

**Systematic Theology**  
**Church Government: Monarchy, Anarchy, or Democracy? Part 2**  
**Selected Scriptures**  
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It occurred to me this last week as I was thinking about our continuing study on the nature of the church, and particularly the form of government, the structure, in which the church should fall, there are a large number of forms characteristic of our world and its governments. Think about the world for a moment and sort of let your mind drift across the various continents and think about the different structures or forms that government takes. You have, of course, as we've read recently in North Korea, a ruthless dictatorship. Across the Middle East you have everything from a modified democracy to really a monarchy, a rule by king, or someone very much like a king. You go across some of the sweep of Africa and you find some of those countries locked in a state of really anarchy, and so there is a spectrum of governmental forms that spans an incredible continuum in our world.

Sad to say, most of those forms can be found in churches. I've attended churches that had varying forms of church leadership, some of them were nearly anarchy, others were pure democracy where everyone voted on everything. For a brief time when I was in college, I attended a Presbyterian church with a Presbyterian model of government, and I have for the last 20 years attended an elder rule, plurality of elders leading the church, kind of church. So, I've been exposed to a lot of those different kinds of structures that characterize the church. There was even a brief time in my life when just before I became a Christian actually, that I was attending a church where you could say that it was headed by a ruthless dictator. And so, they're all out there and you've heard about them, you've read about them, perhaps you've attended churches characterized by some of those forms of government. But the real question for us is: What was God's design? What was the plan of God when He conceived the church in eternity past, what structure did He desire the church to have?

Let me remind you where we have come thus far, and I won't spend a lot of time here. If you missed last week, some of these might not make complete sense to you. You'll have to catch up

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on the internet or through a CD. But we looked at the primary forms of church government that are present in the world today. The first being Episcopalian, which is led by an archbishop overseeing bishops, who then oversee rectors at the local level, who oversee congregations. It is a hierarchical system of government. A second form is Presbyterian, in which there are elders elected from each congregation that form a session, select elders from each session or each congregation leadership panel form a presbytery, and then they come together, the various presbyteries come together, to form a general assembly. So, the government of the church happens from outside the church in both of these models.

But then there is the congregational model. But when you say *congregational*, you don't mean by that, democracy, necessarily. There are various forms congregationalism takes. When we say *congregational*, all we're really saying is that the government of the church is completely inside of that local church. The form it takes may be varied, and we went through these. There is the single elder or single pastor model, working with a deacon board. This is the typical Southern Baptist model, and we looked at that at length. The corporate board model, where essentially the board oversees the pastor and the pastor is responsible to the board in the same way that a CEO is accountable to the board of directors in a for profit business.

Also, another congregational model is the pure democracy, where the congregation votes, literally, on everything, that's actually fairly close to anarchy. But then there's "no government but the Holy Spirit," a sort of model that ebbs and flows everywhere, based on the individual congregation, there's really no structure. This is a very emotional-driven church that's characterized by "no government but the Holy Spirit." And then a final congregational model, and it's the one that I'm proposing to you is the biblical model, is that, the government of this church should be within this church entirely, but it should not be "no government but the Holy Spirit." It should not be a democracy, in the sense of everybody gets a vote on everything.

Instead, what the Bible teaches is that every church has self-contained leadership that is plural in form, comprised of men called elders. And the pastor, as we like to call them in western culture, or in other portions of Christianity as well, but especially here in western culture, is one of those elders overseeing the church. So, my task here is two-fold: and that's to present to you the evidence from the scripture, evidence that shows that a group of godly men, not a single

individual, is to lead the church. And secondly, to persuade you that God requires every church to follow that pattern. So, this is where we find ourselves in our little study together.

We looked last week; we began to look at the evidence for a plurality. Where do we get that idea? Well, you go back even to the Old Testament and you see that the concept of a plurality of godly men leading was evident there, and I won't rehearse all of that, but we saw that there were elders of houses or families, there were elders (plural) of cities, and there were elders (plural) of the nation. So, the Jewish mind was used to the concept of a plurality of godly men leading in various contexts.

And then when you come to the New Testament and see the apostolic example, you see that played out in the life of the early church. We looked at a number of texts in the New Testament and each one of them connects a plurality of godly men with a single flock or church. And so, there's no question but what that was the New Testament model. And I think by the time we finished last week, if you were doubtful of that, I hope that I overwhelmed you with the biblical evidence for that.

