

# **Biblical Eldership**

**The Study and Application of God's Word**

## Proposed Schedule

Date	Lesson #	Topic	Text
Sept 14	1	The "Call" of an overseer	1 Tim 3:1a
Sept 18	2	The "Office" of an overseer	1 Tim 3:1a
Sept 25	3	The "Work" of an overseer- Part 1	1 Tim 3:1b
Oct 2	4	The "Work" of an overseer- Part 2	1 Tim 3:1b
Oct 9	5	The "Qualifications" of an overseer - Part 1	1 Tim 3:2a
Oct 16	6	The "Qualifications" of an overseer - Part 2	1 Tim 3:2b
Oct 23	7	The "Qualifications" of an overseer - Part 3	1 Tim 3:3
Oct 30		<b>NO STUDY</b>	
Nov 6	8	The "Qualifications" of an overseer - Part 4	1 Tim 3:4
Nov 13	9	The "Qualifications" of an overseer - Part 5	1 Tim 3:5
Nov 20	10	The "Qualifications" of an overseer - Part 6	1 Tim 3:6
Nov 27	11	The "Qualifications" of an overseer - Part 7	1 Tim 3:7
Dec 4	12	The "Qualifications" of an overseer - Part 8	1 Tim 3:8
Dec 11	13	The "Qualifications" of an overseer - Part 9	Titus 1
Dec 18	14	The "Qualifications" of an overseer - Part 10	1 Peter 5
Dec 25		<b>NO STUDY</b>	
Jan 1		<b>NO STUDY</b>	
Jan 8	15	The "Honour" toward an overseer	1 Tim 5:17-21
Jan 15	16	The "Appointment" of an overseer	1 Tim 5:22-25
Jan 22	17	TBA	
Jan 29	18	TBA	

# Purpose

- Consideration for pursuing eldership
- Men growing in Godly character
- Understanding of Biblical Eldership

Every Christian should take a sober assessment of their gifts and calling (Rom 12:3) to serve Christ and His church, this includes men giving consideration as to whether God may be calling them to eldership.

Not every and even most Christian men aren't called to the office of overseer, but all should consider it and all should strive toward the godly characteristics set forth as qualifications for pastors.

This assessment should consider the negative and positive aspects of this role:

- Positively: The work of a pastor is called a "noble task," "good work," and "fine work" (1 Tim 3:1) and therefore is a good role to pursue and practice
- Negatively: Those who teach will be judged with greater strictness (James 3:1) and therefore great care must be taken to evaluate one's calling to such an office

# Method

## Iron Men:

“Iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another” (Prov 27:17)

- Teaching
- Discussion
- Prayer
- Application Questions/Steps
- Support/Accountability
- Sharing with others

