



THE FOURSQUARE CHURCH



Healthy and Unhealthy Church Leadership

Prepared by the U.S. Foursquare
Church Doctrine Committee

Purpose—

The purpose of this piece is to provide a brief biblical and theological framework for understanding healthy and unhealthy leadership, as well as noting biblical guidelines on how to respond to unhealthy leadership. The two primary examples explored are those of the Lord Jesus and the Apostle Paul.

This piece is intended to be brief and oriented toward a pastoral audience. It cannot cover every aspect the Bible's or the Church's long history of reflection says about healthy and unhealthy leadership; endnotes have been provided for those who seek further information and resources. This document was researched and prepared by licensed Foursquare ministers from a variety of backgrounds, all of whom are serving or have served as pastors and in addition have or are serving in roles of denominational leadership, education and cross-cultural ministries.

A Definition of Church Leadership—

The terms and concepts related to leaders and leadership in the Bible are relationally focused.¹ Leadership and leading are one aspect of a role a person, or a group of people, serves in the lives of others. Church leaders, then, exert trust-based authority to influence others toward abundant life. Authority (*exousia*) includes both the ability (*dunamis*) and the prerogative to use that ability.² Biblical leaders, therefore, must be disciplined to understand healthy kingdom authority, avoiding all physical, disingenuous, or manipulative means of leading (Mark 10:35-45). The trust that lies behind their authority must be earned and maintained (Prov. 14:22, 25).³ The source of trust is two-fold: it is given by God (calling) and given by his Church in recognition of a gifting or a calling *and* maturity (*e.g.*, laying on of hands, set as an example.)⁴

Closely aligned with leadership within the Bible is *how* and *toward what ends* it is used. Contemporary discussions of power tend to focus on the amount of relational influence, standing or equity (value) a person exerts within a context and the network of relationships within that context. Whether realized or not, one has more power when one has more influence based on any number of factors, such as wealth, class, race, ethnicity, education, skill, charisma, relational connections, ability, etc. These dynamics and an awareness of them were present within Israelite and Greco-Roman societies and seen through the lens of the cultural expectations around honor and shame.

Contemporary Christians live within societies whose cultural dynamics are variously constituted--generally along the spectrums of fear and power, guilt and innocence, or honor and shame. These dynamics determine the ways power and influence are distributed throughout a community or larger society: who is seen as having power within a context and used toward what purpose and who has less or no power? Christians, including Christian leaders, must *never* manipulate these dynamics to exert influence in a domineering, controlling, or oppressive manner. Such would constitute abusive relationships and abusive leadership, undermines the prerogative of authority (undermining the trust of God and the community) and violates its purpose; all that remains is the bare and improper use of power.

Instead, Church leaders ought to cultivate a compassionate awareness of these dynamics and the various ways influence and therefore power and authority are distributed and used within their context. As will be further addressed later, both Paul and Jesus show a striking awareness of these dynamics and their influence on human beings. Their leadership shows **1)** a concern to provide space for self-agency (choice) to all, even when legitimate calls toward action are made (e.g., uncoerced repentance); **2)** limitations on the use of legitimate authority, power, or freedom because of love (e.g., 2 Cor., Philemon); **3)** a concern to recognize and address how differences in power and authority and the influence it affords or does not afford affect persons and their communities (Luke 10:28-42; Matt. 5:43-47, 15:21-28, 20:20-27; 1 & 2 Tim.; Titus; Acts 6:1-7, 15:1-35); **4)** calls for the participation and honoring of everyone within the church community regardless of their level of power and authority, their gifts, their ability, their gender, their social standing including marital status, or their ethnicity (Rom. 12:12-26); and **5)** a concern to address unhealthy and abusive behavior including the abusive use of power and its influence within Christian households and above all in the household of faith.

Christians and Christian leaders today then ought also to cultivate this awareness for the purpose of creating healthy and mature communities, equipping and encouraging discernment and a humble responsiveness to cultural and relational dynamics in merciful, loving, and just ways (Micah 6:8; Matt. 5:7; Luke 6:36, 11:42). As such, this constitutes an important aspect of the kingdom *ethos*.

Church leadership must always reflect servant-leadership (John 13:1-17). Paul notes that **just as a nursing mother cares for her children, so we cared for you** (1 Thess. 2:7B-8A), and Peter comments that Church leaders are to **be shepherds of God's flock...eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted** to their care (1 Pet. 5:2-3). Such leadership is seen as noble and worthy of honor (1 Tim. 3:1, 5:17-18). Consequently, leadership is a great privilege and like other endeavors involving human beings it can be a great joy; but it also can entail grief and disappoint. When leaders err in attitude or action, they must be disciplined by those to whom they have submitted themselves for accountability (Heb. 13:17; 1 Peter 2:13-17, 5:5); this discipleship may call for various levels of correction, discipline, and in some instances removal (Deut. 17:4; 1 Tim.5:20).⁵ Jesus and the apostles emphasized this by highlighting how other leaders and the community itself are given the responsibility to hold errant members of the community, including its leaders, accountable (Matt. 18:15-20; Gal. 6:1; 1 Tim. 5:20; 1 John 2:1).