Now, what I want us to do tonight, or I want us to move on from that to several other issues. I want us to start with this: so, what are the primary arguments against the plurality of elders? If that is the biblical model, as we looked at in detail last week and saw it flow, why are there other models? What are the arguments that are used against it? Well, there's several and I'm not going to take a lot of time with these. There are good defenses of these in several books including Alexander Strauch's excellent book, *Biblical Eldership*, Wayne Grudem in his *Systematic Theology* addresses it, etc. I'm just going to touch on them.

First of all, there are some passages that seem to show the one pastor model. For example, Revelation chapter 1 you have the angels of the seven churches. *Angels* is simply a word which means "messengers." You remember Christ is standing among the lampstands and He holds the stars in His hands, and when John has that vision explained to him and he explains it to us? The lampstands represent the churches; the stars represent the angels of the seven churches, better translation: the messengers are the leaders of the local churches. And so, some would say those were single pastors over each of those churches, but that cannot be true. The way we know that's not true is one of those churches is the church in Ephesus. And we know from Paul's letter to

Timothy in 1 Timothy chapter 5 verses 17 and 18 and following, that there was a plurality of elders in Ephesus. So that argument really doesn't hold, and there are other arguments against it as well, but that's one example. You can read about that at your choice.

A second argument that's proposed against the plurality of elders is, what about the priesthood of every believer? Doesn't that support a democratic form of congregational government? Turn to 1 Peter for a moment, let's look at this passage. 1 Peter chapter 2 verse 9, Peter says, "But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A ROYAL PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR God's OWN POSSESSION, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light." We are priests to God, that is clear in the New Testament teaching, and so there are those who would say the priesthood of every individual believer argues for every believer to have a vote in what goes on in the life of the church.

Well, there's several problems with that, not to mention the evidence we looked at last week for a plurality. But where is Peter quoting this from? Peter is quoting this verse from Exodus 19 verse 6, words that were originally addressed to Israel. This was Israel's, the nation's, original mandate from God when their constitution was formed there at Sinai. This is who they were to be. They failed to be that, and God has now assigned this role of a witness nation, a royal priesthood, to the church. But what I want you to remember is that these words addressed to Israel, calling them a royal priesthood, did not constitute the nation as a democracy. The people gathered at Sinai didn't get a vote! Moses and the 70 elders were all appointed solely by God and the existing leadership, and the people affirmed that in the very same sense that elders are appointed in the New Testament.

So, in what sense are believers priests? Really in one sense; Hebrews makes it clear. Hebrews chapter 10 verse 19 and following,

Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence [we, each of us, has confidence] to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus [this is the sense in which we're priests], by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, [through] His flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our

hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

You want to know the sense in which you're a priest? You don't have to go through some other priest to get to God. That's the priesthood of the believer. There's no intermediary between you and God except the one mediator, the God-Man, Jesus Christ. Each of us are priests in that sense.

A third argument that's presented against the plurality of elders is that Christians are all one in Christ, and so there's no need for human authority in the church. Well, I think you can see on the face of it that this argument doesn't really stand. Because there is a sense in which we're no longer male and female either, according to Galatians 3:28, but that doesn't abolish those roles. In the home, for example, Ephesians 5 makes it clear that even though, as Galatians says, those distinctions are abolished in our standing before God (there's no difference between a man and a woman before God) and yet in the home the husband still is placed in a position of responsibility and leadership over his wife. The same is true in the church. The fact that we all have an equal standing before God does not obliterate roles and responsibilities and authorities. Spiritual equality does not negate spiritual leadership, nor does it advocate spiritual anarchy or democracy. Those are three of the common arguments you'll hear against a plurality of elders.

Let's continue our look tonight by looking at specifically who are these men. Who are they, and what's their function? I want to look at the three primary Greek words for the office of elder, three words. The first word is the word for "elder" that's translated in our English Bible as "elder," it's the word *presbyteros*. It has two primary uses in the New Testament. One of those is to refer to an older man or an old man. You can see that usage in 1 Timothy chapter 5 verse 1, you remember, Paul tells Timothy if you're going to appeal to an older man do it as to a father, and he uses this word. It's also used as a title for a community official, an elder. It has no specific age with this second usage, in other words, it's not that to be an official elder you have to be a certain age, but it does imply maturity, dignity, experience, and honor.

