

THE SHEPHERDING OF CALVARY CROSSROADS

Various Scriptures

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This morning we are going to do something a little different than what we normally do during our time of the examination of the Word of God. The elders have asked me to do a teaching in preparation for an announcement that will follow concerning the future shepherding of our church family. We believe that when you see the Biblical precedent for what we are about to do, you will agree with us that this is God's intended best direction for us for the near future.

Some of you are new to Calvary Crossroads and have not been able to hear past teachings on how we function as a church as it concerns our style of leadership. So this morning we want to revisit what we believe God's Word teaches concerning the leading of the church, and then explain a couple of changes that we unanimously believe to be God's leading.

We will begin with what the Scriptures have to teach us about the proper leading of the local church, Christ's church. The first question we want to ask and answer is, "How is the church to be led by God?" Does God have some specific instruction as to how He wants His church led? Different churches are functioning different ways these days, and God is blessing their ministries. But how do we here at Crossroads understand the Scriptures in this regard? Does the congregation lead the church in a democratic way? Or does God's Word point to another manner? Does the church have a single "point man" to lead the church, such as a senior pastor? We believe that the Scriptures clearly answer these questions.

Look with me at **Acts 14:21-23**. Contextually, Paul and Barnabas are on their first missionary journey through the Roman province of Galatia, leading people to Christ in various cities, discipling these new believers, and establishing local churches in various towns. In the previous verses to our text, they preached Christ in Derbe. In the passage we are about to read, Paul and Barnabas are headed to three other cities, Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch. Look at what Luke tells us as we read **verse 21**:

After they had preached the gospel to that city [Derbe] and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying, “Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.” When they had appointed *elders* for them in every church, having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

In each town, Paul established a church. And in each church, Paul and Barnabas appointed multiple elders. To do what? The same thing elders were supposed to do in other New Testament churches.

For instance, the Apostle Paul had visited the island of Crete with his fellow disciples Titus and Timothy. After a brief stay, having either discovered many baby Christians already there or possibly having led them to Christ (we are not told), Paul left Crete, taking Timothy with him to Ephesus. Titus is assigned to stay on in Crete for a reason. What reason? Paul tells us in **Titus 1:5**, “**For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city as I directed you.**” As far as islands go, Crete really wasn’t that big, but it was big enough to have a number of cities of size. Each of these cities had its church, and each church had a plurality of elders to “**set things in order.**” This is a reference to organizing the leadership as well as to bringing about moral and theological correction where needed in those cities. Hence, these elders were to be the initial leaders and spiritual protectors of the gospel and the local church.

But just in case that isn’t clear enough, look with me at Paul’s letter, written to his disciple Timothy at the church in Ephesus. In **I Timothy 5:7** we read this, “**The elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching.**”

The Greek word “**rule**” is unfortunately translated. The original term does not imply that elders are to be the bosses, the lords, or the governors who are somehow in charge. But actually, the word is “**leads**.” One who leads is not necessarily bossy or heavy handed. A pastor/elder/overseer does not drive people like cattle, but leads people like a shepherd leads sheep. You can’t drive sheep. You can’t bully sheep. The elders go before the family and set the pace and direction. They lead like Jesus led--by being servant/leaders.

Whether or not the people follow the elders depends on two things: Are they willing to obey Jesus Christ and submit to His leadership through His appointed human leaders, the elders? And secondly, are the elders respected and trusted as a result of their personal character, servant’s heart, practical understanding of the Word, and their demonstration that they genuinely care about those who make up the church? No elder is perfect, nor does he not fail. But if people are confident that an elder has the understanding of God’s Word to lead appropriately, along with character, even when he does make a mistake in leadership, they will forgive and follow. But lack of perfection or past failures is no excuse for others to not follow the elders. As in all areas of life, God calls us to submit to those whom He places in authority over us, such as elders. The only exception to this is if those in authority are encouraging us to sin. Then we are to disregard their instruction.

The apostle Peter speaks of these things in his first epistle to the Jewish Christians who had fled Israel due to persecution. These new Jewish believers settled in the Roman provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, and their new churches required leadership. In **I Peter 5:1-5**, Peter not only tells us how the church is to be led, but much more. We read:

¹Therefore, 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, ²shepherd 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; ³nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock. ⁴And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. ⁵You younger men, likewise, be subject to your elders; and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble.

It should be really clear to you from this passage of Scripture and the others that have been cited, that the church is to be led by a number of elders, not by the congregation. Nowhere in Scripture do we find any basis for what some call democratic or congregational rule. The congregation is called to inform the elders, but the elders are the ones responsible to lead the church.

