



10 studies on Church Hierarchy – 3rd draft

Does the New Testament endorse a hierarchy for church?

This series of Bible studies attempts to look at the question “does the New Testament endorse a hierarchy for church?” The question assumes that there is a hierarchy in church so I have included the article on page 2 to support that assumption, in case there was any doubt. But *should* there be a hierarchy in church? Is the hierarchy something the early church adopted because all the social structures of the time had hierarchies or is it endorsed by the New Testament i.e. is it Biblical to have a hierarchy in church? If there was no hierarchy in church would it work in practise? How would things happen if there was no hierarchy?

I've tried to present studies to help you answer these questions. The first 6 studies use Bible passages that seem to suggest that no, the New Testament does not endorse a hierarchy for church – the NO argument. The next 3 studies use Bible passages that seem to suggest that yes, the New Testament does endorse a hierarchy for church – the YES argument. The 10th study tries to bring you to a conclusion on the issue. Of course, I have an opinion and you will probably guess what it is but my hope is that this series helps you make up your own mind.

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In preparing these studies I've used the following sources:, New Bible Dictionary 3rd edition, New Illustrated Bible Dictionary, The Lion handbook to the Bible, Lead with Wisdom by Mark Strom, “Reverting to Religion: even evangelicals?” by Mark Strom, Briefing #132, 4/4/1994, “The Evangelical Double Standard not an article about women's ordination”, The Briefing #14, 1/11/1988, The Message of Exodus by Alec Motyer, The Prophecy of Isaiah by Alec Motyer, The Message of Ezekiel by Christopher J. H. Wright, Hebrews for Everyone by Tom Wright, The Wrong Messiah by Nick Page, sermons by John Dickson at St Andrews, Roseville when preaching on Hebrews 2012 and “Don't Throw the Baby out with the Bathwater” 2013, 1 Corinthians 8-15 The Handbook for a Healthy Church Bible study booklet by Naremburn Cammeray Anglican Church, Ugly beautiful 26 Bible studies on 1 Corinthians from St Barnabas November 2015, article by David Fitch 16/9/2015 at missioalliance.org called “Not a Hierarchy, Not a Democracy, But a Pneumatocracy: The Church's True Politics”, and an article by Ed O'Connor at <http://www.members.iinet.net.au/~birdocon/> called “Sharing the Leadership”.

Study 1, The NO argument 1, servant, Mark 10:35-45

Getting started

1. What is hierarchy in church?



The following article gives us an idea of what church hierarchy is in the Anglican Church.

Within most denominations, and the Anglican Church particularly, the ways of this world have been allowed to steadily undermine the 'servant' character of Christian ministry. Jesus harangued the Pharisaic rabbis for their love of long flowing robes [Luke 20:46, Mark 12:38-39], and grandiose titles [Matt 23:7] and the seats of honour in synagogues [Luke 11:43, Matt 23:6]. They revelled in the power and status associated with their position. By contrast, the symbols of status, power and authority were not to be the pattern of ministry for the followers of Jesus.

Yet within Anglicanism there has developed exactly this structure of power, with all its symbols and titles. In nearly every Anglican Church building in Australia, there is a special chair set aside for the Bishop, and a seat of honour for the Rector (irrespective of his role in conducting a particular meeting). There are robes for ministers to wear both in and outside church meetings, most of them being scarves and over-coats (which are completely inappropriate to our cultural context, not to mention our climate). Other robes, such as hoods, are used to indicate the minister's authority, and others make symbolic reference to the kind of mediatorial priesthood that Anglicanism rejected at the Reformation.

Then there are the titles that are used to indicate one's place in the Anglican hierarchy. Though revered by few, most clergy are called Reverend, some Very Reverend, others Right Reverend, and some even Most Reverend. We have Venerables and Canons, not to mention Bishops, Priests, Deacons, Vicars, Rectors, Curates, Archdeacons, Lay Readers, Church-wardens, and Parish Councillors.

These titles delineate our place in the pecking order — the higher up we are, the further back we walk in ecclesiastical parades. Worse than this, for the congregation member and the outsider they create a perception of hierarchy, of rule and lordly authority.

Most of these titles have no Biblical origin, and even those that do come from the Bible have been considerably distorted from their original use. Bishops, for instance, in the New Testament are equivalent to the presbyters/elders. Nowadays, the bishops are more like deacons — they administer the affairs of denominational life, care for widows and orphans, and allow those engaged in the ministry of the word and sacraments to get on with their task (see Acts 6). But in so doing they are somehow seen to be at the top of the ecclesiastical tree!

Likewise, 'priest' in the Bible most often refers to the Old Testament intermediaries between God and Israel. Jesus has made this priesthood redundant and inappropriate — he is our one great High Priest who has made a full, perfect and sufficient sacrifice, mediating complete salvation for his people. And yet we persist in the confusing practice of calling our pastors 'priests'.

These manifold symbols of status and authority are not empty — they represent a reality that is deep-seated. The almost supreme power of the Rector in his parish has stifled many a long-suffering congregation, to the detriment of gospel ministry. The failure of our structures to allow the 'elders' of the congregation to exercise leadership and ministry has been one of the great failures of Anglicanism. The use and abuse of power within the episcopal administration has at times been scandalous, and usually operates as a disincentive to the preaching of the gospel at the grass roots. Constant haggling over power in synodical government, which reduces our fellowship to legal enactment, has been a sad reflection of Anglicanism's departure from true Christian fellowship.

From "The Evangelical Double Standard not an article about women's ordination", The Briefing #14, 1/11/1988.

2. You may already have an opinion on the question “does the New Testament endorse a hierarchy for church?” It will be interesting to see if you have that same opinion at the end of these studies. So the first question is

(a) Do you think the New Testament endorses a hierarchy for church?

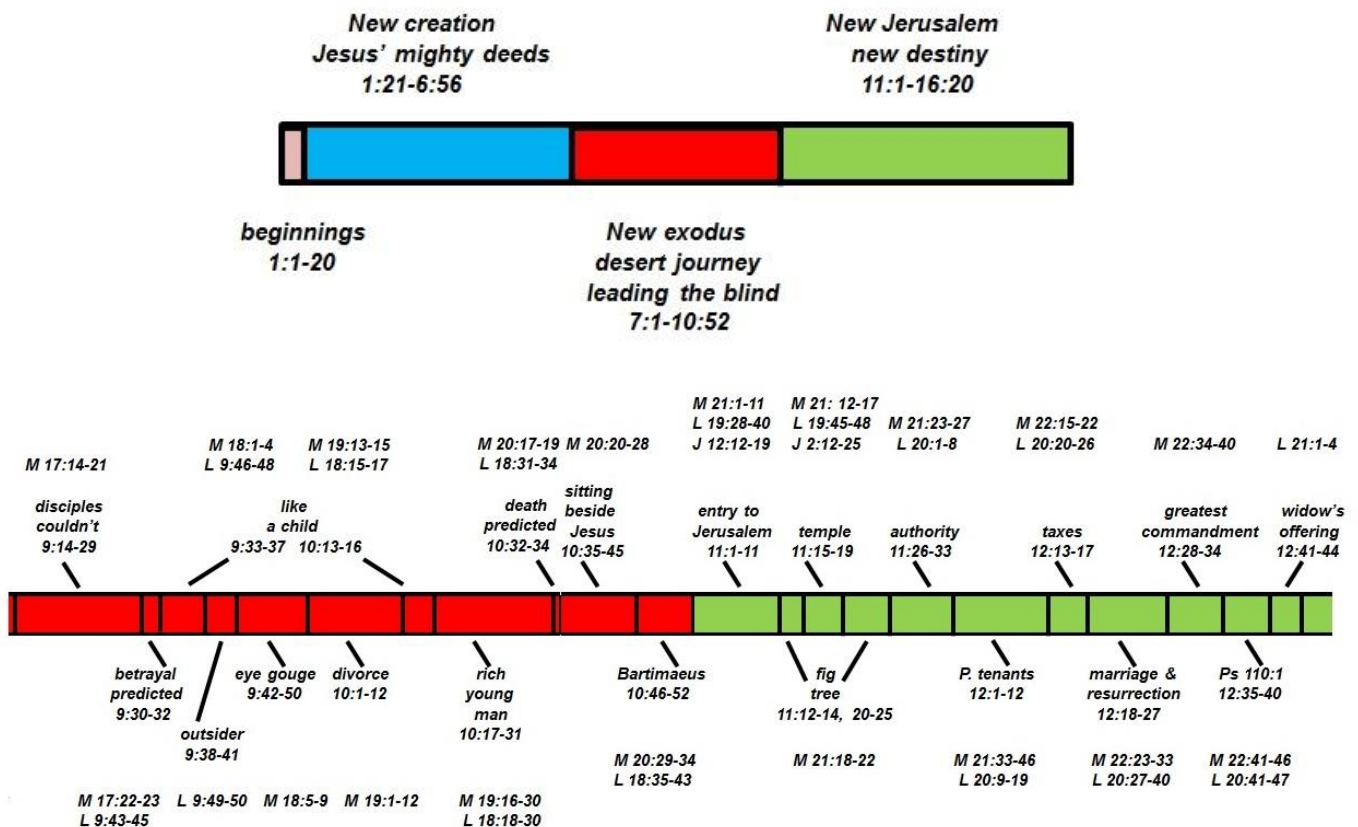
(b) What is it that has brought you to have this opinion?

Bible

3. Read Mark 10:35-45 (= Matt 20:20-28).

Context: Jesus has been healing and teaching about the kingdom of God. This event occurs just before he enters Jerusalem and goes to his death.

Mark's Gospel



(a) Why were the disciples indignant (v41)?

(b) (i) What is it about the way the Gentiles ruled that Jesus advised against?

(ii) What alternative did Jesus suggest?

(iii) How would that work out in practise for us - at work?

- at home?

- at church?

(b) What do these verses tell us about leadership?



It is here, in the months leading up to Passover, that James and John come to Jesus with a request: they want to sit at his right and left hand in his 'glory' (Mark 10:37). In Matthew's Gospel it is not just the brothers, but their mother too, who make the request (Matt. 20:21), but probably all three were involved in the petition.

