

Church Leadership and Government
Selected Scriptures
January 18 and 25, 2015

Introduction

We defined last week the meaning of church: Congregation of professing believers in Christ meeting regularly at a location under the care of the elders, observing the Lord's ordinances, and continuing the apostle's doctrine. There are many people who meet together for Bible Study or attend a weekend conferences, but those events are not the church because the people are not under the care of the elders. Today and the next few weeks we will be looking at what the Bible says about church leadership and church government.

As I've said before, the Bible does not really give us a detailed listing of what the church should look like. It does not give us minute details about how to run a business meeting or what vision we are to have for any communities. In fact, God has given the church great deal of freedom to operate in this world. However, the Bible does give us some details about church leadership and government.

Before we start, I just want to mention that I do not advocate the Presbyterian style church government where the elders have the final say in church business and issues. I am a Baptist and I believe that the congregation has the final authority in church business and issues. I will explain with Biblical support in the next few weeks how I came to this conclusion. However, I also believe that Scripture is clear on elder / deacon offices, and I also believe that the Bible teaches the plurality of elders. Does that mean that what we are practicing is sinful—not necessarily, because as I said from the outset, God has given the church a great deal of freedom to govern herself.

I. Elders in the NT

- Greek word—*presbuteros* (From which we get Presbyterian)
 - 1 of 2 offices described in NT: elders and deacons
 - Used 20 times in conjunction to the office of elder
- Elders used in NT
 - Jerusalem

Acts 15:4 *When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and elders, to whom they reported everything God had done through them. (cf Acts 11:30; 15:2, 5, 22-23; 16:4; 21:18)*

- Lystra, Iconium, Antioch

Acts 14:21-23 *They preached the good news in that city and won a large number of disciples. Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, **22** strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. "We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God," they said. **23** Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust.*

- Ephesus

Acts 20:17 *From Miletus, Paul sent to Ephesus for the elders of the church.*

- Crete

Titus 1:5 *The reason I left you in Crete was that you might straighten out what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town, as I directed you.*

- James

James 5:14 *Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord.*

- Peter

1 Peter 5:1 *To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ's sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed:*

- Interchangeable terms

- Shepherd, pastor, bishop, overseer, elder—all are used interchangeably
- **Ephesians 4:11**

Ephesians 4:11 *It was He who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers,*

- Pastor = *poimen* in Greek
- Means shepherd

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

- Shepherd = *poimen*

- **Acts 20:17, 28**

Acts 20:17, 28 *From Miletus, Paul sent to Ephesus for the elders of the church. 28 Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which He bought with His own blood.*

- To shepherd = verb of shepherd = *poimaino* in Greek (*poimen* = noun)
- Also used as “to feed” or “to take care of”

John 21:16 *Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you truly love Me?" He answered, "Yes, Lord, You know that I love You." Jesus said, "Take care of (*poimaino*) My sheep."*

- Overseers = bishop = *episkopos* in Greek (where we get Episcopal)

- **1 Peter 5:1,2**

1 Peter 5:1-2 *To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ's sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed: 2 Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve;*

- Elders are to be pastors of God's people

- They are to be overseers
- **Titus 1:7, 1 Timothy 3:1**

Titus 1:7 *Since an overseer is entrusted with God's work, he must be blameless—not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain.*

1 Timothy 3:1 *It is a trustworthy saying: If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task.*

- Single Elder or Plural Elders
 - From what we have read so far, plural elders

Philippians 1:1 *Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus. To all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons:*

1 Timothy 4:14 *Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through a prophetic message when the body of elders laid their hands on you.*

James 5:14 *Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord.*

- It seems that the churches were pastored (shepherded) by elders
 - The early church began with 12 Apostles as elders
 - Paul commands Titus to establish elders for each church

Titus 1:5 *The reason I left you in Crete was that you might straighten out what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town, as I directed you.*

- How many?
- Bible does not say

II. Qualification of Elders

- Two places in NT that talk about the Elders qualification
 - **1 Timothy 3:1-7**
 - **Titus 1:5-9**
 - Quick summary of their qualifications
- Desire to be an elder

1 Timothy 3:1 *This is a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of a bishop (overseer), he desires a good work.*

- Note: Desire is not the same as calling
- Calling comes when the church recognizes that a man meets all the qualifications directed by Scripture

Note: For years, many pastors have said that they have had the “call” to be a pastor as a nudge from God. The problem is that this “nudge” is nowhere to be found in the NT. All Paul says is that if a man wants to be a pastor, then great! Here are the qualifications that the CHURCH needs to observe in a man’s life before calling that man

to be a pastor. The church is the one that calls men to be pastors, not men self-proclaiming that they have the call.