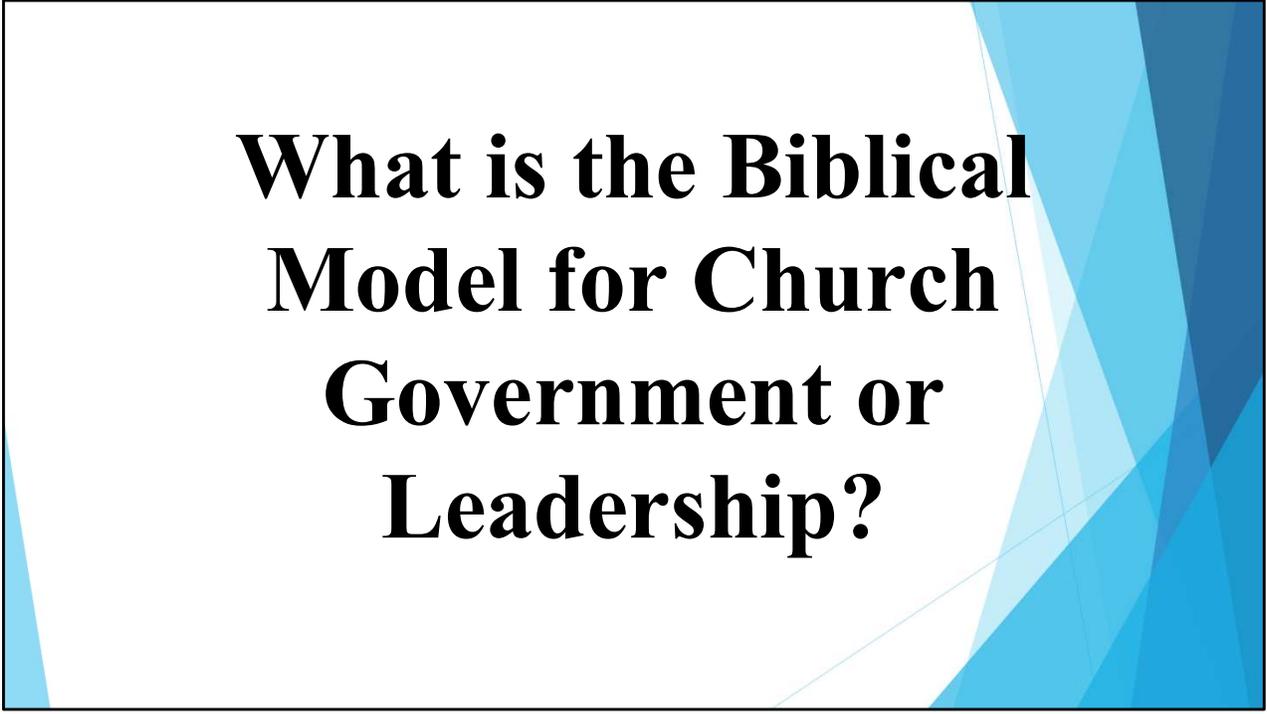
It's easy to sit and listen to someone speak... are you prepared to be engaged and do the hard work of application?

There will be time for small group prayer and discussion, including application questions. I'd also encourage small groups to support and keep each other accountable in growing (Please let me know after this week if you plan on continuing with this study and want to be part of a small group. These groups will meet during our time together).

The topics we discuss would be great material to share with your wife and children, so they're learning alongside us and you're learning as you teach them. This will also increase the level of accountability.

# Summary

- Eldership is IMPORTANT!
- Eldership is for men only
- Eldership is a Calling from God
  - Aspiration (External pursuit)
  - Desire (Internal passion)



**What is the Biblical  
Model for Church  
Government or  
Leadership?**

## What is the Biblical Model for Church Government or Leadership?

### **Disclaimers:**

- To teach a biblical model for church leadership doesn't take away from the reality that God has used many other leadership structures for great work!
  
- To practice a biblical model for church leadership doesn't guarantee godly leadership!

You've probably been part of many different churches that followed different leadership structures (my example)

## What is the Biblical Model for Church Government or Leadership?

### ▶ Foundational truth: Christ is the Head of the Church!

- ▶ Christ is the Supreme Leader and “chief shepherd”
- ▶ Acts 20:28; Eph 1:22-23; 5:23-24; Col 1:18; 1 Tim 3:5; 1 Pet 5:2, 4.
- ▶ No discussion about church leadership should omit this reality and this is the foundational truth for a church’s leadership structure!
- ▶ Because Christ is the Head we follow His directions as it relates to church leadership (and all else).

- <https://gracebible.ca/sermons/christ-is-the-head-of-the-church/>

Acts 20:28, *Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which **the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.***

Eph 1:22-23, *And HE PUT ALL THINGS IN SUBJECTION UNDER HIS FEET, and gave **Him as head over all things to the church,*** <sup>23</sup> *which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.*

Eph 5:23-24 **Christ also is the head of the church,** *He Himself being the Savior of the body.* <sup>24</sup> *But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything.*

Col 1:18a **He is the head** *of the body, the church*

1 Tim 3:5, *if a man does not know how to lead his own household, how will **he take care of the church of God?***

1 Pet 5:2 *shepherd the **flock of God** among you* (Peter doesn’t say “your flock” but “flock of God”)

1 Pet 5:4, *And when the **Chief Shepherd** appears...*

## What is the Biblical Model for Church Government or Leadership?

- ▶ **The Office of Overseer**
  - ▶ The Call of an Overseer (last session)
  - ▶ **The Titles for Overseers**
  - ▶ The Number of Overseers
  - ▶ The Authority of Overseers

As we look at each of these subtopics, I'll also weave in and discuss various other models for church leadership, so that we end up with the biblical model for church governance or polity, again, which is important for us to understand, because these are the leaders of Christ's church.

