

# God's Leaders

Ephesians 4:7, 11-16; Titus 1:5-9; I Timothy 3:1-7

A sermon preached by Calvin Warpula  
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Today's announcement by brother Kelly of the nomination of additional men to serve as elders is one of the most important announcements made in the three years I have been here with you at West U. The choice of additional leadership is always a serious and prayerful matter. The church can never rise any higher than its leadership. The future of the West University congregation will be determined by the emphasis, direction, teaching, and guidance of our leadership.

**Biblical leadership is always servant leadership.** There is an old saying, "Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely." Biblical leadership is not a matter of running for office, seeking a power grab, politicking for the job, or being a dictator or autocrat. Jesus was meek and lowly in heart and we are told to take up our cross and follow him. We are commanded to learn from him what it means to serve. Listen to his teachings in Matthew 20:20-28 [read].

While the disciples were arguing at the last supper on who was to be number 1 and number 2 in God's kingdom, Jesus took a basin of water and a towel and got down on his knees and washed the disciples' feet. Jesus taught us and showed us what it means to be a servant. He said, "If I your lord and savior have washed your feet, then you should wash one another's feet. Blessed are you if you do these things." We are all in the towel ministry. The Bible says, "In love, serve one another."

**There are three key words that are used to describe the role of those who are called to the highest order of leadership in the local church.** These words are (1) pastor or shepherd, (2) elder, and (3) bishop or overseer. These three terms are used together in some biblical verses to describe the role and function of church leaders. For example, notice in Acts 20, that Paul called the elders of the church in Ephesus to meet with him (v. 17). In talking with them, in v. 28 Paul urged them as "overseers" to be "shepherds" of the church. Here the same men are addressed as "elders," "shepherds," and "overseers." The apostle Peter does the same thing in his first letter, chapter 5, vs. 1 and 2. [read]. Here he uses all three words,

“elders, shepherds, and overseers,” to describe the work and role of the same group of men. In Paul’s letter to Timothy he gave the qualifications for “overseers,” [chapter 3] but in his letter to Titus, he gave similar qualifications for men called “elders” [chapter 1]. In Titus, Paul says for Titus to “appoint elders in every town” (v. 5) but two verses later says, “an overseer is entrusted with God’s work” (v. 7). Thus, it appears from the Scriptures that “elders, shepherds and overseers” all describe the same group of church leaders.

Let’s take a look at each of these works and what they mean for us.

**The first word is “pastor” or “shepherd.”** The Gk. word is *poimen*. The Latin translation is “pastor” and the English is “shepherd.” This word speaks of feeding, nurturing, guiding and protecting sheep. Jesus often used the imagery of sheep to describe his disciples. He spoke of the perils of sheep without a shepherd. He described and lived the life of the good shepherd who loves and cares for his sheep, who knows them by name, who feeds and nurtures them, who protects and comforts them, and who even is willing to lay down his life for them. Jesus said, “I am the good shepherd.” Being a shepherd is a demanding job. The sheep are always on the mind of the shepherd. The whole life of the sheep is tied up with the shepherd.

Through the prophet Ezekiel in the O.T., God speaks of false shepherds who neglect the care of his sheep, Israel. Hear his penetrating words: [read 34:1-6].

Jesus, on the other hand, is the good shepherd and the model for all the under shepherds of the church. The work of shepherds is to feed and care for the sheep. After his resurrection, Jesus appeared to the disciples and spoke with Peter, who just a few weeks before had denied Jesus three times. Three times Jesus said to Peter, “Peter, do you love me?” Each time Peter said, “Yes, Lord, I love you.” Jesus replied each time, “Feed my sheep,” or “Tend my lambs.” When leaders love Jesus, they take care of Jesus’ flock, his disciples.

Some 30 years later, in his first letter Peter referred to Jesus and his suffering and his being the great shepherd of the church. Hear him in I Peter, chapter 2, verses 21-25: [read].

Three chapters later Peter addressed the church shepherds of his day. Here he wrote that shepherds are not in it for power or money but for service to Christ’s church. Here him now: [read 5:1-4].

