

# WHO'S THE BOSS AROUND HERE ANYWAY

By Tony and Felicity Dale

In the late sixties and early seventies, the Holy Spirit was moving powerfully on both sides of the Atlantic. In the States, it was the days of the “Jesus movement.” The emphasis brought by the Holy Spirit into many American churches was of God’s supernatural power. Many unusual healing ministries were released, new church movements were birthed, such as Calvary Chapel and Vineyard, along with much of the church being challenged by the faith movement. In the U.K., the emphasis was different, with the charismatic movement leading into an understanding of the importance of being the body of Christ. Church structure and government came to the fore, as God raised up apostolic and prophetic ministries to call the church to repentance and faith. The emphasis tended to be on character rather than charisma. Both countries had a lot to learn from each other. The strengths on one side of the Atlantic tended to be the weaknesses on the other. How to learn from and build on each other’s strengths was the challenge.

One of the most controversial issues surrounding the type of church life that we are discussing is that of leadership. Some people feel that the church does not need any kind of structured leadership - that if the church consists of small groups, they do not need to designate any specific leadership. However, the New Testament church did appoint leaders, some of whom at times

exerted very strong leadership. At the other extreme is the CEO, business style leadership, where one man has the vision and carries the authority to work that vision out. The development of the “mega-churches” with their large staffs and polished programs would typify this style of leadership, which has become the norm for “successful” churches in the States. However, it is hard to show this kind of leadership in the New Testament either. So what was the nature of leadership in the early church?

A quick read of the New Testament leaves one with no doubt as to who was in charge of the church. It was Jesus, working through the Holy Spirit! Colossians 1:18 states, “Christ is the head of the church, which is His body.” The Book of Acts makes it plain that this was worked out in practice. For example, Acts 13:2 says, “One day as these men (the prophets and teachers of the church in Antioch) were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Dedicate Barnabas and Saul for the special work I have for them.’ ” The anticipation was clearly that God would guide in the practical, day-to-day life of the church.

So what we are really looking for in church leadership is a context that allows the Lord to lead. This is not a democracy, nor a CEO type leadership, but a style where Jesus Himself is welcomed to lead His church. How can that actually happen in this day and age? Isn't that just pie in the sky? Our experience is that it is not only possible, but also eminently practical. We just need a new look at the nature of authority as lived and taught by Jesus.

In Matthew 20:25-27 Jesus states, “You know that in this world, kings are tyrants, and officials lord it over the people beneath them. But among you it should be quite different. Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must become your slave. For even I, the Son of Man, came here not to be served but to serve others, and to give my life as a ransom for many.” Jesus was the supreme example of servant leadership. Paul gives us some insight into this leadership style in I Thessalonians 2:7 and 8 when he says, “but we were as gentle among you as a mother feeding and caring for her own children. We loved you so much that we gave you not only God’s Good News but our own lives too.” And Peter, giving advice to the elders in I Peter 5 states, “Care for the flock of God entrusted to you. Watch over it willingly, not grudgingly-not for what you will get out of it, but because you are eager to serve God. Don’t lord it over the people assigned to your care, but lead them by your good example.” It is clear throughout the New Testament that authority is of a servant nature, willing to submit to others, gentle and loving and willing to lay down one’s life for others.

On a number of occasions we have seen what this means in practice. Several years ago, Tony had a clear sense that the Lord was leading us to start a Christian school as a part of the work of the church. We worked at the time in the East End of London; an inner city area that most Christians left as their kids grew older, because the schools were so bad, both academically and spiritually. The leadership team was with him in this desire, except for one person. Our pattern was to wait until there was a clear unanimity in all-important decisions. We trusted the Holy Spirit that he would give

a “green light” to go ahead when He brought us to the place of being of one heart and one mind. At the right time, in an amazing way, when the Lord was also going to make a superb property available to us for the school, this “common mind” came to all on the leadership team.

Contrast this with the “senior pastor” concept that is normal in American churches. In one of the first churches that we were a part of in the States we were told in no uncertain terms that the vision was the pastor’s, and everyone else was to support the pastor’s vision. We have found that this pattern exists in practice in most American churches. There is a CEO who definitely has the first and the final say. The interesting thing is that both the senior pastor and the congregations seem to like it that way. Our impression has been that the adulation that is received by many senior pastors is close to idolatry. Of course we should respect our leaders; that is both natural and Biblical. But we had better be careful about putting them on pedestals, or they might fall off. Remember Humpty Dumpty!

In Matthew 23 Jesus warns the religious leaders of His day that, “they enjoy being called ‘Rabbi.’ Don’t ever let anyone call you ‘Rabbi,’ for you have only one teacher, and all of you are on the same level as brothers and sisters. And don’t address anyone here on earth as ‘Father,’ for only God in heaven is your spiritual Father...” Yet in the evangelical/charismatic world of today, the pastor loves to be called “Pastor.” The people who hang on his every utterance place him on a pedestal. This idolatry is not entirely the senior pastor’s fault. The church culture of today teaches the people to

have this kind of attitude towards its leaders. This is unfair. No wonder so many pastors end up acting as CEOs rather than as the servants that they were called to be. As the paid professional, they are not only expected to hear God about the direction of the church, but also to hear from God on a weekly basis for the Sunday and Wednesday night sermons, to organize the programs, visit the sick, and run a perfect family life too! It is not surprising that many, trying to live up to this impossible image, end up shipwrecked morally or physically.