## What is the Biblical Model for Church Government or Leadership?

### ▶ The Titles for Overseers:

- ▶ “Overseer” (ἐπίσκοπος) (1 Tim 3:1, 2)
  - ▶ “Word meaning: the Greek word for overseer is translated either “overseer” or “bishop” and means 1) **the act of watching over with special ref. to being present, *visitation***; 2) **position of responsibility**; 3) **engagement in oversight, *supervision*** (BDAG)
  - ▶ The title “bishop” is used another 3x in the NT (Acts 20:28; Phil 1:1; Titus 1:7) in reference to church leadership and once in reference to Christ as our “shepherd and overseer” (1 Pet 2:25)

- The title of “overseer” is used in 1 Tim 3:1 regarding the office of overseer and in v. 2 in reference to the qualifications of an overseer.

- The episcopal church in the US (which is very similar to the Anglican church in Canada) derives its name from this word, because it functions under a leadership structure with a hierarchy or order of bishops. This is also the model of the Roman Catholic church, the Orthodox church, and various off shoots of these denominations.

- This title is the basis for churches that follow a leadership structure that generally includes priests or pastors, who are under a bishop, who is in turn under an archbishop or some other title, or in the case of the Roman Catholic church, is under the pope.

- Titus 1:5, 7 “For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint **elders** [plural] in every city as I directed you... For the **overseer** [this is the individual among the elders] must be beyond reproach as God's steward, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not addicted to wine, not pugnacious, not fond of dishonest gain.”

- A comparison between all the qualifications in Titus 1:5-9 and 1 Tim 3:1-7 suggests Paul is speaking about the same person and the same office, although he uses two different titles, “overseer” or “bishop” and “elder.”
- Acts 20:17, 28 “Now from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the **elders** of the church [plural elders of single church]. ... "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you **overseers**, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.

## What is the Biblical Model for Church Government or Leadership?

### ▶ The Titles for Overseers

- ▶ “Shepherd” (ποιμένας) a.k.a. “Pastor”
  - ▶ Word meaning: the Greek word for “shepherd” refers 1) to someone who herds sheep or 2) to an office of leadership (this is also a common reference to Israel’s leadership in the OT e.g. Jer 10:21; Ezek 34)
  - ▶ The only occurrence of “shepherd” in the NT, in reference to church leadership, is Eph 4:11.
  - ▶ The role of a “shepherd” (noun) is used in reference to the work of “shepherding” (verb) e.g. Acts 20:28; 1 Pet 5:1-3

- Eph 4:11 “And He Himself gave some [as] apostles, and some [as] prophets, and some [as] evangelists, and some [as] **pastors** and teachers”
- Acts 20:28 “Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you **overseers**, to **shepherd** the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.
- Paul address the elders all the way through until the end of v. 36 and in the middle of his speech we see him also address them as “overseers,” and their role is to “shepherd,” therefore the elders of the church in Ephesus were also the overseers of the church in Ephesus and they were charged with the responsibility to “shepherd” (pastor) the congregation.
- 1 Pet 5:1-3 “Therefore, I exhort the **elders** among you, as [your] fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, 2 **shepherd** the flock of God among you, **overseeing** not under compulsion, but willingly, according to God; and not for dishonest gain, but with eagerness; 3 nor yet as lording it over those allotted to you, but being examples to the **flock.**”

- In this passage we see all three key terms used to describe the office of an overseer, both by title (“elder”) and role (“shepherd,” “overseeing”)

## What is the Biblical Model for Church Government or Leadership?

### ▶ The Titles for Overseers

- ▶ “Elder” (πρεσβυτέρους)
- ▶ Word meaning: the Greek word for “elder” refers **1. pert. to being relatively advanced in age, *older, old...* 2. an official** (cp. Lat. senator), *elder, presbyter* (BDAG)
- ▶ The most common title for an overseer e.g. Acts 11:30; 14:23; 15:2, 4, 6, 22-23; 16:4; 20:17; 21:18; 1 Tim 5:17, 19; Titus 1:5; James 5:14; 1 Pet 5:1, 5

