



Bellwether Leadership

As each of us ponder the biblical role of leadership in Jesus' Church, as opposed to the forms of leadership that have developed over the centuries, and have led His Church astray, I submit the following article as a helpful insight into the nature of the problem of leadership we see today.

Jesus left us with clear understanding of Who the Shepherd of the sheep was to be, in John 10:1-16

John 10:1 Most assuredly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door, but climbs up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. 2 But **he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep.** 3 To him the doorkeeper opens, and **the sheep hear his voice;** and he calls his own sheep by name and **leads them out.** 4 And when he brings out **his own sheep,** he goes before them; and **the sheep follow him, for they know his voice.** 5 Yet **they will by no means follow a stranger,** but will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers. 6 Jesus used this illustration, but they did not understand the things which He spoke to them. 7 Then Jesus said to them again, "Most assuredly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. 8 **All who ever came before Me are thieves and robbers,** but the sheep did not hear them. 9 I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture. 10 The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly. 11 I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep. 12 But a hireling, he who is not the shepherd, one who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them. 13 The hireling flees because he is a hireling and does not care about the sheep. 14 I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own. 15 As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. 16 And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and **they will hear My voice;** and there will be one flock and one shepherd.

The New King James Version. 1996, c1982 (electronic ed.) (Jn 10:1). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Jesus makes it quite clear - He is the Shepherd, He gives His sheep the ability to hear His voice, and as a result He is able to lead them, and they follow Him. Because of this they are protected from strangers, thieves, robbers, and hirelings. It was His intent that this would define Church history. In fact, He tells us true sheep won't even follow these folks, because they will discern their voice doesn't represent His voice.

This presents us with a dilemma. Is the Church, of Church history, not truly composed of true sheep, since the majority of Church history is an example of sheep who have followed those who led them astray? While I'm concerned over their departures, I think it would be a wrong conclusion to assume they were not His sheep, just because they strayed. Rather, I suspect what Jesus meant was far more prophetic in nature, and dealt more with ultimate

outcomes. Ultimately His Church will wake up, recognize they have been following thieves, robbers, and hirelings, and return to the true Shepherd Himself, look to Him for leadership, and grow in their confidence and ability to hear His voice.

In some cases the thieves, robbers, and hirelings have been so unwittingly, and in other cases have known full well they were leading His sheep astray, but did it anyway because it furthered their personal agenda for the sheep.

I believe we are living in such a prophetic day, and as result of this the true Shepherd is causing just such a returning. All over the globe we are hearing of millions upon millions of believers who have grown weary with the voice of false shepherds, recognizing they have led the flock to their own ways and caused them to lose touch with the headship and shepherding directly under Jesus. Writers and leaders, all over the world, are noting the phenomenon of believers longing for a simple walk under the leadership of Jesus, and a concept of Church that is free of the agendas and policies of men. It is a great day.

If Jesus had no intention of His flock being directly under any other Shepherd than himself, and all who have drawn His sheep to gather under their shepherd's banner are either intentionally or unwittingly thieves, robbers, and hirelings, then is there a role of shepherding for men, and if so, what is their leadership to look like?

Fortunately, in Jesus using the metaphor of sheep before a shepherd, we do not have to look beyond this metaphor to understand what Jesus had in mind for human/sheep leadership. Contained within the historical industry of sheep herding and shepherding, is the answer to our question, and it is no surprise that we have heard so little of this down throughout the centuries, because if we had we would not see the forms of leadership that have characterized the Church.

If we had paid closer attention to this industry, and one particular character within this industry, we would have easily understood what the apostles were trying to tell us concerning their leadership and what leadership was to continually look like.

We have to look no further than the little known character - ***the Bellwether*** !

Sheep flocking behavior is so prevalent in some English breeds that special names apply to the different roles sheep play in a flock. One calls a sheep that roams furthest away from the others an *outlier*, a term originally used to refer to someone who lives far from where they work. This sheep ventures further away from the safety of the flock to graze, due to a larger flight zone or a weakness that prevents it from obtaining enough forage when with the flock. Another sheep, the ***Bellwether***, leads the others. Traditionally this was a castrated Ram (or wether) with a bell hung off a string around its neck. The tendency to act as an outlier, Bellwether, or to fight for the middle of the flock, stays with sheep throughout their adulthood; that is unless they have a scary experience which causes them to increase their flight zone.

Here then is our clue as to what Jesus and the apostles had in mind for the role of men in shepherding Jesus' flock.

