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What is Spiritual Authority in Leadership?

by Dan Trygg

In order to understand what the Bible teaches about spiritual authority and leadership, it is necessary to survey some of the key words and concepts used throughout the Scriptures. As we do so, the picture of what spiritual authority in leadership is to be among the people of God will become more and more clear.

Old Testament Background

Competition and Power Relations: The Result of Sin

It is necessary for us to go back to the very beginning to the garden of Eden, when God described to Adam and Eve some of the consequences of their sin. God cursed the serpent for the part it played in the deception of Eve. He also told Adam that the ground was cursed as a result of his sin. With sweat and toil, he would make his livelihood. It is important to see that God did not curse either Adam, himself, or Eve. Though corruption and death had been released upon the world, He still loved them. Even at the moment of His confrontation of their sin, He told them that the hope for their deliverance from the serpent's seed would come from the seed of the woman. Sin has its consequences, however, and to Eve the effect was multiplied pain in childbirth, and the introduction of competition into her relationship with her husband (Gen. 3:14-19). The last part of Genesis 3:16 has been misunderstood and misinterpreted by many. The couplet,

"...and your desire will be for your husband,
and he will rule over you",

has been explained as though it was God's plan for marriage. In reality, it is a description of the cursed effects of sin. The woman's "desire for" her husband is not referring to any romanticized longing for home and hearth, or of her "need for her man". The next occurrence of the word is in Genesis 4:7, where God confronts Cain about the anger of his heart toward Abel, "...sin is crouching at the door; *and its desire is for you*, but you must master it." From this passage it is quite clear that this word translated as "desire for" means a desire to control, possess, and manipulate for selfish motives. The poetic couplet of Genesis 3:16, as is characteristic of all Hebrew poetry, is a parallelism of thought. Both lines are about the same basic idea, i.e., vying for control in their relationship. The woman would attempt to control the man. The man, however, being bigger, stronger, and faster, would rule over the woman. The saga of competition, manipulation, and domination between the sexes had its beginning on that day in the garden. Throughout human history, literature has described this struggle for power in innumerable forms. Usually women have had to resort to trickery, allurements and deceitful charm, while men have forced their will upon women repeatedly throughout history by brute force. The record of Genesis 4, beginning with the murder of Abel by his envious brother, and culminating with the record of the threatening boast of Lamech, who vengefully murdered a boy for striking him, makes plain that the dynamic unleashed in the garden was not limited to the battle of the sexes. The poison of competition and control had spread to touch all human interrelationships. Murder, warfare, vengeful retaliation and rule by forceful intimidation were the fruits of the sin-filled anarchy of early civilization.

Old Testament Words For Authority

In the OT, most of the Hebrew words for authority convey functional and descriptive word pictures. They are usually found in contexts where there is already an established authority, and these

words describe his relationship to his subjects. The words, shalat (שָׁלַט -- v., to have mastery over, dominate, exercise autocratic control over), mashal (מָשַׁל -- v., to rule, have dominion over), kisse (כִּסֵּא -- n., seat of honor, throne), toqeph (תָּקַף -- v., to prevail against, overpower; n., power, strength, authority), and se'eth (שִׁיעָה -- n., exaltation, dignity, high position) do not occur in the context of spiritual authority. They are descriptive of the authority structures in the civil arena, or in the cultural family system. They *describe* what was taking place in that historical setting, but they are not in contexts which purposefully advocate these dynamics of leadership and authority as being either just or godly. They are *descriptive*, not necessarily *prescriptive*. One of the more common Hebrew idioms employed for authority relationships in this area is "under the hand of", meaning "under the control or direction of" (e.g., Gen. 16:9; 41:35). Other than the obvious conclusion that most of these authority positions are largely based upon physical power and dominance, there is not much revealed about how one comes to receive authority, nor is there much said about *spiritual* authority.

A Charismatic Basis of Authority

There is one word that does capture one's attention, however. It is the Hebrew word hod (הֹדָה), meaning splendor, glory, majesty, or vigor. In Numbers 27, where the Lord determines that Joshua is to lead the people in Moses' stead, He instructs Moses to lay his hand upon Joshua, commission him before all the people, and "put some of your authority (splendor, glory, majesty) on him, in order that all the congregation of the sons of Israel may obey him" (vs. 20). It was almost as though there was some spiritual commodity which could be transferred from one person to another. Furthermore, this "majesty" was what would cause the people to recognize Joshua as a leader and obey him. It is important to realize that it was not as a result of this "spiritual transaction" alone that the Israelites responded to Joshua. He already had a track record of capable and effective leadership. From this point, moreover, God purposely acted on his behalf to exalt him in the eyes of his countrymen, by giving visible indications of His presence with Joshua, coupled with unmistakable success as a leader.

In a similar instance in Dan. 4, Nebuchadnezzar had a vision where it was revealed that his kingdom would be taken away for a time, until he would recognize that "God is sovereign over the kingdoms of men, and gives them to anyone He wished" (vss. 31-33). After this took place, the passage records, "At the same time that my sanity was restored, my honor and splendor were returned to me for the glory of my kingdom. My advisors and nobles sought me out, and I was restored to my throne, and became greater than I was before" (vs. 36). The word translated as "honor" in the NIV, or as "majesty" in the NASB, is the Aramaic word hadar (הָדָר), a word related to the Hebrew word hod. This incident, in conjunction with Daniel's review of this same occasion in 5:18-21, shows that there *is* a quality which God bestows or removes from individuals which enables them to attract followers.

King Saul would be an excellent OT example of authority given by God, which was later removed (I Sam. 9,10, especially 10:6,7; cf. 11:1-8; 13:14; 15:1-29; 16:14,15). Notice that the unmistakable blessing of God was upon the battles that Saul fought before his downfall. Note also that after his loss of authority from God, he became jealous and suspicious of others, e.g., 18:1-15. After this point, Saul began to rule by force and domination. His claim to power was based upon his *past* spiritual anointing, abilities, and accomplishments, and enforced by the army he had amassed over the years (I Sam. 14:52). In reality, he was no longer as distinctly effective or recognizably blessed by God. In fact, he began to be eclipsed by David in current military campaigns. David, who had the Lord's anointing, was visibly a "brighter light" that the people could recognize, and they were drawn to him. In the end, as Gal. 4:29 declares, "he who was of the flesh persecuted him who was of the Spirit". Saul's insane jealousy and demand for power drove him to not only attempt to minimize David's influence, but beyond that to unjustly discredit him and eventually to seek to kill him and others whom he perceived as a threat.

New Testament Word Pictures

Authority in the New Testament

The Greek words for authority are very revealing. Unlike the Hebrew words we examined, which mostly conveyed the idea of authority as dominant power and control, these Greek words contain within themselves word pictures which indicate how someone might become an authority in a broader, more natural context than that of power relations alone.

1. Archōn -- First, Origin.

There are two primary words that are translated "authority" in the NT. The first is archōn (ἄρχων), usually rendered as ruler, officer, chief, authority, or magistrate. The word itself is derived from archē (ἀρχή), which means beginning, first, origin, or first cause. We have an English derivative from this word, archetype, which still reflects this idea of first, i.e., first type or pattern. This connection offers some great insight into the concept of "authority". If we follow the logic of this, a leader is someone who excels at something. He/she has abilities and talents, or a vision and purpose, that are different from those around him/her. As they effectively pursue their craft or vision, they become recognizable, and others begin to see such people as unusually skilled in their field. In time they may become an "authority", in that they know their area of expertise so well that others come to them for advice. Our English word "authority" has a similar derivation. An authority is someone who has "authored" something. He has become so good at what he does that others look to him to see how he does it, to get his ideas and counsel. In this regard, he has become a leader, and others begin to follow him. In the case of vision and purpose, people are attracted to his clarity and reasonableness of thought, or the good that they can see would derive from that vision. They are convinced by his sincerity, fervency, and communication, until they themselves "own" the vision and pursue it themselves. They still tend to look to him, however, as the authority, for he "authored" it by introducing them to it, and mentoring them in it. Thus, they still feel he has a clearer, more comprehensive vision than they, and they "look up to" him. Should they ever feel that he no longer is "ahead of them" in his skill, or in his vision, they begin to no longer look to him as an authority figure in their own life. This is a natural process, a natural rise of a leader, and the natural decline of his influence in one's life.