- The office of “elder” was practiced by the Jews from OT times and Jewish “elders” are mentioned numerous times in the NT (e.g. Matt 16:21; Mark 14:43; Luke 7:3). Heavenly “elders” are also described in Rev 4:4, 10; 5:5-14; 7:11, 13; 11:16; 14:3; 19:4 and the Apostle John introduces himself as “the elder” in 2 John and 3 John. In secular Greek, the word was also applied to people who held official positions in society.

Acts 11:30; 14:23; 15:2, 4, 6, 22-23; 16:4; 20:17; 21:18; 1 Tim 5:17, 19; Titus 1:5; James 5:14; 1 Pet 5:1, 5

## What is the Biblical Model for Church Government or Leadership?

### ▶ The Titles for Overseers

- ▶ The title “bishop/overseer” is interchangeable with “elder”
  - ▶ Titus 1:5, 7; Acts 20:17, 28; cf. Phil 1:1
- ▶ The titles “overseer” and “elder” are directly connected to the role of “shepherding”
  - ▶ Acts 20:17, 28; 1 Pet 5:1-3

Scripture doesn't separate these titles (overseer, elder, pastor) into different categories of leadership or authority, and they aren't different positions or referring to different people...

**An elder is a pastor, a pastor is an overseer, and an overseer is an elder.**

Titus 1:5, 7 “For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint **elders** [plural] in every city as I directed you... For the **overseer** [this is the individual among the elders] must be beyond reproach as God's steward, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not addicted to wine, not pugnacious, not fond of dishonest gain.”

- A comparison between all the qualifications in Titus 1:5-9 and 1 Tim 3:1-7 suggests Paul is speaking about the same person and the same office, although he uses two different titles, “overseer” or “bishop” and “elder.”

Acts 20:17, 28 “Now from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the **elders** of the church [plural elders of single church]. ... “Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you **overseers**, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.

- Paul address the elders all the way through until the end of v. 36 and in the middle of his speech we see him also address them as “overseers,” therefore the elders of the church in Ephesus were also the overseers of the church in Ephesus.

Phil 1:1 “ Paul and Timothy, slaves of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the **overseers** [plurality of elders overseeing the church in Philippi] and deacons”.

- If “elders” were a different office in the local church, why would Paul include “overseers and deacons” but not “elders”? Answer, because elders and overseers are the same office.

1 Pet 5:1-3 “Therefore, I exhort the **elders** among you, as [your] fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, 2 **shepherd** the flock of God among you, **overseeing** not under compulsion, but willingly, according to God; and not for dishonest gain, but with eagerness; 3 nor yet as lording it over those allotted to you, but being examples to the **flock**.”

- In this passage we see all three key terms used to describe the office of an overseer, both by title (“elder”) and role (“shepherd,” “overseeing”)

\*\*There may be some distinction in the terms related to different aspects of spiritual leadership e.g. “elder” may refer to maturity, “overseer” may refer to the function of leadership, “pastor” may refer to the role of shepherding (i.e. caring for, feeding, protecting).

## What is the Biblical Model for Church Government or Leadership?

### ▶ The Title for Overseers: A Modern Mistake?

- ▶ How does the modern church often differentiate between a pastor and elder?
- ▶ How does the Bible differentiate between a pastor and elder?
- ▶ When we're seeking God to raise up "elders," we're trusting Him to raise up "pastors."

We need to be careful how we refer to lay elders (meaning elders who aren't paid) because sometimes we can focus on and elevate a paid elder (which we often call "pastor"), and regard other elders as less important or less authoritative.

In reality, biblically speaking, both are pastors, elders, and overseers, with the same position, the same authority, the same accountability, and the same general responsibility.

This doesn't mean they all function in the exact same their role, because according to 1 Tim 5:17 some will focus more on preaching and teaching, but elders who work hard in preaching and teaching and those who are involved in some other way, are still in the office of an overseer.