It's used 28 times, this word *presbyteros*, or elder, in the gospels and Acts for the members of the Jewish Sanhedrin, 12 times in Revelation of the 24 elders who are representatives of the redeemed, 19 times in Acts and the epistles it occurs, referring to a unique group of leaders in the church. We'll come back to give some meaning to this in a moment. Let's look at the second

word. The second word is the word translated “overseer.” In some English Bibles it’s translated “bishop” as well. The Greek word is *episkopos*.

This was a common word for an office holder in Greek culture. It’s used of secular officials of various kinds, especially local officials. Any official, who acted as a superintendent, a manager, a controller, or a ruler, could be called an *episkopos*. In the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament, the Septuagint, it’s used for army officers in Numbers 31:14. It’s used of tabernacle administrators in Numbers 4:16. It’s used for those supervising the repair of the temple in 2 Chronicles 24:12 and 17. It’s used of those who guard the temple in 2 Kings 11:18, and it’s used of city supervisors or mayors in Nehemiah 11:9. So it’s used in a vast number of ways in the Septuagint.

It’s used only 5 times in the New Testament, one time of Christ in 1 Peter 2:25, where He’s called the Overseer or Bishop of our souls. The other four times it’s used of church leaders. By the way, these four times it’s especially used for Gentile congregations like Ephesus, which would have understood the sort of secular Greek usage of this word, someone who acted as a ruler or manager, an overseer. It’s a very general word, like supervisor, manager, or guardian. Those would be familiar English words that would capture some sense of this Greek word, *episkopos*. Now, “oversight” is something that’s a little hard to define but I think we can get our arms around it a little more if we look at 1 Timothy, because 1 Timothy 5 sort of expands this concept without the word. What is “oversight” in the sense of an elder providing oversight? The word that is used here, the word for “rules” in verse 17, “...the elders who rule well...” it means to “put before,” to “set over” or to rule. It’s also translated “leads.”

These are very informative. It’s translated as “leads” in Romans 12:8. So what we’re doing here is we’re looking at a synonym, if you will, for our word “overseer,” a word that explains a little bit of what this means to oversee or to manage. And, this word is translated as “leads” in Romans 12:8 where it refers to a gift of administration, the ability to manage, to set things in order, to rule. This word is translated, as “manages” in 1 Timothy 3:4 and 5, where it refers to an elder’s oversight of his household. He manages his household well. This word is translated as “managers” in 1 Timothy 3:12, there referring to the deacon and his managing of both his children, notice this, managing his children, and his household. So, this word encompasses both

people and things, if you will, the parts of a household in addition to the people. So, we are responsible, the elders are responsible to rule, to lead, to manage in all of these senses.

Now, notice in 1 Timothy 5:17, he says, “The elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at... [teaching and preaching]” This also helps us understand a little bit more. This word “especially” is used 12 times in the New Testament, 8 times in Paul’s epistles, and every time Paul uses this word, what follows it is always a subset of what has come before. And I’m not going to take you to all those references. You’ll have to trust me. But the bottom line is, when he uses this word, he’s saying, “I’m going to now describe a subset of what has come before.” Now why is that important in 1 Timothy 5? Look at it again, 1 Timothy 5:17. You have all of the elders who are supposed to rule, then some of the elders rule particularly well, while all of the elders are supposed to be able to teach, 1 Timothy 3:2, some work hard at teaching and preaching. The implication is that some elders have greater teaching responsibilities, probably because of superior gifts.

What I want you to see here in 1 Timothy 5:17, is that the responsibility of all elders is to rule, or to use the word we’ve been looking at before, they are to serve as overseers, *episkopos*, managers, which is a synonym to this word in 1 Timothy 5:17. Now, when I say that, some people immediately say, “Well, wait a minute, the elders should just stay out of everything except the spiritual. Isn’t that what Acts 6 teaches?” I’ve actually had a lengthy discussion with a dear friend who absolutely believes that elders should stay out of everything except—well, turn to Acts 6, let’s look at it—except what the apostles say they’re going to do. Look at Acts 6 verse 3 they say, “...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 [the apostles] will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.”

In other words, there are those who say, “You keep your hands off, elders, of everything except the ministry of the word and prayer and let the rest of us do everything else.” Is that what the Bible teaches in Acts 6:1 to 6? Let’s look at it together. First of all, most commentators agree that this passage does not deal with the offices of elder and deacon, but only a foreshadowing of them. In other words, we are not yet talking about the office of elder and the office of deacon. This is just foreshadowing. These are apostles and men who are going to serve. In that sense, it

points forward but it's not the exact thing. However, even if you grant that this passage deals with the church offices, even if you say, "O.k. these are like elders and deacons," it only affirms or confirms that elders ultimately have oversight of every aspect of church life and they must exercise that oversight.

