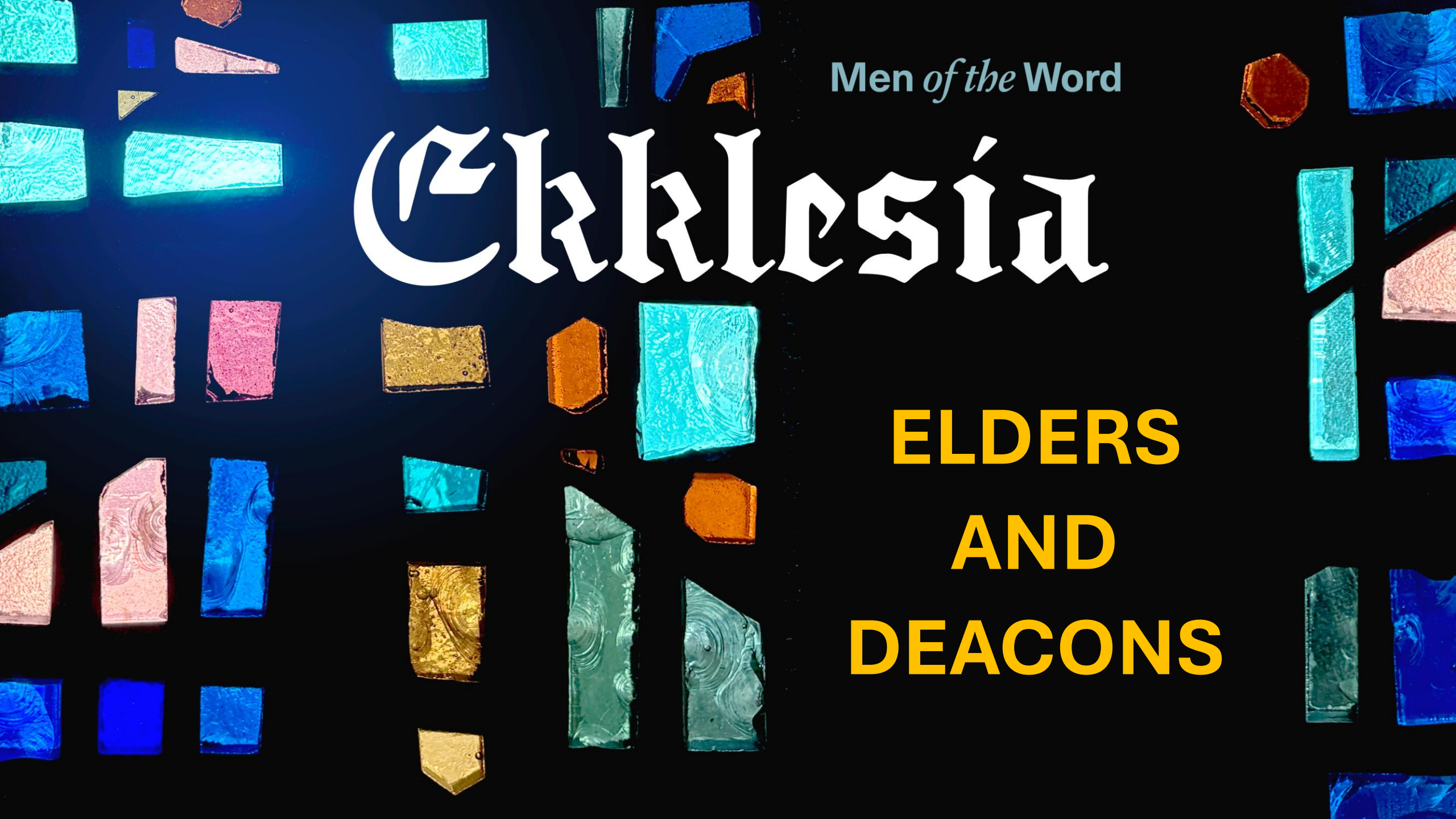




Men of the Word

Ekklesia

**ELDERS
AND
DEACONS**

The Draw of the Ditches

ANARCHY

- The inherent distrust and rejection of authority, structure, order, and laws.
- The promotion of absolute egalitarianism and freedom.