Our Primary Example of Healthy Leadership,

Jesus Christ—

Jesus, who **made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant** (Phil. 2:6), is clear about the nature of Christian relationships, calling his disciples to love God and love others, even one's enemies (Matt. 5:43-48, 22:37-40). Love toward God is meant to characterize every part of human life—internally and externally, individually and communally—shaping how we view ourselves, and others.⁶ This included not only preaching and teaching the Gospel but embodying it in order to bring the fullness of God's love to the entirety of human life. For Jesus, this included a prayerful awareness of one's own motivations and attitudes toward oneself and others and recognized the need for sustainable rhythms of work and rest.⁷ Love toward others is birthed out of God's love for us (Matt. 18:21-35). It is meant to mirror God's proactive, generous, forgiving, faithful yet truthful care and love that is poured out upon us even while we were his enemies (Rom. 5:8). This love is meant to characterize not only his disciples individually but his entire community, the Church (John 13:35).

Jesus is also clear about leading others and how one ought to use their abilities and prerogative (authority). In Matt. 20:20-28 and Mark 10:35-45, he draws attention to how authority works among the unredeemed, underscoring the behavior of their **“rulers”** and **“high officials”** and how they exercise their authority by **“lording it over [others].”** The picture is one in which those who have status, fame, or influence over others use it to domineer and exploit them. The context in both Gospels is one in which the disciples are competing with one another over status (Matt. 20:21; Mark 10:37). In contrast to the unredeemed, Jesus succinctly exhorts his disciples against such uses of authority—**“Not so with you”** (Mark 10:43). Instead, offering himself as an example, one's status, fame, or influence is to be based on and used for service and sacrifice on behalf of others, rather than dominating or manipulating others. In a masterful way, Jesus critiques both **“rulers of the Gentiles”** and his disciples for being driven by the pursuit of status and fame and the domineering or manipulative authority it might allow over others. Jesus is echoing a theme from Deuteronomy (Deut. 17) and events in Israel's own history (I Sam. 8).⁸

As Jesus' disciples, members of his body and filled with the Spirit, these examples are still applicable today and are a reminder of how what passes as leadership in our world, or our own contexts, must continually be evaluated according to the Spirit-breathed Scriptures and the *ethos* the New Testament sets before the Christian community. Jesus' training of the disciples demonstrates patient, compassionate, yet firm expectations around this *ethos* for those who will eventually lead his Church. Training for leaders ought to highlight the importance of embodying this *ethos* and embrace creative ways in which to disciple others toward this same maturity.

Additional examples of the *ethos* of God's kingdom in Jesus' life are demonstrated in his interactions with women, children, the poor, the oppressed, the foreigner, the widow, the sick, the diseased, the disabled, the sinner and his various calls to love God and love others (even enemies) as a fulfilment of the Law and the Prophets (Luke 4:16-19; Matt. 5:43-48; 1 John 3:16-18; 2 Tim. 1:13. Cf Matt. Eph. 5:1, 1 John 4:7-12). His is the highest and most continued example of healthy leadership for all Church leaders. As his disciples, the active love demonstrated in this *ethos* is birthed out of being loved by God, from which flows Christian mission and purpose (1 John 4:11; Jude 20).

The Apostle Paul and Healthy Leadership—

The Apostle Paul presents Jesus as the example of the mindset and conduct the entire Christian community ought to have toward one another and connects it with **common sharing in the Spirit** (Phil. 2:1-11). Later he details the kind of fruit such a life will produce—**love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control** (Gal. 5:16-25). This is the case regardless of whether one is a Church leader or not, yet Paul's activities and instructions concerning leaders highlight how leaders are to embody this *ethos* in a mature, persistent, and consistent manner to the extent that they can serve as examples to others (1 Tim. 3:1-7). This concern for maturity, persistence, and consistency leads Paul to advise against too eagerly appointing leaders, to heightened self-awareness, and to a process of testing leaders (1 Tim. 3:6, 10, 5:22).⁹ The primary goal of a leader and those training for Church leadership is to

continue to live this *ethos* and from it to call forth and equip others so that this same mature *ethos* of love is persistently developed within the lives of his people, the Church (Eph. 4:11-16).

In referencing healthy Church leadership and how people are to be treated, Paul draws on the truth that *all* human beings are made in the image of God (Col. 3:10). This theme, which originates in Genesis and continues into the NT, indicates that all human beings have an inherent worth and value in God's eyes and therefore are to be treated with the utmost dignity and respect.¹⁰ Paul also appeals to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit as a rationale for how Christians individually and corporately ought to interact with others, including non-Christians (Col. 3:5-14).¹¹

The implications of these last two themes, along with those covered above, demonstrate that all Christians ought to treat their brothers and sisters and non-Christians with dignity and respect, and give careful attention to reflecting God's love (*cf.* 1 Pet. 2:12; Rom. 12:7; 2 Cor. 8:21; Col. 4:5; 1 Tim. 3:7). The vision that Christ and Paul cast for their audiences is a community that lives out of its identity as the beloved of God and strives to embody the kingdom *ethos* by the power of the Spirit.

