**Section 1**

A Definition:

***God-given spiritual leadership***

*consists of a multiple number of godly men*

*referred to in Scripture as elders, overseers, and pastors or shepherds,*

*who are recognized by the local church as appointed by God,*

*and who jointly and humbly shepherd*

*their loving and obedient flock.*

***God-given spiritual leadership …***

***God-given*** *… not Man-made*

Even a quick glance at churches reveals many different church-leadership structures. There are three basic models:

1. purely congregational (members decide issues)

2. the traditional baptistic structure -- pastor-deacons-laity

3. and the elder structure

Some people think that Scripture is silent regarding the structure of government in a church. People use this argument all the time to support virtually every kind of leadership structure. But is it true that there really is no one form of government presented in Scripture, as some suggest?

As Alexander Strauch notes,

Many contemporary scholars say, however, that the New Testament is ambiguous or silent regarding the topic of church government and conclude that no one can insist upon a biblical model of church government for all churches because the Bible doesn't. (Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, p.103)

He quotes one such scholar who says exactly that,

It appears likely that there was no normative pattern of church government in the apostolic age, and that the organizational structure of the church is no essential element in the theology of the church. (Ladd, as quoted in BE, p.103)

But Strauch counters,

Not only does the New Testament record the existence of elders in numerous churches, it also gives instruction about elders and to elders. In fact, the New Testament offers more instruction regarding elders than on other important church subjects such as the Lord's Supper, the Lord's Day, baptism, or spiritual gifts. (ibid, p.103)

The leadership structure of a church is a crucial subject, and a subject to which we must attend. The amount of attention that it receives in Scripture calls us to a careful consideration to this subject. Working from the data gathered from Scripture, Strauch presents three proofs that that establish eldership as a Biblical pattern to be followed, as this lengthy quote indicates …

**“A Consistent pattern of Plural Elders among the First Churches**

The New Testament records evidence of pastoral oversight by a council of elders in nearly all the first churches . . . .

* + Elders are found in the churches of Judea and the surrounding area (Acts 11:30; James 5:14-15).
  + Elders governed the church in Jerusalem (Acts 15) [Council on religious practices]
  + Among the Pauline churches, leadership by a plurality of elders was established in the churches of Derbe, Lystra, Iconium, Antioch (Acts 14:23), …Ephesus (Acts 20:17; 1Ti 3:1-7; 5:17-25); … Philippi (Philippians 1:1); and … Crete (Titus 1:5).
  + According to the well-traveled letter of 1 Peter, elders existed in churches throughout northwestern Asia Minor: Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bythynia (1Peter 1:1, 5:1).

**Instruction about Elders Given to the Churches**

* James instructs those who are sick to call for the elders of the church (James 5:14)
* Paul instructs the Ephesian church to financially support elders who labor 'at preaching and teaching' (1Ti 5:17-18)
* Paul instructs the local church about protecting elders from false accusation, disciplining elders who sin, and restoring fallen elders (1Ti 5:19-22)
* Paul instructs the church as to the proper qualifications for eldership (1Ti 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9)
* To the church in Ephesus, Paul states that anyone who desires to be an elder, desires a noble work (1Ti 3:1)
* Paul instructs the church to examine prospective elders as to their qualifications (1Ti 3:10; 5:24-25)
* The writer of Hebrews instructs his readers to obey and submit to the elders (Heb 13:17)
* Paul teaches that elders are the household stewards, leaders, instructors, and teachers of the local church (Titus 1:7; 1 Th 5:12; Titus 1:9)
* Paul instructs the church to acknowledge, love, and live at peace with its elders (1 Th 5:12-13)

**Instruction and Exhortation Given Directly to Elders**

* James tells elders to pray and anoint the sick with oil (James 5:14)
* Peter … charges elders to pastor and oversee the local congregation (1Pe 5:1-2)
* Peter warns elders against being too authoritative (1Pe 5:3)
* Peter exhorts the elders to be clothed in humility (1Pe 5:5)
* Paul reminds the Ephesian elders that the Holy Spirit placed them in the church as overseers to pastor the church of God (Acts 20:28)
* Paul exhorts elders to guard the church from false teachers (Acts 20:28) and to be alert to the constant threat of false doctrine (Acts 20:31)
* Paul reminds elders to work hard, help the needy, and be generous like the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 20:35)
* Paul exhorts elders to live at peace with the congregation (1Th 5:13).”  **(ibid, p.104-108)**

***Spiritual******Leadership*** *… not Earthly preoccupation and control*

This is an important distinction. This sets the tone even for the elders. Elders should not be concerned in whether the church puts up mini-blinds or curtains. If an issue becomes a controversy, *then* elders should be involved. Elders' work is spiritual work for which they are accountable to God, as Hebrews 13:17 declares, "… they keep watch over your souls, as those who will give an account." The church today has lost sight of the Scripture's teaching regarding role elders are to perform in the church. Strauch again points out,

People today think of church elders as lay, church-board members who are separate and distinct from the professional, ordained pastor … A true biblical eldership is not a businesslike committee. It's a biblically qualified council of men that jointly pastors the local church. (ibid, p.31)

In the above lists of instructions about and exhortations to elders, there is nothing to do with petty or minor earthly or physical matters. Scriptures’ directives about elders and to elders are strictly spiritual. The leadership elders are called to is *Spiritual* Leadership as MacArthur exhorts,

Elders, as the spiritual overseers of the flock, are to …

determine church policy (Acts 15:22);

oversee (Acts 20:28);

ordain others (1 Ti. 4:14);

rule, teach, and preach (1 Ti. 5:17);

exhort and refute (Titus 1:9);

and act as shepherds, setting an example for all (1 Peter 5:1-3).

