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ESTABLISHING UNITY AMONG THE PASTORS AND LAY
ELDERS AT CALVARY CHURCH IN CHARLOTTE,
NORTH CAROLINA

A Project
Presented to
the Faculty of
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Educational Ministry

by
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May 2023

APPROVAL SHEET

ESTABLISHING UNITY AMONG THE PASTORS AND LAY
ELDERS AT CALVARY CHURCH IN CHARLOTTE,
NORTH CAROLINA

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Defense Date: March 10, 2023

To my wife, Jennifer.

An excellent wife is the crown of her husband (Prov 12:4).

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PREFACE

Attempting to change the constitution in an eighty-year-old church is a weighty task. To be sure, this project has not been without considerable challenges. Yet, from the writing of the project to its implementation, the Lord has been with me. During the last three years, the Lord has put people in my path to encourage, challenge, and guide me. I am eternally grateful for these brothers and sisters in the Lord.

First, I want to thank Calvary Church. I appreciate all the prayers and encouragement from my church family. Specifically, I am grateful to Dr. John Munro, Calvary's Senior Pastor. Without Munro graciously allowing me to teach the curriculum, the project would not have been completed. Furthermore, Munro's commitment to the Lord and His Word has inspired me, as well as helped me to grow in grace and knowledge.

I am also thankful for the elders and deacons who participated in the Understanding Church Polity course. It is a privilege to serve alongside these men of God. I pray that this project helped them better understand Calvary, church polity, and the need to work together in unity. I look forward to seeing how the Lord will use these men through the ministries at Calvary.

The faculty at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary has been excellent. I could not be more pleased with the instruction during my time in the DEdMin program. I am especially indebted to Dr. John Morrison, my supervisor for this project. His wisdom and guidance were invaluable.

Lastly, without the encouragement and love of my wife, Jennifer, I would be undone. I have never known a stronger, kinder, and more faithful person. With Jennifer, the Lord has blessed me beyond words. I am blessed by the entire the Reece crew—our children, Gage and Jae, and my mother, Toni. I love you all.

Rob Reece

Charlotte, North Carolina

May 2023

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Unity is essential to the spiritual health of any church seeking to glorify Christ in a fallen world. Indeed, among the apostle Paul’s great passions was his desire to see the church mature in Christ and to “maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph 4:3).¹ Surely, this peace and unity should be sought among those who have been entrusted with shepherding the flock of God.

Throughout its eighty-year history, Calvary Church has been led by a board of lay elders known as the Session. Although this form of church polity is common, it is not without its issues. A significant challenge is that the elders generally fail to embrace pastoral responsibilities other than oversight, as they seem to see themselves as a board of governors rather than spiritual shepherds. Furthermore, other than the senior pastor (a non-voting moderator), Calvary’s governing board of elders is not comprised of any staff pastors. Thus, tensions and conflicts between the pastors and the Session have manifested over the years that have not only divided these two parties, but also have had the potential of damaging the church body. Scripture clearly identifies both pastors and elders as church overseers; therefore, a better understanding of these roles and how each can effectively coexist will aid in establishing unity and peace in the leadership.

Context

Calvary Church opened its doors in May 1939 with the mission of “being and

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are from the English Standard Version.

making authentic followers of Jesus Christ.”² For eighty years, Calvary has been dedicated to this mission through the expository preaching and teaching of the word of God. In fact, Calvary’s unwavering commitment to the authoritative Word of God has been one of its distinguishing features within the Charlotte religious community. Due to its high view of Scripture, it has been a beacon of light and fortress for those who have sought sound biblical preaching in an ever-changing cultural and spiritual landscape. The fact that over forty nations are represented in the body at Calvary is a testimony to its commitment to reach all nations with the pure gospel of Jesus Christ.

Currently, Calvary’s membership is over 3,100 people, with approximately 2,800 attending the worship service each Sunday. In addition to corporate worship, Calvary provides many opportunities for individuals and families to learn and grow in the Christian faith. These include ALGs (Adult Life Groups), Bible studies, children’s ministries, student ministries, senior adult ministries, AWANA, and CHAMP Sports Outreach. At any given time, a sundry of groups and ministries are meeting on campus for the purpose of helping individuals and families grow in grace and knowledge.

From operational as well as spiritual perspectives, Calvary is a complex organization, as there are many “moving parts” within the church. This necessitates an engaged, committed, and qualified leadership team comprised of pastors, elders, and deacons. All church functions and operations fall under the leadership of this group of men, specifically the pastors and elders. While deacons are considered part of the leadership team, these men serve the body in more practical ways, such as ushering and administering the Lord’s Supper.

Again, Calvary is an elder-led church. Thus, the Session has authority over the “government of the church, the conduct of its business, the management of all its property, real and personal, the distribution of all funds, the supervision of its general work, its

² Calvary Church, “History,” accessed September 8, 2020, <https://www.calvarychurch.com/history>.

organizations, its ministries, and branch works.”³ While the Session is also charged with the spiritual oversight of the church, it primarily governs through policy implementation.

The pastors, on the other hand, are more directly involved in the spiritual life of the church, as these men have been ordained for pastoral ministry. Not only are the pastors responsible for caring for the physical and spiritual wellbeing of the congregation, but they also directly oversee all of Calvary’s ministries and programs. In addition, pastors are assigned various ministerial responsibilities which may not be allocated to lay-leaders. Such duties include preaching, officiating at weddings and funerals, and conducting baptisms.

There are a number of significant benefits to having pastors as well as lay elders involved in the oversight of the church. For example, many pastors lack the managerial and organizational experience required in operating a large church, and yet elders can bring this knowledge to leadership. Often the Session is comprised of men, retired or still in the workforce, with successful backgrounds in business and finance. Therefore, these men are able to offer counsel and guidance in specific areas of church administration.

Furthermore, because the elders are chosen by an election process, these men generally provide a good cross-section of the diverse Calvary congregation. The Session consists of men from different nationalities, cultural and economic backgrounds, and even spiritual backgrounds. Thus, the elders truly are an earthly representation of people “from every tribe and language and people and nation” (Rev 5:9). While there is diversity among these men, generally they do well to speak with one voice on behalf of the congregation.

Although the Session and the pastors are both responsible for church administration and for the spiritual wellbeing of the congregation, significant differences exist between the two parties. Most notably, the elders usually do not have theological training; therefore, pastors are often viewed as the resident “theological and spiritual

³ Calvary Church Core Documents and Membership Information, 2012.

experts.” The Session, on the other hand, is considered to be more managerial and operational in nature. In essence, the Session views itself as a board who employs the pastors and makes executive level decisions. Due to these unofficial classifications, pastors generally view the Session as being entirely occupied with temporal concerns while being somewhat ill-equipped to handle spiritual ones. In contrast, some elders have been known to be quite displeased with pastors’ supposed lack of managerial and organizational skills.

Thus, tensions arise when one party oversteps perceived boundaries. One such instance occurred in 2019 when the Session decided to revisit Calvary’s divorce policy. Per the current policy, Calvary does not employ any pastor nor elect any elder who has been divorced. However, deacons who have been divorced are permitted to serve. In light of the interpretational disparity between the roles of elders and deacons, the Session spent much time deliberating the biblical qualifications for church leaders. A great deal of attention was specifically given to 1 Timothy 3:2. The Session concluded that Paul’s “husband of one wife” statement meant that no church overseer, whether pastor, elder, or deacon, is allowed to marry more than once. In other words, under no circumstances is an overseer allowed to remarry, even after the death of his spouse. Therefore, *any* remarriage would disqualify one from holding a church office.

The Session’s interpretation of Scripture not only sent shockwaves among the pastors, but also among others in leadership who had been remarried. The Session’s reading of Scripture and the proposed policy change would have resulted in resignations of current deacons, and would have permeated the church causing tremendous hurt and pain. Those who had previously held deacon or elder positions and who had been remarried, even after the death of a spouse, would now be regarded as unqualified.

Without exception, the staff pastors interpreted Paul’s statement in 1 Timothy 3:2 to mean “married to one woman.” Nevertheless, the majority of the Session disagreed with this interpretation and made a motion to pass the proposed policy change. Again, in

accordance with the church's Constitution, the authority to change the church policy rested solely on the Session, as the pastors are not permitted to vote.

By the Lord's grace, one of the elders, who originally supported the change, made the decision to abstain from voting and the proposed policy change did not pass. Still, this experience, and others like it, led to further distrust, animosity, and resentment among the leadership team. Sadly, the current mindset in leadership is occasionally "we versus they" or "us and them." Unquestionably, this mentality is not only detrimental to effective church leadership, but it is unhealthy for the greater church.

Even so, there have been instances which would have proved disastrous if the pastors *had* possessed voting rights. In 2014, one of Calvary's pastors organized a "coup" of sorts against the senior pastor. His motive was to garner opposition against the senior pastor, and to ascend to that position once it was vacated. In a short time, he gathered much support among those on staff, particularly the other pastors. While he was not at all successful in obtaining backing from the elders, should the pastors have had the ability to vote in the Session, this man would have likely been appointed as senior pastor. Arguably, his appointment would have splintered the church. However, in the Lord's providence, without a vote, the pastors were not a factor in this decision and the wisdom of the elders prevailed. Still, a number of pastors and elders resigned after this incident.

In view of that, there is the concern that if pastors had voting privileges, there would be an imbalance in power. In short, should the pastors have voting rights, the senior pastor would have tremendous influence over and above his current authority. As all pastors ultimately report to the senior pastor, his potential influence over the pastoral votes would be undeniable. In theory, it would be difficult for any subordinate to vote contrary to his supervisor. Thus, it would be of greater advantage to the body if the pastors were prohibited from casting a vote.

Clearly, Calvary's operational structure, including the voting arrangement as written in its Constitution many years ago, has resulted in challenges to unity in the church

leadership. If indeed this structure, including the voting policy, are the underlying conditions, then the symptoms have manifested themselves in a number of ways, in addition to those mentioned previously. First, because only elders are allowed to vote on church matters, the pastors have seeming little influence in certain areas concerning church government. Second, in part because pastors do not have a vote and are not on the Session, few attend the monthly Session meeting. It should be noted, however, that these meetings are open to pastors. To the Session, the pastors' absence can reflect a lack of concern for governing issues, or even a lack of skills necessary to contribute in a meaningful way. Third, only a handful of elders attend designated prayer times. These times of prayer are held before each Sunday worship service and on the Monday before the monthly Session meeting. As all pastors are present for these prayer meetings, there is some resentment among them that many elders are not in attendance. Therefore, some pastors attribute this to a lack of spiritual concern or maturity among the elders. In fact, some of the pastors' meetings can dissolve into unhealthy chatter and bickering about the Session.

Finally, the number of qualified elders has drastically dropped over the past several years. Originally, Calvary's Constitution called for eighteen elders and thirty-six deacons. However, in 2020, Calvary's leadership team is comprised of eight elders and twenty-two deacons. Either due to lack of interest or disqualification among the men in the congregation to hold these important positions, some among the pastoral staff have noticed a "relaxing" of biblical standards to allow the few who have been nominated into church leadership. In other words, with few men being put forth, more grace is given to allow them to pass through the vetting process. Thus, some men are appointed to these positions who seemingly possess a lack of maturity, competency, and a less than desired knowledge of Scripture.

Undoubtedly, the culture that exists in leadership has contributed to this problem. Indeed, the culture is so challenging that it is not uncommon for men who are

qualified and who have previously served as elders to not seek reelection. After a season of service, some of the church's former elders simply lack the wherewithal to continue in these roles, as some have been taxed beyond their physical, mental, and perhaps spiritual abilities. There are instances, in fact, of elders leaving the church after serving their terms, and some have resigned prior to the completion of their term. One can speculate, then, that there are reports infusing the church about the tensions in leadership that contribute to a lack of interest in these positions.

Without question, divisions in church leadership will not produce the fundamental unity that is mandated in Scripture. Such discord is particularly dangerous as it has the potential of dividing an entire congregation. Where enmity, strife, and anger exist, one can be certain that the works of the flesh and the devil are also present. If the leadership environment can be at times characterized by the works of the flesh, then one cannot expect to see a holy, Spirit-filled church.

While the Lord has blessed Calvary Church greatly over its eighty-year history, one can wonder how much more could be accomplished if true unity existed in church leadership. Moreover, the benefits of working to unify the leadership would surely spill over into the general congregation for the glory of the Lord. Hopefully, this project contributed toward significant unity.

Rationale

It is no secret that the church is made up of imperfect people. Indeed, church history reveals more than its share of battles, wars, and schisms. Even the apostle Paul was not immune from dealing with numerous internal conflicts in the first century church, including lawsuits, immorality, and false doctrine. Many of the issues that plagued the early church are still present today, even in leadership. Nevertheless, the apostle goes to great lengths to underscore the damage that such divisions cause to the church and to its testimony. Unequivocally, Paul warns that biting and devouring each other leads to annihilation (see Gal 5:15).

For that reason, church leadership should take to heart the Lord's High Priestly Prayer in which Jesus prayed that His people would be one (John 17:20-22). Truly, each person, including every pastor and elder, exists as part of the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:27). Each member, then, is of value and serves a purpose within the church. For pastors and elders, the responsibility of shepherding the church necessitates mutual respect, love, and appreciation for each person's partnership in the gospel. In fact, the characteristics of an overseer include being self-controlled, gentle, and not quarrelsome (1 Tim 3:1-7).

At Calvary, two foundational issues were addressed to help eradicate the wall between these two leadership groups. First, it was necessary to revisit Scripture, as well as church history, to provide a clear definition of the office of pastor and elder. This research provided details regarding the functions and responsibilities of each office, and determined if Calvary's interpretation of these offices and their functions could be supported. What is more, it needed to be determined if Calvary's own traditions and history have resulted in the redefining of these offices to the extent that they are neither biblical nor productive.

Although many in Calvary's leadership had a general knowledge of the qualifications for overseers as indicated in Scripture, the practical aspects of these positions were not as clear. Therefore, some of the first-term elders and deacons who enter into service wide-eyed, nervous, and puzzled as to their responsibilities, exit in the same condition in which they came. Certainly, most men enter the system not knowing how or to what extent the elders and pastors will oversee the congregation in unison. Arguably, some are surprised to find that the weight of authority between these two groups is not balanced.

As mentioned previously, there are many similarities and differences between the offices of pastor and elder at Calvary Church; however, the general lack of knowledge about these roles, from biblical and historical perspectives, has quite possibly contributed to decreased effectiveness among the leaders. Furthermore, this lack of understanding has

added to confusion, animosity, and deteriorating relationships. Thus, it is advantageous for Calvary's leadership team to have a clearer understanding of these offices and to comprehend how they should work together.

Although the current church administration inherited policies, procedures, and even traditions from those saints who came before, these cannot stand in the way of church unity. Granted, parameters may have been put in place with the best of intentions, but there are times when policies need to be revisited. If an item such as voting authority is the cause of division, then perhaps it can be concluded that tradition has made void the Word of God (Matt 15:1-9). Thus, this was a good time to reevaluate the current governmental structure, church offices, and some questionable policies.

In conclusion, equipping Calvary's leadership with a better knowledge of their offices was a primary step in helping to create unity among the brothers. Presenting the leadership team with a biblical and historical analysis regarding the nature and purpose of their offices helped to eliminate many misunderstandings about these roles. This project helped to not only educate the elders, but also aided them in developing appreciation for each other and their positions.

Purpose

The purpose of this project was to foster greater unity between the pastors and lay elders at Calvary Church through a biblical church polity.

Goals

The following are three goals for the completion of this project.

1. The first goal was to assess the current pastors and elders regarding their general understanding and key convictions concerning church leadership and polity.
2. The second goal was to develop a curriculum for training new and current leaders in a biblical church polity.
3. The third goal was to teach the curriculum to Calvary's current governing body to increase their knowledge of the church leadership roles and polity.

A specific research methodology has been created that measured the successful completion of these three goals. This methodology is described in the following section.