In Jewish tradition older women were treated with respect, and as we have seen, this may have been Salome, the sister of Mary (Matt. 27:55; Mark 15:40; John 19:25). They are family. But they are asking the impossible. Although they confidently assert that they can drink the cup that Jesus will drink, they have completely misunderstood the nature of status in his kingdom. They think that what is being planned in the ravines of Ephraim is some kind of messianic coup. But in the hours of his 'glory', the only people at Jesus' left and right hand will be convicted criminals.

James and John do not know what they are asking, but, in Myers' words, 'they do know how the ruling class operates'. To sit at the right and left hand of a ruler was to sit in the highest places of honour. At banquets and public events, people jostled for positions of influence and patronage among the nobility. This is why Jesus slaps them down with his condemnation of the leadership among the Gentiles — by which he clearly means the Romans. The statement drips with sarcasm: 'You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognise as their rulers lord it over them, and there great ones are tyrants over them' (Mark 10:42). You can sense the quote marks here: the 'so-called' rulers, the 'great ones'.

In fact, he goes to the other extreme. Whoever wants to lead in his kingdom will be like a slave in the Gentiles' world. Far from sitting at the top table, the kingdom leader's role is to be a waiter, a nobody. 'For who is greater,' asks Jesus, 'the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one at the table? But I am among you as one who serves' (Luke 22:27). Jesus uses two words here: *doulos*, which means 'slave', and *diakonos*, which means 'servant' (Matt. 20:26-28). It is significant that when the early church came to name the officials who looked after their churches, they chose one of the words used here: they became 'deacons'. They became servants.

From The Wrong Messiah by Nick Page pp 218-219.

To finish

4. How should this servanthood idea apply to the organisational structure of the church?
5. Is this passage relevant to church hierarchy or to how authority is to be exercised in church or both? Give reasons for your answer.

Study 2, The NO argument 2, children, Matt 18:1-4, 19:13-15

Getting started

1. What criteria do you use when evaluating how "great" someone is?
2. Is it wrong to want to be great? Why/why not?
3. What is true greatness?



N.B. After each study I write a summary of the arguments so far. This is so that, if you are doing one study a week, for example, you can quickly get up to speed on the discussion. The summaries are slanted towards the NO or YES side rather than giving arguments from both sides.

Does the New Testament endorse a hierarchy for church?

The argument so far . . .

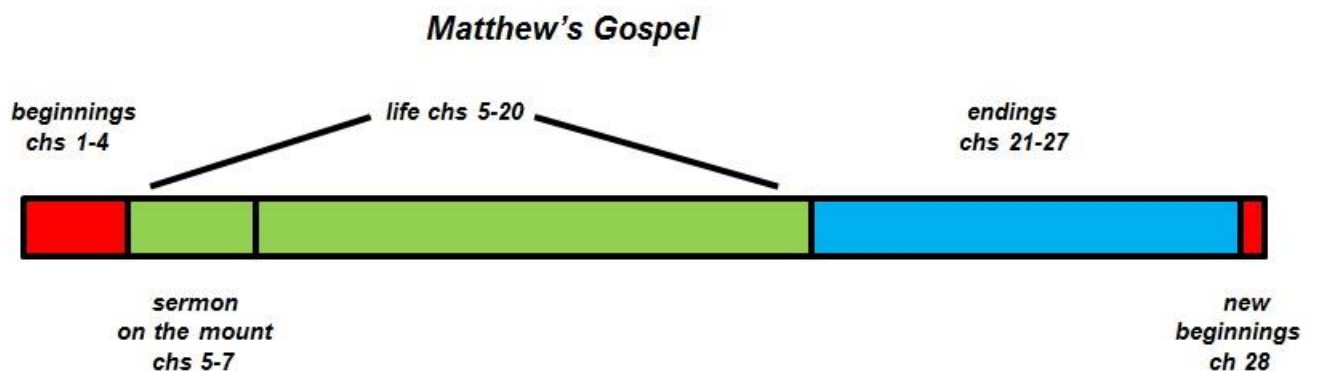
NO

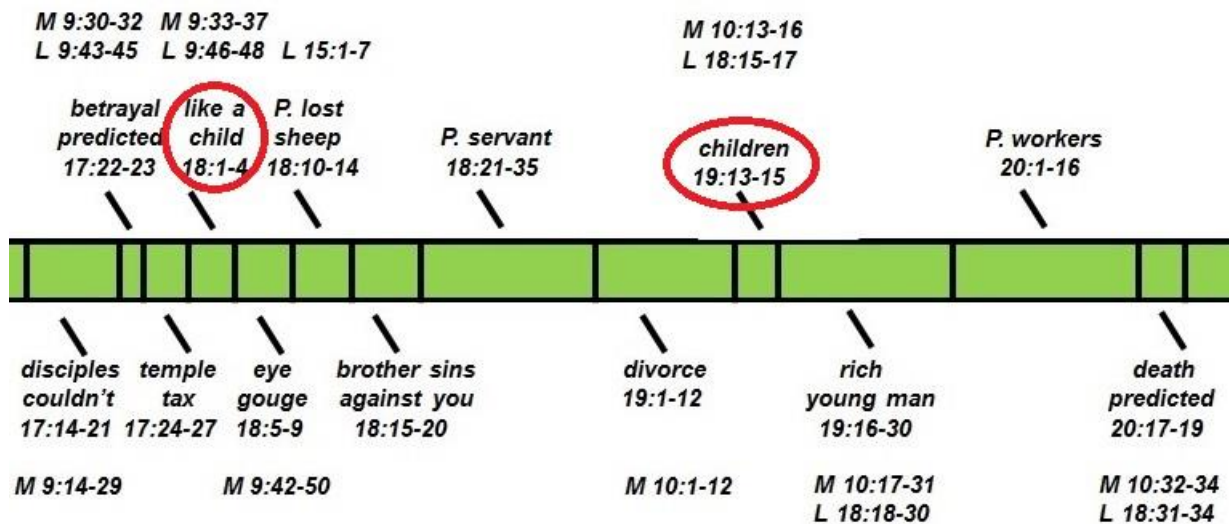
Mark 10:35-45 (Matt 20:20-28). James and John wanted to sit either side of Jesus when he came into his glory. Jesus said that if they wanted to be great they must be servants or slaves of others rather than lord it over them. This suggests the opposite of hierarchy.

Bible

4. Read Matt 18:1-4, 19:13-15 (= Mark 9:33-37, Luke 9:46-48, = Mark 10:13-16, Luke 18:15-17).

Context: Jesus has been healing and teaching about the kingdom of God.





(a) What is it about little children such that the kingdom of heaven belongs to them (Matt 19:14)?



(b) (i) How does Jesus answer the disciples' question in Matt 18:1?

(i) What is it about humility that allows us to be great in the kingdom of heaven?

(iii) How does knowing Jesus help us to be humble?

Along the way Jesus again talks of dark days ahead; but the disciples seem unable or unwilling to confront this reality. Instead they start arguing about who is the greatest. (Easy to see how this could come about. One can imagine the three disciples who had been up the mountain looking condescendingly at those who had failed at the mountain's base [Matt 17:1-13].) Jesus responds to this in a formal, rabbinic style: he sits down and calls them to him (Mark 9:35 [= Matt 18:1-4]). It is a seminar, a class about leadership. And, like everything else in the kingdom, it is upside down. The bottom is the top, the first is the last. The visual aid is a child. It is a striking image, because no one in the first-century Jewish world would see a child as a religious role model. Jesus is talking about service here. Whoever welcomes — i.e. 'serves' — these children is serving him; but in the household of his time the women, children and slaves did the welcoming, brought you food, washed your feet. In Aramaic the word for 'child' and the word for 'servant' are the same — talya.

The disciples are behaving childishly, but they need to behave like children. Jesus' teaching on leadership is informed all the time by a subversion of the models he sees around him. Leadership, for Jesus, is all bound up with service. We shall see this in its fullness in the Upper Room, the night before his execution [Luke 22:24-30]. His description of how honour and status work in the kingdom he is establishing is all about role reversal. It is an upside-down world, where the last is first, where the landless day labourer who works for one hour gets the same rate as

Study 3, The NO argument 3, Mary & Martha, Luke 10:38-42

Getting started

1. What are the 5 most important things in your life? How would you put these in order of priority and what governs your thinking in making those priorities?

I thought it might be interesting to read this brief section from Wm. Paul Young's fictional work The Shack because it deals with **priorities**. This section is from pp 206 – 207. Sarayu is the Holy Spirit, Papa is God, the Father, and Mackenzie is the main (human) character of the story.

"The trouble with living by priorities," Sarayu spoke, "is that it sees everything as a hierarchy, a pyramid, and you and I have already had that discussion. If you put God at the top, what does that really mean and how much is enough? How much time do you give me before you can go on about the rest of your day, the part that interests you so much more?"

Papa again interrupted. "You see, Mackenzie, I don't just want a piece of you and a piece of your life. Even if you were able, which you are not, to give me the biggest piece, that is not what I want. I want all of you and all of every part of you and your day."

2. Does this change your ideas on priorities? If so, how so?

Does the New Testament endorse a hierarchy for church?

The argument so far . . .

NO

Mark 10:35-45 (Matt 20:20-28). James and John wanted to sit either side of Jesus when he came into his glory. Jesus said that if they wanted to be great they must be servants or slaves of others rather than lord it over them. This suggests the opposite of hierarchy.

Matt 18:1-4, 19:13-15 (= Mark 9:33-37, Luke 9:46-48, = Mark 10:13-16, Luke 18:15-17). Jesus welcomes children and tells them to change and be like children if they want to be great. Church hierarchy needs to change and become like children.