One of the confusing matters concerning church leadership is the use of three Biblical terms for leadership: elder, pastor, and bishop or overseer. What are the three positions? What does each do? Well, it's really simple. All three of these terms, elder, pastor, and overseer, refer to the same person, but simply different responsibilities that the church leader is charged with.

This is made obvious as we look at another passage, **Acts 20:17, 28**. We read:

¹⁷**From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church. . . .** ²⁸**“Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd [pastor] the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.”**

If you notice in this passage, the formal title of the leadership role is “**elder**.” This is a common term that the earliest believers, the Jewish Christians, would

have recognized for its role in the church, because this was the term used for leadership in the Jewish community in the Old Testament times. When you look at the words that describe how the elder is to lead, you see the same terms used elsewhere to describe their leaders, “**overseers**” and “**shepherds**” (pastors).

These three terms, elder, overseer, and shepherd, describe three different functions of the leaders of the local church. The shepherd is one who cares for and guards the flock. He feeds the sheep. That’s one of the jobs of an elder. The overseer administrates and gives direction and management to the church family much like parents do for the family. The term elder was associated with a more mature believer (not perfect) and wiser individual in the community. He would have been the one to whom others would seek counsel, or maybe find correction and direction. Hence, an elder is an overseer who is also a pastor. These three terms all describe various roles of the same leader of the church.

So, answer these questions for me:

If Calvary Crossroads has seven elders, how many overseers do we have? Seven.

If Calvary Crossroads has seven elders, how many pastors do we have? Seven. Typically, churches have become used to using this term to describe only paid staff elders. But in reality, all elders are pastors.

If Calvary Crossroads has seven pastors, how many overseers do we have? Seven.

Look with me again at the passage we looked at a moment ago that teaches us the same thing as **Acts 20**. We see here that these same men are called to do the same three things in **I Peter 5:1-5**. Here, we read:

¹Therefore, 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, ²*shepherd* [pastor] 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; ³nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock. ⁴And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. ⁵You younger men, likewise, be subject to your elders; and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble.

At this point, I think it is important to make a significant observation. Neither this text nor any other passage in Scripture suggests that there is one man who is to be the head elder or the premier overseer or the senior pastor, ruling over all the other elders and thus leading the church. In fact, this passage strongly suggests that just the opposite is true. According to **verse 4**, there is only one “**Chief Shepherd**” (pastor/ elder/overseer). This verse is the only place the word “**chief**” is used in the New Testament in reference to church leadership. The word refers to one who is the Primary, the Head, the Chief or Senior who is in charge. Clearly in this text, it refers to only one person: Jesus Christ. Only Jesus is the Chief or Primary or Senior Shepherd of the church. There is no senior pastor of a local church mentioned in Scripture except Jesus!

If a church hires only one staff elder, that staff elder is not above or below the other elders. If a church has multiple staff who answer to one staff elder, that one staff elder is not the boss of the whole church. He is merely the manager of the staff, and he still is in submission to the other non-paid elders, as is every other elder to be in submission to the others.

Furthermore, a paid staff elder is not to be treated by the other non-paid elders as an employee, answerable to them. Except in the area of compensation, there has to be unanimity among all the elders, including the paid staff elder, about the paid staff elder’s ministry and every other aspect of church ministry. The non-staff elders are no more his boss than the paid staff elder is their boss.

When it comes to any decisions made on the elder board level, all the elders should be of one mind, as **Acts 15:25; Philippians 1:27, 2:2;** and **II Corinthians 13:11** suggest. And the way to insure one mindedness is that Jesus rule through each decision.

Here is another way to put it: there is no Biblical support to stipulate that any one elder is to be treated as the commander and chief of the others or the church. There is no Biblical support that one elder is to unilaterally make decisions to hire or fire or remove another elder. I say this, because I have witnessed too often a few elders in a church treating a fellow paid elder as though they were his master, and somehow they were above him rather than his equal. I have witnessed the tragic event of seeing a couple of influential elders pushing their agenda against another elder and bringing a divisive spirit to the church. This should not be allowed. Jesus is the only senior pastor of the church. The rest of us humbly submit to one another in the spirit of unity and one mindedness.

We human elders are under-shepherds of Jesus, held accountable by Jesus to work together in accordance with the directions that Christ gives in the Scriptures. And the rest of the church is to submit to the elders' leadership.