Research Methodology

Successful completion of this project depended upon the completion of the three goals. The first goal was to assess the current pastors and elders regarding their general understanding and key convictions concerning church leadership and polity. This goal was measured by administering the Church Overseer Assessment which was used to analyze leadership's current understanding of church polity. This goal would have been successfully met if the majority (75 percent) of the leadership team, consisting of ten pastors, eight elders, and twenty-eight deacons, completed the assessment and the inventory was evaluated giving a clearer indication of their knowledge of these roles.⁴

The second goal was to develop a curriculum for training new and current leaders in a biblical church polity. This training identified the functions, responsibilities, and expectations of these roles. The training was based on biblical and historical perspectives of church offices. This goal was measured by a panel of two pastors and one former deacon, who used a rubric to evaluate the biblical faithfulness, clarity, scope, and applicability of the curriculum.⁵ This goal was successfully met as a minimum of 90 percent of the evaluation criterion met or exceeded the sufficient level. If the 90 percent benchmark had not been initially met, then the material would have been revised until it met the standard.⁶

The third goal was to teach the curriculum to Calvary's current governing body to increase their knowledge of the church leadership roles and polity. This goal was

⁴ See appendix 1. All of the research instruments used in this project were performed in compliance with and approved by the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Research Ethics Committee prior to use.

⁵ See appendix 2.

⁶ See appendix 2.

measured by administering a pre- and post-survey to pastors and elders to measure the change in doctrinal knowledge.⁷ This goal was considered successfully met as the *t*-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive statistically significant difference in the pre- and post-survey scores.

Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations

The following definitions of key terms was used in the ministry project:

Session. The *Session* is the governing body at Calvary Church. It is comprised of eight elders and the senior pastor (a non-voting moderator). The Session's duties include leading the congregation in the pursuit of Calvary's mission, providing spiritual and financial oversight to the body and ministries, and managing all church property. The work of the Session is accomplished largely through its regular monthly meetings and its committees, which are chaired by elders. The Session utilizes its Finance Committee to oversee the financial affairs of the church.

Executive Committee. The *Executive Committee* is appointed annually by the Session and comprised of the senior pastor, the chairman of the Finance Committee, the clerk of Session, and up to three members at large. The Executive Committee is to assist the moderator in staffing and preparing issues for consideration by the Session, and in other matters delegated to it by the Session.

Elder. According to Calvary Church, *elders* are active, non-employee members of Calvary Church and are elected by the congregation to serve four-year terms. *Elders* are men who meet the spiritual qualifications (1 Tim 2:11-15; 3:1-7; Titus 1:6-9). They are characterized by spiritual maturity as seen in their personal character, love for people, ability to discern and communicate God's Word, leadership, and example to the church.

Deacon. *Deacons* are active, non-employee members of Calvary Church elected by the congregation to serve three-year terms. *Deacons* are men who meet the

⁷ See appendix 1.

spiritual requirements described in 1 Timothy 3:8-13. They must be characterized by spiritual maturity as seen in their personal character, love for people, and example to this church. *Deacons* are to provide assistance to the elders. They shall assist in the conduct of all matters related to their assigned committees and be in readiness to help with special services such as communion, baptisms, installations, care of the flock, etc.

Pastor. The role of *pastor* is not defined in Calvary Church's Constitution. Pastors are hired at the discretion of the senior pastor. *Pastors* should hold a master's degree from an accredited seminary, be ordained to pastoral ministry, and agree to Calvary's "Articles of Faith."

One limitation applied to this project. Due to potential conflicting schedules, this curriculum was taught during a winter Bible elective semester at Calvary.

One delimitation applied to this project. Due to the difficulty in assembling the leadership team outside of regular monthly meetings, the project was limited to sixteen weeks, which included pre-assessment, curriculum instruction, and post-assessment.

Conclusion

Unity in leadership is essential for any church to be effective and spiritually healthy. Thus, to help maintain unity of the Spirit and the bond of peace, lay-elders were equipped with a biblical understanding of their offices. The following chapters will indicate how unity was improved by educating leadership on these matters. Chapter 2 will present a biblical understanding of church polity and church office functions. Chapter 3 will present how these offices operate practically and in unity.

CHAPTER 2
BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR UNITY
AMONG PASTORS AND ELDERS

This chapter demonstrates that the roles of elder, overseer, and pastor are indeed one office, share the same functions, and are to be unified. An exegesis of 1 Peter 5:1-2 will indicate that elders, overseers, and pastors are three titles for the same office, and each of these terms are used interchangeably. A study of Acts 20:28 will reveal that that elders, overseers, and pastors share the same function of teaching and ruling the flock. Lastly, an analysis of Ephesians 4:11-13 will show that elders, overseers, and pastors are to be unified and labor together to care for Christ's church.

An Exegesis of 1 Peter 5:1-2

In 1 Peter 5:1-2, Peter addresses those charged with caring for the church regarding the nature of their pastoral call and relationships within the church.¹ An examination of this passage concludes that elders, overseers, and pastors refer to the same office. Peter urges, "So I exhort the elders [*presbyteros*] among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: shepherd [*poimaino*] the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight [*episkopos*, overseer]." Throughout history, these verses of Scripture have generated a significant amount of research and literature since they appear concerned with ecclesial

¹ Brian Lucas, "1 Peter," in *A Collaborative Commentary*, ed. Peter R. Rogers (Eugene, OR: Resource, 2017), 138.

structures and the development of the early church. Certainly, there has been much debate over the identity and roles of the presbyter or fellow-elder.²

Interpreters have explicitly focused on Peter's use of *prebyteros* or "elder" as derived from Jewish tradition to describe a specific ministry.³ The word "elders" (*presbyterous*) is often used in the New Testament to refer to leaders in the church. For example, the church or churches in Jerusalem had elders (Acts 11:30; 15:2, 4, 6, 22-23; 16:4; 21:18). Scripture also indicates that Paul and Barnabas appointed elders at the churches they visited during their first missionary journey. So, there is significant evidence in Scripture that elders were widespread in the early church.⁴ In fact, Alexander Strauch argues that Peter is writing from the viewpoint that each congregation had an official body of elders. What is more, 1 Peter 5 is unique because it is the only passage in the New Testament letters that singles out elders from the rest of the flock for direct exhortation.⁵

In this letter, Peter speaks to these men from experience, but also from apostolic authority and as a witness to Christ's sufferings.⁶ Nevertheless, in addressing these elders (*presbyterous*), Peter uses a word indicating that he held the same office (*sympresbyteros*, "fellow-presbyter"). Therefore, as an apostle and elder (*sympresbyteros*), Peter is able to authenticate the offices and instruct on proper order within the churches.⁷ However, by referring to himself as a "fellow elder," Peter is expressing a sense of mutuality in the call

² Earl Richard, *Reading 1 Peter, Jude, and 2 Peter*, Reading the New Testament Series (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2000), 200.

³ Richard, *Reading 1 Peter, Jude, and 2 Peter*, 201.

⁴ Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, The New American Commentary, vol. 37 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2003), 204.

⁵ Alexander Strauch, *Biblical Eldership: An Urgent Call to Restore Biblical Church Leadership* (Littleton, CO: Lewis and Roth, 1988), 143.

⁶ Roger M. Raymer, "1 Peter," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament*, ed. John R. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 1983), 855.

⁷ Richard, *Reading 1 Peter, Jude, and 2 Peter*, 201.

that they share.⁸ There is no sense that Peter is “first” among the leaders of the churches; rather, he considers himself a partner with the others in the sharing of the same office.⁹ Peter, then, is simply underscoring a common bond of leadership within the community.¹⁰

After establishing his credentials, Peter proceeds to explain the task of the elders, specifically that they are to function as shepherds of God’s flock.¹¹ Throughout Scripture, the relationship of leaders to their people were described metaphorically as a shepherd-like relationship. As shepherds cared for their flock, so were Israel’s leaders to care for the Israelites. These metaphors are, in fact, grounded in the description of God himself as a Shepherd to his people.¹² It is likely, according to Rogers, that Peter’s challenge to the elders to “shepherd the flock of God” is drawn from these shepherd motifs, particularly those found in Isaiah and Ezekiel.¹³

Furthermore, when Peter speaks of church leaders as shepherds, he is also assimilating their work into the work of Christ, the Chief Shepherd (1 Pet. 5:4).¹⁴ Christ himself is the divine and human model for church leaders, as he is the one who gathers the straying sheep and is the shepherd (*poimena*) and guardian (*episkopon*) of their souls. The messianic church leadership must bear the image of Christ the shepherd and “exercise oversight” (*episkopountes*) as true shepherds.¹⁵ This pastoral imagery, then, underscores

⁸ Lucas, “1 Peter,” 139.

⁹ Wayne A. Grudem, *1 Peter*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, vol. 17 (Nottingham, England: Inter-Varsity, 2009), 184.

¹⁰ Richard, *Reading 1 Peter, Jude, and 2 Peter*, 204.

¹¹ Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 205-6.

¹² Scot McKnight, *1 Peter*, The NIV Application Commentary Series (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 165.

¹³ Lucas, “1 Peter,” 141.

¹⁴ Grudem, *1 Peter*, 187.

¹⁵ Grudem, *1 Peter*, 187-88.

the theological focus that Christ is the Chief Shepherd, others act as under-shepherds, and the flock belongs to God.¹⁶ In fact, the phrase “shepherd the flock of God that is among you” could be translated, “shepherd the sheep of God.”¹⁷ Wayne Grudem concludes that it is “church leaders that Peter addresses, and he calls them in particular, in all times and places, and whether in formal offices or not, to a way of ‘shepherding’ the ‘flock’ (5:2) that reflects the character and manner of leadership of the ‘chief shepherd.’”¹⁸

Accordingly, as shepherds of the Lord’s sheep, Peter instructs them in the way of messianic leadership. The leaders of God’s people must display in their leadership the kind of servant lordship that Christ himself displayed so that the flock might in fact see in them a “type” after which they themselves might pattern their lives. Only in this way is the church leader truly a “vicar of Christ” and a “vicarious representative of the chief shepherd.”¹⁹ Thus, just as the Good Shepherd commissions Peter in his role as under-shepherd, Peter likewise charges his fellow elders as under-shepherds to oversee the Christian believers in their area.²⁰ They are “to tend” (*poimanein*, ‘shepherd’) the flock of God that is in their charge.²¹ In exhorting his fellow shepherds, Peter must have had in mind the role of church leaders in tending to the “house church as a group assigned to them by God.”²² To be sure, Peter commits the men to governing this church, and tells

¹⁶ Richard, *Reading 1 Peter, Jude, and 2 Peter*, 205.

¹⁷ Douglas Karel Harink, *1 & 2 Peter*, Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2009), 183.

¹⁸ Grudem, *1 Peter*, 185.

¹⁹ Grudem, *1 Peter*, 189.

²⁰ Lucas, “1 Peter,” 141.

²¹ Grudem, *1 Peter*, 187.

²² McKnight, *1 Peter*, 165.

them that not he, but the Holy Spirit, had made them overseers—bishops of the flock.²³

The verb Peter uses is the same one Jesus used when Jesus instructed him “tend [*poimaino*] my sheep” (John 21:16).²⁴ The word *poimante*, meaning “to tend,” also includes the tasks of feeding, caring, leading, guiding, and protecting. All of these are duties and responsibilities that a shepherd has for his flock.²⁵ Earl Richard confirms, “In the present case the term (*poimante*) seemingly has a generic sense and envisions the overall activity of those in positions of leadership as analogous to the care and activity of shepherds.”²⁶ Only in 1 Peter 5 and Acts 20:28 is the imperative form of this verb used in this manner. In both cases, the association between shepherding and careful oversight is evident.²⁷ It can be concluded, then, that the elders (v. 1) are ministers who exercise leadership over Christian communities, with their duties being described in pastoral terms as “tending to the flock of God.”²⁸

In addition to Peter’s use of pastoral images (shepherding, tending the flock), his use of the term “overseer” (*episkopeo*) is an indication of a developed ecclesial structure.²⁹ Related to the noun “overseer” (*episkopos*) is the participle “serving as overseers” (*episkopountes*).³⁰ It is evident that the participle “serving as overseers” (*episkopountes*) denotes another task of the elders; namely, overseeing the church and

²³ Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary in One Volume* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1960), 1719.

²⁴ Grudem, *1 Peter*, 195.

²⁵ Raymer, “1 Peter,” 855.

²⁶ Richard, *Reading 1 Peter, Jude, and 2 Peter*, 205.

²⁷ Timothy S. Laniak, *Shepherds after My Own Heart: Pastoral Traditions and Leadership in the Bible*, *New Studies in Biblical Theology* 20 (Leicester, England: Apollos, 2006), 232.

²⁸ Richard, *Reading 1 Peter, Jude, and 2 Peter*, 201.

²⁹ Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 205-6.

³⁰ Raymer, “1 Peter,” 855.

superintending it. This serves as an additional hint that the offices of elder and overseer are the same.³¹ Grudem concludes, “The combination of the term ‘elder’ with the verbs related to ‘pastor’ and ‘bishop’ (overseer) in such close connection in verses 1 to 2 is good evidence that the terms ‘pastor,’ and ‘bishop, overseer’ were interchangeable during the New Testament period.”³² Since “overseer” is interchangeable with “elder,” both terms imply physical and spiritual guardianship responsibilities.³³

The observations regarding 1 Peter 5 are consistent with the use of these terms across the New Testament. For example, additional evidence is found in Acts 20:28 in which Paul addresses the elders (*presbyteroi*) at the Ephesian church, yet in verse 28 they are identified as “overseers” (*episkopoi*). Again, this demonstrates that two different terms are used for the same office. The same conclusion can be drawn from 1 Timothy. The singular “overseer” in 1 Timothy 3:2 is another reference to the elders mentioned in 5:17. Hence, by the time the Pastoral Epistles were written, it appears that the offices of elders (overseers) and deacons were established.³⁴ It is also likely that the “overseers and deacons” mentioned in Philippians 1:1 could be described as elders and deacons.³⁵

In 1 Peter 5, it is clear that Peter is addressing elders who have the function of pastoral oversight and the responsibility of leading the community.³⁶ It would be nonsensical, then, if the elders and “pastors” or “overseers” are not the same people since

³¹ Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 205-6.

³² Grudem, *1 Peter*, 195.

³³ Raymer, “1 Peter,” 855.

³⁴ Mark Dever and Jonathan Leeman, *Baptist Foundations: Church Government for an Anti-Institutional Age* (Nashville: B & H, 2015), 245.

³⁵ Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 205-6.

³⁶ Greg W. Forbes, Andreas J. Kostenberger, and Robert W. Yarbrough, *1 Peter*, Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament (Nashville: B & H, 2014), 166.

they perform the same duties.³⁷ Furthermore, there is significant textual evidence (Acts 20:17, 28; Titus 1:5, 7) that the terms pastor, elder, and bishop refer to the same office.³⁸ To be sure, 1 Peter 5:1-2 brings all three of these terms together to describe one office in the church.³⁹

An Exegesis of Acts 20:28

Paul’s exhortation to the elders in Ephesus reveals that elders, overseers, and pastors share the same function of teaching and ruling the flock. Paul warns, “Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood (Acts 20:28). Paul’s solemn exhortation to the elders in this passage is in anticipation of what he sees as soon taking place in the church—specifically persecution from outside and apostasy from within.⁴⁰ Darrell Bock argues that this text “makes a major statement about the responsibility of shepherding that is to be the task of God’s leaders.”⁴¹ Indeed, this verse is the “practical and theological center” of Paul’s speech as he instructs the elders to fulfill their tasks conscientiously and effectively, while noting the significance of Christ’s death and the work of the Holy Spirit.⁴²

A critical component in any organization is its leadership. Certainly, the Lord is concerned about the leadership within his church, as a central task of the apostles was

³⁷ Dever and Leeman, *Baptist Foundations*, 247.

³⁸ Dever and Leeman, *Baptist Foundations*, 246.

³⁹ John MacArthur, *Shepherdology: A Master Plan for Church Leadership* (Panorama City, CA: Master’s Fellowship, 1989), 155.