If, however, the leader is an insecure person, or one who enjoys position and feels the need to control those he is leading, he may begin to abuse his leadership. He may truly be a natural leader in that he has something to benefit others by, something to offer them. His natural leadership and authority is in the place of his skills, in the example of his exploits. In a healthy relationship to such an "author", interested people are stimulated by his life to be creative, to keep persevering in developing their own skills and vision. They learn from him, from his accumulated wisdom of thoughts, technique, and methods, so that they can become skillful enough to express their own interior vision. The true ministry of a healthy authority figure is to equip people and free them up to go beyond him in their own unique way. Mentoring is to be a process of training and liberation. The relationship that becomes one of slavish devotion to reduplicate the product, patterns, and style of the authority, however, is not healthy. Nor is any relationship healthy where the authority's focus is on *using* those he trains to do something that is in his heart, but not in theirs. Furthermore, if he begins to "lord it over" those who are following him by attempting to "get from them" or by insisting that they serve him, he misuses his authority. Then, he is using his God-given gift, which has been given him to serve others, as a tool to manipulate people to serve him. This is abuse. This is selfishness. This is what we expect to see in the unredeemed world, but it has no place in the Body of Christ.

If this person demands such service and devotion to himself, he will begin to use manipulative techniques to get people to continue to hold him up as a leader. He will demand certain performance. He will get "BIG", i.e., become threatening in some way, in order to enforce his control. He will use his influence over those who are still naturally looking up to him to put pressure upon those who have begun

to see his limitations, in order to keep them silent about his weakness, to remain loyal and obedient. Again, as in the case of Saul in the OT, he will attempt to continue to keep people respecting him.

The noun archōn is *never* used in the NT for authority or leadership within the Church. This common secular title for ruler, authority, chief, or prince is never used to describe any person within the Church to describe their relation to other believers. References: Mt. 9:18,23,34; 12:24; 20:25; Mk. 3:22; Lk. 8:41; 11:15; 12:58; 14:1; 18:18; 23:13,35; 24:20; Jn. 3:1; 7:26,48; 12:31,42; 16:11; Acts 3:17; 4:5,8,26; 7:27,35; 13:27; 14:5 16:19; 23:5; Rom. 13:3; I Cor. 2:6,8; Eph. 2:2; Rev. 1:5. It is used in reference to Jesus as our high (chief, first) priest in the book of Hebrews (2:17; 3:1; 4:14,15; 5:10; 6:20; 8:1; 9:11). He is also referred to as the archē, the "beginning" or "first", in Col. 1:18; Rev. 3:14; 21:6; 22:13. The same word is used numerous times to refer to spiritual "principalities" (Rom. 8:38; I Cor. 15:24; Eph. 1:21; 3:10; 6:12; Col. 1:16; 2:10,15; Tit. 3:1). Again, this term is never used for leadership within the people of God.

2. Exousia - Legal Right and Ability.

In the NT, the second major Greek word which is translated into our English word "authority" is exousia (ἐξουσία). It means authority, right, freedom, or ability to act, and power. Again, there are tremendous insights to be gained in meditating on the flavor of this word. It is derived from the preposition ek (or ex), which means "out from, from", and ousia, a present participial form of the verb "to be" (eimi), meaning "being". In other words, the origin of the concept of authority in the Greek word exousia is that it is something which is "out from (one's) being", i.e., it comes from who you are, what is inside you. For example, your ability to act comes from your inner strength or identity. This sounds similar to the OT idea of having a recognized "majesty" or "anointing" that people respond to, as well as close to the idea conveyed by the NT word archon, which is authority based upon a recognized skill or ability. There is a distinctly different flavor to exousia, however. It does not define how, functionally, that authority comes about, other than to say it is from "within you".

The unique contribution of this word to the concept of authority is that it emphasizes legal right, not just power or ability alone. Another, more primitive form of this word is exesti. It literally means "it is out from", and I would guess that in context it meant something like "it is [what is] expressed, or [what is] done, out from" so and so. Over time, it commonly progressed in meaning from "it is [what is] done" to "it is [what is] permitted" to "it is [what is] lawful". Thus, in the development of the word, the focus came to be on what is lawful, permitted, able to be done. From this background, exousia came to carry the idea of legal right or authority to do something. In this regard, it is a much stronger word than the Greek word dunamis (δυναμίς), which means simply "power or ability to do". Exousia means not only do you have the power to do what you intend, but you also have the authority, the legal right, to do as you intend. In Lk. 10:19, we see the significance of this differentiation. Jesus gave the 72 authority (legal right and power) over all the power (dunamis) of the enemy. Make no mistake, the enemy has power! We, however, have authority which gives us the legal right to "walk all over" his power and not be injured by him. He is trespassing, and it is our place to "arrest him and escort him off the property".

In this sense, exousia can also be a derived authority, i.e., it is authority and power given to us by another. We exercise the authority by virtue of our *position*, our identity as a legal representative in relationship to the entity having power, not necessarily by virtue of our own personal strength. The centurion in Mt. 8:9 revealed his understanding of "rank", or "derived authority", in his statement communicated to Jesus. He did not have to personally overpower each new recruit that came into his unit in order to establish his position of authority over them. His legal right over his men came by virtue of authority granted to him by imperial Rome.

Jesus was noticeably someone who possessed and exercised authority (Mt. 7:29; 21:23-27; cf. Mk. 1:21-27). His power and authority was literally *both* a derived authority as well as something that flowed out from within His being. He made it very plain that He did not come on His own initiative or authority (Jn. 5:19-30; 6:38; 7:16-18; 8:27-29; 12:47-50). It is also quite clear that the miraculous power that enforced and performed His authoritative words was *not* His own, but was the power of the Father within Him (Jn. 10:32,37-39; 14:9-11; Lk. 4:14,31-37; 5:17; 6:17-19; 8:43-48; Acts 2:22).

The important point for us is to realize that Christians now have been given authority in the same fashion (Mt. 28:18-20). We have been given the legal right from God as His representatives (II Cor. 5:20). This derived authority is backed up by the power of the Holy Spirit resident within us (Jn. 14:12-20; 15:26,27; Acts 1:8; 4:29-31; 5:12,32; 6:8-10; 8:4-8; 14:1;-3,27; 19:11,12). We must come to understand the areas where such authority has been granted (e.g., Mt. 9:6-8; Jn. 20:21-23; Mt. 10:1; Mk. 3:14,15; 6:7; Lk. 10:8,9,19). We must also understand that as ambassadors of our heavenly King, our right use of our legal authority remains dependent upon Him. We must walk as Jesus walked, i.e., not as doing anything from ourselves, but doing only what we see the Father doing (Jn. 5:19,20). This keeps us focused on a healthy relationship with the Father, not on just doing "works of the kingdom".

If this spiritual authority is analogous to human authority, then it would be possible to abuse, or unlawfully use it. This is a matter of debate, not being clearly discussed in the Scriptures. We have the sons of Sceva (Acts 19:11-16), who, along with others (cf. vs. 13), were in the practice of attempting to call upon the authority of Jesus' name, when they themselves were not His official representatives. They had evidently done this on several occasions, with some external results, before meeting the demoniac who challenged them as not having a rightful claim upon that authority. Also, even though we represent the superior power, there are times when God will not allow us to advance in an area (cf. Acts 16:6,7). We are not always told why, but we must conclude that God, the Commander in Chief, has His strategy and His purposes. Even in the case of the demonized slave girl in Acts 16:16-18, we do not see Paul just blasting away with his "Carte Blanc" authority. The text says that she followed them for many days before Paul expelled the demon. We are not told why the delay occurred. We can observe from the subsequent events, however, that this act significantly cut short Paul's time of ministry at Philippi. Would the "many days" of her annoying harassment have been critical to the health or stability of the Philippian church? We do not know. We only know that Paul did not exercise his "kingdom authority" until after that period of time. Was it a matter of permission from God? Was the power available at Paul's command at any time up to that point? Speculations to consider, but we are not told. We do know that even Jesus Himself recognized the time and authority (exousia) of the kingdom of darkness (Lk. 22:47-53). On the eve of His crucifixion, though He was very much aware of the superior power that was available to Him (cf. Jn. 13:1-3; Mt. 26:47-56), He submitted even Himself to the abuse and evil of the next hours that the purposes of God might be fulfilled. In the OT, we have examples, such as Samson and Saul, who, while disqualifying themselves by their sinful behavior, continued to be used by God in mighty victories *for a time* before their power was removed. All of this is to say that we must be pressing into God to hear His heart, or authority and power can have their pitfalls.

