

"The Government of the Church"
(Part 2)
Selected Texts

INTRO. - Our summer sermon series has been on what the Bible has to say about the church, and last week we began looking at the subject of biblical church government. We're going to finish out this series on this focus.

- I think it is worth taking several weeks on this because it is so important to understand, and there are many who come from a congregational background, who may be unfamiliar with the biblical polity of plural eldership.
- When we started PBC 21 years ago, we made a commitment to the Lord that anything we see in Scripture that doesn't match what we are doing, we will be willing to change what we are doing to line up with what God's Word teaches.
- And we need to line up with God's Word in *this* area just as much as we need to in any other area. Whenever we do something God's way we have His blessing. When we do it our own way, we have problems.
- Now, we are breaking this down into three aspects: Last week we examined "The *Plea* For Biblical Church Government." Today we will focus on "The *Pattern* For Biblical Church Government" and then we

will examine "The *Procedures* For Biblical Church Government."

- Now, we'll also take today's study in 5 parts: We're going to look at shepherd leadership, shared leadership, specifically male leadership, substantiated leadership, and supported leadership. Let's jump right in here and begin with:

I. SHEPHERD LEADERSHIP

- 1 Peter 5:1-2 says, "Therefore, I exhort the elders among you...*shepherd* the flock of God..." In Acts 20:28, Paul reminded the Ephesian elders that God had made them overseers for the purpose of shepherding the flock of God.
- Acts 20:28 says, "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."
- To clear up one of the most common misunderstandings about elders, let me say (first of all) that they are *not* a board of directors. They are *not* CEOs or corporate executives for the church or advisers to the pastor...they are *pastors!!!*
- They are *shepherds* of the flock of God. They are to give spiritual oversight to the church, which (in Paul's analogy) is like a flock of sheep. If we really want to

understand the biblical model for the role of elders in the NT church, we need to understand the biblical imagery of shepherding sheep.

- As keepers of the sheep, NT elders are to feed, protect, lead, and care for the needs of the flock of God. Now, we're *not* going to spend a *lot* of time developing each one of these responsibilities, but let me at least touch briefly on each one.
- Under the responsibility to *feed* the flock, we learn from the NT that all elders must be able to *teach* God's Word. Unlike most people's concept of board elders, 1 Tim. 3:2 makes it clear that part of the "feeding" responsibility of elders is that of teaching Scripture.
- 1 Tim. 3:2 says "An overseer...must be...able to teach..." Titus 1:9 adds "(the elder must hold) fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, that he may be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict."
- In 1 Tim. 5:17-18, we are told that those elders who rule well are to be "...considered worthy of double honor, *especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching.*"
- Since the analogy Paul uses is that of sheep, we should take note of the fact that shepherds have to guide the sheep to pasture. They do *not* naturally find food by themselves. They may be very close to a green pasture

but they will *not* find it unless the shepherd guides them to it.

- Very often that is the case in the spiritual realm with the flock of God, and the elders are to carefully feed the flock on the Word of God, *and* help the sheep to learn how to feed on the Word of God themselves.
- So the Bible makes it clear that elders are required to be able to teach, and this is a vital part of fulfilling their responsibility to feed the flock of God. This ministry does *not* necessarily have to be administered from the pulpit, but I believe that every elder should be *able* to stand in this pulpit and teach God's Word if they are called upon to do so.
- As far as *protecting* the flock, the primary responsibility of the elder is to protect the sheep from false doctrine and false teachers. In Acts 20, Paul refers to false teachers as "savage wolves" who come in and devour the flock.
- A prospective elder *must* be able to refute false teachers, and to be a good discerner of false doctrine. As Titus 1:9 says, "he (must) be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict."
- This means that a prospective elder must be knowledgeable in God's Word. Listen, appointing an elder is *not* one of these things where we simply take a vote on the most popular men in the congregation. It

is *not* a matter of finding someone who is successful in business.