Leadership, in the body of Christ, is to be nothing more than *Bellwether leadership*. And what is this leadership? It is one sheep/leader, chosen out from the midst of the other sheep, to be castrated, have a bell hung around his neck, and be singularly trained by the Shepherd to hear His voice in a unique way and thus lead His flock to follow Him.

However, this does not preclude the rest of the flock hearing the Shepherd's voice, because Jesus doesn't say that just the *bellwether* hears His voice, but all the sheep would hear His voice.

And what does this castration tell us? Something that is so incredibly important it is no wonder, over the centuries, that Church leaders have hidden this character from us. A leader is a man who has had his ability to reproduce after his own kind removed from him. He will never again reproduce man centered theologies, practices, agendas, rules, standards, laws and philosophies. His role is singular - listen to the Shepherd and lead the rest of the sheep to follow Him. He isn't allowed to reproduce after his own image. He's done with his own lineage, his own agenda, his own will, his own likeness. He now fully represents the lineage, agenda, will, and likeness of Another - the Shepherd.

Sadly, this little known fact of sheep husbandry could have prevented much of the woes of Church history, that has led the majority of believers away from Jesus' direct leadership, and towards the headship of men.

Just imagine, if a young believer, in the early Church, had asked one of his local Church leaders, "What does it mean to be a leader in Jesus' Church?" If he had consistently heard the same thing, "Young man, there is painful picture from nature that perfectly describes the nature of shepherding, and it comes straight from sheep herding itself. In any given flock, the shepherd would choose one ram to become the bellwether for the rest of the flock. He would take this one ram aside, tie him down carefully, and before he knew fully what was happening to him, he would be castrated. After this procedure he would be taken aside by the shepherd for a prolonged period of time, to be trained to follow his voice and lead the sheep wherever the shepherd wanted them led." "Why would he have to be castrated?" "So there would never be a question in the bellwether's mind as to who owned the sheep, and what his role was to be with them. He would always look among the flock and know that none of the flock was 'his' flock. He hadn't reproduced himself in them. He couldn't claim them as his or lead them where he wanted to. His castration always told him the sheep belonged to the shepherd and his only role was to lead them wherever the shepherd wanted them to go. The sheep would look to the bellwether for a bell tone that guided them, as a back up to the shepherd's voice, but ultimately all simply anticipated the bellwether to be leading them according to the shepherd's dictates. The bell was simply a secondary element to the shepherd's voice." Was the bellwether a shepherd? Definitely, but a castrated one... One taken from the among the flock, not exalted over the flock, in fact, just the opposite...he was humiliated by being castrated. This operation rendered him safe among the flock and fully given to the shepherd's voice.

Consider the following possible historical conversation between Paul and Timothy:

"Paul and Timothy were on one of Timothy's first journeys, and one day Timothy, as did the disciples of Jesus to their master, when He walked the earth, turned to Paul, as they passed by a sheepfold, along their way to Ephesus, and asked... 'What is the nature of leadership in Jesus' Church? How are leaders to view themselves?' At that point, Paul searched across the landscape for one particular sheep. It didn't take him long, since he was able to use both his eyes and ears to locate one specific sheep. 'Do you see that ram in the distance? Can you hear the bell tied to his neck?' 'Yes, replied Timothy, and what does this teach me?' 'As you know, he is the bellwether. All of the other sheep have been trained to listen to the shepherd's voice and the bellwether's bell, so as to know where to find the fold, the green grass, and the cool waters. ' 'And what,' asked Timothy, 'makes a bellwether a bellwether?' 'One word,' said Paul, 'but it tells you just about everything you'll ever need to know about

leadership in Jesus' Church.' 'And what is that one word,' asked Timothy? 'Castration.' 'Castration?' 'Yup, castration! That's just about all you need to know to be a really great leader in the Church...castration.'"

What a picture of humility this would have always provided to leaders. It's no wonder this role was never picked up by the majority of Church leaders. "What are we?" "Simply castrated rams." Instead, such terms of function as pastor/shepherd, elder, or bishop, became titles, and over time were exalted to such titles as Pope and Senior Pastor.

Historically men have acted as if Jesus had nothing more to say to the sheep, and it was the leader's job to tell the sheep what they were to be doing. He reproduced himself, and his ideologies of the Church life, to the sheep under his care. He himself lost his confidence he could truly hear the voice of the Shepherd, which even more gave him license to develop his own theology of the Church and his own agenda for each individual Church.