Paul not only taught these truths but embodied this *ethos* and illustrated this kind of service through prayer on behalf of others and through a willingness to lay aside personal prerogatives or comfort for the benefit of others; he modeled a consistent display of vulnerability (concerning his desire for prayer, his sufferings, concerns, hopes, fears, thorns in the flesh) as a means of encouragement and inspiration for others, and of transparency in his activities (regarding resources, his mission activities, and his relationships with others [2 Cor. 12]). Above all he demonstrated his own devotion to Christ and the importance of imparting the Gospel and the Scriptures with a careful awareness of the diversity of his audience both with the Church and among the nations (Phil. 3:7-14; Rom. 1:8-15; Acts 17:16-34). He gave careful attention to having a clear conscience (1 Tim. 1:5) and genuine love (Rom. 12:9).¹² As a leader, he could call upon others to follow his example in as much as he followed Christ (1 Cor. 11:1).¹³

Unhealthy Leadership—

Leadership modeled on the life of Jesus Christ in service to God and his people acts as an active embodiment of the gospel to the world. This means, above all, that Church leaders are to be **servants for Jesus' sake** (2 Cor. 4:5). But sometimes Church leaders display unhealthy leadership. Paul and other NT writers, therefore, provide pastoral instruction on how to correct leaders toward the example of Jesus when they go astray. For example, John publicly rebuked Diotrophes, a leader in the church, for failing to lead like Jesus and **lov[ing] to be first** (3 John 9). Paul similarly opposed Peter publicly for his duplicitous actions toward the Gentiles when certain Jewish colleagues arrived in Galatia (Gal. 2:11-14).

The necessary qualities for Christian leadership in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 provide a certain discernment for unhealthy qualities that would inhibit people from Church leadership, such as, failing to live above reproach, unfaithfulness to marriage (if applicable), harshness, a lack of self-control, disrespect, perversity, irritability, obstinacy, a givenness to drunkenness (addiction) and/or violence, a propensity towards quarreling and controversy, and a love of money (1 Tim. 3:1-7). Furthermore, leaders who are overbearing, undisciplined, quick-tempered, or pursue dishonest gain could be considered unfit for Christian leadership (Titus 1:7-8). Such are contrary to the *ethos* of Jesus Christ as a Leader and must be appropriately addressed.

Preventing Unhealthy Leadership—

Before addressing how to respond to concerns of unhealthy Church leadership, a brief word on preventing unhealthy leadership. It is important for Church leaders to not only make themselves accountable to others to bring correction when necessary (see above), but to **examine...and test [themselves]** (2 Cor. 13:5; see also 1 Tim. 1:5, 19). Both practices should

lead to confession and repentance and the active pursuit of help, healing and health when the Spirit sheds light and convicts (1 Cor. 11:27-34; James 5:19-20). Self-examination echoes Scripture's concern that leaders explore their underlying motivations to deal with anything that is biblically unhealthy in terms of intentions, behaviors, and self-centered hearts to ensure that they do not injure others, grieve the Spirit, or bring upon themselves God's discipline (Eph. 4:30; 1 Cor. 11:31).¹⁴

Our human proclivity toward sin, selfishness, and self-preservation and the devil's desire to wreak havoc within the Church of God means that leaders must be aware of the temptation and sin of using biblical texts concerning confronting sin, discipline, and discipleship in a manner that constitutes abuse or using biblical texts concerning the honoring or calling of God as a means of insulating ourselves or other leaders from concerns, accusations, accountability or discipline.¹⁵ Instead, Paul exhorts that Christians, especially Christian leaders, have their **minds set on what the Spirit desires**, and live out of genuine love (Rom. 8:5, Phil. 4:4-9).

Biblical Precedent On Engaging Unhealthy Spiritual Leaders—

Before exploring some specific texts that help give a *framework* for responding to unhealthy leadership, a word of caution—these texts must never be made into *hard and fast rules imposed without Spirit-led process which always points to the kingdom's ethos*. Rather, the following texts and examples provide biblical precedent within which to explore and develop our theological reflection and practical response. Each situation must be handled individually and relationally¹⁶ with prayer, reflection, careful contextualization, diligent collection of facts, due process, spiritual discernment, wisdom, prophetic insight/words, and the godly input of **many advisers** (Prov. 15:22).

Paul, who gives the most definitive understanding in the NT as he dealt with specific 1st century leadership and faith-community situations, demonstrates how ideas concerning communal discipline were adapted in Gentile contexts for all Christians, providing an

understanding that echoes the OT, Second Temple Judaism, and Jesus' teaching: **1)** there must be impartial and transparent corroboration, investigation, and judgment by a third party;¹⁷ **2)** if private and personal attempts fail, there must be increasing community involvement which always seeks repentance and restoration; and **3)** appropriate action must be taken, perhaps even expulsion under certain circumstances.¹⁸ The Bible expresses concern regarding how the Church's witness may be damaged by internal conflicts, but ultimately the primary concern is responsiveness to God, restoration of the erring leader and the health of those affected of Christ's overall Church (1 Cor. 5:1-13, 6:5-6; 1 Pet. 3:13-17; 2 Cor. 2:5-11).