When Pastor Brad from GraceLife comes to preach for example, I refer to him as "pastor Brad," because even though he isn't paid staff like pastor James and some of the other elders, I want to present him to you with the respect and dignity deserving of his

position and I want to be careful to try and preserve the biblical terms and their meaning.

With all this in mind, if we come back to the question of what is the biblical model for church leadership, we've seen, there is no distinction in office between a bishop, overseer, elder, or pastor.

This means any leadership structure that elevates a bishop or pastor's authority and position above a person, in the same biblical office, is not following the biblical model for church leadership.

Now, this isn't a problem for some churches, because they simply call one man to be the pastor and he gets to dictate everything that happens or he becomes one member of a larger group of elders from other churches who have authority over the church, but that's not biblical either, as we'll see next in "the number of elders"

## What is the Biblical Model for Church Government or Leadership?

- ▶ **The Office of Overseer**
  - ▶ The Call of an Overseer (last session)
  - ▶ The Titles for Overseers
  - ▶ **The Number of Overseers**
  - ▶ The Authority of Overseers

As we look at each of these subtopics, I'll also weave in and discuss various other models for church leadership, so that we end up with the biblical model for church governance or polity, again, which is important for us to understand, because these are the leaders of Christ's church.

## What is the Biblical Model for Church Government or Leadership?

### ▶ The Number of Overseers

- ▶ While **there's no set number** of elders for a church, the Bible repeatedly refers to a **plurality** of elders overseeing **one local church**.
  - ▶ Acts 11:30; Acts 14:23; Acts 15:2, 4, 6, 22, 23
  - ▶ 1 Tim 5:17
  - ▶ James 5:14
  - ▶ 1 Pet 1:1 with 5:1

*Without exception, every time the New Testament mentions the government of a particular church, the leadership structure is a **plurality of elders*** (Allison in *Sojourners and Strangers*, p. 293, emphasis mine)

- ▶ Early church history also refers to a plurality of elders in the church\*

If a word ends with an 's' how many things does that usually refer to?

For example,

- how many dogs are there at my house if I say "dog"? What about if I say "dogs"?
  - What about sheep, how many sheep are there if I say "sheep"?
  - Last one, how many men are elders, if I use the word "elders"?
- Having passed that basic English test...

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

[Act 14:23 LSB] 23 And when they had appointed **elders** for them **in every church** [elders plural, in every church], having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

[Act 15:2, 4, 6, 22-23 LSB] 2 And when Paul and Barnabas had not a little dissension and debate with them, [the brothers] determined that Paul and Barnabas and some others of them should go up to Jerusalem to the apostles

and **elders** concerning this issue. ... 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. ... 6 Both the apostles and the **elders** came together to look into this matter. ... 22 Then it seemed good to the apostles and the **elders**, with the whole church, to choose men from among them--Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas, leading men among the brothers--to send to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas, 23 and they sent this letter by them, "The apostles and the brothers who are **elders**, to the brothers in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia who are from the Gentiles, greetings.

[1Ti 5:17 LSB] 17 The **elders** who lead well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor at [preaching] the word and teaching.

[Jas 5:14 LSB] 14 Is anyone among you sick? [Then] he must call for the **elders** of the **church** [elders plural from the local church] and they are to pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.

[1Pe 1:1 LSB] 1 Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who reside as exiles, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who are chosen [this is Peter's audience]

[1Pe 5:1 LSB] 1 Therefore, I exhort the **elders** among you, as [your] fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed,

See also Acts 20:17-36; Phil 1:1; Titus 1:5 and references to a plurality of church leaders without using a title for the office are found in 1 Thess 5:12; Heb 13:7, 17

\*Allison refers to Clement of Rome's "Letter to the Corinthians," the "Didache," and the "Shepherd of Hermas"

## What is the Biblical Model for Church Government or Leadership?

### ▶ The Number of Overseers: Our situation

- ▶ We're NOT functioning with a plurality of men recognized as biblical qualified elders
  - ▶ Biblical examples: Paul's first missionary journey and Titus in Crete
  - ▶ We've adopted a "leadership team" approach to provide a plurality approach to leadership decisions
  - ▶ We're supported by Grace Community Church which functions with a plurality of elders
  - ▶ We're striving toward a plurality of elders
  - ▶ Please be praying for the current leadership team and for God to raise up a plurality of elders!

