

BOOK REVIEWS

Hellerman, Joseph H. *Embracing Shared Ministry: Power and Status in the Early Church and Why It Matters Today*. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2013. 213 pp.

Reviewed by Paul Gritz, Professor of Church History at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. Paul received his B.A. from Oklahoma Baptist University, his M.A. from Oxford University, and his M.Div. and Ph.D. from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

With his latest book, *Embracing Shared Ministry*, Joseph Hellerman provides a tool for rectifying abuses of power by too many CEO type pastors in evangelical churches today.

As a professor of New Testament Language and Literature at Talbot School of Theology, Biola University, and as one of the pastor-elders at Oceanside Christian Fellowship in El Segundo, California, he uses his academic expertise to craft this book, which is used for training leaders in his church. Previously, the author has published scholarly studies on how first century Roman social structure can elucidate Paul's message. These include *Reconstructing Honor in Roman Philippi: Carmen Christi as Cursus Pudorum* (Cambridge University Press, 2005) and related articles in journals such as the *Bulletin for Biblical Research* and *Biblical Theology Bulletin*. His summary of this material in parts 1 and 2 allows a broader audience access to his technical and exegetical findings. Part 3 contains his recommendations concerning the value of a plural elder approach, which arise from his own pastoral experience.

In part 1, chapters 1 and 2, Hellerman explains the Roman preoccupation with gaining glory and recognition, the *cursus honorum* (run for honors) by citing from ancient writers and numerous inscriptions in the archeological remains. His survey of this honor-shame culture provides insight into Paul's argument and wording in his Philippian epistle. In chapter 3, he discusses the culture of honor and self-promotion which dominated Roman Philippi itself. The inscriptions at public buildings demonstrate this fact not only as a driving force for the ruling classes but also among commoners. Voluntary associations among the latter, such as the one dedicated to the worship of Silvanus (the Roman forest god), created their own hierarchies of coveted honorific titles and ranks among their members. Therefore, the city's Christian community would have recognized Paul's insertion of inherited and earned titles in his badge of honors (Philippians 3:4–6) and would have been shocked that he regarded such things as "filth" instead of as sources of pride.

In part 2, chapter 4, the author argues that in his encounter with Philippi's authorities (Acts 16) and again in his epistle to the congregation, Paul presented a radically counter-cultural alternative approach—the cruciform example of Jesus Christ. In the first case, rather than appeal to their Roman citizenship, Paul and Silas endured the suffering and humiliation meted out to slaves in part so that they could flip the conflict over and have members of the social elite publically escort them out of the city. The dishonor of a flogging yielded a display of honor, which served as a precedent for how the Philippian Christians were to behave. In the second case, Paul stressed that their community needed unity of attitude to fend off external accusations that they were un-Roman in behavior. Internally they had to resist the temptation to mimic their culture's attitude toward competition for status.

In chapter 5, Hellerman declares that Paul's primary purpose in the hymn of Christ's humiliation (Phil. 2:6–11) was ecclesiological and secondarily Christological. The apostle wrote to encourage the Philippians to adopt the Jesus example in their mutual relationships (Phil. 2:5). The author describes the levels of humiliation Jesus endured—surrendering his equality with God, becoming a man, and being crucified like a slave, the most abhorrent situation in Roman society. Yet this humiliation God would honor with the greatest praise possible. The Philippian believers needed to appropriate such a radical challenge to their city's values.

The intriguing title of chapter 6, "When Jesus is not enough," refers to how Paul did not stop with the individual examples of Jesus and himself but went further in his epistle to call for the modelling of "other-centered" relationships in a community context. The author draws on his previous lengthier studies, *The Ancient Church as Family* (Fortress, 2001) and *When the Church Was a Family* (Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2009) to do so. For Hellerman, the apostle's terminology and emphases point to a plurality of elders working as a team as the way to foster such a context.

In part 3, chapter 7, the writer shifts the scene to contemporary church life and the abuse of power issue. He presents several case studies, many of these taken from the experiences of his students as junior staff in such situations. In chapter 8, he critiques the outlook and the structural, institutional, or business dynamic, which can develop among both a senior pastor and a church board when the criteria for success is numerical growth and financial solvency. He posits that a better indicator of success and health appears in how well a pastor and other ministers on a staff relate to one another, setting the tone for behavior among the lay members.

In chapter 9, Helleman suggests how Paul's cruciform vision can be modelled through a plural pastor/elder approach. He uses his own congregation to illustrate how it can work.

In the previous chapter, he narrated a situation in which a junior staffer had to give an account of his work to the pastoral team. Afterward, his fellow pastors pointed out that he had been too harsh with the young man. Helleman said he took their criticism to heart and apologized to the staffer. He had not reacted defensively, because he knew his teammates. The key to his own openness stemmed from the sharing and honesty experienced in their prayer meetings on Wednesdays, which occurred separately from their program discussions on Saturdays. He then elaborated in chapter 9 how steps were taken to ensure that the pastors were servants, that leaders (especially on the church board) were qualified biblically, and the principles of a shared ministry were embraced. In the conclusion, he added other ways that their team enhanced a sense of community, such as by sharing pulpit and Bible teaching responsibilities among themselves.

As a result of reading this book, I have a better understanding of what Paul was doing in his Philippian letter. I also agree with how Helleman has diagnosed the problems with the success driven CEO model in churches and the solution he outlines with a plural pastor/elder approach. However, his argument in part 2 that Paul presented a counter-cultural agenda in the case of Philippi is stronger than his case for a plural pastoral team as Paul's way to promote this approach. Most of the writer's suggestions in part 3 seem to arise from his stated thesis concerning the necessity of shared leadership for a servant-minded church to exist. Thus, some disjunction seems to occur between what the reader can deduce as the central emphases in parts 1 and 2 and what is argued in part 3.

With regard to my personal preferences, I think too much repetition occurred of the points made in the chapters. I believe that chapter 7 could have been left out, since the introduction presented the leadership problem well. In other words, the book could have been shorter, especially for use among lay people. Nevertheless, I recommend this book for anyone interested in revitalizing a biblical pattern for decision making in both older and newer evangelical churches.