

# Church Leadership I

## (1) Why study church government?

### Hebrews 13:7

Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith.

### Hebrews 13:17

Obeys your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.

### 1 Peter 5:1-7

<sup>1</sup> So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: <sup>2</sup> shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; <sup>3</sup> not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. <sup>4</sup> And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.

<sup>5</sup> Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” <sup>6</sup> Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, <sup>7</sup> casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.

## (2) There are four forms of church government:

model	description
<b>Bishop-rule</b>	Church is ruled by the bishop.
<b>Connectional</b>	Pastors are appointed by the bishop. Each bishop has control over several churches. There is an archbishop over several bishops.
<b>Elder-rule</b>	Church is ruled by elected elders.
<b>Connectional</b>	The pastor is one of the elders. Each church is connected/accountable to one another through a regional body of elders.
<b>Congregation-rule</b>	Church is ruled by congregation members.
<b>Independent</b>	Pastor (elder) is under the congregation (usually through board of deacons). Each church is independent of one another.
<b>Elder-rule</b>	The church is ruled by elected elders; pastor is one of the elders.
<b>Independent</b>	Each church is independent of one another.

### (3) The biblical case for an elder-rule, connectional church:

#### Elders in the Old Testament:

##### Numbers 11:14-17

<sup>14</sup> “I am not able to carry all this people alone; the burden is too heavy for me. <sup>15</sup> If you will treat me like this, kill me at once, if I find favor in your sight, that I may not see my wretchedness.”

<sup>16</sup> Then the LORD said to Moses, “Gather for me seventy men of the elders of Israel, whom you know to be **the elders of the people and officers over them**, and bring them to the tent of meeting, and let them take their stand there with you. <sup>17</sup> And I will come down and talk with you there. And I will take some of the Spirit that is on you and put it on them, and **they shall bear the burden of the people with you**, so that you may not bear it yourself alone.”

##### Ezekiel 8:1

In the sixth year, in the sixth month, on the fifth day of the month, as I sat in my house, with **the elders of Judah** sitting before me, the hand of the Lord GOD fell upon me there.

#### In the New Testament, the early church was governed by the apostles:

##### Acts 1:1-2

<sup>1</sup> In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, <sup>2</sup> until the day when he was taken up, after **he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen**.

##### 2 Corinthians 10:8

For even if I boast a little too much of **our authority, which the Lord gave for building you up** and not for destroying you, I will not be ashamed.

##### Matthew 16:19

I will give you **the keys of the kingdom of heaven**, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

##### Ephesians 2:19-20

<sup>19</sup> So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, <sup>20</sup> built on **the foundation of the apostles and prophets**, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone.

#### But along with the apostles, elders governed the church:

##### Acts 15

<sup>1</sup> But some men came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.” <sup>2</sup> And after Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them, Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up **to Jerusalem to the apostles and the elders** about this question. ...

<sup>6</sup> The apostles and the elders were gathered together to consider this matter. ...

<sup>22</sup> Then it seemed good to **the apostles and the elders**, with the **whole church**, to choose men from among them and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They sent Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas, leading men among the brothers, <sup>23</sup> with the following letter: “The brothers, both **the apostles and the elders**, to the brothers who are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia, greetings. ...”

<sup>30</sup> So when they were sent off, they went down **to Antioch**, and having gathered the congregation together, **they delivered the letter**.

**In each church, there is a plurality of elders:**

**Acts 11:29-30**

<sup>29</sup> So the disciples determined, everyone according to his ability, to send relief to the brothers living in Judea. <sup>30</sup> And they did so, sending it to the **elders** by the hand of Barnabas and Saul.

**Acts 20:17**

Now from Miletus Paul sent to Ephesus and called **the elders** of the church to come to him.

**Acts 21:17-18**

<sup>17</sup> When we had come to Jerusalem, the brothers received us gladly. <sup>18</sup> On the following day Paul went in with us to James, and all **the elders** were present.

**1 Peter 5:1-7**

<sup>1</sup> So I exhort **the elders** among you...