- It is finding someone who has a good knowledge of the Word of God, and is sound doctrinally, so that he can help protect the flock of God from error.
- Now, protecting the flock may include several different aspects, such as seeking after lost and straying sheep, confronting and disciplining sin, admonishing improper behavior and attitudes, and stopping gossip and feuding among the sheep.
- All these things are *important*, and although this can be more of a *negative* part of the elders role, it is *essential* because the unity and health of the flock depends on it.
- This aspect of the elders' role (often) takes a great deal of courage and maturity. To discipline sin in the church (especially the sin of a prominent member), or to confront internal strife, or to stand up against powerful false teachers, takes a lot of courage and dependence on God. And yet, these things are sometimes necessary to protect the over-all health of the flock.
- As far as *leading* the flock, the Bible makes it absolutely clear that the elders are the spiritual leaders of the church. And here the Bible uses a word that we

are usually very uncomfortable with today. It is the word "rule."

- 1 Tim. 5:17 says "Let the elders who *rule* well be considered worthy of double honor..." We have a difficult time today with that word "rule," but it simply means to "lead, direct, or manage." The Greek word is "pro-istemi" which simply means "to have charge over."
- In Titus 1:7, elders are referred to as "God's stewards." A steward was a "household manager," someone with the responsibility over the master's servants, property, and even finances. Elders are stewards of God's household, the local church.
- And last week I pointed out that the word "overseer" signifies that elders manage and supervise the ministry of the church. So there is a *leadership* responsibility placed on the elders. This may include giving counsel and vision, and a sense of direction to the church as well.
- Now, since elders must be managers of God's household, the NT requires that they have proven themselves as good managers in their own homes.
- We're going to look more fully at the qualifications for elders next week, but 1 Tim. 3:4-5 makes it clear that those who are *not* managing their *own* families well

can never be expected to manage the household of God well.

- Elders are to lead by example. They are to be examples in how they love their wives and how they raise their children. They are to be examples by working hard at caring for the flock. They are to be examples by their deep love for God and commitment to His church.
- They are to be examples in humble service. They are to be examples in making disciples and ministering to needs -- which leads us to the last aspect of their shepherding role, *caring* for the flock.
- There are many passages which indicate this role, such as James 5:14 and Acts 20:35. Paul told the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:35, “In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’” (expound)
- Elders have a responsibility to help meet the many practical needs of the sheep. But we also need to be careful at this point, and remember that the pastors (or elders) are *not* the ones who are to do the work of the ministry. They are to equip the saints for the work of ministry.

- Elders are *not* the “ministers,” they are the equippers. The whole church is responsible for the ministry of meeting the needs in the body and in the community.
- We also need to remember that the NT model includes deacons, who are specifically appointed to help meet the practical needs in the body so that the elders can continue to fulfill their responsibilities without being overburdened with too many responsibilities.
- But let’s boil it all down. The bottom line with regard to elders caring for the flock is that elders are simply to *love* the sheep. If the elders truly love the sheep then they are going to make certain that their needs are getting met. This is what must motivate their service.
- Well, we must move on...a second major aspect of the pattern for biblical church government is:

II. SHARED LEADERSHIP

- Now, I have already spent some time on this one, so I won’t say much more here other than to re-iterate the fact that in Scripture there is always a *plurality* of elders. The Greek word for “elders” is always in the plural form. There is nothing in Scripture *anywhere* that would indicate that a church should be governed by one individual pastor.
- Neither is there evidence of a church being governed by a majority vote of all the members, or any kind of

democratic process. There *is involvement* by the entire congregation, but the leadership falls on the elders.

- It is always a council of elders leading the church, and I believe that there are many inherent benefits in that. There is accountability, tempering, mutual support, and many built-in protections, *not only* for the elders but also for the church. Thirdly, we see that biblical church government is:

III. SPECIFICALLY MALE LEADERSHIP

- Now, I may make somebody mad here this morning, and if I do, it won't be the first time, but I believe that the Bible is very clear that elders are supposed to be men. Our modern society doesn't like to hear that, but if we are going to do it God's way then we have to follow the pattern He has given us in His Word.
- And we have the biblical model beginning with the 12 apostles. All 12 were men. We know that Jesus' followers included many women of that day, but when it came time for Him to choose those who would become the foundational officers of the church, He chose all men.
- You say, "Well, Jesus was just accommodating His culture..." Wait a minute. This was Jesus Christ, the second person of the Trinity. How could anyone say that Jesus accommodated His choice of male leadership to the spirit of His age? He was *hated* and

eventually *crucified* for *not* going along with the traditions and values of His day.