I want you to notice the following oversight functions of the apostles in Acts 6. Notice, they fielded the problem. A complaint arose, and it came to the twelve. The twelve, again if they're acting as elders, notice how they provide oversight here. They fielded the problem. They determined the key issue was a shortage of manpower: "The real problem we have here is we need some people to deal with this." Then the apostles determined that the solution was to put some men over the specific task. They decided how many men were needed. They said, "We need seven men we think will handle this problem." They set up the qualifications for those who would be appointed, they determined what they needed to be, verse 3, "...men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task."

They decided who would select the men. They allowed the people who were a part of the church to select these men, particularly the party that was complaining that their widows were being overlooked, which was a wise decision on the part of the apostles. And while we're not told, while the text doesn't mention any outcome of this situation, there is every reason to expect that the apostles checked up on this new ministry to make sure that it was functioning properly. The only thing, listen carefully, the only thing the apostles said they would not do, and they did not do, was actually serve in the ministry. This does help in some ways to define and confirm the role of oversight of an elder. While the office is not here, you see that the elders are responsible for oversight, but they must not, and they should not, do the ministry itself. All these are undeniably the functions of an overseer.

Now, let's move on to our third Greek word. We've looked at the word "elder." We've looked at the word "overseer." Our third word is the word "shepherd," or "pastor," *poimēn* is the Greek word. The noun form of this word occurs 18 times in the New Testament. It's used of actual shepherds, that is, keepers of real animals. That's not our task. It's used of Christ in two passages, in Hebrews 13 and 1 Peter 2. And it's used one time of church leaders where it's translated "pastor" in our English versions, and that's in Ephesians 4:11. By the way, in



Ephesians 4:11, the Greek construction puts the two words together. It's probably best to translate it as it is, I believe, in the New American Standard, "pastor-teachers." It emphasizes the shepherd's primary role which is teaching or feeding the sheep.

Think about it for a moment. What is the key role of a literal shepherd of animals? Feeding them. You can get away with a lot of things as a shepherd, but you're not going to be a shepherd very long if you don't feed the sheep. This word highlights the key responsibility that we have in leading the church: teaching or feeding the sheep. Now the verb form of this word is used three times in the context of church leaders. It's used in John 21 where Christ demands that Peter shepherd His sheep. It's used in Acts 20 verse 28 where Paul reminds the Ephesian elders that they are to "shepherd the church." And it's used in 1 Peter chapter 5 where Peter charged the elders that were scattered to shepherd the flock of God.

Essentially, this word is a word picture. It pulls from that culture and helps the leadership of the church to see what their heart and function is to be. They are to be to the people, to their flock, what an actual shepherd is to literal sheep. They are to be everything that that shepherd is, they are to feed them, they are to care for them, they are to protect them, they are to help heal them when they're in trouble, rescue them from danger, all of the things that a shepherd does to sheep, a leader of the church, an elder, an overseer, and a shepherd is to do.

Now, when you look at these three words, it's important to understand that they identify the exact same person, or same office. "Elder," "overseer," "shepherd" all refer to the same office and the same person. How do we know that? Well, again I'm not going to spend a lot of time here, but you need to know this. Here's how we know these all refer to the same person. First of all, the qualifications for an overseer, the word used in 1 Timothy 3, and the qualifications for an elder, the word used in Titus 1, are almost identical. It's clear that that function is the same, even though it's described by these different words, overseer and elder.

Secondly, Paul tells Titus to appoint elders in Titus 1:5, then calls the same office overseer in verse 7, two verses later. A third argument, 1 Peter 5:1 and 2 brings all three of the concepts together into one office. Notice what Peter says, "...I exhort the elders among you [there's our first word], as your fellow elder...shepherd the flock [there's our second word] ...among you, exercising oversight [there's our third word] ...." So Peter brings all three of those concepts

together in this one office. Acts 20 also uses all three of these terms interchangeably. In verse 17 of Acts 20 we read, “From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church.” In verse 28 he says, “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.” So, these terms all come together of the same office.

