

Selected Scriptures
The Legacy of Biblical Elders
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I want to finish up the series we have been working through the end of this summer and that is considering the legacy that was handed down to the church from past generations, but sadly that the Christian church, as a whole, has lost. Particularly over the last 100 to 150 years so much of that legacy has either been abandoned intentionally or has died from sheer neglect.

So far, we have examined the legacy of expository preaching, the legacy of worship in music, and last time we looked at the legacy of absolute truth. Today I want us to finish this series by considering the legacy of biblical elders. This has largely been abandoned in the Christian church in many regards.

It really starts with this basic principle, and that is that our God is a God of order and structure. That's true everywhere in the universe there is intelligent life. Think about it this way. In the trinity there is order. There is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Among the holy angels there is order as well, with the archangels leading the other orders and categories of angels that are unfolded on the pages of Scripture.

Among mankind, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Creator and sustainer of everything, established spheres of order and authority. It is He who established governments, that governments would be over nations of people. He established the husband as the head of the marriage and of the wife in marriage. He is the one who placed parents over families and children. So, in every category of intelligent life in the universe God has established order and structure. So, it shouldn't surprise us that Jesus Christ has established order and authority in His church.

Now, you know this, but let me just remind you that Christ is the head of the church. He is the one who directs its life, directs its existence and how it should respond to His lordship. In Ephesians 5:23 we read, Christ is the head of the church in the same way that the husband is the head of his wife. Christ is the head of His church, of His bride. And Christ has instituted leadership within the context of the church. He gave offices and gifted men to His church to act as stewards on His behalf; to act as under shepherds; to act as house managers. All of those images are used in the New Testament.

For example, in Ephesians 4:11 and 12, Christ gave to His church these offices: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastor-teachers, "... for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ." Christ, as the head of the church, has decided how the church should be structured. Sadly, many churches, and even church leaders, think how the church is organized is unimportant. For example, Donald Miller in *The Nature and Mission of the Church*, writes this,

No particular structure of church life is divinely ordained. Any form which the Holy Spirit can inhabit and to which He may impart the life of Christ must be accepted as valid for the church. As all forms of life adapt themselves to their environment, so does the life of Christ by His Spirit in the church.

In other words, just adapt, do whatever you want. Structure the church however you please. But the truth is the structure of the church is crucial. It reminds me of what Winston Churchill said about actual structures. He said, "We shape our buildings, and our buildings shape us." Well, the same thing is true about organization and structure. We create our organization and structure, and that structure then shapes how we respond in that circumstance in that organization.

Alexander Stroock in his excellent book *Biblical Eldership* writes this,

"Some of the worst havoc wrought to the Christian faith has been a direct result of unscriptural forms of church structure. Only a few centuries after the apostle's death for example, Christ's churches began to assimilate Roman and Jewish concepts of status, power and priesthood. Under Christ's name an elaborately structured institution emerged that corrupted the simple family structure of the apostolic churches, robbed God's people of their lofty position and ministry in Christ and exchanged Christ's supremacy over His people for the supremacy of the institutional church."

Before you came to Countryside, perhaps you were a part of churches with many different models of leadership. For example, perhaps you belonged to a church that was run like a democracy, where it was pure congregational rule; and everybody got a vote, and so everybody equally decided what was going to happen in the church.

Or maybe you belonged to a church that was run like a dictatorship where all authority rested in the senior pastor. This is very common. In fact, I actually have heard a pastor say, “I am not only the dictator in my church, I am the only tater.” Maybe you belonged to a church like that. Or maybe you belonged to a church that was run like a corporation with a board of trustees, basically men who were qualified to run a business, but who were not spiritually qualified to run a church. Now, I’ll tell you that as I was growing up in the church and through college, I belonged to all of those kinds of churches but never a truly biblical one. In the end, your experience, my experience, it doesn’t really matter.

The question is, what does the Scripture say about the structure of the church? You see, the church always has some form; it has to. But what form does the Scripture prescribe? This morning, I want to show you the biblical evidence that a group of godly men (I’ll use the expression, a plurality of godly men), not a single pastor, not congregational rule, but a group of godly men led the New Testament churches.

And secondly, I want you to understand the biblical arguments that God requires every church to follow that pattern even today. So, we’re going to look at the pattern of the scriptures, and then we’re going to look at why that should be the pattern for this church and every church. So, let’s begin then with the biblical evidence for a plurality of elders in each church.