**What about “bishops” (overseers)? My argument is that “elders” and “bishops” are interchangeable terms.**

**Titus 1:5-8**

<sup>5</sup> This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint **elders** in every town as I directed you – <sup>6</sup> if anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife, and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination. <sup>7</sup> For an **overseer**, as God’s steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, <sup>8</sup> but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined.

**Acts 20**

<sup>17</sup> Now from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called the **elders** of the church to come to him. ...

<sup>28</sup> Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you **overseers**, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.

**1 Peter 5:1-7**

<sup>1</sup> So I exhort the **elders** among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: <sup>2</sup> shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising **oversight** (literally: being an overseer)

**(4) What are the responsibilities of elders?**

**Governance and rule of the congregation:**

**1 Timothy 3:4-5**

<sup>4</sup> He must **manage his own household well**, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, <sup>5</sup> for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he **care for God’s church**?

**1 Peter 5:1-3**

<sup>1</sup> So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: <sup>2</sup> **shepherd the flock** of God that is among you, **exercising oversight**, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; <sup>3</sup> not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.

**Acts 20:28**

Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you **overseers**, to **care for the church of God**, which he obtained with his own blood.

**Administering pastoral care of the congregation:**

**James 5:14**

Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.

**Making doctrinal determinations:**

Acts 15 (see above)

**Is there a difference between pastors and elders? (Teaching Elders and Ruling Elders)**

**1 Timothy 5:17-18**

<sup>17</sup> Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, **especially** those who **labor in preaching and teaching**. <sup>18</sup> For the Scripture says, “You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain,” and, “The laborer deserves his wages.”

**1 Corinthians 9:14**

In the same way, the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel. (see also Galatians 6:6)

**Notes**

**(1) Why study church government?**

People have an aversion to church government. They have bad associations – church politics, fighting, dissension. So they want to avoid the topic. Or, why can't we just get along without thinking about it?

Two problems with that: (1) Church government is not a matter of indifference in Scripture. We have clear instructions about how the church is to be organized. To ignore or disobey is to disobey God. (2) Lack of church government does not spare us fights. Why do we fight? We fight because of sin. Church government actually mitigates the effects of sin because it provides us structures and channels to deal with the sinfulness of the church. When practiced well, church government creates harmonious church life.

**Hebrews 13:7**

Look at your leaders and imitate them. They are there for your benefit. But who are the leaders?

**Hebrews 13:17**

Obey and submit to your leaders. This is very strong language. Our culture hates authority. We want to be free and independent. But as Hebrews shows us, we have leaders for our advantage. Why? Because the leaders are watching over our souls. And so let's not make their work burdensome, but submit willingly and gladly.

**1 Peter 5**

This is an exhortation to the leaders of the church (elders). What are the leaders to do?

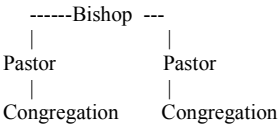
Shepherd the congregation (v. 2). Care for them. Provide oversight.

In other words, as a congregation, we need leaders to shepherd us. Sheep without shepherds will get lost and come to harm.

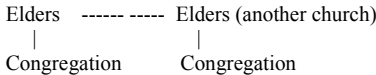
And verse 5 – “be subject to the elders.” Once again, this is a clear command of Scripture. This is not a matter of indifference or something unimportant. This is the command of God.

**(2) There are three historic forms of church government (with a fourth recent addition)**

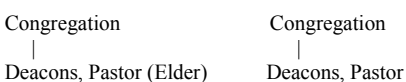
**Bishop-rule, connectional**  
*(Episcopalism)*



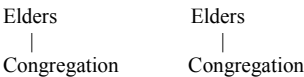
**Elder-rule, connectional**  
*(Presbyterianism)*



**Congregation-rule, independent**  
*(Congregationalism)*



**Elder-rule, independent**  
*(Hybrid of Presbyterian and Congregational)*



There are **two** main issues:

**(1) Who rules the church?** (Who makes the decisions?)

- bishop (monarchy)
- elders (republic)
- congregation (democracy)

**(2) What is the relationship between churches?**

- Connectional
- Independent

Episcopalism and Presbyterianism are both **connectional** models of church government. There is a hierarchy so that an individual church can be disciplined and corrected by the larger body. Congregationalism and the Hybrid are both models of **independency**. There are two kinds of independents. Extreme independents – non-denominational churches (some even have the word Independent in their church name). Denominational independents – Baptists. They associate with one another and cooperate on certain things, but each church is an autonomous unit.