- Elders must be men
 - One-woman man
 - Paul did not permit women to have leadership or teach over men

1 Timothy 2:12-14 *I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent. 13 For Adam was formed first, then Eve. 14 And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner.*

- Qualified by mature life
 - Above reproach
 - One-woman man
 - Self-controlled—not quick-tempered or quick to do sin
 - Sensible
 - Respectable
 - Not a new convert
 - Good reputation outside the church
- Qualified by good management
 - Hospitable
 - Not pugnacious
 - Gentle
 - Free from love of money (or not fond of sordid gain)
 - Rules house well
 - Children under control with dignity
 - Children not rebellious
- Qualified by ability to teach
 - Able to teach
 - Devout—life influenced by sound doctrine
 - Encourage in sound doctrine
 - Refute those in error or contradiction to doctrine

III. Responsibilities of Elders

- Shepherding the church
 - To lead the church by example
 - Imitate me as I imitate Christ
 - To encourage the church
 - To feed the church (with solid teaching)
- To teach

Titus 1:9 *He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.*

- To be alert for false teachers and wolves (to protect the church)

Acts 20:28-31 *Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which He bought with His own blood. 29 I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. 30 Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples*

after them. **31** So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears.

- Pray for church members

James 5:14 Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord.

IV. Office of Deacons

- What is the office of Deacon?
 - Gk word—*diakonos* which means servant; or table-waiters
 - Started in **Acts 6**

Acts 6:1-6 In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Grecian Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. **2** So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, "It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. **3** Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them **4** and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word." **5** This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism. **6** They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them.

- The group grew large and the needs for everyone was increasing
 - They were overwhelmed with the focus on preaching and teaching plus other things
 - They could not keep up with the physical needs of the church
 - These deacons were responsible to make sure that all the needs of the church were met (physical needs)
 - They were keeping the unity of the body together (note the complaint)
- Qualifications
 - Only found in **1 Timothy 3:8-13**
 - Same moral character as elders—that is the calling of every Christian
 - Able to teach is not part of the deacons' requirement (they can teach if they are gifted in it)
 - Can be either men or women
 - Deacon's wives
 - Interesting translation choices
 - Gk – *gune* can be woman or wife (actually used as woman of any age, young or old)

Note: There was no Greek term for female deaconess. Paul uses the generic term of women to include them in the deacon office.

- Why would Paul single out deacon's wife but not elder's wife?
- There is one example in NT of a woman who is a deacon

Romans 16:1 I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant (diakonos) of the church in Cenchrea.

- Responsibilities
 - Free up the elders to focus on the spiritual needs of the church
 - The Deacons focus on the physical needs of the church
 - Financial, transportation, benevolence, church building, church activities, etc

V. Who Makes the Final Decision?

- Who is in charge?
 - Jesus Christ is the head of the church (not the head of the Pastor/Elders) but the church
 - In church decisions He is speaking through the church
 - It is the church that has the final authority or say in decisions
 - Does not mean that the congregation is perfect!
 - Sometimes they will exercise their responsibility badly
 - Jonathan Edwards example: Jonathan Edwards was fired—they had the right to do so, but exercised poor judgment against him
- Congregation
 - Final authority in dispute between Christians

Matthew 18:15-17 If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. **16** But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.' **17** If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector.

- Note the church is the one that decides who is wrong and decides to excommunicate the member
- **Acts 6:1-6**, when selecting the disciples, the apostles appealed to the church to make a decision
- Final authority in basic doctrine matters
 - There are basic doctrines that the church should not deny or compromise
 - If a teacher comes to preach another gospel—kick them out

Galatians 1:8 But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned!

- If we allow such teachers to stay, then we are guilty of sharing in their sins

2 Timothy 4:3-4 For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. **4** They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.

- Final authority in discipline

1 Corinthians 5:7, 11-13 Get rid of the old yeast that you may be a new batch without yeast—as you really are. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. **11** But now I am writing you that you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat. **12** What business is it of mine to judge those outside the

church? Are you not to judge these inside? **13** God will judge those outside. "Expel the wicked man from among you."

- The church, not the elders, the pastor, the deacons, or even Paul himself
- The church is to decide to remove such person from fellowship
- Final authority in affirming church membership

2 Corinthians 2:6-8 *The punishment inflicted on him by the majority is sufficient for him. 7 Now instead, you ought to forgive and comfort him, so that he will not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. 8 I urge you, therefore, to reaffirm your love for him.*

- Paul, the apostle, can only encourage the church in accepting the man back
- The church has to make the final decision on accepting such person
- Final authority in calling the elders / deacons
 - **Acts 6, 1 Tim 3, Titus 1** have the same thing in common
 - The church is to select the leaders of the church
- Other congregational decisions in Scripture

Acts 15:1-3 *Some men came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the brothers: "Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved." 2 This brought Paul and Barnabas into sharp dispute and debate with them. So Paul and Barnabas were appointed, along with some other believers, to go up to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders about this question. 3 The church sent them on their way, and as they traveled through Phoenicia and Samaria, they told how the Gentiles had been converted. This news made all the brothers very glad.*

Acts 15:22-23 *Then the apostles and elders, with the whole church, decided to choose some of their own men and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They chose Judas (called Barsabbas) and Silas, two men who were leaders among the brothers. 23 With them they sent the following letter: The apostles and elders, your brothers, To the Gentile believers in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia: Greetings.*

- Relationship between the congregation and the elders
 - It is an issue of trust
 - Does the congregation trust their elders with decisions?
 - Does the congregation listen to the elders' advice?
 - Elders are there to help shepherd the church—not to be the lord of the church

Hebrews 13:17 *Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you.*