Church history is all too often the story of thieves, robbers, and hirelings, who, having lost their ability to hear the Shepherd, and having inflated their concept of self reproduction, have stolen the sheep away from the Shepherd, and taking the sheep down the primrose path towards Christianity, which is essentially no different than any other world religion that is connected with a dead historical figurehead. If shepherds can't accurately hear their God's voice and the sheep are taught to follow the voice of shepherds other than the chief Shepherd, then the result of this, just like all other world religions, is a dead religion, and thus Christianity has taken its place along side all other dead world religions, led by men who claim to speak for their God/god, but in fact are nothing more than hollow voices reproducing their own will.

This is why the very warning Jesus gave in Matthew 20 has been so seriously violated throughout history.

Listen to Jesus once again:

Matthew 20:25 But Jesus called them to Himself and said, You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. 26 Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. 27 And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave 28 just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many. The New King James Version. 1996, c1982 (electronic ed.) (Mt 20:24). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

And Luke says it similarly:

Luke 22:24 Now there was also a dispute among them, as to which of them should be considered the greatest. 25 And He said to them, The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those who exercise authority over them are called "benefactors." 26 But not so among you; on the contrary, he who is greatest among you, let him be as the younger, and he who governs as he who serves. 27 For who is greater, he who sits at the table, or he who serves? Is it not he who sits at the table? Yet I am among you as the One who serves. The New King James Version. 1996, c1982 (electronic ed.) (Lk 22:24). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

If we had just followed these basic instructions we would never have gone astray. Instead

we have taken Jesus' words, twisted them to be a warning against "abusive or harsh" leadership, and have neatly set them aside and developed the very thing Jesus said was never to happen - i.e. Autonomous benefactive leadership. What is a "Benefactor?" He is one who has created wealth and passed it along to another. In the Greek world this word was most commonly used for a master to a slave, who would pass along benefits to his slaves. Down throughout Church history, where that master to slave mentality was manifested in clergy to laity, or Bishops to laity, or Pope's to laity, or in our day Senior Pastor's to laity, the entire notion of someone who would fill a master relationship to the flock, even if done beneficently, was a violation of Jesus' clear teaching. Churches were never meant to be business organizations with CEO's over them, dispensing the benefits to the body, in the forms of staff positions, Church programs, missions opportunities, ministry opportunities, with attending requirements, rules, and laws.

Leader's are simply those, with Christlike character, who ring the bell to guide the flock to the Shepherd. They oversee the flock, in terms of watching out for their best interests, guiding them to safety whenever they stray, and leading them to the pastures of feeding when they're hungry.

Notice how Paul describes his *Bellwether* leadership:

Romans 15:5 May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you **follow** Christ Jesus,
The Holy Bible : New International Version. 1996, c1984 (electronic ed.) (Ro 15:5). Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

1 Corinthians 3:4 For when one says, I **follow** Paul, and another, I **follow** Apollos, are you not mere men?
The Holy Bible : New International Version. 1996, c1984 (electronic ed.) (1 Co 3:4). Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

1 Corinthians 10:33 even as I try to please everybody in every way. For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved. 1 **Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.**
The Holy Bible : New International Version. 1996, c1984 (electronic ed.) (1 Co 10:33). Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

1 Corinthians 11:1 **Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ.**
The New King James Version. 1996, c1982 (electronic ed.) (Heb 6:12). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

The writer of Hebrews references the principle of following:

Hebrews 6:12 that you do not become sluggish, but **imitate** those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.
The New King James Version. 1996, c1982 (electronic ed.) (Heb 6:12). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Hebrews 13:7 Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, **whose faith follow**, considering the outcome of their conduct.
The New King James Version. 1996, c1982 (electronic ed.) (Heb 13:7). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Peter addresses it as well:

1 Peter 2:21 To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that **you should follow in his steps**.

The Holy Bible : New International Version. 1996, c1984 (electronic ed.) (1 Pe 2:21). Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

Finally John tells us:

Revelation 14:4 These are those who did not defile themselves with women, for they kept themselves pure. They **follow the Lamb wherever he goes**. They were purchased from among men and offered as firstfruits to God and the Lamb. 5 No lie was found in their mouths; they are blameless.

The Holy Bible : New International Version. 1996, c1984 (electronic ed.) (Re 14:4). Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

Each of the apostles knew better than to reproduce after their own personal vision, agenda, or view of things. They understood the necessity of following Christ and urging the body to follow Him. If their approach to leadership, a *Bellwether* approach, had remained the approach of all successive leaders, the Church today would look very differently than it does.

It is for our generation to refresh all leaders, and “would-be” leaders, with what true biblical leadership looks like. To those who treasure titles of honor, I encourage taking up the title “bellwether, or perhaps senior bellwether...” Not too catchy is it?

It is high time we returned to a *Bellwether* leadership.