Bible

3. Read Luke 10:38-42

Luke's Gospel

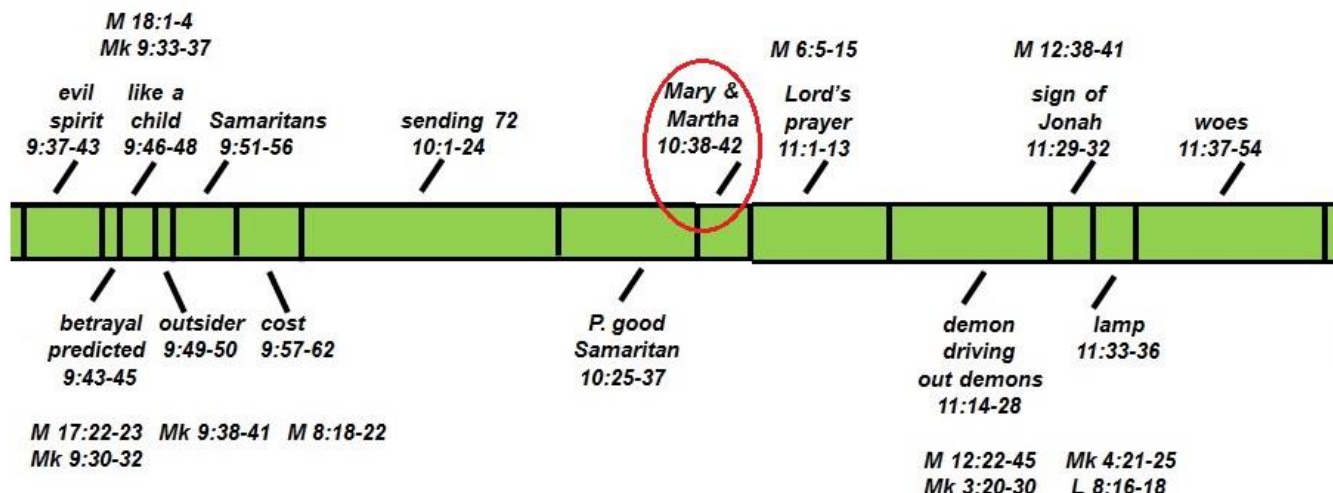
beginnings
1:1-4:30

endings
19:28-23:56



life
4:31-19:27

new beginnings
ch 24



Do you think there is anything unfair in this story? Why/why not?

4. What are Martha's positive and negative qualities?
5. What are Martha's priorities?
6. What are Mary's priorities?
7. How would you describe the way Jesus handled the situation?

The real problem between Martha and Mary wasn't the workload that Martha had in the kitchen. That, no doubt, was real enough, but it wasn't the main thing that was upsetting Martha. Nor was it (as some have suggested) that both the sisters were romantically attracted to Jesus and Martha was jealous of Mary's adoring posture, sitting at Jesus' feet. If there was any such feeling, Luke neither says nor hints anything about it. No: the real problem was that Mary was behaving as if she were a man. In that culture, as in many parts of the world to this day, houses were divided into male 'space' and female 'space', and male and female roles were strictly demarcated as well. Mary had crossed an invisible but very important boundary within the house, and another equally important boundary within the social world.

The public room was where the men would meet; the kitchen, and other quarters unseen by outsiders, belonged to the women. Only outside, where little children would play, and in the married bedroom, would male and female mix. For a woman to settle down comfortably among the men was bordering on the scandalous. Who did she think she was? Only a shameless woman would behave in such a way. She should go back into the women's quarters where she belonged. This wasn't principally a matter of superiority and inferiority, though no doubt it was often

perceived and articulated like that. It was a matter of what was thought of as the appropriate division between the two halves of humanity.

In the same way, to sit at the feet of a teacher was a decidedly male role. 'Sitting at someone's feet' doesn't mean (as it might sound to us) a devoted, dog-like adoring posture, as though the teacher were a rock star or a sports idol. When Saul of Tarsus 'sat at the feet of Gamaliel' (Acts 22.3), he wasn't gazing up adoringly and thinking how wonderful the great rabbi was; he was listening and learning, focusing on the teaching of his master and putting it together in his mind. To sit at someone's feet meant, quite simply, to be their student. And to sit at the feet of a rabbi was what you did if you wanted to be a rabbi yourself. There is no thought here of learning for learning's sake. Mary has quietly taken her place as a would-be teacher and preacher of the kingdom of God. Jesus affirms her right to do so.

From Luke for Everyone by Tom Wright p 130 & 131.

Mary, Martha and Lazarus lived in Bethany, a village on the eastern slopes of the Mount of Olives. Far enough outside the city to escape the crowds and the attention, it was Jesus' preferred place to stay when he came to Jerusalem.

We do not know how they met. If this was indeed the Bethany we hear of earlier in John's Gospel, it may have been back in the time when Jesus was with John the Baptist. What we do know is that this family were to play a significant role in Jesus' life. I will examine their rather unusual household in more detail a little later on. For now, though, let us look at the two sisters, two disciples of Jesus.

This story is all about discipleship. While Martha rushes around serving the guests — i.e. the men — Mary sits at the feet of Jesus and listens to his teaching. Martha complains, with some justification perhaps, that Mary has left her to do all the work. 'Tell her to help me,' she says to Jesus. But Jesus gently reproves Martha for being worried and distracted by too many things, while Mary has 'chosen the better part' (Luke 10:42).

The traditional interpretation of this story has centred around a conflict between the active and the contemplative life. Martha is the active one, Mary is the contemplative, faith-focused sister who sits and listens. Actually it is not about that at all. If there is a conflict at all, it is between a sister who knew her place, and one who did not.

Mary is behaving in a way unbecoming to her gender. Instead of serving the men, she is sitting and learning. She wants to be part of the conversation. She sits at the feet of her rabbi, her teacher, adopting the traditional pose of a disciple. And disciples had to be male.

In rabbinical thinking, it was a fundamental belief that God simply did not talk to women. 'In the name of R. Eliezer b. R. Shimeon: we have not found that the Almighty spoke to a woman except Sarah,' runs one source. In the same way, rabbinic teaching largely excluded women from the study of the Torah. Rabbi Eliezer said that 'anyone who teaches his daughter Torah, it is as though he has taught her lechery'. Women did attend various religious assemblies, but they were there to listen, not to debate. Eleazar ben Azariah interpreted the command, 'Assemble the people — men, women and children' (Deut. 31:12), to mean that the men should come to study, the women to listen and the little ones 'to receive the reward for those who bring them'. Martha's complaint against Mary is not that she is a contemplative, but that she is a rebel. This is why Martha is so concerned to get her back to work. She wants her back within the acceptable boundaries.

This, then, is an attempt by Mary to play a fuller part in the kingdom of God. She wants to be a disciple of Jesus in the fullest possible sense. She wants to listen and to learn. She wants to follow Jesus like the others do. She wants what the men have. Mary, in sitting at Jesus' feet, is actually getting above herself. And Jesus, far from dismissing her, commends her for it.

It should be clear by now that Jesus did have women disciples. They are never called that in the Gospels: under the culture of the day that was impossible — the very word itself was masculine. But they could act like his disciples, even if doing so meant that they had to step outside the cultural norms of their society.

From The Wrong Messiah by Nick Page pp 196-197.

To finish

9. If you concluded after all 9 studies that the answer was yes, the New Testament does endorse a hierarchy in church then another question is what does this passage indicate about a woman's place in church hierarchy?

Study 4, The NO argument 4, body, 1 Cor 12, Eph 4:1-16, Rom 12:1-8

Getting started

1. (a) After finishing school how did you decide what direction you would take?



- (b) Did you aspire to any sort of leadership position? Why/why not?

Does the New Testament endorse a hierarchy for church?

The argument so far . . .

NO

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Luke 10:38-42. Like male disciples Mary sat at Jesus' feet to listen to his teaching. This was the way disciples became teachers. Jesus endorsed women and men in their roles as teachers/leaders.

Bible

2. Read 1 Cor 12.

Context: The Corinthian church was a youngish church that was experiencing a burst of spiritual life. It was an exciting place to be but, at worst, this new life had made the church a place of rivalry, and a place to show off rather than a place to serve others. The kinds of 'spiritual gifts' that the Corinthians seemed to prize the most were the kinds of gifts that elevated the individual, and not the church body. They loved the more fantastic manifestations of the Spirit like speaking-in-tongues as opposed to the more ordinary gifts like gifts of administration. Tongues-speaking was a particular sign of spirituality for some in Corinth (see 1 Cor 14).

Paul is very careful in his reply to them here. He doesn't want to allow excesses in their use of gifts to divide them but he doesn't want to quench the work of the Spirit either. He *does* want them to be mature so he goes about instructing them on this issue.

From 1 Corinthians 8-15 The Handbook for a Healthy Church Bible study booklet by Naremburn Cammeray Anglican Church.

- (a) What metaphor does Paul use to describe the church?

(b) What do the different parts of the body say about different people in the church?



(c) What are the different body parts/people for?

(d) (i) Considering what Paul has just said about the body is he now giving a hierarchy in vv 28-29?

(ii) What point is Paul making in vv 28-30?

(e) The passage following this one is all about love (1 Cor 13).
What has love got to do with body parts and gifts?

(f) (i) Do we *treat* some people in the church as more important than others? Why/why not?

(ii) In view of 1 Cor 12 *should* we treat some people in the church as more important than others?
Why/why not?

3. Different people have different gifts. How should this be accommodated in church leadership?

4. Read Eph 4:1-16

Context: Paul was in prison when he wrote this letter to a group of churches (probably) the most important of which was at Ephesus. In chapter 1 Paul outlines God's great plan for the cosmos with Christ as its head and his people as partners with him. In chapter 2 Paul explains what it means to be "in Christ". Paul writes about unity – unity for Jewish and Gentile believers (chapter 3) and unity in the Spirit (chapter 4).

(a) What is the purpose of appointing "the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers" (v 11)?

(b) Is this a hierarchy? Why/why not?

(c) Is this any different to 1 Cor 12:28-29 above? Why/why not?

(d) How could appointing apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers work in a non-hierarchical way?

