The fall of man was essentially a failure of leadership. Rather than choose God over his relationship to the woman, Adam stood by, failed to protect his wife and allowed her to eat fruit from the forbidden tree. Thus, from the very beginning of Judeo-Christian history, leadership effectiveness has been inextricably linked to our ability to honor and glorify God. The earthly leadership of God's people has been vilified, reified, and sanctified by almost exclusively by society, church hierarchy, and governments alike. There is a better, a more Biblical worldview.

Thinking that leadership enhancement, however, will somehow effect the church's influence is paradoxically true and false. On the one hand, good leadership can facilitate others to know Christ—before justification and subsequently through sanctification processes. Similarly poor leadership can obfuscate believers and paralyze unbelievers to inaction. Few things please doubters more than godly men caught up by sin. Even fewer things challenge believers more than their religious leaders who can not keep their pants on, or their hands out of the till. Through it all, paradoxically, people are brought to Christ by Holy Spirit who seems to overcome in spite of leadership failures.

But leadership is a complex construct. A quick visit to Amazon.com reveals "leadership development" is popular, and gauging by over 60 *current* authors, "well understood." It would seem there is much known and much to gain by developing leaders. Attempts to discover unique attributes of leadership, however, belie such simplistic assumptions.[1] Consider, for example, the selection of a king to replace Saul. Initially described as *"… an impressive young man without equal among the Israelites."* [1 Sam 9:2] Samuel noted, *"Do you see the man the LORD has chosen? There is no one like him among all the people."* [1 Sam 10:24] But, God became disappointed; He said, *"I am grieved that I have made Saul king, because he has turned away from Me and has not carried out My instructions."* [1 Sam 15:10] It took God's intervention to see the heart of a man to replace Israel's king.

As seen above, Godly leadership is not only a complex construct, it is also exceedingly vast; accordingly, a full exploration of same is beyond the scope and purpose of this article. The purpose here, while relatively less complex, is also considerably more modest. This article seeks to identify an ethic for leaders of God's people. An ethic must be considered first because "effective" leadership of God's people has been manifested in the Paige Patterson's—**and** the Jim Jones's of the world. Godly leadership is more than "effective" leadership. An ethic must be considered first because at the core of all leadership theories, however conceived and structured, are direct and implied standards of morality. An ethic must be considered first because without standards for the conduct, character and goals of the Godly leader, we have a ship with no rudder "blown and tossed by the wind." There must be a clear explication of the ethic expected for a leader of God's people.

Operationalizations

What is meant by an ethic for Godly leaders? Plagiarized from a well-known source, Godly leadership ethics are defined as:

> "… the **study and application** of morals **prescribed in God's word** that pertains to the **conduct**, **character**, and **goals required** of those who would lead those professing to be in a redemptive relationship with the Lord Jesus the Christ." (D. Jones, 2007)

[1] I continue to find it fruitful, and amazing, to consider the mysterious nature of "leadership." In asking individuals and groups to describe the characteristics of an "ideal" leader, no group ever has ever identified a characteristic that they would not also want in a "follower." With the possible exception of "charisma," a gift as it were (χαρισματι), all the "ideal" attributes of a leader also describe an "ideal" follower. When phenomena have few unique characteristics, they are exceedingly difficult to recognize, understand, and develop behaviorally.

Whether labeled "deacon, pastor, elder, teacher, prophet," or "bishop," the Godly leader has certain expectations for their conduct, character, and goals which set them apart, help define their nature, and assist in their role to glorify God. For sake of linguistic efficiency, the Godly leader who seeks to lead those professing to be in a redemptive relationship with our Lord, whether man or woman, ordained or not, paid or not, will be called "elder" in this article. Because of page constraints, this article will focus on leaders in the local church, as opposed to para-church organizations (e.g., conventions, associations, or seminaries).

What then is the raison d'être of those who would be elders in the local church? What ethic must we seek for them? What standard should we preach, teach, and develop in the hearts of our local leaders? If developed well, such an ethic will reveal God's heart about leaders, thus instructing us well about His will with regard to individual people in particular, and leadership in general.

Some Historical Antecedents

The church has continually fought over and around issues of who is and who is not "the leader." In the first century, we learn from Paul that at least one leader in Timothy's purview needed correction:

> "Do not entertain an accusation against an elder unless it is brought by two or three witnesses. Those who sin are to be rebuked publicly, so that the others may take warning." [1 Tim 5:19-20]

In the second century, Gonzalez reports Ignatius leadership title as "bearer of God" became the basis for his martyrdom by imperial Rome, and influenced not only Antioch for a season, but the entire Christian world as a function of his seven letters while traveling to his execution. He left behind a series of leadership battles over doctrine in Antioch.[2]

As the church dealt with continuingly complex doctrinal issues resulting from persecution, leadership issues were inextricably linked.[3] As the church dealt with language and culture differences, the Latin and Greek church not only grew apart doctrinally, the manner in which they governed their local and province collection of churches differed even more. For example, one tradition chose celibacy for its leaders; the other encouraged marriage.