Those responsibilities put elders at the core of the work of the New Testament church. Understandably, elders cannot afford to allow themselves to be consumed with business details, public relations, minor financial matters, and other particulars of the day-to-day operation of the church. They are to devote themselves first of all to prayer and to the ministry of the Word, and select deacons to handle the lesser matters (cf. Acts 6:3-4). (MacArthur, *Elders*, p.13)

***Leadership*** *… not Lordship*

Often when people hear discussion of 'elder-rule' they often react due to some common misunderstandings regarding elders. They believe that 'elder rule' sounds heavy-handed and controlling. They think of it as a dictatorship. But as the Apostle Peter exhorts, it is to be anything but,

:1 I exhort the elders among you … :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. (1 Peter 5:1-3)

Indeed, people are entrusted to the elders for their care -- even for their charge -- but this is never to be lorded over them. The fears of oppression, controlling men, 'men who won't listen to us anymore,' are not fears of true biblical leadership. Strauch identifies biblical eldership,

Elders are to be servant leaders, not rulers or dictators. God doesn't want His people to be used by petty, self-serving tyrants. (Strauch, *Eldership*, p.95)

The exhortation to this kind of leadership should not surprise us. Jesus, washing the disciples' feet, showing them an example of a servant should be our model for ministry. The call to lead the church is a call to servanthood. Servanthood is the heart of ministry -- not the dictators, self-appointed masters, self-willed tyrants of the church. Strauch warns,

There is no place for dominating, lordly leaders in a family that is to be marked by mutual love (1 Peter 1:22; 3:8; 4:8; 5:14), brotherhood, submission, and humility (1 Peter 2:13, 14, 18; 3:1; 5:5). The elders are not to shepherd the church like 'little popes or petty tyrants.' (ibid, p.247)

One may then ask, "If there is not to be lordly domination doesn't that mean that all authority is removed from God's church leaders?" Not necessarily so. Even the business world teaches that authority goes hand in hand with responsibility. Strauch explains,

The humble-servant character of the eldership doesn't imply, however, an absence of authority. The New Testament terms that describe the elders' position and work -- "God's stewards," "overseers," "shepherds," "leading" -- imply authority as well as responsibility. . . . As shepherds of the church, elders have been given the authority to lead and protect the local church (Acts 20:28-31). The key issue is the attitude in which elders exercise that authority.

Following the Christian model, elders must not wield the authority given to them in a heavy-handed way. They must not use manipulative tactics, play power games, or be arrogant and aloof. They must never think that they are unanswerable to their fellow brethren or to God. Elders must not be authoritarian, which is incompatible with humble servanthood. . . .

… biblical elders do not dictate, they direct. True elders do not command the consciences of their brethren, but appeal to their brethren to faithfully follow God's Word.… true elders suffer and bear the brunt … bear the misunderstanding and sins. (ibid., p.97-98)

Another question often arises, "What happens if you get the wrong kinds of elders -- men who are not biblically qualified?" Strauch warns severely of the need of a high standard for elders,

If elders are petty tyrants who lord their authority over the local church, others will follow their example, abusing and fighting one another to gain power and recognition. If the elders are examples of uncompromising fidelity to the Scripture, then the congregation will be loyal to the Scripture. If the elders trust God, the people will trust God. If the elders love God and His people, the people will love. If the elders are peaceful, gentle, loving, and prayerful, the church (for the most part) will emulate their pattern. If the elders are humble, the people will be humble, avoiding much contention. If the elders are servant leaders, the church will be marked by Christlike, humble servanthood. (ibid., p.248)

**Practical Applications for this section:**

* The local church is to be led by *Elders* who exercise spiritual oversight as they shepherd God's flock.
* The elders shall endeavor to humbly attend to the spiritual matters of the church and to delegate non-spiritual matters to deacons and others.

**Section 2**

A Definition:

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***consists of a multiple number of godly men***

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*and who jointly and humbly shepherd*

*their loving and obedient flock.*

… *consists of* ***a multiple number*** *of godly men* …

The ministry of the local church is not supposed to be a one-man-show – just ask Moses. Unfortunately, the structure of most churches facilitates just that, and often opens the door unsuspectingly to self-willed men who can end-up troubling the church. Church leadership should be carried out by 'a multiple number of godly men.' Strauch describes plural leadership,

By definition, the elder structure of government is a collective form of leadership in which each elder shares equally the position, authority, and responsibility of the office. (Strauch, *Eldership*, p.39)

Nuggets of wisdom on the benefits of pluralistic leadership …

'The advantages of pairs are obvious … and we find it repeatedly in the [Early] Church; Barnabus and Saul, Judas and Silas, Barnabus and Mark, Paul and Silas, Timothy and Silas, Timothy and Erastus.' Plummer, Mark

'Their work in pairs provided **mutual help** and fulfilled the **legal requirement for an authentic testimony** … 'it may also **tone down individualism** and suggests the necessity of team-work.' Hiebert, *Mark*

'This arrangement … had some important advantages … The two served as **company** for each other, **preventing loneliness** which [even] the apostle Paul took so much pains to avoid on his journeys. They could also relieve each other in **preaching**.' John Broadus, *Matthew*

'… the reason of his sending them by pairs, was partly for the sake of **company**, and that they might be useful and **assisting** to one another; and partly to show their **agreement in doctrine**; and that they might be proper and **sufficient witnesses** of it, whereby it might be established.' John Gill, *Mark*

Strauch presents that shared leadership is a Biblical concept,

In addition to explicit statements regarding a plurality of elders, other examples of shared leadership exist throughout the New Testament (Acts 13:1; 15:35; 1Co 16:15-16; 1Th 5:12-13; Heb 13:7, 17, 24). On the local church level, the New Testament plainly witnesses to a consistent pattern of shared pastoral leadership. Therefore, leadership by a plurality of elders is a sound biblical practice. (ibid, p.37)

Reinforcing the idea that this pluralistic structure of leadership is thoroughly Biblical, MacArthur adds some crucial insights into how elders function together,

The biblical norm for church leadership is a plurality of God-ordained elders. Furthermore, it is the only pattern for church leadership given in the New Testament.… If all the elders are guided by the same Spirit and all have the mind of Christ, there should be unanimity in the decisions they make … If there is division, all the elders should study, pray, and seek the will of God together until consensus is achieved. Unity and harmony in the church begin with this principle … Much can be said for the benefits of leadership made up of a plurality of godly men. Their combined counsel and wisdom helps assure that decisions are not self-willed or self-serving to a single individual … In fact, one-man leadership is characteristic of cults, not of the church … That does not eliminate the unique role of a special leader … But it does prevent the independent, nonaccountable, self-styled leader from dominating … (MacArthur, *Answering Key Questions About Elders*, pp.1, 12, 27)