5. Read Rom 12:1-8.

Context: Paul explains the gospel in the first 7 chapters. In chs 5-8 he writes about freedom from the wrath of God, freedom from the power of sin, freedom from the law and freedom from death. Paul begins to write about the Holy Spirit in chapter 8 and how he helps us live in between being saved and finally being glorified. In chs 9-11 Paul tackles the problem that so many people from his own Jewish heritage have not yet become followers of Christ.

(a) What aspects of the cultural norms does Paul refer to when he says “do not think of yourself more highly than you ought” (v 3 and see Mark Strom’s article below)?

(b) What does Paul suggest instead of thinking of yourself more highly than you ought?

(c) What does Paul suggest instead of the Roman cultural norms of hierarchy?

Ancient demarcations of rank defined social life. ‘Free’, ‘freed’ or ‘slave’ stamped a person for life. . . . Household slaves gave themselves ranks with special prominence for the literate. . . . As a freedman, you might rise to great prominence but there was always someone of inherited rank ready to rub your lowly origins in your face.

In the ancient worlds of Greece and Rome, leadership meant rank. Position, not role. Leadership was a right and responsibility attached to a man (overwhelmingly a man) by birth, marriage or adoption. Leadership did not depend on competence, gift, intellect or experience. The purpose of leadership was to maintain the order of a highly stratified society. Good order depended on people staying in the places allotted to them by birth, by Fate, by the gods or by personal accomplishment.

Status always complicated rank. One’s rank was largely fixed by birth with some possibility of change through marriage or adoption. (We read of great men with sons many years their senior.) The marks of status are familiar to us: education, wealth, fame, achievements, friendships, personal appearance, memberships, lifestyle and, in Paul’s day, oratory. A man might live many steps above or below his rank according to how well he fared in business and in securing the right friends.

Talent, piety, virtue and citizenship could each offer a platform for new status. Divorce, marriage and adoption might offer a rare opportunity to lift one’s rank. It was in everyone’s interest to keep the system going. The costly business of benefactions brought status to those of means. . . .

Enter Paul. What would an educated and urbane Greek man or woman make of a similarly educated and urbane Jewish man publicly declaiming or writing the following: ‘there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one’ [Gal 3:28]? Or ‘do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves’ [Phil 2:3]? Or ‘think not of yourself more highly than you ought but with sober

judgement' [Rom 12:3], 'associate with people of low position' [Rom 12:16], and 'give greater honour to those without honour' [1 Cor 12:23]? . . .

Paul set himself on a collision course with Greco-Roman social expectation and convention. And for good reason. The social implications of his story were profound.

First, the story was anchored in a man who, in Paul's words, 'emptied himself, made himself nothing, and subjected himself to death' [Phil 2:6-8], even execution by the Romans. If Paul wanted to cast the central figure of his message as eminently embarrassing and dismissible, he couldn't have done a better job of it.

Second, Paul claimed that on the basis of this inexplicable act of self-sacrifice, grace was now available impartially to all. It was inconceivable to Greeks or Romans that a deity would subvert the social system. Yet this was Paul's claim and he insisted on modelling it in his own life. . . .

We should not intellectualise what Paul was advising. It involved inverting the normal conventions of honour. Paul expected his associates to break with the convention of allocating food and seating according to rank. He expected wives, children, even slaves, to be allowed, no, *invited* to recline at meal with those of rank and to participate fully in the conversation. This was entirely scandalous. . . .

Paul was building something entirely new and had set himself an ambitious program of nurturing co-workers for the task. He had to neutralise the grip of every social convention that tied their hearts and minds to the old world. His strategy included undermining virtually every assured premise and outcome of the social system."

From Lead with Wisdom by Mark Strom pp 246-248.

To finish

6. (a) What are the conventions of hierarchy that you see in business/work, education, family life and sport?

(b) What are the conventions of hierarchy that you see in your church?

(c) Should we continue to follow these conventions? Why/why not?

Study 5, The NO argument 5, all one in Christ, Gal 3:23-29

Getting started

1. (a) What is the purpose of industrial unions?



- (b) What is a union united about?

- (c) In what sense is a sporting team united?

- (d) In what sense is your church united?

Does the New Testament endorse a hierarchy for church?

The arguments so far . . .

NO

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Luke 10:38-42. Like male disciples Mary sat at Jesus' feet to listen to his teaching. This was the way disciples became teachers. Jesus endorsed women and men in their roles as teachers/leaders.

1 Cor 12. Paul describes church in terms of body parts. Each part of the body needs all the other parts to work properly. Different people have different gifts. All the gifts are equally important. Each part should have equal concern and respect for all the other parts. The church works through equality not hierarchy.

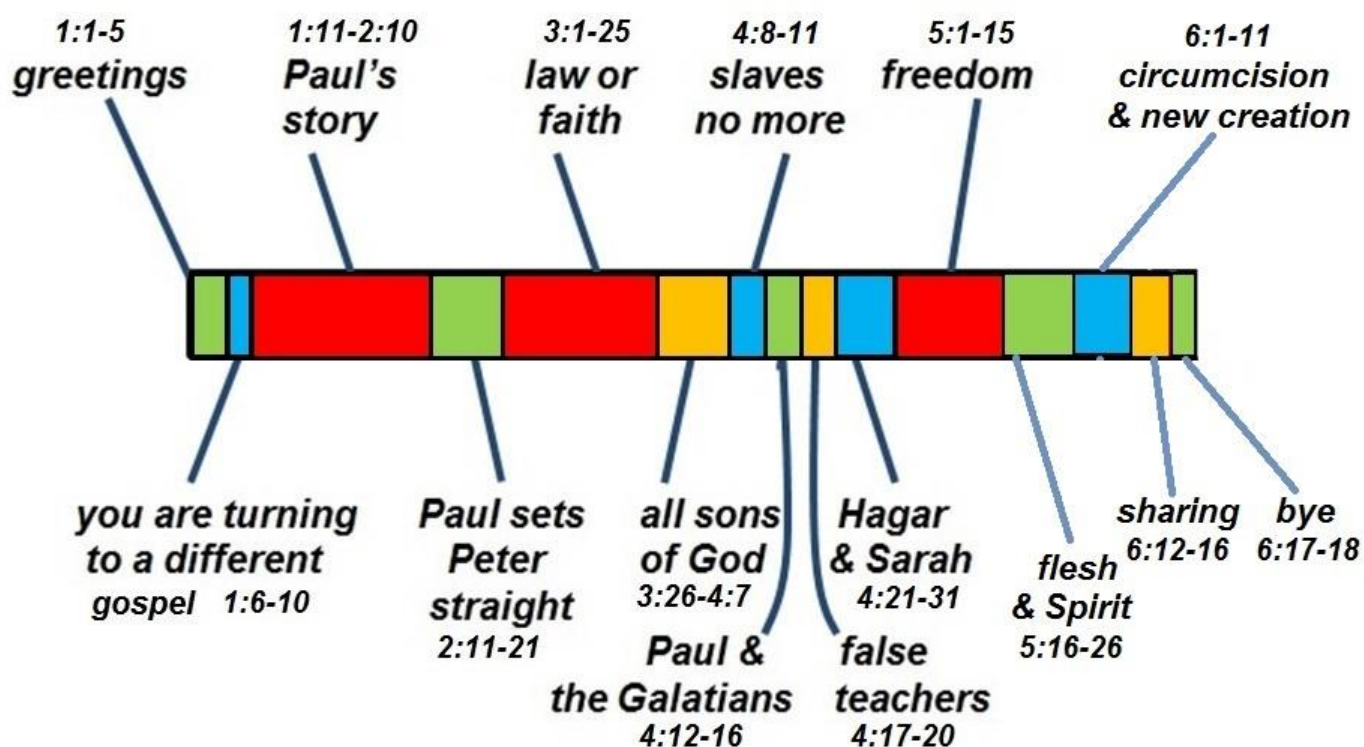
Eph 4. Paul writes that God has graced different people with different roles to build up the church to maturity and unity of faith. The emphasis is on different roles and oneness to direct people to maturity, not hierarchy.

Rom 12. Paul says that people should use their different gifts to work together and form one body. Not conforming to the pattern of the world means not conforming to the pattern of rank and status in the ancient Roman world i.e. not conforming to their hierarchy.

Bible

2. Read Gal 3:23-29.

Context: Galatians gives details about the problem of some Jewish Christians (the circumcision group) saying that faith in Jesus is not enough. You've got to keep the Jewish law as well, they say. Paul strongly argues against this and says that the law was to *lead us* to Jesus (Gal 3:24) and now we are no longer under the supervision of the law (Gal 3:25). In fact, Paul says, if you go back to the law you are going back to the slavery to all its rules and regulations (Gal ch 4), none of which will get you saved. Instead of being burdened by the law we have freedom in Christ (Gal ch 5).



(a) What does it mean practically to be no longer under the law?

(b) What does it mean to be "in Christ" (v 26)?

(c) How do your answers to (a) and (b) above relate to race issues, status issues and gender issues (v 28)?



(d) How does the absence of race issues, status issues and gender issues relate to hierarchy in church?

(e) How would you respond to someone who said “There is neither Jew nor Gentile, slave nor free, male nor female, refers only to salvation in Jesus”?

3. (a) What is the gospel?

By the fourth century, the churches had in large measure turned Paul on his head, structuring their relationships on the very social patterns which he had declared to be destroyed by the gospel. The writings of the Christians and their opponents in the centuries immediately after Paul indicate, I believe, that by the fourth century many of the churches had turned Paul's teaching on its head in the crucial area of social conventions in the Christian gathering. They had structured their relationships and gatherings on the very social hierarchies which he had declared to have been discredited by the gospel. As Paul considered the gospel, he came to the startling realisation that God showed no partiality in his dealings with humanity through Christ—all the more startling in a society which attached great importance to a person's rank and status. When people gathered under the name of Jesus, it didn't matter if they were senators or slaves, men or women, Greeks, barbarians or Jews; each had been given the 'rank' of in Christ (Gal 3:28).