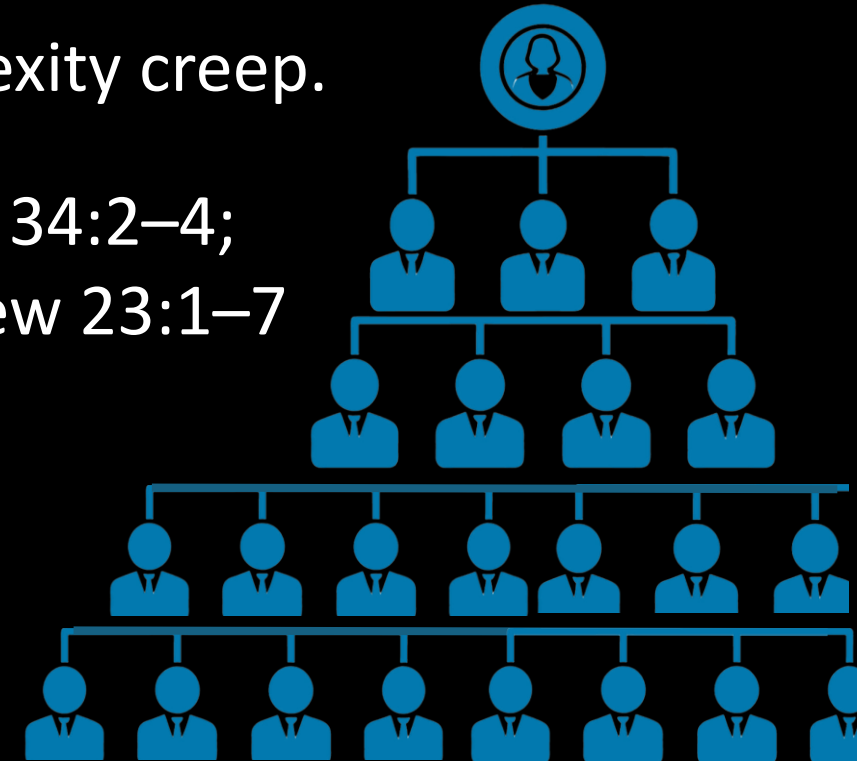
- Judges 17:6;
21:25



OVER-COMPLEXITY

- The accumulation of extra layers of leadership to entrench and protect authority.

- Complexity creep.
- Ezekiel 34:2–4;
Matthew 23:1–7



“We’ve become accustomed to thinking about abuse and power in the same sentence, and about authoritarianism whenever we think about authority. Whatever the reason, there is a pervasive and inherent suspicion of authority in our society. . . . Perhaps it has to do with selfishness.”

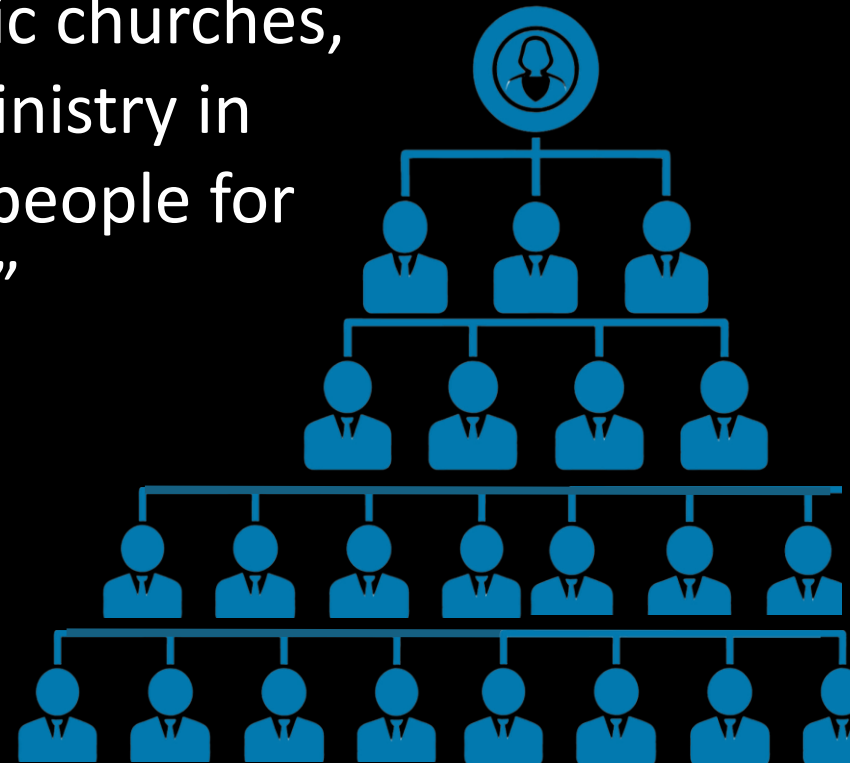
“A world without authority would be like desires with no restraints, a car with no controls, an intersection with no traffic lights, a game with no rules, a home with no parents. It might go on for a little while, but before long it would seem pointless, then cruel and unutterably tragic.”