As leadership waned and waxed in Godly effectiveness, the members of the Western church began to fear, rather than revere, church leadership. Continuingly seeking revenue for fulfilling various leaders dreams of concrete success (e.g., St. Peter's Basilica), the leaders stretched their credibility so far that one touring priest in Rome saw so wide a breach of ethics that he decided to challenge the entire ecclesiastical order. Luther's call for purity, progression, and new permutations set the stage for a whole new round of conflict about just who and how leaders of the church should be designated.

As the Reformation ensued, so did splits about leadership. Anabaptists and Reformed often fought as much about how to govern the church as to what doctrines were Biblical. Their agonistic legacy failed to fade, and wrestling matches over governance punctuated 16th to 21st century church history. While the main competitors were congregational versus elder board versus pastor led governance proponents, it is clear that leadership is more than

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[2]Justo L. Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity, Volume 1: The Early Church to the Dawn of the Reformation* (New York: Harper Collins, 1984), 41-42.

[3]Conflicts over how to deal with the return of those Christians who did not hold up well under the decidedly heavy persecution of Decius became grist for considerable leadership crises. For example, Novatian and Cyprian clashed so much over how to restore such "lapsed" Christians that Rome was "blessed" with two bishops rather than the traditional one per city. See Gonzalez, *op cit.,* 88-90.

structure—it must start with an ethic of just who, how, and what elders are to be in the church—regardless of the governance structure in which they fulfill God's purposes.

Christian Ethics: An Abbreviated Explication

In order to understand an elder ethic, one must outline the nature of an ethic for all Christians, whether designated as elder or not. The *ethical* Christian believes, understands, and acts on the premise that his/her character has been created in the image of God, and therefore protects that image at all costs. Consequently, he/she acts only to achieve goals which glorify God, in a manner solely prescribed by His standards for conduct. When a Christian fails to protect that image, acts to achieve goals that do not glorify God, or fail to follow His standards, that Christian is unethical. The ethic of the elder then must not only include the ethic of the ethical Christian, that ethic must also assist our understanding of those seeking to lead God's people in the local church.

The Elder's Character

Scripture has much to say about the goals, character, and conduct of the elder. First, and foundationally, elders were characterized as those who **walk with God** (e.g., Enoch, Noah, Moses, John the Baptizer). While there was a close relationship between the elder and God, elders were not perfect—David and Moses murdered and lied, Solomon's wisdom did not save him from a rather debaucherous harem, and Noah's drunken stupor caused him to curse his youngest. In all cases, there was a close relationship between the elder and God—a walk as it were (e.g., John portrays Holy Spirit as the παρακλητος, the one who walks alongside; c.f., John 14:16, 14:26, 15:26 and 16:7)

Abraham exemplified a second attribute of an elder's character—**behavioral faith**. When Abraham was called upon to sacrifice his son—the Scripture does not record kvetching, but his entourage moved "straightway" to Moriah. Moses also noted Abraham said to his servants, "We will be back." The Hebrew writer attributes Abraham's obedience to a faith based on knowing God's character; to wit, "Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death." [Hebrews 11:19]

Furthermore, Rahab did not merely mentally assent to God's glory at Jericho, but acted on that faith. James commented that she was considered righteous for lodging spies and sending the king to the wrong direction; the Hebrew writer asserts she **acted** on this "by faith."

The third facet of an elder's character is the **nature of their pride**. Regardless of the manner in which they have been designated, elders have an inherent thorn in the flesh. As people, we become easily addicted to the toxicity of human approval. Church members have been known to twist this thorn, sometimes for sport, often to the point of permanent injury. Thus, the elder must have a Godly pride set within her/himself that may acknowledge social approval but nonetheless continually submits to God.

Elders, like all people, must be wary of this thorn for "Humans will seek social approval, even at the cost of moral disapproval."[4] For example, when Ezekiel was giving advice about the exile, he said:

> "If I tell the righteous man that he will surely live, but then he trusts in his righteousness and does evil, none of the righteous things he has done will be remembered; he will die for the evil he has done." [Ezekiel 33:13]

[4]Porter's Third Law of Human behavior. A caveat: moral approval is often disguised as social approval. It is the Christian ethic that distinguishes between an ethic centered on God's character rather than the character of an individual, social structure or culture. See Appendix A for an analysis of how society has abrogated God's morality as its own.