But let's face it and be honest. Sometimes, because of either special giftings or because of longevity of service, one elder may be considered more influential or carry more weight than others; or because of schooling and years of experience in the ministry one elder may be considered a leader among equals. But even that elder still must humbly submit to the unified direction of the other elders. Why? Because God's Word says, **"Clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble."**

When you read those words, **"God is opposed to the proud,"** picture in your mind a boxing ring. The Almighty God is standing in one corner wearing the white trunks, and in the other corner the arrogant elder is his opponent, wearing black trunks. That picture sticks in my mind when I find myself trying to push another elder into agreeing with me. Quite honestly, I have had to repent and ask forgiveness of my brothers more than once over the past twenty-eight years. And some of them have had to do likewise. But these men are gracious and quick to forgive when that happens, and we move

forward. I call it learning how to fight fair! Repentance and forgiveness are founded upon our Savior's grace. It's the practice of clothing oneself in humility.

I remember reading about the time when the elders of Peninsula Bible Church called their first paid pastor, Ray Stedman. Although Ray was an elder in the beginning, he was not considered the leader among equals. He was still a green recent graduate from seminary who had never been an elder or pastor of a church. On the other hand, the other elders had been functioning as pastors, leading the church long before their first vocational pastor ever graduated from seminary. Hence wisely, Ray may have given his opinion about certain issues when he first came on board at PBC, but it wasn't for a few years that he was considered an equal with the other elders, which is only normal.

There is something else we can learn about church leadership from a passage we looked at earlier, **I Timothy 5:17**, which is pertinent to what is going to happen here in church in a moment. Notice the order in which things are listed which most often points to that which takes priority. **"The elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching."**

First, Paul does not say that the priority for all of the elders is to teach, but rather to **"rule."** And, secondly, not all elders are equal or have strengths in the same things. There are some elders who spend their time ruling well and others who invest additional time at preaching and teaching. Those would be the vocational or paid staff elders, who deserve **"double honor,"** which is a reference to being paid for their efforts.

In the latter half of this verse, Paul points to **"those,"** plural, meaning more than one, who preach and teach. It suggests that when it comes to the healthy church, it is better to have more than one gifted person preaching and teaching. That is why we, as the leadership at Calvary Crossroads, are committed to making sure that we follow God's Word and not allow this to become Bob Bonner's pulpit; rather, we expose you to many able expositors of God's Word. This way, we intentionally direct your attention to Jesus, rather than to one human being to follow. We avoid the divisive nature that the Apostle Paul writes about that took place at Corinth where individuals

were saying, **“I am of Paul, or I am of Apollos,”** forgetting that ultimately we are only to be **“of Christ.”** Amen!

My seminary class notes contain a quote from Dr. Stanley Toussaint, a man whom a recent book described as the model of both theological and practical integrity. He declared, “The primary work of the elders is to oversee, govern, or rule, not teach.” The second work, in order of priority, is teaching. The word for “teaching” used in Timothy is the specific term that refers to formal instruction, that is, the preaching and teaching of God’s Word. Not all elders have the spiritual gift of teaching or prophecy. Hence, this reference to teaching is only for those who are specifically set apart and spiritually gifted by God to teach and preach.

Yes, all of the elders are to be familiar enough with God’s Word that they are able to use its truth in their counseling and in making decisions. But not all elders were created equally gifted by God. Some are spiritually gifted teachers and others are spiritually gifted administrator/leader types; and some are both, like Victor. I’m organized, and I understand the Biblical vision for Christ’s church, but I’m not gifted in the same way that either Dan O’Donnell or Victor is gifted. And praise God we are not. This makes for a more balanced and healthy Calvary Crossroads Church.

This leads us to our purpose for this morning. We are going to practice what the New Testament refers to as the “laying on of hands.” Let me explain.

In considering the exercise of the laying on of hands, there are three things one must keep in mind:

First, the New Testament action of laying on hands was an act of singling out or setting apart someone for something. In places in the New Testament the laying on of hands refers to the setting apart of someone to receive a specific prayer of blessing or healing. In other places, as it concerns the matters before us this morning, it is used in reference to the setting apart of someone for a mission or ministry. In other words, it is used to commission someone for a particular service or ministry.

Second, the setting apart of someone for something was usually done by someone or a group in authority.

For instance, in **Acts 9:10-17**, we read this about the Apostle Paul upon his dramatic conversion to Christ at Damascus.

¹⁰Now there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias; and the Lord said to him in a vision, “Ananias.” And he said, “Here I am, Lord.” ¹¹And the Lord said to him, “Get up and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying, ¹²and he [Saul] has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him, so that he [Saul] might regain his sight.”