—Mark Dever, *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*, 199–200, 223



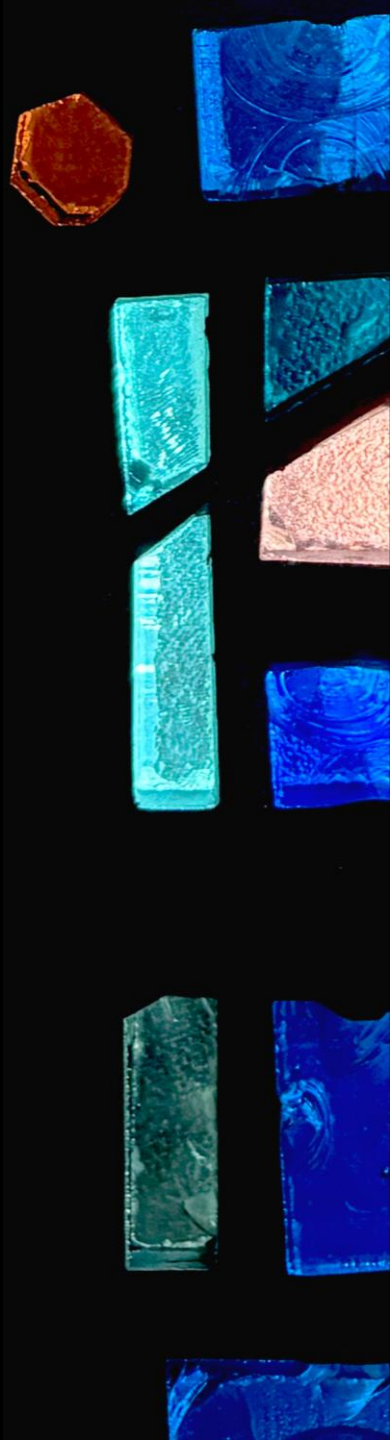
“Some of the worst havoc wrought to the Christian faith has been a direct result of unscriptural forms of church structure. Only a few centuries after the apostles’ death, for example, Christ’s churches began to assimilate both Roman and Jewish concepts of status, power, and priesthood. . . . Under Christ’s name an elaborately structured institution emerged that corrupted the simple, family structure of the apostolic churches, robbed God’s people of their lofty position and ministry in Christ, and exchanged Christ’s supremacy over His people for the supremacy of the institutional church.”

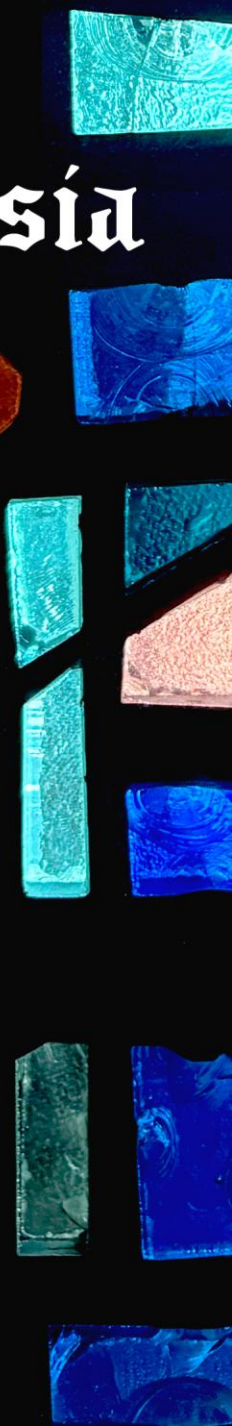
—Alexander Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 101–102



**The absence of leadership, or the
corruption of leadership, is a curse to
the church.**

**Godly leadership is a blessing to the
church and the key to its spiritual
prosperity.**



A decorative stained glass pattern in the top right corner, featuring various colored glass pieces in shades of red, orange, yellow, and green, arranged in a geometric, mosaic-like fashion.