How do the terms work? Well, essentially elder refers to the character of the man, he is spiritually mature. And shepherd and overseer both refer to function. He exercises the role of a shepherd in that he feeds, protects and heals his people, and an overseer, he rules or has charge both over the people and everything that happens in the church. That’s what elders are to do. John MacArthur puts it this way in his little book on pastoral ministry, he says, “The term *elder* emphasizes who the man is, *bishop* speaks of what he does (or overseer), and *pastor* or *shepherd* deals with how he ministers, reflects his attitude or his heart.”

Now, before I leave this, I want to draw it all together for you. Essentially what the scriptures teach is that every church has its government residing within that church, without a hierarchy outside of that church, and that government is to be a plurality of godly men who can be called elder, overseer or shepherd. Those are all three identical titles. The elders of this church all have equal intrinsic authority, not one of us is above another in terms of intrinsic authority. However, we all have differing levels of experience, different levels of spiritual maturity, different ages, different expertise, and in all of those things we’re to practice mutual deference to one another. But in terms of intrinsic authority, my authority is not greater than any of the other elders who serve in this church.

Now a question some people have is, ‘Why are some elders paid and other elders not?’ Well, you know, I think there’s really only one indication of that in scripture and we’re going to look at it a little later. It’s in 1 Timothy 5, so I’ll get to that question. It also raises a couple of other issues. There are certain practices in the church at large that have been in place here in this church which could cause some potential confusion. Let me address them. First of all, we call some men pastors who are not officially set apart to serve as elders. You say, “I thought an elder was an overseer was a pastor, so why are all of our pastors not elders?” For example, Adam Bailey is our family pastor, but he’s not an elder. Why is that? Well, as long as you understand that he and

Jonathan both are elders-in-training. We believe that they are gifted men; they are gifted to serve as elders and someday will, and so we ask them to do the work of an elder in one specific area of ministry, rather than serve in the official role of elder over the entire church, as each of the elders who serve officially as elders in this church, have been given the responsibility to do.

We also ordain men to the ministry who are not yet elders. In fact, I mentioned Jonathan's ordination coming up two Sunday nights from tonight. And yet, he will not automatically become an elder in this church just because he's ordained. And just because Adam was ordained out at Grace Church he didn't come into this church as an elder. Why is that? Why do these anomalies exist? And they are anomalies from the biblical pattern. Why do they exist? Well, I think they exist to some degree from an overall lack of a biblical doctrine of the church in the church at large. So, these things have sprung up through the history of the church, they're part of the church's culture.

I also think that the current seminary system, and I'm a fan of seminary, I think if you're going to be in ministry and you're going to be a senior pastor, your goal is to teach the Word of God, you need the tools that you will get there. And yet, at the same time, the current system encourages both of these practices which are in some ways, distinct from the clear teaching of the New Testament. But in the end, the elders of each church have been given the latitude, I believe, to make these kinds of decisions and to identify these roles and to give specific responsibility to these men. But I just want to acknowledge to you that those are practices that are common in this church and outside of this church that are hard to synchronize with what we've studied together.

So, the New Testament pattern is certain and clear: A group of qualified men leading the church. But is that the pattern—listen carefully—is that pattern required for every church today, is it a mandate? There are people who will say, “Absolutely, what you just taught is true. That's what the pattern was in the New Testament, but that doesn't mean we are bound to that pattern. We have the freedom to choose whatever mode and model, whatever structure that we want.” Well, let me briefly give you the arguments for a mandate. I believe it is a mandate, that every church has the responsibility to function in this way. Let me, before I share these say, if you're visiting from a different church, it is not your mission in life to go convert that church to an elder-led

church. There's a lot of patience, a lot of teaching, a lot of wisdom, and that's the role of the leadership in the end, and not your role. Nevertheless, it's important to understand that I think there is a biblical mandate.

First of all, look at the purpose of the Pastoral Epistles. The Pastoral Epistles, when we use the term, we're talking about 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus, those books written to pastors to give them instruction and to deal with issues in the church. They were written to church leaders with instruction about life in the church. In 1 Timothy chapter 3 verse 15, Paul spells out his purpose. In fact, turn there with me. 1 Timothy chapter 3 verse 14, he says, I hope to come "...but in case I am delayed, I write so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth."

Paul is saying, "Listen, I'm writing so that you know how life in the church should function." And within the context of the Pastoral Epistles, the evidence is absolutely clear: Paul is insisting on a plurality of leadership. You see it in 1 Timothy chapter 5 verse 17. You see it in Titus chapter 1 verse 5. So, here are books, given to tell the church how to function, and in those books, Paul insists that a plurality of godly men be put in charge of the church. I don't see how you get around that, honestly.