By the fourth century, however, rank had been returned to its old prominence. When Paul spoke of what we might call 'leaders' (a word I suggest we need to rethink, especially in its more loaded form, 'leadership'), he flattened all connotations of rank by using the terms for manual labour and household stewardship to describe these roles. But by the fourth century and even much earlier, 'leadership' was structured along the lines of the Roman imperial magistracies and priesthoods — what we have known ever since as clergy and bishops and their associated paraphernalia.

In our day, we continue to rationalise and promote what the gospel has destroyed. There have always been those who will say that having a strong bishop and clergy is the only way to keep people believing in Christ and to safeguard their faith and the truth. Ignatius of Antioch was saying it before the end of the first century. In the twentieth century, it is still the accepted wisdom. But this idea of safety in hierarchy is naive: historically, it has never worked as its advocates claim it should; theologically, the gospel discredits it. Show me any church in history which insisted on structures of bishops or priests or ministers or deacons or synods or doctrinal confessions or the like, and I'll show a church that has had all manner of schisms and heresies. For example, if I adopt the 39 Articles, then I confess that Jesus is God and man, historically born of a virgin and raised from the dead. But if I disbelieve these truths, recent history alone shows that it would not disqualify me from being a minister or even a bishop! How then do these systems keep us on the straight and narrow? Such systems do not deliver what they claim. Worse still they sidestep the significance of Christ and his Spirit. The gospel brought an end to law and hierarchy through the gift of the Spirit to all

God's people (see Jer 31:31-34; Joel 2:28-32; Acts 2:16-40; Rom 8:9-17, 23-27). It is not only in our church structures that we often return to the things the gospel has destroyed. We also see religion creeping back into our approaches to morality and into our concepts of christian growth and lifestyle..

We place a major barrier before nonbelievers in so far as we confuse the message of the gospel of Jesus Christ with the 'scaffolding' of christianity. This point is very close to me. When we come to think of the gospel in terms of religion (which it is not), we create a barrier between us and our friends who do not yet know Jesus. As we speak to them, especially to those who have had any sort of church contact, they already have in mind that we are trying to sell them religion. Ask anyone what it means to be a christian: "Boredom, special buildings, trying hard to be good, pews, do's and don'ts, and narrowmindedness". It's a fair description, because that's the message we often have given them. I always ask people to tell me first what they think a christian is. They almost always give me a list like the one above. And I always say, "I'm so glad that's not what it is, 'cause if it was, I wouldn't want a bar of it!" And then they say, "Well, what is it?", and I tell them the story of Jesus Christ. It has nothing to do with religion.

From "Reverting to Religion: even evangelicals?" by Mark Strom, Briefing 132, 4/4/1994

(b) How has the gospel brought an end to law and hierarchy through the gift of the Spirit to all God's people (see Jer 31:31-34; Joel 2:28-32; Acts 2:16-40; Rom 8:9-17, 23-27)?

To finish

4. (a) The question we are looking at in these studies is
 "Does the New Testament endorse a hierarchy for church?"
 Looking back at all the NO arguments how would you sum up the NO side?

(b) Look again at the Bible quotes referenced: Mark 10:35-45 (Matt 20:20-28)

Matt 18:1-4, 19:13-15

Luke 10:38-42.

1 Cor 12

Eph 4:1-16

Rom 12:1-8

Gal 3:23-29

Can these references be used as supportive for the YES argument i.e. that the New Testament *does* endorse a hierarchy for church? If so, how are these references supportive of the YES argument?

Study 6, The NO argument 6, royal priesthood, 1 Pet 2:4-10

Getting started

1. What do you know about priests - priests as we know them today?



- Old Testament priests?

Does the New Testament endorse a hierarchy for church?

The arguments so far . . .

NO

Mark 10:35-45 (Matt 20:20-28). James and John wanted to sit either side of Jesus when he came into his glory. Jesus said that if they wanted to be great they must be servants or slaves of others rather than lord it over them. This suggests the opposite of hierarchy.

Matt 18:1-4, 19:13-15 (= Mark 9:33-37, Luke 9:46-48, = Mark 10:13-16, Luke 18:15-17). Jesus welcomes children and tells them to change and be like children if they want to be great. Church hierarchy needs to change and become like children.

Luke 10:38-42. Like male disciples Mary sat at Jesus' feet to listen to his teaching. This was the way disciples became teachers. Jesus endorsed women and men in their roles as teachers/leaders.

1 Cor 12. Paul describes church in terms of body parts. Each part of the body needs all the other parts to work properly. Different people have different gifts. All the gifts are equally important. Each part should have equal concern and respect for all the other parts. The church works through equality not hierarchy.

Eph 4. Paul writes that God has graced different people with different roles to build up the church to maturity and unity of faith. The emphasis is on different roles and oneness to direct people to maturity, not hierarchy.

Rom 12. Paul says that people should use their different gifts to work together and form one body. Not conforming to the pattern of the world means not conforming to the pattern of rank and status in the ancient Roman world i.e. not conforming to their hierarchy.

Gal 3:23-29 says that "in Christ" there is equality in race, status, gender and, by implication, any other distinctions that people like to make. A hierarchy would involve aspects of inequality.

Bible

2. Read 1 Pet 2:4-10.

Context: Peter is writing to Christians to give them advice on how to live as God's people, especially in the face of persecution. In the first chapter Peter writes about new birth, inheritance, God's shielding of his people, salvation, the prophets who were pointing to Jesus, hope, holiness, faith in Jesus and love for each other. In chapter two Peter encourages his readers to leave behind their old sinful lifestyle and grow into what salvation means with

Jesus as Lord. They are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation and living stones with Jesus as the cornerstone.

(a) What do you think it means when Peter describes Christians as - a holy priesthood (v 5)?

- a royal priesthood (v 9)?

3. Peter would have understood what priests were because of his Jewish background. We too need to understand priests as described in the Old Testament.

Ex 29:38-42 offer sacrifices

Ezekiel was the son of a priest, most probably from Jerusalem itself. The whole of his education throughout childhood and youth and into his young adult years would have been thorough training for the day when he would enter on all the varied professional duties of Israel's priesthood. These included not only all the tasks involved in the sacrificial rituals (which meant skill in animal anatomy and butchery as well as familiarity with all the levitical regulations and categories), but also the responsibility to teach and administer the law - Israel's Torah.

From The Message of Ezekiel by Christopher J. H. Wright p 21.

Ex 30:7-8 burn incense

Lev 6:8-13 tend the altar, ashes and the sacred fire

Lev 10:10-11, Mal 2:7 teach

Aaron, the older brother of Moses, was appointed Israel's first high priest (Ex chs 28-29), and in theory his descendants were Israel's priests thereafter. Other members of his tribe (Levi) were 'Levites' performing other liturgical duties but not sacrificing. Priests lived among the people all around the country, having a local teaching role (Lev 10:11, Mal 2:7), and going to Jerusalem by rotation to perform the Temple liturgy (e.g. Luke 2:8).

From Hebrews for Everyone by Tom Wright p 191.

Lev chs 13-15 assess impurity

Lev 24:1-9 tend the lamps and the bread

Num 3:5-13 from the tribe of Levi

Num 4:46-48 at least 30 years old

Num 6:22-27, Deut 10:8 blessing

Deut 21:5 blessing and judging disputes and assaults

4. (a) Before God gave Moses the Law he said that all his people would be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (see Ex 19:5-6).

Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites. Ex 19:5-6.

The elect, covenant-people are citizens of the kingdom of the divine King, but within that kingdom, ideally considered, each citizen is a priest, with the privilege of priestly access to the king's presence. . . . The sin of the golden calf brought home to Israel their unfitness to be the Lord's 'kingdom of priests', and the privilege of priesthood became vested in the tribe of Levi and the family of Aaron. This lasted until, in the fullness of time, the Lord Jesus Christ restored the lost ideal, making us — all believers — 'a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father' (Rev. 1:7), possessing and called to exercise the blessed privilege of priestly access into his holy presence (Heb. 10:19-21).

From The Message of Exodus by Alec Motyer p 199.

(b) Isaiah looks way into the future and has a similar vision (see Is 61:1-7).

"And you will be called priests of the Lord, you will be named ministers of our God." Is 61:6a.

'And as for you, you will be called' *priests* refers to the hitherto unrealized ideal of Exodus 19:6 (cf. the further extension to Gentiles in 66:21; both passages are anticipatory of the 'priesthood of all believers' in the New Testament).

From The Prophecy of Isaiah by Alec Motyer p 502.

5. Jesus fulfilled the role of priest and sacrifice.

When Christ came the whole system was reformed ([Heb] 9:10). As perfect high priest he offered himself as the perfect sacrifice (9:14) - a single offering for sin, valid for all time. He has dealt with human sin once and for all, removing the stain completely - something the Old Testament animal sacrifices lacked the power to do (10:10-12). And his death brought the terms of his will (the new covenant) into effect (9:16ff.). We are forgiven. We can come to God. No further sacrifice is needed (10:9).

From The Lion handbook to the Bible p 629.

6. If Jesus fulfilled the priestly role what priestly role is left to be done by his followers?

(a) Read again 1 Pet 2:4-10.

What specific priestly roles does Peter point to?

(b) By checking against the priestly roles outlined in Question 4 above, what other priestly roles are prescribed in the New Testament?

(i) Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God – this is your true and proper worship. Rom 12 :1

Context: Paul explains the gospel in the first 7 chapters. In chs 5-8 he writes about freedom from the wrath of God, freedom from the power of sin, freedom from the law and freedom from death. Paul begins to write about the Holy Spirit in chapter 8 and how he helps us live in between being saved and finally being glorified. In chs 9-11 Paul tackles the problem that so many people from his own Jewish heritage have not yet become followers of Christ.

What priestly role is described here?

(ii) Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise – the fruit of lips that openly profess his name. Heb 13:15

Context: The writer of Hebrews, addressing an audience of Jewish believers, works his way through Jewish concepts of creation, Law, rule, tabernacle, rest, priesthood, faith, covenant, the sacrificial system and he shows them that they are all superseded and obsolete because Jesus has brought in a way that is much better. In chapter 11 the writer describes Old Testament heroes ("such a great crowd of witnesses" 12:1) who believed in something God told them though they couldn't see it. Hence they became pilgrims - constant travellers here on earth, yearning in their hearts to be somewhere else with God in His unending city. This leads us to the writer's conclusions in chapters 12 and 13 to keep focus on Jesus in spite of hardship.

