

THE FORMATION AND FUNCTION OF THE CHURCH

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Merciful and gracious Father, we come to you with humble anticipation that you would once again be pleased to have your Holy Spirit fulfill his job description, and that is to guide us into all truth. Remove the blinders from our eyes, the presuppositions from our heart, and our human expectations and just fill them with your grace. Father, we just trust that you'd be pleased once again to protect us from ourselves and open our eyes that we might behold wonderful things from your Word, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Before we continue our study on the function and formation of the church, I want to take you to just a brief passage of Scripture, if you'd turn with me please to the book of 1 Corinthians 3. I want you to know how much I appreciate your marvelous support over these 17 or 18 years, however long we've been together. It's just been a marvelous experience for all of us. I trust all of us are maturing in our faith in Christ.

One thing I do want to be careful of is that you do not make more out of me or Bishop Rogers or Tom or Ted or Carl or Don—those of us who teach. I want to make sure that you don't make more of us than you should. There's a tendency because of our human nature...you know, the Scripture says, "Have no false images." Often times when you take somebody who's up front all the time, you create a false image. Brothers, we just need to be careful of that. The Lord has created something here that's very unique among the Brave Men on Friday. We need to maintain its integrity and not to begin to create more out of myself or the other brothers who teach. This is really a team effort. That's why we rotate teachers around when I'm not here because it's by design that I don't want to set myself up to be the icon or somebody else to be the icon.

I just want to read you something to call our attention, to make careful that we always have our mind be Christ-centered and not man-centered. The danger with the church today is that we make icons out of men, rather than continuing to worship the Lord as our Savior and eternal Sovereign. Here's what Paul says about this very issue. 1 Corinthians 3:5-8, "⁵What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed." Now brothers, that's all we are. We're just the servants whom the Lord has been pleased to allow us to come together as a group of men that hopefully this is increasing your belief and your maturity.

⁵Servants through whom you believed, even as the Lord gave opportunity to each one. ⁶I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth. ⁷So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth. ⁸Now he who plants and he who waters are one; but each will receive his own reward according to his own labor."

Brothers, you know, we are so grateful for your continued support by the way that you show up every Friday. There's a lot of others things you could be doing. For those of us who have the privilege of planting the seeds, we are very, very grateful for your support and encouragement. You are a great encouragement to us. We need to make sure that that encouragement always goes to center upon the person and work of Christ. Don't aim for me because I'll disappoint you. Christ will not disappoint you. Don't look to me, look to Christ, because he will not fail you, I will.

Brothers, let's always just but so grateful. There's something really unique here. I had the privilege last week of being up in Durian, Connecticut, to speak to another movement of men called the New Canaan Society. They were so intrigued to hear about what's going on. They said, "You mean you've got X number of guys who come to a Friday and actually sit there for 50 minutes and listen to somebody teach?" I said, "Yeah, we've been doing that now for about 18 years." They said, "That's really different

because men don't want to sit and listen. They want to sit and share." Now there's nothing wrong with sharing. Understand what I'm not saying. But there's something unique going on here, guys, and that is that we come together every Friday, and the Holy Spirit just seems to be doing a pretty good job of teaching in spite of our frailties and our humanity. All I'm saying, guys, is let's always keep our mind on Christ. That's got to be the critical thing. Don't look to us. We're just the vessel hopefully that's understanding the sufficiency of Scripture and taking the Scripture and doing the best we can to give it to you. May God always be pleased to call attention to himself and not to us. There's something unique going on here, guys. Let's maintain the integrity of that.

Secondly, playing off of that, as we're looking at the Scriptures teaching us on the function and formation of the church, I don't want take the position of being critical of anybody else's church leadership or church government. That's not my intent. I don't want to be critical in saying you ought to do it this way, you ought to do it that way. All I'm trying to do, brothers, is teach what the Scripture teaches us about leadership and that's elders and deacons.