Paul's first missionary journey included people getting saved and planting churches and it was on his return journey he appointed elders in these churches (Acts 14:23).

Paul's Instructions to Titus and the men he was to appoint as elders implies churches had been planted but needed qualified leadership.

The leadership team is involved in decisions a plurality of elders would usually make and we strive for unanimous decisions, as would be expected of a plurality of elders.

## What is the Biblical Model for Church Government or Leadership?

- ▶ **The Office of Overseer**
  - ▶ The Call of an Overseer (last session)
  - ▶ The Titles for Overseers
  - ▶ The Number of Overseers
  - ▶ **The Authority of Overseers**

As we look at each of these subtopics, I'll also weave in and discuss various other models for church leadership, so that we end up with the biblical model for church governance or polity, again, which is important for us to understand, because these are the leaders of Christ's church.

## What is the Biblical Model for Church Government or Leadership?

- ▶ **The Authority of Overseers**
- ▶ What authority comes with those who are in the office of elder?
  - ▶ Common approaches:
    - ▶ Pastor and a deacon board
    - ▶ Presbyterian
    - ▶ Roman Catholic and Anglican
    - ▶ Elder-led congregationalism

The question of authority is probably where there are particular differences between churches you may have attended in the past and Grace Bible Church, because even though many churches have a plurality of elders or multiple pastors, the level of authority they are granted can vary.

- Pastor and deacon board: This approach places the pastor/elder as the authority over the spiritual issues of the church and he's supported by a deacon board for practical matters.
- Presbyterian (reformed and some other denominations): there are often a plurality of elders in a church, but these are subject to boards above them that are made up of a group of people who oversee an area and the authority over a local church comes under a synod and then a general assembly at the highest level.
- The Roman Catholic and Anglican model (also discussed under the title of "overseer") places one individual as the 'head' of the church (e.g Pope and King/Queen of England) and follows a hierarchy system that descends from there to the minister/priest in the local church.
- Elder-led: This model values the importance of a plurality of elders, and recognizes the pastoral role given to elders, but the voting members of the church,

rather than the elders, have the final decision-making powers in many aspects of the church.

## What is the Biblical Model for Church Government or Leadership?

- ▶ **The Authority of Overseers**
- ▶ What authority comes with those who are in the office of elder?
  - ▶ “Elder-rule”
    - ▶ Maintains the authority of the local church must remain with the local church, but, rather than the congregation having the power to make the decisions, this responsibility and weight falls upon the plurality of elders.

## What is the Biblical Model for Church Government or Leadership?

### ▶ The Authority of Overseers

#### ▶ Reasons for elder-rule

1. There's **NO** passage in Scripture that prescribes the authority of the local church being under some other external authority (person, group of people, denomination).\*
  - ▶ The biblical model for church governance is autonomous authority, which, according to our "What We Teach" statement means, *"free from any external authority or control, with the right of self-government and freedom from the interference of any hierarchy of individuals or organizations."*
  - ▶ This also means the government isn't responsible for the function and practice of the church... It's the God-given design and purpose for the local church to decide on its worship practices, in accordance with the Word of God, not the responsibility of the government.

\*This is in agreement with elder-led congregationalism but contrary to the Roman Catholic, Anglican, Lutheran, and Presbyterian models.

- What about Acts 15?
  - The request for input came from the church in Antioch, it wasn't forced upon them by Jerusalem (vv. 2-3)
  - The request for input from the church in Jerusalem was based on the supposed introduction of this false doctrine from Jerusalem (v. 1). Therefore, the church in Antioch was trying to understand and clarify what was indeed true and what wasn't (v. 2)
  - The letter sent back to Antioch after the meeting conveyed instructions for the church to follow and we presume they followed these with joy and respect (v. 31), but there's no record of being forced to apply them or consequences if they didn't (which would be appropriate if they were under the authority of the Jerusalem church).
  - Note also, this was a time in the early life of the church in which the NT hadn't been written and the Apostles were laying the foundation for the church, so their practice doesn't necessarily prescribe our practice today.
- Church history also records no authority structure of the church outside the local church's leadership (or any form of denomination or formal inter-church federation), in the first 2 centuries. See *The Organization of the Early Christian*

*Churches* by Edwin Hatch...

