

The Church – Its Organization

In previous studies we have looked at different metaphors used of the church; it is called a body, a flock, and a temple. Each of these metaphors shows that God intends for His people to work together as a unit. Realistically, this also means that there needs to be some form of organization.

Most of the comments from page 1 to 4 are quoted from different places in the booklet, entitled *On Church Leadership (A Book You'll Actually Read)*, by Mark Driscoll. Good News Publishers. Kindle Edition.

Jesus is the Head

- ***The Scriptures are clear that Jesus Christ is the head of the church.***

Ephesians 1:22-23 And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and ***gave Him as head over all things to the church***, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all. (also 4:14; 5:23)

- ***Jesus is the Apostle who plants a church.***

Hebrews 3:1 Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling, consider ***Jesus, the Apostle*** and High Priest of our confession;

- ***Jesus is the Leader who builds the church.***

Matthew 16:18 I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock ***I will build My church***; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it.

- ***Jesus is the Senior Pastor and Chief Shepherd who rules the church.***

1 Peter 5:4 And when the ***Chief Shepherd*** appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.

- ***And it is ultimately Jesus who closes churches down when they have become faithless or fruitless.***

Revelation 2:5 Therefore, remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; ***or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place--*** unless you repent.

Therefore, it is absolutely vital that a church loves Jesus, obeys Jesus, imitates Jesus, and follows Jesus at all times and in all ways, according to the teaching of His Word (Col. 3:16) (p. 12).

Human leadership in the church is little more than qualified Christians who are following Jesus and encouraging other people to follow them as they follow Jesus. Because of this, church leaders must be good sheep who follow their Chief Shepherd, Jesus, well before they are fit to be shepherds leading any of his sheep. This is in large part what Paul meant when he told Christians in various local churches to "be imitators of me, as I am of Christ" (I Cor. 11:1) (pp. 12-13).

Elders

Elders are the male leaders of the church who are synonymously called pastors (ποιμήν *poimen*), bishops, or overseers (ἐπίσκοπος *episkopos*), and elders (πρεσβύτερος *presbuteros*) throughout the New Testament.¹ While the various words are used interchangeably, they each refer to a different aspect of the same role in the same office. As an elder, a man has rank and authority to rule and govern a church (I Thess. 5:12; Heb. 13:17; 1 Pet. 5:2). As a bishop, he has the responsibility before God to rule and protect a church. As a pastor, he has the high honor of caring for Christians and evangelizing non-Christians. As an overseer, he has the responsibility before God of leading and managing the church (p. 14).

The elders are men chosen for their ministry according to clear biblical requirements after a sufficient season of testing in the church (I Tim. 3:2-7; Titus 1:6-9). Elders are nearly always spoken of in plurality because God intends for more than one man to lead and rule over the church, as a safeguard for both the church and the man (p. 14).

An elder is not someone who is a helper that does a lot of work for the church, because that is the definition of a deacon. Rather, an elder is a leader who trains other leaders to lead various aspects of the church. Therefore, no man should be an elder unless he can effectively train people to not only be mature Christians, but mature Christian leaders who train other leaders (p. 19).

The duties of elders include:

- ***Praying and studying Scripture***

Acts 6:4 But we will devote ourselves ***to prayer and to the ministry of the word.***

- ***Ruling/leading the church***

1 Timothy 5:17 The elders ***who rule well*** are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching.

- ***Managing the church***

1 Timothy 3:4-5 He must be one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity (but if a man does not know how to ***manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?***)

- ***Living exemplary lives***

Hebrews 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.***

- ***Rightly using the authority God has given them in caring for people in the church***

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

1 Peter 5:2-3 **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; nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock.

- **Teaching/ Preaching**

1 Timothy 5:17 The elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at **preaching and teaching**.

- **Praying for the sick and anointing them with oil**

James 5:14-15 **Is anyone among you sick? Then he must call for the elders of the church and they are to pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord;** and the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him.

- **Refuting false teachings**

Titus 1:9 holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine **and to refute those who contradict**.

- **Working hard**

1 Thessalonians 5:12 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,

- **Rightly using money and power**

1 Peter 5:1-3 Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, 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; nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock**.

- **Protecting the church from false teachers**

Acts 20:28-31 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. I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be on the alert,

- **Disciplining unrepentant Christians**

Matthew 18:15-17 If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed. If he refuses to listen to them, **tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church**, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.