⁴⁰ Richard N. Longenecker, *Acts*, in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 10, *Luke-Acts*, ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 1029.

⁴¹ Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 634.

⁴² C. K. Barrett, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Shorter Commentary* (London: T & T Clark, 2002), 316.

to appoint elders in the early congregations. Paul, for example, directed Titus to “appoint elders in every town” (Titus 1:5), as he had done on his first missionary journey (Acts 14:23).⁴³ Interestingly, the word Paul uses for elders in Acts 20:28 is not the word “elder” (*presbyteros*), but “overseer” (*episkopos*). *Episkopos*, from which we get the word “bishop,” is composed of two parts: *skopio* (meaning “to look”) and *epi* (meaning “over”). In the book of Acts, the word *episkopos* appears only once, in Acts 20:28. Due to the relatively few Gentiles in the church, the term was not commonly used. However, as more Gentiles were saved, the church began to “lose more of its Jewish flavor” and the Greek culture’s word *episkopos* was more frequently used to describe elders.⁴⁴ While the term “elders” has Jewish antecedents and highlights the dignity of the office, “overseers” is namely Greek in its derivation and emphasizes the responsibility of the office “to look after” others.⁴⁵ Hence, the term may not be used to denote an office at all but rather the function of overseeing the flock.⁴⁶ James Montgomery Boice agrees that Paul is not using the word to describe a certain order of clergy or a person who is singularly responsible for a segment of the church; rather, he is speaking to all the elders as overseers of a local church.⁴⁷

It is also clear in verse 28 that the same men who serve as elders (v. 17) and as bishops (*episkopoi*, v. 28) are to be understood as being shepherds. Paul describes the church as a flock, which the elders must shepherd.⁴⁸ Paul uses the metaphor of a flock and

⁴³ John MacArthur, *Acts 13-28, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 1996), 220.

⁴⁴ MacArthur, *Shepherdology*, 156.

⁴⁵ Stanley D. Toussaint, “Acts,” in Walvoord and Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, 414.

⁴⁶ John B. Polhill, *Acts*, New American Commentary, vol. 26 (Nashville: B & H, 1992), 397.

⁴⁷ James Montgomery Boice, *Acts: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 349.

⁴⁸ Barrett, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 316.

a shepherd to reiterate the relationship between God and his people, and as mentioned in the exegesis of 1 Peter 5:1-2, the metaphor of shepherding the flock is a familiar Old Testament image of God's people under their rulers (Ps 100:3; Isa 40:11; Jer 13:17; Ezek 34).⁴⁹ The metaphor is likewise used of rulers and leaders in the non-biblical world.⁵⁰ Although this imagery is not common in Paul's writings, when he uses it, he is instructing the church leaders to imitate Christ.⁵¹ Christ spoke about himself as the Shepherd, saying, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep" (John 10:11). Paul stresses the fact that the Holy Spirit sovereignly raises up under-shepherds, or overseers, who are responsible for watching over the flock of God.⁵²

As Paul commits the governing of the church to these elders, reminding them it is the Holy Spirit himself who designated these men as overseers, he warns that these ministers must have a constant regard to the souls of those under their charge.⁵³ Paul cautions the elders that the sheep are always going to be in danger. The value of the flock, over which the elders were to be shepherds (*poimainein*), is emphasized by Paul's calling it the church of God and by referring to its purchase by His own blood.⁵⁴ Again, the apostle's charge to the elders "to care for the church" equates to these men serving as shepherds, emulating the Good Shepherd.⁵⁵

⁴⁹ I. Howard Marshall, "Acts," in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 596.

⁵⁰ Barrett, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 316.

⁵¹ Boice, *Acts*, 349.

⁵² MacArthur, *Acts 13-28*, 224.

⁵³ Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary in One Volume*, 1719.

⁵⁴ Toussaint, "Acts," 414.

⁵⁵ I. Howard Marshall, *Acts*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, vol. 5, North American ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2008), 262.

Shepherding refers to all the care that must be given in relation to the flock.⁵⁶ In fact, the word “shepherd” is from *poimaino*, a term that encompasses the entire task of a shepherd.⁵⁷ Hence, the term conveys the idea of complete spiritual oversight and pastoral care.⁵⁸ Bock writes, “The present-tense infinitive (*poimainein*) means to shepherd continually and in this context also indicates the purpose of being an overseer. The elder is to protect, rule, and foster care (Acts 11:22-26; 13:2-3; Eph. 4:11-12).”⁵⁹ In the New Testament, it is also apparent that a bishop (overseer) is to teach, feed, protect, and generally nurture the flock (Acts 20:28).⁶⁰

Therefore, Paul counsels the elders to follow his own example and instructs them to point out the right path for the sheep to pursue.⁶¹ John MacArthur concludes, “Since sheep are followers, the shepherds’ task also involves leading the flock. They must set the direction for the sheep to follow.”⁶² Overseers, MacArthur suggests, are to be “followed without conflict.”⁶³ Shepherding, Alexander Strauch explains, is the “vivid, figurative expression for governing,” and giving general overall supervision and oversight of the entire company of saints.⁶⁴ The overseer, Strauch adds, is the “superintendent, guardian, manager, inspector, and protector.”⁶⁵

⁵⁶ Marshall, *Acts*, 262.

⁵⁷ MacArthur, *Acts 13-28*, 224.

⁵⁸ Marshall, *Acts*, 262.

⁵⁹ Bock, *Acts*, 630.

⁶⁰ MacArthur, *Shepherdology*, 156.

⁶¹ F. F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1988), 394.

⁶² MacArthur, *Acts 13-28*, 225.

⁶³ MacArthur, *Acts 13-28*, 225.

⁶⁴ Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 147-48.

⁶⁵ Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 90.

Overseers are not only entrusted with guiding the community of believers, but they are also guardians of the apostolic tradition.⁶⁶ So, in addition to ruling or governing the flock of God, the overseers are to teach. According to John R. W. Stott, among all the tasks involved with shepherding, feeding the flock is the first priority.⁶⁷ When Jesus instructed Peter three times to care for his sheep (John 21:15-17), Jesus' first and third instructions use the word *bosko*, which means "to feed."⁶⁸ Matthew Henry concludes, "They must feed the church of God, must lead the sheep of Christ into the green pastures, must lay meat before them, must feed them with wholesome doctrine, and must see that nothing is wanting that is necessary in order to their being nourished up to eternal life."⁶⁹

Furthermore, the shepherds of Christ's flock are not only called to feed the sheep by teaching the truth, but they are to protect them from wolves by warning of error.⁷⁰ Drawing again on the shepherd imagery, Paul compares false teachers to fierce wolves who devour and destroy (Matt 7:15; Luke 10:3; 2 Cor 10–13). The imagery Paul uses is similar to John 10, in which the true shepherd protects the flock against the thieves, whose goal is to draw people away from Christ's church.⁷¹ Therefore, elders must not only hold firm the trustworthy Word and give instruction in sound doctrine, but also rebuke those who contradict it (Titus 1:9). Again, the idea of overseer was associated with being a guardian and protector (Phil 1:1; 1 Tim 3:2; Titus 1:7).⁷²

⁶⁶ Bock, *Acts*, 631.

⁶⁷ John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Acts*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1990), 326.

⁶⁸ MacArthur, *Acts 13-28*, 224.

⁶⁹ Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary in One Volume*, 1719.

⁷⁰ Stott, *The Message of Acts*, 329.

⁷¹ Bock, *Acts*, 630.

⁷² Bock, *Acts*, 630.

Only in two places in Scripture are elders addressed directly (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet 5:2), and in each of these accounts they are charged to shepherd the flock of God.⁷³ The importance of the elders in the early church is seen in this responsibility, specifically ruling and teaching the flock.⁷⁴ Biblically, then, there is no difference in the roles of elder and bishop.⁷⁵ Strauch concludes, “Since the elders’/overseers’ duty is to shepherd God’s church, we see all three terms (elders, overseers, shepherds) used in the same context to refer to the same group of church leaders.”⁷⁶ Certainly, the shepherd imagery is a reminder of the flock’s need for leadership and protection, and God has entrusted elders with this important responsibility.

An Exegesis of Ephesians 4:11-13

An exegesis of Ephesians 4:11-13 reveals that elders, overseers, and pastors are to be unified and labor together to care for Christ’s church. Paul proclaims, “And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Eph 4:11-13). In these verses, it is apparent that Paul’s central concern is with the unity and maturity of the church as one body—the body of Christ. In fact, Andrew Lincoln suggests that “no other section of the letter is so directly and intensively devoted to the church’s life and purpose.”⁷⁷

⁷³ Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 147-48.

⁷⁴ Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 98-99.

⁷⁵ MacArthur, *Shepherdology*, 156.

⁷⁶ Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 88.

⁷⁷ Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 42 (Dallas: Word, 1990), 267.

While the first half of Ephesians stresses unity in the church, Ephesians 4:7-16 emphasizes Christ's act of giving gifts to the church to make this unity a reality.⁷⁸ Specifically, verses 7-16 remind the church that they are to follow the leadership Christ has given and grow into the full stature of Christ.⁷⁹ The apostle's statement is clear that the gifts given by Christ to his church are not merely spiritual gifts, but are in fact people.⁸⁰ In short, Christ gives specific people to people.⁸¹ While all saints should be involved in ministry and should serve others spiritually, Paul's list identifies a specific set of gifted people with specific goals. These goals are to equip the church for ministry, give them doctrinal and practical stability, and lead them to mutual edification.⁸² Henry argues that these gifted people are intended for the "perfecting of the saints; to bring into an orderly spiritual state those who had been dislocated and disjointed by sin, and then to advance them therein, that so each might contribute to the good of the whole."⁸³

Although church offices and functions are not limited to apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds, and teachers, Paul underscores these since he understood their essential place in promoting the unity of the church.⁸⁴ However, during the time Paul is writing to the Ephesian church, the age of the apostles and prophets is coming to a close, and a different picture of ecclesiastical preaching and ruling in the congregation is taking

⁷⁸ Thomas R. Neufeld, *Ephesians*, Believers Church Bible Commentary (Waterloo, Ontario: Herald, 2002), 169.

⁷⁹ John B. Polhill, *Paul and His Letters* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1999), 368.

⁸⁰ Benjamin L. Merkle, *Ephesians*, Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament, ed. Andreas J. Köstenberger and Robert W. Yarbrough (Nashville: B & H, 2016), 127.

⁸¹ Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 249.

⁸² Harold W. Hoehner, "Ephesians," in Walvoord and Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, 635.

⁸³ Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary in One Volume*, 1853.

⁸⁴ William W. Klein, *Ephesians*, in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 12, *Ephesians-Philemon*, ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 115.

shape. During this time of transition, Paul understands that pastors and teachers needed to be strengthened in their roles. To be sure, the process of encouraging and strengthening is further advanced in the Pastoral Epistles.⁸⁵

Paul mentions “pastors” (*poimen*), better translated as “shepherds,” as it is their role to guard and lead the flock. They also carry out the function of overseer (*episkopos*) because it is their responsibility to rule the body (Rom 12:8; Phil 1:1; 1 Thess 5:12; 1 Tim 3:1; Heb 13:17). As previously noted in the exegesis of 1 Peter 5, the role of pastor is interchangeable with elder (*presbyteros*).⁸⁶ F. F. Bruce suggests, “‘Pastors’ may readily be identified with the ministers who are elsewhere called ‘elders’ (*presbyteroi*) or ‘bishops’ (*episkopoi*, rendered ‘guardians’ in [our preceding citation of] Acts 20:28: ‘shepherd the flock of God that is in your charge’ is the injunction given to ‘elders’ by a ‘fellow elder’ in 1 Pet. 5:2).”⁸⁷ As 1 Peter 5 makes it clear, this ministry imitates the “chief shepherd,” Jesus Christ. Yet, only in Ephesians 4 are the pastors listed as designated gifts to the church.⁸⁸

As the age of the apostles came to a close and as heretical teachings arose, there was an increased need for authoritative teaching; thus, the office of teaching-elder came into being.⁸⁹ In Ephesians 4:11, Paul lists pastors and teachers together as they are governed by one article (“the” occurs before “pastors” but not before “teachers”), and because the word “and” (*kai*) differs from the other “and’s” (*de*) in this passage. While this could refer to two kinds of gifted people, it is likely that Paul is referring to two characteristics of the same person who is pastoring and instructing believers. To be sure,

⁸⁵ Rudolf Schnackenburg, *Ephesians: A Commentary* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2001), 182.

⁸⁶ Klein, *Ephesians*, 115.

⁸⁷ Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, 158.

⁸⁸ Neufeld, *Ephesians*, 180.

⁸⁹ Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 1088.

Scripture indicates that overseers or elders are to be able to teach (1 Tim 3:2; Titus 1:9).⁹⁰ John Pohill agrees that the structure of the Greek suggests that pastors (“shepherds”) and teachers designate a single group of leaders who are responsible for teaching.⁹¹ MacArthur concludes, “Although teaching can be identified as its own ministry (1 Cor. 12:28), it is best to regard ‘shepherds and teachers’ in Ephesians 4:11 as describing two facets of a single office of pastoral leadership.”⁹² Due to the fact that teaching is an essential part of the pastoral ministry, it is appropriate, then, that “pastors and teachers” should be joined to denote one order of ministry.⁹³

Other commentators argue that Paul may have intended to imply that “pastors” and “teachers” were not a single group, but rather overlapped in their responsibilities.⁹⁴ Not all teachers are pastors, for example. Frank Thielman suggests, “Insofar as we can distinguish ‘teachers’ from ‘shepherds,’ we should probably think of people who are not necessarily skilled in administration, but whom Christ has equipped to instruct others in what 1 Tim. 6:1 calls ‘the teaching,’ the Christian message or doctrine by which the church is known.”⁹⁵ Certainly teachers, with whom pastors are closely associated, already played a special role in Paul’s time, as their function was to preserve, transmit, expound, interpret, and apply the apostolic teachings.⁹⁶ Furthermore, their importance as guardians of the

⁹⁰ Hoehner, “Ephesians,” 635.

⁹¹ Pohill, *Paul and His Letters*, 369.

⁹² John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue, eds., *Biblical Doctrine: A Systematic Summary of Bible Truth* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 757.

⁹³ Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, 158.

⁹⁴ Frank Thielman, *Ephesians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010), 275.

⁹⁵ Thielman, *Ephesians*, 276.

⁹⁶ Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 251.

apostolic teachings increased exponentially in the postapostolic period.⁹⁷ In summary, this view maintains that pastors, who are seen as equivalent to bishops or elders, are to exercise leadership through nurture and guidance, and teachers are to contribute to the church's growth in wisdom and knowledge as they expound the apostolic traditions and the Scriptures.⁹⁸ Although Paul stops short of saying that all teachers are to be pastors, he probably expressed himself in this way because he wanted to convey that all pastors are to be gifted to teach⁹⁹

Regardless of any differences in interpreting these two roles, Paul is taking a general view of the ministers given by Christ and describes the activity that these ministers were intended to perform.¹⁰⁰ The kinds of people Paul lists are essentially ministers of the Word.¹⁰¹ The goal and purpose of these ministers is to equip the saints for the work of ministry for the edification of the church.¹⁰² In other words, these gifted leaders are not merely to do the work of ministry, but to invest their time in developing and preparing fellow believers to engage in ministry to the body. The model Paul presents, then, is one of mutual service in the community.¹⁰³

Accordingly, elders, overseers, and pastors are to be united in a common goal. Paul defines the common goal of these ministers in several ways. The first goal is unity in faith and knowledge, which is identified as shared faith and knowledge of the Son of

⁹⁷ Neufeld, *Ephesians*, 181.

⁹⁸ Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 266.

⁹⁹ Clinton E. Arnold, *Ephesians*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament Series (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 249.

¹⁰⁰ Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 254.

¹⁰¹ Neufeld, *Ephesians*, 179.

¹⁰² Thielman, *Ephesians*, 279.

¹⁰³ Arnold, *Ephesians*, 250.