I want to begin then, not in the New Testament, but in the Old. I want us to consider the Old Testament pattern and the Jewish mindset. The most common New Testament word for church leaders is the word “elder”. And that word occurs often in the Old Testament. So, let’s examine what was in the minds of the apostles by looking at what an elder was in the Old Testament. Don’t misunderstand me, Old Testament elders and the New Testament office in the church are not identical. The church didn’t begin until Pentecost. All right, so we’re not talking about New Testament elders in the Old Testament. But rather, we can help to understand this concept by looking at its origin in Old Testament history.

So, let’s begin then by considering the two primary Hebrew words for “elder” in the Old Testament. The first is “zaqen.” The word means old. It speaks of mature age. It’s usually plural. It occurs 178 times in the Old Testament, about a hundred times as a technical term for those in authority. Another word is the word “sieve.” It’s an Aramaic word. After the Babylonian captivity, the people returned to the land in about 500s BC. They didn’t speak Hebrew anymore.

They spoke Aramaic, and so in the books in that period of time this word “siyb” is used. It occurs about five times in the Old Testament, all in Ezra, after the exile. It means “gray headed.” So, taking those words, let’s look at how the word elder is used in the Old Testament.

First of all, there are elders of a house or a family. In Genesis 50:7, Joseph went up to bury his father, and with him went all the servants of Pharaoh, the elders of his household....” So extended families had elders who were responsible for the leadership of the family. In Psalm 105:22 it speaks of Pharaoh’s elders, that is his household. In 2 Samuel 12:17 we read of the elders of David’s household, or his extended family. So, there were elders of a house or a family.

Secondly, there were elders of a city, that is those who administered the local government of a city. Just a couple of examples, in Judges 8:14 Gideon captured a young man from the city of Succoth, and he questioned him, and it says the youth wrote down for him the princes of the city of Succoth and its elders, 77 men. So, of a city there were elders, those who were responsible to lead it. In Ruth 4:9 Boaz approached the elders of the city of Bethlehem about the responsibility regarding Ruth. So, elders of cities.

Thirdly, in the Old Testament you find that there were elders of nations. Now, let’s begin outside of Israel. There were actually elders in the nations around Israel. For example, in Genesis 50:7 we read about all the elders of the land of Egypt. In Numbers 22:7, the elders of Moab, the country of Moab, and the elders of the country of Midian. So, even the nations around Israel were led by a plurality of elders; older men who were responsible for the leadership of the nation.

So, let’s come then, to the nation of Israel itself. Israel clearly had elders by the time of Moses. Go back to Exodus 3. Exodus 3, you have here the commissioning of Moses to go and lead the people out of Egypt. In Exodus 3:16, God says to Moses,

“Go and gather the elders of Israel together and say to them, ‘Yahweh’ [The LORD], the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, has appeared to me, saying, “I am indeed concerned about you and what has been done to you in Egypt. [And I’m going to bring you out of that affliction.]”

Go to 4:29, Then Moses and Aaron went and assembled all the elders of the sons of Israel; and [they] ... spoke ... the words which [God]... had ... [commanded] to ... [them].

Now, that's during the time of Moses. We already mentioned, I already mentioned the time of the Judges, Boaz and the elders of the city of Bethlehem. But there were also elders in the nation when you come to the monarchy. When David and Saul and Solomon, and later the kings of Israel reigned, the elders were still there. Even though there was a king, there were still elders, and they acted as an advisory body to the nation. First Samuel 8:4 speaks of, "all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel."

In 2 Samuel 5:3, "all the elders of Israel came to David and anointed him king over Israel." So, the elders are the ones who anointed David as king over the nation. Even in those wayward tribes, the ten northern tribes that were worshiping a false god set up by Jeroboam, even there, there were elders of that nation. In 1 Kings 20:7, the king of Israel called all the elders of the land together. So, during the monarchy, you had elders acting as an advisory body. During the exile, during the time that the children of Israel, those 70 years that they were exiled into Babylon, and you still had elders. And Jeremiah 29:1, "... these are the words of the letter which Jeremiah the prophet sent from Jerusalem to the rest of the elders of the exile..." So, you still had elders even in the time of the Babylonian exile.

And then after the exile, after they returned from Babylon, about the 500s BC you still have elders. Ezra 6:7, "... let the governor of the Jews and the elders of the Jews rebuild this house of God on its site." In Ezra 10:8 and 14 you have the council of the elders of the nation, and you have the elders of each city; still the same structure after they returned from Babylon.

