

The Leadership Role of the Pastor in the Congregation

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In *The Shepherd Under Christ*, authored by Profs. Armin Schuetze and Irwin Habeck, there is a section under the chapter on the shepherd's involvement in administration that deals with pastoral leadership. This section speaks of planning, decision making, implementation, and self examination. The summarizing paragraph for this section says, "The pastor will provide leadership toward bringing about an effective working together on the part of the congregation's members. To that end, the pastor should cultivate a spirit of service, love for people, self-discipline, open objectivity, and a spirit of urgency that does not, however, lead to impatience. Leadership involves certain functions. Important among them are planning, making decisions, implementing them, and self-examination. At all times the pastor and congregation must remember that the Lord's business calls for their best efforts."

A person could simply stop at this point and say the subject assigned for this presentation has already been covered. But assuming that I would not get away with that, I have instead approached the theme under headings different from planning, decision making, implementation, and self-examination. The first heading is necessary to put into proper perspective any discussion on the leadership role of the pastor in the congregation.

Who is the leader of the Church?

"Follow me" (Mark 2:14). "Come to me" (Mt. 11:28). "I am the way - and the truth and the life" (John 14:6). "Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life (John 8:12). This is Jesus talking, Jesus who "calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice" (John 10:3-4).

Who are those that make up the body of this flock? All who by the working of the Holy Spirit acknowledge Jesus as Lord make up that flock or body. There is only one such body, even as each of us has only one body. "The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body" (1 Cor. 12:12-13).

But you don't see a body walking around that has parts only from the neck on down. If the body is not connected to its head, its leading part, it is dead. It needs the head to be and to survive, even as branches need a trunk. That head for the body of believers, for the church, is Jesus. "God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over every thing for the church, which is his *body*" (Eph. 1:22-23). And what kind of a head is He? "Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior...Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy" (Eph. 5:23ff).

What grace! What mercy! In Christ's atoning is our salvation. We, the members of His body, live in the benefits of His substitutionary accomplishments. We live with the declaration that our sins are not being charged to us. We live in the hope of life and glory. We live because of our head, our leader, who is Christ.

The Apostle Paul forcefully reminded the Corinthians of that in the third chapter of his first letter to them. Some said they followed Paul as their leader, and others looked to Apollos. But "what, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants through whom you came to believe," Paul said, and then went on to say, "No one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ."

Who is the leader of the church? It is not the pastor, even if he is of the caliber of Paul. Dr. Martin Luther put it this way: "I am a doctor of Holy Scripture, more learned than the pope, and I am preacher here at Wittenberg. But if I were to speak sacrilege and say: I am the head of the church at Wittenberg, the devil take such presumption. In my home I have the right to be the head of my wife, children, and servants. But over the

church or the communion of God, Christ alone is to be Head, and no creature whatsoever. A bishop, pastor, or preacher should not be called the head of the church but a minister and steward, as St. Paul says: "Let a man so account of us as of the ministers of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God" (1 Cor. 4:1)."

Is the Pastor a leader in the Church?

By saying "in the church" instead of "of the church" we now leave the vertical and come to the horizontal. Christ is above us. He is the head, the leader. We, the members of His body, stand on the same level, sinners who have received His grace. We also stand on the same level as "a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light" (1 Peter 2:9). This is the universal priesthood which all of God's people share.

Yet on this same and equal level there are differences. God has not given the same abilities or gifts or responsibilities to all. "There are different kinds of gifts" (1 Cor. 12:4). In Ephesians 4 we are told that our victorious ascended Lord "gave gifts to men... It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers." In 1 Corinthians 12 we are told, "Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues."

The utilizing of these gifts, when that is to be done functioning in a public capacity in behalf of other Christians, is to be through a proper call, as Scripture teaches. Thus Article XIV of the Augsburg Confession says "that no one should publicly teach in the church or administer the Sacraments unless he be regularly called." Guided by the Holy Spirit Christians will specify in a call the duties they want carried out publicly in their behalf, the responsibilities to be met, the scope of what is to be done. This is the public ministry in its various forms which, like those not publicly called, is also to function "for the common good" (1 Cor. 12:7).