Whatever your tradition may be beyond that, that is your responsibility to apply it as you can. Please understand that I'm not saying this is the way you should do it. All I'm saying is let me tell you what the Scripture teaches, and then the application must become your responsibility in your own church. I'm not trying to change anybody else's tradition. I'm just trying to do the best I can to say the Scripture teaches us about this and the Scripture teaches us about that and how you apply it. So please understand I don't want to be critical of the leadership situation you have in your own flock. I'm just trying to bring the church back to the standards of Scripture. That's all I'm trying to do. Forgive me if I fail, if I have a bad spirit about it. I trust I don't. I really pray about my spirit and my teaching as much as I do the content, because it's got to be grace and truth. I'm committed to teaching the truth, but I want to do it graciously. It's got to be grace and truth.

As we go through some of these things on church leadership, I just trust that the Lord will be pleased to perhaps give us some insight about how we can call the church back to its glorious stage of being salt and light in a lost world.

God always works through leadership. God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. There you see the leadership example of the heavenly divine. You don't ever see the Holy Spirit trying to be Jesus, and you don't ever see Jesus trying to be the Father. For what the Father ordained, the Son accomplished and the Holy Spirit applied. There's absolute unity and agreement in those three.

As we get into some of the qualifications of church leaders, I just want to contrast for you, again, the necessity of our taking the biblical standard as the qualifier for someone who's in a leadership position. Let me just give you a contrast between the world's way of picking leaders, which often times has infiltrated into the church environment, inappropriately, contrast that with a more biblical version of that to see the contrast, just to help us understand the contrast.

Here's man's way versus God's way. Man's way is to focus on power. God's way is to focus on submission. The world's way is freedom and individuality. The biblical way is responsibility and accountability and authority. Man's way is getting ahead. God's way is giving away. Man's way is immediate fulfillment, where God's way is lasting achievement. Man's way is praise of self. God's way is praise from God. The world's way is self-gratification. The biblical way is self-control. Man's way is be sir. God's way is to sir. Man's way is forging ahead. God's way is waiting on God. Man's way is lead people. Biblical way is follow God. Man's way is competition. God's way is cooperation. Man's way is write the book. God's way is read the Book. {LAUGHTER} Man's way is win at all costs. God's way is the victory is already won.

Now look at the contrast, brothers. When we start talking about church leadership, remember this. Leadership essentially is influencing the behavior of people. That's why the Scripture is so clear on who is it that God has qualified to either be an elder or a deacon. In lesson 10, I gave you the descriptive qualifications of those two positions—the elder and the deacon.

You'll notice in lesson 10, the qualifications for deacon, in my mind, basically should be the minimum qualifications for anybody who's in a leadership position of any ministry in the church. Yes, the deacons have certain requirements. They are involved in taking care of the temporal needs—waiting on tables and taking care of the temporal needs. But in reality, those qualifications for a deacon ought to be the same qualifications, minimally, for anybody who's involved in any type of ministry, be it youth work, be it feeding the poor, be it housing, be whatever it is. There are some minimum standards that we need to have. Remember, we're not doing this based upon the system of the world; we're doing this based upon the qualifications of Scripture.

Biblically, God is the one who qualifies people for leadership. We don't vote them into positions. We recognize who God has qualified and then we set them apart to fulfill that ministry that is unique because of the spiritual qualifications that God has built into them. It's not like you say, "Oh, let's take a look at so-n-so because he or she is this." It's really, "I've observed this person's life. They have the qualifications and I am now willing to submit to them because part of the role of membership of the church is two-fold—to submit to the leaders and hold them accountable."

Now, you're not going to be able to follow somebody unless you're convinced they really have the qualifications that God has required of them, and that's something that God builds into people. We don't make that happen. Yes, we can begin to train Christian leaders. Absolutely. We need to do that. But we need to realize that these qualifications are something that is a spirit lead work in a person's life. As a result of that, we say, "Oh, there's one. Let's set him apart for that particular role."

In my judgment, I can only tell you why I did things in the church that I pastored, the couple of churches that I served as a senior pastor/teacher. I can only tell you why I did it. I can't tell you why other churches don't do it. You'll have to ask them. All I can say is this is what I tried to do, understanding the role of the elder and the role of the deacon.