Finally, the NT speaks positively of civil authority and indicates that believers ought to expect earthly authorities to have a divine role of punishing evil and honoring good (Rom. 13:1-7; 1 Tim. 2:1-2; Titus 3:1; 1 Pet. 2:11-17; *cf.* Mark 12:15-17 // Matt. 22:20-22 // Luke 20:24-26).¹⁹ Leaders who commit acts of criminality should not expect to be given special protection by the Church from civil authorities pursuing unlawful or criminal activity (*cf.* 1 Pet. 3:13-17).²⁰

Some Biblical Examples in Response to Potentially Unhealthy Leadership—

Once more, by way of reminder, the texts below offer us sketches and examples of how the process of discipline worked within the Bible. Further theological and practical application ought not be made outside of the framework described earlier in this document. Additionally, the focus of this section is on dealing with unhealthy *leadership*, not necessarily unhealthy church members, and so carries a certain urgency. How churches and Christians respond to sin within the Church is a careful process of discernment that takes into consideration cultural, relational, and health dynamics. The Bible recognizes that the severity of an accusation and the severity and pattern of transgression, sin, and abuse, determine the level of response in terms of urgency, as well as the kind of correction and discipline. However, regardless of the severity or pattern, we ignore the wrongdoing of leaders at the peril of the Church and its ministry.

- In the context of discussing sin against others in Matthew 18, Jesus encourages his disciples to become like children, assuming a lowly position in serving others. Therefore, the process of looking into such matters is not something heavy-handed or spiteful, nor done simply to oust problematic and uncomfortable situations or people. However, when sin is confirmed or found out and a brother or sister refuses to respond to the Church's²¹ mediation toward repentance, Jesus says actions may become progressively more grave (Matt. 18:17). Such action is "not out of contempt for our neighbor but precisely out of love for him and a concern for his (or her) eternal salvation."²²
- Paul reiterates this general attitude of childlike service in the process of discipline by stating, **if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently** (Gal. 6:1). Three specifics are noteworthy—**1)** the discipline should be Spirit-led; we want to do our best to hear His voice when dealing with, confronting, and disciplining sin; **2)** our aim should be restorative and not punitive; and **3)** we want to discipline **gently**.²³ **Gently** connotes being sympathetic, forbearing, considerate, non-arrogant and uncensorious toward others. "The Spirit led are not to approach the wayward in a spirit that would beat down or alienate or that would bring shame, but with the humility and sympathy that come from each one knowing his or her own equal vulnerability to temptations to sin."²⁴
- **Some from Chloe's household have informed me that there are quarrels among you** (1 Cor. 1:11) indicates that those responsible for dealing with unhealthy situations do not always observe them first-hand. We must remember that those coming forth often do so at great implicit or explicit cost and they deserve great care. This care, however, does not sidestep due process. When such reports come, they must not be ignored or minimized. We must take them seriously and investigate if the allegations against the leader are true, the result of someone being misinformed or the result of someone spreading **malicious nonsense**, such as Diotrephes did with John and his colleagues (3 John 9-10).
- **Encourage one another daily, as long as it is called "Today," so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness** (Heb. 3:13) indicates that although we want self-aware and self-examining leaders, we all have personal blind spots and need the community to help us see them. When they're pointed out, we should be thankful and

realize that we were just spared the potential of not only hurting others but of being saved from death ourselves (James 5:19).

- The process of looking into possible unhealthy leadership must be done **without partiality...[doing] nothing out of favoritism** (1 Tim. 5:21). **Without partiality** means without “preconceived judgment or prejudice...without predetermination of either guilt or innocence” and **[doing] nothing out of favoritism** “indicates that leaning toward or favoring someone in discipline is always wrong.”²⁵ This text was written to Timothy and discourages him especially against partiality or deference toward accused leaders. However, this impartiality should also extend to those who bring reports or accusations.
- Giving grace and seeking restoration of leaders who have sinned by way of unhealthy or abusive leadership to the Lord and his Church (2 Cor 2:5-11; Gal 6:1) does not mean we overlook nor minimize wrongdoing. Nor does it mean the leader will or ultimately should be restored to leadership. If an accusation is brought to our attention as fellow leaders, we must **investigate it thoroughly** (Deut. 17:4).
- **Do not entertain an accusation against an elder unless it is brought by two or three witnesses** (1 Tim. 5:19) indicates there must be due diligence to be sure of the facts and to make sure there’s no collusion among accusers or the accused (see Deut. 17:6; 19:15). We also want to listen carefully to the accused. Nothing is said here about dealing with those who bring dishonest or mistaken accusation, and each situation differs. We must look largely to intent, differentiating between accusations which are found to be deliberately manipulative and dishonest vs. those found to have been made in ignorance (e.g., not knowing all the facts or failing to realize people see things differently concerning issues that are not a matter of right or wrong). However, the basic Deuteronomic principle of assuming personal responsibility for wrongdoing would indicate that some sort of correction leading to repentance and asking for forgiveness of those wrongly accused are necessary (Deut. 23:15-25).²⁶
- **But those elders who are sinning you are to reprove before everyone, so that the others may take warning** (1 Tim. 5:20) indicates that at times leaders are found to be wrong through due process and corrective action must be taken. The biblical evidence in terms of how to carry this out can be complex relationally and culturally and necessitates subjective Spirit-led decisions.