Ekklesia

I. THE BIBLICAL OFFICES OF CHURCH LEADERSHIP

Men of the Word

A. CHRIST, THE HEAD

- The authority to be exercised in the church originates in the absolute rule of Jesus Christ over His church; there is no other head.
- **Matthew 16:18** – “I will build My church”
- **Matthew 28:18–20** – “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples”
- **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.”

- **Colossians 1:18** – “He is also head of the body, the church”
- **1 Peter 2:25** – “For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian [Overseer] of your souls.”
- **1 Peter 5:4** – “And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.”
- **Hebrews 13:20** – “. . . The great Shepherd of the Sheep”

B. APOSTLES, THE FOUNDATION

- Jesus Christ delegated His authority to those whom He personally chose and commissioned to proclaim His message to the world.
- This message—and their authority—has been captured on the pages of the New Testament.
- **Ephesians 2:19–22** – “So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God’s household, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.”



- Thus, the continuation of the authority Christ delegated to His apostles is not seen in the line of “apostolic succession,” but in the permanent testimony of the New Testament.

- “The Bible alone affords the church its elements of polity, thereby excluding any human additions whether deriving from custom, tradition, human authority, expediency, or any other consideration” (Guy Waters, *One Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church*, 170–71).

C. ELDERS, THE RULERS

- Jesus Christ, through the written record of His delegated apostles, has instructed that each local church be led by a *special category of men*.
- These men do not belong to this category because of *lineage, family connections, financial prosperity, social status, education, or worldly acclaim*.
- They belong to this category because of *God's sovereign gifting* and their *fidelity to His truth* and *godliness of character*.
- They are identified by three synonymous titles: “elders,” “overseers,” and “pastors.” Each title emphasizes something about them.

1. “Elders”

- The term “elder” is the most common for this category of leadership; from πρεσβύτερος (*presbyteros*); emphasizes maturity and character.
- From an early date, “elders” ruled the church in Jerusalem alongside the apostles themselves (Acts 11:30; 15:2, 4, 6, 22–23; 16:4; 21:17–18).
- The letter of James—the earliest of the NT books (AD 45)—attests to the ministry of “elders” in individual local assemblies (James 5:14).
- The apostle Paul established “elders” in each Gentile church throughout his ministry (Acts 14:23; Acts 20:17; 1 Tim 5:17, 19–20; Titus 1:5).
- Peter also mentions the “elders” among the churches to which he writes (1 Pet 5:1).

1. “Elders” (cont’d)

- **Acts 14:23** – “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.”
 - Paul ensured that there were “elders”—*plural*—appointed to rule “in every church”—*singular*.
- **Acts 20:17** – “From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church.”
- **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.”
 - Paul instructed Titus to appoint “elders”—*plural*—“in each city”—*singular*; there would have been one church per city.

2. “Overseers”

- The term “overseer” (translated as “bishop” in some translations) is the second most common term; from ἐπίσκοπος (*episkopos*); emphasizes function.
- **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.”
- **Philippians 1:1** – “Paul and Timothy . . . to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers and deacons.”
- **1 Timothy 3:1–2** – “. . . if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do. An overseer, then, must be”

2. “Overseers” (cont’d)

- **Titus 1:7** – “For the overseer must be above reproach as God’s steward”
- **1 Peter 5:1–2** – “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.”

3. “Pastors”

- The term “pastor” comes from the Latin term for “shepherd”; from ποιμήν (*poimēn*); emphasizes manner.
- **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** – “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.”