- In the course of the second century the custom of meeting in representative assemblies began to prevail among the Christian communities... At first these assemblies were more or less informal. Some prominent and influential bishop invited a few neighbouring communities to confer with his own : the result of the deliberations of such a conference was expressed sometimes in a resolution, sometimes in a letter addressed to other Churches ". It was the rule for such letters to be received with respect : for the sense of brotherhood was strong, and the causes of alienation were few. But so far from such letters having any binding force on other Churches, not even the resolutions of the conference were binding on a dissentient minority of its members. Cyprian, in whose days these conferences first became important, and who was at the same time the most vigorous of early preachers of catholic unity — ^both of which circumstances would have made him a supporter of their authoritative character if such authoritative character had existed — claims in emphatic and explicit terms an absolute independence for each community. Within the limits of his own community a bishop has no superior but God. \* To each shepherd/ he writes, \* a portion of the Lord's flock has been assigned, and his account must be rendered to his own Master.' (pp. 166-67) Hatch goes on to note it was when the church was recognized by the State that the authority structure changed and "conferences" began to impose instructions upon churches as binding.

## What is the Biblical Model for Church Government or Leadership?

- ▶ **The Authority of Overseers**
- ▶ Reasons for elder-rule
  2. The absence of any voting in the NT church.
- ▶ Note: This doesn't mean the church wasn't welcomed and encouraged to participate in decisions (they definitely were), but the NT never says they voted and in Acts 6 and Acts 15 (two common passages used to defend congregational voting, we clearly see participation was guided by and delegated by the church leaders.
- ▶ **Excluding congregational voting doesn't exclude congregational involvement!**

With a bit of tongue and cheek, something I read a while ago suggested we take a church vote as often as the early church did, and the point was the church should never vote, because there is not one instance in the NT that describes or prescribes a church vote.

As a leadership team we appreciate proactive feedback (i.e. unsolicited feedback people give) and responsive feedback (solicited feedback we ask of people, either formally or informally). As a leadership team we also delegate responsibility for decisions to others e.g. camp was mostly organized by three women, the schedules are put together with little input from leadership, church in the park and our hymn sings are largely entrusted to others in the church with leadership oversight.

## What is the Biblical Model for Church Government or Leadership?

### ▶ The Authority of Overseers

#### ▶ Reasons for elder-rule

3. The responsibilities of elders to lead and exercise oversight.

▶ Acts 11:30; 1 Tim 3:4-5

▶ 1 Tim 5:17 and 1 Thess 5:12-13 Paul refers to church leaders leading well

▶ Heb 13:17

▶ The elders are accountable to God for the spiritual well-being of the congregation.

Acts 11:30 implies the elders had the responsibility to disperse the financial support they received from Paul and Barnabas (even if they delegated the task to others), because it was entrusted to them (not others)

1 Tim 3:4-5 implies the authority of a man in his home and the ability he shows to exercise this seems to be important, so that he can also exercise authority in the church.

1 Thess 5:12-13 But we ask of you, brothers, that you know those who labor among you, and **lead you** (this word means, 1. to exercise a position of leadership, *rule, direct, be at the head (of)*... 2. to have an interest in, *show concern for, care for, give aid*; BDAG ) in the Lord and admonish you, 13 and that you regard them very highly in love because of their work. Live in peace with one another.

- The Greek word for “lead” in 1 Thess 5:12 is the same word found in 1 Tim 3:4-5 (“manage”); 5:17.

Heb 13:17. This reason implies elder-rule, because the elders are responsible for the

souls of the flock and allowing the congregation or some other person or group of people to exercise authority and make the decisions for the souls of these people, places decisions I'm going to be personally responsible for, in the hands of others.