In powerful terms, John Murray also declares the legitimacy of multiple elders,

Titus … was not instructed to ordain an elder or bishop in every city. . . . This emphasis upon plurality indicates the jealousy with which the New Testament guards against government by one man. The New Testament institution is not, as we have seen, a pure democracy. Neither is it an autocracy. It is the simple truth that singularity has no place in the government of Christ's church. In every case the singularity exemplified in diocesan episcopacy, whether it be in the most extreme form of the papacy, or in the most restricted application of local diocesan bishops, is a patent deviation from, indeed presumptuous contradiction of, the institution of Christ. Plurality is written in the boldest letters in the pages of the New Testament, and singularly bears the hallmark of despite to Christ's institution. . . . Plurality is a safeguard against the arrogance and tyranny to which man has the most characteristic proclivity. And plurality in this sphere always differentiates the singularity that belongs to Christ and to Him alone. It is no wonder that failure to adhere to the plurality that must be maintained in the government of the church has, by logical steps, resulted in what on all accounts is the greatest travesty ever witnessed in the history of Christendom, namely, the pretensions and blasphemies of the Roman see. (John Murray, *Collected Writings*, p.345-346)

But a problem often develops with the desire to establish and maintain a plurality in leadership. Usually, quotas are used to ensure that a number of men will always be on the board. There are several problems with quotas. On the one hand the church may be tempted to compromise standards in order to arrive at the 'magic number.' On the other hand, a quota-system may actually prevent a godly and called man from serving if the elder-board is 'full.' Either way the church loses.

**The Advantages of a Plurality of Elders**

*It is obedience to God and His Word*

*It provides the necessary leadership*

*It is in keeping with the brotherly nature of the church*

*It helps to avoid the tyranny of a self-willed man*

*It provides multiplied counsel and wisdom*

*It ensures protection against one man being criticized and abused*

*It allows use of all of the gifts and gifted individuals Christ has provided*

*It maximizes strengths and minimizes weaknesses*

*It magnifies the ministry of the church*

Strauch reasons that it is the giftedness of all believers that serves as one of the greatest arguments in favor of a plurality of leaders …

… each member of the body has a spiritual gift and function to perform for the good of all. (1Co 12:7). Therefore … ministry is the sacred privilege and duty of every believer. There is to be no passive, inactive majority. . . . Since ministry is the duty of every believer, no one person or group is responsible to provide the total ministry for the rest of the congregation. The concept that only a professional, lawfully ordained man is qualified to perform 'the ministry' totally contradicts the fact that the church is a ministerial body. . . . The one-man-professional-ministry concept is totally unsuited for the body of Christ. . . . Shared, brotherly leadership by ordinary men, who are empowered by the Holy Spirit (Acts 20:28), is the structure established by the apostles because it best enables the church to function as the body of Christ." (Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, p.16, 1988 edition.)

… *consists of a multiple number of* ***godly*** *men* …

Puritan Thomas Taylor, in his commentary on Paul's Epistle to Titus, sets forth the importance of godly character in the leaders of the church …

It is the main beauty or main blemish of any church, to be honored or dishonored with gracious or graceless ministers; for they are as captains or leaders to the people, in whatever ways they themselves take up.

John MacArthur, in his commentary on the Epistle to Titus, extolls the importance of godly character in the ministry …

God's standards for leadership in the church are high, a basic and extremely crucial truth that many evangelical churches today either deny or ignore. New Testament standards for pastors are often lowered, selectively applied, or simply disregarded. Some congregations and denominations pick and choose pastoral qualifications that seem most relevant and appropriate for the times, that satisfy personal preferences, and that do not conflict too sharply with contemporary social standards and practices. . . . Nothing is more needed in the church than the careful application of the biblical principles of leadership. (MacArthur, *Titus*, p.18)

MacArthur sets for the consequences associated with character in leadership …

The character and effectiveness of any church is directly related to the quality of its leadership. That's why the Bible stresses the importance of qualified church leadership and delineates specific standards for evaluating those who would serve in that sacred position. Failure to adhere to those standards has caused many of the problems that churches throughout the world currently face. (MacArthur, *Master Plan for the Church*, p.215)

**The Biblical Qualifications of an Elder**

**Qualifications of an Elder from 1Tim 3:1-7**

**above reproach** -- *blameless, irreproachable, not indictable*

**the husband of one wife** -- *'a one-woman man'*

**temperate** – *sober-minded, clear-headed*

**prudent** (Titus 1:8 'sensible') -- *of sound mind, reasonable, serious*

**respectable** -- *honorable*

**hospitable** -- *a lover (practical) of strangers*

**able to teach** -- *skillful in teaching*

**not addicted to wine** -- *drunken*

**[not] pugnacious** -- *given to violence, a bully*

**gentle** -- *yielding, kind, a forbearing spirit*

**uncontentious** -- *peaceable*

**free from the love of money** -- *not greedy*

**one who manages his own household well** -- *head of, rule, direct, care for*

**not a new convert**

**[having] a good reputation with those outside the church**

**Additional qualifications from Titus 1:5-9**

above reproach -- 1Ti 3:2

the husband of one wife -- 1Ti 3:2

**having children who believe not accused of dissipation or rebellion** –

*faithful, trustworthy, loyal; not given to debauchery, incorrigibility*

**not self-willed** -- *stubborn, arrogant*

**not quick-tempered** -- *inclined to anger, a 'hot-head'*

not addicted to wine -- 1Ti 3:3

[not] pugnacious -- 1Ti 3:3

**not fond of sordid gain** -- *dishonest gain, fraud*

hospitable -- 1Ti 3:2

**loving what is good** -- *virtuous*

sensible -- 1Ti 3:2

**just** -- *upright, righteous, 'fair and impartial'*

**devout** -- *pious, pleasing to God, holy, pure*

**self-controlled** -- *disciplined*

**holding fast the faithful word**

… *consists of a multiple number**of godly* ***men***…

**1 Timothy 2:11-3:2**

2:1-9 – Admonition – especially to the men – to pray

:9 Likewise – He also has something to say to the women

:11 Let a woman quietly receive instruction with entire submissiveness. \*

:12 But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man,

but to remain quiet.