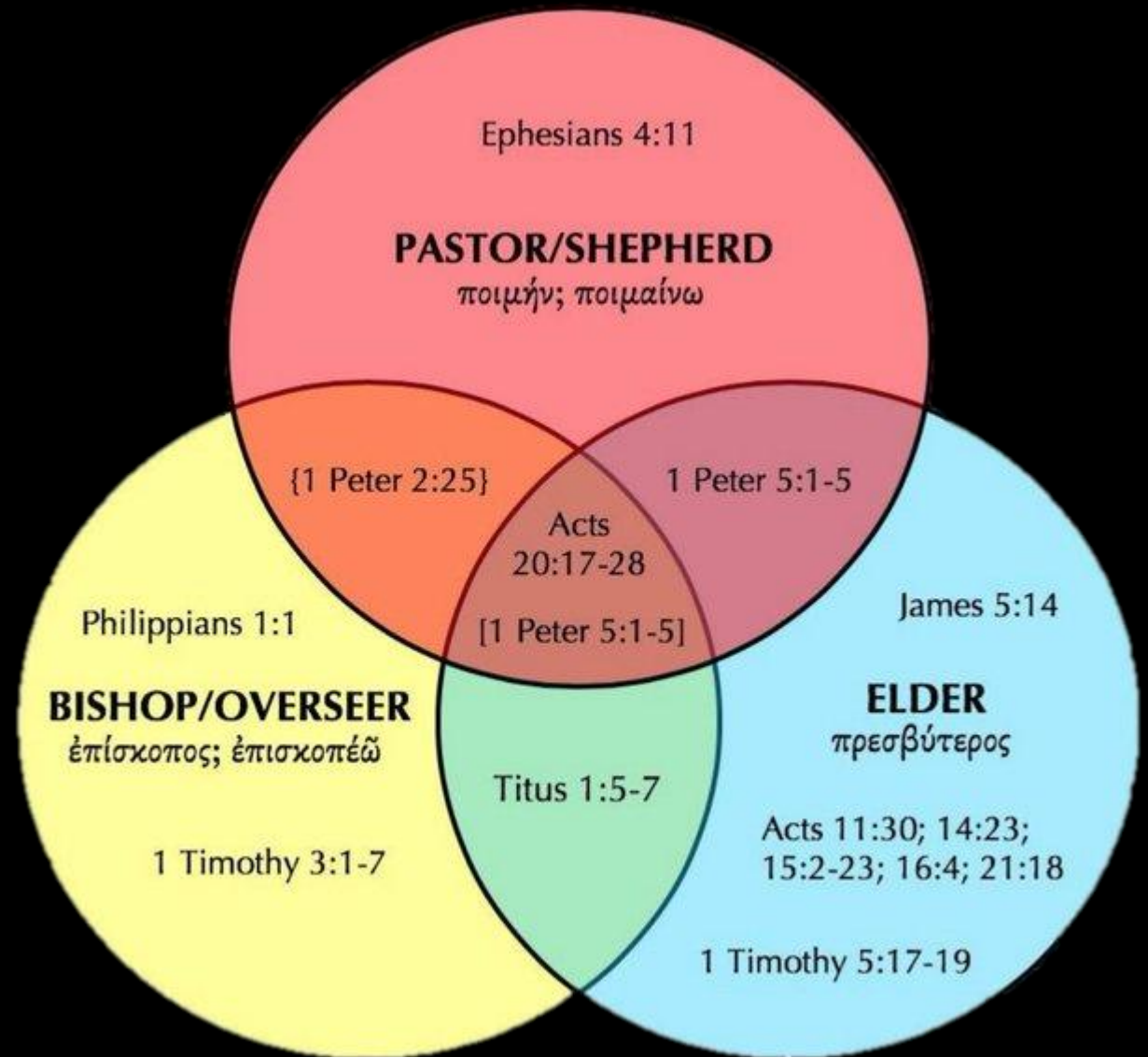
“The presbyter is the same as the bishop, and before parties had been raised up in religion by the provocations of Satan, the churches were governed by the Senate of the presbyters. But as each one sought to appropriate to himself those whom he had baptized, instead of leading them to Christ, it was appointed that one of the presbyters, elected by his colleagues, should be set over all the others, and have chief supervision over the general well-being of the community

Without doubt it is the duty of the presbyters to bear in mind that by the discipline of the Church they are subordinated to him who has been given them as their head, but it is fitting that the bishops, on their side, do not forget that if they are set over the presbyters, it is the result of tradition, and not by the fact of a particular institution by the Lord.”

—Jerome (AD 345–420), Commentary on Titus 1:7



“Elder” (*character*)
=
“Overseer” (*function*)
=
“Pastor” (*manner*)



4. “Leaders”

- The term “leader” comes from the verb ἡγέομαι (*hēgeomai*), which means “to be in a supervisory capacity”; emphasizes *function*.
- **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.”
- **Hebrews 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.”
- **Hebrews 13:24** – “Greet all of your leaders and all the saints. Those from Italy greet you.”