If you now turn to lesson 11—I hope you have that—I want to go through the roles of the eldership. I want to talk about the role of the elder. Church government in the Scripture comes by instruction not by construction. In other words, we don't construct a new paradigm to organize the church based upon successful corporate patterns of this world. Church government comes by instruction, and that instruction comes from the Scripture—the sufficiency of Scripture. Do you really believe that Scripture is sufficient for all things for life and godliness? That includes the organization of the church.

The organization of church government comes from instruction from the Scripture, not construction by man's ways. That's why I wanted to go through the contrast between what the world says that leadership is versus what the Scripture says.

There are three elements of Christ-instructed government in the church—three elements. First of all, kingdom authority rules the church. Kingdom authority rules the church. All decisions must be made in light of what is the best thing for the kingdom and the church. When you make your decisions based upon what is the best thing for the church, then you're going to do the things that are best for the kingdom. We need to realize that kingdom authority is what rules the church. Secondly, submission maintains the church. Submission maintains the church. Leaders submitting to the Holy Spirit, congregations submitting to the leader. Thirdly, appointed representatives lead the church. Those are the three hallmarks of Christ-instructed church government. Kingdom authority rules the church.

Submission maintains the church. Appointed or qualified representatives lead the church.

The word we want to talk about today would be the elders or the guardians. Two words are used to describe the role of the elder. First of all, the word elder would be the word that tells you who they are. They're spiritually mature. They're mature spiritually. That's who they are. We recognize that; we don't recognize their "leadership abilities" as we look at the spiritual qualifications.

Thirdly, the word guardian or bishop. That would be what they do. They oversee spiritually. The role of the elder is to be a person of mature spirituality. Remember this—spirituality is an absolute. You and I do not become more spiritual; we become more mature. Spirituality is defined by the person and work of Christ. Our maturity is more of Christ and less of me. That's what you're looking for in church leaders—people who have more of Christ and less of themselves. That's the role of the elder. That's who they are. They are mature spiritually. We do not become more spiritual; we become more mature.

Notice the number of times Paul says that the goal of ministry is maturity. It's to become mature in Christ. That's all the whole church is about one thing—bringing people to maturity in their relationship to Christ. That means we've got to have leaders who are already there, or at least ahead of us. That's the qualification.

Secondly, what they do is they are guardians, or they're shepherds. They oversee spiritually. The word elder really describes those who being raised up and qualified by the Word of God of the Holy Spirit were appointed to have spiritual oversight and care to the local church. That's what we see in the Christ instituted government of the church.

The description of what they do, the guardian or bishop, that's the nature of their work. They were appointed in the Scripture according as they had given evidence of fulfilling the divine qualifications.

It's interesting the word "elder" or "Presbuteros" is used 67 times in the New Testament. Every one of those times it describes spiritual maturity. That's the qualification. It's not humanly-gifted leadership qualifications; it's spiritual maturity. The word "episcopos" or "bishop" or "guardian" is used five times, and it always describes a function—what they do.

What are some of the qualifications? They're not chosen on the basis of creative abilities, based upon financial success, their public relations skills, their position, their power, their personality, but on specific spiritual qualifications that I gave you in lesson 10. You can read back and see all the personal qualifications.

Basically there are four when you take a look at all of the 28 qualifications of an elder. They break down into basically four major topics. First of all, they have high moral character. Secondly, their family life must be in accord with God's order portrayed in the Scripture. Thirdly, their relationship to others must reveal interpersonal relationships with both believers and non-believers. They've got to have the ability to work and relate to the believer as well as the non-believer. Lastly, spiritual life exhibits wisdom and maturity. When you look at all the qualifications that I gave you in lesson 10, that's how you can summarize all of those in those four major headings.

***Audience Member:** Bruce, will you go over those one more time please.*

Certainly. When you take a look at lesson 10 and the 28 qualifications of eldership, you can take those down and summarize them in four major themes or four major headings. First of all, high moral character. Not talking about sinless perfection, guys. We're not talking about that. Remember, we do not become more spiritual; we become more mature. Maturity is how quickly you respond when you do fail.

You see, we're all going to fail.