The assignment of this paper has to do with pastors in a congregation. While there are many other areas, responsibilities and functions to which the church calls the gifts of Christ who is the head and leader of the church, in striving to keep with the assignment I shall look from now on especially at that called position of pastor. Many of the Scripture passages that will be referred to, however, may well apply to many other called positions. Since we all are members of Christ's church, regardless of our positions, may His Word benefit us all.

To come now specifically to the assigned theme of this paper we ask, "Does the Word of God speak of the pastor as a leader in the church?" In Romans 12:8 the word "leadership" is used. There it is not restricted to pastors. But the same Greek word is used in 1 Thessalonians 5:12 and 1 Timothy 5:17 where it does apply to pastors. According to 1 Peter 5:2 they are to shepherd or pastor the flock under their care, and that includes leading. That position of leadership is to be respected. "Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you" (Hebrews 13:7). "Respect those who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you" (1 Thess. 5:12). "The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching" (1 Tim. 5:17). "Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy" (Hebrews 13:17). And to this we could add Hebrews 13:24, "Greet all your leaders and all God's people," which speaks of all of God's people and refers to leaders among them. Not all of those leaders are necessarily pastors. But by nature of a pastor's call as we know it, we can say that the Word of God does speak of the pastor as a leader in the church.

Let us make reference here to the pastor's call form which we use. It has this in it: "In extending this call to you we solemnly charge you to preach the Gospel of our Lord among us in its truth and purity, and to administer the Sacraments--- and to establish and maintain sound Lutheran practice at all times; to discharge toward all the members of our congregation the functions of a pastor, that is, to watch over their souls ---, to admonish ---, to be ever zealous for the winning of souls for Christ's kingdom; to be faithful in the spiritual care of the young ---) to walk and conduct yourself at all times as it becomes a minister of Christ ---; and to devote

your time, strength, and ability to the general advancement of the Kingdom of Christ and to the gathering in of His harvest.” Surely leadership is being asked of a pastor in this call form.

What does his leadership mean?

What does that mean when we say that the pastor is a leader in the church? Is his leadership to come from behind a desk that organizes and administers? Is he to lead by delegating responsibilities to others? Is his leadership to be mainly a training of others, as a number of writings assert? Is his leadership to be like a solo that permits no one else to be a vital part of the congregation’s work? Is his leadership to be more in back pushing than in front showing the way?

What are the answers to such questions? Surely the gifts that God has given a pastor and the needs of a congregation will have a part in the answers given. But, allowing for the fact that needs and answers may well differ somewhat with different people and situations, is there nevertheless a general guideline from Scripture as to where the emphasis should ordinarily be?

We can start getting an answer by looking at the qualifications laid down in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:6-9. There it becomes clear that the pastor’s leadership is to be a visible one, for his own conduct and example and ability to teach are stressed as being extremely important. Thus it is safe to say that a pastor should not look upon leadership as something to be carried out isolated from the people or in a fashion that removes him from the people.

Move of an answer can be obtained by looking at the advice and encouragement given by the Apostle Paul to Pastors Timothy and Titus. Let the emphasis come through that he places upon their leadership roles.

We look at 1 Timothy. There Paul urges doctrinal concern (1:3); concern about proper worship (ch. 2); lists the qualifications previously referred to (ch.3); tells Timothy that: being a good minister of Jesus Christ means pointing out the things the people need to know (4:6); says he is to “command and teach these things” (4:11), to devote himself “to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching (4:13); cautions him to counsel people properly (ch.5); and again says he is “to teach and urge” (6:2) and to “command” (6:17). The emphasis that comes through is a concern for the truth and for urging the people to live it.

That concern is also in 2 Timothy. He is to train (2:2); to keep reminding of God’s will and to warn (2:14); to be a workman “who correctly handles the word of truth” (2:15); to teach and instruct (2:24-25); to continue in the Scripture he has learned (3:14) to use the Scripture for “teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness” (3:16); to “preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage” (4:2); to do the work of an evangelist and discharge all the duties of his ministry (4:5); and to be on guard against those who oppose (4:15). Again the emphasis is on proclaiming, teaching, and strengthening in the truth.