Biblical commentary on 1st Timothy 2:11-12 …

“In the service of the Word … a woman should learn, not teach … she should be silent … not cause her voice to be heard … this learning in silence should not be with a rebellious attitude of heart but 'with entire submissiveness' … she should cheerfully [arrange] herself under God's law for her life.” (William Hendriksen)

“Woman does not lose her rational power of thought and responsibility by abiding in the place assigned her by the gospel; and she also has a right to prove all things -- only in a manner suited to her position … she is not to act the part of a teacher in the meetings of the faithful … she is not to assume the part of ruling or domineering over man. When she attempts this, she goes out of her proper place, and ventures upon a line of things which is not compatible either with her natural constitution or with her distinctive vocation.” (Patrick Fairbairn)

:13 **For** it was Adam who was first created,

*and* then Eve.

:14 And *it was* not Adam *who* was deceived,

but the woman

being quite deceived,

fell into transgression.

:15 But *women* shall be preserved through the bearing of children

if they continue in faith and love and sanctity with self-restraint.

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.*

An overseer, then, must be above reproach,

the **husband** of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach …

Paul had just forbidden the women from teaching or exercising authority (2:11-12), effectively barring them from the eldership. Thus, it would be pointless for him to include the women of the congregation in this portion of his directions to the church.

Further, the second qualification, 'husband of one wife,' clarifies further the objects of Paul's admonition -- the men of the congregation.

Paul’s admonition about women in ministry is echoed in 1st Corinthians 14 …

**\*1 Corinthians 14:34-36**

:34 Let the women keep silent in the churches;

for they are not permitted to speak,

but let them subject themselves,

just as the Law also says.

:35 And if they desire to learn anything,

let them ask their own husbands at home;

for it is improper for a woman to speak in church.

:36 Was it from you that the word of God *first* went forth?

Or has it come to you only?

**Practical Applications for this section:**

* ***… multiple number …*** No quota (i.e., 4) for the number of elders to serve. Multiple means two or more -- as many as are qualified.
* **… *godly* …** Evaluation of all current and prospective elders according to Scripture's Qualifications.
* **… *men* …** Women shall not be considered as candidates for elder.

**Section 3**

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*their loving and obedient flock.*

***… referred to in Scripture as elders, overseers, and pastors or shepherds …***

Three Greek words are used with reference to the primary, permanent office of spiritual leadership in the church.

**1.** **'Elder*'*** *–* πρεσβυτερος / **presbuteros** – used some 70x in the NT; reference to mature age.

Historically, the term and the importance of the office simply fell by the wayside.

**Non-technical use**: 'aged,' 'older,' implying seniority

Lk 15:25; Jn 8:9; Acts 2:17; 1Ti 5:1-2; Heb 11:2

John 8:9 When they heard it, they began to go out one by one, beginning with the older ones, and He was left alone, and the woman, where she was, in the center of the court.

I believe that *this* the way the Apostle John is using this word …

2 John :1 **The elder** to the chosen lady and her children, whom I love in truth; and not only I, but also all who know the truth,

3 John :1 **The elder** to the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth.

**Technical use**: 'elder' the office of …

**The Jewish System Elder** –28x from Mt 15:2 to Acts 6:12 and 22:5, 23:14; 24:1; 25:15

Matthew 16:21 From that time Jesus Christ began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the **elders** and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day.

**Eternal Elders** -- "heavenly council" the 24 elders surrounding God's throne – 13x in Rev 4:4-19:4

Revelation 4:4 And around the throne [were] twenty-four thrones; and upon the thrones [ I saw] twenty-four **elders** sitting, clothed in white garments, and golden crowns on their heads.

**The Christian Church Elder**

The office mentioned

Acts 11:30 And this they did, sending it in charge of Barnabas and Saul to **the elders**.

The office set forth

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.

The office validated – Acts 15:2, 4, 6, 22-23; 16:4

Acts 15:6 And the apostles and **the** **elders** came together to look into this matter.

The Ephesian elders summoned

Acts 20:17 From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him **the elders** of the church.

The elder board (presbytery)

1 Timothy 4:14 Do not neglect the spiritual gift within you, which was bestowed on you through prophetic utterance with the laying on of hands by **the presbytery** **[the elders]**.

The elders' considerations – double honor

1 Timothy 5:17 Let **the elders** who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching.

The protection of elders

1 Timothy 5:19 Do not receive an accusation against an **elder** except on the basis of two or three witnesses.

The appointment of elders

Titus 1:5 For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint **elders** in every city as I directed you,

Summoning elders for prayer

James 5:14 Is anyone among you sick? Then he must call for **the** **elders** of the church and they are to pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord;

Exhortations to, and about, elders

1 Peter 5:1 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,

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.

**2. 'Overseer / Bishop'** – επισκοπος / **episcopos** – a

compound word – epi (over) / scopeo (to watch, oversee); but historically transliterated (not translated) as 'bishop.'

**The verb** επισκοπεω **/ episcopeo** – to oversee.

One of the two occurrences refers to ecclesiastical duty.

Hebrews 12:15 **See to it** that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled;

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;

**The feminine noun** επισκοπη / **episcope** – inspection, 'overseership'

One of the four occurrences refers to ministerial office.

Luke 19:44 and will level you to the ground and your children within you, and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not recognize the time of your **visitation**."

Acts 1:20 "For it is written in the book of Psalms, 'Let his homestead be made desolate, And let no man dwell in it'; and, 'His **office** let another man take.'

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.*

1 Peter 2:12 Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may on account of your good deeds, as they observe *them,* glorify God in the day of **visitation**.

**The masculine noun** επισκοπος / **episcopos** – overseer

Three of the four occurrences refer to ministerial office.

Philippians 1:1 Paul and Timothy, bond-servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the **overseers** and deacons:

No greeting to the elders?

1 Timothy 3:2 An **overseer**, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach,

Context: elder qualifications

Titus 1:7 For the **overseer** must be above reproach as God's steward, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not addicted to wine, not pugnacious, not fond of sordid gain,

Context: elder qualifications

1 Peter 2:25 For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and **Guardian** of your souls.

Two terms used side-by-side of the Chief Shepherd!