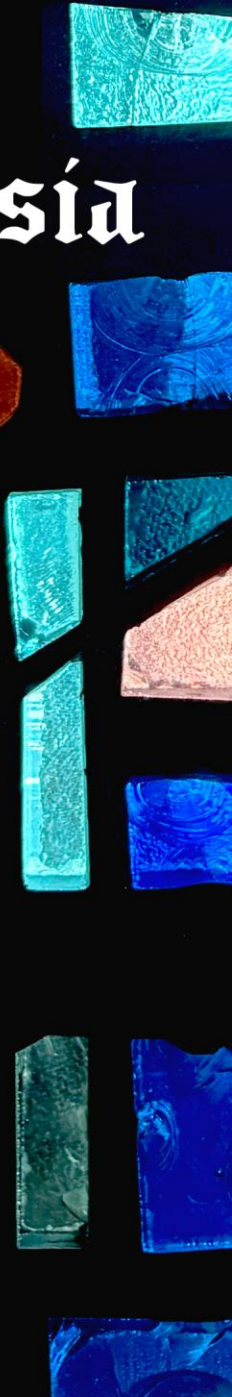
- For the leadership of elders/overseers/pastors to be a *blessing* to the church, God's Word provides clear requirements for each candidate:
 - **Conviction** – he must “aspire” to the work (1 Tim 3:1)
 - **Character** – he must be “above reproach” (1 Tim 3:2–7; Titus 1:6–9)
 - **Competency** – he must be “able to teach” and “manage well” (1 Tim 3:2, 4–5; 5:17; Titus 1:9)
 - **Consistent** – he must “hold fast the faithful word” (Titus 1:9)
 - **Cooperative** – he must lead together with others (Acts 20:28)
 - **Confirmed** – like the deacons, he must be “tested” (1 Tim 3:10)
- When any of these are lacking from a candidate, his leadership quickly becomes a *curse*.

D. DEACONS, THE SERVANTS

- Through the written record of His delegated apostles, Christ has also instructed that each local church be served by a *special category of servants*.
- Like the elders, this category is made up of those who demonstrate *spiritual gifting, fidelity to God's Word, and godliness of character*.
- They have similar character qualifications as the elders, but without the competency needed in *teaching or decision-making*.
- **Philippians 1:1** – “Paul and Timothy . . . to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers and deacons.”

- **1 Timothy 3:8–13** – “Deacons likewise must be men of dignity, not double-tongued, or addicted to much wine or fond of sordid gain, but holding to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. These men must also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons if they are beyond reproach. Women must likewise be dignified, not malicious gossips, but temperate, faithful in all things. Deacons must be husbands of only one wife, and good managers of their children and their own households. For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a high standing and great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.”

- The term “**deacon**” generally describes “one who is busy with something in a manner that is of *assistance* to someone.”
 - “one who serves as an intermediary in a transaction, *agent, intermediary, courier.*”
 - “one who gets something done, at the behest of a superior, *assistant to someone.*”
- Deacons are not a *competing* or *parallel* form of leadership in the church, but a *complementary one*—one that provides *practical assistance* to the elders in the implementation of their leadership.
- The need for deacons does not negate the responsibility all believers have to “serve one another” (Gal 5:13), but deacons are to ensure this service takes place in the corporate/formal aspects of church life.

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II. THE BIBLICAL FORM OF CHURCH GOVERNMENT