But what about those years between the Testaments, those 400 silent years when synagogues sprung up? When synagogues became the focus of every community's worship, each synagogue had elders. Now, this begins to shape our understanding of (when get to the New Testament) each synagogue had elders. They were the mainstays of the synagogue. From them the head of the synagogue was selected. And you see this even in the New Testament era. In Luke 7:3 "... when he heard about Jesus, he sent some Jewish elders from the synagogue, asking him to come and save the life of his slave."

One other usage in the gospels and Acts of the expression “elders” is referring to the Jewish Sanhedrin. In Luke 22:66, the council of the elders of the people assembled and led Jesus away to their council chamber. So, occasionally, this expression is used of the elders of the nation meaning the Sanhedrin.

Now, here’s what I want you to get and why it took so long to work through that, was I want you to clearly understand that in the Jewish mind when you mention elders, you are referring to a plurality of men overseeing some aspect of life; whether it was a family; whether it was a city; or whether it was a nation; and a plurality of men who were responsible for leadership. With that history then, it would have been natural for the concept of elder rule to be adopted by the first churches, all of which were primarily Jewish.

But beyond that Old Testament pattern, we’ve looked at the Old Testament pattern, the Jewish mindset. Beyond that, and more importantly, when you examine the New Testament, you find overwhelming evidence of a plurality of godly men leading every church.

Let’s look at the New Testament passages and the apostles’ example, the New Testament passages and the apostles’ example. Let’s start with the Jerusalem church. Elders played a dominant role in the life of the church in Jerusalem and in the Jerusalem council. You can see this in several passages. Initially, the apostles apparently acted as the elders of the church. You see this in chapter 6. But eventually, the apostles appointed elders in the church in Jerusalem. So that, when you get to the Jerusalem council in Acts 15, turn over there with me. In Acts 15 you find them present. You remember the context here? There was a debate about how the essence of the gospel. The Judaizes were influencing this in Antioch, the church of Antioch and verse 1 says,

[The] ... men came down from Judea ... [to begin] teaching the brethren, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.”

And when Paul and Barnabas had great dissension and debate with them, ... [the leadership of the church in Antioch decided to send] Paul and Barnabas and some others ... to Jerusalem [notice this in verse 2] to the apostles and [the] elders [there in Jerusalem] concerning this issue. ... [Look down in verse 4] When they arrived at Jerusalem, they were received by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they reported all that God had done with them.

Go down to verse 22. After the debate, and after the decision was made [verse 22 says that] it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men from among them to send to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas ... [along with this letter that's quoted here.] So, what I want you to see is this: in the Jerusalem church the apostles appointed a plurality of elders to lead that church. And you will notice "church" is singular and "elders" are plural. You are going to see that pattern again and again. Now in this chapter, chapter 15, James features prominently because James was the key leader of the church in Jerusalem.

And let's see what he says in his letter. Turn to James 5, James 5. James sent his letter to the Jewish believers who had been dispersed out of Jerusalem because of persecution, probably that of Herod in Acts 12. James wrote this letter in the mid-40s AD. It was probably the first New Testament book written, and notice what he says in 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." Individuals don't belong to a group of churches. Individuals belong to one church. And when that individual is sick, that individual is to call for the elders, plural, of the church, singular.

Turn to the book of Acts, Acts 14. So far, we are talking about churches that consist primarily of Jewish people. What about Gentiles? Acts 14:23, here's Paul. Acts 14:23, "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." This is the first reference to elders in Gentile churches. It's at the end of Paul's first missionary journey, really at the very beginning of his ministry, and noted, he appointed elders, plural, in every church, singular. In fact, the way the Greek preposition here is used, you can actually translate it like this, "Having appointed for them church by church, elders." It refers to the churches they ministered to in the first missionary journey.

The church in Antioch of Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra, Derby, don't miss this, one of the key steps in organizing a new Gentile church was appointing elders, plural. That's Paul's pattern everywhere he went. In fact, turn over to Acts 20, Acts 20, in Acts 20 Paul was finishing his third missionary journey. He's about to head to Jerusalem for the feast of Pentecost. This would have been about May of the year 57 AD. Earlier, on this third journey, he'd established the church in Ephesus and had stayed there as its pastor for about three years.