In Ephesians 4:11 Paul speaks of four functionaries Christ set in his church: (1) apostles, (2) prophets, (3) evangelists, and (4) pastors and teachers. The last one named, “pastors and teachers,” describes only one group, not two. The Greek text has a definite article before each of these

four groups: **the** apostles, **the** prophets, **the** evangelists, and **the** pastors and teachers. There is no article before the word “teachers.” This means that “the pastors and teachers” are one group. They are pasturing teachers and teaching pastors. The chief way a pastor ministers is by teaching or by supervising the teaching. Teaching prepares God’s people for works of service. When God’s people know better, they will do better. Teaching is the key ingredient in building up the body of Christ, the church, and helping the body to reach unity in the faith, knowledge of the son of God, and maturity in Christ. Paul goes on to say that when this occurs the body will not follow false and deceptive teachings but will be joined together with Christ and grow and be built up in love.

Teaching then is a vital role of being a pastor or shepherd of the church. We are what we eat. If we eat spiritual junk food, then we become spiritual junkies. If we eat rotten or poisoned food, then we become sick and may even die. Paul wrote to Titus and encouraged him to appoint leaders in the churches that would hold to the truth of God. Here’s how Paul phrased it to Titus: [read Tit. 1:9]. This is why Paul says in I Timothy chapter 3 that church leaders must be “able to teach.” He goes on in that chapter to say that “the church is the pillar and the foundation of the truth of the truth” (v. 15). This means that the church holds up the truth and supports the truth in everything. This is as Jesus prayed in John, chapter 17: “Father, sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.” Earlier Jesus had said, “You shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free. If you continue in my word then are you truly my disciples” (John 8:31-32).

In speaking to the elders from Ephesus, Paul was very strong on this point. Hear his admonition to them in Acts 20 beginning with verse 25: [read vs. 25-31]. In some places today, the church is floundering, weak, and unfed. If the sheep are not fed, they cannot be led. Weak and sickly sheep may be the result of poor shepherding. Of course, the sheep must eat what the shepherds provide. If the sheep will not eat good, wholesome spiritual food, then it is not the fault of the shepherds.

**The second word that describes those that lead the church is the word “elder.”** This word is the Greek *presbuteros* which means “an older, aged, mature person.” In a general sense, it is used of older, wise men. In a special sense, it is used of church leaders who are filled with wisdom, experience and maturity. The concept comes from the O.T. elders of Israel who were the respected, older and wise men who led God’s people. They would sit in the city gates where they formed somewhat of a city council to make decisions regarding the life of the community. The elders of the Jews shaped and directed the Jewish communities during the time of Jesus and the

apostles. The first mention of elders in the N.T. church is in Acts 11:27 where the church in Antioch of Syria sent funds to the elders of Jerusalem to distribute to the poor among the saints. We are not told how the funds were distributed to the needy. It could very well be that the elders had special servants like those seven men of Acts chapter 6 that took care of the distribution of funds to the needy widows in Jerusalem. When Paul and Barnabas were on their first missionary journey, they planted new congregations and then, after a period of teaching, they appointed “elders in every church” (Acts 14:23). The elders of the church in Jerusalem met with the apostles to discuss the controversy raised by some in the churches on how to accept the new non-Jewish converts to the faith in Jesus (Acts 15). Later, when Paul reported to the Jerusalem church the conversions among the Gentiles and Jews on his third missionary journey, he met with the elders of the church (Acts 21:18).

The writer of Hebrews may be referring to elders, among others, including preachers and teachers, when he wrote about leaders and their example of faith and life. Hear him now in chapter 13, verses 7 and 17: [read]. God’s people here are urged to follow their leaders’ example of devotion and obedience to God. They are also urged to obey their leaders and follow them.

**The third word for God’s leaders is the word “bishop” or “overseer.”** This word is used in I Tim. 3:1 and 2. [read]. It is also in Phil. 1:1 [read]. The Gk. word is episcopas which means “one who looks after or superintends.” The word is used of a person who is in charge of the construction of a building, of one who is responsible for making decisions and providing direction, and of an educational tutor. Whenever any community group meets, someone has to be in charge. Every sports team has a captain. Every organization has structured leadership. Even God built into nature organization and leadership as evidence by a colony of ants or a swarm of bees. Leaders in the church are accountable and responsible for the life, work, ministry and progress of the body. That’s why Paul says, “an overseer is entrusted with God’s work” (Tit. 1:7). Paul spoke of an overseer “managing God’s church” (I Tim. 3:5). Somebody has to be providing leadership or the church will flounder and dissipate because of a lack of cohesion and unity. God’s overseers provide that servant leadership.