There's a second argument, however, and that's apostolic authority. The 12 apostles, in their example, established elder rule in the Jewish churches. In Acts chapter 15 verse 6 we see that there was a plurality of elders in the churches the apostles established. Also, if you look at Paul's example, he established elder rule in the Gentile churches that he founded. In Acts 14:23, he tells us that he went back over those cities and he established elders in every place, in every church. Then you have the Apostle Paul's command to Titus in Titus 1:5, "...appoint elders in every...[church]..." So when you look at the Pastoral Epistles and the reason they were written, to provide us guidance for the life of the church, when you look at the authority of the apostles and what they designated, we're responsible as churches to have a plurality of godly men leading the church.

Now, let me just give you some common misunderstandings about what's called "elder rule." You'll hear that expression; it's an expression to describe a plurality of godly men leading the local church. Let me give you some misunderstandings about that. Unfortunately, some people

see it as an oligarchy. Do you know what that word means: “rule by the few?” That’s what it literally means. It usually implies, the word does, a heavy-handed, autocratic kind of leadership. That’s not what the Bible teaches when it teaches elder rule. We are to lead instead as servants, Jesus says, in Matthew 20 verses 25 to 28. We’re to lead as examples, Peter says in 1 Peter 5. “Don’t lord it over the flock, lead them instead by example.” So, we’re not talking about some heavy-handed rule by a few men in a smoke-filled room somewhere.

There’s a sense in which we can legitimately say, listen carefully, there is a sense in which we can legitimately say, that elder rule is an oligarchy, in the sense that you have rule, and have a few. But that’s where the similarities stop. It’s perhaps better to describe elder rule as a republic, as representative government. You see, ultimately Christ chooses the elders of the church according to Ephesians 4 verse 10 and following. But He doesn’t do that, either by communicating His choice solely to the man himself, in other words just telling the guy, “I want you to be an elder.” And then I say, “God told me He wants me to be an elder.” He doesn’t do it by communicating to the elders. We don’t get any letters from God, apart from the ones you have, in the Word of God. And He doesn’t do it by some miraculous or providential intervention. Instead, Christ gives both the other elders and the people of the church the responsibility to affirm that a man meets the biblical qualifications. If they affirm that reality, then the man becomes their representative. The people’s authority ends at that point, unless they become aware that a man has biblically disqualified himself to serve as their representative, in which case they are compelled to follow a process through the elders to see that man removed from being an elder.

A second misunderstanding about elder rule is the corporate model. This is how some people interpret elder rule. In this model, the pastor is the CEO, the elders are the board. The problems with this approach are several. First of all, the character of the men. Often in this model, they ignore the biblical qualifications and they only see the qualification to be for the pastor, the one guy who’s teaching, and all the rest of them can be just really successful businessmen to happen to have a lot of money. There’s another view of the corporate model, and that is their view of the pastor. They see the pastor as an employee working under the direction of the elder board, as opposed as the pastor being one of the elders having equal authority with the other elders.

And there's a problem with the focus. Usually, when you have a corporate model of leadership in the church, the focus is solely or primarily on the business side of the church. They spend all their time on the business and very little time on the shepherding, teaching, equipping issues. We have a practice in our elders' meeting for which I'm grateful, of making sure that we balance those responsibilities that we have and we don't spend all of our time, as it were, as a corporate board making business decisions, but rather focusing on shepherding issues and equipping and teaching issues, because we have all of those duties and responsibilities. Don't misunderstand, the elders are responsible for everything that happens in the life of the church, but not to do it, to oversee it. And the focus and the elders' life and time should be the spiritual welfare of the people.

Just briefly, a third common misunderstanding about elder rule is egalitarianism. Do you recognize that word? It essentially means everyone's equal. It's a terrible blight on those churches today that embrace elder rule. On some of them, I've had to deal with the fallout of this mindset as I've talked to churches that have blown apart. Many churches who understand the principle of elder rule have misunderstood it and made it pure egalitarianism; everyone is exactly equal. Listen, that's the Declaration of Independence, not the Bible. We're not exactly equal. There will always be our superiors in age, in gifts, in experience, in position, and we owe them proper respect. Romans 13:7 says, "Render to all what is due them...honor to whom honor." As I mentioned before, there ought to be, even among the elders, a mutual deference. So, it's not pure egalitarianism, one-man-one-vote. Instead, there is a recognition of honor to some who by age or experience deserve that honor.