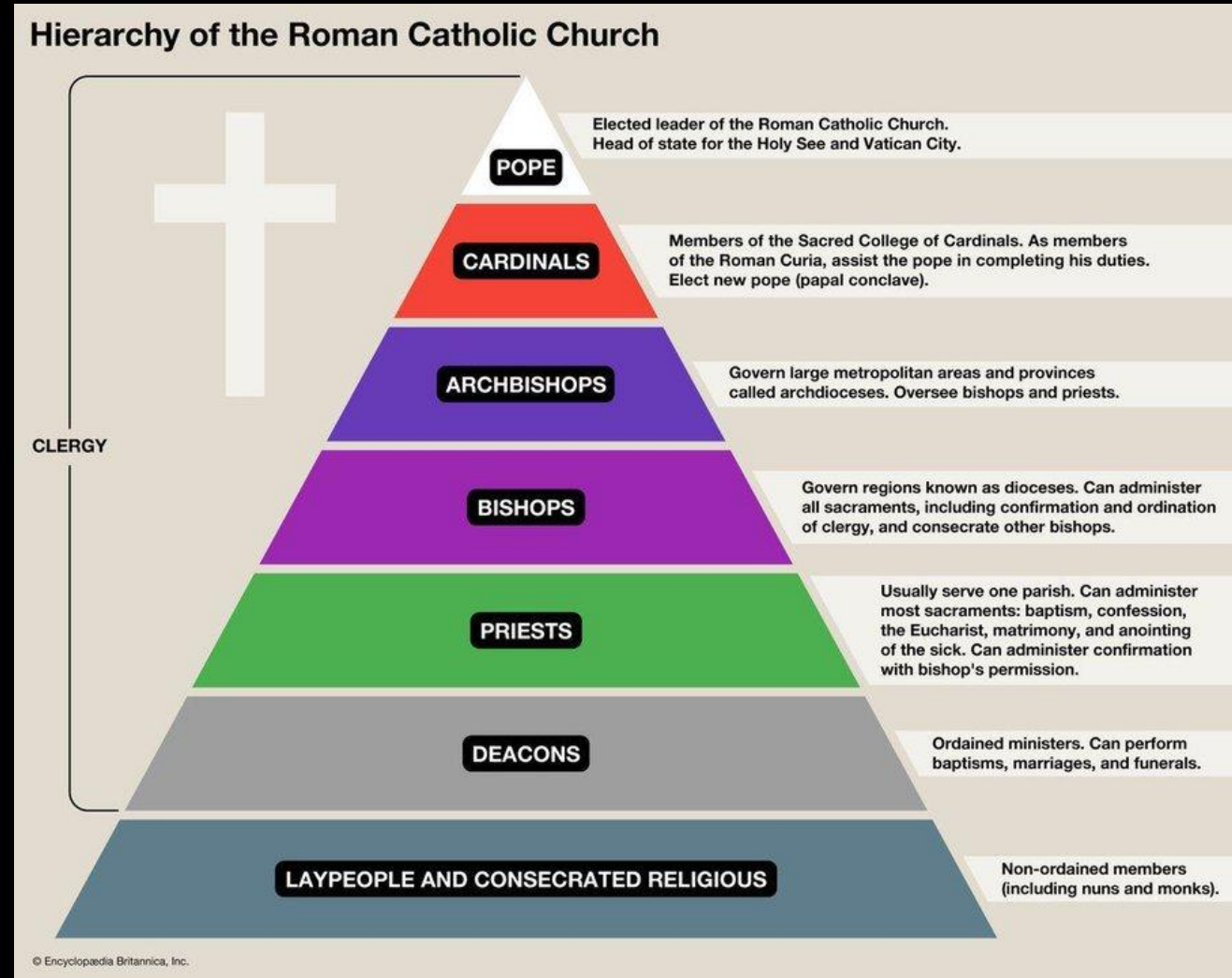
Men *of the* Word

The church must have some form [of government]; in fact, it always does. The question remains as to which form is prescribed in the Scriptures.”