God.¹⁰⁴ Paul clearly teaches that there is one unified and proper understanding of Christ and the central components of the faith.¹⁰⁵ To be sure, Christians are to be united in the biblical truths that define the Christian faith.¹⁰⁶ The “teaching arm” of the church (v. 11), then, is charged with training the saints in core Christian doctrines.¹⁰⁷ These gifted leaders are to help impart correct knowledge, which is essential to the unity and maturity of the church.¹⁰⁸ The unity of the church is constituted and preserved by holding to and rehearsing shared convictions.¹⁰⁹

While many professing Christians understand unity in the church as an important theological concept, they see nothing abnormal in the visible disunity that contradicts their own theology.¹¹⁰ Furthermore, when the church is not sure of its own doctrine, it may be tempted to adopt views derived from secular sources.¹¹¹ Yet, in his grace the Lord has supplied everything necessary for the church to become what it is meant to be.¹¹² The apostle Paul makes this evident in his letter to the Ephesians, as he appeals to his readers to play their role in seeing the church attain to the unity and maturity which belong to it.¹¹³

¹⁰⁴ Neufeld, *Ephesians*, 185.

¹⁰⁵ Arnold, *Ephesians*, 253.

¹⁰⁶ Grant Osborne, *Ephesians Verse by Verse, Osborne New Testament Commentaries* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2017), 48-49.

¹⁰⁷ Osborne, *Ephesians Verse by Verse*, 48-49.

¹⁰⁸ Arnold, *Ephesians*, 253.

¹⁰⁹ Neufeld, *Ephesians*, 185.

¹¹⁰ John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Ephesians, The Bible Speaks Today* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1979), 173.

¹¹¹ Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 1040.

¹¹² Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians, Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 42 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1990), 269.

¹¹³ Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 262.

The second goal is “mature manhood,” or literally, “a mature man.”¹¹⁴ While Paul’s aim is to “present every person mature in Christ,” in Ephesians 4:11-16 the church is seen as a corporate entity, not as disparate individuals.¹¹⁵ Paul’s emphasis is on the necessity for corporate growth rather than on interdependence itself.¹¹⁶ Hence, the use of “man” is similar to that of the “new humanity” of 2:15, referring to the body of believers that constitutes the church.¹¹⁷ The saints must be aware that they must draw on these gifted people to live up to their identity as Christ’s body and grow more fully into that identity.¹¹⁸ The goal of these gifted people is to lead the church to Christ-like maturity, which is characterized by unity in doctrine, a relationship with Christ himself, and a stable adherence to the truth.¹¹⁹ The idea is that true Christian maturity is in contrast to the spiritual infants of verse 14.¹²⁰

The third goal builds upon mature manhood by emphasizing growth to the “measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.” The final goal, therefore, is full Christlikeness.¹²¹ By emphasizing that the body of Christ must grow up to maturity, Paul intends for his readers to think of the church as eventually reaching Christ’s full height.¹²² This growth is necessary in order to resist the forces that threaten the health

¹¹⁴ Osborne, *Ephesians Verse by Verse*, 48-49.

¹¹⁵ Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 256.

¹¹⁶ Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 262.

¹¹⁷ Osborne, *Ephesians Verse by Verse*, 48-49.

¹¹⁸ Neufeld, *Ephesians*, 184.

¹¹⁹ Peter S. Williamson and Mary Healy, *Ephesians*, Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), 195.

¹²⁰ Osborne, *Ephesians Verse by Verse*, 48-49.

¹²¹ Osborne, *Ephesians Verse by Verse*, 48-49.

¹²² Frank Thielman, *Ephesians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010), 282.

and effectiveness of the church. Again, full maturity is marked by “the unity of faith and knowledge of the Son of God,” and is attained through accepting the various ministries he lists.¹²³

While Paul’s fivefold list of gifted people is not a complete enumeration of all the leadership roles within the church, all five were foundational to the establishment of local churches and were responsible for the proclamation and application of the Word to people’s lives.¹²⁴ Indeed, all these gifted persons are to work together to build up the body of Christ, with union in Christ in all his fullness as the final objective of this work.¹²⁵ Certainly, Paul’s readers should note his interplay between unity of the body as well as the empowerment and giftedness of individuals.¹²⁶ When these people work together, the church advances toward its goal of maturity in Christ.¹²⁷

Unlike the church in Corinth that was divided by social cliques, factions, and religious leaders, the church is to be a unified body.¹²⁸ Paul’s letter to the Ephesians provides the distinct concept of unity in diversity in the church as the body of Christ. This picture of diversity includes the contributions of each member, while highlighting unique roles—the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. From Paul’s perspective, these gifted believers are Christ’s means of equipping the church to attain unity and

¹²³ Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, 159.

¹²⁴ Arnold, *Ephesians*, 245.

¹²⁵ Thielman, *Ephesians*, 280.

¹²⁶ Neufeld, *Ephesians*, 170.

¹²⁷ Pohill, *Paul and His Letters*, 369.

¹²⁸ Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 1048.

maturity.¹²⁹ Unity, stability, and maturity in the church are essential if the church is going to provide the responsible witness to the surrounding society.¹³⁰

Conclusion

While Christ has gifted certain individuals to exercise authority on his behalf, he is still the Head of church. Christ is the church's supreme authority. Yet, the absolute rule of Christ as the Head of the church is administered through leaders whom he has given to guide his people (1 Thess 5:12-13; Heb 13:7, 17).¹³¹ Indeed, Christ continues to exercise his priestly, prophetic, and royal activity by the means of the offices he has instituted. Through these offices, he instructs, leads, and cares for his flock. With all these offices in conjunction, Christ "proves himself to be our chief prophet, our eternal king, and our merciful high priest."¹³²

In a sense, then, the church is unimaginable without a government. Bavinck suggests, "Just as a temple calls for an architect, a field a sower, a vineyard a keeper, a net a fisherman, a flock a shepherd, a body a head, a family a father, a kingdom a king, so also the church is unthinkable without an authority that sustains, guides, cares for, and protects it."¹³³ Since these men operate under the authority of the Chief Shepherd, they represent the highest level of spiritual authority in the church.¹³⁴ Consequently, church offices are not to be taken lightly, as "they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account" (Heb 13:17). When the Chief Shepherd appears to

¹²⁹ Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 268.

¹³⁰ Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 269.

¹³¹ MacArthur and Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine*, 755.

¹³² Herman Bavinck, *Holy Spirit, Church, and New Creation*, vol. 4 of *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 388.

¹³³ Bavinck, *Holy Spirit, Church, and New Creation*, 329.

¹³⁴ MacArthur and Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine*, 768.

judge all ministers and under-shepherds, those that have done their duty will receive a crown of glory that fades not away.¹³⁵

In conclusion, 1 Peter 5:1-2 reveals that all three New Testament terms (“pastor,” “bishop,” and “elder”) refer to the same office of church leadership. Again, all three terms are found in this passage of Scripture.¹³⁶ Second, Acts 20:28 indicates that “elders” were appointed by the Holy Spirit to give oversight over the congregation, and considering the work assigned to them, these men were also called “overseers.” It is evident, therefore, that the elders were charged with the oversight, government, and guidance of the church.¹³⁷ Third, Ephesians 4:11-13 shows that Christ has gifted his church with pastor-teachers (elders, overseers) to work together to equip, edify, and unify the saints. Throughout the ages, pastor-teachers have continued to build on the foundation of the apostles and prophets by proclaiming the gospel of grace and preaching Word of God.¹³⁸

Although church leaders will differ according to giftedness, church ministry is a team effort. All offices are vital, and all contribute to the overall strength of the church.¹³⁹ Churches, therefore, depend on faithful men to oversee and lead them to be strong, healthy, productive, and fruitful.¹⁴⁰ As such, church leaders will be all the more diligent in their ministry if they remember that the flock is the church of God, which he purchased with his own blood.¹⁴¹ Stott concludes, “They are the flock of God the Father, purchased by the

¹³⁵ Henry, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary in One Volume*, 1948.

¹³⁶ MacArthur and Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine*, 759.

¹³⁷ Bavinck, *Holy Spirit, Church, and New Creation*, 342.

¹³⁸ MacArthur and Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine*, 755.

¹³⁹ MacArthur and Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine*, 768.

¹⁴⁰ MacArthur and Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine*, 759.

¹⁴¹ Stott, *The Message of Acts*, 326.

precious blood of God the Son, and supervised by overseers appointed by God the Holy Spirit. If the three persons of the Trinity are thus committed to the welfare of the people, should we not be also?"¹⁴²

¹⁴² Stott, *The Message of Acts*, 329.

CHAPTER 3

THEORETICAL, PRACTICAL, AND HISTORICAL ISSUES RELATED TO THE PROJECT

The exegesis in chapter 2 revealed that elders, overseers, and pastors are one office, share the same functions, and are to be unified. To further understand the office of elder, this chapter first surveys the three general forms of church polity: episcopalianism, presbyterianism, and congregationalism. Second, it examines the responsibilities of the elder as issued in Scripture, specifically the roles of teaching and ruling. Third, it explores the position that elders must work together in a spirit of unity.

Understanding Church Polity

For elders to be effective in caring for the Lord’s church, they should have a working knowledge of church polity. This knowledge matters because church polity shapes how people think and act, and determines how things get accomplished.¹ Although ecclesiology may not be a doctrine of highest importance like theology proper, Gregg Allison concludes, “It is of great importance because the church of Jesus Christ is a necessary reality.”² Church polity creates leadership offices, specifies who is eligible to serve in those offices, and demarcates their responsibilities and boundaries.³ However, many churches neither understand their current culture nor the preferred culture which

¹ Alexander Strauch, *Biblical Eldership: An Urgent Call to Restore Biblical Church Leadership*, rev. and expanded ed. (Littleton, CO: Lewis and Roth, 1995), 102.

² Gregg R. Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers: The Doctrine of the Church*, Foundations of Evangelical Theology (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 47.

³ James Leo Garrett, *Baptist Foundations: Church Government for an Anti-Institutional Age*, ed. Mark Dever and Jonathan Leeman (Nashville: B & H, 2015), 2.

would best help them achieve their goals.⁴ Furthermore, unbiblical deviations in leadership will undermine the congregation's view of the care, courage, and competency of its leadership.⁵ According to Al Mohler, a leader who does not know how the work is done cannot possibly lead with effectiveness.⁶ Certainly, this applies to one's knowledge of church polity.

Three types of government will be explored: episcopalianism, presbyterianism, and congregationalism. L. Roy Taylor analogizes episcopalianism to a monarchy, presbyterianism to a representative republic, and congregationalism to a pure democracy.⁷ Before considering each of these types, it is important to define church polity. R. Stanton Norman defines church polity as "the organization or governmental structure of a local church or fellowship of churches, or as a form of church government adopted by an ecclesiastical body."⁸ In other words, church polity is typically understood as the way in which a church or group of churches organize and administrate themselves.⁹

Episcopalianism is the form of church government in which a bishop governs as ultimate authority.¹⁰ In this form of polity, there is a difference between bishops and presbyter/elders. The authority of bishops is exercised in the act of consecrating other

⁴ Eric Geiger and Kevin Peck, *Designed to Lead: The Church and Leadership Development* (Nashville: B & H, 2016), 142.

⁵ Geiger and Peck, *Designed to Lead*, 144.

⁶ R. Albert Mohler, *The Conviction to Lead: 25 Principles for Leadership That Matter* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2012), 72.

⁷ L. Roy Taylor, "Presbyterianism," in *Who Runs the Church? 4 Views on Church Government*, ed. Peter Toon and Steven B. Cowan, Counterpoints Series (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 67.

⁸ R. Stanton Norman, "Is Polity That Important?" in *Perspectives on Church Government: Five Views of Church Polity*, ed. Daniel L. Akin, Chad Brand, and R. Stanton Norman (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2004), 15.

⁹ Norman, "Is Polity That Important?," 15.

¹⁰ Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers*, 210.

bishops, and ordaining priests and deacons. Presbyters or priests, the second order of clergy, are ordained ministers of a local church with responsibilities to lead worship, preach, pray, and administer baptism and the Lord's Supper. Deacons constitute the third order of ordained clergy and are responsible for helping the bishops and priests. Examples of the episcopalian form of church government include the Catholic Church, the Orthodox Church, the United Methodist Church, and some Pentecostal churches.¹¹

Episcopalianism, according to Allison, is thought to be “based upon that which developed in the providential guidance of God from the apostolic age through the first few centuries of the Christian church.”¹² Proponents argue that this polity is not only in accord with apostolic teaching, but it also takes into account the results of evangelization, church planning, and the teaching of the apostles and their successors.¹³ In fact, history shows that by early in the second century, a single bishop ruling over the church (monoepiscopacy) was encouraged by church leaders, and the threefold ministry of bishop, presbyter, and deacon were well established.¹⁴ By the end of the third century, the early church fathers placed such a strong emphasis on apostolic succession that the bishopric was recognized as an institution. During this period, Cyprian argued that the criterion for church membership was submission to the bishop, and without a submission there was no salvation.¹⁵ By the third and fourth centuries, this threefold structure became the standard church government.¹⁶

¹¹ Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers*, 211.

¹² Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers*, 211.

¹³ Peter Toon, “Episcopalianism,” in Toon and Cowan, *Who Runs the Church?*, 23.

¹⁴ Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers*, 211.

¹⁵ Robert L. Reymond, “The Presbytery-Led Church: Presbyterian Church Government,” in Akin, Brand, and Norman, *Perspectives on Church Government*, 99.

¹⁶ Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers*, 212.

In addition to drawing from tradition, episcopalianism points to Scripture for support. Although no passage in the New Testament is an explicit endorsement of this polity, advocates argue that the “notion” of episcopacy is found in Scripture and is brought to maturity in the history of the church.¹⁷ The Catholic Church, for example, suggests that its most important biblical warrant is Jesus’s calling of the twelve apostles (Matt 10:1-4) and Jesus’s words to Peter after Peter’s confession (Matt 16:13-20).¹⁸ It is also understood that a higher ecclesiastical structure has its origins in the Jerusalem council (Acts 15), suggesting that James functioned in a way similar to an episcopalian bishop.¹⁹

However, a common criticism of episcopalianism is that it is not clearly taught in the Scriptures and can only be learned from later tradition.²⁰ In fact, the Reformation was in total opposition to the notion of a hierarchical church and the disjunction between clergy and laity, as the New Testament speaks nothing of a separate clerical class. With the Reformation, a new interest was shown in the Bible’s teaching on church polity, and the New Testament evidence for the plurality of elders was rediscovered. Following the work of Calvin and others, churches began to reorganize according to a Presbyterian system.²¹ Herman Bavinck adds, “It is to Calvin that we owe the restoration of a biblically based presbyterial form of church government. By restoring the office of elder and deacon alongside that of the minister of the Word, the Reformed tradition most

¹⁷ Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers*, 211.

¹⁸ Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers*, 213.

¹⁹ Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers*, 214.

²⁰ Samuel E. Waldron, “A Plural-Elder Congregationalist’s Response” in Toon and Cowan, *Who Runs the Church?*, 56.

²¹ Mark Dever, *The Church: The Gospel Made Visible* (Nashville: B & H, 2012), 118.

accurately grasped the idea of Scripture and most firmly recognized the rights of the local church.”²²

Both presbyterianism and congregationalism believe that Christ is the ultimate authority in the church, and reject the episcopal belief that bishops exercise apostolic authority over a group or local congregation. One of the reasons Presbyterians opposed episcopacy was due to the way this polity was abused by the medieval Catholic Church.²³ Moreover, Presbyterians and Congregationalists affirm the priesthood of all believers more consistently than episcopal traditions.²⁴ According to this view, Scripture is clear that a church as a local body has the right to designate and elect the bearers of the church offices.²⁵

While both Presbyterians and Congregationalists affirm that elders and deacons are the two biblically ordained offices in the church, there is debate over the nature of the eldership.²⁶ In presbyterianism, there are two church offices: elders and deacons. The elders exercising authority in the congregation are called a session (Presbyterian) or consistory (Reformed). The session or consistory is comprised of teaching elders and ruling elders.²⁷ In this polity, the church is not a pure democracy, as the elders do not hold their office to simply carry out the congregation’s agenda. Rather, the elders are to rule and oversee the congregation, not necessarily in agreement with the will of the

²² Herman Bavinck, *Holy Spirit, Church, and New Creation*, vol. 4, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 327.