Now he's on his way to Jerusalem, and his ship docked in Miletus for several days to load and unload cargo. Miletus is only 40 miles south of Ephesus, and so, Paul seized the opportunity, and he called the Ephesian elders to Miletus. This is the only record of Paul speaking directly to elders. Look at verse 17 of Acts 20. "From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church." Again, noted elders, plural, church, singular.

Now do down to verse 28 and notice what he said to them. "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." Notice, Paul warns them to be on guard for all the flock, singular, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, plural. The church in Ephesus had a plurality of godly men who pastored it.

We see that, by the way, also in Paul's letter to Timothy, 1 Timothy 5:17. That's where Timothy was pastoring was in Ephesus, and it's clear even in that verse, 1 Timothy 5:17, there was a plurality of elders.

What about a smaller church? Turn to Philippians 1. At this point the church in Philippi was more than ten years old. Paul was under house arrest in Rome. The Philippians had sent an offering to Paul for his support, and Epaphroditus, one of their own who was going to act as his assistant, his personal assistant, and Philippians was his response. In chapter 1:1, notice he identifies two offices, "Paul and Timothy, ... to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers and deacons." Both are plural, but there was only one church in Philippi.

In fact, 50 years later, the early church father, Polycarp, wrote to the church, singular, and told them to submit to their elders, plural. Turn to Titus 1, Titus 1. You remember in Acts 27 that Paul, on his journey to Rome, had harbored on the south side of the island of Crete. And after his release from his first Roman imprisonment, he returned to Crete. And the churches there had already been established, but they were weak. They were under assault from false teachers. Read the book of Titus, you see that.

And Paul left his young son in the faith, Titus, on Crete for a specific purpose. Look at chapter 1 of Titus, verse 5, "For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint elders, plural, in every city, singular, as I directed you." Just as we found with these other cities there weren't multiple churches. There was one church in the city and in each city, that is each church he appointed elders.

One last passage, look at 1 Peter 5, 1 Peter 5. Peter, according to 1:1, was writing to churches scattered in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia. Those are all territories, not cities. And look at what he says to them in 5:1,

... “I exhort the elders among you, as *your* fellow elder ... shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight....”

In other words, Peter expected that in every church in those vast regions would have elders, plural.

Now, I just want you to see from that brief survey that the New Testament evidence is overwhelming. Every church had a plurality of godly leaders. So, that being true, how is it that there are some who argue against it for other forms of church government? We, let me just briefly point out primary arguments against the plurality of elders. There are a number of different arguments that are used, but here are the three primary ones, different expressions of church government.

First of all, some say, well Tom, I see those passages: but there are some passages, they would say, that show the one pastor model. For example, they would point out Revelation 1 where the letters are addressed to the messengers of the churches. And it says at the beginning of each letter “to the angel or the messenger of this church, and to the angel, singular, of this church and so forth and say, those are individual pastors leading those churches.

But this can’t mean one pastor churches, one elder churches. Why? Because one of the seven churches is, guess what, the church in Ephesus. And we just saw that both in 1 Timothy and in the book of Acts, that church was led by a plurality of elders.

Another argument that’s used is: the priesthood of every believer supports congregational government. We’re all priests to God, and therefore we all ought to have an equal voice. Well, that concept occurs in 1 Peter 2:9, ... you are a royal PRIESTHOOD. We are all priests in that sense. We all have access to God, and we represent God to the peoples of the world as Israel was supposed to. But again, Peter is quoting Exodus 19:6, words addressed to Israel. Guess what, the people in Israel didn’t get votes. Moses and the 70 elders were all appointed solely by God in the existing leadership, and they led. So, that’s not an argument that stands up.

A third argument that's used is: listen Christians are all one in Christ so there is no need for human authority in the church at all. We're all one. We have an equal status so we don't need leadership. Verses like Galatians 3:28 are used to argue this. "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus." And that's true, but that's talking about our spiritual standing, our spiritual equality before God. Those differences don't matter when it comes to our standing before God is absolutely true.

But that same verse says that there are no longer males and females, and yet Ephesians 5 is clear that men are the ones Christ has designated to be the leaders in their marriages. My point is spiritual equality does not exclude spiritual leadership. So, those arguments really don't stand up. But why would God do this? Why would God have a plurality of leaders in this church and other churches? What is the point? Well, there are a lot of benefits. But let me just briefly give you the key benefits of a plurality of elders, key benefits:

Number one is a practical one, it practically creates enough leadership based on the size of the church. Imagine, if you were pastoring the church in Jerusalem, and there was one elder, one pastor; five thousand men at one point, and the church is multiplying. How do you do that? The answer is, you don't. I can't adequately pastor all of the people in this church, much less a church the size of the church in Jerusalem, but a plurality of elders allows that group of godly leaders to grow as Christ brings others in who are qualified, and therefore, it spreads out the load.