¹³But Ananias answered, “Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he did to Your saints at Jerusalem; ¹⁴and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name.”

¹⁵But the Lord said to him, “Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; ¹⁶for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name’s sake.”

¹⁷So Ananias departed and entered the house, and after laying his hands on him said, “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to

you on the road by which you were coming, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.”

Here, God uses one individual, Ananias, to set apart Paul for a specific ministry to the Gentiles. It is, if you will, Saul’s commissioning service whereby he goes from being Saul to Paul, an apostle to the Gentiles.

In **Acts 13:1-3**, we read this about the commissioning of two men for ministry by a group of other men, presumably elders of the church at Antioch. We read:

¹Now there were at Antioch, in the church that was there, prophets and teachers: Barnabas, and Simeon who was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. ²While they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” ³Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.

This was the commissioning service of Paul and Barnabas by the leadership of the church at Antioch as they were being set apart and sent out by God to be missionaries to the Gentiles in Galatia, on what would be Paul’s first missionary journey.

In **I Timothy 4:13-16**, we read this about how the apostles set apart one man for a teaching ministry. Paul writes to his disciple, Timothy:

¹³Until I come, give attention to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation and teaching. ¹⁴Do not neglect the spiritual gift [the gift of exhortation and teaching] within you [Timothy], which was bestowed on you through prophetic utterance with the laying on of hands by the presbytery [elders of the church]. ¹⁵Take pains with these things; be absorbed in them, so that your progress will be evident to all. ¹⁶Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things, for as you do this you will ensure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you.

Here, Paul references a time when elders recognized that God had gifted Timothy with the spiritual gifts of exhortation and teaching and had called him to help lead the church at Ephesus with these gifts.

In these three Scriptural cases, the laying on of hands was the setting apart of people to a specific ministry.

Third, there is a warning to be heeded when there is a laying on of hands. We find this warning in **I Timothy 5:22**, where the Apostle Paul says to Timothy, **“Do not lay hands upon anyone too hastily and thereby share responsibility for the sins of others; keep yourself free from sin.”**

When it comes to church leaders setting apart specific individuals for specialized ministries, we are clearly warned not to be too hasty in commissioning people to ministry.

Today the elders of CCC, after considering the church wide evaluations we have been taking annually for the past few years, and what you have identified as priority needs for our church family, and after a great deal of prayer and seeking after the Lord’s direction for the near future of Calvary Crossroads,

understanding the vision that the Lord has given us to exalt Christ, equip the saints, and evangelize the lost, are going to publicly lay hands on three individuals, setting them apart for specific ministries in this church. Those individuals are Dan O'Donnell, Victor Borchard, and I.

So that you can better understand what the elders are commissioning us to do, specifically for the next year, we have provided you with copies in the back of what I am going to show you now. If you wish, they will be made available to you after the service at the information table. We are showing you these things so that you will not only be aware of what our focus will be for each of our ministries, but we also want you to pray for us and hold us accountable to seek to fulfill these objectives to the our best abilities.

Dan O'Donnell is not a full time pastor nor does he want to be. He is not technically an elder. Dan is absolutely qualified to be an elder, yet he also recognizes that we have to keep a healthy ratio of elders to staff elders so that the staff doesn't override the rest of the elders. It's best when the non-staff elders outnumber the staff elders. Dan sits with us at every meeting and blesses us with input based on wisdom gained from over thirty-five years of ministry experience. When we find that we have more qualified men to be elders to join our team, then Dan, if he wants to, will be brought before you to affirm it so. Dan, do you have anything you would like to add to this? Are you supportive of this? (Dan briefly agrees that he is.)

Victor Borchard is a uniquely gifted man. His gifts of leadership and administration have been desperately needed around here for years. In the past few years this has been made obvious to all of us, especially the elders. We strongly welcome the use of his spiritual gifts. Because I believe Victor is a spiritually gifted administrator and I am not, I believe and so do the elders that at this time, God is calling Victor to run the operations of our church. In addition, I have asked Victor to serve in this manner for the betterment of our church family. For those of you who have been here a while, I want you to understand that I am not threatened nor do I feel pushed aside in any way by the responsibilities that the elders are commissioning Victor to fulfill.

Executive Teaching Pastor
Teaching the Bible
Beseeching the Lord

Running the church
Supervision of the annual church budget (\$495k for 2016)

Bob Bonner as

Pastor-at-Large

Teaching the Bible

Pastoral care (weddings, funerals, hospitals, visitation)

Presenting the Opportunity (capital campaign)

Biblical counseling

Shepherding the city