

ECCLESIOLOGY: GOD'S PLANS AND PURPOSES FOR HIS CHURCH

WEEK 6: THE LEADERSHIP OF THE CHURCH

INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES

- When the word “church” is mentioned, several different things may come to mind.
 - Is it an event?
 - A building?
 - Local, universal??
 - What about a college campus ministry– what is that?
- We want to explore what Scripture says about the nature and purposes of the church.
- This class will study the topic of the church, explore the distinctions with Para-church ministries and Israel and the world.
- We will also discuss the importance of leadership, ordinances, and marks of healthy churches.
- As we desire to plant and revitalize churches, we should understand, “When is a church a church?” and “When is a church in good health?”
- Our goal in this class is to develop a proper biblical view of the Bride of Christ, the Body of Christ, THE CHURCH.
- **Class Schedule:**
 - September 7: Introduction and the Nature of the Church
 - September 14: Parachurch Ministries and Missions Agencies
 - September 21: The Beginning of the Church and Distinctions with the World and Israel
 - September 28: Descriptions, Purpose, and Mission of the Church
 - October 5: What Defines a Healthy and Faithful Established Church?
 - **October 12: The Leadership of the Church**
 - October 19: Ordinances and Worship

INTRODUCTION:

- **Who's in charge? Who's church is it? Who will be held accountable for each local church?**
- “When many Christians hear of church elders, they think of an official **board of directors, lay officials, or influential people** within the local church. They think of elders as **policymakers, fundraisers, decision-makers, or advisors** to the pastor. I call them ‘board elders.’...
- ...According to the New Testament, elders jointly **pastor** the church, **teach** the word, **protect** the church from false teachers, **exhort** and **admonish** believers in sound doctrine, **pray** with the sick, and **judge** doctrinal issues. In biblical terminology, elders shepherd, oversee, lead, manage, and care for the local church. I call them shepherd elders, or pastoral elders, or pastor elders.”¹

WHO CAN BE THE LEADERSHIP OF A LOCAL CHURCH? (ACTS 14:23)

1. Men who have the God-given desire (SUBJECTIVE)

1 Timothy 3:1 ~ It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do.

Acts 20:28 ~ the Holy Spirit has made you overseers

1 Peter 5:2 ~ shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to *the will of God*; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness;

2. Men who are qualified (OBJECTIVE)

1 Timothy 3:2 ~ An overseer, then, must be above reproach...

Titus 1:5b-6 ~ set in order what remains, namely, if any man is above reproach...

3. Men who are appointed. (COLLECTIVE)

Titus 1:5 ~ set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city as I directed you,

1 Timothy 5:22 ~ Do not **lay hands** upon anyone *too* hastily and thereby share *responsibility for* the sins of others; keep yourself free from sin.

SIMILAR TO ISRAEL'S ELDERS

The New Testament concept of the office of elder is primarily drawn from Old Testament Judaism (cf. Ex. 12:21; 19:7; Num. 11:16; Deut. 27:1; 1 Sam. 11:3; 16:4). The elders of Israel were **mature men** who exhibited **strong moral convictions**, being **characterized by truth, integrity, courage, and the fear of the Lord** (Ex. 18:21–22; cf. Num. 11:16–17). **Wise and discerning, they taught, interceded, and judged righteously and impartially** (Deut. 1:13–17). The New Testament understanding of elders in the church includes those same attributes of personal strength, spiritual maturity, and moral integrity.²

¹ Alexander Strauch, *Biblical Eldership: Restoring the Eldership to its Rightful Place in the Local Church*, 2023 edition, 12.

² John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue, eds., *Biblical Doctrine: A Systematic Summary of Bible Truth* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 758.

THE CHURCH'S AUTHORITY (1 PETER 5:1-4)

Authority Matters.

1 Peter 5:1-4 ~ Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, 2 shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; 3 nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock. 4 And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.

God “Flock of God” The church is God’s.

- “Authority begins and ends with the Creator of the universe (Gen. 1-2), the all wise and all-knowing God (Rom. 11:33-36). All authority structures must begin and end with the Lord Most High.”³

1 Timothy 1:17 ~ Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.

Jesus “Chief Shepherd” The church is Christ’s.

- The Son of God is our Chief Shepherd and Great High Priest, to whom has been given all authority

God’s Word “Will of God”

- The purpose is God’s and comes through His inerrant, infallible word, the Bible.