Secondly, it provides accountability and a protection against the sinfulness of the human heart. There is obviously an element of truth to the fact that power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. You've seen it displayed sadly in many different settings. It can even happen in the church. And so, there is benefit to there being a plurality of leaders, and with that comes accountability. I'm not the dictator at this church, have no desire to be. And I am accountable to the other elders in this church, and that is a protection for me; it is a protection for you; it is a protection for the other elders.

But thirdly, and I think most importantly, plurality insures wise council and effective decisions. Proverbs talks so much about this. Proverbs 11:14, "Where there is no guidance the people fall, But in abundance of counselors there is victory." Proverbs 15:22, "Without consultation, plans are frustrated, But with many counselors they succeed."

As the elders and I remind each other often, our collective wisdom is much greater than our individual wisdom. I'm so glad I'm not responsible to make all the decisions pertaining to everything in this church, because I don't have that much wisdom. But when you have a group of men who have been gifted and qualified by God, who come together, collectively, our wisdom makes for a greater wisdom than any of us has individually. There's balance with that, there's God's wisdom in that plan.

Elder rule is really a form, when you think about it, of representative government. Once the elders select, then test the man; once the congregation affirms the man as biblically qualified, and that man is installed as an elder, then that person, the elders now, that person joining with the other elders represent Christ. He's the chief shepherd, we are under shepherds, and we represent you as one of the congregation. The elders may decide, for the protection of the church, that certain matters require a vote of the congregation. Elders are responsible to lead, but the elders may say for the protection of this congregation, we're going to have certain things the congregation needs to vote about.

For example, our constitution requires the whole church to vote on changing the doctrinal statement, on buying land, and calling a new senior pastor. Why? For the protection of the church, so a small group of people don't change the entire direction of this church. So, that can happen, but in the end, the elders are responsible to lead, and they lead even in making that decision. And they govern as Christ's representatives in this church. That's Christ's plan. Biblically qualified and gifted men lead His church.

By the way, for your encouragement, we hope on September 25 to install two additional elders alongside Dusty Burris at the church plant, Northlake Bible Church, which will bring them to three elders. And at that point, the elders of this church (who have been the elders of that church to this point) we have decided that when they were financially independent, which they have been since the beginning, and when there were three biblically qualified elders, they would become an entirely independent church, and those elders will lead that church. And Lord willing, that will happen at the end of this month. This is Christ's plan.

Now, before we leave the biblical evidence, let me briefly just comment on the Greek words for "elders", the Greek words for elders. There are three of them. First of all, the word "elder" itself; the Greek word is "presbuteros" presbuteros. Primarily in the New Testament it's used either of a

person who is older, just in age, or it's used as a title for someone who's in authority, someone who's responsible. There's no specific age with that second use, but it certainly implies maturity, dignity and experience. Twenty-eight times it's used in the gospels and Acts referring to the Sanhedrin. Twelve times in Revelation it's used for the twenty-four elders, representatives of all the redeemed. But nineteen times in Acts and the epistles it identifies a unique group of leaders in the church; elder.

The second word that's used is "overseer." The Greek word is "episcopos." Sometimes it's translated "bishop." This was a common word in secular Greek culture for local officials, superintendents, managers, controllers. In the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, it's used of army officers, tabernacle administrators, supervisors of the temple repair, temple guardians, and even of a city supervisor, what we would call a mayor. It occurs only five times in the New Testament, one time of Christ in 1 Peter 2:25, He's called the overseer of our souls. And four times it's used of church leaders, especially in Gentile churches like the one in Ephesus. It's a general word. It just means supervisor, manager, guardian.

The third Greek word is "shepherd." The Greek word is "poimen." It's also translated as "pastor". The noun form of this occurs some 18 times in the New Testament. Sometimes of those who keep animals. But it occurs for Christ in Hebrews 13 and 1 Peter 2. He's called the shepherd or the chief shepherd. And it's used of church leaders in Ephesians 4:11. In our translation it's translated as pastors, but better pastor-teachers. The Greek construction puts those two words together. It emphasizes the shepherd's primary role is teaching or feeding the sheep.