As an example of this, parents think of your responsibility for your children. This is a real and dangerous example, because as parents we're being threatened to lose rights and authority to parent our children, by government and society and yet we know biblically we're responsible and accountable for their upbringing in the fear and admonition of the Lord.

Using this example, to hand off the decision-making power of the church to the congregation, would be like parents giving over the decision-making power of children to the school, even if it's a Christian school.

## What is the Biblical Model for Church Government or Leadership?

### ▶ **The Authority of Overseers**

#### ▶ Reasons for elder-rule

4. The responsibilities of the congregation to submit to and respect leadership.

▶ 1 Thess 5:12-13; 1 Tim 5:17

▶ Heb 13:7

▶ Heb 13:17

▶ Very clearly and emphatically the congregation is called to 'obey and submit' to their leaders

This authority doesn't equal totalitarian leadership.

- Peter makes this clear, "nor yet as lording it over those allotted to you, but being examples to the flock" (1 Pet 5:3).

- Jesus also describes biblical leadership as service, not dominion (Mark 10:42-45)

## What is the Biblical Model for Church Government or Leadership?

### ▶ **The Authority of Overseers**

#### ▶ What authority comes with those who are in the office of elder?

##### ▶ Summary of Elder-rule

- ▶ The biblical model for church leadership is elder-rule, meaning the **authority** for the decisions of the **local church** resides with the **plurality** of **elders in that church**.

Note: The elders aren't above being disciplined for sin, because Paul describes the public discipline for an elder in unrepentant sin in 1 Tim 5.

The elder-rule approach to church polity increases the weight of responsibility in training and recognizing men as elders because they aren't voted out by a congregation and there's no outside or external authority with the power to dismiss them.

What we're seeking is a plurality of qualified men who are above reproach and committed to holiness and the Word of God.

## What is the Biblical Model for Church Government or Leadership?

### ▶ The Office of Overseer: Summary

*The Biblical leadership structure for a local church consists of a **plurality of qualified men** who are **called by God** to serve (in submission to **Christ** who is the head of the church) in the office of **overseer** (who are also known by the titles of “bishop, elder, or pastor”) and these men have been granted **authority, by God, over the local church** (“flock”) entrusted to them.*

## What is the Biblical Model for Church Government or Leadership?

### ▶ Application Questions

1. What other titles or references for “overseers” are used in the NT? What verses describe these different terms as speaking of the same leadership role in the church?
2. How is a plurality of elders in a church supported in Scripture?
3. What’s the difference between “elder-rule” and “elder-led”? What reasons from Scripture support “elder-rule” as the model of church governance?
  - ▶ Does “elder-rule” rule out participation from the congregation? In what ways could you be involved in decision making processes in the church (e.g. decisions you’ve been delegated or provided advice on decisions to be made)?
4. What other models of church governance are you aware of and why are these not the biblical model for church leadership?
5. How might your experience in other churches have shaped your view (good or bad) on church governance today?

What other titles or references for “overseers” are used in the NT? What verses describe these different terms as speaking of the same leadership role in the church?

- “Bishop,” “Pastor,” “Elder.” See Acts 20:17, 28; 1 Pet 5:1-3; Titus 1:5-7.

How is a plurality of elders in a church supported in Scripture?

- The word “elders” is in plural when it’s speaking about a group of elders overseeing a church, including elders (plural) being appointed in one local church e.g. Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5.

What’s the difference between “elder-rule” and “elder-led”? What reasons from Scripture support “elder-rule” as the model of church governance?

Does “elder-rule” rule out participation from the congregation? In what ways could you be involved in decision making processes in the church (e.g. decisions you’ve been delegated or provided advice on decisions to be made)?

- The difference is who has the final say and carries the authority for decisions made in the church. Elder-led encourages and welcomes the elders to provide spiritual

oversight and pastoral care, but they're not responsible for overseeing all areas of the church, because the congregation will be responsible for voting for some matters.

- The elders are accountable to God for their ministry, the congregation is to obey and respect leadership, there's no biblical evidence of congregational voting.

What other models of church governance are you aware of and why are these not the biblical model for church leadership?

How might your experience in other churches have shaped your view (good or bad) on church governance today?