²³ Nathan A. Finn, “The Rule of Elders: The Presbyterian Angle on Church Leadership,” in *Shepherding God’s Flock: Biblical Leadership in the New Testament and Beyond*, ed. Benjamin L. Merkle and Thomas R. Schreiner (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2014), 210.

²⁴ Finn, “The Rule of Elders,” 210.

²⁵ Bavinck, *Holy Spirit, Church, and New Creation*, 327.

²⁶ Finn, “The Rule of Elders,” 200.

²⁷ Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers*, 217.

congregation but in agreement with the Scriptures, and in accordance with the authority delegated to them by Christ.²⁸

Some of the strengths of presbyterianism include a mutual accountability, cooperative ministry, and a system of checks and balances. L. Roy Taylor concludes,

The abuse of power is one of the recurring sins throughout the long history of the church. Most Reformed Christians believe that sin taints the entirety of human personality. Those who believe in human depravity recognize the practical truth of the statement, “Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely,” not only in the political sphere but in the church as well. A hierarchal episcopacy, or a monoepiscopacy, offers greater opportunity for the abuse of power by individual leaders. A purely congregational system offers an opportunity for the “tyranny of the majority.” The presbyterian system of representative-connectional government by a plurality of elders in a gradation of church courts poses an effective check on the abuse of power by an individual leader. Moreover, the presbyterian system features not only majority rule, but also preserves the rights of a minority within the local church and the larger church.²⁹

The nature of presbyterian oversight is a divinely appointed authority and is strictly spiritual, moral, ministerial, and declarative.³⁰ Scripture speaks to the congregation’s responsibility to submit to its elders (1 Thess 5:12-13; Heb 13:7, 17, 24). The decisions of the elder board are authoritative regardless of the consent of the church as a whole.³¹ All the same, the congregation elects the elders to the session.³²

While the minute details of church government are not necessarily found in Scripture, Presbyterians argue that the general principles of ecclesiastical polity are derived from the Bible. According to presbyterianism, the church is composed of the people of God in the Old and the New Testaments. As such, presbyterian church government is found in the Old and New Testaments.³³ The office of elder originated in the Old Testament, as

²⁸ Reymond, “The Presbytery-Led Church,” 82.

²⁹ Taylor, “Presbyterianism,” 89.

³⁰ Reymond, “The Presbytery-Led Church,” 109.

³¹ Waldron, “A Plural-Elder Congregationalist’s Response,” 174.

³² Taylor, “Presbyterianism,” 68.

³³ Taylor, “Presbyterianism,” 68.

Israel was a patriarchal society.³⁴ In the Old Testament, Moses, the priests and Levites, the judges, and the kings of Israel were all assisted by “elders of Israel” or “the elders of the congregation” in governing the people (Exod 3:16; Num 11:14-15; Josh 7:6, etc.).³⁵

In the New Testament, Israel’s practice of governance by elders continued as evidenced in Luke 22:66 where Jesus was brought before “the council of the elders [*presbyterion*] of the people,” and in Acts 22:5 Paul states that “all the council of the elders (*presbyterion*)” authorized him to persecute Christians.³⁶ The office of elder was firmly established in the church during the apostolic age, as Paul and Barnabas appointed elders “in every church” (Acts 14:23). Paul also instructed Titus to appoint elders “in every city.”³⁷ In addition to these verses, other passages of Scripture provide evidence that a plurality of elders existed in the early churches (Acts 11:30; 15:2; 14:23; 20:17; Eph 5:17). Early Christian documents also indicate the plurality of elders in the churches.³⁸

In presbyterianism, a distinction is made between “teaching elders” and “ruling elders.” While all elders are responsible for the government and spiritual oversight of the church, including teaching, only elders who are gifted, called, and trained may serve as “teaching elders.” Generally, teaching elders or pastors are vocational ministers while ruling elders are laypersons.³⁹ Teaching elders or pastors are often paid staff and the elders are laypeople who make governing decisions, sometimes in conjunction with the staff

³⁴ Taylor, “Presbyterianism,” 68.

³⁵ Reymond, “The Presbytery-Led Church,” 82.

³⁶ Reymond, “The Presbytery-Led Church,” 82.

³⁷ Reymond, “The Presbytery-Led Church,” 82.

³⁸ Taylor, “Presbyterianism,” 72.

³⁹ Finn, “The Rule of Elders,” 200.

and other times in authority over the staff. The ruling elders, then, often function like a church board, while the pastors serve as ministry program directors.⁴⁰

To advocate this position biblically, Presbyterians cite Ephesians 4:11-13 and 1 Timothy 5:17. Early Presbyterians argued that Paul's reference to shepherds and teachers in Ephesians 4:11 referred to two offices. The office of "pastors-teachers" that Paul identifies in Ephesians 4:11 consists of "teaching elders" only, not ruling elders.⁴¹ In 1 Timothy 5:17, Paul also appears to be addressing two distinct groups: "elders who rule well" and "those who labor in preaching and teaching." Based upon 1 Timothy 5:17, many Presbyterians believe that a *presbyteros* is always a ruler, but not always a teacher.⁴² Other support is found in Romans 12:7-8 in which Paul makes yet another distinction between "teaching" and "leading."⁴³

Those who counter this polity generally doubt the Presbyterian interpretation of 1 Timothy 5:17 and the distinction between ruling elders and teaching elders. Here, Paul is not describing two different groups, but rather a sub-group within the larger group.⁴⁴ To be sure, all elders should be able to teach as well as exercise leadership in the church (1 Tim 3:4-5).⁴⁵ Furthermore, Ephesians 4:11 refers to "pastor-teachers" as one entity and does not distinguish teaching elders from the ruling elders.⁴⁶

⁴⁰ Finn, "The Rule of Elders," 201.

⁴¹ Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers*, 219.

⁴² Finn, "The Rule of Elders," 202.

⁴³ Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers*, 219.

⁴⁴ Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers*, 221.

⁴⁵ Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers*, 222.

⁴⁶ Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers*, 222.

Congregationalism is a form of polity in which the local church governs its own affairs under the lordship of Christ.⁴⁷ Generally, the authority of the church rests in each local body of believers, with Christ alone as the head.⁴⁸ This type of church polity is based on Scripture but is marked by the distinctives of local church autonomy and democracy. In other words, the local church is independent and self-governing, and the authority with the local church resides in its individual members who participate in decisions through democratic processes. Because all of God's people are empowered by God, gifted by God, have access to God, and know God, the entire congregation is involved in the governance of the church. However, this does not negate the importance of leadership offices in the church, specifically those of elder and deacon.⁴⁹

Although congregational polity admits of different structures, such as the pastor and deacons structure, the units within any structure are subject to the final authority of the congregation.⁵⁰ In many cases, a plurality of elders work alongside a pastor or pastors, whose primary work is preaching and teaching, to shepherd and direct the affairs of the church. These men, assisted by deacons, are responsible for organizing and implementing practical ministry objectives in the life of the congregation. This occurs within the context of a congregation who possesses final authority.⁵¹ When a church functions rightly, a healthy balance exists between the leaders and the congregation.⁵²

⁴⁷ Garrett, *Baptist Foundations*, 63.

⁴⁸ Daniel L. Akin, "The Single-Elder-Led Church: The Bible's Witness to a Congregational/Single-Elder-Led Polity," in Akin, Brand, and Norman, *Perspectives on Church Government*, 33.

⁴⁹ Garrett, *Baptist Foundations*, 66.

⁵⁰ James Leo Garrett Jr., "What Is Congregational Polity?" in Akin, Brand, and Norman, *Perspectives on Church Government*, 129.

⁵¹ Garrett, *Baptist Foundations*, 48.

⁵² Garrett, *Baptist Foundations*, 77.

Proponents of congregationalism maintain that biblical evidence that ecclesial responsibilities should be delegated to the congregation is found in Matthew 18:15-20, 1 Corinthians 5:1-5, and 2 Corinthians 2:6. All of these passages suggest that the church itself has the responsibility to exercise discipline, forgive, and reaffirm.⁵³ Other passages indicate that significant roles were played by the local church, including appointing people for specific responsibilities (Acts 11:19-24) and commissioning Paul and Barnabas for their missionary journey (Acts 13:1-3). Furthermore, certain decisions were said to have “pleased the whole gathering” (Acts 6:2-6), and other decisions “seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church” (Acts 15:22).⁵⁴ Thus, it is not a bishop, pope, presbytery, or synod who has the final word—it is the assembly of believers who are the church.⁵⁵

Congregationalism draws additional biblical support from the fact that the majority of the New Testament letters were written to church congregations. With the exception of Paul’s letter to the Philippians which addresses the church, overseers, and deacons, each letter in the New Testament has the entire congregation in view.⁵⁶ This is also the case concerning the letters to the seven churches in Revelation. Allison claims it can be concluded through these letters that each church is responsible for the “maintenance of orthodoxy, orthopraxis, and orthopatheia.”⁵⁷

In the New Testament, elders are given authority to lead the church in its overall direction and spiritual edification, yet congregations are given authority as the final court

⁵³ Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers*, 227.

⁵⁴ Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers*, 229.

⁵⁵ Akin, “The Single-Elder-Led Church,” 34.

⁵⁶ Akin, “The Single-Elder-Led Church,” 37.

⁵⁷ Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers*, 228.

of appeal. Thus, churches are to be elder led, and congregationally ruled.⁵⁸ A plurality of elders can together lead a congregation in matters of doctrine and discipline. Still, the congregation shoulders the responsibility for acting as the final court in all matters which rise to that level of significance.⁵⁹ At a human level, the ultimate authority rests not with the elders but with the congregation.⁶⁰

Congregationalism advocates that the Bible teaches the local congregation is responsible for its discipline and doctrine. No other authority may interfere with this process, nor may the congregation delegate this authority to an elder or any other structure.⁶¹ However, opponents of congregationalism generally argue that it is anarchist, chaotic, and promotes individualism instead of unity.⁶² The ecclesiastical anarchy that stems from congregational polity can result in great harm to the health, fellowship, and witness of the church.⁶³ Many believe that much of Christianity is in a state of chaos because churches and pastors are accountable to no one. In addition, the impact of this disorder is serving to ruin the Christian witness.⁶⁴

Calvary Church has a presbyterian form of polity, and its leaders need to have a general knowledge of the pros and cons of this form of government. With this increased understanding, Calvary's leadership should be able to discern areas in which the polity may be faulty, or areas in which they may be falling short. Certainly, any model of ministry that is "hierarchical, authoritarian, abusive, singular or exalts personality, or any model

⁵⁸ Bruce A. Ware, "Putting It All Together: A Theology of Church Leadership," in Merkle and Schreiner, *Shepherding God's Flock*, 304.

⁵⁹ Dever, *The Church*, 142.

⁶⁰ Ware, "Putting It All Together," 304.

⁶¹ Dever, *The Church*, 121.

⁶² Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers*, 230.

⁶³ Akin, "The Single-Elder-Led Church," 33.

⁶⁴ Reymond, "The Presbytery-Led Church," 112.

that exalts tasks to the exclusion of relationship, or growth to the exclusion of truth, would not be legitimate.”⁶⁵ Simply because a church has ecclesiastically correct terminology does not mean it necessarily reflects correct biblical ecclesiology.⁶⁶ Therefore, to help protect the church from a potentially defective polity, Calvary’s leaders should not only have a working knowledge of general church polity, but must also have a functional knowledge of their responsibilities as mandated in Scripture.

A Functional Knowledge of Responsibilities

Effective church leaders must be equipped with a functional knowledge of their responsibilities as issued in Scripture, specifically the roles of teaching and ruling. For an elder to understand his primary responsibilities of teaching and ruling, it is important to first clarify that there is no scriptural or practical differentiation between ruling elders and teaching elders. Not everyone agrees with this position, however. For example, Bavinck claims that 1 Timothy 5:17-18 provides proof that there is a clear distinction between overseers charged with governing and others charged with teaching, preaching, and the administration of the sacraments.⁶⁷ Bavinck proposes that the Lord takes care of the needs of his church by three distinct offices: “By the teaching office he instructs, by the office of elder he leads, and by the diaconal office he takes care of his flock.”⁶⁸

Presbyterianism, which reflects the view above as well as the polity of Calvary Church, also proposes a clear distinction between teaching elders and ruling elders. The teaching elder is often seminary educated and ordained. He is responsible for the ministry

⁶⁵ Derek Tidball, *Ministry by the Book: New Testament Patterns for Pastoral Ministry* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2008), 238.

⁶⁶ Joseph H. Hellerman, “Community and Relationships: Leadership in Pauline Theology,” in *Biblical Leadership: Theology for the Everyday Leader*, ed. Benjamin Forrest and Chet Roden, Biblical Theology for the Church (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2017), 423.

⁶⁷ Bavinck, *Holy Spirit, Church, and New Creation*, 344.

⁶⁸ Bavinck, *Holy Spirit, Church, and New Creation*, 388.

of the Word, the administration of the sacraments, and leading with the ruling elders.⁶⁹ Ruling elders, on the other hand, are not necessarily seminary educated and are not ordained. They are elected by the congregation as their representatives to govern the flock along with the teaching elders.⁷⁰ Although the lay elders have ruling authority, they are separate and distinct from the pastoral staff.

This system is problematic as it maintains a distinction between the professional and nonprofessional leaders. Indeed, it creates a division between “pastors” and “elders” that is unbiblical. Making such a distinction creates an office that is not found in the Bible. While it is not wrong to have paid and unpaid elders in the church, it is unwise to have unequal authority in the church by creating a distinct office.⁷¹ Derek Tidball argues this point from Scripture.

Ministers are never presented as organizational leaders or directors of busy congregational programs. Little is said about the method of their appointment and only the vaguest hint is given about the “terms and conditions” of their position. What we do know is that they can expect to be paid for their services (1 Cor. 9:7-12; Gal. 6:6; 1 Tim. 5:17). There is no emphasis on ordination, even though the laying on of hands was clearly practiced. The pastoral leader is not presented as a priest or present at the sacrament. There is no clergy—laity split. Leaders are distinguished from the congregation but remain firmly a part of it and their role in no way detracts from the emphasis on all believers ministering to one another.⁷²

Again, the “pastor” is not a separate office from elder. Neither is there a difference between teaching elders and ruling elders. All elders are pastor-teachers, and all elders must have the gifts of leadership and teaching. To be sure, the New Testament qualifications mention no separate set of qualifications for the pastor.⁷³ Bruce Ware

⁶⁹ Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers*, 218.

⁷⁰ Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers*, 218.

⁷¹ Benjamin L. Merkle, *40 Questions about Elders and Deacons*, 40 Questions Series (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2008), 171.

⁷² Tidball, *Ministry by the Book*, 243.

⁷³ Phil A. Newton and Matt Schmucker, *Elders in the Life of the Church: Rediscovering the Biblical Model for Church Leadership*, 9Marks (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2014), 53.

confirms, “The terms elders, overseers, pastors refer to one and the same office held by those with a richness and integrity of spiritual life and experience, oversight responsibility for the spiritual well-being of the church, and a watchful care for others that Christ has ordained as one of the greatest means for the growth and maturity of his people.”⁷⁴ As pastors and shepherds, these men are equally responsible for not only running the church, but also shepherding, teaching, and equipping the congregation.⁷⁵ Nathan Finn agrees, writing, “All elders, whether paid or unpaid, are tasked with the responsibility of leading their congregations through the ministries of teaching, prayer, and shepherding.”⁷⁶ While some elders will excel in administration and others excel in teaching, turning this distinction into two kinds of elder offices seems “artificial” and beyond the intention of 1 Timothy 5:17. An elder who rules well but lacks biblical knowledge will most certainly create disharmony among the elders.⁷⁷ In fact, there is no allowance made for elders who do not teach.⁷⁸

Leadership, according to Mohler, is “explicitly centered in the responsibility to teach.”⁷⁹ Though the call to teach all that the Lord has commanded is placed on every follower of Christ in the Great Commission (Matt 28:20), the New Testament is clear that elders have a specific responsibility to teach the Word of God (1 Tim 3:2). As such, an elder must be firmly committed to apostolic doctrine and must be able to instruct people in biblical doctrine.⁸⁰ Alexander Strauch comments, “This requires that a prospective elder

⁷⁴ Ware, “Putting It All Together,” 304.