Presbyterians and reformed Baptists have elected elders rule the church. Episcopalism and Congregationalism does not have elder-rule.

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### **(3) The biblical case for Elder-rule, Connectional model of church government (aka, Presbyterianism)**

#### **Elders in the Old Testament**

The argument starts in the Old Testament. Remember the Bible is one story. There is only one people of God. Part of the difficulty with competing ideas of church government is that people only look at the New Testament. And in the NT, there isn't a chapter defining clearly how the church should be governed. Instead, we have descriptions of church government in action – and from that we can piece it together. But if we remember that the early church looked to the Old Testament and how synagogues were governed, it makes the task much easier.

#### **Numbers 11:14-17**

Moses is overwhelmed and burnt-out. The needs and burdens of the people are too much for one man to handle. God provides him a group of elders (older, wiser men) who will share the burden with him.

#### **Ezekiel 8:1**

Just one example of what we see throughout the Bible. The responsibility of caring for and governing the people are given to the elders.

#### **New Testament – Apostles**

What is the difference between apostles and elders?

**Apostle** – *apostolos* means messenger with **the authority** of the sender (power of attorney). They were direct witnesses of the resurrection of Jesus and received his teachings to impart to the church. They had the “keys of the Kingdom” – authority. Once the apostles died, there are no more – unique once-in-history office.

**Elders** – Also have authority over the church. But they do not impart new teachings as the apostles did. The apostles wrote the New Testament, or they authored the content. Elders teach from the apostles' teachings.

#### **But along with the apostles, the elders governed the church:**

Acts 15 is critical to our understanding of church government. The problem arose in Antioch. Judaizers were arguing that you had to be circumcised in order to be saved. (This argument made a lot of sense, because circumcision was a sign of covenant membership in Israel.) Paul and Barnabus said no. Only faith is required.

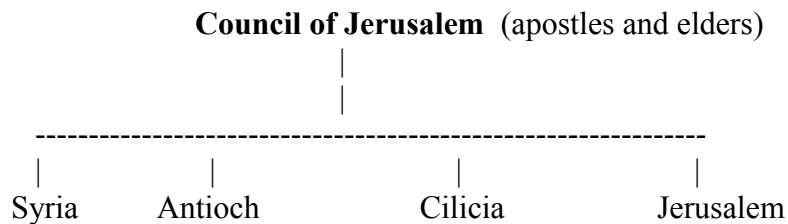
The controversy couldn't be settled within Antioch, so they sent representatives to Jerusalem where a council of apostles and elders convened. Several things to note:

Notice that the decision made at the Jerusalem Council was not decided by one or two people – for example Peter and Paul (contra Episcopalism). It was deliberated by a large gathering of leaders. Notice elders are included with the apostles. In other words, the elders shared authority with the apostles.

Notice also that a problem that arose in Antioch is brought to Jerusalem, and the meeting of the leaders (presbytery) is binding to all the churches. They write a letter and this letter is sent around to all the churches. This is the foundation for the **connectional nature** of the church. Churches are not independent of one another. They are connected and are accountable to each other. This good, for how else will you solve problems that arise in a particular church unless you have elders from other churches who can have oversight? What if a particular church or pastor goes bad? The benefits of being connected and accountable is that each church can watch over the others.

(We also know the church is inter-connected because Paul teaches us the church is the **body of Christ**. Meaning we are all connected to one another. We cannot disassociate from one another.)

And notice the role of the elders. They have **doctrinal oversight**. They decide the practice of the church. It's not up to the church members (Congregationalism). It's not up to a single guy (Episcopalism). It's up to the gathering of the elders.



Notice a regional body of elders (and apostles) make a decision that is binding to the local churches of Syria, Antioch, Cilicia and Jerusalem. What model of church government does this look like? The elder-rule, connectional model of Presbyterianism.