The verb form of "shepherd" occurs three times of church leaders. In John 21 when Jesus commands Peter to shepherd His sheep. In Acts 20:28 when Paul tells the Ephesian elders to shepherd the church of God, and in 1 Peter 5 when Peter charged the elders to shepherd the flock of God.

Now, here's what I want you to see about those three words. Those three words, "elder, overseer, and shepherd" all refer to the same office, not three separate offices, but one office. How do we know that? Well, look at the qualifications. The qualifications for an overseer in 1 Timothy 3 and the qualifications for an elder in Titus 1 are almost identical. So, the qualifications are the same.

Secondly, Paul tells Titus to appoint elders, Titus 1:5, and then he calls the very same office, overseer, in Titus 1:7. In 1 Peter 5, Peter used all three of these terms to describe one office.

Listen to what he writes, I exhort the elders among you, as *your* fellow elder ... shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight.... Acts 20 uses all three of these terms interchangeably for the same office. Acts 20:17, he sent and called for the elders. Verse 28, he says to the elders, the Holy Spirit has made you overseers to shepherd the church of God.

So, these three terms then are used of the same office, elder talks about character, he's spiritually mature; overseer talks about his function, he oversees, he manages; and shepherd, emphasizes his heart, as well as his teaching duties. John MacArthur writes this, "The term elder emphasizes who the man is; overseer speaks of what he does; and pastor or shepherd deals with how he ministers."

Now, what exactly is this plurality of elders supposed to do? What is my job description? What is the job description of the rest of the elders of this church? Essentially, we have three primary duties.

Number one, we are to manage the church. How can he manage the church if he doesn't know how to manage his own household? Manage is part of our responsibility.

Secondly, we're to teach. We're to teach by verbal instruction, and we're to teach by personal example.

And thirdly, we're to pray. That's our job description: to manage the church; to teach the Word of God and to live it out by example; and thirdly to pray.

Now, the goal of our doing those things is in Ephesians 4:12. It's on the wall out in the foyer. This is our goal. Christ gave us to this church in order to equip you for the work of service so that the entire body is built up. That's our job. To manage, to teach, to pray so that you would do the work of ministry, so that the body of Christ here would be built up. So, what I want you to see here, folks is: the New Testament pattern is certain and clear. When you look at the New Testament churches, a group of qualified men led the churches.

But here's the question, is that pattern required of every church today? Is it a mandate for this church and every other Christian church? Briefly, I want you to consider the biblical arguments for a mandate. It is a mandate. And here is why. There are two reasons.

The first reason is because of the purpose of the pastoral epistles. The three letters addressed to pastors: 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy and Titus. They were written to church leaders with instruction

about life in the church. First Timothy 3:15 says, “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.”

In other words, the pastoral epistles were written to elders like me and to the other elders in this church to say here’s what life in the church should be like. And in the pastoral epistles the evidence is clear. Paul insists on a plurality of leadership. In 1 Timothy 5:17, a plurality of leadership in Ephesus, and in Titus 1:5, I want you to appoint elders, plural, in every church, singular. If these letters are written to tell us how to conduct life in the church, then how in the world can we improve on what’s been commanded?

A second argument for a mandate is this; the example and command of the apostles. The examples as well as the commands of the apostles. You see the apostles established elder rule in the Jewish churches. We saw that in the Jerusalem church in Acts 15. They established elder rule in the Jewish churches. James expected elder rule in the churches outside of Jerusalem in James 5. We already saw that.

Thirdly, Paul established elder rule in Gentile churches. We saw that in Acts 14:23, “... in all the Gentile churches he established elder rule.” And finally, and most importantly, Paul commanded Titus, and therefore through him every other church leader to appoint elders in every church.

Now, that invites a question. How does a church identify those men that Christ has given to lead His church? In other words, how do I and the other elders in this church know whom Christ has appointed as leaders in this church? What’s the biblical process? It’s laid out in 1 Timothy 3. I wish I had time to take you there and walk you through it. Let me just give you the outline. Here’s how we know. Here’s how we can look at a man and say, this man has been called and gifted by Christ; four criteria.

Number one, craving. Does he desire to do the work? First Timothy 3:1. He has to aspire to this office? He has to desire the work. That’s the only subjective qualification. Is this something he wants? We’re not going to force this on anybody.

Number two, character. You remember all those character qualifications? Does this man exhibit these character qualifications? Not in perfection, but in direction. Titus 1, 1 Timothy 3.

