

Who does God want leading His Church?, pt. 2

Shared Leadership

November 29, 2009

We continue our series on Biblical eldership this morning

- We are talking about the office of an elder under some broad headings and categories

Last week, we studied *Pastoral Leadership*

- We saw that elders are not merely administrators, decision makers, or financial officers
- Instead, they are shepherds, pastors, overseers

This isn't an issue of semantics

- The Church needs to understand the role and responsibility of elders!

This morning, we will study *Shared Leadership*

I grew up in a SBC church that was run by the “pyramid” structure

- This is where the teaching pastor referred to himself as the “senior pastor”
 - o Underneath him were many deacons who were his subordinates (for lack of a better term)
- I often wondered how one man could take care of all of the needs in a local church, no matter the size of the congregation!
- No matter the decision, it always came down to the senior pastor

I think this is very unfortunate

- And very dangerous

In the New Testament, the Scriptures place leadership in the hands of many, not simply one

As I have shared with you many times, I have rejected the title “senior pastor”

- Instead, I have taken a more Biblical title, “pastor-teacher”

I am a pastor – I shepherd people, seeking to disciple them in the faith

- I am also a teacher – I love to study and to teach God's Word to His people.

Some of my greatest joys in life are when God used me to help someone understand the Word of God better

The term “senior pastor” conveys a level of superiority above the other elders

- I don't view myself as their superior, but their equal

I understand that even the title “pastor-teacher” could be viewed in a wrong light

- It could still imply that I have more authority

It has been a special joy of mine to work closely with various men since I have been here at CBC¹

- Phil over the past few years
- Troy Stuart and Torrey Bingham before then
- And others who served for a brief while during my first year or two

¹ Much of this sermon's outline and flow is taken directly from Alexander Strauch's book, *Biblical Eldership*. Where there are direct quotations, I cite the page number.

One long-time elder has written these words, “I do not hesitate to say that the relationship with my fellow elders has been the most important tool God has used, outside of my marriage relationship, for the spiritual development of my Christian character, leadership abilities, and teaching ministry.”²

The men who have served as elders during my tenure have helped me in so many ways

- They have sharpened me – they have helped me to document my beliefs, all the while instructing me into being a better servant of Christ
- They have balanced me – they have helped me in my weaknesses. Where I am weak, they are strong
- They have comforted me – in times of discouragement, they have been there to encourage me
- They have protected me – in times of personal attack, they have come to my side, protecting me from the unnecessary criticism
- They have strengthened me – this is an overall term, that when I am weak, they have strengthened me

We need other Christians in our lives

- Solomon, one of the wisest men ever to live, said “Two are better than one because they have a good return for their labor. For if either of them falls, the one will lift up his companion. But woe to the one who falls when there is not another to lift him up” (Eccl 4:9-10)

The same applies in leadership

- As I said last week, serving as an elder is time-consuming and demanding, at times
 - o However, there are great benefits of seeing God’s people change into Christ-likeness

This morning, I want us to consider some truths related to shared leadership

- The model of shared leadership
- The benefits of shared leadership
- The diversity within shared leadership

I. Model of shared leadership

Even in the OT, Israel was governed by a plurality of leadership

- Moses even had his 70 judges to assist him in overseeing the nation of Israel
- Ex 3:16, God told Moses, “Go and gather the elders of Israel together”

In the New Testament, Jesus entrusted the Church into the hands of many, not one

- He poured His life into 12 apostles, one of whom deserted and abandoned the faith

In the book of Acts, the Seven were appointed to relieve some of the pressures and demands of the apostles

- They were a body of servants who helped the local church in Jerusalem
- These 7 men served as the prototype for the office of a deacon

Throughout the NT, the pastoral oversight of a local church was placed in the hands of a plurality of men

- Acts 15 – the elders (plural) of Jerusalem assisted and led the Jerusalem Council
- James 5:14 – when someone is sick, they are to call for the elders (plural) of the church (singular)
- Acts 14:23 – Paul and Barnabas “appointed elders for them in every church” (plurality of elders in a local church)
- When leaving the area, Paul called the elders (plural) of the church at Ephesus (singular), “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” (Acts 20:28)

² Strauch, 35.