What priestly role is described here?

(iii) Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. Col 3:16.

Context: Paul writes about the importance of Jesus and warns against false teachers. Paul tells the Colossians to put away their old selves and put on their new lives/their new identity.

What priestly role is described here?

7. Back to 1 Pet 2:4-10.
 (a) Is there a hierarchy in this royal priesthood? Why/why not?

- (b) If all Christians are priests does the church need to have a special position that does priestly things?
 Why/why not?

To finish

8. (a) The question we are looking at in these studies is
 "Does the New Testament endorse a hierarchy for church?"
 Looking back at all the NO arguments how would you sum up the NO side?

- (b) Look again at the Bible quotes referenced: Mark 10:35-45 (Matt 20:20-28)

Matt 18:1-4, 19:13-15

Luke 10:38-42.

1 Cor 12

Eph 4:1-16

Rom 12:1-8

Gal 3:23-29

1 Pet 2:4-10

Can these references be used as supportive for the YES argument i.e. that the New Testament *does* endorse a hierarchy for church? If so, how are these references supportive of the YES argument?

Study 7, The YES argument 1, appointed ones, 1 Tim 3:1-13, Acts 14:21-25, 15:1-35

Getting started

1. Think of a discussion/argument you had that involved a disagreement with another Christian e.g. same sex marriage vote, scarcity of women on staff at St Faiths, overemphasis on sin at church, can a Christian lose his/her salvation?, euthanasia, stem cell research, Donald Trump, voting Labor/Liberal. Rather than get into the details of the discussion consider the following questions by keeping the particular discussion in mind:
 - (a) Who began the discussion?
 - (b) What were you trying to do with the argument?
 - (c) How did the discussion end?
 - (d) Did you learn anything from the discussion? If so, what? If not, why not?
 - (e) Did you or the other person change their mind?
 - (f) How did you feel at the end of the discussion?



Does the New Testament endorse a hierarchy for church?

The argument so far . . .

NO

Mark 10:35-45 (Matt 20:20-28). James and John wanted to sit either side of Jesus when he came into his glory. Jesus said that if they wanted to be great they must be servants or slaves of others rather than lord it over them. This suggests the opposite of hierarchy.

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Gal 3:23-29 says that “in Christ” there is equality in race, status, gender and, by implication, any other distinctions that people like to make. A hierarchy would involve aspects of inequality.

1 Pet 2:4-10 says that all believers are priests doing priestly things with no distinction in position or status, i.e. no hierarchy.

Bible

2. Read 1 Tim 3:1-13.

Context: Paul wrote to Timothy to give advice on problems he was encountering. In the first 2 chapters of 1 Timothy Paul encourages Timothy and warns against false teachers. He gives advice on the law, grace, prayer and writes about how women/wives should dress and act.

(a) What qualities does Paul want to see in overseers/supervisors (David Bentley Hart)?

(b) What qualities does Paul want to see in deacons/ministers (David Bentley Hart)?

(c) Is Paul describing a hierarchy of elders and deacons? Why/why not?

(d) Some of these qualities come from the culture of the day e.g. Paul assumes men, not women, will be overseers and deacons. Could Paul's whole idea of leadership be governed by his culture? Why/why not?

What does an overseer/supervisor/elder do?

Christ is the one great teacher or rabbi (Matt 23:8). His disciples call themselves elders (1 Pet 5:1, 2 John 1, 3 John 1). They pass on the teaching they have received and commit it to others, who are to commit it to others again (1 Cor 11:23, 15:1, 3, 2 Thes 2:15, 3:6, 2 Tim 2:2). Those to whom it is committed are likewise called elders (Acts 14:23, Titus 1:5). They are apparently appointed by the laying on of hands (Acts 6:6 cf. 11:30, 1 Tim 4:14, 5:22, 2 Tim 1:6). They must be ready to earn their own living if necessary (Acts 20:17, 33-35). They have the tasks of teaching (1 Tim 5:17, Titus 1:5, 9) and of acting as judges (Acts 15:2, 6, 22-29, 16:4). . . .

The Christian eldership is thus primarily an office of teaching, of adjudicating questions of right and wrong, and of providing pastoral oversight. Though elders are specially ordained, their office is not a priestly or a ceremonial one.

From New Bible Dictionary 3rd edition pp 954-955.

What does a deacon do?

The term “deacon” occurs in only two passages in the NKJV (Phil 1:1, 1 Tim 3:8-13). But the Greek word *diakonos* from which it is taken is found 30 times. In most cases *diakonos* is translated as “servant” rather than “deacon”. In the Greek world, *diakonos* was used to describe the work of a servant – a person who waited on tables or ministered as a religious official. When the office of deacon was established in the New Testament church, it may have paralleled the function of the Jewish synagogue assistant – an official who took care of the administrative needs of the assembly.

The origin of the office of deacon is usually related to the events described in Acts 6:1-6. . . . To meet this critical need, seven men were chosen by the congregation and presented to the apostles (Acts 6:1-6). Although these men were not called deacons at that time, the Greek work used to describe their work comes from the same Greek root word.

While these “table servers” were appointed to relieve an emergency and their assignment may sound somewhat menial, these men possessed the very highest moral and spiritual credentials.

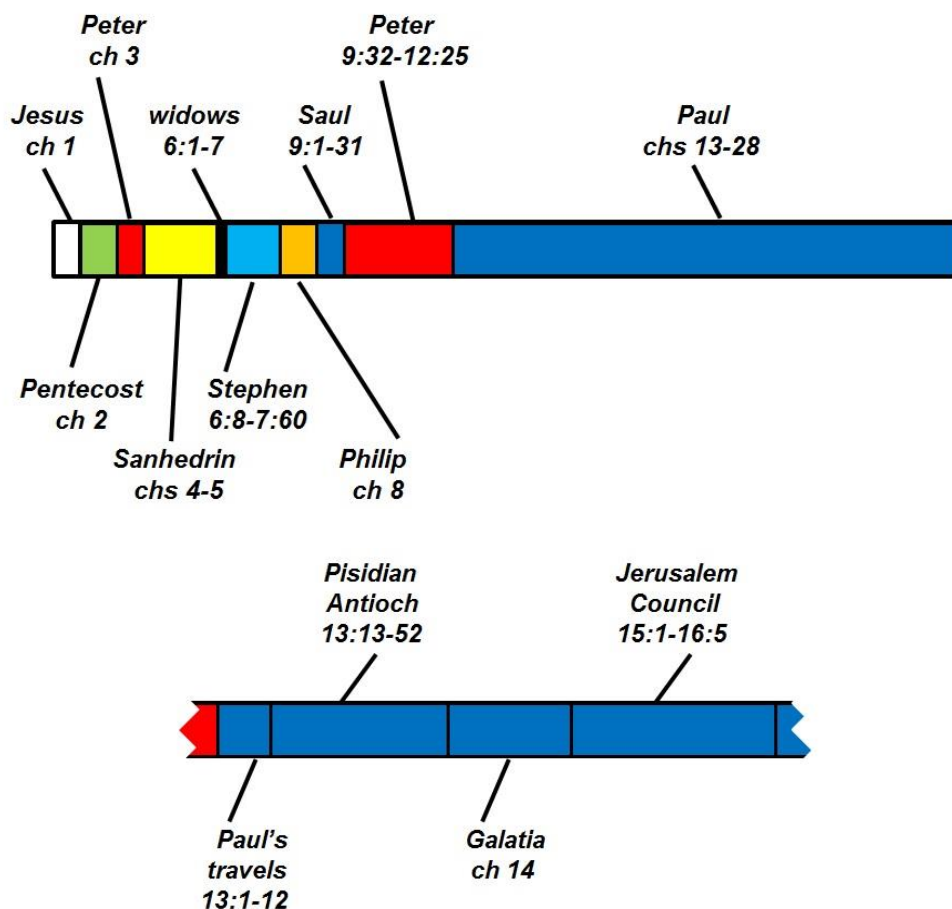
From New Illustrated Bible Dictionary p 335-336.

While *diakonia* is a mark of the whole church, it is also a special gift – parallel with prophecy and government, but distinct from generous giving – to be exercised by those who possess it (Rom 12:7, 1 Pet 4:11). and while any servant of Christ is rightly called a ‘deacon’, the term may be particularly applied to those who minister, like Phoebe (Rom 16:1). . . . But whether the diaconate existed universally under this name, or whether, for instance, the ‘helpers’ at Corinth (1 Cor 12:28) were equivalent to the ‘deacons’ at Philippi, remains uncertain. There is little to suggest that in NT times the term ‘deacon’ is ever more than semi-technical, or that it has any connection with the Jewish *hazzan*.

From New Bible Dictionary 3rd edition p 262.

3. Read Acts 14:21-25.

Context: The Holy Spirit has come. The apostles have been speaking about Jesus and were persecuted for doing so. One of their persecutors, Saul, met the risen Jesus and had his life turned around. Saul joined the disciples and began preaching about Jesus and the church continued to grow. Peter is called to the home of Cornelius, a Gentile, and all the Gentiles there received the Holy Spirit. Peter had to explain this in Jerusalem and Gentiles were accepted into the church. Peter was arrested by Herod but miraculously escaped. Later Herod accepted adoration as a god and was struck dead by an angel. The rest of Acts focuses on Paul whose name has been changed from Saul. He and Barnabas began their first missionary journey. Wherever they went people became disciples but some Jews opposed and persecuted them. In ch 14 they are in Galatia.



(a) Why do you think every church needs appointed elder(s)?

(b) What do you think an elder's role would be in - a hierarchical structure?

- a non-hierarchical structure?

4. Read Acts 15:1-35

Context: After describing the coming of the Holy Spirit and Peter's ministry the rest of Acts is about Paul's ministry. Paul, traveling with Barnabas, passes through Pisidian Antioch and Galatia and they make their way back to Jerusalem to discuss a question about circumcision.