One of the best evidences of a person's spiritual maturity is how quickly do they rebound when they have failed, because we all fail. That's where humility comes in. Humility is seeing that which is perfect and realizing I can't achieve it by myself. That's humility. That's what you're looking for in church leaders. You're looking for humility; someone who says, "I see this standard of excellence that Scripture portrays as an elder, and I can't do that." In essence, one of the great qualifications of eldership in the church is weakness; not in their personality, but weakness in the realization that they can't fulfill the responsibility, and they're going to be falling on their knees in prayer. You see, you want the weakest person you can find in that regard. They realize that, "I look at this and realize this is beyond me. I can't do that."

If you take a look at lesson 10, I have sort of a summary statement at the end. This is the attitude. Whether one is called to serve as an elder or deacon, who is humanly equipped to assume such roles? That's what I'm referring you. Recognize their weakness. They just can't do that on their own. They see which is perfect and they realize they can't do it by themselves. Who is sufficient or adequate for these things? Our sufficiency is in God (2 Corinthians 3:4-6). Let us draw upon his inexhaustible resources as we trust him not only for the process of identifying the people, but also the pattern in which they provide servant-oriented leadership.

You see, brothers, we're looking for people who recognize their inability to achieve that, and they're going to be men of prayer because they're trusting the inexhaustible sources of the Holy Spirit. That's the kind of people that people will end up wanting to follow.

High moral standards. The second one is family life must be in accord with God's order portrayed in the Scripture. That doesn't mean that your children have to win the Bible verse contest. I'm not suggesting that. But I've got to say that there's got to be some semblance of a divinely ordered in the home. Now women are going to hate me for saying this, but headship is critical in the home. You've got to have that. That's the biblical order. That's not chauvinistic. That's biblically oriented. The world doesn't like that because it's not politically correct, but you've got take a look at the elders of your families and say do they model to the best of their ability, not sinless perfection, but do they model the structure that the Scripture outlines for the family.

There are two organizations in the world that are solely described as being led by men. The church and the family. You've got to have that in the family of your elders. Again, not sinlessly perfect, but do they have that?

***Audience Member:** You go elder, deacon, deaconess. Now, to me, is elder, deacon, trustee. Is deaconess basically the same as trustee?*

No, I don't know what a trustee would be. It's somebody who has the fiduciary responsibility for the corporation.

***Audience Member:** For taking care of the church.*

Well, no...deacons take care of the church. The elders take care of the church.

***Audience Member:** Well, they do the work.*

The elders do the work, the deacons do the work. The trustees, I think, those of you who have trustees in your church, you'll have to help me out. I've never had them because...the elders were our trustees. We

had elders and deacons. Now when there was a female who was qualified to be involved in ministry to women, or to younger women, we referred to them as deaconesses because we applied the same qualifications of deacon as we did to them. That's where you can... a woman who's involved in ministry ought to have the minimum qualifications of what I'm calling just a deaconess. But I don't know what trustees do. I think, legally, they have the responsibility of the fiduciary activities of the corporation, but in my judgment, that falls under the elders.

Audience Member: They do the physical work [UNCLEAR]...

Yeah maybe... that may be in your... I understand that. I don't know what the trustees do because I've never had that. There's a difference between elders and deacons.

Here's the way that we were organized. Again, I'm not saying you have to do it this way. As we prayed through this Christ-instructed government, here's the way we had... we had elders. Under each elder, was a deacon. We had certain sections of our community were divided up. There was an elder responsibility for a certain number of families, and we had one or two deacons assigned to each one of those elders. They worked very closely together.

The elder might say, "I understand that Mary needs a new roof." He would turn it over to the deacon. The deacon then would mobilize people in the church who would go prepare the roof. It might be that the deacon would come to an elder and say, "You know, so-and-so's hurting spiritually," then the elder would get involved. There was cooperation between the roles of the elder and the roles of the deacon. But they were together. And the church knew that. They knew that if I lived in this section of the community, here are my elders and here are my deacons. If I have temporal, earthly needs, I go to the deacon. If I have spiritual needs, I go to the elder. They all worked together back and forth, back and forth.

There was a wonderful unity of always taking care of the family because our commitment was, our role is to bring these people to maturity, to the best of our ability, and so that's how we organized it. All we had were elders and deacons. That's the way that we structured it because where we were geographically was a rather large area. It worked out rather well because we had the elders and the deacons always talking about the families that they were assigned. Each elder had so many families, who his responsibility was the spiritual maturity development of those families. I, as the senior pastor, would preach and help us do that, and we all worked together.