⁷⁵ Merkle, *Elders and Deacons*, 22.

⁷⁶ Finn, “The Rule of Elders,” 198.

⁷⁷ Newton and Schmucker, *Elders in the Life of the Church*, 71.

⁷⁸ Newton and Schmucker, *Elders in the Life of the Church*, 216.

⁷⁹ Mohler, *The Conviction to Lead*, 42.

⁸⁰ Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 79.

has applied himself for some years to the reading and study of Scripture, that he can reason intelligently and logically discuss biblical issues, that he has formulated doctrinal beliefs, and that he has the verbal ability and willingness to teach others.”⁸¹ For the apostle Paul, teaching is of utmost importance, as it is a key function of the church leader.⁸²

A common misunderstanding is that only professional, formally trained, and ordained men should be ministers of the church. Stephen Pickard proposes that the notion of the “ordained ministry” creates a different and distinct order within the church that is entirely fictitious.⁸³ Although the importance of formal training is not to be minimized, the apostle Paul makes it clear in Ephesians 4:11-13 that formally educated men are not the only people who minister the flock of God. Indeed, those who minister in the church are members who themselves are gifted and called to serve one another.⁸⁴

Still, the qualification that an elder must be able to teach requires that he know the truth of the Christians faith and is a reliable and faithful communicator of that truth. Primarily, elders give to the people the truth of the message they themselves have also received.⁸⁵ Ware exhorts,

I think it is fair to say that there is nothing more central to an elder’s calling, or of greater potential benefit for the people of God, or closer to the heart of God and his desire for his people, than that elders take up their teaching and preaching responsibilities with earnestness, sobriety, faithfulness, diligence, and joy. Although elders are more than this, they simply cannot be less or other than those committed with heart and soul to bring the word of God to the people of God. Teaching, this is the chief responsibility of the office of the elder.⁸⁶

⁸¹ Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 79.

⁸² Andrew D. Clarke, *A Pauline Theology of Church Leadership*, Library of New Testament Studies 362. (London: T & T Clark, 2008), 152.

⁸³ Stephen K. Pickard, *Theological Foundations for Collaborative Ministry*, Explorations in Practical, Pastoral, and Empirical Theology (Farnham, England: Ashgate, 2009), 21.

⁸⁴ Ware, “Putting It All Together,” 283.

⁸⁵ Ware, “Putting It All Together,” 292.

⁸⁶ Ware, “Putting It All Together,” 294.

The New Testament is clear that an elder is primarily a teacher (1 Tim 3:2). The calling to teach distinguishes elders from deacons, and the role of teaching is inseparably connected with the function of the pastor in Ephesians 4:11.⁸⁷ Thus, all elders should be involved in some kind of teaching. It would seem odd for Paul to require that all elders be able to teach if they are not involved in any type of teaching.⁸⁸ Merkle concludes, “The importance of solid, gospel teaching in the church is vital to the church’s existence. The Word must be preached, and it is the task of elders to preach that Word.”⁸⁹

In addition to shepherding, teaching, and equipping the congregation, all elders and pastors are responsible for running the church.⁹⁰ The basic function of elders/pastors is overseeing (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet 5:2).⁹¹ The core competency for any elder is that he must be a proven manager of people. While any qualified elder can gain experience, managerial ability must be to some measure visible before he is appointed to the position of elder.⁹² The fundamental requirement that an overseer is to “manage his household” is because this is an essential element of the job description.⁹³

No matter how simple or complex, there will be management dimensions to every ministry. For example, the disciples had a money manager, and the apostles in Jerusalem appointed deacons to attend to the daily life of the congregation. Harold Senkbeil concludes, “You can serve the Lord of the church and receive his gifts without

⁸⁷ Merkle, *Elders and Deacons*, 92.

⁸⁸ Merkle, *Elders and Deacons*, 111.

⁸⁹ Merkle, *Elders and Deacons*, 93.

⁹⁰ Merkle, *Elders and Deacons*, 22.

⁹¹ John MacArthur, *Pastoral Ministry: How to Shepherd Biblically* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 89.

⁹² William D. Mounce, “The Noble Task: Leadership in the Pastoral Epistles,” in Forrest and Roden, *Biblical Leadership*, 448.

⁹³ Clarke, *A Pauline Theology of Church Leadership*, 185.

budgets, print and media resources, calendars, and time management, but in our historical setting you can't do it well.”⁹⁴ Effective pastors must be efficient managers. Senkbeil advises that an elder/pastor should “keep a finely tuned balance of both informed administration and intentional ministry.”⁹⁵

Leadership and management are, in fact, inseparable. Leaders who leave management to others are not leaders.⁹⁶ Mohler concludes, “The leader’s task is to define and articulate certain values, and then work to see them driven throughout the organization. The leader cannot do this without involving himself in the machinery of the organization.”⁹⁷ Elders must possess the skills necessary for effective leadership, as theological acumen is not enough. A man must prove that he has the skill and ability to lead others, or else he should not be leading as an elder in the Lord’s church.⁹⁸ Indeed, the future of the church depends greatly on the pastor’s ability to lead.⁹⁹

Yet, church leadership is difficult. Some problems include individual inadequacies as leaders, including a lack of skill or an insufficient understanding of the organization in which one serves.¹⁰⁰ What is more, many seminaries do well at equipping the minister theologically, but do poorly at preparing them for pastoral leadership.¹⁰¹

⁹⁴ Harold L. Senkbeil and Lucas V. Woodford, *Pastoral Leadership: For the Care of Souls*, Lexham Ministry Guides (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2021), 66.

⁹⁵ Senkbeil and Woodford, *Pastoral Leadership*, 68.

⁹⁶ Mohler, *The Conviction to Lead*, 70.

⁹⁷ Mohler, *The Conviction to Lead*, 72.

⁹⁸ Robert H. Thune, *Gospel Eldership: Equipping a New Generation of Servant Leaders* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth, 2016), 70.

⁹⁹ MacArthur, *Pastoral Ministry*, 229.

¹⁰⁰ Richard L. Hamm, *Recreating the Church: Leadership for the Postmodern Age*, The Columbia Partnership Leadership Series (St Louis: Chalice, 2007), 2.

¹⁰¹ Robert H. Welch, *Church Administration: Creating Efficiency for Effective Ministry* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2005), 9.

Subsequently, the governmental structures of many churches today bear little to no resemblance to that of the New Testament churches. Merkle argues, “Because of the professionalization of the ministry, the rise of pragmatism, and the growing size of congregations, the biblical model has been set aside for something more modern or more efficient. As a result, countless churches have embraced the corporate business model and thereby marginalized the biblical model.”¹⁰² Nevertheless, God seeks humans to enlist in his mission, and human rule is a derivative extension of divine rule. Scripture depicts such rulers as vassals, vice-regents, and deputy rulers (Ps 2).¹⁰³ There is no aspect of the life of the flock that the shepherd can disregard.¹⁰⁴ Thus, every congregation needs to be led by men who possess both pastoral and administrative skills.¹⁰⁵

Unity in Service

Third, effective church leaders must work together to maintain unity in the church. With this in mind, elders should be aware that doctrinal convictions, including ecclesiology, have proven to be grounds for both unity and divisions among Christians.¹⁰⁶ For centuries, theologians, biblical scholars, pastors and teachers, have carried on the work of defining church leadership, and the challenge continues even today.¹⁰⁷ Pickard writes, “Anecdotal evidence suggests that local independent congregational churches in the Protestant and Pentecostal traditions seem as susceptible as episcopally ordered churches

¹⁰² Merkle, *Elders and Deacons*, 169.

¹⁰³ Timothy S. Laniak, *Shepherds after My Own Heart: Pastoral Traditions and Leadership in the Bible*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 20 (Leicester, England: Apollos, 2006), 248.

¹⁰⁴ Cornelis Van Dam, *The Elder: Today's Ministry Rooted in All of Scripture*, Explorations in Biblical Theology (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2009), 26.

¹⁰⁵ Newton and Schmucker, *Elders in the Life of the Church*, 52.

¹⁰⁶ Dever, *The Church*, 98.

¹⁰⁷ Lovett H. Weems Jr, *Church Leadership: Vision Team Culture Integrity* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2010), xiii.

to dysfunctional ministry patterns and autocratic and/or overly submissive forms of ministry which are anything but collaborative.”¹⁰⁸ In some churches, for example, trusted individual leaders will often find authority withheld “because there is insufficient trust in the system to give authority.”¹⁰⁹ Other churches have created leadership structures that were assumed to be “right,” and the role of the leaders is to simply maintain the organization.¹¹⁰ Still others avoid making the necessary correctives toward proper church governance because they rely on tradition and charismatic personalities.¹¹¹

For the leaders at Calvary Church to effectively work together, two important principles need to be understood. First, Christian ministry is, in fact, a collaborative effort. A cooperative approach to ministry is not simply the bestowal of power, but it requires the sharing of power.¹¹² To be clear, Christian leadership is *shared* power. Putting this concept into practice helps to prevent individualism, isolation, and self-centered empire building.¹¹³ Church leadership is never solely about personal authority or a management process, but rather about the faithful future of faith traditions and communities.¹¹⁴

However, most of Christianity has embraced a management philosophy and principles from the secular business world that are humanistic and materialistic. Authority and power are seen as a means of manipulating, using, and controlling people.¹¹⁵ For instance, in the “CEO/Board Model” of church polity, the pastor functions as the CEO or

¹⁰⁸ Pickard, *Theological Foundations for Collaborative Ministry*, 5.

¹⁰⁹ Hamm, *Recreating the Church*, 65.

¹¹⁰ Hamm, *Recreating the Church*, 66.

¹¹¹ Newton and Schmucker, *Elders in the Life of the Church*, 198.

¹¹² Pickard, *Theological Foundations for Collaborative Ministry*, 2.

¹¹³ Kenneth O. Gangel, *Team Leadership in Christian Ministry: Using Multiple Gifts to Build a Unified Vision* (Chicago: Moody, 1997), 59.

¹¹⁴ Weems, *Church Leadership*, 1.

¹¹⁵ Myron Rush, *Management: A Biblical Approach* (Colorado Springs: Victor, 2005), 2.

the “point-leader” of the church, and elders are viewed as a governing board instead of pastors. The function of the elder board is, according to Robert Thune, is “to keep the pastors in check and provide a system of checks and balances (lest the ministry staff or pastors have too much power).”¹¹⁶ Unfortunately, secular models of leadership, such as the “CEO/Board Model,” have been appropriated in many churches with large infrastructures.¹¹⁷

Without question, the issue of power, authority, and control is unescapable. In a fallen world, power corrupts, coerces, and oppresses. Yet, power also influences and guides. The issue, then, is what kind of power a leader should possess and how that power should be used.¹¹⁸ In the church, all elders should be equal in value, power, and rank.¹¹⁹ Any diversity that exists among the eldership does not equate to a diversity of office.¹²⁰ Therefore, leaders in the church must exemplify unity as a model for the flock.¹²¹

One of the unintended consequences resulting from the professionalization of ministry is the failure to recognize that each person is an indispensable participant in the body of Christ.¹²² The apostle Paul’s use of the metaphor of the body signifies the mutual dependence of each member and the inherent value of each person.¹²³ This metaphor not only frames Paul’s view of ministry, but also seeks to accommodate the hierarchical structure of the church. While the church has leaders, it is primarily a community in which

¹¹⁶ Thune, *Gospel Eldership*, 28.

¹¹⁷ Hellerman, “Community and Relationships,” 423.

¹¹⁸ Mohler, *The Conviction to Lead*, 66.

¹¹⁹ Merkle, *Elders and Deacons*, 174.

¹²⁰ Merkle, *Elders and Deacons*, 176.

¹²¹ Gangel, *Team Leadership in Christian Ministry*, 37.

¹²² James W. Thompson, *The Church according to Paul: Rediscovering the Community Conformed to Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2014), 242.

¹²³ Clarke, *A Pauline Theology of Church Leadership*, 135.

there is equality of grace and discipleship.¹²⁴ Thus, the overarching ethic of any church leadership team should be mutual “upbuilding.”¹²⁵ This involves working in concert with each other to engage in team ministry.¹²⁶

It should also be noted that Christian leadership is inseparable from the life of sacrifice first demonstrated by Christ who abandoned divine prerogatives and “emptied himself” for the sake of others (Phil 2:7). Those in leadership roles must also deny themselves for the sake of others.¹²⁷ Indeed, Christian leadership is always cruciform in nature. Still, this is a continuing challenge for the contemporary church.¹²⁸

Second, elders and pastors are to look to Christ, the Good Shepherd, as their example and authority. All church leaders are unequivocally located within a hierarchical structure in which all should lead, teach, and command.¹²⁹ As such, elders have the requisite authority to execute these tasks, including shepherding, at the highest levels of authority. Yet, this authority is a delegated one. As leaders, they are always under the supreme authority of the head of the church, Jesus Christ.¹³⁰

While authority is a feature of the role of the shepherd, elders have no proprietary rights. Elders, then, need to be mindful that they are caring for the Chief Shepherd’s flock.¹³¹ Hence, shepherding calls for the benevolent use of authority—a

¹²⁴ Tidball, *Ministry by the Book*, 90.

¹²⁵ Clarke, *A Pauline Theology of Church Leadership*, 154.

¹²⁶ Gangel, *Team Leadership in Christian Ministry*, 63.

¹²⁷ Thompson, *The Church according to Paul*, 242.

¹²⁸ Thompson, *The Church according to Paul*, 242.

¹²⁹ Clarke, *A Pauline Theology of Church Leadership*, 186.

¹³⁰ Gregg R. Allison, *The Church: An Introduction*, Short Studies in Systematic Theology (Wheaton, IL: Crossway., 2021), 49.

¹³¹ Laniak, *Shepherds after My Own Heart*, 234.

“subtle blend of authority and care.”¹³² Tim Laniak concludes, “To be a good shepherd—and this is consistently the biblical concern—means to be accountable for the lives and well-being of the sheep. For this reason, the designation is used for prophets, priests and kings in the Old Testament, and for ruling elders in the New Testament church.”¹³³

Those who bear these offices are to pattern the love they have for the flock after God’s love, and the concern for the flock after God’s concern for his people. The Lord is the Shepherd of his sheep, and he is the standard for the work of the office bearers. Christ gives the church offices their content and meaning; therefore, the elders are to represent and reflect the Lord’s wishes, criteria, and interests.¹³⁴ Accordingly, the power that a leader exercises is not the leader’s but Christ’s. The position to which the leader is called is not sovereignty over the flock but stewardship within the community, submitted to the leadership of Christ.¹³⁵

Conclusion

Many decades ago, the leaders at Calvary Church instituted what they believed was a biblical church polity. While Calvary rightly recognizes the Bible as God’s divine revelation, leaders must also acknowledge that exegesis and theology are human conceptual endeavors. As such, ecclesial backgrounds and church experience can shape a person’s theology, including one’s formulation of the doctrine of the church. Human understanding of God’s revelation can change and grow; therefore, there are times in which theologies need to be reworked to reflect changes in understanding.

¹³² Laniak, *Shepherds after My Own Heart*, 247.

¹³³ Laniak, *Shepherds after My Own Heart*, 247.

¹³⁴ Van Dam, *The Elder*, 18.

¹³⁵ Timothy Paul Jones and Michael S. Wilder, *The God Who Goes Before You: Pastoral Leadership as Christ-Centered Followership* (Nashville: B & H, 2018), 4.

