

Biblical Servant Leadership

[Wayne ODonnell](#)

June 17 · [Edited](#)

Lu6:12ff, "He called His disciples to Himself; and from them He chose twelve whom He also named apostles: ... Peter, and Andrew ..., James and John, Philip and Bartholomew, Matthew and Thomas, James ... and Simon ..., Judas, and Judas Iscariot which also was the traitor." Lu9:1ff, "Then he called his twelve disciples together, and gave them power and authority over all devils, and to cure diseases." Mt19:28, 20:25ff, "Jesus said to them, "Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel ... 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. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant ... just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve."

People in the Biblical Church movement (house church, organic church, simple church movements, etc.) often forget that Jesus taught the twelve apostles about leading by serving right after telling them they would sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel in the future. He was not telling them not to have any positional authority in the church but rather that even though he placed them in positions of authority they were not to -lord it over- people but to -act- like servants. He wasn't telling them to abdicate the positions he had placed them in, just as he did not stop being our Lord or abdicate his position of authority over us by serving us. It's the manner of leadership that was at issue, not the fact of leadership.

Likewise in John 14 when Jesus girded himself with a towel and washed the disciples feet, "You call Me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you. Most assuredly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master." Jesus did not abdicate his position as our Lord and Teacher and become a servant by serving us (function), he remained our Lord. That's the kind of leadership he wants us to imitate, a loving leader leadership not a non-leader leadership. And he didn't become the Lord by serving (function) either. He was and is the Lord in -position- regardless of how he -functions-, but he wants us to function in the power of the Holy Spirit and in love and in serving, not like the world.

He wants people in real positions of real authority who act like servants. Anyone can avoid the temptation to act like a master when he's not a master (well not everyone), but it takes the new life in Christ for a person who actually is in authority to act like a servant. The organic church movement should keep all the most extreme language we have about not controlling, or domineering, or seeking power, but serving unselfishly etc.; but apply it to elders who are actually in positions of authority. That's the real NT

miracle of servant-like leadership that the Lord has accomplished by sending us his Spirit.

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[John Muir](#), [Ian Vincent](#) and [Wesley Rostoll](#) like this.

Comments

[Ian Vincent](#) So obvious..... thanks bro for stating the obvious, at a time when many stumble over such a simple concept as this.

June 17 at 3:47am · [Like](#)

[Ian Vincent](#) May i add that no one is forcing anyone to submit to the positional authority of elders in any one given congregation. Yes, scripture tells us to submit to elders, and yet only ones worthy of submitting to. Spiritual authority is manifest in true servanthood. When we perceive that more mature men are helping us spiritually then we in turn should recognize that servanthood as authority to speak into our life: it becomes relational: the relationship defines the nature of the authority.

June 17 at 3:53am · [Like](#) · 1

[Wayne ODonnell](#) [Wesley](#), I guess you figured out that my post above was the one I owed you on Mark 10 (though I used the parallel Mt and Lu passages). Thanks for stopping by and reading! smile emoticon

June 17 at 6:06am · [Edited](#) · [Like](#)

[Wayne ODonnell](#) [Ian](#), your post above sounds like some Organic Church speak right out of one of Frank's books. You basically said we should count a man who is not an elder but who is more mature and who helps us spiritually as having authority in our life; and we should count a man who is an elder but who is not more mature and who doesn't help us spiritually as not having authority in our life. With this kind of a philosophy we can just remove all mentions of elders from the NT because with this philosophy being an elder is irrelevant. That doesn't sound like the Bible's view of authority, where we are exhorted to honor those in authority even if we disagree with them or they are not as mature or knowledgeable or as wise as we are.

June 17 at 6:34am · [Edited](#) · [Like](#)

[Ian Vincent](#) I've not read much of Frank Viola, just snippets. I don't think you can make those assumptions on just a few sentences i've written here. I wrote a book on the subject, Reality Church. I'm not saying that positional authority doesn't exist, but that it is meant to function in relationship and not apart from it. Relational is the ideal. Here's an example of what i'm saying: "If I be not an apostle unto others, yet doubtless I am to you: for the seal of mine apostleship are ye in the Lord." (I Corinthians 9:2)Paul cites the relationship: he is truly their apostle due to the relationship.If we don't take this position it;s going to be fraught with frustration: you would have to accept any form of positional authority whether it is legitimate or not, and whether they are in relationship to you or not: non-relational. This is one of the great problems with the IC.It would be better to look for relationship than settle for non-relational, that's all i'm saying.

June 17 at 6:40am · [Like](#)

[Wayne ODonnell](#) Paul is an apostle because Jesus appointed him to be an apostle, and that's why I'm obligated to respect his authority, not because of any relationship he has or does not have with me. In defending his authority, Paul was just saying that they, the corinthians, of all people shouldn't be doubting his authority, not that he didn't have authority over others in the church or that his authority was in any

way based upon relationship, except the relationship of his being a chosen and appointed an official representative of Jesus.