With regard to spiritual leadership, the word exousia is never used to describe the healthy relationship one believer is to have toward another. In fact, Jesus makes a very pointed contrast in Mt. 20:25-28. Literally, Jesus said, "You know that the rulers (archon) of the Gentiles lord it down over them and the great [ones] exercise authority down over (an intensified verbal form of exousia) them. Not thus will it be among you (all), rather whoever shall wish to be great among you (all) shall be your servant, and whoever shall wish to be first will be your slave. Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give His life a ransom for many." There is no support for the idea of a positional authority structure whereby certain believers exercise power, authority, or legal rights over the lives of others in the Body in order to govern them. That is not the flavor or heart of NT leadership (cf. Lk. 22:24-27). There is no "Divine right of" pastors, deacons or elders that can be supported Scripturally. The one exception is that the Lord has given exousia to those who preach the Gospel, in that they have the right (exousia) to receive material support for their work (I Cor. 9; cf. Gal. 6:6-10). Even Paul's apostolic authority (exousia), mentioned in II Cor. 10:8 and 13:10 in a tone of warning, is carefully and clearly identified as being for the purpose of building up the Corinthians, and not for tearing them down. Throughout chapters 10-13, Paul contrasts his opponents' motives from his own as being precisely this distinction of his servant heart, versus their desire to dominate, control and lord it over them (cf. 11:13-21). This same self-seeking heart is described as being in the heretical Judaizers that troubled the Galatian churches (Gal. 4:17-20; 6:12,13).

Spiritual Leadership in Contrast to Authority in the World Political Structures

3. Hēgemōn and Hegeomai -- Leaders as Thinkers.

A third Greek word that is used of authority figures in the NT is hēgeomai (ἡγεομαί). Of the 24 times that **the noun form, hēgemōn** (ἡγεμῶν), occurs in the NT, it is translated most often as governor (21 times - KJV). Other choices are prince (once - KJV) and ruler (twice - KJV). This title, interestingly, is used only of political rulers. It is **never used for leadership within the Church**. The **verbal form, hēgeomai**, occurring some 28 times in the NT, is rendered as possibly having a "ruling-type" function **within the Church on five occasions** (Lk. 22:26; Acts 15:22; Heb. 13:7,17,24). Therefore, it is a term we should discuss. Of the 28 verbal occurrences, only three other times in the NT is it rendered with a leadership-type of definition, i.e., as governor (Mt. 2:6; Acts 7:10), or as chief (Acts 14:12). The other main definition of the word is "to think, consider, esteem, or count". The remaining twenty times that the word is translated into English, it conveys this other emphasis. This "thinking-type" of activity is therefore the primary meaning of the word, the idea of "ruling" is secondary. Somehow it has developed out of this main idea of "thinking".

Four observations could be made at this point:

(1.) *The noun form of the word is clearly the preferred way in which the non-Christian world described their leaders.* They used the noun to describe an office, or as the title of the one who was filling that office.

(2.) *In the NT, there appears to be a definite, conscious rejection of the noun form of the word, in favor of the verbal form, when used to describe this leadership function in the church. NT writers must have understood leadership roles in the church differently from what was conveyed by the common usage of the noun form in the everyday Greek of their time.* It is amazing that the usage is so consistent. In the case of Luke, the same writer uses only the noun form to describe political leaders on nine occasions (Lk. 20:20; 21:12; Acts 23:24,26,33,34; 24:1,10; 26:30), but employs only the verbal form to describe church leaders (Lk. 22:26 -- lit., "the [one] leading as the [one] serving"; Acts 15:22 -- lit., "men leading among the brethren").

(3.) The predominate *preference for the verbal form*, when describing leadership in the church, *seems to reflect a conception of leadership as not resting on offices or positions, but in function and activity.* If someone is doing leadership, he becomes a leader. If he is not doing leadership, he had no office, job, or position which would identify him as having any authority beyond what he was functioning in. Leadership would always be based upon effective function, "Is someone following me?", not based upon elected or "inherited" position or on past accomplishments.

(4.) *It would seem to be important to see the relationship of leading, or "governing", alongside of the primary definition of the word hēgeomai, i.e., to think, consider, regard, etc.* Those who become "governors" are those who are thoughtful, at least in the ideal. Those who excel at devising well-thought plans, who can communicate or "sell" their ideas to others well enough so that their plans are recognized and implemented, are the ones who have become true hēgeomai leaders.

Of course, in a fallen world those positions, once established by wise, thoughtful leaders, came to be the political booty and inheritance of those who succeeded them politically. Thus, offices which grew out of the functional skill of a strategist, came to be handed out to corrupt men who abused the trust of the people, and who ruled with "force and severity" (Ezk. 34:1-4). Unfortunately, this same degenerative process has repeatedly occurred within the history of Christendom, as well. When someone possessed a clearly recognizable ability to lead people by thoughtful, effective strategy, others began to notice, acknowledge, and respect their success. Success, order, and prosperity would attract additional people, until this hēgeomai leader would acquire a sizable following of individuals who profited from his gift of wise leadership. With this growing company came prestige and power, both in monetary terms and in the power afforded by the free response of the peoples' obedience to the carefully crafted plans of their leader.

When that leader passed off the scene, however, the system that was built around his abilities oftentimes was unprepared to stand on its own. Oftentimes some other leader would step in who did not have the natural abilities of the previous leader. He would now come into all of the power, prestige, and allegiance of the people at his disposal *by virtue of habit*. They were accustomed to giving whatever had been wisely requested by the previous hēgeomai leader. Thus, they would tend to unquestioningly continue in that mode, unless confronted with unsatisfactory results. Unfortunately, a new leader, who may have neither the hēgeomai skill, *nor the time-tested Christ-like character*, would be strongly tempted to utilize this power to, at best, keep the status quo, or, in the worst case, to accumulate things and power for himself. As life situations change, there is a constant need for new plans, new leadership. If this new man did not have the ability to formulate or recognize such plans, he would become ineffective, and the people would become distressed. If he would use power to keep his *position* secure, he would rapidly become an abusing tyrant, at least to some degree. A healthy system of leadership can rapidly become sick and dysfunctional if the emphasis is focused upon office, rather than ability.

Let us look briefly at these five NT instances where the verb hēgeomai is used for leadership in the Church:

First, we observe in Acts 15:22 that the Jerusalem council chose Judas Barsabbas and Silas as representatives commissioned to accompany Paul and Barnabus back to Antioch of Syria. Their purpose was to deliver the written decision of the council regarding the requirements of Gentiles who became believers. We notice initially that being "leaders" did not mean that they were in any recognized office. They were not apostles or elders. Their names are not included among the list of deacons in Acts 6:5, either. Nevertheless, they are described in the Greek as "men leading among the brothers", or as "leading men". The verbal form emphasizes that they were recognized as prominent by virtue of their activity. In vs. 32, we discover that they were also prophets who were able to address the people, and they "said much to encourage and strengthen" the Christians in Antioch. Here we get a glimpse of their "leading ability" in action, i.e., their ability to lead by wise, thoughtful counsel.

A second context where this word, hēgeomai, occurs three times in a short compass of verses is found in Hebrews 13. In vs. 7, we are told to "remember the [ones] leading y'all, whoever spoke to y'all the word of God, of whom watching closely/reflecting upon the outcome of their conduct/way of life, imitate the faith". In reflecting upon this verse, you will notice that these are not necessarily people in church offices. Their leadership is more closely defined as "ones who spoke the word of God" to us. Also, we are told to use discernment in examining the outcome of the way they live, i.e., the fruit that comes from their lives (cf. Mt. 7:15-20; I Thess. 5:21), and imitate what is "the faith", using the encouragement and practical lessons that we can gain from their example.

The next reference is found in Heb. 13:17. This verse has often been quoted in a manipulative way to forcefully impose the will of an abusive leader upon his people. This is a gross misrepresentation of what this verse is teaching. Of key significance in understanding this passage is the meaning of the word "obey". In this particular instance, this is the Greek word peithesthe (πείθεσθε), which is a present passive imperative addressed to the believers. Peithō (πείθω), the dictionary form, does *not* mean blind obedience. It primarily means to persuade, convince, win over, conciliate, satisfy, or reassure. In the passive form, the idea of obedience emerges. As you are persuaded by, convinced, won over, or are reassured by, then you put your trust in, rely on, and have confidence in the one persuading you, and do what they suggest. However, the action of obedience is *not* the primary focus. It is rather this process of being persuaded, being conciliated by, or having confidence in, that is the thrust of the word.