Shepherds “elders” “Shepherd the flock” “Exercising oversight”
“Voluntarily... according to the will of God... with eagerness, as an example”
“not under compulsion... not for sordid gain... not yet as lording it over”
“your charge”

- These men are “biblically qualified leaders (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9), appointed by God to be the under-shepherds of the Chief Shepherd (1 Pet. 5:1-2) to minister God’s word to himself and God’s redeemed people (1 Tim. 4:16) and to protect the flock Acts 20:28), all of which is accomplished with patience, grace, and humility (1 Pet. 5:2-3) and a knowledge that they will give an account to the Chief Shepherd for the flock under their care (Heb 13:17). Pastors do not have any authority in and of themselves, but only that which is given by God, through God’s word, on behalf of the Chief Shepherd.”⁴

Church “Flock” “those allotted to your charge

1 Peter 5:5 ~ You younger men, likewise, be subject to your elders; and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for God is opposed to the proud but gives grace to the humble.

- The church is given the authority to confront sin (Matthew 18:15-17; 1 Cor. 5:2)
- The church is given the responsibility to uphold the truth (1 Tim 3:15)
- The church is given the authority to rebuke, exhort, admonish each other (1 Thess 5:11,14)

³ Brian Croft, *Biblical Church Revitalization*, 65.

⁴ Croft, 66.

LEADERSHIP MODELS

- Along with plurality comes a need for structure or form. Who leads? Rules? Is responsible?
- 1. **The Episcopalian Model** gives authority to an additional office called Bishop that selects other bishops, rectors, and each rector has authority over congregations. They practice apostolic succession, and this form started in the 2nd century.
 - a. Problems: No Apostolic Succession, late start, No bishops.
 - b. Examples: Roman Catholic, Methodists, Lutheran, Episcopal
- 2. **The Congregational Model** gives governing power to the people of each local church since no man or group of men should exercise authority over a local assembly. Members have responsibility and are all involved in selecting leaders and exercising discipline (1 Cor 1:10; Phil 1:27; Matt 18:17; 1 Cor 5)
 - a. Problems: Elders oversee/ are held accountable (Acts 20:28; 1 Thess 5:12; 1 Tim 3:1; 1 Pet 5:2).
 - b. Examples: Baptists, Evangelical Free, Congregational, some Bible and independent churches
- 3. **The Presbyterian Model** gives authority to elders (the word “presbuteros” = elder). The church appoints elders who are a part of a general assembly who are over several presbyteries over many churches in a nation or region (Acts 15), who are over a session of elders over each local congregation.
 - a. Problems: Acts 15 was ruled by apostles, and elders are not over other churches.
- 4. **The Single Elder-Led Model** give the possibility (admittedly not mandated) of a single elder/pastor who leads a church, often with heavy congregational democracy or a first-among-equals pastor if a church as a plurality of elders. In these models deacons often function like elders.
 - a. Problems: The NT lists plurality of elders, does not hold one person accountable for a church.
- 5. **The New Testament Model** gives elders governing authority as they shepherd by a plurality of qualified men who unanimously, equally, and independently serve the local body of believers.
 - a. They have a close relationship with the church (1 Peter 5:1-4), serve more than they gain, and the qualifications and plurality guard against domination.

Acts 20:17, 28 ~ From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church...Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers to shepherd the church of God

1 Peter 5:1, 2 ~ Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness;

QUALIFIED ELDERS (1 TIM 3:2)

Biblical Elders are qualified by biblical standards-

- These are the key characteristics that will be true if a man is qualified to be an elder
- The authority of the Word of God will not allow us to recognize a man for eldership who substantially lacks any of these qualities
- Biblical elders are not honorary positions for the popular, for those who have seminary degrees, or those who have “put in their time”.

1 Timothy 3:1-7

1. Above reproach
2. Husband of one wife
3. Sober-minded
4. Self-controlled
5. Respectable
6. Hospitable
7. Able to teach
8. Not a drunkard
9. Not violent
10. Gentle
11. Not quarrelsome
12. Not a lover of money
13. Manages his household well...
children submissive
14. Not a recent convert
15. Well thought of by outsiders

Titus 1:6-9

1. Above reproach
2. Husband of one wife
3. Children are believers [faithful]
4. Not arrogant
5. Not quick-tempered
6. Not a drunkard
7. Not violent
8. Not greedy for gain
9. Hospitable
10. A lover of good
11. Self-controlled
12. Upright
13. Holy
14. Disciplined
15. Holds firm to the trustworthy word
as taught
-Able to give instruction in sound doctrine
-Able to rebuke those who contradict sound doctrine

1 Peter 5:1-5

1. Not under compulsion
2. Willingly
3. Not for shameful gain
4. Eagerly
5. Not domineering
6. Example to the flock

SERVING ELDERS (1 PETER 5:3)

- The primary goal and job of the local church leaders is to serve
- If elders are truly shepherding their people, they will be able to provide understanding and sensitive oversight

Matthew 20:28 ~ Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many

John 13:15 ~ For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you.