- **Generally, you want to keep the circle of discipline private.** This is undoubtedly an implication of James’s *whoever turns a sinner from the error of their way...will cover over a multitude of sins* (James 5:20 [emphasis noted]; see also Prov 10:12; 1 Pet. 4:8) and Jesus’ **“If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you”** (Matt. 18:15).
- Paul’s statement that the reproof should be **before everyone** (1 Tim. 5:20) brings in the dimension of public discipline before the affected community, likely because “the first stages of the traditional procedure of church discipline (private rebuke: Matt. 18:15-17; Titus 3:10; I Tim. 5:1) had been ineffective in stemming the elders’ misbehavior”²⁷ or because the stability of the church was at stake. Jesus also notes the occasional need’ to **“tell it to the church”** (Matt. 18:17). The purpose of the public discipline in 1 Tim 5:20 is **so that the others may take warning**, namely, that the other elders (leaders) and the congregation at large **will hear of this and be afraid, and never again will such an evil thing be done among you** (Deut. 19:20).²⁸
- On occasion, Jesus challenged the religious leaders and authorities in public places and held them accountable publicly (Mark 12:1-12, 35-40).
- Paul’s open opposition of Peter **to his face...in front of them all** (Gal 2:11-14) indicates the broadest *possible* audience for public discipline of leaders (before an entire Foursquare District? The Foursquare ministerium of an entire nation?); although often debated today as to when/if such action is appropriate, it seemingly holds the possibility of being implemented when it’s determined that the damage is dire, patterned, and widespread, and corrective precedent must be set. In other words, when there are paradigmatic or systemic issues embedded in the individual’s infraction, it *may* be necessary to go beyond both “private correction” and the “local faith community” where the infraction occurred.
- Finally, a biblical and historical perspective offers us a sketch of the kinds of issues that has consistently called for the more serious responses to sinning leaders. These include exploitative practices by false teachers and false prophets, sexual immorality (which includes sexual abuse), manipulative, competitive, or violent uses of power, exploitation of individuals, households, or communities (e.g., the vulnerable) for their resources,

extreme administrative maleficence, false teachings around the *core* doctrines of Christianity (e.g., Trinity, Christ, salvation) as opposed to issues of conscience, non-essential doctrines, or denominational distinctives, extreme asceticism (e.g., disallowing marriage) or libertine practices (e.g., sexual immorality).²⁹ Most accounts of discipline we have in the earliest church after the NT are of Church leaders (e.g., Arius – deacon then priest, Nestorius - Bishop) or leaders of sectarian groups (e.g., Marcion, Gnostics). Following the examples of the NT, the early Church sought to confront accusations of false teachings and any necessary discipline of leaders through a progressively involved process, at times involving meetings of leaders as representatives of the Church (e.g., regional or ecumenical councils, cf. Acts 17) in which the parties involved presented their arguments to the larger group and a determination was made. If necessary, repentance was called for and if there was none, excommunication. Excommunication often entailed deposition from leadership and being sent to a monastery in a region where the person could no longer influence the larger Church. Meetings that were deemed to be done without transparency, were violent, or did not allow the opportunity for full participation of the necessary parties were repudiated by later meetings (e.g., Robber Council 449 A.D.).

¹ The sparsity of the term “leader” or “leadership” as a generic category in the Old and New Testaments should not be taken to mean that leaders and leadership are unimportant but rather as a sign that the activities associated with them are bound up in roles that emphasize the overall place or relationships that person within a community (Ancient Israel or the Church). In Hebrew, the terms translated “leader” (אֶלֶּל, נָגִיד, נְשִׂיא, פָּרֵעַ, קִצִּין) often indicate a military, monarchical, priestly, or judicial role in Israelite society. In the New Testament, the broadest category is overseer/bishop (ἐπίσκοπος – lit. “one who watches over,” “guardian”) and is one who cares for or shepherds God’s flock (1 Tim. 3:2) and stewards God’s household (cf. its application to Christ as the one who watches over and Shepherds our souls in 1 Peter 2:25) or the participial form of ἡγέομαι variously translated “leader”, “leading”, “ruler”,

“chief” (lit. “the one who goes before”; e.g., Matt. 2:6; Luke 22:26; Heb. 13:7, 17; Acts 15:22,). The activity of leading is also part of the role of the elder (πρεσβυτέριον), deacon (διάκονος), pastor/shepherd (ποιμήν), evangelist (εὐαγγελιστής), teacher (διδάσκαλος), and apostle (ἀπόστολος) (also compare these terms which are never used of Christian ministry: ὁδηγός - guide, ἀρχισυνάγωγος – synagogue leader, ἄρχων – ruler/prince, δυνάστης – court official, sovereign, ἡγεμών - governor). In one instance Paul states there is a gift of leading (e.g., Rom. 12:8 – lit. “the one who stands before” often translated “the one who leads”) but like the above Hebrew terms and other NT precedents, it is viewed as part of a constellation of roles and gifts within God’s people highlighting the interdependent nature of the Body of Christ. These terms also underscore how the roles and their authority are sourced from God and recognized by his community and therefore are contingent on the trust discussed. These roles are never cast as owning the flock or household they lead. Neither Jesus, nor Paul or other NT writers attempt to give a clearly defined way in which all these roles relate to one another. This, in addition to many instructions about how one ought to think and live, is additional evidence that of primary importance for God’s community and its leaders is its *ethos* rather than its structure. It is significant that the NT church did not attempt to recreate Ancient Israel’s structures even though some roles are retained (e.g., prophet). While there is no clearly defined structure there does seem to be a clear preference for group leadership rather a singular leader. The manner in which the Bible speaks about leadership is instructive and should draw our attention to the value of consistent critical discernment regarding how roles that include leading are distinct or similar to leadership and roles within the broader culture, specifically in the area of values, goals, and the means of pursuing those goals.