**The qualities of the men to serve as elders, shepherds, and overseers are significant because of what they do not include as well as for what they do include.** First, in I Timothy chapter three and in Titus chapter one the qualities of God’s leaders say nothing about wealth, advanced degrees, senior age, social status, or great spiritual gifts. Second,

church leaders are required to be spiritually-mature men of God. Combining the teachings of Paul in these two chapters produces a list of twenty qualities for a leader's maturity profile. Here is what Paul wrote:

1. Overall spiritual maturity (a well-rounded man)
2. Above reproach (a man of good repute)
3. The husband of one wife (morally pure)
4. Temperate (balanced in words and deeds)
5. Prudent (wise and humble)
6. Respectable (good role model)
7. Hospitable (unselfish and generous)
8. Able to teach (communicates sensitively in a non-threatening and non-defensively manner)
9. Not addicted to win (not addicted to substances)
10. Not self-willed (not self-centered and controlling)
11. Not quick-tempered (void of anger that becomes sinful)
12. No pugnacious (not abusive)
13. Gentle (sensitive, loving and kind)
14. Peaceable (non-argumentative and non-divisive)
15. Free from the love of money (non-materialistic)
16. Manages his own household well (a good husband and father)
17. Loving what is good (pursues godly activities)
18. Just (wise, discerning, non-prejudiced and fair)
19. Devout (holy, devoted to God)
20. Self-controlled (disciplined)

(An excellent study of these twenty attributes is Gene Getz, The Measure of a Man. Ventura, CA: Regal, 2004).

Leaders must be men who know, reverence, and respect the word of God. They are men who make decisions based on the values of the word, not on what works or what pleases people. They are to be gifted with leadership abilities and to be able to teach and lead the church in sound doctrine. "Sound doctrine" in the Scriptures means "teaching that promotes spiritual health and wholeness." Leaders must beware of rigidity and legalism that stifle and kill churches. They must remember this mantra:

"Methods are many,  
principles are few;  
Methods always change,  
principles never do."

These men are to be leaders of their families. They are to live in love with their wives and to lead their children to know and serve God through his son Jesus Christ. Leaders are to have a good reputation among those that are not believers so they can have a good and righteous influence for the body of Christ. They are to be men of self control in their tempers, their speech, and their habits and lifestyle. These men then are to be worthy of respect and honor for their life for Jesus. They are to be among the finest examples of Christian character found in the church body. God does not require perfection but he does require sincerity and effort. These men are not to be novices or new converts but men who are seasoned and experienced with God, the word, and church life.

**These men have a tremendous task of leading and teaching the body of Christ, the church.** They are to set the example for the rest of us. They are not to ask us to do anything for God that they are not already doing for God. We follow them as they follow Christ. They are our spiritual mentors. They are following Christ just like we are, only they are further along up the path ahead of us. A good leader “knows the way, goes the way, and shows the way.”

General George Patton of World War II fame was leading a group of soldiers when they came to a river. It was cold, it had been snowing, and the soldiers mumbled that it was impossible to cross the icy river with all of their gear. Patton listened briefly, then wade out into the water, swam across the river, climbed out on the other side, glared at them from the opposite bank for a moment, got back in, swam back, and said to the soldiers, “Do you think you can do it now?”

(Bob Russell, When God Builds a Church: Ten Principles for Growing a Dynamic Church. West Monroe, LA: Howard Publishing, 2000, p. 104).

The role of being an elder, a shepherd and an overseer is “a noble task” (I Tim. 3:1). It is not an office to hold but a ministry to perform. Paul says that we are to “respect leaders for the work they do” (I Thess. 5:13). The authority of church leaders grows out of the ministry they perform. We respect those who serve us the most. An elder’s greatest authority is the example of his life. He leads by moral suasion which is his greatest persuasion. Everett Ferguson in his book on the Church of Christ makes this comment:

A people voluntarily submitting to those in whom they recognize the moral and spiritual leadership they want to follow is not the same as leaders

insisting on being obeyed because of their position. The authority of elders/bishops is the moral authority that comes from their loving service, their example, and their spiritual knowledge and experience.

(The Church of Christ: A Biblical Ecclesiology for Today. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1996, p. 327).