- At the church of Ephesus, it was written, “**Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching.**” (1 Tim 5:17) {notice the plurality of elders within the local church}
- Paul began his letter to Philippians by saying, “**Paul and Timothy, bond-servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers and deacons**” (Phil 1:1)
- Titus 1:5 – “**For this reason I left you in Crete, that you might set in order what remains, and appoint elders in every city as I directed you**”
 - o In Paul’s mind, there was to be one church for every city

Peter exhorted the elders of the churches at Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, “**Therefore I exhort the elders among you**” (1 Pet 5:1)

- Notice the plurality of elders
- He didn’t commend a single elder/leader of the churches

Besides these explicit references to a plurality of elders in every local church, there are other passages that speak of a plurality of leadership

- Acts 15:35, “**But Paul and Barnabas stayed in Antioch, teaching and preaching, with many others also, the word of the Lord.**”
- 1 Thess 5:12-13, “**But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction, 13 and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Live in peace with one another.**”
- Heb 13:7, “**Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith**”
- Heb 13:17, “**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.**”
- Heb 13:24, “**Greet all of your leaders and all the saints. Those from Italy greet you.**”

There are 18 passages in the NT that speak of church leadership³

- 15 of them are explicitly plural
- 3 speak of leadership in singular terms

In these three passages, the singular would not be incompatible with plurality

- 1 Tim 3 – elder is spoken of as singular; however, it is describing each elder (which would be compatible with a plurality of men with such qualifications)

To my knowledge, the NT never entrusts the leadership of a local church into the hands of only one man

- It is always viewed as being the responsibility of a plurality

Even though I am the only elder right now, the leadership advisory council helps me to make decisions

- They help to bring an element of plurality

What is interesting is that many don’t contest the plurality of deacons, but they want to dispute a plurality of elders

- We should be concerned when one leader sits atop a pyramid structure and seeks to make all of the decisions

There is much confusion over what Biblical eldership looks like

- Just having more than one man serving as an elder does not guarantee that things will be God-honoring

³ Strauch, 38.

The NT model is clear about who should be leading the church⁴

- Men who are truly born-again believers
- Men who meet stringent moral and spiritual qualifications
- Men who are publicly examined
- Men who are properly motivated by the Holy Spirit and who are not self-seeking
- Men who are publicly installed as elders

At the very heart of NT eldership is the fact that they are a “council of equals”

- “Each elder shares equally the position, authority, and responsibility of the office”⁵

This is similar to marriage

- The husband and wife are both equal in essence
- But they differ in function and responsibility

Whatever name you call it (multiple church leadership, plurality, shared leadership, or team leadership⁶), all elders are equal with one another

- One is not more of an elder than another
- One is not less of an elder than another

We have seen the model of shared leadership...

II. Benefits of shared leadership

There are three (3) basic benefits of having a shared leadership, as opposed to having one leader on top of a pyramid

1. Shared leadership balances people’s weaknesses

One of the main benefits of having multiple leaders is the “check and balance”

- Each one of us has our blind spots and weaknesses

What is sad, however, is that we can see others’ weaknesses, and be blind to our own!

- This is why we need others to help us see our sin

These blind spots can even distort our judgment

- This is why there is wisdom in a multitude of counselors

The person who says he/she doesn’t have a blind spot is the person to avoid

- This person is self-seeking and deceived as to his/her spiritual maturity

Sometimes, a very talented leader will not want someone to confront him on certain issues

- He wants “yes men” – no confrontation

⁴ Ibid., 39.

⁵ Ibid., 39

⁶ Strauch 39

This type of “check and balance” typically does not take place in a pyramid structure leadership

- “To be a lone chief atop a pyramid is abnormal and corrupting. None of us are perfect by ourselves, and all of us need the help and correcting influence of close colleagues. When someone is moved atop a pyramid, that person no longer has colleagues, only subordinates.”⁷

In a team leadership, however, things are different

- If one elder tends to be harsh, the others can balance it with love and patience
- If one elder fears confrontation, others can press for action
- Elders who are doctrinally oriented can sharpen those who are more service- or outreach-minded
- Those who are outreach-minded can ignite a passion among those who may be cold in their evangelism

Can you imagine a single pastor who has the ability to balance every other person in the church, as well as dealing with personal issues?

