

An Elder Led, Congregationally Ruled Church

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Text: 1 Peter 5:1-4

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Introduction: Open your Bibles to **1 Peter 5:1-4**. We are looking tonight at the overseers, or the watchmen of the churches. We continue in our series entitled "What We Believe". Doctrine is important, and applying that sound doctrine to our lives is even more important. And abiding in Christ as we live out His commands—experiencing that ongoing revival that fuels our obedience is really what this series of messages is all about. We are here not to hear a sermon, but to meet with God tonight.

Tonight we are going to talk the leadership of the local church. We are going to examine how Jesus Christ as the Head of His church, ordains men to leadership and what role they play in leading the church. Tonight we are going to see that we are an **Elder Led, Congregationally Ruled Church**.

Background: In the church I was discipled in, and most churches that we know of in our group of churches normally have one Senior pastor and a group of deacons that make decisions for the church. What I have found is that in most Baptist churches in the last 50 years, the deacons actually rule in the church. They either make the decisions or help the pastor make the decisions. As I began to study the Scriptures and look at church history, I found that this is a relatively new phenomenon. A hundred years ago, the offices of pastor and deacon were separate. We are going to see tonight that biblically, the offices of pastor and deacon are separate. Pastors (also called overseers or elders) are the overseers or administrators of the church, and then the deacons are the servants of the church. One office is for direction, the other is for serving and lifting the physical burdens of the church from the elders so that they can teach and lead.

Tonight I want to show from Scripture what a pastor, or an elder is, and what a deacon is so that our church can reflect God's pattern for church leadership as much as possible.

Let's begin by looking at a key passage, and a classic example of a church in the New Testament found in **1 Peter 5:1-4**. Let's stand as we read this passage.

1 Peter 5:1-4, "The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: 2 Feed [pastor] the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight [bishop] thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; 3 Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. 4 And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away."

We are talking about the leadership of Christ's local churches tonight. Let's ask God to give us understanding in His Word.

[Prayer for Guidance]

We need to understand that the Bible gives three titles to one office. The main teacher of the church and those who help him administrate the church are called both elders, bishops (overseers), or pastors. They are all the same office. We will see that in a moment.

Tonight we are going to see the **purpose** of the elders, the **pattern** of the elders, and the **power** of the elders.

I. Let's first look at the **Purpose** God gives to the pastor/elder/bishop in the Bible. The three titles of elders are used interchangeably and have to do with the various functions of the elders of the church.

A. **Elder** (*presbuterov, presbuteros*): This title reflects the spiritual maturity that is required of the office. This is the title found most often in the New Testament.

1.1 **Peter 5:1-2**, "The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: 2 Feed [pastor] the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight [bishop] thereof."

B. **Overseer/bishop** (*episkopov, episkopos*): This title reflects that the pastors of the church are to be giving the vision and oversight and administration for the church, and watching out for their protection. They are to give direction and protection.

1.1 **Peter 5:1-2**, "The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: 2 Feed [pastor] the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight [bishop] thereof."

2. **Philippians 1:1**, "Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons".

3. **Acts 20:28**, "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood."

4.1 **Timothy 3:1**, "This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work."

5. **Titus 1:7**, "For a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God; not selfwilled, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre".

C. **Pastor** (*poimhn poimen*): This title reflects that pastors are to be feeding, nurturing, and protecting the flock.

1.1 **Peter 5:1-2**, "The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: 2 Feed [pastor] the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight [bishop] thereof."

2. **Ephesians 4:11**, "And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers 12 For the perfecting

of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ". The pastor is to equip the saints by teaching and shepherding.

II. We've seen the **Purpose** for the elders in their three titles: elder, pastor, bishop.

II. Let's now **Pattern** the elders.

A. Ideally, there should be a **Team** of elders. I want to show you biblically that the churches are to be led by a team of elders. It should be the exception to the rule if a church has only one elder.

In a moment I'm going to show you from the Scriptures that each church from what we can understand had a team of elders, and among them there were one or more that was paid to be full time.

But before we look at that, let me tell you practically why a church should have a team of people at the helm of the leadership.

- No one single man was gifted or called to bear the responsibilities of shepherding even a small group of people.
- One man can be wrong. The teaching elder needs the safeguard of other wise men's opinions, vision, and guidance.