² An English definition of the term “power” includes both the ability to do something, the influence of that ability and the prerogative to exert that influence based on any number of factors. While in general it has both positive and negative connotations, many contemporary studies on “power” focus on its negative effects. The Greek term *exousia* usually translated “authority” bears a similar definition as the English definition and is evaluated both positively and negatively by the authors of the Bible depending on its source, use, and goals. In this document, “power” will primarily be used to discuss one’s ability, especially to exert influence or accomplish a task, and “authority” will mean both power and the prerogative to use it.

³ Acts 6:1-6, 13:1-3 (cf. Exod. 18:21) This seems to be the concern in Paul’s cautious instructions to Timothy about not choosing those who are recent converts or being overly eager to recognize leadership too quickly (1 Tim. 3:6, 5:22).

⁴ The authority to be a leader is often derived from three areas: force, competence, and trust. From a biblical standpoint, the last category is the ideal. “Competence” can be developed or provided by the Lord. “Force,” whether by overwhelming physical or any disingenuous and manipulative means, is biblically disavowed and often carries high stakes and consequences for the leader and the community. On “trust,” see Acts 6:1-6, 13:1-3 (cf. Exod. 18:21). This seems to be the concern in Paul’s cautious instructions to Timothy about not choosing those who are recent converts or being overly eager to lay hands on others (1 Tim. 3:6, 5:22).

⁵ Within God’s community this submission is found alongside leaders recognizing that they are under God’s authority and are to mutually submit to one another in love (Eph. 5:17-21).

⁶ Jesus’ teaching on worry and anxiety regarding reputation, food, clothing, and wealth (money/assets) are meant to avert idolatrous pursuits and debilitating obsession, not their pursuit for livelihood. Paul offers similar warnings but also rejects severe asceticism (e.g., forbidding food or marriage) and highlights the sober use and enjoyment of earthly good when joined with contentment and thankfulness toward God (Matt. 6:1-34; 1 Tim. 4:1-5, 6:6-7, 17). The Bible uses a set of words to communicate self-control, disciplined or temperate and moderate use of earthly goods and sexual relations in marriage (e.g., σώφρων – “self-controlled” - 1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:8, 2:2,5; νηφαλέος – “sober-minded” or “temperate” 1 Tim. 3:2, 11, Titus 2:2; ἐγκρατής – “disciplined” – Titus 1:8; ἐγκράτεια – “self-control” - Acts 24:25, Gal. 5:23; 2 Peter 1:6; ἐγκρατεύομαι – “to exercise self-control/to exercise continence” - 1 Cor. 7:9, 9:25). The contrast between unhealthy and healthy uses is not about ratio but rather what is fitting, wise, and loving, given one’s need, role, and context (e.g., those with weak consciences in 1 Cor. 8, marriage in 1 Cor. 7 and 9), and resonates with the *ethos* of the kingdom. This is contrasted with what is selfish, idolatrous, and an unloving exercise of one’s prerogative and freedom (Eph. 5:5; Gal. 5:13; 1 Cor. 10:23; cf. 1 Pet. 2:16). The Apostle Paul also discusses wealth and riches, advising Timothy to warn the rich against trusting in riches and arrogating themselves over others (1 Tim. 4:6:9-10, 17-19). He also advises against the love of money (1 Tim. 6:10; cf. Jesus in Matt. 6:24) and as a requirement for overseers requires they not be lovers of money and deacons not be greedy (1 Tim. 3:3, 3:8; Titus 1:7). In our contemporary context, the concern for unhealthy and healthy interaction with earthly goods and aspects of life ought also to be extended to all forms of entertainment and work, especially as it relates to leaders.

⁷ Jesus models this rhythm in his consistent practice of prayer, withdrawal, and rest even during ministry, travel, and life events (Matt. 14:21-23, 26:36-46; Mark 1:35, 6:30-32, 46, 14:35-39; Luke 6:12, 9:18, 28, 11:1, 22:39-46).

⁸ Deuteronomy 17 provides one of the starkest pictures of leadership in contrast to the cultures around Israel. Much of what is forbidden would have been part and parcel of what many, even within Israel, would have expected a king to have. Horses were indicative of military strength, a partnership with Egypt would have been seen as a strategic alliance, wives were indicative of both political potential and fertility, and the accumulation of “excessive silver and gold” was the right of the king to be wealthy and a source of fame not only for the king but for the nation. Instead, Deuteronomy states that kings are to copy the law of God under the supervision of the priests so that the law becomes an integral part of the king’s life. The desired result was that the king would fear God and not arrogate himself over **his fellow Israelites**. None of Israel’s kings managed to live up to these expectations throughout their entire lives and this failure is what paved the way for Israel’s eventual idolatry, division, and exile. I Samuel 8 shows how Israel’s request for a king has very little of Deuteronomy 17 in mind, since they desired to be **as all the other nations** and God’s judgement is captured in his statement to Samuel, **“They have rejected me as their king”** (1 Sam. 8:7).

