

A NEW TESTAMENT PATTERN OF LEADERSHIP

A. HISTORY OF DEVELOPMENT OF LEADERSHIP IN THE EARLY CHURCH

We can trace the first thirty years of early church history through the book of Acts and note different phases of leadership development.

1. **Jerusalem**

Eleven (then 12) apostles govern the church. Deacons (administrative) are appointed a few years later to free the apostles for prayer and the ministry of the word and to pursue their apostolic call (e.g. Peter touring the churches throughout Judea and Samaria). James, the brother of the Lord, starts to emerge as a senior figure and leader, and an apostle who is not one of the twelve. See Acts 1-12, Galatians 1: 18, 19. Prophets also begin to emerge in their ministries (see Acts 11:27), but their leadership capacity in the church is unclear at this stage.

2. **Antioch**

Acts 13:1, "In the church of Antioch there were prophets and teachers." This is now some 8-10 years after Pentecost. Antioch has begun to be established as a centre of Gentile Christianity, while Jerusalem remains the centre of Jewish Christianity. Antioch could thus be a closer model for modern churches.

Prophets and teachers governed the church in Antioch at this time. From amongst these, apostles develop (Paul and Barnabas), and like James, they are genuine NT apostles aside from the Twelve. Thus Antioch would be governed in the ensuing years by a team of apostles, prophets, and teachers.

Note 1 Corinthians 1:28, "And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers ... " (See later comments on this).

3. **Jerusalem Council**

Acts 15. Some 18 years had now passed since Pentecost Day. The council faced a magna carta decision for the early church: the admission and acceptance of Gentiles to the faith, apart from the Jewish law. We see a multi-faceted leadership group in operation: apostles and elders (v4, 6); James - carried a unique authority (v13, 19); prophets - these were also active as part of the leadership group (v22, 32). So by now in the early church there have emerged the following leadership gifts and ministries: James (an apostle), apostles, prophets, teachers, elders. Apostles and prophets seemed to be more mobile while elders were more local.

GIFT PRIORITY IN CHURCH LEADERSHIP

The NT seems to indicate a priority or weighting of gifting that perhaps should be reflected in the makeup of a leadership group in the local church.

1. Ephesians 2: 19,20 - "You are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus Himself as the chief cornerstone."

That this is referring to NT apostles and prophets as foundations in the local church (as apposed to NT apostles and OT prophets) is clear from Ephesians 3:5, "which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets."

2. 1 Corinthians 12:28 - "And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those with gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues."

Note the order of appointment:

First: Apostles - to lay the foundation of the local church and movements. 1 Corinthians 3:10a - "By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder ..." (the apostle Paul). Apostles are sent ones, concerned with extending the boundaries of God's kingdom and transforming cities and nations. They reveal heaven's strategies for building the church.

Second: Prophets - to help lay the foundation with apostles, check the plans, and encourage the building process. They are concerned with opening up the spiritual realm and the realm of the Holy Spirit. Bring revelation of current and future happenings. Encourage and strengthen the church especially in times of hardship.

Third: Teachers - to build on the foundation. 1 Corinthians 3:10b- " ... and someone else is building on it" (this was Apollos, a skilled teacher- Acts 18:24, 25). Teachers build the superstructure, instructing the people in the faith to stand strong and upright. Apostles and prophets are also active in this. Teachers and ascension gift pastors are closely connected in this process (Ephesians 4: 11).

Then: Miracle workers and healers. This probably closely fits the evangelist, although is wider than just that ministry. This causes bodily growth and increase.

And: Helpers - servers, ministries to the poor, etc. Administrators - bringing organisation to the growing structure and enabling each part to function properly.

From miracle workers on, no strict order is given, and the gifts mentioned are a mixture of motivational and charismatic, possibly representative of all the other gifts that make up the local church. The ascension gift ministries listed initially, however, seem to be given in a strict order of priority. This perhaps should be taken into account when considering the gift-mix of the leadership of a church, whilst also noting the importance of the other gifts mentioned.

NOTE: This order is, I believe, not an order of superiority of these gifts and ministries (the context of 1 Corinthians 12 plainly states the equal value, importance, and need of all ministries and gifts to the body), but rather an order of priority in which these ministries are needed to serve the body to enable its growth.

The church needs a correct foundation. If we do not build on an apostolic- prophetic foundation, we will build it on something else. Examples:

- institutionalism (rigid and formal)
- democracy (consensus and mediocrity)

- tradition (we've never done it like this before)
- sentiment (we might hurt and lose some people).

CONCLUSIONS

Leaders should recognise and understand as much as they can about their ministry gift and how this can best function on the team and on the oversight, and whether they should be where they are. We must note the order in 1 Corinthians 12:28, whilst also noting the importance of other giftings.

The early church displays a pattern that could be meaningful to us today. James stands as an apostle with unique authority and leadership, together with other apostles, prophets, and teachers who concern themselves with strategic-level matters (such as vision, direction, revelation, teaching, building, equipping). Then there are elders/overseers concerned with the day-to-day feeding and care of the flock, together with other gifts (administrators, helpers) who help the body function. The Five fold ministries and elders represent two legs of the same body, to carry the church forward.

B. PRACTICAL STEPS

1. Conviction – a church leadership needs to be sure that a move towards an apostolic-prophetic leadership team is not only Biblical, but is a current revelation of the Holy Spirit to them. Are you convinced that this is something God is asking you to do? There will be spiritual opposition to it and it will need commitment and much prayer.
2. Identification – who in the leadership team (staff, elders etc) already has any of these five office gifts? If there are gaps, begin to pray that God would add to the team. If some of the offices are not resident, link with ministries outside the church to provide input in those areas. This is good to do anyway.
3. No fanfares – begin the transition quietly and slowly. Go in stages. Educate leaders. Go for function rather than titles. Once the five-fold team is functioning, it will be easier to give titles. The title is not a badge of honour but a description of function.
4. Think through what this will look like. That is, what will a new leadership structure look like? Does the apostle run the team? What is the place of the elders? In the new model, the leading apostle and prophet should lead, with a strong team around them for safeguard. Elders will make a strong contribution to the team without control. Soak everything in prayer.
5. Understand who apostles and prophets are (see separate papers). Understand the roles of pastors, teachers, and evangelists functioning under apostolic-prophetic leadership.
6. True apostles make room for all the other gifts to emerge and promote their release.
7. Value character above all. Apostles, prophets and other offices should display great humility and Christ-likeness. The spirit of the person is paramount. Poor character (ambition, pride, dictatorial attitude) will stop the new structure emerging, as people will be scared of it. Trust, humility, love, and grace is

essential in all parties for this to work.

8. No one has the perfect pattern yet. God is restoring this model to the church, so we will need to seek him for ongoing revelation of how it will work.