Let's try this on for size and translate the verse: "Have confidence in/be persuaded by/pay attention to/be conciliated to the [ones] leading y'all and yield; for these alertly watch on behalf of your souls as ones giving/keeping an account; [do this] in order that with joy they might do this, and not groaning/sighing/complaining, for this [would be] of no advantage/help to y'all." What a different flavor! This passage is not about the pulling of rank and insisting on performance. It is about relationships. It is about yielding to the thinking of the "thinkers", about yielding to their suggestions instead of always being

stubbornly resistant and hard to work with. It is not about black and white moral issues. It is about leadership styles. It is about being able to trust God to direct other people, and to defer to that direction, even when He hasn't personally shown you the same things. It is about being subject to one another (Eph. 5:21). Notice, too, that it is not presented as a "sin issue". It is presented as an issue of emotional encouragement or discouragement to the leader. True, this will eventually come back upon those being led. If the leader is frustrated, shut down at every turn, and discouraged, will he or she be able to speak positive, encouraging things to those in their care for very long? No, ... and the entire group will feel the effect of that.

The third occurrence in this chapter is in vs. 24, where the author simply says, "Greet all the [ones] leading y'all and all the saints". Not much new to be found here. It is important to note again that the writer employed a functional, verbal method of referring to those "doing leadership", rather than using a noun. Once again, there is no link between the common understanding of the positional "governor" and the leadership role mentioned here. By avoiding this connection, he also avoids any cultural coloration that he does not deem appropriate to the economy of the kingdom of God.

The other passage that we must look at is Lk. 22:26. Understanding the context is so important to be able to receive the entire weight of Jesus' words. The disciples were arguing about which of them was the greatest. Jesus stops them and points out a key contrast between the leadership models they have seen, and how leadership in the kingdom of God is to be expressed. "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves 'Benefactors'. But *you are not to be like that*. Rather the [one] greater, let him be as the younger; and the [one] leading (*hēgoumenos*), as the [one] serving. For who is greater, the [one] reclining [at table], or the [one] serving? Is it not the [one] reclining? But I am in your midst as the [one] serving." In these words, and by His example (Jn. 13:1-17), Jesus clearly and forever set in contrast what had been the normal worldly attitude of earthly authorities versus the kind of people Jesus counts as great. Those with authority in the world dominate those under their power, or they pridefully boast of themselves as "good-doers" or "benefactors" in the exercise of their authority over people. However, the ones that are great in the kingdom of God are as teachable, humble, and open to learn as the youngest (cf. Jas. 3:13-18).

This is an especially poignant word of balance to correct those who are leading by virtue of their thinking ability. To be most effective, they must remain open and teachable. The strength of the thinker is in gathering and analyzing all of the information, putting together all of the various ideas into a comprehensive plan. As pride enters in, premature judgments are made. An overconfidence in one's ability may cause them to *not* listen to all of the perspectives and options, thereby excluding aspects of the "big picture" which he/she cannot see from his/her point of view. Pride causes premature decisions, and pride also is behind the defensiveness and arrogance that causes leaders to impose their will upon others. Domination comes out of a "do it because I said so" attitude. At such a point the thinker is no longer relying upon the wisdom and soundness of his/her plan to speak for itself. Position and power have become a license to force compliance. Over time, the disenfranchisement of others from the decision making process, and the rough imposition of the leader's will upon his people will alienate and demoralize them. Soon, they will no longer whole-heartedly follow the leader's counsel. Emotionally, the leader and his plan are no longer perceived as positive and effective. Faultfinding grows, feet drag, and the plan begins to fail. Policing efforts by the leader only complicate and reinforce the alienation, often leading to rebellion. As you can see, Jesus' model of leadership is very practical and promotes health. Such leaders do not dominate, but thoughtfully lead in humility by being an example of service, as was Jesus. They do not look for honor for themselves, but seek to serve others, even giving their lives away that others might be built up and encouraged (cf. Mt. 10:45; II Cor. 8:9; 12:15). Such leadership purifies the hearts of those who would be first. They must be first in service, in self-giving. They will then inspire loyalty by the example of their lives, not by worldly rewards or threat of punishment. Such leaders are those who will truly show the way to Christ-likeness.

4. Proistemi -- One Who Stands Before.

Another important word that is translated in our English version of the New Testament as being a ruler is the Greek word proistēmi (προϊστέμι). It occurs eight times in the NT (Rom. 12:8; I Thess. 5:12; I Tim. 3:4,5,12; Tit. 3:8,14). The King James Version translates it five times as to "rule", once it is rendered as referring to those who "are over you" in the Lord, and in the instances in the book of Titus it is translated as "to maintain". Some of the other more modern versions soften the authoritarian flavor of the definition by yielding proistēmi as "to lead" or "to manage", but I believe that our Western hierarchical expectations of what authority structures should be like still color our interpretations of the Greek.

The word is derived from the Greek verb histēmi (ἵστέμι), which means "to stand", and the preposition pro (προ), which means "before". Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words (pg. 307) defines it as "lit., 'to stand before', hence, to lead, attend to (indicating care and diligence)".

Leadership, in the form of attending to, or standing before some person or group, does not necessarily imply this idea of "ruling over" that has been adopted as a definition for this word in our translations. We have been guilty of reading our familiar authority structures into these NT passages, and have clouded the true Biblical model of leadership and authority.

As we have already seen from some of these previous word studies, Jesus specifically admonished us that our authority style or pattern should not be like what we have been familiar with in the pagan world. **Leadership in the kingdom of God is more based upon being ones who do service**, and are thus models and examples of Christ-likeness, **than upon being ones who give orders** to others, i.e., talkers instead of doers. Kingdom leadership is action and function oriented, not position and title oriented. **Leaders in the kingdom are not those who accumulate power for themselves, but those who are effective at giving power, prestige, honor, and recognition away, thereby empowering others.** A careful study of proistēmi in its various contexts reveals nothing that would contradict this picture of spiritual authority. Nor is there anything which would support a strict hierarchical, rank-type structure.

In Rom. 12:8, where Paul has been referring to the various spiritual gifts granted to different ones of us by God's grace, he seems to be indicating that the gifts are visible in the area where, to the extent that, and according to the intensity that we employ them. In this context, he simply says, "The [one] being stood before [others] in/with diligence/earnestness". In other words, one who has this gift of "standing before" others should have an attitude of diligence and earnestness as he/she seeks to use this gift. We are not told in this context what exactly this "standing before" is all about. Is it leadership? Is it to stand before others in order to help or assist them with some service? Either possibility can be supported by the usage of this word in other Greek literature of the day. We are not told. We are to be impressed, however, that there is a significance or seriousness involved with this gift which requires care, precision, hard work, and an intensity of desire in order to be most effective.

Another point of interest is that the form of the word here could be either passive, as I translated it above, or of the middle voice. The active voice in verbs means that the subject is acting upon an object. The passive voice is where the subject of the verb is being acted upon by someone else. The Greek middle voice means that the subject does the action of the verb, but somehow does it to or for himself. He is either intensely involved in the action, or the action in some way affects or limits him. It is often translated in a primitive way as "he does (for himself) the action". The significance of this in this passage is that the particular form of the verb "to stand" would allow for either the scenario where the subject is "being stood before others (by someone else)" [passive], or for the possibility where the individual "is standing (for himself) before others" [middle]. In other words, this verse allows for either the model where leadership/helping happens when a person is appointed or endorsed by someone else for that specific task, or where leadership/helping is the action initiated by the person him/herself.

In the occurrences of the word in Titus, there cannot possibly be any thought of hierarchy or leadership at all. Here the readiness for, and application to, helpful service is what is in focus. In both

passages (3:8,14), Christians in general are the subject of the verb, proistēmi. In both verses, the word occurs in the present middle infinitive form, meaning that the action is ongoing, and that they are themselves recipients of, or are affected by, the action of the verb. Literally, they are "to stand (for themselves) before" good deeds. In their thinking, they are to be "at the ready", so to speak, regarding good works.

The next context (I Tim. 3:4,5,12) relates to leadership in the family. It is here that I believe we can find an important understanding of this word that will carry over into the context of church leadership. In these verses, Paul is discussing the qualifications for those who would be overseers and deacons in the Body. One important mark required of such leaders is that they are to be ones "standing (for themselves) before their own houses well". Here the context helps to define what Paul is getting at. He goes on, "having children in obedience/subjection/order, with all seriousness/proper conduct (But if anyone does not know how to stand before their own house, how will he take care of/look after the assembly of God?)". Whatever proistēmi means, proper, healthy exercise of it at home should produce children who are obedient and are serious about the things of God. We are dealing with more than controlling behavior here. We are dealing with establishing their character. This is not an example of a top-down, authoritarian, legalistic structure which focuses on behavior. It is the result of leadership that models character in such practical and winsome ways that the children choose to value and adopt what they have seen in their parents. It is **leadership primarily by example, not legislation**. Furthermore, the comparison of the home dynamic to what is to happen in the church sheds additional light on this servant-type of leadership. The implied comparison is that knowing how to "stand before" one's household should equip one to care for, be attentive to, and look after the church family. W. E. Vine states that this word (epimeleomai) involves caring for something with interest, forethought, and provision (pg. 169). For example, it is also used in Lk. 10:34,35 for the care and attention given to the wounded Israelite by the good Samaritan. Somehow, these activities must be involved in the process of "standing before one's household well", if that is to be an indicator of readiness for church leadership.