Thirdly, a major qualification would be the relationship to others must reveal interpersonal relationship. In other words, the elders have got to have such interpersonal skills that they can relate to the church members themselves as well as the lost. They've got to be able to go both ways. You don't want somebody who is a Bible basher who knows the Scripture but he turns off all the unbelievers. You don't want that. You want somebody who can relate and not violate or compromise himself in a way dealing with a non-believer, have you also want them to be able to teach the believer. You've got to say do they have the skills interpersonally to relate to both people—the sheep and the goats, the wheat and the tares, the believer and the non-believer.

Lastly, their spiritual life exhibits wisdom and maturity. Those are the overall four major characteristics when you divide those 28 individual characteristics, they fall into those categories.

Let me tell you what elders are not. They are not accountable to earthly authority. They're not accountable to earthly authority. You might have a system within your denomination that they have a responsibility and authority chain, which I understand that. But I'm basically saying they are not accountable to men and the system of this world. That's what I mean.

They are also not a check and balance system for the pastor, and are not to be torn by spiritual conflict. In other words, they're not yes men for the pastor to do whatever he wants. There's a unity of spirit between the pastor/teacher and the elders who rule. They are not a dictatorial body whose objective is to bring a body of people into blind servitude to their authority. That is not what they do. They are not to operate by majority rule.

What they are. First of all, they are the rule, which means to govern. They are divinely appointed in the process of God working through divinely ordered chain of command to manage and serve the church and bring people to maturity. They are to seek constantly to glorify Christ by making decisions based upon sound biblical principles.

Let me give you a couple here. Go to Philippians 2:2-3, "make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit intent on one purpose." Essentially, that's the heart of how you want the elders to work.

Another example would be they are to lead by precept and example, and it's a position of servitude, not dictatorship. Go to Hebrews 13:7—here's a critical verse—"Remember those who lead you, who spoke the word of God to you and considering the results of their conduct, imitate their faith." That's why you've got to have the right people in church leadership, because what is it the responsibility of the church member to do? Imitate the faith of the leaders. If you don't have the right leaders, how can they imitate the faith its authentic? You see, that's critical. The role of the church is to respond to the authority. It's to imitate their faith. That's why you've got to have mature people in leadership roles within the body of Christ, because their responsibility is to imitate them.

Now that doesn't mean that you make idols of them. Not at all. What it does say is this—your responsibility as a church member is to follow. Why do you want to follow somebody who isn't giving you a model you want to follow? There's no leadership without followership.

Notice this. I'm going give you several verses about being unified in spirit, why elders should not operate on majority rule. It's because of this—you want the eldership to model unity because what is the church designed to do? Be unified. Where are they going to see unity? They're going to see it in the leadership. If the leadership is divided, the church will be divided because you're going to take sides.

I was just involved in a situation with a church recently where that's exactly what's happening. They're taking sides because there was not unity among the leadership. If the leadership had stood up and said, "This is the decision." You don't need to know who agrees or doesn't agree, but when you speak it, you speak it with a unified voice, that all the elders are saying, "This is our decision. It's a unified decision. We've all come to agreement. We're all going to win together. We're all going to lose together. This is us." It's not a me versus them. It's not a majority rule. It's everybody.

***Don:** You're saying majority rules, you mean majority rule among the elders.*

Correct. That's what I mean. That's what I'm saying is...elders should not run by majority rule. Let me just give you an illustration. Again, all I can do is give you examples from my own life, as flawed as that is. The second church I was pastoring in Chicago, we had to make a decision about a youth director. We had four elders. We spent three years making a decision because three of us were one way, and one was the other way. Now we were committed to. We were committed to the unity of spirit principle, which didn't mean that we agreed with every jot and tittle. It meant this—that when a decision in made, it is a unified decision. It's always going to be 4-0. If we don't go 4-0, we're not going to make the decision. So for three years, we were 3-1.