God wants even the righteous man not to take pride in his righteousness. More positively, for example, when Deborah was giving instructions to Barak, she pointed out the glory would not be to him, but "to a woman" thereby increasing the glory of the battle and the glory to God. After all, she said, "Go! This is the day the LORD has given Sisera into your hands. Has not the LORD gone ahead of you?" [Judges 4:9, 14] Peter, when worshipped by Cornelius, reminded him that he was "only a man myself." [Acts 10:26].

The character of the elder thus must reflect the character of God. Our human appetite for social approval is best diffused by remembering the Trinitarian nature of God—especially how God in one is three persons. At Christ's baptism, the Father defers to the Son—here is My beloved Son in whom I am well-pleased—hear ye Him. Throughout Christ's life, His goal was to please the Father—not the crowds, or even His erstwhile devotedly zealous disciples. And Holy Spirit continues to work among us, not obtaining glory for Himself, but pointing to the Christ and the Father. No greater lesson regarding this "thorn in the flesh" can be wrought that how God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit seek to glorify each other rather than themselves.

The Elder's Conduct

How the local church leader conducts oneself is revealed in a series of instructions by Paul to Titus, for example [Titus 1:5-9]. Paul identifies a series of characteristics which the elder should possess. Again, these "rules of conduct" reflect the nature of God. To illustrate, consider the following table …

ILLUSTRATING GOD'S CHARACTER: PAUL'S ETHIC FOR AN ELDER (USING TITUS 1:5-9)		
Elder Conduct	God's Conduct	Illustrative Implication
"Elders in every town"	God is one, but three.	Elders acting on their own will be limited to the wisdom of one person.
"Blameless"	God is the cause of every-thing, but can not be blamed for the evil men have wrought by their disobedience.	While not perfect, an elder should not be the cause of evil, but its anti-catalyst.
"Husband of one wife"	God is faithful to His bride, even though she often commits idolatry.	An elder is a faithful spouse.
"Not overbearing"	God forces no one to obey, even though He could. There is no glory for God when people honor Him because they have no choice otherwise.	An elder who facilitates Godly behavior in members without helping change their heart has only built a bigger church, not increased the Church.
"Not quick-tempered"	God jealously guards His glory, but He is slow to anger, and abounds in love and faithfulness.	Elders bite their tongue, even when the church is stiff-necked.
"Not given to drunk-enness"	God fills us with Him ra-ther than wine [Ephesians 5:18]	An elder oozes with the Spirit, not spirits.
"Not violent"	God's peace is ειρηνης, (reconciliation) not *pax*.	The elder seeks reconciliation between peo-ple and God, not just the absence of conflict between them.
"Not pursuing dishon-est gain"	God's pursuit is men's hearts—He can seek them honestly because they are His.	Elders seek church growth by honest means—not to meet the needs of people as defined by culture, but to keep culture away and meet the needs of people as defined by God's pursuit.

Elder Conduct	God's Conduct	Illustrative Implication
"Hospitable"	God has provided a home for all who are lost, heavy laden, and just worn out—Himself.	Elders must not be relationally challenged—they, like God, must love people and act on that love. All church members must find an inn in their elders.
"Love that which is good"	God abhors evil—for it is the opposite of who He is.	An elder always looks to find ways to love that which is good. He/she is not ignorant of evil, but actively seeks and reinforces the good in others and him/herself.
"Self-controlled"	God controls the universe for "all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together." [Colossians 1:16a-17]	Not given to tirades of self-righteousness or idiosyncratic penchants, the elder controls her/himself with Godly control.
"Upright, holy, and disciplined"	God is holy.	Elders must be, and seen to be, reliably connected not to the "holiness" of society (see Appendix A), but the disciplined holiness of obedience to God Himself.
"Hold firmly to the trustworthy message"	God's message from the beginning of time has been hold fast to Me and I will protect you. Even when Adam and Eve hid after disobeying Him, seeking repentance, God asked, "Where are you?"	Much presses the elder to move, modify, or massage the Message away from God and toward ticklish ears. Like God, the elder will continue to ask, "Where are you?" The elder will continue to protect, continue to love, continue to hold firmly to that eternal message—God loves righteousness. "Be ye holy."