According to Robert Welch, change should occur “when the present polity, policy, or procedure hurt, when stagnation or status quo will not satisfy the needs of the church or organization. They also change when they learn a better way of doing what needs to be done.”¹³⁶ This does not imply that Scripture is to be ignored or warped to fit issues it never intended to address; rather, biblical teaching is to be expounded and applied to issues that confront the church in one’s own day.¹³⁷ Such is the case regarding church government. Church polity, in fact, requires ongoing theological and practical dialogue.¹³⁸

Church leadership is always a theological endeavor.¹³⁹ Bavinck adds, “The church as communion of saints is not autonomous; it is not free to decide whether or not it will organize itself at all or will organize itself this way or that, but is bound also in this regard to the Word of God and finds there the principles indicated and lines drawn that it has to follow in the government of its affairs.”¹⁴⁰ Be that as it may, Christian leadership must be open to evaluation and change.

Although the Holy Spirit can work through faulty church polity, it is not acceptable to replicate those models. Preserving ways of doing things should not take precedence over “conserving, nurturing, and extending core values.”¹⁴¹ In a healthy organization there is always room for change. When church leaders manage and change church culture effectively and accurately according to Scripture, God can change

¹³⁶ Welch, *Church Administration*, 71.

¹³⁷ Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers*, 18.

¹³⁸ Norman, “Is Polity That Important?,” 21.

¹³⁹ Mohler, *The Conviction to Lead*, 81.

¹⁴⁰ Bavinck, *Holy Spirit, Church, and New Creation*, 386.

¹⁴¹ Hamm, *Recreating the Church*, 8.

presuppositions, foundational beliefs, and core identities.¹⁴² Certainly, Scripture should be allowed to deconstruct and reconstruct ways of thinking and living.¹⁴³

¹⁴² Geiger and Peck, *Designed to Lead*, 144.

¹⁴³ Thune, *Gospel Eldership*, 28.

CHAPTER 4

PROJECT PREPARATION AND IMPLEMENTATION

This chapter describes the project preparation and gives a detailed account of its implementation. The purpose of this project was to foster greater unity between the pastors and lay elders at Calvary Church through a biblical church polity. Chapter 1 of this project details the need for Calvary's leadership to have a better understanding of church polity. Chapter 2 considers three key texts in Scripture to present a biblical understanding of church polity and church office functions. Chapter 3 explores three general forms of church polity, examines the elder roles of teaching and ruling, and establishes that elders must work together in a spirit of unity.

The project had four key components: (1) develop and administer the Church Overseers Assessment to determine the competency of leadership regarding church polity and church office functions. The survey was given pre- and post-class to determine the effectiveness of the curriculum; (2) develop a curriculum for training current leaders in a biblical church polity; (3) obtain an evaluation of the curriculum from a panel consisting of two pastors and one former deacon. The panel used a rubric to assess the curriculum in terms of its biblical and theological faithfulness as well as its adherence to Calvary's Articles of Faith; and (4) administer the curriculum that consisted of six sessions, each was ninety-minutes in duration. Implementation of the project began on September 7, 2022, and concluded on October 12, 2022. The current chapter will describe the (1) preparatory steps leading up to teaching the curriculum; (2) development of the curriculum; (3) evaluation of the curriculum; (4) development of the class survey; and (5) implementation of the project.

Preparation

As this project would challenge those who took the course to examine and critique Calvary's Constitution, it had potential to generate spirited class discussions and disagreement among those in leadership. With eighty years of Calvary history under scrutiny, there was a possibility that not all participants would necessarily see this project as a unifying exercise. In anticipation of some dissention, a key factor in teaching the curriculum was to gain support from the senior pastor. In the early stages of the project, the senior pastor graciously approved the project's implementation. He reaffirmed his decision in the weeks leading up to the teaching of the curriculum.

With the senior pastor's approval, the class was promoted as a Wednesday evening study to Calvary's current leadership team. Calvary's Wednesday evening electives are generally open to the church's adult congregation; however, this course was made available only to elders and deacons serving in leadership. Men who had previously served as an elder or deacon, but who are not currently serving, could also participate.

The class, titled "Understanding Church Polity," was promoted on the church website beginning in July 2022. In addition, personal e-mails were sent to elders and deacons inviting them to participate in the course. The class was offered as a six-week Fall Bible study elective. Enrollment was available online through Calvary's website.

Preparation for this project was completed in part by using assignments from doctoral seminars at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. The curriculum was organized as part of the 80960WW—Foundations of Teaching seminar. Information in the curriculum was collected from the research in chapters 1, 2, and 3 of this project. The survey instrument was developed in the 80950—Applied Empirical Research seminar.

Developing the Curriculum

The curriculum was developed in conjunction with the 80960WW—Foundations of Teaching seminar taught by Dr. Matthew Haste in the winter 2022 semester. Following the Curriculum Plan Rubric for this seminar, a number of the

components of the curriculum were finalized, including the Content Outline, Lesson Outcome Outline, Course Description, and a full Lesson Plan for eight sessions. However, to fit within Calvary’s Bible study elective requirements, the curriculum was condensed into six sessions. Each session consisted of ninety minutes of instruction. The final draft of the curriculum was submitted to two of Calvary pastors and one former deacon for review in July 2022.

Evaluating the Curriculum

Two Calvary pastors and one former deacon evaluated the curriculum using the Church Overseer Curriculum Evaluation Rubric.¹ The panel included the Pastor of Senior Adults and the Pastor of Outreach and Internationals. The former deacon holds a Master of Arts degree from Southern Evangelical Seminary and is currently pursuing a doctorate from The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. These men have a firm grasp of Scripture and are familiar with Calvary’s Constitution. Therefore, this panel was well qualified to assess the curriculum.

One of the men noted on the rubric, “Well-formed argument being built from a strong Scriptural foundation. It slowly and gently conveys the idea that polity should be revised if it doesn’t conform to Scripture.” Another commented, “This kind of education is long overdue for Calvary. The current environment seems to be a deadlock between the Session and the pastors, which is not conducive to biblically based unified church leadership.”

All of the questions in the completed evaluation rubrics received a rating of either “3-sufficient” or “4-exemplary,” with the exception of one item. Two panelists suggested that opportunities for participant interaction with the material should be added. With this adjustment, the curriculum was finalized. The feedback from this panel was helpful in making minor adjustments to the curriculum.

¹ See appendix 4.

Development of the Class Survey

The Church Overseer Assessment was developed in the 80950—*Applied Empirical Research* seminar taught by Dr. Joseph Harrod in the fall of 2021. The first draft of the assessment consisted of twenty-five, four-point Likert scale questions and two multiple-choice questions.² These questions were designed to assess the class participants' pre- and post-class knowledge, beliefs, and practices regarding biblical church leadership. The first draft of the assessment was evaluated by a fellow classmate.

Resulting from the peer evaluation, the Church Overseer Assessment was edited to include five general questions to gather demographic information, twenty-five, five-point Likert scale questions, two multiple-choice questions, and four open-ended questions. The qualitative, open-ended questions were included to help explain the quantitative survey by obtaining the participants' opinions and views. This section of the survey could also help identify some of the underlying issues that contribute to a lack of unity within the leadership. The final draft was reviewed by Harrod.

The Church Overseer Assessments were e-mailed to all eighteen course participants one week prior to the start of the class. The e-mail instructed the class members to bring the completed assessment to the first class. All eighteen men completed the pre-class survey. This represented 41 percent of Calvary's leadership team.

In reviewing the completed pre- and post-surveys, I noticed that the first draft was used in error. The first draft consisted of twenty-five, four-point Likert scale questions and two multiple-choice questions. While the final draft, a convergent mixed methods approach, would have been preferred, the assessment used in the project still yielded measurable results.

² See appendix 1.

Understanding Church Polity Curriculum and Implementation

Eighteen people registered for the class, including five elders and thirteen deacons. All were men currently serving in leadership at Calvary. The class session commenced at 6:30 p.m. on Wednesday, September 7, 2022, and continued each Wednesday through October 12, 2022. Each session was ninety minutes in length, with no option for meeting online.

Session 1: General Church Polity

In the first session, the purpose of the project was communicated to the class. That is, the project was designed to help “foster greater unity between the pastors and elders at Calvary Church through a biblical church polity.” Due to the subject matter, however, the class was advised to keep discussions within the classroom, as it would not be edifying if the general congregation perceived that Calvary’s polity was problematic. Nevertheless, discussion in the classroom was highly encouraged. The class adopted the theme, “What is said here, stays here.”

After this introduction, the class was instructed on the importance of polity. I defined *Church polity* as “the organization or governmental structure of a local church or fellowship of churches, or as a form of church government adopted by an ecclesiastical body.”³ I suggested that church polity must be biblical, and church leadership is always a theological endeavor. Indeed, Scripture must be used to examine polity, and it must be allowed to shape the thinking of church leaders.

Next, I presented a general overview of three types of polity. These included Episcopalianism, Presbyterianism, and Congregationalism. These forms were considered from biblical, theological, and historical perspectives. I also gave an overview of the strengths and criticisms of each of these forms of government. The learning outcome for

³ R. Stanton Norman, “Is Polity That Important?” in *Perspectives on Church Government: Five Views of Church Polity*, ed. Daniel L. Akin, Chad Brand, and R. Stanton Norman (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2004), 15.

this lesson was that students should be able to articulate the core components of these three church polities.

Calvary is a non-denominational church, and its members represent several different denominations. For that reason, the discussion section of the class invited participants to share their insights and experiences from their various church backgrounds. Interestingly, many students had little to no knowledge about church polity. Thus, session 1 provided a good foundation on which the remaining sessions would build.

Session 2: Calvary Church Polity

In week 2, I addressed the polity at Calvary Church, giving special attention to Calvary's Constitution. The learning outcome for this lesson was that the students should have an increased understanding of Calvary's church polity. Students should also be able to discern strengths and weakness of this polity.

Directing the class to Calvary's Constitution, I defined the role of *elder* as "active, non-employee members of Calvary Church and are elected by the congregation to serve four-year terms." The Constitution recognizes the *session* as the governing body comprised of elders and the senior pastor (a non-voting moderator). I also noted that the role of *pastor* is not defined in the Constitution. Hence, I asked the class, "Are pastors at Calvary Church elders?" This would be the issue the students would wrestle with throughout the remaining sessions.

At this point, the case of conflict between pastors and elders that occurred in 2019 was communicated to the class.⁴ Using this example, I introduced several areas of concern regarding Calvary's polity. A primary issue is that the pastors are not on the Session, and therefore do not have voting authority. As a result, the pastors seem to have little influence in certain areas concerning church government. The subsequent mindset of "we versus they" or "us and them" can be detrimental to effective church leadership,

⁴ This account is stated in detail in chap. 1 of this project.

and unhealthy for the greater church. In short, in this session the tension between pastors and elders was introduced.

During the discussion section of the class, one elder referred to Calvary's Constitution and bylaws, stating that Calvary is, in fact, a "corporation." He added, "As such, Calvary must be governed by a board of directors, none of whom can be on staff at Calvary. Should an employee of Calvary obtain a position on the board, it would create a serious conflict of interest." These comments presented an opportunity to do more research in preparation for the upcoming classes.

Session 3: The Terms *Elder*, *Overseer*, and *Pastor*

The third session focused on three references in Scripture to demonstrate that the terms *elder*, *overseer*, and *pastor* refer to the same office. The class was reminded that Scripture must be considered in order to (1) provide a clear definition of the office of pastor and elder; (2) determine the functions and responsibilities of these offices; and (3) determine if Calvary's interpretation of these offices and their functions can be supported. The learning outcome was for the students to be able to demonstrate that the terms *elder*, *overseer*, and *pastor* denote the same office.

An exegesis of 1 Peter 5:1-2 indicated that elders, overseers, and pastors are three titles for the same office, and each of these terms are used interchangeably. A study of Acts 20:28 revealed that that elders, overseers, and pastors share the same function of teaching and ruling the flock. Lastly, an analysis of Ephesians 4:11-13 showed that elders, overseers, and pastors are to be unified and labor together to care for Christ's church.

During the discussion section of the class, additional thought was given to Calvary being a "corporation" that must be ruled by a board of directors. A portion of Calvary's by-laws were read to the class. According to the by-laws, "The members of the Session are hereinafter referred to sometimes as the 'elders,' and as such, the term 'elder'

is *synonymous* with the term ‘member’ of the Board of Directors or “Director.”⁵ This statement sparked more debate about whether pastors at Calvary Church are, in fact, elders. The question also remained about the balance of power or the weight of governing authority between these two groups (pastors and elders). These issues would continue to be debated in the remaining sessions.

Session 4: The Roles and Functions of Elder/Overseer/Pastor according to Scripture

The fourth session considered the roles, responsibilities, and goals of the church offices. I taught the class that effective church leaders must be equipped with a functional knowledge of their responsibilities as issued in Scripture. It is to the advantage of Calvary’s leadership team, therefore, to have a clear understanding of these offices and to comprehend how they have historically worked together. The learning outcome was for the students to be able to identify the fundamental roles, functions, and goals of the elder/pastor/overseer.

First, I presented shepherding as one of the principal roles of the elder/pastor. As shepherds care for their flock, so are church leaders to care for the church. This section of instruction centered on the word *poimaino*, a term that conveys the idea of complete spiritual oversight and pastoral care.⁶ Second, I introduced the term “overseers” (*episkopountes*) as another task of the elders; namely, overseeing the church and superintending it. In short, the overseer is the “superintendent, guardian, manager, inspector, and protector.”⁷ Third, I argued that in addition to ruling or governing the flock of God, the overseers are to teach. Elders must not only hold firm the trustworthy Word

⁵ Calvary Church By-Laws, amended November 11, 2018, emphasis added.

⁶ I. Howard Marshall, *Acts*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, vol. 5 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2008), 262.

⁷ Alexander Strauch, *Biblical Eldership: An Urgent Call to Restore Biblical Church Leadership* (Littleton, CO: Lewis and Roth, 1988), 90.

and give instruction in sound doctrine, but also rebuke those who contradict it (Titus 1:9). In session 5, teaching and ruling would be considered in more detail.

Fourth, referring to Ephesians 4:11-16, I presented to the class three goals for elders/overseers/pastors. The first goal is unity in faith and knowledge, which is identified as shared faith and knowledge of the Son of God. The second goal is “mature manhood,” or literally, “a mature man.” The third goal builds upon mature manhood by emphasizing growth to the “measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.” The final goal, therefore, is full Christlikeness.

During the discussion section of the class, one of the elders commented that if elders at Calvary are faithful to their tasks of teaching, ruling, and shepherding, then the church runs well. He added that problems arise when an elder falls short in one or more of these fundamental responsibilities. I proposed that while the elder’s statements may be true, the imbalance of power remains.

At this point in the discussion, I presented to the class an article titled “What Is the Nature of Pastor Authority?—A Presbyterian Perspective.” The article was written by Kevin DeYoung, Senior Pastor at Christ Covenant Church in Charlotte, North Carolina. DeYoung writes,

The pastor’s authority in Presbyterian polity is an authority shared with all the elders and exercised jointly through the Session and the other courts of the church. The nature of the pastor’s formal authority is simply this: he has a voice and a vote in each of these courts. The Presbyterian pastor is not a bishop, nor the de facto ruler in his own little fiefdom. He is a teaching elder, whose vote counts no more and no less than the other installed teaching and ruling elders—In short, the nature of pastoral authority in Presbyterianism is both informal (in dozens of areas, from preaching, to casting vision, to having a broad understanding of the issues in the church, to making lots of daily decisions), formal (as a member and moderator of the Session), and shared (as only one voice and one vote when it comes to making the most important decisions facing the courts of the church).⁸

⁸ Kevin DeYoung, “What Is the Nature of Pastoral Authority?—A Presbyterian Perspective,” The Gospel Coalition, October 4, 2016, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevin-deyoung/what-is-the-nature-of-pastoral-authority-a-presbyterian-perspective/>.