It reminds me of the respect that was shown to us when we worked as doctors. Put on that white coat (and make sure that everyone can see your stethoscope) and you automatically become the leader, the boss. That kind of respect is only skin deep. It is character that makes the person, not position. The trouble is that it is rather fun being given that respect, even when it may not be deserved. When Tony began working within American churches, he inadvertently caused considerable problems for the pastors that he was working with by refusing to let the people call him “pastor” or “doctor”. He didn’t want, and wouldn’t accept, the prestige that comes from the position. Church leaders need to gain respect by laying down their lives rather than by upholding their position. Part of the problem here is that this pattern of church, with a senior pastor as the main leader, is not a scriptural model. In fact, the term “pastor” as such, is only used once in the New Testament, in Ephesians 4, and then only as one of a group of ministries within the church. If you look closely at New Testament church leadership, there is not a single example of a church being led by one man. In every case, whether it is Jerusalem, Antioch, or Ephesus, a plurality

of leaders is described. In Acts 14, we see Paul and Barnabas returning to the churches they had planted and appointing elders (plural) in every church. So we see that local church government was by a group of leaders.

What were the qualifications that these leaders were supposed to have? It was not seminary training, or a degree in theology. In 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1, there is a description of the necessary qualifications to be a leader. The focus is far more on issues of character and lifestyle than anything else. It was, and remains, far more important for the church to be led by men and women of character and integrity than charisma! How different today, when the ability to entertain (whether in preaching or leading worship) from the platform is the major ingredient in the choice of pastor or worship leader. The search committee may be able to offer the right salary to draw away a person from another church, but this hardly constitutes a call from God!

There is an incredible safety for those in leadership, when the church is run along New Testament lines through a group of leaders. I remember when Tony was doing a huge amount of national and international travel connected with the ministry that he ran among physicians and other health care professionals. He was also one of the leaders of the church we were a part of in the East End of London. The leadership team of our church in London decided that he was away far too much, and that our family life was suffering. (Now I had been telling him that for months!) God was blessing incredibly wherever he traveled. Yet, because he was a part of a team that willingly submitted their lives to each other, he

agreed that he would only be away for a maximum of two Sundays in any given month. I praise God for the collective wisdom of that leadership team! If leaders were genuinely a part of an inter-submitted team which practiced a mutual accountability, I very much doubt if we would have seen half the church scandals that have so devastated the church in the States in recent years.

Let me to describe to you a little of the way that the leadership team works. It has proven to be a successful model in establishing a variety of churches in different countries and cultures. We meet on a regular basis, giving the majority of the time to worshipping and seeking the Lord. The more business things we have to cover, the more important it is to spend extensive times in His presence. If we fail to do that, it invariably takes us hours just to cover a few details. If we spend an hour or more in His presence, we can cover a huge amount in a very short time because we will all be of the same mind. Added to this, the Lord is free to break in and frequently does so, giving us prophetic words or insights that may totally change the course of the leadership meetings. I well remember our early experiences of leadership meetings that followed this pattern. In those days, one would never dare go into a meeting with unconfessed sin, because the Holy Spirit would invariably break through in some way to reveal and deal with it. Scary, but awesome!

Church leadership is not only seen in the context of the local church. Clearly Paul and others, such as the council of Jerusalem (Acts 15), had authority that went far beyond the local church, both through their force of personality and through their apostolic role. It

is clear that the Lord is again producing in His church worldwide, a respect and expectation that similar giftings are still being released into the body of Christ. What people like Peter Wagner call “the new apostolic reformation” is really just recognition that throughout church history God has raised up apostolic and prophetic men and women to help with spearheading His work.

William Burton, pioneer Pentecostal missionary to the Congo (Zaire), left over a thousand churches established by the end of his life. John Wimber, founder of the Vineyard movement here in the United States, may have been hesitant to use the term “apostle” to describe his own ministry, but many others would recognize him as fitting that office. Watchman Nee, whose sermons on church life were put together in a little book, *The Normal Christian Church Life*, describes very clearly the role of apostles and prophets. Watchman Nee left behind an indigenous church movement that has touched millions in China. His work has also laid the foundation for many of the new churches that have emerged around the world.

You do not have to think that modern day apostles are of the same category as the twelve apostles, to believe that apostles are for today. Clearly, this generation needs every gift that the risen and ascended Christ wants to pour on his church (See Ephesians 4). The church is still being built on the “foundation of the apostles and prophets” (Ephesians 2:20). One of the weaknesses that we see so prevalent in the smaller independent churches meeting in homes and storefronts across this nation, is that they do not want, nor do they accept, the moderating influence of apostolic and prophetic ministries that come from outside their own fellowship. This leads



to significant weaknesses. Suspicious of anything from outside, they tend to become insular and at times arrogant, and sadly some, like the Exclusive Brethren of old, end up feeling that they are the only true Christians around. It doesn't take a prophet to discern that they might be wrong!

When local churches welcome the input of those they recognize from outside as apostles and prophets, they are availing themselves of a safeguard that the Lord has provided. Churches that remain open to outside ministry are less likely to become insular and inward looking. These churches are not limited by the gifting and ability of their own people, but can receive strength from those gifted ministries that Jesus has put into His body, to help His body grow and mature unto "the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ."

The apostle Paul, in writing to one of the churches, comments that, "though you have had many teachers, you've only had one spiritual father" (I Corinthians 4:15). An apostle is not necessarily viewed as being in the office of "apostle" by all of the churches that he/she visits. Paul "fathered" the church at Corinth, and as such was naturally viewed by the Corinthians as an apostle. Does this mean that everyone who has planted a church is apostolic in nature? Not at all. This would be no truer than saying that everyone who has given a word in prophecy is prophetic by calling. What does need to be recognized is that some are called as apostles and others as prophets. This is biblical, and was a gift of the ascended Jesus to His church (Ephesians 4).

But as the work of the Ephesians 4 ministries is to “release the saints for the work of the ministry”, let’s see how all of God’s people become involved.