The Goals of the Elder

God designates elders to glorify Him. Therefore, the essential goal of the elder's ethic is, and must be, glorifying God. But elders have a special obligation in that they are also led to lead others to glorify God. As such, their mission takes on special significance. When God called Saul to proclaim the gospel to the Gentiles, "At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God. All those who heard him were astonished and asked, 'Isn't he the man who raised havoc in Jerusalem among those who call on this name? And hasn't he come here to take them as prisoners to the chief priests?' Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Christ." [Acts 9:20-22] From the beginning, Paul sought to honor his calling by demonstrating that Jesus of Nazareth is indeed the anointed one, Messiah. The goal of all ethical elder conduct must be that same demonstration.

The goal of the ethical leader is also illustrated well by Jesus' dealings with Peter. When He asked Peter, "Do you love Me?," his answer was "of course," but Jesus' response was "feed My sheep." Elders feed His sheep. When Jesus asked the disciples who they say I am, many answers were provided, but Peter answered, You are the Son of God, the Messiah. Jesus told them, and us, that Holy Spirit had revealed this to Peter, not the world. Elders depend on Holy Spirit to guide them to understand the μυστεριον of the gospel, not the world. And when Peter sought to behead Malchus, Jesus reminded him that the cup still must be drunk. [John 18:10ff] Elders who depend on the sword of their own making will not only miss the head of the matter, they will perish by their sword. Only God yields the sword of glory—our sword is the Spirit of God, that is the word of God. [Ephesians 5:17]

Conclusion and Caveat

As with most articles in such a delimited context as this, the reader rarely knows how to constrain his/her interest, in advance of the research necessary to conduct the project. We often seem to cut off more substance than we can handle—we have bigger cerebral eyes than our rational stomach can hold.

When it comes to an ethic of Christians in general and elders in particular, the failure to congeal and stipulate meaningful parameters is no more apparent than in this article. Not only were a variety of issues not covered in breadth (e.g., elders and money, when the gender of the elder makes a difference within the church, etc.), there were also issues that were not covered sufficiently deeply. For example, this article barely touched whether the characteristics of Godly leaders listed in Scripture are to be treated fundamentally, or as broad attributions. In other words, if a person is called by Holy Spirit to lead, but has does not exhibit hospitality for example, should he/she seek another role in the church?

Additionally, there is no systematic review of ethical standards for elders in extra-Biblical materials (or Biblical materials for that matter). A comparison and contrast of these standards across ecclesiastically high and low churches might provide fruitful insights into the causes for our wrestling matches about governance. Perhaps a route to unity, at least among Biblically-focused groups, might start with the explication of an ethic for our leaders. Such an analysis was not even begun in this high-sounding but actually modest article.

But, what has been learned? Like all people, elders can easily get carried away with myopic focus on having the right character and acting little (Jamesian indictment). Or, elders can obsess on conduct so much that the character or goals of their sheep are ignored. Sheep are dumb—sometimes we are unaware of our goals or character, or even the consequences of our conduct. As under-shepherds, elders must continue to feed the sheep, love the sheep, and shelter the sheep. Eventually if the elder has done his/her job well, the sheep will realize that they too must heed the call to be under-shepherds. All were given the commission to teach, baptize and make disciples—not just the elder.

When elders are called by Holy Spirit to open eyes that are blind, free captives, and release those from the dungeons of darkness, He decrees that the elder's hand will be held, and a covenant and light for the Gentiles will be made out of the elder. [Isaiah 42:6-7] This hand-holding, covenant creating God designated Messiah as the ultimate elder—the eldest brother as it were. Thus, we who seek a designation as "elder" have a powerful set of shoulders on which to stand, and a wonderful yoke with whom to share. For we seek God's face, we seek God's glory, we seek God's people. We are elders.

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Gonzalez, Justo L. *The Story of Christianity, Volume 1.* New York: Harper Collins, 1984.

APPENDIX A[5]

"IDOLATRY'S SEDUCTIVE POWER IN THE 21ST CENTURY: REBUILDING OUR ETHICAL FOUNDATIONS"

The depravity and beauty of human beings are sometimes so inextricably linked that it is often difficult to isolate which is which. No better example of this ungodly marriage is found than how society has appropriated deity-based ethics as its own. The theft has not only been subtle, it has abrogated God's sovereignty, seduced believers, and comforted non-believers into idolatry. The problem is subtle, severe, and vast. An explication and plan for reconfiguring our ethical foundations follows.

PROPOSITION I

God created human beings "in Our image, in Our likeness" (Genesis 2:26). Since the nature of Father God is spirit (John 4:24) and the nature of Holy Spirit God is obviously spirit (Genesis 1:2; John 14:16-18), and the Christ emptied Himself yet added humanity through Holy Spirit (Luke 2:35; Philippians 2:7), then we can learn much about God by understanding ourselves—our spiritual selves. Of course, myopic use of this approach is problematic. The better way to understand God is by studying what He has revealed through the Word, Scripture and His creation, which of course we are a part.