**3. 'Pastor / Shepherd'** – ποιμεν / **poimen** – translated

usually as 'shepherd' and those occurrences usually of Christ.

**The verb** ποιμαινω **/ poimaino** – to tend, shepherd, nourish, rule, lead -- Used 11 times in NT: 5 clearly referring to Christ; 2 with reference to literal shepherding; 3 plainly referring to the responsibility of church leadership; 1 to false teachers.

Acts 20:28 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 which He purchased with His own blood.

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;

**The noun** ποιμην **/ poimen** – 'shepherd' -- Used 18 times in NT; 8 clearly referring to Christ as the Great Shepherd; 5 alluding to Christ as such; 4 referring to literal shepherds; 1 referring to church leaders and translated only here (Ephesians 4:11) as 'pastor'.

Ephesians 4:11 And He gave some *as* apostles, and some *as* prophets, and some *as* evangelists, and some *as* **pastors** and teachers,

**Conclusion drawn from the Biblical data**

These three terms -- **elder,** pastor **/ shepherd, and overseer /** bishop -- all refer to the *same* leadership office. All three Greek words are used with reference to the primary, permanent office of spiritual leadership in the church. This is proven by …

* The fact that qualifications for an **overseer** in 1 Timothy 3 are nearly identical to those of **elder** in Titus.
* The fact that in Titus 1:5-7 the **terms elder and overseer used interchangeably**

:5 For this reason I left you in Crete, that you might set in order what remains, **and appoint elders** in every city as I directed you, :6 *namely,* if any man be above reproach, the husband of one wife, having children who believe, not accused of dissipation or rebellion. :7 For **the overseer** must be above reproach as God's steward, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not addicted to wine, not pugnacious, not fond of sordid gain …

* As in Acts 20:17-28 where **all three terms used in conjunction with one another.**

:17 And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him **the elders** of the church....

:28 "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 which He purchased with His own blood.

* As in 1 Peter 5:1-2 the **terms** elder, shepherd, and oversight all **used interchangeably.**

:1 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 …

* In Philippians 1:1, if there are three offices (bishops, elders, and deacons), why would Paul only address the first and third offices and omit the second -- the elders?

Paul and Timothy, bond-servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the **overseers** and deacons …

**The logical conclusion drawn from the Biblical information, clearly stated** …

“Bishops and elders is [sic] all one and an officer chosen to govern the congregation in doctrine and living.” (Tyndale, comment at Titus 1:7)

“Elders are shepherds of the flock; they are to 'shepherd the church of God' (Acts 20:28) and 'the flock of God' (1Pe 5:2; cf. Vss. 3, 4). It is the same term 'shepherd' that appears in Ephesians 4:11. Since Paul penned the latter, it would be necessary for us to infer that he has in view the same function which he enjoined upon the elders from Ephesus. And so, the conclusion is that the pastors (shepherds) of Ephesians 4:11 are those designated in Acts 20:17, 28 as elders and bishops. In a word, the evidence would require the conclusion that the pastors are elders of the church of God.” (John Murray, *Collected Writings*, p.360-361)

“Bishops and pastors are not distinct from elders; the terms are simply different ways of identifying the same people . . . all three terms refer to the same office.... So the term *elder* emphasizes who the man is. *Bishop* [ Overseer ] speaks of what he does. And *pastor* deals with how he feels -- the pastoral role of caring and feeding.” (MacArthur, *Elders*, pp. 8-11)

**Practical Applications for this section:**

* The church should endeavor to use one title for all elders -- either 'elder,' 'overseer,' 'shepherd,' 'pastor.'

**Section 4**

A Definition:

*God-given spiritual leadership*

*consists of a multiple number of godly men*

*referred to in Scripture as elders, overseers, and pastors or shepherds,*

***who are recognized by the local church as appointed by God****,*

*and who jointly and humbly shepherd*

*their loving and obedient flock.*

***… recognized by the local church as appointed by God …***

**I. What is it to *appoint* elders?**

"The AV [KJV] uses the verb 'to ordain' to render about thirty different Hebrew and Greek words, which shows that **the English word has many different shades of meaning**." (*Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, p.801)

Point: we must be *very* careful in our gathering of Biblical data.

The idea of 'appointment' to the Eldership is really only traceable to two passages – Titus 1:5; Acts 14:23

**Titus 1:5** For this reason I left you in Crete, that you might set in order what remains, and **appoint elders** in every city as I directed you …

καθιστημι (kathistemi) -- to place down, appoint, designate; Usually translated 'to make'

Matthew 25:21 "His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful slave; you were faithful with a few things, **I will put you in charge** of many things, enter into the joy of your master.'

Luke 12:13-14 And someone in the crowd said to Him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me." 14 But He said to him, "Man, who **appointed** Me a judge or arbiter over you?"

Acts 7:27 "But the one who was injuring his neighbor pushed him away, saying, **' Who made you a ruler** and judge over us ?

Romans 5:19 For as through the one man's disobedience the many **were made** sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many **will be made** righteous.

**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.

Appointing elders in every church was Paul's *pattern* – but here a different word.

χειροντονεω (keerontoneo) – to stretch out or stretch forth the hand

This word is only used in one other NT passage …

2 Corinthians 8:19 and not only *this,* **but he has also been appointed by the churches to travel with us in this gracious work**, which is being administered by us for the glory of the Lord Himself, and *to show* our readiness …

The question is, is this word speaking of …

A vote taken by show of hands?

Or the laying on of hands in prayer?

Not surprisingly, it is interpreted and applied in both ways – some say that it refers to a vote, others to the symbolic laying on of hands. And sometimes it is used in both senses at the same time! Take the example of an Elder who is voted into office, and then the other Elders ratify this action by literally *laying hands on* the new Elder!

**II. Much of our modern understanding of ordination is not biblical**

Some definitions of ordination …

"Ordination -- a liturgical action of the church by which some of its members are designated, commissioned and **consecrated to public pastoral ministry**." (*Westminster Dictionary of Christian Theology*)

Question: Is the 'pastor' *one* of the elders?

"The act of setting a person apart for **ministerial office.** Sacramentalists believe it **confers certain powers of ministry**. Others regard it as simply a public recognition of what God has already done." (Erickson, *Christian Theology*)

Question: Given that we take it in the latter sense, a recognition of what God has already done,' is the 'minister' *one* of the elders?