One of the elders, I was on the side of three. I was convinced that I was absolutely right because I had the experience working with youth. I knew what young people needed. I knew what they wanted. They wanted a mustached, guitar-playing young guy with long hair. That's what we need, because we need to identify with them. We had one wise elder who said, "No, Bruce. That's wrong. You need the older men to teach the younger men. We need a mature man, not a young buck, to lead our program. We need somebody who's got maturity." I said, "But they can't identify with the youth." We prayed. We studied. We did research. It took us three years.

You know what happened at the end of three years? Three of us changed. He was right. The other three of us changed and we hired a 56-year old former high school football coach to be our youth director, and he's the best youth director I've ever seen, because he could relate to the kids' parents. You see, youth work is working with parents; it's not giving activity to kids. It's working with their parents. We began to teach fathers how to lead worship in their home with their young people, because this man knew how to relate to their parents. He was a 56-year old former high school football coach. He'd put up with all that stuff from parents. He knew how to work with parents.

Now just let me tell the rest of the story. Six of those kids in our youth group—junior high and high school—are now on the mission field. Six of them, who grew up in that environment. We only had 12 kids in the youth group. Six of them are on the mission field. Four in Europe and two in the United States. I now support them as part of my commitment to them, because they grew up in that mature relationship because we had older men teaching younger men how to respond to the Scripture. It wasn't anything brand new. We didn't come up with a new paradigm for youth work. It took us three years to come to that because pigheaded me, I was convinced that I knew what young people needed.

That's what I'm saying. You see, there's such power when the elders operate with a unified spirit because basically you're saying to the church, "We are unified. You be unified." When we went to the families and said, "Here's the man we're hiring," certainly there were some questions. He doesn't have a mustache and can't play the guitar; he's bald. How does that change anything? You see, when we went and explained why, they said, "Oh, okay. We trust you. We trust you. You're our leaders. You've modeled that. You guys are convinced. Our role is to follow, because you're leading us, and we have confidence in you.

You see, the picture that the elders portray when they operate from a unity of spirit is what sets the model for the rest of the church to become unified when you have difficult issues. Look at that in Hebrews 13:7, "Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you and considering the results of their conduct, unified, imitate their faith." When we came up with issues in the church that there was potential division, most of that was really snuffed out because we were unified at the elder level, and we taught that to the congregation. They understood this—our responsibility is now to trust them, because we have the right people in the right spots. We have the right people in the right spots. Why is that? Because they were qualified by the Word of God through the Scripture. We can now follow them. I may not understand it, but I can trust them because they're the godly, equipped, qualified authority to lead. We now can follow.

You're helping your church membership fulfill their responsibility, and that is to follow the leadership, and to hold us accountable. They would come to us and say, "We don't understand it." They were holding us accountable. We held ourselves accountable because of the response of the congregation. The one thing we were committed to was operating with unity of spirit within the elder board because that was the model we were trying to portray.

***Audience Member:** Two things. One in Hebrews 13:7. That's about parenting, that's us as fathers as*

well. I can really see that. The question is, when you're in a larger congregation, like at Christ Church, like some of these other ones out here, and you have a huge elder board...

You have to ask them. I can't answer that. Talk to them.

Audience Member: *I didn't hear the last part of that question.*

He's asking me what do you do with a church who has a huge elder board. Correct.

Audience Member: *Correct. I mean the same things apply [UNCLEAR]?*

Absolutely. More difficult. You've got to have the right people. If you don't have the right people, what just described, is not possible. If you don't have the right qualified people, it's not going to happen. You go back to the qualifications. If you have the right kind of people in there, this will happen, regardless of the number. There's nothing magical as I see the Scripture about how many you need to have—10, 15, 20, 25, 30. I don't know that. All I'm saying is the right number is the ones who are qualified, however many there are. So I don't know. You'll have to ask them otherwise they function.

Audience Member: [UNCLEAR]...the argument's going to be we don't have [UNCLEAR]...

Okay, I would say this. I've had pastors frequently tell me, "Bruce, if we did what you're saying, I'd have nothing else to do." I said, "I just described your job description for you. Your role is this—to preach the word every Sunday and train church leaders. That's what you ought to do. That's your role. You tell me that you don't have men like that, then I have just identified your job description for the next five years. You need to train church leaders. and build into them." I'll show you how to do that in a couple of weeks when we finish this little series, about how do you start a men's ministry where you begin to build church leaders.