—Robert Saucy, *The Church in God's Program*, 105

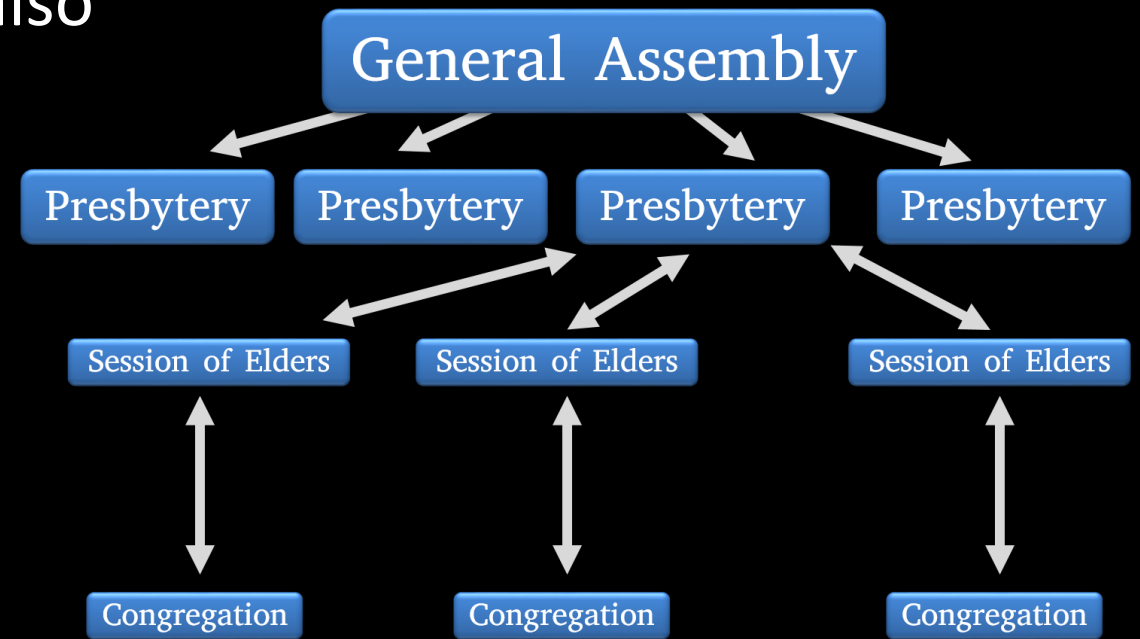
A. PROPOSAL 1: EPISCOPALIANISM

- A complex hierarchy of ordained clergy above the congregation (laity).
- Known for having “priests” and “bishops” and chief figures.
- Examples include the Roman Catholic Church, the Eastern Orthodox Church, the Anglican Church, and the Methodist and Episcopalian Churches.



B. PROPOSAL 2: PRESBYTERIANISM

- Affirms the role of “elders” (*presbyteros*) who rule in local churches, but who also form various “courts” above the congregations (“sessions,” “presbyteries,” and “assemblies”).
- “Elders” in the local church are categorized according to “teaching elders” and “administrative elders.”
- Examples include Presbyterian and Reformed Church denominations.



Presbyterian Model

C. PROPOSAL 3: CONGREGATIONALISM

- Affirms the autonomy of the local church in overseeing and administering its worship, administration, discipline, and ministries.
- Congregationalist churches vary in terms of their relationship to other churches; they range from tight cooperative relationships in denominations (Southern Baptists) to completely independent churches with no fellowship with others.
- Congregationalist churches also vary in terms of their leadership structure; they can be radically democratic, implement a secular business model, be committee-led, elder-led, or elder-rule.

*The Doctrinal Statement of
Grace Community Church*

What We Teach

THE ELDERS'
PERSPECTIVE
SERIES

GRACE COMMUNITY CHURCH: ELDER-RULE

“We teach that the one supreme authority for the church is Christ (1 Cor 11:3; Eph 1:22; Col 1:18) and that church leadership, gifts, order, discipline, and worship are all appointed through His sovereignty as found in the Scriptures. The biblically designated officers serving under Christ and over the assembly are elders (also called overseers and pastors, Acts 20:28; Eph 4:11) and deacons, both of whom must meet biblical qualifications (1 Tim 3:1–13; Titus 1:5–9; 1 Pet 5:1–5). . . .

*The Doctrinal Statement of
Grace Community Church*

What We Teach

THE ELDERS'
PERSPECTIVE
SERIES

“We teach that the eldership of a local congregation consists of spiritually qualified men who lead or rule as servants of Christ (1 Tim 2:11–12; 5:17–22) and have His authority in directing the church. The congregation is to submit to their leadership (Heb 13:7, 17). We teach the importance of discipleship (Matt 28:19–20; 2 Tim 2:2), the mutual accountability of all believers (Matt 18:5–14), as well as the need for discipline of sinning members of the congregation in accord with the standards of Scripture (Matt 18:15–22; Acts 5:1–11; 1 Cor 5:1–13; 2 Thess 3:6–15; 1 Tim 1:19–20; Titus 1:10–16). . . .

*The Doctrinal Statement of
Grace Community Church*

What We Teach

THE ELDERS'
PERSPECTIVE
SERIES

“We teach the autonomy of the local church, free from any external authority or control, with the right of self-government and freedom from the interference of any hierarchy of individuals or organizations (Titus 1:5). . . .

*The Doctrinal Statement of
Grace Community Church*

What We Teach

THE ELDERS'
PERSPECTIVE
SERIES

“We teach that it is scriptural for true churches to cooperate with each other for the presentation and propagation of the faith. Each local church, however, through its elders and their interpretation and application of Scripture, should be the sole judge of the measure and method of its cooperation. The elders should determine all other matters of membership, policy, discipline, benevolence, and government (Acts 15:19–31; 20:28; 1 Cor 5:4–7, 13; 1 Pet 5:1–4).”

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IV. IMPLICATIONS FOR TODAY

Men *of the* Word

1. Pray for the leadership of your church.
2. Demand qualified leadership in your church.
3. Submit to the leadership of your church.
4. Imitate the leadership of your church.



“He who rules over men righteously, who rules in the fear of God, is as the light of the morning when the sun rises, a morning without clouds, when the tender grass springs out of the earth, through sunshine after rain.”

—2 Samuel 23:3–4



Ekklesia

Tonight's resources will be
posted on-line at
gracechurch.org/motw