The next passage for consideration is I Tim. 5:17. Here the word is definitely applied to the activity of church leaders. Literally, the verse reads, "The having-stood-before-well elders let them be worthy of double honor, especially the (ones) laboring in word and teaching." Once again, if we apply Vine's definition of this word as meaning "leading or attending to with care and diligence", there is nothing in the context that requires the hierarchical idea of "ruling over". (In fact, as we have mentioned above, if there is any doubt as to how NT Christians were taught to think of this office of elder, the apostle Peter clearly portrayed it as being essentially example oriented [I Pet. 5:1-4]. Furthermore, he specifically forbade any elder from "lording it over those allotted to" them. This, in conjunction with Jesus' clear teaching in Lk. 22:24-27, would strongly argue against a hierarchical interpretation of this word.) It is plain that the message of these verses in I Timothy is that leadership that is effective should be rewarded. Paul especially underscores "the [ones] working hard/laboring (active participle, indicating ongoing action) in word and in teaching/instruction" as those he was particularly interested in blessing. Paul goes on to say, however, that leadership that is involved in sin needs to be rebuked before everyone. Once again, the strength of example is cited as the reason for this public action, "in order that the rest also might be fearful of sinning" (I Tim. 5:20 NASB).

The last passage where proistēmi occurs in I Thess. 5:12,13, "We ask you, brothers, to know/recognize/perceive the (ones) laboring among you and standing [for themselves] before you in the Lord and admonishing you, and to consider them very highly in love on account of their work." The King James Version and the NASB translate "standing [for themselves] before you" as those who "have charge over you". Again, I can see no justification for this hierarchical interpretation of this word.

There can be little doubt that Paul is referring to those individuals who were spiritually investing into the lives of the Thessalonian Christians. They were described as "the [ones] laboring" among them, the same word as used in I Tim. 5:17. They are "the [ones] standing [themselves] before y'all" (middle

participle), further defined as "the [ones] admonishing/teaching/instructing y'all", i.e., ones involved in helping them to effectively apply and live out the truth in their lives (cf. Col. 1:28).

Once again, these leadership activities are described in verbal forms to emphasize their function. How much easier would it have been to say, "We ask you to esteem highly your leaders"? Yet, Paul goes out of his way to define these people by using participles ("-ing" words) that identify certain ongoing actions. To translate proistēmi in this passage as "those who have charge over you" totally obliterates this emphasis. It makes the passage sound like these people have a *position* which they *possess*, not an *activity* which they regularly *do*.

Another point is that **the very fact that Paul asks them to know or perceive the ones doing these activities** (i.e., so that they might esteem them properly), **seems to indicate that these "leader types" were not in official positions of authority.** If they were in established, publicly known positions or "offices" of leadership, why would the apostle find it necessary to instruct them to discern or recognize who these people are? If there were people who had offices or titles, Paul would be telling the people to distinguish between those who effectively minister from those who merely have a title. In either case, he admonishes them to watch for, or to see, who it is that exhibits these activities. Consequently, to translate proistēmi as "having charge over you" is virtually nonsensical in this context.

The NASB betrays its hierarchical cultural bias by compounding the translation confusion through its rendering of the infinitive "to know" as "to appreciate". Of the 320 occurrences of this Greek word, oida (οἶδα), this is absolutely the *only* case where it is ever translated as meaning anything other than simply to know, be aware of, to recognize, to understand, or to learn something. Obviously, the NASB translators must have had some preconceived notions about the status of "leader types" to have felt it necessary to depart so significantly from not only the simple meaning, but also from the sense of the other 319 examples of this word in the NT. To have a knowledge of someone's life and activities *may lead to* an appreciation of them, but "knowledge" and "appreciation" are by no means words that should be thought of as *equivalent* and *interchangeable* in their definitions.

As in the I Tim. 5 passage, the basic message is that effective leadership should be valued. By contrast, those in I Timothy *are* recognized leaders, while those in this passage *are leading* in practical, functional ways, but may or may not be officially recognized. In fact, it is first this issue of recognition (i.e., the awareness of the impact of their lives) that the apostle exhorts the believers to apply their attention toward. Secondly, once these "leader types" come into focus by virtue of their labor, their example, and their ministry of the word, Paul admonishes the Body to value them appropriately for the work that they do. This is not at all the picture of a "top-down leadership structure". It describes how we are to identify, respect, and encourage up-and-coming leadership.

5. Poimēn -- Shepherds or Shepherding?

Without a doubt, **the most common English term used within the greater part of American Protestantism to describe recognized church leaders is the "pastor"**. This word comes to the English through Latin and **means literally a "shepherd"**. An examination of the NT usage of this word reveals some interesting insights.

The noun form of the NT word translated as "shepherd" is the Greek word poimēn (ποιμήν). It occurs 18 times in the NT. In one passage it occurs four times in reference to literal shepherds of actual sheep (Lk. 2:8,15,18,20). In all other cases, it is figuratively used in reference to people, e.g., Jesus as the Good Shepherd of the sheep (Jn. 10:2,11,12,14,16). Of these occurrences, this term is used in a general way when describing how Jesus had compassion on the multitudes, seeing that "they were distressed and downcast like sheep without a shepherd" (Mt. 9:36; cf. Mk. 6:34). Virtually every other reference is specifically applied to Jesus. He is referred to as THE Shepherd, "the Great Shepherd of the sheep" (Heb. 13:20). The only exception is in Eph. 4:11, where it says that Jesus "gave some ...as pastors (literally, shepherds) and teachers". That's right, **there is only one time in the entire NT where the noun form of the word is used for leaders in the Body of Christ.** There is no question that this reference is to leadership within the church, whether formally recognized or not. Some have been given the ability to be shepherds in the Body of Christ. They are given for the equipment, or full preparation, of the saints for

ministry. The word translated as "equipping" also means "mending, restoring, setting right, making complete, or to render fit", all descriptions of what are the duties and desires of a good shepherd. (For OT background, see Appendix One.) It is interesting that we in Protestant America have developed a common custom of referring to our visibly recognized church leaders by using a term that is only employed one time in the NT in such a way. The fact that there are so many other ways of describing them should really catch our attention. By using a more Biblical way of referring to leaders, we may be more effectively reminded of what it is that they are really supposed to be doing. By favoring some descriptions, rather than others, we run the risk of losing the balanced understanding that God intended. In some cases, as is true for the word "pastor", its overuse has made it an exclusively religious title. **Most people do not even know the relationship of the word to the meaning of "shepherd". In such cases, the word picture that was supposed to instruct us about the nature of the person's function has been totally lost. The word has become virtually meaningless, and becomes defined more by the expressions that we see in our current religious culture instead of by the true Biblical meaning.**

The verbal form of this Greek word, poimaino (ποιμαίνω), occurs eleven times in the NT. In five of these examples, the passage is clearly referring to Jesus as the One who shepherds His people (Mt. 2:6; Rev. 2:27; 7:17; 12:5; 19:15). In another instance, Lk. 17:7, Jesus is telling a parable in which a servant is "shepherding sheep". This can only be a reference to literal shepherding. It has nothing to do with church leaders. The remaining five passages, the verbal form **is used in reference to leadership in the Church.** These passages would be worth examining to see what can be gleaned about leadership from the usage of this word in these contexts.