Now, I want to end our discussion tonight with asking this basic question and answering it: so, what's your duty to the elders? Our church has nine elders, so most of you sitting there tonight are not elders. How do you respond? What has God commanded of you in responding? Scripture assigns you four basic obligations to the elders of this church. Now, I have to admit to you, I'm a bit reluctant to share these with you simply because it could seem self-serving, but I think it's important for you to think about and practice these clear commands. These are as much a part of scripture as everything else we study together. This is your responsibility.

First of all, you are to appreciate and esteem them. In 1 Thessalonians chapter 5 verses 12 and 13, Paul writes this, "... we request of you, brethren, [writing now to the church-at-large] that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord [that's how we know we're talking about elders here; they have charge over you in the Lord] and give you instruction...that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work." By the way, notice here the work of elders. They are to labor to the point of exhaustion, they're to have charge over you, and they're to teach you. That's not a bad definition of the role of an elder. But you are to esteem and appreciate those whom God has placed as elders in the church.

Secondly, you're to support some of them financially. In 1 Timothy chapter 5 verse 17, "The elders who rule well [this is the verse I mentioned earlier] are to be considered worthy of double honor..." What's "double honor"? Pay. The reference here is to money. How do I know that? Look at the next verse, "For the Scripture says, 'YOU SHALL NOT MUZZLE THE OX WHILE HE IS THRESHING,' and 'The laborer is worthy of his wages.'" One of those an Old Testament text, the other from the gospel of Luke. We're talking here about pay. Some of the elders are to be paid. How do you determine which elders are to be paid? Well, look at verse 17, "...especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching."

All the elders are to be teachers, and all of our elders are teachers, and they are all involved in teaching. But there is some distinction made here between those who especially labor at preaching and teaching versus those that don't. There's also a distinguishing here about some elders who rule or manage well. Not that some elders manage poorly, that's not the point. The point has more to do with the extent in which they're involved in managing and leading. And so, both could be supported by the church if they give themselves in a specific way to managing and overseeing the church and shepherding the church, and especially if they labor at teaching and preaching, they are to be supported. And by the way, you do that here and you do it well.

A third responsibility that you have to your elders is to imitate their faith. Hebrews chapter 13 verse 7, "Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith." By the way, here's another verse that outlines some of the responsibility of elders. We are to lead, we are to teach, and we're to set an example for

people to follow. And you are responsible to imitate our faith. That's a frightening thing for me to even say, honestly, but that's clearly what the scripture says.

Finally, your duty to your elders is to obey and submit to them. Hebrews chapter 13 verse 17, just a few verses later in that same chapter, "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 with joy and not with grief, for this would [even] be unprofitable for you." Now, let me say that my authority as an elder, the authority of the other elders in this church, stops where the Word of God stops. I have no authority to command you which house to buy, or which car to buy, or which color socks you should wear next time you come to church. But if I can take the Word of God and I can show you from the scripture what God commands, then you have a responsibility to obey and submit to that Word. That's what the writer of Hebrews is saying, so that we can lead you with joy and not with grief. These are your responsibilities.

And let me just say as an elder of this church, that as far as I'm concerned, many of you do these things extremely well and I am blessed to be here. But I remind you of the standard that the scripture lays down. This is the leadership God has put in place. Next week, Lord willing, we'll finish our study of the elders by looking at the biblical qualifications. And I hope to get to deacons as well, and finish that off next week in our study together. Let's pray together.

Father, thank You for Your great wisdom in the church. Lord, we see in the structure that You have put in place, the wisdom of Your great mind and we thank You for it. We thank You for the protection that comes in a plurality of leadership, for the pooled wisdom and experience, for the protection that comes from error and sin, and heavy-handedness and all of those things that leaders can be tempted to. Father, we thank You and praise You. I thank You, Father, not only for the pattern You've established, but I thank You for the elders of this church, for the men that You have given me the privilege to serve alongside. Lord, I thank You for their love for You and for their passion for the church. Lord, I pray that you would help us as a church to function as You designed the church to function. Lord don't let us be influenced by our own government as a democracy, or other governments, or our past and our past church experience. Lord, help us instead to be governed by the Word of God and to approach the government of the church in a way that would bring honor to Your great name. We pray it in Jesus' name, for His sake. Amen.