### **In each church, there is a plurality of elders:**

Notice there is always more than one elder in each church. There are a group of elders. This makes a great deal of practical sense. One man ruling the church is prone to mistakes and personal blindness. It leads to people being dictatorial and overbearing. But a group of elders gives multiple perspectives. Also, many elders who are equal to the pastor give the pastor accountability and fellowship. But unlike the chaos and unruly-ness of congregational rule, elders are wise and knowledgeable about doctrine and so are suitable to make decisions.

### **What about bishops (overseers)? My argument is that “elders” and “bishops” are interchangeable terms.**

The Greek word for elder is *presbuteros* (English: “presbyter”). It connotes someone older and wise. The Greek word for bishop is *episcopos*, which is basically a foreman in charge of a group of workers. It means overseer.

These two words are completely interchangeable. They describe different aspects of the same office.

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## **(4) What are the responsibilities of elders?**

### **Elders have three broad responsibilities**

- manage the church (finances, set vision/direction, hiring non-pastoral staff)
- shepherd people (love the people)
- do theology (love studying the Bible)

### 1 Timothy 3

This chapter is the most extensive description of the qualifications of an elder, but not so much his duties. One of the key qualifications is that an elder manage his own household – meaning his children aren't unruly, his wife respects him. Why? Because if an elder can't manage his own household, how can he manage the church? Thus it's the same responsibilities. Just as the father rules over his children; so the elder rules over the church. This is why the Bible commands us to obey our elders, just as we are to obey our fathers in the family.

father	=	elder	(An analogy. Elder is has father-like spiritual authority)
children		congregation	

### 1 Peter 5

What does this management of the church entail? We are to shepherd the flock. People think only pastors are shepherds (the word “pastor” means shepherd). Not true. Peter clearly states that elders are pastors as well, in the sense that they are to care for the congregation, pray for the congregation, minister to the congregation. And so one of the chief qualifications of being an elder is that you have a pastoral heart. You love people. It's not just for people who like doctrine.

### Acts 20

Elders are to care for the church. We know from Hebrews that elders are to watch over our souls. And they will have to give an account to the chief Shepherd Jesus in the end. The spiritual health of the people falls on the elders.

### James 5:14

Elders visit the people and pray for them. This is not just the job of the pastor.

### Making doctrinal determinations:

Acts 15. Elders have to be steeped in the Bible and really know doctrine to be able to make determinations and decisions. What is false doctrine and what is true doctrine? Elders have to love studying theology.

### Is there a difference between pastors and elders? (Teaching Elders and Ruling Elders)

After hearing the description of elders, it's natural to ask, is there a difference between pastors and elders? And the answer is, substantively, no. Pastors and elders basically do the same thing. That's why pastors are just one of the elders. They have neither more say or more power than another elder.

But the Bible does recognize a difference in that pastors do the work of the church full-time and specialize in teaching and preaching.

### 1 Timothy 5:17-18

Two main differences. (1) Pastors (teaching elders) are dedicated to the ministry of teaching and preaching in a way that the other elders are not. Though all elders should know the Bible and doctrine well enough that they can teach. But pastors teach full-time. (2) Pastors (teaching elders) are paid for their work. Ruling elders are not paid.

Paul evokes two images. Don't muzzle an ox. Oxen should be allow to eat the grain and grass while they labor. And the other image, much more straight-forward, laborers should be paid for their work.



This makes a lot of practical sense. You want the person teaching and preaching to really devote all their time to it – to do it full-time. But how are they to live? How can they support their families? They need to be paid. Ruling elders, by contrast, don't need to do their work full-time. So they are engaged in full-time work in commerce (secular job) and do the work of the church part-time.

### **1 Corinthians 9:14**

The Bible recognizes that gospel workers are paid. Again, there is a two-tier classification – teaching elders are paid, ruling elders are not.

It's important to emphasize again that the difference between ruling elders and teaching elders is not power. Teaching elders don't get two votes. They have an equal say with ruling elders. Of course, practically speaking, the teaching elder will have greater influence. He is responsible for teaching his own ruling elders. But there is a modesty and humility in the teaching elder when it comes to governing the church. He does it side-by-side with his ruling elders.

<b>Ruling Elders</b>	=	<b>Teaching Elders (equal in power and authority)</b>
don't specialize		specialize in preaching/teaching
part-time		full-time
not paid		paid