- Some (today) want to say that Jesus' work of redemption abolished all male-female role distinctions. If *that* was the case, then Jesus' choosing of 12 men as apostles was certainly a poor way of showing that.
- The rallying cry of evangelical feminism is Gal. 3:28, "There is neither male nor female..." But, my friend, that passage is talking about *salvation*. Read the context. It is dealing with the fundamentals of *salvation*, *not* with the concept of *headship* or *leadership*.
- It is absolutely true that in regard to salvation, male and female alike have full access to eternal life through faith in Christ. But the issue of God-ordained roles for men and women is a completely different matter.
- If Jesus' atoning death was intended to eliminate male-female roles, then why didn't He appoint 6 men and 6 women? At the very least, He should have chosen at least *one* woman. If Jesus is the supreme egalitarian, (as some today claim), then He certainly failed women at a crucial point in church history!
- Now, you know that I don't really believe that Jesus ever "failed" at anything. I am saying this to make a point that what Jesus did was to re-affirm the OT

creation order of male headship, which both the Apostle Paul and the Apostle Peter later confirmed.

- Everyone today wants to interpret the Bible culturally, but I think it is significant to note that the very same methodology is being employed by so-called “Christian homosexuals” to justify their sin. They want to use that phrase, “neither male nor female” to say that the Bible does *not* prohibit homosexual behavior.
- But back to the issue of male leadership, if you follow the progression, the apostles then followed their Lord’s example by appointing 7 *men* in Acts 6 as deacons. There were no women included. Acts 6:3 says “But select from among you, brethren, seven *men*...”
- Now listen, even if you believe that 1 Tim. 3 allows for “deaconesses,” (which we do *not* hold to here [expound]) you cannot get around the fact that the first 7 appointed were men.
- And when it comes to elders, we have already seen where elders are required to be able to teach, and yet 1 Tim. 2:12 says, “I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man...” (expound)
- Now, those who want to say that this should be culturally interpreted fail to go on and see that Paul did *not* follow this statement with a cultural argument.

This is *not* something that is limited to a specific time or place.

- In the following verses, Paul goes all the way back to the creation account in Genesis to show that this has been God’s design from the start.
- Now, you may *not* agree with Paul’s argument, but you cannot get around the fact that, to the Apostle Paul, this was *not* a limited cultural teaching. This was a universal principle for the church.
- Paul supports his instruction of headship and submission with weighty, theological reasons -- *not* cultural or sociological reasons -- in many passages of Scripture, (including 1 Cor. 11:2-16, 1 Tim. 2:13-15, Titus 2:1-5 and Eph. 5:22-24).
- In the list of qualifications for elders (in 1 Tim. 3), verse 2 tells us that an elder is to be the “husband of one wife.” It does *not* put that in reverse form. Why? Because this follows the pattern set forth all throughout Scripture, that men are to lead in the home and in the church.
- As many passages make clear, headship-submission in the marriage relationship is *not* culturally conditioned, and neither is male leadership in the church.