- No pastor is able to do such a thing
- Inevitably, something will be lost in the mix

I am so grateful that the entire weight of this local church doesn’t fall on my shoulders

- It would not be healthy for me to sustain that burden
- It would not be healthy for this church for me to sustain that burden

What happens to the church where there is a strong personality who refuses to delegate responsibility?

- When that person dies, the church usually suffers a crisis of identity
- For so long, they were controlled by a dominant personality

Some of you may know the name C.J. Mahaney

- It was his conviction a few years back to hand over the responsibilities of the church he was leading to a young man

So he began discipling this man for many years

- Then when he and the other elders thought it was the right timing, C.J. handed off the teaching pastor role to the man, Josh Harris

This is probably the best modern-day example I can think of as it relates to a man who was the opposite of self-controlling and dominant

- Instead, he was quite ready to train the next generation

The sobering truth is that a solo pastor would have to have every single spiritual gift

- If he was to minister fully by himself

But the only Person who had every single spiritual gift was the Lord Jesus Christ

- He didn’t need anyone else around Him
- He was self-sufficient since He was Divine

The NT mandates a plurality of leadership in the local church

- This way, no one elder feels the entire burden of the church

This introduces us to our second benefit of shared leadership

⁷ Strauch, 41

2. Shared leadership lightens the work load

As I mentioned last week, serving as an elder requires a huge commitment of time

- There are long hours, heavy responsibilities, and shepherding issues that never seem to go away

If these aren't enough to burden the elders, he has to deal with people's sins and listen to an almost endless stream of complaints and conflicts within the church

- This isn't the case all the time
- But it is the case some of the time

Even the great leader, Moses, could not endure the complaints of the people

- Numbers 11:10-15, “Now Moses heard the people weeping throughout their families, each man at the doorway of his tent; and the anger of the LORD was kindled greatly, and Moses was displeased. 11 So Moses said to the LORD, “Why hast Thou been so hard on Thy servant? And why have I not found favor in Thy sight, that Thou hast laid the burden of all this people on me? 12 Was it I who conceived all this people? Was it I who brought them forth, that Thou shouldest say to me, ‘Carry them in your bosom as a nurse carries a nursing infant, to the land which Thou didst swear to their fathers’? 13 Where am I to get meat to give to all this people? For they weep before me, saying, ‘Give us meat that we may eat!’ 14 I alone am not able to carry all this people, because it is too burdensome for me. 15 So if Thou art going to deal thus with me, please kill me at once, if I have found favor in Thy sight, and do not let me see my wretchedness.”

Moses certainly felt the burden of leading the nation Israel

- He admitted that he couldn't do this alone

Yet I have heard some Baptist pastors use Moses as their model for preferring solo-pastor model of leadership!

- Amazing!

In many pyramid-type leadership structures, the deacons and other members serve as “ringside critics” instead of helpful participants

- [Is it any wonder that the average stay of a vocational pastor in a church is 18-36 months?](#)

In a plurality of leadership, however, the burden of ministry can be spread over many elders

- There is mutual encouragement and help in the times of difficult ministry
- Again, the burdens of ministry are shared

Another great side-benefit of this is that each elder can serve according to his own personal giftedness

- In a pyramid-type structure, the solo senior pastor must be good at everything, because there is no one else that he can pass the responsibility to

We have seen two benefits of shared leadership thus far

- **Balances one's weaknesses**
- **Lightens the work load**

3. Shared leadership provides accountability

As someone said nearly 150 years ago, “power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely”⁸

- [The better we understand human depravity, sin, and Satan, the more we will seek out accountability](#)

⁸ Strauch, 42

Only within the context of shared leadership will mutual accountability take place

- This helps to alleviate the pastoral authority syndrome that some pastors have

I don't have to tell you the dangers of seeing men who have an inflated ego about themselves

- Such power-hungry individuals don't want anyone confronting or correcting them

The Bible is clear about such a sinful mindset

- **“Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall.”** (1 Cor 10:12)
- **“GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE”** (James 4:6; 1 Pet 5:5)

Remember what I said earlier, that Jesus Christ did not leave the Church in the hands of one person

- He entrusted the Church into the hands of a number of qualified men
- It would seem to me that Jesus was setting a pattern to be emulated

Yet there is still a mindset that “the pastor” is supposed to handle the bulk of the ministry load

- But this is bringing the wineskin of the Old Covenant and trying to patch it on the New Covenant!