The first example occurs in Jn. 21:16. This is the account of one of Jesus' resurrection appearances to the disciples. On this particular occasion, Jesus questions Peter about His love for Him three times. With each further question, the Lord presses into Peter's heart a little more, until Peter is almost exasperated because Jesus seems to be challenging his very claim of affection for Him. In actuality, however, the Lord is affirming His acceptance of Peter right where he is, i.e., at the level of faith and affection that He presently had. This affirmation is accomplished by Jesus' entrusting the role of feeding/ tending/shepherding to Peter each time he confesses his love for Him. In the Greek, the first and third times Jesus entrusts the shepherding task to Peter, the word is boske (βόσκει), meaning "to tend or feed". The only other context that this word is used in the NT is in regard to feeding/tending swine (Mt. 8:30,33; Mk. 5:11,14; Lk. 8:32,34; 15:15). Here in Jn. 21, it is in a parallel construction with poimaino. In the middle of the interchange between Peter and Jesus, He uses the word poimaino, meaning to shepherd, tend, or feed. Thus the reaffirmation of Peter's call to follow Jesus is accompanied by the responsibility of shepherding the "sheep" of Jesus. Who are these "sheep"? The answer to this question was revealed earlier in the book, in Jesus' teaching in Jn. 10. His sheep are those who hear His voice and follow Him (Jn. 10:3,4,27). Peter's task, then, is **to care for the followers of Jesus as a shepherd cares for his sheep.**

The next passage is found in Acts 20:28. In the context, Paul is speaking privately to the elders of Ephesus (vs. 17). A primitive translation of the verse would be as follows: "Pay close attention to yourselves and to all the flock, among whom the Holy Spirit placed you [as] overseers to shepherd the church/assembly of God, which He purchased with His own blood."

Several observations could be made at this point:

(1.) **Elders and overseers are different titles for the same office.** Paul seems to at least perceive the role of an elder as including being an overseer, i.e., one who "watches over". This *function* is further emphasized by the admonition to "pay close attention to" (vs. 28) and, again in vs. 31, to "be on the alert". This overseeing function is then further drawn into the context of shepherding by the next couple of verses, where Paul warns them of "savage wolves" that will "come in, not sparing the flock", or "will rise from within", ones who will attempt to "lead the disciples away after them". .

(2.) **The primary responsibility that the Holy Spirit has appointed them as elder/overseers to do is to function as shepherds of the people of God.**

(3.) **Shepherding is an activity that requires paying constant attention to the sheep.** Phrases such as "be on guard" and "be on the alert" convey the sense of urgency and importance of maintaining this attention.

(4.) Obviously, the setting emphasizes that **shepherds are to fulfill a protective role.** The imagery of "savage wolves" is descriptive of the level of possible danger. This is serious business.

(5.) A final observation is that **sound teaching is vital to effective shepherding.** Paul emphasizes how he had carefully and thoroughly taught them the truth (vss. 24,25,27,31). He warns them that this is an area of attack that they must be prepared for (vs. 29-31). Their own safety, as well as that of the people, would rely not only upon their alertness, but also the strength, wisdom, and clarity that comes from both their relationship to God Himself and a clear understanding of the message of His grace as recorded in His word (vs. 28,32).

The next passage which has any reference to spiritual leadership is found in I Cor. 9:7. Actually, this is a metaphorical illustration which Paul uses to support the idea that "those who proclaim the gospel [should] get their living from the gospel" (vs. 14). The apostle uses seven such illustrations to buttress his point. The portion of the verse where poimaino occurs would be translated, "Or who shepherds a flock, and does not eat from the milk of the flock?" Again, though not a direct reference, the implication is that **those who do shepherd, in the sense of teaching and proclaiming the good news, may at times have a right to expect to be financially supported.** Of course, this is stated by Paul more directly in Gal. 6:6 and I Tim. 5:17,18.

In I Pet. 5:1-5 we find another passage that further ties together some of these concepts that we have come upon in this study. A verbal outline of this passage would be, "Elders ... shepherd the flock ... watching over not grudgingly, but willingly ... , not greedily, but eagerly, ... but not/nor as lording it down upon ... but rather being examples."

Following are some observations, some of which reinforce what we have seen before:

(1.) Peter is addressing his remarks to elders as a fellow elder (vs. 1). Here we find the three words we saw in Acts 20:28 used to describe the same "office" within the space of two verses. The elder is to "shepherd" by "watching over", verbal forms of the words for "shepherd" and "overseer", respectively. **Elder, overseer, and shepherd (pastor) are clearly meant to be understood as synonymous terms.**

(2.) **The admonition to elders is to "shepherd the flock of God"** (vs. 2). This is a description of an action, an exhortation to function in a certain manner. Again, the activities involved in shepherding would have been well known to the recipients of this letter. Constant care, tending, attentiveness, feeding, and protection were parts of the word picture that would come to their minds.

(3.) **Part of the definition of what is meant by shepherding is provided by a clarifying participle, i.e., "overseeing" or "watching over".** This is a verbal form of the word for overseer, which we saw in Acts 20:28.

(4.) This clarifying participle is further modified by some **adverbial contrasts that indicate how this overseeing is to be done, namely, "not grudgingly, but willingly", and "not greedily, but eagerly".** Attitude is important in order to do the job well.

(5.) Following this, the verb, **"shepherd" is once again clarified by a participial phrase, this time by means of a negative contrast, i.e., "not as lording it down upon the ones allotted [to you], but rather being examples of the flock".** It is significant that Peter felt it necessary to add this corrective word. Apparently, it was not an uncommon tendency then, nor is it now, that men would see the role of being a shepherd as that of controlling people, dictating to them and exercising power over them. Peter clearly rejects such an understanding of this role. He strongly asserts the opposite, by use of the strong negative conjunction alla (ἀλλά), meaning "but, rather, on the contrary". He advocates that elders do their shepherding by being, or becoming, examples/models of what the flock is to be. Undoubtedly, Peter was thinking about Jesus' own words to the twelve (Mt. 20:25-28; Mk. 10:42-45), when they had a similar misunderstanding of authority in the Kingdom. He even employed one of the same words that Jesus had. He had said, "The ones thinking/supposing to rule the Gentiles *lord it down upon them* (same word as in I

Pet. 5:3), and the greatest of them exercise authority down upon them. But not in this same manner is it among you, rather/but whoever shall wish to become great among you, he will be your servant; and whoever shall wish to be first among you, will be slave of all, for the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give His life a ransom for many" (Mk. 10:42b-45).

6. Kephalē -- Head, but not Boss

The value of good scholarship is inestimable if we wish to faithfully discover, apply and present the correct meaning of the original writings of the Bible as the basis for understanding and living out God's truth in modern times. A clear example of this need for careful study methods could be illustrated by our common understanding of the New Testament Greek word for "head", i.e., kephalē (κεφαλή). Unfortunately, **we have fallen into the error of reading the definition of what "head" means to us from our cultural background into the text of the NT**. As a result, we have grossly misunderstood many of those passages where this word occurs. Furthermore, we have done this for such a long period of time that many of our common reference resources for the meaning of Greek words have been compromised. In my personal experience, I had bought into the more widely accepted cultural interpretation of this word for years. It was only by being exposed to the observations made by a seminary professor¹ that I was prompted to look into the matter more closely. Eventually, through the results of a careful inductive study of the word usage of kephalē as a translational equivalent for the Hebrew word for "head", i.e., ro'sh (ראש), I became convinced of a more accurate definition of this word. The significance of this one misunderstanding runs very deep, and the implications are far-reaching. They affect not only the interpretation of particular texts, but they also have significant impact on our understanding of the authority structures that have been handed down to us. These are models of authority that have been uncritically accepted and promoted by us as being "God's established order", though it is becoming increasingly obvious that instead of causing domestic and ecclesiastical harmony, these structures often are the cause of emotional and spiritual dysfunction. They promote irresponsibility and immaturity for all parties involved. They stand in the way of finding full personhood and mature intimacy with God. The truth is that, to our own detriment, we have *not* been promoting the teachings of the New Testament, but rather the cultural traditions of Western European-American society.

The crux of the problem centers in a very elementary phenomenon of language. It is a commonly recognized fact that often words do not have just one definition. Instead, they have a range of meanings. In other words, if you were to look up a word in a good dictionary, you would usually find listed several options that could legitimately be accurate meanings of that particular word in various contexts. From that list of possibilities, and the examples of word usages given as illustrations of them, you must determine what the word means in the particular setting under examination. This is further complicated by the differentiation of literal meanings from metaphorical, or figurative, applications of the word. These metaphorical meanings are strongly determined by the world view, cultural values, and literature of that society. Oftentimes in translation work one finds that although the primary, or literal, meaning may be the same from one language to another, the metaphorical possibilities allowed in one may *not* be allowed in another.

What am I getting at? Simply stated, the Greek word for "head" does not have the same range of meanings as our English word does. Therefore, if we read into the New Testament occurrences of kephale those English meanings that are not true options in Greek, we are misunderstanding, distorting, and even misrepresenting what the New Testament is really saying in those passages.