- **Developing other leaders and teachers**

2 Timothy 2:1-2 You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. **The things which you have heard from me** in the presence of many witnesses, **entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also**.

Women in Ministry

Nowadays, whenever the discussion of church leadership comes up, the topic of women's role in ministry often follows on its heels. Your view on the issue of women in ministry is in many ways a reflection of how you view Scripture, God, gender, marriage, and ministry.

The Basis of Gender Roles - The order of Creation

Not surprisingly, our study of the role of women in ministry must begin in Genesis, the book of beginnings, because God created male and female roles there with our first parents, Adam and Eve. Subsequently, those aspects of our humanity that are rooted in creation are binding upon people of all cultures and are not merely expressions of culture. This fact is important for our study of gender roles, because throughout the New Testament, both Jesus (Matt. 19:4) and Paul (1 Tim. 2:12-14; 1 Cor. 11:8-9) commonly refer back to the Genesis creation account to clarify confusions that had arisen in their day regarding men's and women's roles (p. 28). Peter also refers to Genesis to straighten out confusion that had arisen over male and female roles in marriage (1 Pet. 3:1-7). We will likewise begin in the opening chapters of Genesis, and follow their examples of beginning where the Bible begins.

In Genesis 1:27-28 and 31, we discover that God made everything. He made male and female as the crowning jewel of His creation-not merely with the will of His Word, but rather with the loving work of His hand. This simple distinction is vital to our understanding of human nature because it undermines the popular social-psychology notions that there is no innate difference between males and females (except biology), and that gender tendencies are largely socially conditioned. God intentionally made us male and female, which means that males and females are in many ways quite different.

In hearing that males and females are different, modern ears tuned by a culture of egalitarianism (meaning "equal" or "level") are prone to hear that males and females are not equal, which is untrue. The Bible teaches that both men and women are made in the image and likeness of God, which means that men and women are equal by virtue of creation. They do not need to be identical to prove their equality-in the same way that a right hand and left hand are different but equally necessary(pp. 28-29).

God made men and women with jobs to do, including having children and raising them to be fruitful upon the earth, ruling over creation, and creating a culture that honors the Lord. After creating the man and woman in his image and likeness and giving them their responsibilities, God said that all of this was "very good." Genesis 2 revisits the creation account with further details about the beginning of human history. We read in Genesis 2:18: "the Lord God said, 'It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.'" There we find that although everything (p. 30-31) in Genesis 1 was declared "good" or "very good," there was one thing that was "not good", that Adam was alone. This simple fact carries with it a number of important lessons.

Adam, because he was made first, was the head of all creation and bore primary responsibility for the creation that God had entrusted to him to steward. But he was incomplete. Adam needed Eve in order to be complete and to reach a state that can be declared "good" by God. Men and women also need each other to fulfill God's command to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth (Gen. 1:26-27), a task that neither can do by themselves. In other words, the creation account tells us that men and women are made equal and need each other to be complete. Nevertheless, the order of the creation of Adam and Eve established a unique

role and responsibilities for man (Gen. 2:7, 18-23; 1 Tim. 2:12-13; 1 Cor. 11:8), in the same way that the first born son had a different role and responsibilities than his siblings.

The creation account also leaves us with at least 5 more indicators that man was to be the leader in the relationship.

1. God spoke first to Adam after the fall, suggesting that he was the one primarily accountable for what had happened (Gen. 3:9).
2. Later, we learn that Adam, not Eve, was the representative head of the human race (1 Cor. 15:22, 45-49; Rom. 5:12ff).
3. Eve was created as a helper for Adam, not Adam as a helper for Eve (Gen. 2:18; cf. 1 Cor. 11:8-9).
4. Adam named Eve (Gen. 2:23; cf. Gen. 1:5, 8, 10; 2:19, 20, 23), which was an action that to the Jewish mind suggested "authority over."
5. God named the human race "man", not "woman" (Gen. 5:1-2; cf. Gen. 1:27), which suggests man's headship.

This pattern of male leadership in the home and in the spiritual affairs of Israel dominates the OT.

Women's roles in the NT

The biblical pattern of male leadership continued throughout the New Testament era. Nothing in the NT suggests that male headship has been reversed by the work of Christ, or that it cannot co-exist with full moral and spiritual equality between men and women.