You may have heard someone say that a pastor's work is spiritual while non-ministerial work is secular

- I think this is very unfortunate terminology

If you are doing the will of God by being a homemaker, bus driver, lawyer, doctor, computer technician, machine operator, etc., your work is spiritual

- You are seeking to be a good witness for Jesus Christ in your sphere of influence
- You are doing what God has called you to do

The sacred/secular distinctions have disappeared with the old covenant!

- In the New Testament, we are all commanded to be living sacrifices, no matter what we do and where we go!
- Every member is a minister!

Elders are not prone from the temptation to be above accountability

- A Baptist seminary professor has said these words of wisdom, **“It is my conviction that God has provided a hedge against these powerful temptations by the concept of multiple elders. The check and balance that is provided by men of equal authority is most wholesome and helps to bring about the desired attitude expressed by Peter to the plurality of elders”**⁹
- **“shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to *the will of God*; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; 3 nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock”** (1 Pet 5:2-3)

It is helpful to have someone following up with you regarding responsibilities

- We all have a tendency to be lazy, forgetful, or too busy to do certain things
- I appreciate the reminder when I am forgetful!

Coaches of various sports teams know that athletes who train together will push each other

- This is another side benefit to shared leadership
- We are all challenged when we are around someone who delights in his/her role or function

⁹ Ibid., 43.

When Jesus sent out His disciples, how did He do it?

- He sent them out in groups of two

Shared leadership, however, does not guarantee that everything will run smoothly

- It requires “a great deal of patience, persevering prayer, wisdom, self-control, humility, trust, love, and genuine respect for the gifts and perspectives of others in the body of Christ”¹⁰

As with any other person, elders can experience jealousy, pride, and bitterness with one another

- Elders are humans, and therefore subject to sinful tendencies just like anyone else

Also, organization is crucial

- It doesn't do any good simply to have elders if they are not functioning properly

Overall, however, the benefits of shared leadership far outweigh any disadvantages

We have seen

- **the model of shared leadership**
- **the benefits of shared leadership**

III. Diversity within shared leadership

Even among a group of elders, there exists a wonderful variety of giftedness

- Different levels of Bible knowledge
- Different levels of leadership ability
- Different levels of experience

During seminary, I was part of a large church that had over 30 elders

- Certainly, among that group, there was equality and diversity
 - o Equality because all had only one vote
 - o Diversity because each had different levels of input, counsel, etc.

This variety among the elders is a wonderful asset to a local church

- As I have said before, it is sad to think that the senior pastor on top of the pyramid structure has to take the stance, “the buck stops with me”

The beauty of a multiple leadership structure is the fact that elders can be weak in certain areas while others can be strong in those same areas

- One person doesn't have to do everything
- The burden can be shared with others

Among any group of elders, there will exist this blend of giftedness that needs to be diagnosed

- I have seen that with the different elders here at CBC over the years

Among the 12 apostles, Jesus picked three for special attention and recognition

- Peter, James, and John
- Even among these three, Peter stood out above the rest as the spokesman and leader for the group

This does not mean that Peter, James, and John were “more” of an apostle than the others

- It simply means that among the group, there was a sense of priority, as determined by Christ Himself

¹⁰ Ibid., 44

When Jesus wanted to heal a young girl, he only took Peter, James, and John with Him (Lk 8:51)

- When Jesus chose to display His glory at the Transfiguration, he only took Peter, James, and John (Lk 9:28)
- When Jesus went to the Garden of Gethsemane, He only took Peter, James, and John to pray (Mk 14:33)

In all four lists of the apostles, Peter is always mentioned first

- Matthew even refers to Peter as “**the first**” (Mt 10:2)

This wasn't based on chronology!