**Any man who accepts the role is agreeing to be the servant of the sheep.** Lynn Anderson, in his book, They Smell Like Sheep (West Monroe, LA: Howard Publishing, 1997), describes the kind of people God needs in leadership positions. We need to be reminded of this because

over time, the church has drifted into selecting leaders based on the same criteria utilized by corporate, industrial, and public service organizations. As a result, the church may be fiscally sound and efficiently engineered, but spiritually bankrupt.

(Gerald Turner, quoted on the back cover of Anderson's book)

The two divine models for leadership are fathers in the home and shepherds of sheep.

Managing the local church is more like managing a family than managing a business or state. A man may be a successful businessman, a capable public official, a brilliant office manager, or a top military leader but be a terrible church elder or father. Thus a man's ability to oversee his household well is a prerequisite for overseeing God's household.

(Alexander Strauch, Biblical Eldership: An Urgent Call to Restore Biblical Church Leadership. Littleton, CO: Lewis and Roth, 1995, p. 77)

God never endorses the CEO business model for his church. "The CEO model works mostly behind closed, boardroom doors—making decisions, tapping gavels, dispatching memos, and announcing edicts." (Anderson, p. 34). Remember, "When Jesus contrasted godly leadership with the authoritarian style of worldly leaders, he stated flatly, 'I don't want you leading like the pagans.'" (Anderson, p. 198). "Good spiritual leaders are shepherds, not saviors, leaders, not lords, guides, not gods." (Anderson, p. 74).

**Being a shepherd of the sheep is no easy, comfortable task.** Look at what Moses went through as he led Israel for forty years. There were times when he was so frustrated that he wanted to throw up his hands and quit. Look at Jesus, the model shepherd. He was often grieved and he

groaned inwardly at the shallowness, fickleness, and selfishness of God's people. "A follower of Christ who seeks to lead like Jesus must be willing to be treated like Jesus. Some will follow. Others will throw stones" (Gene Wilkes, quoted in Anderson, p. 158). Above all, elders must be men of strong, spiritual character because "thin-skinned, easily swayed, insecure persons won't lead well or last long." (Anderson, p. 182).

God will hold church leaders responsible for what they do with the flock and how they serve (Heb. 13:17).

**In summary, church leaders as elders show wisdom, maturity and experience. As overseers, they are responsible for the decisions and direction of the church. As shepherds, they love, protect, nurture and feed us in Christ.**

Today, you are asked to consider and evaluate these two men, Hilton Merritt and Jim Taylor, as your prospective elders, pastors, and overseers. The Bible does not give us a specific methodology for appointing new leadership. The Scriptures tells us that Paul and Barnabas and that Timothy and Titus appointed leaders but no details are given as to how the particular men were chosen. God evidently leaves that process up to us, as long as everything is spiritual, fair and equitable. Our present elders, Ralph Arnold and Kelly Rushing, who have served us in peace and love for many years and who know the congregation well, have nominated these two deacons to be recognized as elders.

Because neither the elders nor these two men wish to serve without the consent of the congregation they want your input. If you accept these two men, then please mark your evaluation form "I agree," sign your name and submit the form to the elders. If you have objections to either or both of these men, mark "I don't agree." Write any comments or suggestions you may have, and then sign your name. The elders will prayerfully and carefully consider your comments, and follow through on them as needed. They will tabulate the evaluations and announce to the congregation the results. The will of the congregation will be followed. The elders promise you confidentiality in this entire process. If you would like to talk with the elders about any of this, or any other matter, I have always found them to be approachable and ready to listen.

**The selection and appointment of leadership in God's church is such a significant event that the Bible says that it calls for "prayer and fasting" (Acts 13:3; 14:23).** I encourage you to spend some time focusing on God and his will for West U and to commit yourself totally to doing what God wants in your individual lives and in our corporate life together as the body of Christ.

Let us pray:

God, our heavenly Father, we love you and praise your name today for saving us through your son, Jesus. Thank you for creating the church and allowing us to serve you together in it. We thank you for our congregation and pray for our continued growth and strength. Father, we commit this process to you in every way. We want your will to be done, not ours. Guide us, O God, in everything. We confess to you, O God, that we are sinners that we need your grace and mercy every step of the way. Thank you, good Lord, for our present leadership team. May we always work together in peace, love and unity so that we can glorify you together in this community. Father, thank you for these two men that have agreed to serve if they are approved by your people. Again, Father, in this process, and in everything, we implore that your will be done, not ours. In Jesus name, Amen.

-cwarpula@westchurch.com