- The qualifications for elders listed in 1 Tim. 3 assume male leadership. There is no suggestion (at all) that there might be female elders.
- Now, I'm *not* going to just stand here and "hammer" on this, but the positions of evangelical feminism (or egalitarians) does *not* hold up to honest biblical exegesis.
- Now, if this is a problem with you, then talk to me later about it, but I'm going to move on to some other issues. Notice fourthly that biblical church leadership is:

IV. SUBSTANTIATED LEADERSHIP

- Eldership will never work if the elders do *not* understand, or if they fall short of, the standards that God has given for biblical elders. It will *not* work properly if there is *not* a high level of commitment to self-sacrificing love and humble servanthood.
- The biblical model for church leaders is diametrically opposed to self-promoting, self-seeking, power-hungry, prideful, people (like we often see in the *world* today).
- God calls on His shepherds to die to self -- and to model the same kind of servant attitude that He Himself exhibited when He washed His disciples' feet. We see this taught in many places (such as Mat. 11:29,

Mark 9:33-35, Mark 10:35-45, Mat. 23:1-12, Luke 22:24-27 and John 13:3-17).

- Now, we won't take the time to go to all those passages this morning, but from these passages (and others), we see that God hates pride among His leaders. He insists that His leaders lead by being an example of humble servanthood in the body of Christ, and that everything must be tempered and guided by love.
- Elders certainly *have* God-given authority in the church, but they are *not* to exercise that authority in a "heavy-handed" way. They are *directors*, not *dictators*. They are *managers*, not *monarchs*. They are stewards, *not* slave-drivers.
- And because much harm can come to the church when this is abused, the standards for proven character and the qualifications for service as an elder are very high. We will be looking at those qualifications next week. But there is one more aspect that we need to see today. Biblical church leadership is also:

V. SUPPORTED LEADERSHIP

- The NT indicates that elders are to be supported in a couple of very important ways. First of all, the church is to support their elders by following their leadership.

- As Heb. 13:17 says, “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.”
- The way in which a given church follows its spiritual leaders will determine whether those leaders will be able to lead with “joy” or whether they will constantly be filled with “grief.” (expound)
- So one of the important ways in which elders are to be supported is through submission to their God-given authority.
- But there is another way that elders are to be supported, and that is financially. Even in the early church, *some* elders were being paid by the church for their labor.
- 1 Tim. 5:17-18 says, “Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, ‘YOU SHALL NOT MUZZLE THE OX WHILE HE IS THRESHING,’ and ‘The laborer is worthy of his wages.’”
- The word “honor” (there) is a word that often referred to financial remuneration. It is simply a way of saying that *some* elders, who labor full time shepherding the

flock and teaching the Word of God, are to be well-supported financially.

- In 1 Cor. 9:3-9, Paul says something similar: “My defense to those who examine me is this: Do we not have a right to eat and drink? Do we not have a right to take along a believing wife, even as the rest of the apostles, and the brothers of the Lord, and Cephas? Or do only Barnabas and I not have a right to refrain from working? Who at any time serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard, and does not eat the fruit of it? Or who tends a flock and does not use the milk of the flock? I am not speaking these things according to human judgment, am I? Or does not the Law also say these things? For it is written in the Law of Moses, ‘YOU SHALL NOT MUZZLE THE OX WHILE HE IS THRESHING.’ God is not concerned about oxen, is He?”
- Now, what Paul is communicating (there) is that it is built into the very nature of the ministry, that those who minister should be supported by those ministered to.
- Soldiers are supported by the government. Farmers are supported from the fruit of their labor. Shepherds drink milk from the flock they shepherd. Even oxen get fed through the work that they do.
- So the teaching pastor is to be supported by the church for his ministry. This is clearly taught in Scripture.

But having said that, I need to hasten to say that financial support is optional to the individual elder.

- The Apostle Paul chose *not* to be supported by the churches, but instead chose to be a “tentmaker” and to be self-supported. Every elder has that same right.
- *Some* elders are going to be supported by the church financially (usually those who are devoted to shepherding full-time) and *some* are going to support their families through other means.
- In a church with a plurality of elders, it will be likely that some will be supported by the church and others will support themselves. Either way, it does *not* affect a man’s status as an elder.
- The terms “lay” and “clergy” are really non-biblical terms. In Scripture there is no such distinction made. Biblically, there is no difference between a “lay-elder” and a “pastor.” Subsidy should *not* be a dividing issue. An elder’s *subsidy* is *optional* while his spiritual *qualifications* are *not*.
- PRAYER