What about the advice to Titus? Is training the people to know and live the truth again the emphasis? After setting forth the qualifications referred to earlier (1:6ff), Paul tells Titus to “encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it” (1:9); to rebuke sharply for the sake of soundness in faith (1:13), to teach what is in accord with sound doctrine (2:1ff); to set an example, show integrity in teaching, seriousness and soundness of speech (2:7-8); to teach, encourage, and rebuke (2-15); to remind people of obedience to authority (3:1); to stress these things (3:8); to warn and then avoid the divisive person (3:10); and to stress the need for the people to “learn to devote themselves to doing what is good” (3:14).

This emphasis on teaching and strengthening so that people might know and live the truth is an emphasis that was in Paul’s own ministry. For an example let us look to some of the things he said in his first letter to the Christians of Thessalonica. He said he told them the gospel (2:2); shared not only the gospel with them but also his life (2:8); preached the gospel of God (2:9); encouraged, comforted, and urged them to live lives worthy of God (2:12); spread the gospel of Christ (3:2); wanted to see them again to supply what was lacking in their faith (3:10); instructed them how to live in order to please God (4: 1ff); wanted them to know the truth about a Christian’s death (4:13); and urged them to warn, encourage, help, and be patient (5:14). In all

of this Paul was doing what he told Timothy and Titus to do. He was teaching them the truth and training or equipping them to give expression to that in their daily Christian lives. That was the emphasis of his ministry.

We need not look at all of the rest of Paul's letters. The emphasis in them is no different. One spot we could still refer to shortly at this point is Ephesians 4:12, where it says that pastors are "to prepare God's people for works of service." The KJV translation "for the work of the ministry" could cause some people to misunderstand and think perhaps of preparing for the public ministry or for an official functioning. That, however, restricts the service too much. The service for which the pastor is to prepare God's people is service as Christians, giving expression in their daily lives to the faith in which they are being nurtured by the Word. The emphasis remains one of bringing the Word to the people so that they have its benefits and its strengthening. Prof. J. Schaller in his *Pastorale* spoke of it this way: "Among us the one assignment of a pastor is the preaching of the Word, and in particular the preaching of the gospel, whereby alone he can achieve all the results he should arrive at."

That assignment does not remove the pastor from the people. A pastor should not withdraw with the goal of becoming a less visible administrator who trains others to care for the flock over which he has been given prime responsibility. How sad if such who have been called to be pastors see the emphasis of leadership more and more as administration, and neglect more and more the feeding they are to do with God's Word. The pastor's leadership must place the emphasis on the Word for the benefit of his flock. Dr Martin Luther said, "My office, and that of every preacher and minister, does not consist in any sort of lordship but in serving all of you, so that you learn to know God, become baptized, have the true Word of God, and finally are saved."

How is he to lead?

"I am not installed to rule any Christian as lord, but to be his minister. One is the Lord." So spoke Dr. Martin Luther. And so speaks Scripture. "To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder," Peter says, "a witness of Christ's sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed: Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers - not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock" (1 Peter 5:1-3).

When speaking of leadership, we put the emphasis on the Word. When speaking of how to lead, the Word places the emphasis on attitude. In addition to what Peter said above, we can refer to some of many other places in Scripture. In Matthew 23 Jesus tells us not to be called "father" or "teacher" as though we were elevating ourselves to the level of the Father or His Son. Such an attitude dare not be ours. We are servants, a lesson which Jesus brought to His disciples with a striking example the first Maundy Thursday. Thus we are not to lead our people with the attitude that leadership means being high and mighty above them. We want them "to regard us as servants of Christ" (1 Cor. 4:1). They should not see us, then, as being haughty but being faithful (1 Cor. 4:1) putting ourselves into the position of others to save them (1 Cor. 9:22), being considerate of different ages and positions (1 Tim. 5:1ff).

Such humble leadership does not mean weakness. Guided by the authority of the word it will warn (1 Cor. 4:21), it will scold (1 Cor. 11:17), it will refuse to give in to what is wrong (Gal. 2:5). But the attitude will again be that of a servant of Christ who recognizes he can truly serve others only with the truth, not by letting go of the truth.

Might a pastor be tempted to be a leader who pushes his way through, who forces his own opinions? Yes, that is the natural inclination. In the face of such temptation it might be good to think of how God appeared to Elijah (1 Kings 19) not with impressive thunder and display, but with a still small voice. That "still small voice" for a pastor could well be the proper and quiet example of a Christian life and a leadership of humility that uses pressure and insistence only where and how God's Word requires them.