What does kephalē mean? The Greek lexicon compiled by Liddell, Scott, Jones, and McKenzie covers classical and koinē (meaning "common" -- the style of Greek that the New Testament was written in) Greek from 1000 B.C. to 600 A.D. It is the most comprehensive lexicon on the market for English students of Greek. Under the entry for kephalē, **in addition to the primary literal meaning, "head", it lists some twenty-five other possible figurative meanings** for the word which these men observed being used in the ancient Greek literature they surveyed. **Some of the more common ones include: (a.) the top or extremity of something, e.g., the "head" of a column or wall; (b.) the source, origin, mouth,**

or starting point of something, e.g., the "head" of a river; (c.) the crown, completion, or consummation of something; and, (d.) sometimes "head" stands for the whole person, similar to our English idea of doing a "head count".

The point at issue here is that there is one figurative meaning that the English word "head" has in our culture which is conspicuously absent from what the research of Liddell, Scott, Jones and McKenzie concluded about the figurative meanings of kephalē in Greek. In English usage, the word "head" can refer to one who is "leader", "chief", "in authority over", "of superior rank", or "boss". These meanings are foreign to the Greek word. **Kephalē does *not* mean "boss" or "authority".**

Obviously, this has tremendous implications for our interpretations of NT passages where kephalē occurs. Many commentators have wrongly imported our English meanings to these passages, thus distorting and obscuring the intended teaching of these texts. This distortion has, in fact, virtually reversed the message, so that what modern interpreters of these passages take to be the correct understanding is actually *exactly the opposite of what was understood by the original recipients of the text*. A critical example of this would be Eph. 5:23, where the husband is described as being head of the wife as Christ is head of the Church.² A careful look at the context will reveal that "headship" is further defined in this passage by such concepts as "being the Savior of the Body" (vs. 23), having "loved the Church and gave Himself for her" (vs. 25), and by "nourishing" and "cherishing" (vs. 29). These word pictures are more in line with the flavor of the actual Greek word kephalē, meaning "source of life, enabler, one who brings to completion" than the English idea of "being boss over". Unfortunately, much of what is taught as "biblical roles in marriage" springs more from our pagan, cultural world view than from the actual meaning of the biblical passages cited as support.

To make matters worse, some of the most common commentators and Greek reference tools have been compromised in this area. They have not been thorough enough in their scholarship, or have relied on faulty source material. Thus, this particular misunderstanding has been popularized throughout many of the more commonly available research tools, allowing this error to go largely unnoticed by the majority of pastors and teachers. For example, one of the more popular one-volume Greek lexicons, one compiled by Walter Bauer, falls into this error. The frustration of this is that if a pastor hears of this "different" definition of kephalē that I am writing about ("different" in the sense that it is not what he has heard before), he will go to his library and pick up his lexicon to check this against a reference source. He will most likely have Bauer's lexicon, since it is much smaller, more concise, and *affordable* than Liddell, Scott, Jones, and McKenzie's much larger, and more comprehensive work. Thus, what he will find will reinforce the error, and will make what I am claiming to be true look suspect. (Note that Bauer cites no references to substantiate the definition of "authority over" except to refer to the NT passages in question. This is unacceptable methodology. It really "begs the question" and establishes nothing.) It is incumbent upon a genuine student of truth to search a little farther.

Well, if there are two respected lexicons which disagree on this subject, how am I to decide on which to believe? Fortunately, in this case there is a very clear, and reasonably simple method of determining that kephalē does not mean "boss", "chief", or "authority over". You see, the Hebrew word, ro'sh, has approximately the same range of meaning as our English word does. It occurs about 600 times in the OT. Sometime during the period from 250 to 150 B.C., Jewish Hebrew-Greek scholars translated the Hebrew OT into Greek. This translation has been called the Septuagint (LXX) translation, named for the rumored seventy scholars who were involved in the work. As we examine how they translated this word, ro'sh, into the Greek, we are able to gain some significant insight into what these men perceived the range of meaning that kephalē carried. Most of the time (400+), ro'sh refers to the physical head. In each of these occurrences, the translators chose kephalē as the natural Greek term to translate the Hebrew. In approximately 180 occasions, however, ro'sh was employed to indicate someone as the "chief" or "leader". In these passages, the translators virtually always chose one of fourteen other Greek terms to convey the meaning.³ All of these other Greek words *are* clearly about leadership, the predominate choice being the word archōn (ἄρχων - 109 times), meaning ruler, leader, authority. Kephalē was employed in four instances where a head-tail metaphor was being translated. Clearly in these instances any other word choice would have obscured the obvious word picture of the metaphor.

Aside from these, kephalē was used only eight other times. Of these, the contexts allow for the meanings of "top" and "crown" to apply to the person. They were arguably not contexts strictly communicating the idea of authority. It could be that the LXX translators felt that kephalē was the better choice here, because it conveyed these *other* nuances of meaning which they felt more accurately represented the actual meaning of the Hebrew. In other words, the translators chose to use kephalē because they interpreted the meaning of these passages as *not* being about authority, and therefore chose the more precise word to translate the meaning. In light of this, when you examine the overall pattern of word usage, **there seems to have been a definite avoidance on the part of the Septuagint translators toward using kephalē to convey this idea of authority.** The sharp contrast in its employment as *the* favorite word choice to translate ro'sh, to suddenly being virtually abandoned by the same translators in this particularly narrow scope of meaning, can only be explained by recognizing that **they must have felt that kephalē simply did not communicate the authority concept.** Therefore, they opted to use other words that did clearly communicate this idea.

As a result of this word study, we may conclude that **the concept of "headship" meaning "boss", e.g., the husband is the "head of the home" in a chain-of-command type of system, is *not* a New Testament concept. It is drawn, rather, from what were commonly accepted authority structures from our cultural tradition.** In fact, the servant leadership model of the Kingdom of God confronts the abuse of power that is often engendered by such human systems of authority (Mk. 10:42-45; Lk. 22:24-26). Much of the Church has fallen unknowingly into the trap of allowing our cultural background to define for us the meanings of the terms that are from a very different time and culture. In order to rightly understand what God's Word is telling us about authority and leadership in the home, we must study the terms in their original context. We must allow the Scriptures as they were originally given to challenge *our* thinking, wherever our understanding is amiss, not adjust our teaching of the Scriptures to fit comfortably with what our expectations of truth might be.

Conclusion

In the Church of Jesus Christ, spiritual authority is not a legalistic, chain-of-command type of system, whereby we "lay people" must do whatever we are told by the "powers that be" in our church. The basis for spiritual authority in leadership is first of all a giftedness or ability which God imparts to an individual. There is room for the development and growth of this gift through discipline, training and experience. This becomes visible to others as it is openly exercised or given expression. People will be drawn by the effectiveness, health, or goodness that they see in the life of this emerging leader. If they will respond by allowing this person to express and employ their gifts, and by co-operating with the Spirit's inner working in this person, by being willing to "go with the flow", or respond to the suggestions and initiatives of this leader, then he/she will have the encouragement and opportunity to lead. If not, the potential leader will be frustrated by having these inner promptings and inner "visions" (or insights) which never are given expression, and the Body will miss out on the benefit of the deployment of God's provision of grace in their midst through that person. Authority is, in this way, an emerging, recognizable, functional dynamic that will take place where God gives His gifts. We do, however, play an important part in cultivating and developing those gifts that "author" helpful expressions of God's grace in our midst. There is a balance: Leaders lead when people follow; people follow when they clearly see something *worth* following. Authority in the Kingdom is always for the benefit of and service of the Body. It is never to dominate, manipulate, control, or demand obedience for selfish ends. Clear communication lines in the Body help to facilitate the emergence and the healthy employment of leadership in whatever arenas the grace-giftings of God many occur.

Daniel C. Trygg, Jr.

Endnotes

¹ I am deeply indebted to Drs. Berkeley and Alvera Mickelson, professors at Bethel Seminary, St. Paul, MN, for much of the primary research they did in this area. They compiled a series of unpublished notes, entitled *Biblical Teachings About Men-Women Relationships*. Pages 8-14 provided much of the foundational information concerning kephalē and ro'sh in this section. Additional information on this subject could be obtained by contacting Christians for Biblical Equality, 122 West Franklin Ave, Suite 218, Minneapolis, MN 55404-2451, Ph. (612) 872-6898, E-mail <cbe@cbeinternational.org>, Website www.cbeinternational.org.