Jesus and Women

Jesus recognized the order of creation. In Matthew 19:4 He said, "He who created them from the beginning made them male and female." Although Jesus honored, loved, and respected women, He kept to the order of creation and chose men to be in the position of spiritual leadership. This is the same pattern ordained by God in Judaism when he told His people that only men of the tribe of Levi could be the spiritual leaders of Israel.

The Apostles and Women

NT apostles are comparable to OT prophets in that they were God's authoritative spokesman, and their written words that compose the NT are without error just as the OT.

Regarding the marriage relationship, Paul could not have stated more pointedly the divine order of the husband-wife relationship. In complete agreement with Peter's instruction on the wife's marital submission, Paul teaches that the husband is empowered and commanded to lead in the marriage relationship and that the wife is instructed to submit "as to the Lord." The following texts speak for themselves:

- "Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord" (Eph 5:22).

- “But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything” (Eph 5:24).
- “For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church” (Eph 5:23).
- “Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord” (Col 3:18).
- “But as for you, speak the things which are fitting for sound doctrine...that they [older women] may encourage the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be sensible, pure, workers at home, kind, being subject to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be dishonored” (Ti 2:1, 4-5).

Just as Paul teaches male headship in the family, he teaches male headship in the local church (1Ti 2:8-3:7). Because the family is the basic social unit and the man is the established family authority, we should expect that men would become the elders of the larger church family. Consider Paul’s instructions in 1 Timothy 2:12: “But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man.” In the same way that every individual family is governed by certain standards of conduct, so the local church family is governed by certain principles of conduct and social arrangement. The letter of 1 Timothy specifically addresses the issue of proper order and behavior of men, women, and elders in the local church family. To his representative in Ephesus, Paul writes, “I am writing these things to you, hoping to come to you before long; but in case I am delayed, I *write so that you may know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God*, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth” (1Ti 3:14-15; italics added; adapted from Biblical Eldership by Alexander Strauch).

Notice that the reason for Paul’s instruction in 1 Timothy 2:12 is not based on cultural considerations or a local problem in the church of Ephesus, rather he says women are not to teach or exercise authority over men, “for it was Adam who was first created, and then Eve.” The basis for not exercising authority over a man is the order of creation, something unchanged by time and culture!

Immediately following his instruction, Paul describes the qualifications for those who oversee the local church (1Ti 3:1-7). Significantly, the qualifications assume a male subject. Thus the overseer is to be “the husband of one wife” and “one who manages his own household well” (1Ti 3:2b, 4a). Paul gives no suggestion of women elders in this passage.

Considering that the grammar and word meaning of this verse are not difficult to understand, it is easiest to simply take the meaning at face value. This would limit the teaching roles of women to that of teaching other women and children (see Titus 2:3-5).

Likewise, in a long and fairly complicated argument, Paul argues for the role of men as leaders in the church and the home. He begins by saying, “But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ” (1 Cor. 11:3). The reason for this is the order of creation: “For man does not originate from woman, but woman from man; for indeed man was not created for the woman’s sake, but woman for the man’s sake” (1 Cor. 11:8-9). He then concludes by saying, “But if one is inclined to be contentious, we have no other practice, nor have the churches of God” (1 Cor. 11:16).

Ted Kirnbauer

“If anything transcends a cultural custom, it is a Creation ordinance. Thus, it is a dangerous business indeed to treat the matter of subordination in marriage and in the church as a mere local custom when it is clear that the New Testament mandates for these matters rest upon apostolic appeals to Creation” (Sproul). What is important to the topic of discussion of church leadership is that these verses teach that women are not to teach or exercise authority over men in the church. They cannot therefore fill the role of a pastor or elder whose primary jobs are to govern and teach.

Later in 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 Paul says, “The women are to keep silent in the churches; for they are not permitted to speak, but are to subject themselves, just as the Law also says. If they desire to learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is improper for a woman to speak in church.”

Lastly, there is no reference anywhere in the New Testament to a female elder. You may wish to object by pointing out that this is an argument from silence. Yes, it is. But it is a deafening silence, especially when taken in conjunction with the previous points. The bottom line is that we simply have no biblical precedent for female elders or anything in the text that describes their nature, function, and qualifications that would lead us to believe that this could ever be a possibility (adapted from *Biblical Eldership* by Alexander Strauch).