Number three, capacity. He has to have two capacities, two skills. First Timothy 3:2, he has to be able to teach. He has to be able to explain the word of God, and Titus 1, he has to be able to correct those who are wrong. And he has to have the capacity not only to teach, but he has to have the capacity to manage. First Timothy 3:4 and 5 say that he has to manage the church, but he can't do that if he can't manage his own life well. So, look at his life, and see if he is qualified. So, he has to be able to teach and able to manage.

So, craving, does he desire it? Character, does he have the right character? Capacity, is he able to teach and able to manage?

And number four, confirmation, confirmation. Chapter 3 of 1 Timothy, verse 10 speaking of the deacons, let these also first be tested. The clear implication is that the elders who come right before that are also to be tested; that is confirmed by the elders and the congregation. So, the elders select and test the man, and the congregation confirms that, and the elders lay hands on that man and install him as an elder.

If the elders select and the congregation affirms the qualifications of this man, then it means that that man has been appointed by Christ Himself to serve in this church. Now, the fact that Christ has given this church its leaders should affect your response to those in leadership. Scripture is very clear about how you should respond. And, by the way, I don't say this in a self-serving way: you do this. I'm just doing this in the interest of being complete, all right? You need to know how Scripture calls you to respond to the elders that Christ has put in His church. Three ways, I'll give them to you just very briefly.

Number one, appreciate and esteem them. Turn to 1 Thessalonians 5, 1 Thessalonians 5, and look at verse 12. "We request of you brethren that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you" [The Greek word for appreciate is actually "to know" the idea is that you know them well, you respect them, that's why it's translated that way here.] "and those that have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction. By the way, there's the job description of an elder. Have charge over and give you instruction. And not only that you appreciate them, but that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work. You esteem those that Christ has appointed to lead His church very highly and you love them because Christ has given them to the church as His gift. I thank God for the elders of this church. There's no group of men

anywhere that I'd rather serve with than the men I serve with on this elder board. And so, you need to appreciate and esteem those who serve among you.

Number two, you need to imitate their faith. Imitate their faith. Turn to Hebrews 13, Hebrews 13:7, "Remember those who led you," [and again you get the job description of an elder here] "those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you," [and who served as an example, remember them] and [notice this] "considering the result of their conduct," [look at their lives, see what they taught, see how it fleshes out in their lives and] "imitate their faith." To whatever extent the elders and I follow Christ, and we try to live out His word, look at us as a living example and imitate our faith. That's what the scriptures teach.

And thirdly, obey and submit to them, obey and submit to them. Look down in verse 17 of Hebrews 13. "Obey your leaders and submit *to them*, for they keep watch over your souls as those who [would] ... give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you." Now don't misunderstand this verse, unfortunately, as some elders in other places have. And maybe you have been abused by this verse. This is not permission for elders to be heavy handed, to exercise some domineering authority in all the details of your life.

As an elder, my authority stops with the word of God. I have no authority to tell you to do anything beyond the clear commands of scripture. I have no authority to tell you where to live, what car to buy, who to marry unless I can take you to a chapter and verse and say this is what God commands. If I can do that, if the other elders do that, then you are to obey the scriptures that we bring to your life. You are to look at the scripture; you are to obey it; you are to do it.

And the submission part of this, I think, has to do with submitting to the elders' decisions regarding life at this church. There are things that we decide that aren't chapter and verse for the management in the life of this community. You're to submit to that and to go along with that, and not make it a grief for us to lead this church in some of those decisions that have to be made.

You are to obey the scripture, and you are to submit to what the elders have decided about what life in this community looks like as long as you are a part of this community. That's the idea here. Why?

The big picture is: Christ, out of His deep love for His church, gave this church and every true church a plurality of gifted men to lead. We're not perfect; absolutely not. We make mistakes, of course. We're flawed men. We're sinners, saved by grace, just like you are. But this is the plan Christ has for the leadership of His church, and we're all to submit to it.

I don't get to decide; you know what? I would really like to be the dictator of this church. I'm going to be a dictator.

I don't get to decide; you know what? I want a bunch of corporate businessmen who may not be spiritually qualified, but who are really good at running big organizations. I don't get to decide that.

I don't get to decide; you know what? We live in a country where everybody gets to vote; let's make this a democracy. I don't get to decide that. You don't get to decide that.

Christ is the head of His church. He decides the structure of His church, and our job is just to try to follow.

No prayer.