[June 17 at 7:23am](#) · [Like](#)

Ian Vincent In other words, a man may be a bone-fide elder, and yet he may not be your elder/pastor.

[June 17 at 7:24am](#) · [Like](#)

Wayne ODonnell Scripture to back that up ...

[June 17 at 7:24am](#) · [Like](#)

Ian Vincent I agree, Paul's position is different to an elder, and yet there is a principle here.

[June 17 at 7:25am](#) · [Like](#)

Ian Vincent Wayne, according to what you're saying you would have to submit to an elder regardless of whether he is legitimate or whether there is a relationship.

[June 17 at 7:27am](#) · [Like](#)

Ian Vincent It would become a role-playing game with no basis in reality, as much of the IC does

[June 17 at 7:29am](#) · [Like](#)

Wesley Rostoll Hi Wayne. Just finishing work. Will read all the comments later tonight smile emoticon

[June 17 at 10:39am](#) · [Unlike](#) · [1](#)

Wesley Rostoll I see where you are coming from but don't quite agree. I appreciate that both of you are speaking about servant style leadership so I am glad that we are all on the same page where it matters most. Wayne, the biggest issue I have though is the clergy/laity style of leadership that you are advocating. This is exactly what Jesus warns against in Mt 20 when he says "you must not exercise authority over others as the Gentiles do", Mt 23 as well, "Call no man leader, teacher, father, you are all brothers, he who is greatest among you must be your servant (literally deacon).Whoever humbles himself will be exalted and whoever humbles himself will be exalted."

Apostle literally means 'sent one', it was used of the 12 as well as others (including a woman in Romans 16). Although I agree that the 12 (and Paul as well) had a unique ministry among the other apostles. I am not sure how the having power over demons and sicknesses translates to having power over your brethren? The 12 who sit on the thrones (Mt 19:28) serve as a public condemnation or witness against the 12 tribes of Israel. Once again I fail to see a direct connection to having 2 distinct classes of believers in the church.

I agree with you that by washing His disciples feet Jesus was giving us an example to imitate in true leadership. This is 'power under' others, using what you have to build others up. We lead by equipping others and giving a godly example of what it means to follow Christ, But if I am hearing you right, an elder can issue an instruction, to us, even one that we do agree to be in line with Christ's teachings and you would submit because 'the elder said so'? That sounds like a recipe for disaster.

[June 17 at 3:15pm](#) · [Like](#)

Ian Vincent To Wayne, let me put it another way: The principle Paul was referring to when he said that if he is not an apostle to other believers, he is to them, simply means that we can acknowledge true men of

God and their God-given gifts/ministry wherever we encounter them, and while they are elders to those they are in relationship to, they are not elders in relationship to us, as we don't know them, bcos it's not God's will we try and be in relationship with every elder out there in the body of Christ. So. i'm very much for recognizing positional authority, even if that authority does not reach to me, it being outside the sphere of relational authority concerning me. Yes, i don't believe the Biblical position of elder simply exists in private, personal relationship alone, it has to be publicly recognized.

June 17 at 9:24pm · [Like](#)

[Wayne ODonnell](#) Ian, thanks, that is sounding better but I don't want to consider the geographical extent of an elder's authority at this time because the acceptance of all Biblical authority structures as being good and instituted by God is a more important consideration.

Wesley, yes Jesus was condemning a "style of leadership" to use your words, and not teaching against positions of leadership in Mt20, Mk10, and Jn14, we know for the reasons I mentioned above, like Jesus retaining his position while serving. There were only 12 apostles (one replacing Judas) who were "an apostle of Jesus Christ" 2Cor1:1. The others, like Barnabas "they are the messengers (apostles) of the churches" 2Cor8:23. You're right that the verse about their authority over demons only relates in that it talks about authority; I was trying to avoid getting into a discussion of things like "whatsoever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven," etc. When the twelve apostles sit on 12 thrones as judges over Israel, it won't be in condemnation but rather in governmental authority in the future Messianic Kingdom - but that's a discussion for another day.