It is interesting to note that modern ordination focuses upon *Ministers, Pastors,* and *Reverends*. But this tends to promote the idea of the Protestant priest where he alone is equipped for ministry – communion, baptism, funerals, prayer, and preaching. But, if ordination is spoken of at all in Scripture (Titus 1:5, Acts 14:23), it is of *Elders* only – not Ministers, not 'Pastors' (as separate from Elders), and not 'Reverends.' Strauch highlights the concern with the prevailing understanding of ordination,

The principal problem with the modern concept of ordination is that it falsely divides the Lord's people into secular and sacred categories. (Strauch, 1988 ed., p.235)

Note: And *this* is why we (PBC) *ordain* Elders – so that there is no distinction.

Likewise, the common distinction between a 'Lay' elder vs. 'ordained elder' / Pastor / Minister / Reverend is an unbiblical dichotomy.

**III. Perpetuating eldership – by recognition, examination, and**

**ordination**

"**Ordination is the process of godly church leaders affirming the call, equipping, and maturity of new leaders to serve God's purposes in the next generation**. **Ordination validates / authenticates God's will for a fully qualified man to serve God and His people**." (Mayhue, *From Congregational to Elder Rule*)

Note: An excellent definition of the process.

MacArthur echoes the responsibility of 'church leaders' to oversee this process …

The New Testament church is seen in transition … **Initially** it was **the apostles** who selected and ordained elders (Acts 14:23).  **After that**, elders were appointed by **those who were close to the apostles** and involved in their ministry … In the **third phase**, **the elders** themselves ordain other elders (1Ti 4:14). **Always the ultimate responsibility for appointing elders belonged to church leadership.** (MacArthur, *Answering Key Questions about Elders*)

"The concept of ordination implies official recognition by the leadership of the church and a public announcement setting men aside for special ministry." (MacArthur, *Answering Key Questions about Elders*)

**The role of the congregation**

"When elders consider a candidate for eldership, **the congregation's recognition and counsel regarding the candidate's labor and character is absolutely essential** … **The entire assembly is responsible to see that its leaders are scripturally qualified for the office**." (Strauch, 1988 ed., p.76)

"Although the elders are to take the lead in all church procedures, this does not mean that the congregation is passive. **Biblical elders want an informed, involved congregation. Biblical elders eagerly desire to listen to, consult with, and seek the wisdom of their fellow believers** … everyone in the church is to know the biblical qualifications for church leaders and is obligated to see that the elders meet those qualifications." (Strauch, p.283)

Point: The church-body participates in the process.

**IV. Term Limits for Elders: Is the Office Temporary or**

**Permanent?**

Strauch argues for a perpetual calling to the office …

Once a man is appointed to the pastor's council [eldership] **he serves as long as he desires, functions in the work, and qualifies**. **It is unscriptural, harmful to the church, and demeaning to the elders to set limits on the time period a pastor elder can serve, or to limit the number of elders to a fixed number**. (Strauch, p.289)

Question: What's the 'harm'?

John Murray affirms Strauch's concern that the idea of a *temporary* calling is not Biblical. He also affirms the unreasonableness of the idea …

**The idea of being ordained to office for a limited period of time is without warrant from the New Testament, and is contrary to the implications of election and ordination** … There is no *overt* warrant from the New Testament for what we may call 'term eldership.' There is no intimation in the relevant passages that the elders in question were ordained to the office for a specific term. (John Murray, *Collected Writings*, p.351-352)

Murray elaborates …

**The qualifications are of a high order, and they imply that the person possessing them is endowed with them by the Holy Spirit and by Christ the head of the Church**. The implication is that **the person thus qualified is invested with these gifts and graces to the end that he may serve the church of Christ in that capacity for which these endowments fit him** … Now the gifts for eldership are not of a temporary character. If a person possesses them, the implication is that he permanently possesses them … The simple fact is that when a man possesses certain endowments which qualify him for eldership, we must proceed on the assumption that they are abiding, and permanently qualify him for the discharge of the functions of the office. (Murray, p.353)

John Murray's **'Practical considerations against term eldership'** (Murray, p.355-356)

1. It tends to create in the minds of the people the notions of **trial periods**. That should have no place whatsoever in the election of elders.

2. It tends to develop such a notion in the minds of elders themselves, and therefore a **decreased sense of responsibility** and office.

3. It interferes with the **continuity**, and therefore with the sense of **responsibility**, as also with the **stability** of the office.

4. **It may occasion the removal of good elders as well as bad ones**.

5. It may minister to **party division and strife**.

6. It is rather liable to give **the impression of representative government and of democracy**. . .

7. It tends to promote the idea that **the eldership should be passed around**.

**Conclusion:** Logically speaking, **the only term-limits imposed upon an elder are those imposed by God Himself.** Namely: *Death, Disability, Disqualification, Departure*.

**V. Practical Applications for this section:**

* Elders take leadership in appointing elders while seeking the congregation's input and evaluation of elder candidates.
* Churches, leadership and congregation, should look to *affirm* the Work and Calling of God in a man's life.
* No congregational vote on the appointing of elders.
* No term limits. Elders serve for life (Death, Disability, Disqualification, Departure).

**Section 5**

A Definition:

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*consists of a multiple number of godly men*

*referred to in Scripture as elders, overseers, and pastors or shepherds,*

*who are recognized by the local church as appointed by God,*

***and who jointly and humbly shepherd***

*their loving and obedient flock.*

***and who jointly and humbly shepherd***

1 Peter 5:1-5

:1 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.

: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.

**I. As Shepherds of God's flock, Elders duty is that of** …

Protecting – Acts 20:28-31 (*be on guard … be on the alert*)

Feeding (Teaching) – 1Tim. 3:2, 5:17; Titus 1:9-16

Leading – 1 Peter 5:1-5 (*exercising oversight*);

1 Tim. 5:17 (*who rule well*)

Caring – Acts 20:17-38 (*overseers, to shepherd the church*)

Praying – James 5:13-15 (*elders … are to pray*)

Judging doctrinal issues – Acts 21:17-26

Counseling / resolving conflict – Acts 15 (salvation and Gentiles);

Acts 21:17-26

Receiving and administering money – Acts 11:30

**II. What is the work of an Elder?**

"In one word, it was their duty … **to promote to the utmost of their ability, and by every means within their reach, the spiritual good of all those committed to their care**." (Coneybeare & Howson, *Life and Epistles of St. Paul*, vol 1, p.434.)