Everybody says, "I don't have time." What's important or urgent? You run your life by the important, not the urgent. Most of us have our lives dictated by the urgent—somebody else's priority. What's the important thing for a pastor/teacher? Preaching the word, the sufficiency of Scripture, the doctrines of grace, and building church leaders. You want to work yourself out of a job.

Bishop Rogers: *It seems to me what the assumption behind what you're saying is that if you will operate and start seeking a common mind and a spirit, actually, what you're saying is the spirit will lead you in [UNCLEAR]...giving time.*

Absolutely. Absolutely. That's the beauty of it. You know, it was wonderful that I was proved wrong. It was wonderful that I was proved wrong. I was really dead right for three years. I mean, I was right for three years. But it wasn't until I began to look at the Scripture. As Bishop Rogers is saying, let the Holy Spirit lead you. That's what you do. That's why elders are to lead by precept and example. Precept is the word, and example is their life. Precept and example. You see, that's why people will want to follow. So that's it. The Holy Spirit will create that unity. Unity is not something that you and I achieve. Unity is something that you and I receive. It's something the Holy Spirit accomplishes. We can't make it happen.

Audience Member: *What you're saying and what the Bishop said, I'm teaching Sunday school, our adult Sunday school, and we're studying Christian conduct in Romans 12 and 13. What you and the Bishop said, Romans 12:16, we hit this last week, we have the same mind [UNCLEAR] another. My wife is saying [UNCLEAR]...and how do we get that way? We delve into the Scripture and we let the Holy Spirit lead us so that we begin to think Christ's way, led by the Holy Spirit, and that will lead to exactly what you just put out there.*

Amen. It's not an easy process. The Western version is I've got to make a decision in the next 30 days. That's Western culture. You see, we need to think in terms of generations. We need to think in terms of generations.

You see, a pastor really ought to be working himself out of a job. If you're really training church leaders...let me see, how do I say this...the less the church needs you, the more valuable you are to them. The less the church needs you, the more valuable you are to them because you've trained them to maturity. You train them to maturity. That's contrary to the system of this world. The world says, "I need to be here because they can't do it without me." You see, that's why I have the freedom without task one of the other brothers to teach, because it's not about me. It's about us. It's about the Holy Spirit, you see, leading us and guiding us into all truth.

Don: Okay Bruce, but aren't pastors, though, equipped to call, to preach and teach?

Absolutely.

Don: Yeah. So you say that work yourself out of a job and then [UNCLEAR]. What do you mean by that?

Well, what I'm saying is you train church leaders to the point that they govern the church biblically.

Don: Oh, okay.

That's what I mean. Now you have to look at Ephesians 4. There is the gift to the church is the role of the pastor/teacher. It's a gift to the church. No question. So there is the role of the pastor who has a primary responsibility to teach. All I'm saying is, theoretically, you don't want to build the church around you. You want to build it around qualified leadership. It's a plurality of elders, just not one person. It's trying to avoid, Don, the one person icon mentality. "Why do go to church?" "Oh because he has a nice suit and a haircut," or "I like the way he preaches." That's fine. Glad that you like we preach and teach, but you don't build an icon. That's what I'm trying to say.

Audience Member: Bruce, realistically speaking then, this is church growth.

Church growth is depth. Church expansion is numbers.

Audience Member: [UNCLEAR]...of the elders, the elders [UNCLEAR] of those around them. Everybody is being disciplined under this, they live and breathe it in the ministry of the marketplace, people start to see this difference, and wow, let me come to church with this guy because they get it, and you start get a mature, growing, vibrant church.

That's well said. The one thing I would say this—it's not the pastor building into the elders, it's the elders building into the elders. The pastor is not above the elders. He's one of them. The elders hold the pastor accountable. They held me accountable on my preaching, its quality, its content and everything else. The elders work together. It's not me versus the elders, and the elders and everybody else; it's the elders together as a group, led by the Holy Spirit. That's the critical part.

