



feeding ... gathering ... carrying ... leading. (Isaiah 40:11)

[Sermon \(MP3\)](#)

September 24, 2014

Dear Church Family,

It is agreed by many that Ecclesiastes is a hard book to understand. From *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, “Ecclesiastes is a very difficult book to read, with several passages that seem self-contradictory and others that seem contradictory to the whole of biblical revelation. This confusion has led to polar opposite interpretations.” The authors, Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart, reveal that they in fact disagree and adopt those opposite interpretations. This is disconcerting. How can such a book function as revelation from God if like-minded scholars cannot agree on how to read it? And this dynamic with regard to Ecclesiastes is not limited to this book. Any true student of Scripture will encounter passages that are difficult to understand, might seem wrong to them, and have differing interpretations. Scripture is not as clear as we would like it to be. In dealing with this dynamic, we need to be clear on what role Scripture is to play in our lives.

The consistent Biblical perspective on human understanding is that since the Fall, it is deeply flawed and in need of correction to discern the ways of God (Is 55:8, Jer 17:9, Rom 1:21, 2 Tim 4:3-4). Also, interacting with our corrupted hearts and minds is a deceiver with supernatural power. In this reality, we need a revelation outside of ourselves that we submit to that will correct our understanding and lead us to truth about God and His ways. This is what we have in Scripture as described in 2 Tim 3:16-17, “*All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.*”

While it is not the only factor, a believer’s relationship with Scripture is the most important factor in determining their growth as a disciple, their becoming complete and equipped. Without the instructive and corrective role of Scripture operating in our lives, other valuable and legitimate spiritual pursuits will get corrupted and go off track. Consider pursuit of charismatic power, social justice and mercy ministries, cultural relevance and outreach for purposes of evangelism and mission. All valuable pursuits, but if not accompanied by a proper relationship with Scripture, they do not produce healthy and fruitful disciples or churches.

What is a proper relationship with Scripture? Among those who do look to Scripture as a source of truth and God’s revelation, there are different ways that Scripture functions. I identified a *consulting* function and an *authoritative* function. The field of consulting is defined as “giving expert advice to people working a professional or technical field”. Those who hire consultants will follow and implement that advice if they find it helpful and it seems good to them. If they do not, they will ignore it and possibly look for a different consulting firm. This is often

characteristic of our functional relationship with Scripture. We might say we have a high view of Scripture, and consider it inspired, but it functions in our lives on a consulting basis. We enthusiastically embrace it when it seems right and true, but ignore it if it clashes with our own sense of right or wrong or if we find it hard to understand. This is how most Christians tend to treat the book of Ecclesiastes.

When Scripture plays more of an authoritative role, it is not advice that I pay attention to according to how valuable or true it appears to me. It is viewed as an authority that is true and valuable even, and especially, when I do not agree with it or find it difficult to understand. The key difference in the authoritative relationship is that I consider that Scripture is more reliable as a source of God's truth than my own understanding. So if what Scripture appears to be teaching clashes with my own sense of what is right or helpful or understandable, rather than ignoring that passage, or trying to interpret it in a way that fits better with my own understanding, I will instead try harder to grasp and implement what Scripture is teaching.

Assigning Scripture such an authoritative position is not an easy decision to make. There are three key features that will contribute to that decision. One, how convinced am I that there is more to knowing God and growing spiritually than I am currently experiencing? The desire to experience and know more has to be strong to motivate me to do the hard work of trying to submit to that which is difficult. Two, how much trust do I have in the reliability of Scripture? Three, how much trust do I have in the reliability of my own understanding? To put these last two together, when my understanding clashes with what Scripture appears to be teaching, which one is in need of correction?