Let none look upon leadership then, as an ego trip. That is not the spirit of Christ. Rather see it as a means to serve in humility as Christ did. Luther has pertinent words of warning here. "We should bear in mind that we are not preachers and ministers of the church in order to be great lords but to be meek and humble,

faithfully to lead our churches, and to serve our neighbor with all the gifts we have and in this way constantly to wash the feet of others. Thus special honor and pleasure are given to the Lord Christ. Moreover, there is no better way for us to guard against the devil and his snares. For preachers especially are subject to this temptation: The devil attempts to induce them to seek their own honor and profit. If he is successful, he has won. For then they, as said before, have so much to do with worldly affairs that they pay no attention to the Lord Christ, His Word, His church, and the true worship of God, but quite forget them. We have examples before our eyes, and they are entirely too evident. No minister of the church should consider himself safe against this temptation.”

How then is a pastor to lead? He is to do that with an attitude shaped by the Word, the same Word which is to be the emphasis of his leadership.

What about those who are led?

As has already been made abundantly clear by the Scripture that has been cited, those who are led are not to be inactive. If sheep are being led by a shepherd, they are moving and active. So is it with God’s people. The pastor as a leader is not the only one who is active. If he is giving God’s leadership, that leadership urges the people to be active in living the truth they know and believe. Ephesians 4:12 very plainly lays out the fact that leadership includes the responsibility “to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up.”

Some of that service for which a pastor should prepare God’s people may be specialized into responsibilities and needs recognized by the congregation. Acts 6:1-7 gives a good example of that. Stephen was among those chosen for meeting a recognized need. And this was done to permit the emphasis of the pastoral leadership to remain on the Word where it belonged. Peter said, “It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables.” There is nothing wrong or demeaning about waiting on tables. But that was not the function for which God called Peter. His leadership and emphasis were to be the Word. Thus he said, “We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the Word.”

Congregations see needs and responsibilities today too which should be met in the same way. What kind of leadership would that be, that would see a pastor insisting on doing everything, on being a one-man show? His leadership includes preparing God’s people for works of service. Let him encourage and equip for greater involvement according to the needs and according to the gifts that are available. As he would not want to tie his hands behind his back so that they could not serve his body, so he should not try to keep the members of Christ’s body from functioning. His leadership from the Word, like the Apostle Paul’s should say, “In Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man’s gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let *him* govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully” (Rom. 12:5-8). And here surely organization and structure will be involved.

Are all of these gifts, however, to be used in an official and structured capacity in a congregation? Does the pastor’s leadership to get all involved mean that all should be enrolled and structured into some committee or publicly recognized and functioning organization or group in the congregation? If a congregation had such needs and all were properly gifted by the Lord for that, in Christian liberty it could be done.

But are there not some dangers if a person goes too far in this direction? The body of Christ is served not only in an organized way or by committees. The Christian’s works of service are not only those done somehow through his congregation. The pastor’s leadership with the Word is to equip him for works of service wherever the Lord places him. His Christian testimony and example at his place of employment and at home are works of service just as much as a work done for the congregation in some official capacity. As a matter of fact, too much structured meeting time and activity could well keep a Christian from properly carrying out his works of service at home with his own family and elsewhere as he should.

Perhaps at this point I could make some comments on some of the material I read which stresses organizing in the church. There is much that can be learned, many good suggestions that congregations could pick up with profit, a commendable concern for evangelism. But I also picked up impressions that bothered me, without here going into fellowship considerations and other areas of concern.

There could be confusion as to what the real role of a pastor is. In *Training and Equipping the Saints*, by Donald Abdon, it states that "The pastor's primary administration is Word and Sacraments" (p.26). But the page before and the whole book stress that "The pastoral office is the training function so that the rest of the ministers of Christ can function effectively in ministry." This is referred to as "the major function of the pastoral office toward the rest of God's people." Confusion could also arise with regard to the proper distinction between the public ministry and the universal priesthood especially when thinking of a statement made on page 212 where it speaks of "the office of the ministry which he (the pastor) holds with all the members of the congregation."