1. Scriptures

a. **Hebrews 13:17** which says, "Obey **them** [plural] that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that *is* unprofitable for you."

b. **Acts 14:23**, "And when they [PAUL AND BARNABAS] had ordained **them elders** in every **church**, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed."

c. We learn that when Paul wanted to gather the leadership of the church at Ephesus, we read in **Acts 20:17**, "And from Miletus he [PAUL] sent to Ephesus, and called the **elders** of the **church**." Paul goes on to speak to the leadership team of this church at Ephesus where we know that Timothy was the pastor. In **Acts 20:28**, Paul says to the elders there: "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood."

d. **Acts 21:18**, "And the *day* following Paul went in with us unto **James**; and **all the elders** [from the church in Jerusalem] were present." This passage gives us the idea of the Senior Pastor (or as Ephesians 4:11 calls the office "Pastor-Teacher" among the rest of the elders of the church.

e. Paul writes to young Timothy in **1 Timothy 5:17**, "Let the **elders** that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, **especially they who labour in the word and doctrine.**" Those who are laboring in "the

word and doctrine" would be those hired as vocational elders such as the Senior Pastor and pastoral staff.

f. **James 5:14**, "Is any sick among you? 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".

g. **Titus 1:5**, "For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain **elders in every city**, as I had appointed thee..."

2. What about **Deacons**? Biblically, the office of deacon has one task: service to Christ so that the elders can be free to preach and pray lead and oversee the spiritual well-being of the church.

You may say, we have the accountability with our deacons right now in our church. That is correct. But no where in the New Testament do we hear Paul telling the deacons to take the oversight. Deacons are to minister to the elders so that elders can give themselves to the Word and prayer. A man cannot be a deacon and an overseer at the same time. They are two different offices. The description we have for deacons is found in **Acts 6:2-4**, "Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples *unto them*, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables. 3 Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. 4 But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word."

Right now, as we our deacons are functioning as overseers, giving me guidance and help in my task as the pastor of this church. I believe it is permissible biblically to continue in this pattern until we are ready to ordain lay elders from the congregation. I don't know when we will be ready, but I know God will lead us.

So, we saw that each church should have:

A. A **Team** of elders.

B. Secondly, let's talk about the **Teaching** elder (what we call the Senior Pastor) **Senior Pastor**: There needs to be an elder in the church that receives remuneration for laboring in the Word according to **1 Timothy 5:17-18**, "Let the **elders** that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, **especially they who labour in the word and doctrine**. 18 For the scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. And, **The labourer is worthy of his reward**." It is nearly impossible to hold a secular job and spend the 20 to 30 hours a week it takes to carry the preaching load of the church. Paul understood this and gave the above structure to the churches

So, we saw that each church should have:

A. A **Team** of elders.

B. We also saw that there should be a **Teaching** elder.

C. What are the **Tasks** of the elders?

1. Guard the **Doctrine**.

a. **Protection** from false teachers. It is essential for the elders of the church to guard the church from wolves (false teachers) which abound in every time and place.

Acts 20:28-32, "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. ²⁹ For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. ³⁰ Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. ³¹ Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears."

b. **Guidance** in godliness. Pastors also need to give encouragement and guide the congregation into the "whole counsel of God". There are many warnings to Timothy to guard the apostolic doctrine from error such as **2 Timothy 1:13**, "Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus."

2. Another task of the elders is **Discipline**: The elders can bind and loose people from the congregation (**Matthew 18:15-20; Hebrews 13:17**)

Look at the **Matthew 18** passage. Let's begin with **verse 17**: "And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell *it* unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican. ¹⁸ Verily I say unto you, **Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.** ¹⁹ Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. ²⁰ For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."

The above describes the "**binding**" and "**loosing**" of members of the church. The binding is opening the doors of membership to the church. The loosing is canceling the membership of the church. We call this the discipline of the church. There is a standard for entrance into the local assembly. You must be born again. You must be saved, regenerated. You must also be willing to publically identify yourself with Jesus Christ through baptism. Baptism does not save, but it is the first step of obedience in the Christian life.

Conclusion: Next week we will look at how the elders give direction to the church, and how they live out the truth of the Word of God in their lives with Distinction. They after having seen the purpose and pattern of the elders, we will look at where the elders get their power (authority).