I think both of you have more concern than you need to about Biblical authority structures because you are not aware of the Biblical limits placed upon them. For example, the twelve apostles had more authority than anyone who ever lived besides Yeshua. But even their authority was not unlimited. I believe the Book of Acts, or otherwise called the Book of the Acts of the Apostles, starts out with an example of the apostles overstepping their authority as a warning against unlimited authority. They gave God two choices to replace Judas based on a half-true criteria for choosing and then cast lots and claimed God chose Mathias while God remained absolutely silent. Mathias was indeed "numbered among the twelve," but by the church at large, not by God. Jesus had taught them that the apostles would be his eyewitnesses and they knew the prophecy re Judas from the Psalms so they stepped in to help God out not realizing that God had a supernatural solution in mind by sending Jesus back to teach Paul, "not of man but by revelation" so that Paul could be an eyewitness of the resurrection "as one born out of time." Just like Abraham once stepped in to help God out with Hagar when God had a supernatural plan to give Abraham a son through Sarah. The apostles did not even have the authority to choose a representative for me or you or for each other, so even more-so they did not have authority to choose a representative for Jesus, only Jesus did.

Also, people think that the authority of the apostles and elders operates in the spiritual realm, but all our authority structures operate in the physical realm. For example, a husband and wife become "one flesh", not "one spirit." The apostles placed some laws on the Gentile churches not to eat blood, or things sacrificed to idols, or to commit fornication. This was within their authority to do so and the church is still bound to keep those laws (whatsoever you shall bind, meaning prohibit, on earth will be bound, it's prohibition endorsed by, in heaven). Elders in a church group should lead by consensus, but they have the ultimate authority to decide things like where the next meeting will be, and what the meeting will be like, etc. But no one has the authority to decide what another person believes, for example. I am accountable to God for my doctrine and I will not be able to use someone else as an excuse for my spiritual errors. When Peter got sucked back into legalism Paul stood up against him in Acts 15.

We have all been in many situations where others had authority over us that made bad choices or were not the best of leaders and we know how to handle those situations without rebelling and becoming disrespectful or unsubmitive. If a parent decides we will have the meal outside when the weather report is forecasting a thunderstorm, we respect our parent and go along with the plan to eat outside and when it rains we may think "I told you so," but no real harm done, just some inconvenience to us. If we are supposed to suffer loss rather than take a brother to court we can handle a rained out meal. We can go

along with more serious things than that too, like not buying a car till we graduate, or whatever it is our dad, or boss, or husband wants that is inconvenient to us, which we then do for unity, and out of respect, and "as unto the Lord", meaning we ain't doing it for that person but because we want to please God and God will reward us for it. But we would never disobey God to obey men, or let someone else decide our doctrine for us, or submit to someone acting beyond their authority, like an elder trying to choose a mate for us or something.

As for prophets, we are under obligation to obey the words of their prophecy, because they are the words of God, the same as scripture. However, they have to actually be prophets. Jer14:14, "The prophets prophesy lies in my name: I sent them not, neither have I commanded them, neither spake unto them: they prophesy unto you a false vision and divination, and a thing of nought, and the deceit of their heart." Jer23:25-30, "I have heard what the prophets said, that prophesy lies in my name, saying, I have dreamed, I have dreamed. How long shall this be in the heart of the prophets that prophesy lies? yea, they are prophets of the deceit of their own heart; ... Behold, I am against them that prophesy false dreams, saith the LORD, and do tell them, and cause my people to err by their lies, and by their lightness; yet I sent them not, nor commanded them: therefore they shall not profit this people at all, saith the LORD." I believe the gift of prophesy was given by the laying on of the hands of the twelve apostles of Jesus Christ, so there haven't been any church prophets since the generation after the apostles died. Acts8:18, "when Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money, saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost," which obviously had to be the 'gifts' and 'manifestation' (1Cor12:7) of the Holy Ghost because receiving the Holy Ghost himself only comes via being saved. The church is "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets," Eph2:20, and you only lay a foundation once.

[June 19 at 8:23am](#) · [Edited](#) · [Like](#)

Ian Vincent Re: geographical boundaries of spiritual authority , like we see in the NT (the church in Ephesus, etc.) it's my opinion, only, that the hour on the prophetic clock is too late for that, from now on it will be a matter of finding fellowship where you can find it, even traveling out of your locality.

[June 18 at 1:31am](#) · [Like](#)

Dan Beaty Wayne, your point about the limits of authority is probably at the heart of what concerns many people about positional authority.

But what is your scriptural basis for saying the elders have the authority to decide when and where to meet, but not to determine correct doctrine? How do you know the choosing of Matthias was a mistake? This is a subjective area IMO.

[June 19 at 10:26am](#) · [Unlike](#) · [2](#)

Ian Vincent To Wesley, you said Wayne is advocating a clergy/laity style leadership. I didn't interpret his comments to mean that. Why couldn't we function today as it was in the beginning, with recognized elders, and yet with no clergy class, or any of the trappings of the clergy/laity divide? Fact is that God established His church with recognized elders, and they did not lord it over others as clergy.so, discussion on this topic usually ricochets from one extreme to another without grasping the reality which was there at the beginning.

[June 19 at 8:29pm](#) · [Unlike](#) · [1](#)