The topic of human understanding and interpretation of Scripture is a complex topic and I do not mean to oversimplify it due to the brevity of one message. I did offer some considerations that have been key for my commitment to embrace the authority of Scripture in my own pursuit of God. One, without relying on the authoritative revelation of Scripture, I have no confidence that I have a relationship with God as He really is and not just a God that I am making up. Two, I consider that the source of my own understanding is primarily influenced by the dominant culture that surrounds me. Therefore, the more I rely on my own understanding, the more I will share the same values and truth perspectives as my dominant culture. Jesus teaching in Matthew 7 is a warning that this is not how the path to knowing God will be. *Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.*

This introduction to Ecclesiastes has been a teaching on relating to Scripture that we find difficult to believe or understand. I encourage you to try to read Scripture so that it is shaping and forming your understanding rather than your understanding shaping and forming how you read Scripture. I commend you to your own reading of Ecclesiastes as I believe that it is a book that needs to be experienced because it shapes us as we interact with it. Pay attention to the thoughts and feelings that it produces within you as you read. Ask the Holy Spirit to guide us into all truth (Jn 16:13), truth that will further complete and equip us for God's glory.

Pastorally Yours,
Bo

P.S. See below for an important communication about COSC eldership.

1. Role and function of elders:

Christ Our Shepherd is an eldership led church. Bo and I function as full-time pastors in this community. However, the description “pastor”, which legitimately describes a spiritual function and ministry, does not thereby designate a hierarchical position. We are not CEO’s; it is not our church. The title pastor truthfully describes our calling, and that designation is used by Paul in Ephesians 4:11 as a gift of the risen Christ to the church, but it is not the primary description for us, of our role and ministry.

In the scriptural governance of Christ Our Shepherd we also acknowledge the interchangeable (though not exactly synonymous) terms of: episkopos (overseer); presbuteros (elder) and poimen (shepherd), distinctive terms that give a complete picture of pastoral leadership oversight, both position and function, in the church. That doesn’t mean that there is an equality of responsibility or pastoral ability but it does mean that all elders share an equality of ministry as they exercise their gifts in a plurality of leadership among equals. In Acts 20: 17, 28 you will hear Paul using these different terms in order to capture the nature of the calling. *“Paul sent to Ephesus for the elders...the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.”*

2. Call to eldership

- Given that biblical definition and description
- Given the scriptural sources that inform us of the requirements, responsibilities and qualifications for such ministry (1 Tim. 3:17; Tit. 1:6-9; 1 Pet. 5:1-4), that include the four major areas of: personal life and character; order in personal, home and communal relationships; knowledge of and commitment to the Lord and His Word; reputation in the church and community
- Given Christ Our Shepherd’s due process and preparation for the appointment of elders...

Then the eldership, is very pleased to announce that after months of consideration and counsel, prayer and preparation, and examination and study, an invitation to be part of the pastoral oversight team has been accepted by Lorenzo and Cherie Bellamy, whose proven relationship and pastoral ministry, whose service and spiritual gifts, have been expressed and appreciated for so long now in this community in so many private contexts of hospitality and counsel, but also in so many public contexts including home-group ministry, management team leadership and healing prayer ministry. We have grown to love deeply and cherish warmly who they are to us and how they are in the expression of their faith and ministry. Equally, we honor their love and commitment to their Lord and to us in this expression of the body of Christ.

3. The next step

Having pursued due process in this matter for many months now, the elders hereby formally present this calling of the Lord to Lorenzo and Cherie, to you, the congregation of Christ Our Shepherd, and hereby engage the constitutional protocols that we submit to.

- We now set aside a two-week period for prayer before consecration. We invite you to pray for them and for the pastoral oversight team, and for the continuing maturing and equipping by the Holy Spirit of the leadership of this community. We invite you to share with Lorenzo and Cherie or other elders during this time.
- Following two weeks, we will give an opportunity for members of this community to express their affirmation of this invitation, and upon such affirmation being received, we will set them aside, and consecrate them to the ministry with the laying on of hands, and the blessings of the congregation.

The Lord is so gracious in the ways that He builds His church, line upon line, stone upon stone. Generations come and go, but the Lord's faithfulness to care and provide for us remains constant and true. Let's continue to express our gratitude and thanks to Him.

Pastorally yours,

The elder-oversight-shepherd team!!!