1 Peter 5:3 ~ nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock.

- Leading is serving and the desire to serve must be deeply rooted in any leader

PURPOSEFUL ELDERS

The ministry of the leadership of the church is for the purpose of equipping the *every-member ministry*

Ephesians 4:11-12 ~ *And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, ¹² for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ;*

- Apostles and Prophets for the Leading and founding of the New Testament
- Pastor/Teachers and Evangelists for the Leading and establishing of churches
 - Verse 12 “FOR”: The purpose of these offices is for equipping saints for the work of service
 - with the aim of the body being built up

The Purpose of the Apostles and Prophets:

1. To lay the foundation of the church

Ephesians 2:20 ~ *having been built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone*

2. To receive and declare the revelation of God's Word

Ephesians 3:4-5 ~ *And by referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit*

ELDERS ASSISTED BY DEACONS (PHILIPPIANS 1:1)

Elders serve the church by leading.

Deacons are leaders in the church who lead by serving.

- In the same sections of qualification of Elders are the qualifications of deacons who assist in the care for God's church (1 Timothy 3:5, 8-13)
- “⁵The help of qualified, approved assistants relieves the elders of other demanding tasks and helps keep their primary responsibilities of teaching and leading God's flock.”
- Supervised by elders, the deacons can serve in many ways: Hospital visits, phone calls, absentees, managing, distributing benevolence, assist families in need visiting and protecting elderly and shut insurance, helping with finances, overseeing church property, carrying out administrative tasks, A/V and technology, usher ministry, baptism setup, communion, purchases, legal help, etc.
 - Deacons have a complementary ministry to elders
 - In the New Testament, deacons are always in close relationship with the elders of the church
 - Like the elders, deacons are required to meet specific **qualifications**
 - Like the elders, they must be **examined** and **approved** before they can serve
 - Like the elders, they hold an official **position of trust** in the congregation

⁵ Strauch, 41.

PASTORAL ELDERS (ACTS 20:28)

Acts 20:28 ~ the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God

- The apostles charged the apostles to shepherd the church, with authority and care!
- It takes presence, love, authority, hard work, sacrifice, alert to dangers, skill and knowledge, and submission to the chief shepherd.
- Shepherds Feed, protect, lead, and care.⁶
 - **Feeding-** Elders are not only supposed to be able to teach, but also to refute those who contradict sound doctrine. Without healthy, regular food, the sheep perish.
 - Teach the whole counsel of God thoroughly with depth (Acts 20:18, 20, 27; 1 Tim 3:15).
 - Jeremiah 3:15 ~ Then I will give you shepherds after My own heart, who will feed you on knowledge and understanding
 - **Protecting-** Guarding the flock, and keep watch over their souls (Hebrews 13:17)
 - being on the alert of outside wolves (Acts 20:28-31)
 - and bully rams and bucks within (Ezek 34:17-22)
 - **Leading-** “A healthy growing flock of sheep is the result of good leadership and skillful management of the entire flock.”⁷ Stewards manage the household or estate of another.
 - Lead out front with conviction, making the hard decisions in a timely manner, with the flock’s needs in mind.
 - Includes decisions, action, plans for improvements, future teachers, training leaders, providing support to needed ministries, and direction and vision.
 - **Caring-** The pastor/elder’s general responsibility to highly personal and full of Christlike love.
 - “The shepherd and his flock form a close bond, so the shepherd is highly relational, showing personalized care. The sheep always know if the shepherd is present. When the shepherd is present, the sheep can rest comfortable and feed peacefully.”⁸

⁶ Charles E. Jefferson lists the following in *The Minister as Shepherd* : watch, guard, guide, heal, rescue, feed, love.

⁷ Strauch, 38.

⁸ Strauch, 32.

SHARED LEADERSHIP (ACTS 15:25)

- Elders are to function in unanimity such that the one will of the Lord might be demonstrated to the body
- When there is not agreement, it must be worked through until agreement is reached

1 Corinthians 1:10 ~ Now I exhort you brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree, and there be no divisions among you, but you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment.