A person can also get a feeling with regard to the emphasis placed on detailed structure and minutely spelled out procedure, with the apparent implication that this is really the way it should be. Is that really the way it should be? Does the emphasis of Scripture permit us to consider a congregation somehow inferior if it is not highly organized? There is nothing wrong with structure and organization that serve the Lord. But perhaps Christian liberty can better be preserved with the simple directive of 1 Cor. 14:40 in determining such structure and organization according to needs and gifts, instead of by detailed directives that can come across, in my opinion, more as requirements than as suggestions. The Corinthians passage says simply, "Everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way."

Going on from these impressions or feelings of mine, Prof. Armin Schuetze in a *Quarterly* article entitled "A Shepherd or Coach" has some words that I feel might fit in well here. He says, "If all saints are to be drawn into the service of the congregation and carefully equipped for it, this may result in imposing a structured sanctification on God's people. The church, together with its pastor, the enabler, will determine what and how each Christian is to function, even as a universal priest. However, one of the blessings of God's New Testament people is their Christian liberty and freedom. It was Calvin who sought to structure and control the life of each by careful direction and supervision. The church must indeed teach the whole counsel of God, both law and gospel. To follow God's immutable will, as revealed also in His law, in one's life of sanctification is not in opposition to this freedom Christians have under God. But to insist, for example, that every male member over 18 or 21 must attend voters meetings, that every young person must join a youth group, that everyone in the congregation must in some way express his sanctification by being involved in some congregational program of service - that is structuring sanctification according to the will of the congregation and the pastor. And what results may not be the fruits of faith at all." I would highly recommend the reading of this entire article to you.

What about those who are led, then? Let them be led by the Word, let them be prepared "for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up" (Eph. 4:12). The pastor who does not lead in doing that is not leading correctly. But he also is not leading correctly if he interprets "works of service" to be works carried out only in some structured congregational capacity. Let him go beyond verse 12 of Ephesians 4 to the concluding statements in verse 16: "From him (Christ) the whole body joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work." That work is functioning as a part of the body of Christ. It will be different according to different gifts. It will be in a congregation. It will be at work. It will be at home. In short, it is functioning as a Christian all of the time. .

Of that functioning Peter says, "Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever, Amen." Those who are led should look to their leader to use the Word to prepare them for such service, for any and all service that Christians render in functioning as Christians whereby the body of Christ is built up.

The destination is the important thing

The body of Christ is to be built up with a goal in mind. The works of service are “so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fulness of Christ” (Eph. 4:12-13). That body is built up, as we have said, not only by structured functioning of a congregation, but also by every act and prayer of faith and love, whether public or private, whether officially recognized or perhaps completely unseen and unknown except to God and the Christian involved.

The Word remains central to this edification. Paul said to Timothy, “Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers” (1 Tim. 4:16). And there you have the final goal. The body of Christ is saved people on the way to salvation’s fulfillment in glory.

As we travel to that goal, congregations with different needs and differing situations may well do things differently. Organizational structure and constitutions are in themselves areas of Christian liberty and judgment. Let us then be careful that we do not wrongly judge where there are differences. But let us also be careful and concerned that the emphases and principles of Scripture are followed.

May we all follow the real Leader

We can see reference to the leader and to those who are led in Paul’s words to Timothy, “---save both yourself and your hearers,” quoted earlier. But the preacher and the hearers, the leader and the led, are nothing without the real leader. Without Christ we could not find the word “save” in that passage. Without Christ we could not hear the word “Saved” in our lives. Without Christ we could not look forward to heaven as our home. But Christ says, “Follow me.” “Come to me.” “I am the way – and the truth and the life.” He is the leader to our heavenly goal. He is the Chief Shepherd, the real leader, whom we follow. “And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away” (1 Peter 5:4). May we all follow Him and faithfully fulfill the function for which He has placed us in His body.

The words of the Apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 2:16 are good words with which to come to a conclusion: “Who is equal to such a task?” How unworthy we sinful beings are to be a part of the body of Christ! How unworthy to be leaders or led! Yet worthy is what we are by the grace of God because of the cleansing blood of His Son. And for our tasks He also provides His Spirit’s strength.

This paper has many words that are not mine. They are the Spirit’s words from Scripture. May my filler words in between not detract but be of service to our Head for the benefit of His body.

“Jesus, lead Thou on Till our rest is won.
Heav’nly Leader, still direct us,
Still support, control, protect us,
Till we safely stand
In our fatherland.”

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