world.

The closer one grows to the mind of Jesus, the greater world vision he or she will have in accomplishing the task of taking the gospel to the world. Jesus came from heaven into all the world. We must go from home into the same place. Visionary leaders grow the church closer to Jesus in order that the members accept the mind of Christ and go into all the world. Disciples who are sending out evangelists into all the world are disciples who have captured the spirit and mind of Christ.