(a) Is Paul describing a hierarchical structure? Why/why not?

(b) If so, who is at the top Peter or James, and where would Paul and Barnabas fit in?

(c) (i) Why are there no women mentioned in this "hierarchy"?

(ii) If this "hierarchy" were transferred to the 21st century where would women fit in?

To finish

5. (a) Can you have leadership without hierarchy? Why/why not?

(b) Can you think of ways in which leadership without hierarchy would work?

One of the first Bible study groups I went to had no designated leader. This group had a dozen people or so, all about my age, male and female, and most of them were going to the same “low” Anglican church. A different person led the study each week. We met at different people’s homes. Sometimes we studied a book of the Bible. Sometimes we studied a popular Christian book (e.g. we worked through “Knowing God” by J. I. Packer chapter by chapter.) Sometimes we did topics that each leader selected. We used to have a meal together before the study. Usually the person who lived at the home we were visiting would cook the meal, someone else would bring dessert and someone else would lead the study. We had a great time together. Personally, it re-kindled my passion for God: something that had faded since my youth group days.

To decide what we were going to study we had a discussion. Usually we would reach a consensus but if there were multiple preferred options we would decide on one and put the others off for the next series. I didn’t go to the Anglican church that most of the others went to but their ministers never tried to interfere with what we were doing. We were visited twice (by a different minister) in the 5 years that I attended the group. I think that was more to enjoy our company than to check up on us. I got the impression there were a number of other Bible study groups from this church doing the same sort of thing.

The overt focus of this group was Bible study. We also prayed and enjoyed fellowship with each other. Underlying all this were strong relationships and concern for each other. Everyone had the opportunity to lead a study if they wanted to and most people had a go. Some studies went over better than others and input from the more mature Christians often lifted the study if it looked like it was crashing. We found that the person leading got the most benefit out of the study because he/she had to do more research and thinking than the people who weren’t leading. So, after cycling through all the people who wanted to lead, we had most of the group taking their individual Bible study very seriously. We didn’t have a leader in any sense other than the person who led the study for that week. Different people would do different things like work out a roster for the weekly location, who’s cooking, who’s bringing dessert and who’s leading the study, or make suggestions for a night out or a weekend away or going to Handel’s Messiah at Christmas or going to something at a church somewhere. No one person would initiate things, everyone could bring up ideas when they thought of them.

Colin Marshall in his book Growth Groups, chapter 10, says “Firstly, there is no such thing as a group without a leader. The leaderless group is a myth. Any form of human society or grouping will generate its own leadership if none is designated. . . . Secondly, leaderless groups are unstable. They tend to lack consistency in direction and program and are more likely to self-destruct because of a loss of motivation and unresolved tensions.”

Sadly the style of running a Bible study group that I outlined at the beginning of this article has now faded out, as far as I can see. Nowadays you have one or two Bible study leaders in each group and no-one else even wants to lead. Often churches have lists of rules or “covenants” that group members and leaders are supposed to agree to (see elsewhere on this website). I’ve been in Bible study groups without all these rules and I found that different people in the group did all the personal stuff whether they led the group or not. We didn’t need a list of obligations because you cared for each other naturally. Surely the pastoral aspects of a Bible study group should be done by everyone in the group, not just the “leader”. Some people are better at certain things than other people. The “leader” is not always good at all the stuff on the list and nor should he/she be expected to be. The leader doesn’t have to have all the gifts. That’s why we need different people with different gifts to make up the body.

We found it beneficial to share the leadership in the group mentioned at the beginning of this article. It would be more difficult to do that with all the rules that are imposed on leaders in some churches. You could probably do it if you asked the official Bible study leader of your group and he/she would probably ask one of the ministers and then you would have to wait for permission. Shared leadership would take some of the pressure off the usual leaders (see my article on “Avoiding Burnout”) because they wouldn’t have to prepare so intensively every week. It would help group members too because they would share more of the responsibility and benefit from more deeply studying the Bible.

From “Sharing the Leadership” at <http://www.members.iinet.net.au/~birdocon/> by Ed O’Conor.

Study 8, The YES argument 2, headship, 1 Cor 11:1-16

Getting started

1. (a) Did you take any leadership roles at school? If so, what roles did you play? If not, why not?

(b) How did student leadership roles fit in with the hierarchy of the school?



(c) Leadership at school has a certain style about it.

(i) Have you thought about other styles of leadership since leaving school?

(ii) What other styles are there?

(iii) How would/do they work?

Does the New Testament endorse a hierarchy for church?

The arguments so far . . .

NO see pp 25-26.

YES

1 Tim 3. Paul describes the pre-requisites for overseers and deacons which presumes a hierarchy involving, at least, overseers and deacons.

Acts 14. Paul and co. appointed elders in every church they visited thus initiating a hierarchy.

Acts 15. Paul and Barnabas went to Jerusalem to meet with the apostles and elders to settle a dispute about circumcision. These people made a decision at the highest level suggesting a hierarchy was in place.

Bible

2. Read 1 Cor 11:1-16

Context: Paul wrote 1 Corinthians to answer a number of problems and issues that the church was struggling with i.e. divisions within their group, wisdom and foolishness, sexual immorality, lawsuits among believers, marriage and singleness, food sacrificed to idols, Paul's apostleship, idolatry, headship, eating meals together, spiritual gifts and the resurrection. Immediately before ch 11 Paul has been advising on idolatry and their freedom to eat anything as long as it doesn't hurt the faith of others.

The following questions and comments are from Ugly beautiful 26 Bible studies on 1 Corinthians from St Barnabas November 2015. This particular study was written by Andrew Judd.

(a) (i) What does "head" mean in this context?

(ii) Why do you think Paul has chosen to use this word?

(b) Does the ordering of these relationships imply inferiority?

(c) Is this a statement about the relationship between men and women in general, or specifically about a husband and a wife?

[Keep in mind here that "man" and "husband" (and "woman" and "wife") are the same word in the original language ("aner" means man/husband, and "gyne" means woman/wife) so context has to be the guide.]

(d) What involvement does Paul anticipate women will have in public Christian worship (see Joel 2:28)?

(e) What does Paul fear will happen if either men or women throw off cultural gender markers while performing Christian ministry?

[It is not quite certain what sort of "head covering" Paul is talking about here. It may be he is talking about having *long hair* versus having *short hair*, or it may be that he is talking about a type of hat which women were expected to wear in a public context. We don't have time to go into the details here, but depending on how we understand the social context, it could be that a woman not wearing her head covering would be seen as immodest (flaunting her sexual freedom). On the other hand, it is possible that a man wearing long hair was a sign that he was effeminate or homosexual.]

(f) Why does Paul link his argument back to Adam and Eve (vv 7-12)?

(g) Given we are part of a new creation in Christ, why should we pay attention to our origins in Adam and Eve?

[This passage is not about whether women are equal with men or share the image of God with them. Genesis 1:27 makes clear that both man and woman are made in his image, and Paul reinforces that later in 1 Cor 15:49. Paul's concern here seems to be more about women and men not distracting attention away from God's glory by dressing in a way that was (in that culture) shocking or scandalous or seductive. As a reminder about how important our earthly gatherings are, Paul cites the angels – heavenly observers who will notice anything in our church services which takes away from God's glory. Rosner and Ciampa write this: "By wearing her veil during public worship the woman signals her own status as created by God even while covering up any trace of human glory in the presence of God and his angelic court. The woman's head is not one over which others have authority. God has granted her authority to pray and prophesy. She exercises that authority in a dignified way by respecting both herself and the rest of the congregation through the avoidance of provocative attire or any dress or behaviour which would bring shame on herself, others, or God, in a context where all eyes and every heart should be focused on God's glory in the midst of his holy people." (1 Corinthians, p 533)]

To finish

3. Does the passage endorse a system of hierarchy where women lose out, or not?

Give reasons for your answer.

Study 9, The YES argument 3, submit, Heb 13:17

Getting started

1. (a) When someone wants you to do something how do they make that request
 - at work?
 - at school?
 - at home?
 - at church?
- (b) Why is there such a wide range of ways to request things?



Does the New Testament endorse a hierarchy for church?

The arguments so far . . .

NO see pp 25-26.

YES

1 Tim 3. Paul describes the pre-requisites for overseers and deacons which presumes a hierarchy involving, at least, overseers and deacons.

Acts 14. Paul and co. appointed elders in every church they visited thus initiating a hierarchy.

Acts 15. Paul and Barnabas went to Jerusalem to meet with the apostles and elders to settle a dispute about circumcision. These people made a decision at the highest level suggesting a hierarchy was in place.

1 Cor 11 The Greek for man can be translated man or husband and the Greek for woman can be translated woman or wife. The passage suggests a male/female hierarchy in family life and/or all of life (which includes church) depending on which sense is meant for man/woman.