- This was a priority choice by Christ Himself

We can over-react to the Catholic's elevation of Peter and downgrade his role; however, the Gospel writers consistently show that Peter was the leader among the apostles

- Jesus told Peter, “**Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded *permission* to sift you like wheat; 32 but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.**” (Lk 22:31-32)

Jesus knew that the disciples looked up to Peter

- He knew that they would follow his example

We see this lived out, don't we?

- After Jesus' resurrection, what does Peter do?

He goes back fishing!

- And the rest follow his example!

In the book of Acts, some even outline the book according to the two prominent figures

- Peter Acts 1-12
- Paul Acts 13-28

Peter was never given a higher rank than the other apostles

- He was not the senior apostle
- The other apostles were not his subordinates
- But they clearly recognized him as a leader among leaders

Yet it is important to note Peter's mindset about himself

- In his first epistle, he writes in chapter five, “**Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as *your* fellow elder**” (5:1)

That is amazing humility, isn't it?

- He didn't call himself apostle – although he was
- He didn't say that he was superior – although apostle outranked an elder

He called himself “**fellow elder**”

- He viewed himself as being on equal ground with these other men

Paul speaks of James, Peter, and John as “**pillars**” of the church in Jerusalem (Gal 2:9)

Even among “the Seven” in Acts 6, Philip and Stephen stood out above the rest as leaders of the group

- The other five men are not mentioned any further than the one reference
- Philip and Stephen, however, are listed numerous times in Scripture as being influential men in the church

Even among the relationship of Paul and Barnabas, Paul stands out as a “leader among leaders”

- Paul is referred to as “**the chief speaker**” (Acts 14:12)

This same principle is found in the way that local churches treat their elders

- 1 Timothy 5:17, “**Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching**”

Scripture states that all elders are worthy of honor

- It also states that some elders “**work hard at preaching and teaching**”

While teaching is a requirement of all elders, it is not the desire of all elders to do so on a full-time basis

- This is perfectly acceptable, because not all elders are able to commit themselves full-time to teaching and preaching

Many, if not most, elders will have other jobs that support them financially

- Other elders, however, desire to teach and preach on a full-time basis, and the church should support them financially

This does not mean that those who teach and preach on a full-time basis make all the decisions or do all of the thinking

- They may have more insight, but they don’t overshadow the other men
- Their opinion should not be discounted, because they are “in the trenches” every day of the week

The differences between the elders are functional, not formal¹¹

This principle allows gifted leaders and teachers to use their giftedness to its God-given potential

- He is able to pour his life into the ministry on a full-time basis
- It takes a lot of time for serious study, outreach, as well as administrative issues

As I have said, all elders are equal in essence, but different in function

- This allows all elders to have a say in matters
- This prevents one elder from being “boss hog” and making all the decisions

I view my role here in two different perspectives

- On the one hand, I am completely equal with the other men in terms of function, essence, and responsibility
- On the other hand, I understand that since this is my full-time job and responsibility, that I will have more time to devote to the ministry

But we must be careful with this concept of “leader among leaders”

- It is wrong to call me pastor, while calling the other men elders

No

- We are all pastors and elders

¹¹ Strauch, 48

The difference is simply one of function

- I take on more responsibility because I have more time to devote to this ministry

I appreciate men who are willing to make the sacrifice to serve the local church

- Balancing the demands of family, work, and ministry

I want to encourage these men as much as I can

- And I hope that you will express your appreciation for these men as well

Let's avoid some dangers as it relates to elders:

- We must not waver on the qualifications
 - o If we water down what God has said in His Word, then we have placed our own agendas higher than His
- Elders must work together as a team
 - o There can be no renegades or rebels
 - o The men must be close friends, working together
- Elders must work hard to build up one another
 - o They understand the work load and are uniquely positioned to encourage and motivate one another

This is why CBC is serious about the qualifications for an elder

- We don't take this office lightly, and we hold the bar very high

So this morning, we have looked at

1. Model of shared leadership

- The NT is clear that there is to be a plurality of leadership, not merely one man on top of a pyramid structure

2. Benefits of shared leadership

- Balances people's weaknesses
- Lightens the work load
- Provides needed accountability

3. Diversity within shared leadership

- Among a group of equals, there can be diversity of giftedness, knowledge, and ability