"Hence all elders must be, to some measure, **leaders and managers**. The eldership must **clarify direction and beliefs** for the flock. It must **set goals, make decisions, give direction, correct failures, [effect] change, and motivate people**. It must **evaluate, plan, and govern**. Elders, then, must be **problem solvers, managers of people, planners, and thinkers**." (Strauch, p.26)

"When the church eldership is viewed as a status or board position in the church there will be plenty of volunteers, but when it is viewed as a **demanding, pastoral work**, few will rush to volunteer. One reason there are so few shepherd elders or good church elderships is that, generally speaking, men are spiritually lazy. Spiritual laziness is an enormous problem in the Christian community. Spiritual laziness is a major reason why most churches never establish a biblical eldership. Men are more willing to let someone else fulfill their spiritual responsibilities, whether it be their wives, the clergy, or church professionals." (Strauch, p.27)

"Some people say, "You can't expect laymen to raise their families, work all day, and shepherd a local church." But that simply is not true. Many people raise families, work, and give substantial hours of time to community service, clubs, athletic activities, and/or religious institutions. . . . We Bible-believing Christians are becoming a lazy, soft, pay-for-it-to-be-done group of Christians. It is positively amazing how much people can accomplish when they are motivated to work for something they love. . . . The real problem, then, lies not in men's limited time and energy but in false ideas about work, Christian living, life's priorities, and -- especially -- Christian ministry." (Strauch, p.28)

**III. Practical Applications for this section:**

* All elders should shepherd the flock (visitation, discipleship, prayer, teaching), according to their giftedness and availability.
* Each elder should have specific areas of responsibility – according to their giftedness.
* All men (especially elders) should be required to defend their position on an issue.

**Section 6**

A Definition:

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*and who jointly and humbly shepherd*

***their loving and obedient flock****.*

***… their loving*** *and obedient* ***flock.***

**I. A general admonition to a high regard of shepherds**

**1 Thessalonians 5:12-13**

:12 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,

:13 and that you **esteem them very highly in love**

because of their work.

**Live in peace** with one another.

**Context: Was there some measure of disunity between the shepherds and the flock in the Church of Thessalonica?**

'It seems obvious that some feelings of tension and misunderstanding had arisen between the members and their leaders. The members seemingly had not appreciated or rightly understood the nature and function of their leaders.' Hiebert, p.230

**The individuals in consideration – the *Shepherds*.**

The three descriptive clauses all refer to the same persons, namely, the elders-overseers-shepherds.

'… one class of men discharging a threefold function.' Hiebert, p.231

**1. They diligently labor among you …**

'… service done to the community …' Findlay, p.122

'… work requiring strenuous effort resulting in weariness.' Hiebert, p.232

'It indicates that these people had toiled till they were weary in the service of the church … if not a technical term, at least it was well-adapted to expressing what is involved in ministering …' Morris, p.165

Ro 16:12, 1co 15:10, Gal 4:11, 1Ti 5:17

**2. They have charge over you in the Lord**

'… a word usually applied to informal leaderships and managements of all kinds.' Findlay, p.121

'… the spiritual guidance these men are giving to the church …' Hiebert, p.232

'This is not a cold, external authority, but one exercised in the warmth of Christian bonds … for the spiritual good of believers (2Co. 10:8).' Morris, p.166

'… men who look after the general welfare of the group …' Frame, p.194

'The words 'in the Lord' serve a double purpose, a) they limit the scope of the authority of the elders to the spiritual concerns of the saints … and, b) they show that the authority of the elders is not based upon human appointment or election, but upon the relation of all to the Lord.' Hogg & Vine

'… authority … exercised in the warmth of Christian bonds.' Hiebert, p.232

**3. They give you instruction**

'… to put in mind, to correct by word – a word of encouragement, or a word of correction.' Eadie, p.198

'… it bears an ethical, sometimes a disciplinary, sense … it implies kindly, hopeful, 'admonition.'' Findlay, p.122

'It is the activity of reminding someone of what he has forgotten … it may involve a rebuke for wrongdoing as well as a warning to be on-guard against wrongdoing.' Hiebert, p.232

'… brotherly warning or admonition …' Frame

'… while its tone is brotherly, it is big-brotherly.' Morris, p.166

**Therefore,** **appreciate** … and **esteem** … **very highly in love**

'… knowing fully, appreciating at their true worth.' Morris, p.165

'… recognize and acknowledge, to appreciate and value.' Hogg & Vine, p.177

Mt 10:40-41

1Co. 16:15

'[Paul] wants the officials to be highly regarded, and not dismissed as of no account … to be loved, and not thought of simply as the cold voice of authority … It is the good of the church that is the important thing. The church cannot be expected to do its work effectively if the leaders are not being loyally supported by their fellows … effective leadership in the church of Christ demands effective following.' Morris, p.167

'… love is to govern the attitude of the saints toward their leaders.' H&V, p.180

**Live in peace with one another**.

'Apparently some of the brethren … had refused to give heed to the spiritual counsels of the workers … relations between them were strained and the peace of the brotherhood disturbed.' Frame, p.194

'… 'peace' is to be kept through affectionate loyalty to the approved leaders … the ministry exists to bind together the whole body of Christ … not the *making* of peace, but the *maintaining* of it.' Findlay, p.123

'… there is a natural tendency to be puffed up for one leader against another … which inevitably issues in jealousy and strife … they were to be on their guard against rivalries and party-making, things that do not make for peace.' H&V, p.181

'Both [elders and saints] are to keep the peace.' Morris, p.168

**II. Biblical position on financial support of shepherds**

**Question: If elders are all equal (no professional clergy) – how can we justify paying only one elder?**

**A. A primary passage on the subject**

**1 Timothy 5:17-18**

:17 **Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double**

**honor**,

**especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching.**

What Paul is urging here in 1tim 5:17 is not merely respect but practical honor, practical care, for the shepherds of the church.