⁹ Self-awareness can be seen in Paul’s language regarding a “clear” or “good conscience” and “testing” or “examining” oneself (συνείδησις – “conscience” - 1 Tim. 1:5, 19, 3:9; Rom. 9:1; cf. Heb. 10:22; 1 Pet. 3:16, 21; πειράζω – to examination – 2 Cor. 13:5 or “to test”, “to discern”, “to approve” - δοκιμάζω – 1 Cor. 11:28; Gal. 6:4). This concern for maturity should not be understood as a concern regarding age (1 Tim. 4:12). While Paul uses human development from infancy to adulthood as a metaphor for the Body of Christ, his concern is their *ethos*.

¹⁰ Within Genesis this has immediate implications in understanding human beings’ unique place in God’s eyes and their role in creation (Gen. 1:26-27). After the expulsion from Eden and the great flood of Genesis 9, the basis of prohibition and punishment against murder is based on humanity being in God’s image and likeness (Gen. 9:6; cf. 5:1-2). While the sin of Adam and Eve affected humanity’s status and relationship with God, the image of God remains (though tarnished [Col. 3:10]) and provides the basis of treatment between *all* human beings. In James 3:9, humanity’s likeness to God is used a rationale against speaking curses toward others.

¹¹ Paul often uses the rich imagery of temple to communicate the Spirit’s indwelling, referring primarily to the Old Testament precedent of the Temple or Tabernacle as the place where God’s name and presence dwelt. Paul uses this appeal in four distinct ways. The first is to discuss how believers are adopted into God’s family and become his children. In this case, he does not use the imagery of the temple yet nevertheless discusses the indwelling of the Spirit and how he appropriates the work of Christ and adoption to human hearts (Rom. 8:9-11; Gal. 4:4-7; cf. John 14). The second is to address the nature of Christian growth and how leaders interact with fellow Christians in 1 Cor. 3:16-17. Like Jesus in Matthew 20:20-28, the context is again one of competition between followers and their leaders that has led to boasting and division. Paul focuses on to whom they belong (*God’s* field, temple, building), on whom they are built, *Christ*, and the role of God to grow and of leaders as fellow workers to plant and water. Everything else is built on the foundation of Christ either by leaders or Christians themselves, all of which will be evaluated. It is accompanied by a stark warning to those in the Corinthian church focusing so much on competition, and the status and fame it grants these **“super-apostles.”** The third is to address how all Christians ought to treat their bodies in 1 Cor. 6:9-20 and is accompanied by a call for holiness. The fourth is how all Christians ought to avoid a particular way of interacting with unbelievers in 2 Cor. 6:14-7:1. Considering his instructions elsewhere, Paul, in this case, is attempting to deal with a kind of interaction with unbelievers that leads to idolatry or moral compromise. It should not be read as an absolute aversion to unbelievers nor working alongside them (cf. Rom. 12:13; 1 Cor. 5:8-13). The reality that the Church is comprised of human beings *and* is divinely indwelt ought to caution Christian leaders from treating it as just another human organization or as a purely human endeavor (e.g., social club, institution, corporation, business, non-profit, family, building). While reflection on the dynamics of human organizations or social groups can offer fruitful theoretical and practical insights into aspects of the Church community, ultimately it is Christ’s body and bride, the Spirit’s temple, God’s household, flock, and field and therefore requires discernment and reflection concerning God’s will, purposes, and means.

¹² Paul highlights how, as an apostle or father to his audience, he could take advantage of his influence but instead calls his audience to voluntarily respond to God and himself out of love and in recognition of his own sacrificial example on their behalf (e.g., Philemon).

¹³ Paul’s letters and many others in the NT make a transition from greetings, prayer and theological reflection (often what God has done through Jesus Christ and his Spirit) to exhortation and practical advice (*paraenesis*) and the basis of practical living is based on God’s work (God loves therefore we love) and the example of Jesus (Jesus persevered therefore we ought to persevere) by the power of his Spirit (help, encouragement, and power to accomplish this life).

¹⁴ One of the ways leaders are to “test” themselves is to check for evidence of the fruit of the Spirit in their lives (Gal. 5:22-23). However, when leaders fail to take this responsibility seriously, believers are commissioned to lovingly test one another. An examination of Jesus’ words in Matt. 7:1-5 reveals that he does not prohibit all judging, but merely that which is typified by hypocrisy: **“You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will**

see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye” (Matt. 7:5). Jesus exhorts his disciples to **“Stop judging by mere appearances, but instead judge correctly”** (John 7:24). Paul echoes this view of judgment among Christians. In his view, the Church should not judge those outside the church, but should impose judgment and, on occasion, discipline upon its own members (1 Cor. 5:12-13).