Ephesians 4:3 ~ Being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

- **Of one-mind**

Acts 15:25 ~ it seemed good to us, having become of one mind, to select men to send to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul,

- Achieving unanimity is difficult at times, but it provides a safeguard against one man dominating the elders or missing the will of God in favor of a majority vote
- **Equality:** All are equal in value, all given to shepherd (Acts 20:28); able to teach (Titus 1:9); meeting the same qualifications (1 Tim 3:10; 5:22-25; Titus 1:5-9); responsible to visit and pray for the sick (James 5:14); and given the same designation as elder/overseer (Phil 1:1; 1 Tim 5:17).
- **Diversity:** Simultaneously there is a diversity of giftedness and influence among each elder team.
 - Some are devoted to further responsibility and labor in teaching (1 Tim 5:17b ~ *especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching*)
 - Just as within the whole body, each elder is given unique spiritual gifting to complement one another, comprising an effective, balanced, team.
- **Ranks and Hierarchy:** Peter did much of the talking and leading, yet he is given no special rank or title among the apostles or those in the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:6-29), and he had no subordinates who called him boss, senior apostle, bishop of Jerusalem, or Father. He was a brother and a “fellow elder”.
- **Apostles** were temporary gifts given to the church, not archbishops or general assembly over churches.
- Among leaders often rises someone who is given the role to lead the leaders, a “first among equals”, to describe the served in their ability to lead the leaders well.

Acts 15:22 ~ Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men from among them to send to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas—Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas, leading men among the brethren,

PLURAL LEADERSHIP (JAMES 5:14)

- The church is never to be run by one man...The “senior pastor” model is foreign to the NT and runs counter to much biblical teaching on how the church should be led.
- Dangers of the Senior Pastor model:
 1. Pride and Control
 2. Limits the full expression of leadership gifts
 3. Limited to the wisdom and vision of one man
 4. Doesn’t naturally reproduce new leaders
- Though there may be different expressions of giftedness, the responsibility for leadership is placed on a
- group of men
- The term “elder” is only used in the plural except where it refers to a specific man in the context of a group

Acts 14:23 ~ And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

Philippians 1:1 ~ Paul and Timothy... to all the Saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers and deacons.

Titus 1:5 ~ For this reason I left you in Crete, that you might... appoint elders in every city as I directed you.

James 5:14 ~ Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church...

1 Peter 5:1, 2 ~ Therefore I exhort the elders among you... shepherd the flock of God.

MALE LEADERSHIP (ACTS 15:22)

- Men, because in all instances the New Testament describes those as elders in the masculine, has given instructions to the church for men to be in that position/office, and the qualifications list the elders as a one-woman man- “husband of one wife” 1 Cor 14:34; 1 Tim 2:12; Titus 1:6).
- Women are of equal value and worth in Christ, are equally members in the church and able to use their spiritual gifts and serve with their natural abilities, and they are not to be mistreated or discriminated against.
- It is a matter of submission to God’s Word.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ELDERS AND BODY (1 PETER 5:3)

- The Word gives some clear guidelines regarding the how the church body is to relate to the leaders.

A Mutuality of Work

- Elders and the church body are to work closely together in accomplishing the work of the ministry.
- Ministry is not simply the responsibility of the elders...ministry is to be done by the body under the leadership of the elders.

Acts 6:3-6 ~ Therefore, brethren, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word. The statement found approval with the whole congregation; and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch. And these they brought before the apostles; and after praying, they laid their hands on them.

- Authority and role of **elders**, selection of **servants**, approval and involvement of the **congregation**.
- Acts 15:2, 4, 6, 23.....the role of the apostles/elders
- Acts 15:22, 30.....the role of the congregation

An Expression of Appreciation

- The work of an elder, pastor, church leader requires diligence and spiritual exertion
- In light of that, the attitude that should characterize those in the church should be one of appreciation

1 Thess 5:12-13 ~ But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction, and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Live in peace with one another.

A Willingness to Follow

- Pastors, elders, church leaders are called to be models of godliness, Christlikeness, holiness, etc.
- And healthy church members wisely follow their pattern of holiness.

Heb 13:7 ~ **Remember** those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and **considering the result** of their conduct, **imitate** their faith.

A Heart of Submission

- A healthy church member obeys and submits to their church leaders.

Heb 13:17 ~ **Obe**y your leaders **and submit** to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. **Let them do this with joy** and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.

- A heart of submission is necessary for the joy of the elders and the joy of the people!
- Obedience, submission, and the glad support of elders makes their work lighter and more joyful...it makes
- Shepherding and teaching and oversight a blessing rather than a burden
- But it is also brings joy to the people....it's to their gain and credit to make the job of their leaders
- easy...leaders are encouraged so they give themselves fully to their work...and the church benefits...the
- people grow from solid teaching and intentional shepherding

A Commitment to Pray

- One of the best ways to demonstrate a humble respect for the leaders of the church is to pray for them
- Given all that church leaders must do and contend with, perhaps the best encouragement for them is prayer

Heb 13:18-19 ~ Pray for us, for we are sure that we have a good conscience, desiring to conduct ourselves honorably in all things. And I urge you all the more to do this, so that I may be restored to you the sooner