For eighteen centuries, across all denominations, the church was confident that it understood these texts and others like them. The church’s leading pastors, theologians, and exegetes, all saw these verses as meaning the same thing: men are to be the leaders in the home and the church. It wasn’t until the 1800s (significantly corresponding to the women’s rights movement in the United States) that some began to question this consensus. Today, with the onslaught of feminism, those who believe verses like these are demeaning to women mysteriously manage to interpret Paul as saying the exact opposite of what he wrote.²

Deacons

It didn’t take long for the early church to be burdened and over-extended in trying to meet the needs of those in the church. As a result, the leaders had the church choose from among themselves those who could minister to others in other capacities than overall church leadership. These were called as Deacons. The word “deacon” is simply the word “servant.”

While the duties of elders are clearly specified throughout the NT, the duties of deacons are not. From the list of necessary qualifications I Tim. 3:8-13, it seems that the duties would be to be able to manage church money, provide one on one ministry with others, and perform tasks that would help the church operate. Women, as well as men, can be deacons as the word “likewise” in 1 Tim 3:11 suggests.

Deacons serve and care for God’s people, but do so in a way similar to the way that wives serve alongside of their husbands.

END NOTES:

1. Elder / Bishop (overseer)/ Pastor refer to the same people

John Piper does a good job in explaining why we believe that elders, pastors, and bishops are synonymous for the same position.

There are at least four reasons to consider this term (bishop/overseer) as equivalent to elder in the New Testament church:

a. Compare Titus 1:5 with 1:7 where bishop/overseer and elder are apparently interchangeable terms. Paul begins by saying that Titus should appoint elders (*presbuteros*) in every town (v. 5). Then he gives some qualifications that they must meet (v. 6), and continues without a break in v. 7 by saying, "For a bishop (or "overseer"; *episkopon*), as God's steward must be blameless." Virtually all commentators agree that the same office is in view in these two terms: "elder" describing the man with reference to his dignity and standing (older); "bishop" describing the man with reference to his function and duty (oversight).

b. In Acts 20:17 Paul calls the "elders" to come down from Ephesus. ("And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church.") Then he says to them in verse 28 that God has made them "guardians" ("overseers/bishops"; *episkopous*) among the flock. ("Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you guardians, to feed the church of the Lord.") So the "elders" are the "bishops/overseers" in Ephesus. [Then, in Acts 20:28 he tells the same overseers/elders to "pastor" or "shepherd" (the verbal form of the noun "pastor") the flock of God. In other words, they function as pastors as well – Pastor Ted].

c. In 1 Timothy 3:1 Paul says, "If any one aspires to the office of bishop/overseer, he desires a noble task." Then he gives the qualifications for the overseer/bishop in verses 2-7. Unlike the deacons, the overseer must be "able to teach" (v. 2), and in v. 5 he is said to be one whose management of his own household fits him to care for God's church. These two functions are ascribed to elders in the fifth chapter of this same book (1 Timothy 5:17)—teaching and governing. So it is very likely that in Paul's mind the bishops/overseers of 1 Timothy 3:1-7 are the same as the elders of 5:17.

d. In Philippians 1:1 Paul writes, "To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons." These then seem to be the two offices of the church just as in 1 Timothy 3:1-13 the qualifications only for these two are given. But Paul appointed "elders" in all the churches (Acts 14:23), and so it is very likely that the elders of the church at Philippi were the bishops/overseers referred to in Philippians 1:1.

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2. The rise of new interpretations

As Christians absorb the morals of the world, they cannot endure the tension of the conflicting values in the Bible. In order to relieve this tension they seek to make the Bible match their beliefs, instead of allowing the Bible to transform them. This is so predictable that we can see changes in beliefs take place in exact correlation to changes in society – just some years later. An example of this is the research done by Daniel Doriani, Dean of the Faculty and Professor of New Testament of Covenant Theological Seminary. Dr. Doriani looked at 100 commentaries available to him and found that egalitarian interpretations on Ephesians 5:21-22 didn't begin to show up until around 1970 (*Biblical Foundations for Manhood and Womanhood*, 204 and note 2) – after feminism had taken hold of American culture. The same can be said of the influence of homosexuality as well. This is the typical pattern of the church that we have seen repeated throughout history. One would think that Christians would be more aware of culture's influences upon their new "interpretations," but it appears many are not – the world's values are too pervasive.