¹⁵ For example, appeal is sometimes made to “not touching God’s anointed” as a way of insulating leaders from criticism (legitimate or otherwise) or discipline. This is taken from the life of David (1 Sam. 24:6, 10; 26:9, 11, 23; 2 Sam. 1:14, 16). “Anointing” was used in Ancient Israel for kings, priests, and prophets. There are several major problems with this application. Firstly, David’s use of this rationale is found in contexts where he is tempted or prodded to take revenge on King Saul by taking his life. Vengeful murder is not the same as criticism. David does direct criticism toward Saul several times (1 Sam. 24:8-15; 26:17-20) as can be seen in Saul’s response. Additionally, both Samuel and Jonathan, Saul’s son, question and criticize his actions (1 Sam. 13:11-14, 15:10-29, 1 Sam. 19:1-6). Secondly, David, as God’s anointed, was criticized and disciplined by Nathan the prophet (2 Sam. 12:7). Thirdly, the Law provides no such insulation in the only place it speaks of a king (Deut. 17) nor in places it discusses priests, or prophets (Deut. 13:1-5, 18:14-22). Contempt toward legitimate priestly authority or judges is condemned and so also is a prophet or leader’s contempt towards God (Deut. 17:12, 18:22; cf. Prov. 11:2, 13:10, 21:24). All are subject to the same process as it relates to accusation (two to three witnesses - Deut. 17:6, 19:15; false reports and false witnesses either for or against are forbidden – Ex. 20:16, 23:1-3, 7; Deut. 19:16-19), ceremonial cleanliness, atonement for sin, and restitution toward others. However, the influence of kings, priests, and prophets means their failure results in devastating consequences for the nation of Israel and themselves (e.g., Leviticus 22:9). As stark example is Ezekiel 13:1-22, 33:1-9, and 34:1-10. Additionally, while Israel are the people of God and kings are their leaders, leaders in the NT are never cast as equivalent to Ancient Israelite kings. Jesus is the only King. Instead, a common image is that of shepherd. Finally, from a NT perspective, every Christian has the Holy Spirit and thus is anointed (2 Cor. 1:18-22; 1 John 2:20, 27). Like the OT, the NT does not grant a special standing to leaders to insulate them from criticism or discipline and maintains that their failure can result in higher stakes and consequences for the Church and themselves; therefore, one of the responsibilities of leaders is to hold each other accountable in both health and unhealth (James 3:1; 2 Peter 2:1; cf. 1 Tim. 4:16).

¹⁶ According to Jesus, any kind of “church discipline” ought to be discussed in familial terms (Matt. 18:15-20): **“If your brother or sister sins.”** All of this is linked to the fact that followers of Jesus have a heavenly Father (Matt. 18:35) who is Father to all and has a heavenly Son (Matt. 17:25-26) who is a Brother to all (Heb. 3:10-18). We have the same Father, and the same Brother, and thus, are all spiritual siblings (Matt. 12:48-50; cf. 1 Tim. 5:1-2). Therefore, church discipline is set within the context of brotherhood and sisterhood—about dealing with fellow believers as belonging to the same household.

¹⁷ These kinds of scenarios are not pursued without the involvement and oversight of other leaders who are able to give impartial discernment and guidance. This would suggest that once interpersonal attempts fail, the process recognizes the problematic nature of having those involved continue to drive the process and requires a third party who has the role of providing mediation and discipline. Furthermore, this would suggest that a third party must have the authority to do so. Therefore, if a leader is accused, other leaders outside of their influence, ought to be involved and give oversight. Finally, this process, drawn from the OT and Judaism, was well-known and referenced by Paul. This underscores the importance that both leaders and the church community are aware of and know how to engage in similar processes.

¹⁸ Or the loss of a leaders’ ministerial license.

¹⁹ Paul himself makes use of Roman law in his appeals to Roman citizenship and to Caesar (Acts 16:35-39, 22:22-29, 25:1-12).

²⁰ In 1 Cor. 6:1-7, Paul refers to “lawsuits” (κρίματα) between believers taken before the **ungodly**. These should be understood as civil lawsuits which commonly dealt with property, money, injury, or fraud rather than criminal offenses such as treason, murder, adultery, and others. In Roman society, civil lawsuits gave preference to social elites and did not allow lower classes to sue upper classes. Paul here references having a **dispute with one another** (πράγμα ἔχων πρὸς τὸν ἕτερον) in the midst of the more serious case of sexual immorality as a means of showing how they have failed in their judgment and discipline of both serious and less serious matters. See B. B. Blue, “Lawsuit”, *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (InterVarsity Press, 1993) 554-556 and Keener, *IVPBB:NT*, 470-471.

²¹ We are not told who exactly renders the Church’s decision, but clearly, it involves more persons than the accuser as the processes of due diligence outlined here are followed.

²² Donald Bloesch, *The Reform of the Church* (Wipf & Stock, 1998), 75.

²³ This is a fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:23). It connotes forbearance.

²⁴ David A. deSilva, *The Letter to the Galatians—The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2018), 482.

²⁵ George W. Knight III, *The Pastoral Epistles—The New International Greek Testament Commentary* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996 reprint), 239.

²⁶ Having one's name cleared when it's determined the accusations are not true is important (Prov. 22:1). How that is done is again not directly addressed in Scripture, but the leaders involved in the investigative process should take initiative. John took initiative at the first opportunity afforded him to inform all those affected by Diotrephes' **malicious nonsense** that what he said was not true (3 John 10). Paul addressed his false accusers by name and leaned on God's vindication of his reputation and ministry (1 Tim. 4:14).

²⁷ I. H. Marshall quoted in Philip H. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus—The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006), 370.

²⁸ This is likely the text Paul had in mind when stating the discipline's purpose.

²⁹ This is especially prominent in the earliest centuries after the NT and can be seen in such early Christian works as the *Didache*.