Bible

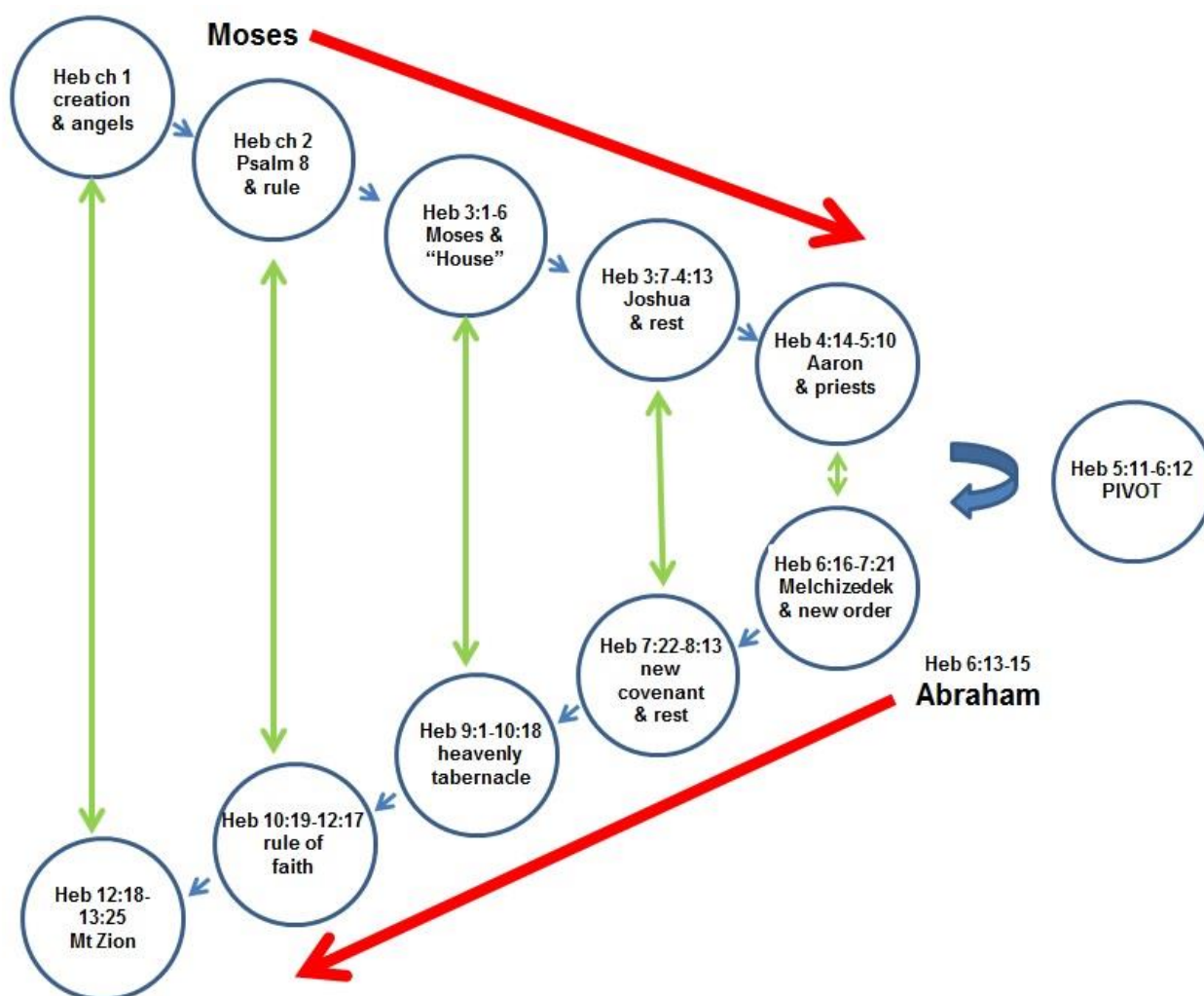
2. Read Heb 13:17

Have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority, because they keep watch over you as those who must give an account. Do this so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no benefit to you.

See also MinistersAuthority02babyBathwaterpartDicksonActs2_36to47.mp3

MinistersAuthorityHeb13JohnDickson01072012.mp3

Context: The writer of Hebrews shows how all the Jewish aspects of faith have been superseded by Jesus. In ch 13 the writer is coming to an end of his letter and includes a number of different pieces of advice.



(a) Do you think your leaders at church keep watch over you? Why/why not?

(b) Do you think your leaders at church are accountable? Why/why not? To whom?

(c) Are you a burden or a joy to your leaders at church? How so?

(d) In what sense do you submit to the authority of leaders at church?

To finish

3. (a) In what way do leaders at church exercise authority over you?

(b) Compare the way your leaders at church exercise authority with Mark 10:34-45.

Study 10, Conclusion

Does the New Testament endorse a hierarchy for church?



NO

Mark 10:35-45 (Matt 20:20-28). James and John wanted to sit either side of Jesus when he came into his glory. Jesus said that if they wanted to be great they must be servants or slaves of others rather than lord it over them. This suggests the opposite of hierarchy.

Matt 18:1-4, 19:13-15 (= Mark 9:33-37, Luke 9:46-48, = Mark 10:13-16, Luke 18:15-17). Jesus welcomes children and tells them to change and be like children if they want to be great. Church hierarchy needs to change and become like children.

Luke 10:38-42. Like male disciples Mary sat at Jesus' feet to listen to his teaching. This was the way disciples became teachers. Jesus endorsed women and men in their roles as teachers/leaders.

1 Cor 12. Paul describes church in terms of body parts. Each part of the body needs all the other parts to work properly. Different people have different gifts. All the gifts are equally important. Each part should have equal concern and respect for all the other parts. The church works through equality not hierarchy.

Eph 4. Paul writes that God has graced different people with different roles to build up the church to maturity and unity of faith. The emphasis is on different roles and oneness to direct people to maturity, not hierarchy.

Rom 12. Paul says that people should use their different gifts to work together and form one body. Not conforming to the pattern of the world means not conforming to the pattern of rank and status in the ancient Roman world i.e. not conforming to their hierarchy.

Gal 3:23-29 says that "in Christ" there is equality in race, status, gender and, by implication, any other distinctions that people like to make. A hierarchy would involve aspects of inequality.

1 Pet 2:4-10 says that all believers are priests doing priestly things with no distinction in position or status, i.e. no hierarchy.

YES

1 Tim 3. Paul describes the pre-requisites for overseers and deacons which presumes a hierarchy involving, at least, overseers and deacons.

Acts 14. Paul and co. appointed elders in every church they visited thus initiating a hierarchy.

Acts 15. Paul and Barnabas went to Jerusalem to meet with the apostles and elders to settle a dispute about circumcision. These people made a decision at the highest level suggesting a hierarchy was in place.

1 Cor 11. The Greek for man can be translated man or husband and the Greek for woman can be translated woman or wife. The passage suggests a male/female hierarchy in family life and/or all of life (which includes church) depending on which sense is meant for man/woman.

Heb 13:17. The church is to obey and submit to its elders suggesting a hierarchy.

1. Which argument do you agree with? Why?
2. Have you changed your mind? Why/why not?
3. What changes (if any) would you suggest for your church?

To finish

4. Something else to consider:

Not a Hierarchy, Not a Democracy, But a Pneumatocracy: The Church's True Politics

by David Fitch 16/9/2015 at www.missionalliance.org

Yesterday I said on twitter:

Take hierarchy away from most Christians and they default to democracy which is almost worse. We don't know how to live into pneumatocracy.

Allow me to expand on this a little.

Despite most N. Americans growing up in democracy, we are most used to living within organizations that run on hierarchy. Our churches, jobs, schools, governments, most often, run via top down authority. For sure there is some kind of democratic legitimization, but our leaders operate with an authority that operates over us. In other words, after all the conversation, all the discussion, in the end, the leader at the top makes the decision. They tell us what to do. A good leader cannot be a despot for long unless he or she gets good results (in a business). Generally, he or she has to have the broad support of his or her constituency. Even monarchs can't go on forever abusing their people. But they are all ultimately still in a position over the people, they rule, and the buck stops with them.

I have been arguing for years (along with some streams of Anabaptism) that hierarchy has been overcome in Christ. The church is a new politics. So Jesus told his disciples over and over again "You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. (Mark 10:42-44). Instead of hierarchy, the church now is a live body of the Spirit where the gifts of the Spirit embody Christ's authority in mutual submission to Christ the singular head of the body and in mutual dependence (and servanthood) upon one another (1 Cor 12; Eph 4 1-16).

But when we get down to doing all this, say in church planting, or in organizing missional communities, or even in organizing larger churches around the five-fold gifting, it seems we default into a mode of democracy. In the name of flat leadership, we operate as if all voices are to be treated equal on all concerns. We end up now in endless conversations discerning the issues a community is facing. And what developed is the church as a bunch of individuals talking a lot and in the end going nowhere together. Instead each individual goes their own way on any number of issues. This is why people persist in saying things like "flat leadership is no leadership."

But the model of the New Testament is not hierarchy (or aristocracy) or democracy. It is pneumatocracy. It is the gifts of the Spirit recognized and empowered to fulfil and lead in certain gift areas (or we might call them tasks) in mutual submission one to one another under one Lord the head of all. It starts first with a set or recognized leaders in certain gifts: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers (Eph 4:11) OR apostles, prophets, teachers in (1 Cor 12:28). These leaders are the "first" leaders which then set into motion the rest of the gifted body. They are not only to lead, but to always encouraging, affirm and call the rest of the body into its giftedness in the various contexts of tasks and arenas the church is serving in. These first gifts get recognized in order to then "equip" the rest of the body for ministry (Eph 4:12). This beginning leadership circle is polycentric, not one singular leader at the top. It demands of each leader mutual submission, because one person cannot see or know everything considering the issues of a

political body (the church). And this leadership circle models for the rest of the church how we are all together to operate.

The gifted one always leads out of their giftedness only and then submits to the rest of the body. A conversation is not leadership. The teacher teaches. The pastor pastors, etc. (1 Cor 12: 8-11; Rom 12:6). The Lord of the church distributes to each as He determines (1 Cor 12:11). So I always ask whoever is leading on an issue to a.) talk about what drives their concern and discernment, b.) make a proposal and then c.) submit it to the rest of us. We discuss, we might have some other angles on the issue, and make another proposal with slight changes. It becomes our joint decisions as led by the one with a particular gift. The apostle (are we engaging!) will generate different issues for concern than the pastor (are we caring for!) than the teacher (are we heretics!!) than the evangelist (are we reaching these hurting people!!) . But in the end we together discern the mind of Christ (1 Cor 2:16).

This is a stunningly different form of leadership than is possible in the world. It is made possible only in Christ. It displays a different politics before the world: non-coercive, mutual, coalescing instead of antagonistic. It recognizes diversity, not a false unity or endless tolerance in a conversation that goes nowhere. For sure there will be leaders who are more visible given their gift. (Paul acknowledges as much in 1 Cor 12). But this does not mean the less visible are any less important. The body of gifts empowers all, not a few. It disperses power instead of amassing it in a few. It is the way of the Kingdom. What do you think?

What do you think?