Galatians 6:6 The one who is taught the word is to share all good things with the one who teaches him.

'… 'honor' generally refers to 'respect,' or 'regard' … also financial support … similar to the English word 'honorarium,' which refers to money given someone to honor them … Paul … does not refer to money directly … He prefers instead to deal with the heart attitude that will result in remuneration. Those who honor elders will not begrudge generosity in paying their support … Though Paul chose to support himself in his evangelistic efforts in pagan cities, those who do not are in no sense inferior, and are to be supported by the church.' MacArthur

**:18 For the Scripture says,**

**"You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing,"**

[Deuteronomy 25:4]

**and**

**"The laborer is worthy of his wages."** (Cf 1Co. 9:1-14)

'Deuteronomy 25:4 … is one of the series of directions enjoining kind and considerate behavior … the only one that has immediate respect to the lower animals … the application [to the laborers in the Christian ministry] is merely to carry the kind and considerate treatment which is sought to foster and call forth into a related but higher sphere -- to claim for the divinely-commissioned laborers in God's spiritual harvest something akin to what a provision in the law had required of men toward the inferior animals that helped them in the harvest field of nature … if that was fitting, then how much more this.' Fairbairn

**But why pay *anyone* to do ministry?**

**Acts 18:1-5**

:1 After these things he [ Paul ] left Athens and went to Corinth.

:2 And he found a certain Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus,

having recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla,

because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave

Rome.

He came to them,

:3 and

because he was of the same trade,

he stayed with them

and they were working;

for by trade they were tent-makers.

:4 And he was reasoning in the synagogue every Sabbath

and trying to persuade Jews and Greeks.

:5 **But**

when Silas and Timothy came down from Macedonia,

**Paul *began* devoting himself completely to the word,**

solemnly testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ.

Point: the support that Paul gained from the arrival of Silas and Timothy, both financial and practical, freed up this great servant to fulfill his God-given calling.

***… their*** *loving and* ***obedient******flock.***

**III. A clear admonition to *yield* to spiritual leaders**

**Hebrews 13:17**

**Obey your leaders**,

and **submit *to them***; \*

for they keep watch over your souls,

as those who will give an account.

Let them do this [keep watch] with joy and not with grief,

for this [grief] would be unprofitable for you.

As we have already seen, elders …

\*1Th 5:12 'those who … **have charge over you** in the Lord'

They are the ones tasked with oversight of God's flock …

\*1Ti 5:17 'elders who **rule** well'

MacArthur identifies a recurring concern with the idea of submission to church leaders …

Twentieth century American evangelicalism, with its heritage of democratic values and long history of congregational church government, often tends to view the concept of elder rule with suspicion.… a new and subversive concept that threatens the very life of the church. (MacArthur, p.1)

But the concept of submission to spiritual leaders is not a rare or isolated mandate in Scripture, nor is the idea of submission new …

First, consider the pattern of submission in Scripture:

Luke 2:51 – Jesus was in submission to His earthly parents (and His Heavenly Father)!

1Pe 2:13-17; Titus 3:1; Rom 13:1-7 – Christians are called to submit to every human institution; to rulers and authorities; to governing authorities!

1Cor 14:34 – Women are to submit to male church leadership!

Eph 5:21 – As Christians we are to submit to one another!

Eph 5:22, 24; Col 3:18; Titus 2:5, 1Pe 3:1-5 – Wives are to submit to their husbands!

Eph 5:24 – The Church is subject to Christ!

Titus 2:9; 1Pe 2:18 – Bond-slaves are to submit to masters!

1Pe 5:5 – Young men are to submit to elders!

Point: If we are to submit to earthly, civil, even unbelieving authorities is it too much to ask that we submit to spiritual leaders in the church?

Secondly, consider also, the echo of Paul's command to submission to spiritual leadership …

**1 Corinthians 16:15-16**

:15 Now I urge you, brethren

(you know the household of Stephanas,

that they were the first fruits of Achaia,

and that they have devoted themselves for ministry to

the saints),

:16 that you also be in subjection to such men

and to everyone who helps in the work and labors.

**IV. Troubling alternatives to loving cooperation**

Alex Strauch broaches the subject of congregational voting …

In many churches, a congregational structure exists in which each member has an equal vote in making community decisions. The elders have no more authority in voting than anyone else …

He criticizes congregationalism on biblical grounds …

Certain democratic theories of government may insist on an equal vote for every member, but this is not scriptural. The church is not bound by such democratic, governmental theories. True wisdom does not require giving every member an equal vote in discerning God's will for the church.…

He next suggests the likely reason for a congregational approach to church-government …

Due to the fear that elders (or pastors) may extend their authority too far over the congregation -- a legitimate fear -- men have devised church structures that only create further problems by extending the congregation's authority too far. For example, a good shepherd who seeks to help people mature and who confronts sin and problems may quickly become unpopular and be voted out of office. But according to Scripture, which is the rule of God's house, an elder cannot be removed from his God-given task by the whim of a majority vote.

He concludes with the tragic results of congregational voting …

In voting, people do not have to give biblical reasons or answers for their actions. They just vote. But in God's household, we are all answerable and accountable for our actions and decisions.… More than any other form of church government, congregationalism breeds fighting and divisions because it gives troublesome -- even wicked -- people an equal vote in directing God's household." (Strauch, *Biblical Eldership, 1988 ed*, pp. 118-120)

Finally, Strauch elsewhere summarizes the biblical argument *against* a congregational approach, and *for* church leadership by a plurality of elders …

The New Testament does not indicate that the congregation governs itself by majority vote, and there is no evidence that God has granted every member one equal vote with every other member. Rather, the New Testament congregation is governed by its own congregational elders. The elders, according to the express instruction of the New Testament, have the authority to shepherd the congregation. (Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, p.293)

**V. Practical Applications for this section:**

* Submission to the elders regarding spiritual decisions (i.e., appointing elders, discipline), thus, no congregational vote on spiritual issues – appointing of leaders, church discipline, etc.
* Faithful attendance at official Church Services (as determined by elders).
* Joining the church for the purpose of humble submission to, and loving oversight by, authority, *not* the right to vote).
* Giving is directed to the general fund, not to 'special' funds, allowing for the unfettered leadership of the shepherds.