We human beings, however, are rarely content with the finite nature of our understanding; nonetheless, we continue to seek to understand the infinite with finite knowledge. This continuing quest for understanding our purpose, our nature, and our universe in which our nature expresses our purpose is part of our God-given legacy from creation (cf., Psalm 8:4—"What is man that You are mindful" of us? and Ephesians 1:9—"And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ …").

PROPOSITION II

God created human beings to worship Him (Genesis 2:8, Ephesians 1:5, Romans 1:19-20). While there are other reasons for our creation (e.g., to be loved by God and to love others), worshipping God is central. If God is God, then He will act in the nature of a god. A god seeks to be worshipped—if He is truly God. As God, He is completely Holy; and thus, when in relationship with us, demands His holiness, sovereignty, and omnipotence be acknowledged, praised, and worshipped.

We know that when our divine nature is constrained or poisoned by culture, it will nonetheless manifest itself in other ways—ways that often are deleterious, if not tragically sinful. For example, God created humans to seek intimacy with others. When obfuscated by sociological (culture) or psychological forces (ego, id, & superego), the drive for intimacy can be satisfied by marital faithfulness, or marital unfaithfulness. Similarly, human beings were created with a drive to worship. It too can be directed toward the sublime, or the coarse.

PROPOSITION III

Today's idolatry desecrates the human drive to worship (2 Kings 22-23; 2 Timothy 4:3). Given the God-given drive of human beings to worship, they will worship. Surreptitiously, the idol makers of today seduce humans with this power. Our societies manage human behavior by rewarding those who manifest characteristics of a worship-driven human being. Corporations praise workers for their self-sacrifice, dedication to service, and faithfulness to the corporate vision, mission, and objective. Organizations praise individuals who put the organization first, are generous with their time and money, and become virtual "citizens of the organization." "Why he's no ordinary man, he's an Exxon-man!" Religious institutions are not immune for they too guilt the disobedient into faithful service, manipulate social cliques to build membership rolls, and promise social approval for faithful-like behavior.

[5]This appendix was based on work in Dr. D. Jones' class in Christian Ethics at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fall 2007.

Reasonable people recognize that it is not "bad" to be faithful to our employing organizations, our social clubs, or our religious institutions. But when we use these criteria as indications of worth—as a substitute for worshipping the Creator—like artificial sweetener, we desecrate the altar and its temple. We leave a bitter taste in God's mouth. After all, the commands of the Lord are compared to honey, not Sweet 'n Low (Psalm 19:9a-10).

Bottom-line? When we revere within ourselves or others, for example, the faithfulness of a "good employee" as if it were equal to faithfulness to God the Creator, we insult the Creator.

PROPOSITION IV

Idolatrous entities use our "worship drive" for its ethical foundation rather than God (Romans 1:22-23). Anarchists, atheists, agnostics, and secularists alike need ethics just as much as believers. If there is no standard for what is right or wrong, then laws, rules, and even norms can not be established. Furthermore, society never has sufficient resources to police, and therefore, can not police all "unethical" behavior. There must be social conditioning apparatuses; otherwise, we would expend the vast majority of our energy supervising ourselves as if we were small children.

Accordingly, society has appropriated and thus stolen, if not abrogated, God's standards for worship—faithfulness, trustfulness, honesty, contrition, compassion, to name just a few. Society has used these standards for managing society by proposing that faithfulness, trustfulness, honesty, contrition, et cetera are the touchstones of ethics.

It is difficult to overstate the evil and subtlety of this seduction. To be faithful to the Hitlers of the world is evil. To be compassionate only to those I know is evil. To be honest only because I want others to trust me is evil. To be faithful to my wife simply because others (or she) would reject me is evil. To be contrite because it will get me what I want is evil.

To be good for the wrong reason is evil. To be good to please God is what He intended in our creation, and expects daily. Yes, God is smart. And, when obeyed, His dictates are extraordinarily functional—both culturally, socially, and psychologically—but when it's all said and done, our God created us to be used for His glory, not to be used by the world for its sordid purposes. From the beginning God has known that if we worship Him, seek Him, love Him, we will be what **He** wants us to be—not the world's whore.

Paul wrote to the church at Colosse saying, "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving."

Finally, Jesus the Christ said it is important to worship God the Father in spirit and in truth. Our spirit is God's and our truth must be His. When we worship, then, let us be wary of who and what we are worshipping. The world would have us worship faithfulness to a king rather than the King.

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