² Interestingly, Paul does not even say "*the* head" in these verses. There is no "the" in the Greek text. A proper translation would emphasize the functional aspect of this role: "(a) man/husband is (a) head of the woman/wife like Christ is (a) head of the Church". Greek has no "a" or "an". Usually, when the definite article ("the") is not used, unless the immediate context has previously specified that a noun is definite (and is obviously referring to the same object or person), or unless it is a name of a specific person, or unless there is some other grammatical structure indicating otherwise, it would be understood as indefinite. When translated into English, we would add the indefinite article, "a" or "an", to make it more understandable to us. **Nowhere does the NT describe a man as "the" head of his wife.** By contrast, in I Cor. 11:3, Christ *is* described as "the" head of every man (the definite article is there), while the man is a head of a woman, and God is a head of the Christ (no definite article is in these phrases). The fact that Paul uses the definite article ("the") in the first phrase, but then omits it in the next two phrases, would indicate that he is purposefully making a distinction.

What would be the distinction caused by leaving this noun indefinite, instead of definite? First, by not making it definite, **Paul is not making the husband equal to "the head" of the wife, as though this were a position** that the husband necessarily and exclusively holds. **Secondly, the indefinite structure more strongly emphasizes that this is written as a metaphorical comparison.** A metaphor is a figure of speech where you describe something as literally being something else, in order to suggest or illustrate an analogy or comparison between the two objects, e.g., "Bill is a cunning wolf". It is like a simile, except that a simile uses "as" or "like" when making the comparison, e.g., "Bill is like a cunning wolf". To say that "the husband is a head of the wife" is a metaphorical statement. It is not in the more fully expressed form of a simile, though the comparative idea of "as" or "like" is nevertheless implied, even if not directly stated. The point of a metaphor is to make the analogy or comparison suggested by the image. If the reader will recognize this, then the question becomes "What is the relationship described by this word picture? What does it mean to function as a 'head' of someone?" In Eph. 5, this is more fully clarified by using Christ's "head relationship to the church" as a standard of comparison. **Thirdly, the grammatical structure allows there to be more than one possible head.** The husband is "a head", which would imply that there could be other people who function as "a head" in the life of the woman. If we think in terms of "source, origin, or one who enables another to grow and come to completion", there is no difficulty in recognizing that there may be several people in someone's life who function in this way, e.g., parents, a schoolteacher, friend, mentor, or Christ. In this way, even God Himself could be described as "a head" of the Christ. **Fourth**, as mentioned above, by allowing this to be indefinite, and open-ended, **it forces the reader to consider "head" in terms of function, not position.** This is a figurative statement regarding *how* the husband is to relate to his wife. It is not meant as a statement regarding position, or as an assigning of rank in an authority structure.

³ This phenomenon is acknowledged in a footnote to the "κεφαλή" article in the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol. III, edited by Gerhard Kittel (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. 1968). Although no conclusion is drawn by Heinrich Schlier, the author of the article, he does quote an observation by Georg Bertram in the note at the bottom of page 675, "Though κεφαλή is almost exclusively used for ראש (Heb. - ro'sh), in many passages in the LXX ראש (ro'sh) is

rendered differently, esp. by ἄρχη (meaning "beginning, first, or ruler, ruling power, authority"), ἀρχῶν (ruler, official, authority), ἀρχηγός (leader, pioneer, founder), ἡγεῖσθαι (to lead the way, to take the lead, to be chief, to preside, govern, rule), προηγείσθαι (to lead the way, to outdo, to vie with), χιλιάρχος (tribune, officer of high rank) and κορυφή." (The parenthetical information was added by me to assist the reader.)

It is interesting to note that all of these options are Greek words meaning "authority". The LXX translators consistently avoided using κεφαλή in these contexts, choosing instead, from these other Greek options, words that would better suit the flavor of rank and authority in these passages.

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Appendix One

BIBLICAL SHEPHERDING: AN INDUCTIVE STUDY

It is important to realize that the term "shepherd" has a very strong OT background for being used to describe people in leadership over the nation of Israel. I think, if one were to examine the history of the term, they would find the same scenario we have seen before, namely, the movement in usage from a functional "every-day" word-picture to that of a "specialized" title for a position. This really was popularized because King David had been a shepherd as a boy. The people could see the preparation that this career had given him to equip him to lead the nation. It became a poetic way of referring to the King, "the shepherd of Israel". It is quite clear from the OT that those who came to be referred to as "shepherds" of the people had, over time, come to abuse their positions, which essentially neutralized what the word picture was intended to convey. Their behavior made a mockery of what this title was *supposed* to represent. In the latter prophets, Yahweh sought to expose this by contrasting the functional differences between true, good, effective shepherds from those who were abusing their place as shepherds. Following is an inductive study of Ezekiel 34:1-26, Jeremiah 23:1-4 and Zechariah 11:16,17, listing these qualities in two columns. I include this study here as a resource and illustration for the remarks about shepherding expressed above (pp. 12-14) in the section entitled *Poimen - Shepherds or Shepherd?* Note how God defines real shepherds in terms of function. Title means nothing if not accompanied by the action which the title is supposed to represent.

Good (effective) Shepherding

from Ezekiel 34

Feed the flock - vs. 2.
I Myself -- personal interest in sheep - vs. 11.
Search for the sheep.
Seek them out - vs. 11.
Care for his scattered sheep.
Deliver scattered sheep from all places they
were scattered - vs. 12.
Gather them and bring them into their own place.
Feed them in their own land.
On the mountains.
By the streams.
In all the inhabited places - vs. 13.
In a good pasture.
In good grazing ground.
They will lie down in good grazing ground.
They will feed in rich pastures - vs. 14.
Will feed the flock.
Will lead them to rest - vs. 15.
Seek the lost.
Bring back the scattered.
Strengthen the sick.
Will judge and destroy the "fat and strong"
sheep - vs. 16.
Will judge between sheep.
Between rams and male goats.
Those who eat the good pasture, but trample
underfoot what they do not eat.
Those who drink the clear water, but foul
rest with their feet - vs. 18.

Evil (ineffective) Shepherding

Feed themselves (not the flock) - vs. 2.
Consume products of the flock, even slaughter the best
sheep w/o feeding flock - vs. 3.
Do not strengthen the sickly.
Do not heal the diseased.
Do not bind up the broken.
Do not bring back the scattered.
Do not seek for the lost.
Dominate (rule over) them with force (harshness - NIV)
and severity (brutality - NIV) - vs. 4.
Lack of shepherding attention (vs. 5) results in:
Sheep being scattered;
Sheep becoming food for every (any) beast;
Scattering of sheep -vs. 5.
Flock wandering everywhere
Through all the mountains and on every
high hill -- signifying the extremity
of the situation.
Flock scattered over all the surface of the earth.
No one searches for them.
No one seeks them - vs. 6.
God's flock has become a prey.
God's flock has become food for all the beasts.
Shepherds' style = lack of shepherding.
Did not search for God's flock.
Fed themselves instead of flock - vs. 8.
God is against these shepherds.
He will take the sheep from them.
He will make them cease from feeding sheep.

Good (effective) Shepherding

Evil (ineffective) Shepherding

from Ezekiel 34 (continued)

Those who force other sheep to eat and drink
what they have spoiled - vs. 19.
Between the fat and the lean sheep - vs. 20.
Those who push each other with side and shoulder.
Those who thrust at the weak (sick) with their horns.
Those who scatter the weak to the outside - vs. 21.
Will deliver the flock from being preyed upon.
Will judge between one sheep and another - vs. 22.
Will feed them.
Will feed them himself - vs. 23.
Will eliminate harmful beasts from the land.
So that the sheep may live securely in the wilderness.
So that they may rest/sleep in the woods - vs. 25.
Will make the sheep a blessing.
Will make their dwelling place to be a blessing.
Will bring blessings to the sheep.
Showers at the proper times - vs. 26.
Fruitfulness to the land.
Security to the sheep.
Will break the bars of their yoke.
Will deliver them from those who enslaved them - vs. 26.

They will not feed themselves anymore.
God will deliver His sheep from their mouth - vs. 10.

from Jeremiah 23

God will gather the remnant.
Will bring them back to their own pasture.
The flock will be fruitful.
The flock will multiply - vs. 3.
God's shepherds will tend the sheep.
So that they will fear no longer.
So that they will not be terrified.
So that none will be missing - vs. 4.

Destroys and scatters God's sheep - vs. 1
Responsible to tend (shepherd) God's people.
Yet have scattered them.
Yet have driven them away.
Yet have not attended to them.
God sees their actions as evil, and will judge them - vs. 2.

from Zechariah 11

Will not care for the perishing.
Will not seek the scattered.
Will not heal the broken.
Will not sustain the one standing.
Will devour the flesh of the fat sheep and tear off
their hoofs - vs. 16.
Leaves the flock.
Will be judged by God - vs. 17.