They lead by precept and example. It's a position of servitude, not dictatorship. Look at Hebrews 13:17. Notice in verse 7, we said imitate their faith. That's one thing. Here's the second responsibility of church members. "Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you."

Why do you want to follow somebody? It's because you know they've been qualified. You see, ineffective, unqualified church leaders make an ineffective, unqualified membership, because members don't do their responsibility, which is to follow and trust, because they know they've got the right people.

Quickly, let me just give you a summation of the role of an elder, and we'll wrap it up with this. Turn with me to Acts 20. Again, brothers, please understand I'm not being critical of denominations or other churches. I'm just trying the best I can to say here is the Christ instituted church government structure. How we work that out is going to be varied in a lot of different expressions, a lot of different traditions, because each situation is radically different. All I'm saying is go back to the standard. We don't need to create a new paradigm. Let's go back to the standard. Yeah, we're going to have the work through all this stuff, but let's get back to where we're called to be because that's where we're going to be salt and light as an organization known as the local church.

Let's go to Acts 20. This is Paul's final words to the church at Ephesus, a church that he deeply loved. He appointed elders there. He trained them. He equipped them. And now he's leaving them. In Acts 20, beginning at verse 28, this is sort of his farewell address to the elders at Ephesus. Notice what he says. In this, I think we see the five priorities of an elder. Acts 20:28, 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. ²⁹I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; ³⁰and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. ³¹Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears. ³²And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified. ³³I have coveted no one's silver or gold or clothes. ³⁴You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my own needs and to the men who were with me. ³⁵In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’”

Brothers, I think that right there is a synopsis of the five priorities of a church elder. Let me give them to you, just quickly. First of all, to keep right with God. Keep right with God. The first priority is to keep right with God. Notice verse 28, “Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock.”

Secondly, to feed and lead the flock. That's verse 28 also, “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.”

The first priority is to keep right with God. The second one is to lead and feed the flock. The third one is to warn and watch, to protect the flock; to warn and watch. Verses 29-31, ²⁹“I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; ³⁰and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. ³¹Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears.” You've got to warn them. That's the role of the elder. It's not an easy job, but you've got to say, “Stop that! Quit doing that!” You see, that's part of the role of the elder. Somebody's not going to obey that unless they know the person has the right qualified person to say those things.

To keep the with God, the feed and lead the flock, to warn and watch, to protect the flock (verses 29-31). Verse 32, to pray and study. Verse 32, to pray and study, “And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace.” Elders study the word; they don't sit around and talk about the color of exit signs. Verse 32, ³²“And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you

up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.” You see, the primary responsibility of an elder is to pray and to study.

Lastly, verses 33-35, to be free from self-interest. To be free from self-interest. ³³“I have coveted no one’s silver or gold or clothes. ³⁴You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my own needs and to the men who were with me. ³⁵In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’”

Now brothers, in my mind, that’s the best priority description of the role of an elder. To keep right with God, to feed and lead the flock, to watch and warn, to protect the flock, to pray and to study, and to be free from self-interest. Guys, that’s an impossible job description apart from the gracious, indwelling of the Holy Spirit as he guides us into all truth by the study of Scripture. Let us be humble. If you’re a church elder, let humility be the basis of your confidence, because you know this—I see what is perfect and I see that I can’t do that apart from my absolute dependency upon the Holy Spirit through the Scripture, and may God be pleased to orchestrate a revival in the church of our country, beginning with us.

Let’s pray. Father, this is so overwhelmingly above our heads that it must be a work of grace, but certainly can’t be something that we achieve; it must something that we receive, that you give us, that we don’t deserve. Father, give us a desire to become what you desire us to be, mature in the faith. For those of us who are in leadership positions, Father, help us recognize the absolute dependency that we must have upon you and your grace, and the word to be the element that will sanctify us so that we can help our members of our churches be responsible in following. Father, resist the temptation for us to read the latest book on the latest church growth fad and help us go back to the reality of what your word says, because your word is sufficient, and may we return to depending upon the sufficiency of Scripture through the work of the Holy Spirit. We pray this for Jesus’ sake, and may it be so. All the Brave Men said...Amen!