To cap off DeYoung’s article, I gave the class examples of other well-known churches who view staff pastors as elders. In these cases, the pastors and lay-elders share equal authority regarding church administration. These churches include Grace Community Church, pastored by John MacArthur; Bethlehem Church, formerly pastored by John Piper; Capitol Hill Church, pastored by Mark Dever; and the PCA.⁹ The goal of introducing the polity of these churches was to verify that pastors can indeed serve on the Session, or “board of directors,” without a conflict of interest.

Session 5: Presbyterian Polity— Teaching and Ruling Elders

Session 5 further explored the nature of eldership in Presbyterianism, which is the polity of Calvary Church. Using Ephesians 4:11-13 and other Scripture, I made a case that all elders should be involved in teaching and ruling the flock. The learning outcome

⁹ From Grace Community Church’s website: Because of its heritage of democratic values and its long history of congregational church government, modern American evangelicalism often views the concept of elder rule with suspicion. The clear teaching of Scripture, however, demonstrates that the biblical norm for church leadership is a plurality of God-ordained elders, and only by following this biblical pattern will the church maximize its fruitfulness to the glory of God.

From Bethlehem Church’s Constitution: The leadership of the Church shall be vested in the Council of Elders who are responsible for governing the Church, teaching the Word and tending the flock of God in this Church. The Elders shall be equal in authority but may be specialized in function. The Elder Council shall be comprised of Staff and Non-Staff Elders. Staff Elders are men who receive financial compensation from the Church as they fulfill God’s call to the specific ministries of the Word, prayer and shepherding the flock. Non-Staff Elders are men recommended by the Council of Elders and called by the Church who serve voluntarily without financial support from the Church as they fulfill God’s call to the specific ministries of the Word, prayer and shepherding the flock. The Council of Elders will meet at least quarterly and will consist of a quorum which is at least one-half of the Non-Staff elders plus at least one-half of the Staff Elders, except for matters on which only Non-Staff Elders are entitled to vote, in which case a majority of the Non-Staff elders shall constitute a quorum.

From Capitol Hill Church’s Constitution: The senior pastor shall be an elder. He shall perform the duties of an elder described in Section 2, above, and shall be recognized by the church as particularly gifted and called to the full-time ministry of preaching and teaching.

From the PCA Constitution: Elders being of one class of office, ruling elders possess the same authority and eligibility to office in the courts of the Church as teaching elders. They should, moreover, cultivate zealously their own aptness to teach the Bible and should improve every opportunity of doing so.

for this lesson was that students should be able to demonstrate that all elders/pastors should be involved in teaching and ruling.

The class began with a brief review of Presbyterian polity. I commented that in Presbyterianism a general distinction is made between “teaching elders” and “ruling elders.” The ruling elders often function like a church board, while the pastors serve as ministry program directors.¹⁰ To counter this position, I maintained that all elders should be able to teach as well as exercise leadership in the church (1 Tim 3:4-5).¹¹ Furthermore, Ephesians 4:11 presented evidence that “pastors and teachers” are two facets of a single office of pastoral leadership.”¹²

Nevertheless, the polity of Calvary Church proposes a clear distinction between teaching elders and ruling elders. Therefore, I suggested to the class that this system is problematic as it maintains a distinction between professional and nonprofessional leaders. While it is not wrong to have paid and unpaid elders in the church, it is unwise to have unequal authority in the church by creating a distinct office.¹³ To conclude session 5, I argued that “pastor” is not a separate office from elder. Neither is there a difference between teaching elders and ruling elders. All elders are pastor-teachers, and all elders must have the gifts of leadership and teaching, as there is no scriptural or practical

¹⁰ Nathan A. Finn, “The Rule of Elders: The Presbyterian Angle on Church Leadership,” in *Shepherding God’s Flock: Biblical Leadership in the New Testament and Beyond*, ed. Benjamin L. Merkle and Thomas R. Schreiner (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2014), 201.

¹¹ Gregg R. Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers: The Doctrine of the Church*, Foundations of Evangelical Theology (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 222.

¹² John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue, eds., *Biblical Doctrine: A Systematic Summary of Bible Truth* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 757.

¹³ Benjamin L. Merkle, *40 Questions about Elders and Deacons*, 40 Questions Series (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2008), 171.

differentiation between ruling elders and teaching elders. Indeed, every congregation needs to be led by men who possess both pastoral and administrative skills.¹⁴

The discussion section of this class began with one of the elders referring to Calvary's Constitution. The elder read, "The government of the church, the conduct of its business, the management of all its property, real and personal, the distribution of all funds, the supervision of its general work, its organizations, its ministries, and branch works shall, *under the leadership of the Holy Spirit*, be vested in the Session." In other words, he was suggesting that although the Session is not comprised of staff pastors, it is still governed by the Holy Spirit. While this may be true, I warned that men also carry sinful flesh into the Session meetings. To argue, then, that the Spirit is always being manifest, and there is a spirit of unity and the bond of peace in all Session meetings, would not be true. To be sure, throughout Calvary's history there have been many instances in which the Session was quite divided. Again, one of those instances is detailed in this project.

At the end of the session, the lingering questions were: (1) Are pastors at Calvary Church elders?; (2) If pastors are elders, then why are they not on the Session?; and (3) Have we adopted a business model of church government that is more practical than biblical? Concluding statements concerning these matters were made in the final class.

Session 6: A Plea for Change and a Call for Unity

In session 6, the focus was on the need for change within Calvary's polity. First, I asked the class to consider the view that church polity is fluid, and can be revisited and adjusted according to the times, culture, and needs of the church. Second, I submitted to the class that unity will stem from staff pastors and lay-elder having equal authority in

¹⁴ Phil A. Newton and Matt Schmucker, *Elders in the Life of the Church: Rediscovering the Biblical Model for Church Leadership*, 9Marks (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2014), 52.

governing the church. The learning outcome for this lesson was that students should be able to recognize that church polity should occasionally be revisited, examined, and potentially adjusted.

Again, I reiterated two questions that were central to the project: (1) Are pastors at Calvary elders?; and (2) Is the weight of authority between these two groups (pastors and elders) balanced? To answer these questions, I directed the class to Calvary's Constitution to show that elders are active, non-employee members of Calvary Church and are elected by the congregation. Furthermore, the Session members are sometimes referred to as the "elders," and as such, the term "elder" is synonymous with the term "member" of the Board of Directors or "Director." At Calvary, the governing body is the Session, which is comprised of elders and the senior pastor (a non-voting moderator). Therefore, it can be concluded that pastors at Calvary are *not* elders, and the weight of authority is *not* balanced, as pastors are not members of the Session.

At this point, I advised the class that all elders/pastors should be equal in value, power, and rank. The elders of the New Testament were all equal in rank and authority, and discharged the same duties, including the ministry of the gospel and the oversight of the government and discipline of the church. There was no "us/them" or "teaching elders/ruling elders." They were one. While some elders excel in administration and others excel in teaching, turning this distinction into two kinds of elder offices seems beyond the intention of Scripture.

Lastly, I challenged the class to consider that Christian leadership must be open to evaluation and change. Although Calvary's polity has been in place for over eighty years, there are times it needs to be revisited. In fact, church polity requires ongoing theological and practical dialogue.¹⁵ However, I submitted to the class that if a change in Calvary's polity were to occur, the Session would need to be involved in that process.

¹⁵ Norman, "Is Polity That Important?," 21.

Perhaps some of the elders in the class would be open to moving this notion forward to the entire Session.

During the class discussion, one elder suggested that all pastors should attend the Session meetings. He suggested that although the pastors do not have voting authority, their input in Session matters is encouraged. Currently, the pastors are scheduled to attend the meetings on a rotating basis. Usually, only two or three pastors attend the Session meeting each month. This elder also communicated to the class that the senior pastor prefers “a voice in the Session rather than a vote.” At the end of this discussion, the class consensus was that although pastors do not have a vote, they should at least attend the Session meetings in order to speak into church governance issues.

Conclusion

The project helped unify the leaders at Calvary Church by educating them about biblical church polity. This was a difficult task as Calvary is well rooted in eighty years of its own tradition, history, and culture. Nevertheless, many class participants indicated they learned a great deal about church polity and gained valuable insight about the inner workings of Calvary. The class also seemed to appreciate the opportunity to speak openly about these topics. In general, class participation appeared to strengthen the bond between the brothers. To this end, the project was successful.

CHAPTER 5

EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT

All who serve in leadership at Calvary recognize that the health of the church depends greatly on the unity of those men serving on the Session. Yet, for unity to be achieved, it is important that church leaders have a biblical understanding of the roles and functions of church offices. However, after teaching the curriculum it was evident that not all in leadership understood what Scripture reveals about church polity. What is more, some class participants had not examined Calvary's polity in light of God's Word. It is likely some students assumed that because Calvary has a high view of Scripture and its pastors preach and teach the Word of God, then its Constitution must naturally be in line with Scripture. This project challenged these men to take a fresh look at these things. In doing so, this project also helped them not only gain biblical knowledge of the office of elder/pastor but also achieve a better understanding of Calvary's polity.

This project was evaluated according to the goals and methodology outlined in chapter 1. Assessing the goals of the project served as the criteria to determine the success of the project. This chapter evaluates the project goals and considers its process and application.

Evaluation of the Project's Purpose

The purpose of this project was to foster greater unity between the pastors and lay elders at Calvary Church through a biblical church polity. Specifically, the project was designed to educate Calvary's leaders on church polity. The Church Overseer Assessment administered as both a pre- and post-curriculum confirms an increase in the

students' knowledge of the subject matter. Thus, the project's purpose of helping students gain a biblical understanding of church polity was successfully met.

Key components of this project included assessing leadership's understanding of church polity, developing and teaching the Understanding Church Polity curriculum, and measuring the change in knowledge after the curriculum was implemented. This chapter will evaluate these components.

Evaluation of the Project's Goals

The success of the project was evaluated according to three goals: (1) assess the current pastors and elders regarding their general understanding and key convictions concerning church leadership and polity; (2) develop a curriculum for training leaders in a biblical church polity; and (3) teach the curriculum to Calvary's current governing body to increase their knowledge of the church leadership roles and polity.

Goal 1: Assess the Pastors and Elders

For the completion of the first goal, a survey instrument was created. The Church Overseer Assessment gathered participants' general knowledge of church polity, specifically regarding their understanding of the roles and functions of the office of elder/pastor.¹ Several statements in the survey also assessed their understanding of Calvary's polity.²

The assessment was given to individuals who completed the curriculum, which included five elders and thirteen deacons. Due to their Wednesday evening teaching responsibilities, pastors were not able to take the Understanding Church Polity class; therefore, the pastors were not surveyed. The measurement of success for goal 1 was based on 75 percent of the leadership team completing the survey. This survey goal was

¹ See appendix 1 for the Understanding Church Polity Survey Tool.

² See appendix 2 for the Understanding Church Polity pre-class survey results.

not met. Nevertheless, 5 out of 8 elders took the survey, representing the majority of the Session. In total, 18 men participated in the survey, reflecting 41 percent of the leadership team, which consists of pastors, elders, and deacons.

In the pre-class survey, 8 of the 25 survey items produced an average score of 3.00 or higher (agree or strongly agree; see table 1). In the pre-class survey, three of the survey items projected an average score of below 2.00. Below 2.00 indicates strong disagreement with the survey statement (see table 2).

While the survey responses confirmed that the class participants had some understanding of the roles and functions of the elder/pastor and some knowledge of Calvary’s polity, responses to other survey items indicated significant misconceptions regarding some of the topics to be addressed in the curriculum (see table 3). A score below 2.00 indicates strong disagreement with the survey statement.

Table 1. Pre-class survey response averages above 3.00

Survey item	Survey Statement	Average Score
1	Biblically, the terms pastor, elder, and overseer refer to the same church office.	3.22
14	Bible knowledge and theological acumen are important for elders at Calvary Church.	3.61
15	Elders must be teachers.	3.17
16	Pastors must be teachers.	3.33
17	Calvary’s Constitution prohibits pastors from voting on matters that come before the Session.	3.00
18	Pastors must possess good leadership skills.	3.50
19	Elders must possess good leadership skills.	3.50
20	At Calvary Church, generally there is unity among the pastors and elders.	3.22

Table 2. Pre-class survey response averages below 2.00

Survey item	Survey Statement	Average Score
8	Elders should have greater authority in spiritual matters than pastors.	1.72
11	Pastors are not equipped to handle administrative matters.	1.94
13	Pastors should not participate in Session meetings.	1.83

Table 3. Pre-class survey responses that indicate misconceptions about church polity

Survey item	Survey Statement	Average Score
2	Biblically, the qualifications for pastor and elder are the same.	2.83
3	Biblically, the responsibilities for pastor and elder are the same.	2.77
4	Elders and pastors should have equal say in decisions regarding church administration.	2.38
7	Elders and pastors should have equal say in decisions regarding spiritual matters.	2.72
22	Pastors and elders must share responsibility for teaching and ruling in the church.	2.83
23	At Calvary Church, elders possess greater authority than pastors in church oversight.	2.61

Goal 2: Develop the Curriculum

The majority of the curriculum was created in the 80960WW—Foundations of Teaching seminar. The curriculum was originally planned to be taught in eight sessions. However, the senior pastor approved the class to be taught as part of Calvary’s Wednesday Fall Electives, which are limited to six classes, with ninety minutes of instruction for each class. Therefore, the curriculum was revised to accommodate six, ninety-minute classes.

There were several objectives in developing the Understanding Church Polity curriculum. First, Scripture needed to be examined to determine the roles and functions of the elder/pastor. Second, Scripture should also be considered to understand the strengths and weakness of three forms of church polity, with a specific focus on Presbyterianism. Third, the voices of the commentators who support or oppose these forms of polity needed to be clearly heard. Fourth, Calvary’s Constitution and by-laws should also have clear representation in the curriculum. Fifth, Calvary’s church polity should be considered in light of Scripture. In summary, the curriculum should direct the students to Scripture, allow them to hear from various commentators, and subsequently aid participants in evaluating Calvary’s polity. Although the class was condensed to six sessions, the content objectives for developing the curriculum were met.

The goal of developing the curriculum was met as a panel, consisting of two Calvary pastors and a former deacon, completed a rubric that measured the curriculum in

four key areas: (1) biblical and theological accuracy; (2) faithfulness to Calvary Church; (3) content and application; and (4) practicality. Two panel members suggested that time for discussion should be added to each lesson. With this minor adjustment, the curriculum was completed and ready for implementation. Table 4 provides a summary of the panel’s curriculum evaluations.

Table 4. Expert panel rubric results

Church Overseer Curriculum Evaluation Tool					
1= insufficient 2=requires attention 3= sufficient 4=exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
Each lesson is faithful to Scripture. All Scripture is properly interpreted, explained, and applied.				Evaluator 1 Evaluator 2 Evaluator 3	
Each lesson is theologically sound.				Evaluator 1 Evaluator 2 Evaluator 3	
The content of the curriculum sufficiently covers each issue it is designed to address.			Evaluator 1	Evaluator 2 Evaluator 3	
The curriculum contains points of practical application.			Evaluator 2 Evaluator 3	Evaluator 1	
Each lesson provides opportunities for participant interaction with the material.		Evaluator 2	Evaluator 1 Evaluator 3		“Nothing in the curriculum indicates opportunity for discussion or questions”- Evaluator 1 “Be sure to add time for discussion.” – Evaluator 2
At the end of the course, participants will have a greater understanding of church polity.				Evaluator 1 Evaluator 2 Evaluator 3	
At the end of the course, participants will have a greater understanding of the roles of pastor and elder.				Evaluator 1 Evaluator 2 Evaluator 3	
The curriculum is directly applicable to Calvary Church.				Evaluator 1 Evaluator 2 Evaluator 3	

Goal 3: Teach the Curriculum

The goal of teaching the curriculum was met, as the Understanding Church Polity course was taught in conjunction with Calvary's Wednesday electives program. To accommodate Calvary's elective requirements, the curriculum was condensed from eight classes to six. The curriculum, therefore, consisted of six, ninety-minute sessions. Participants were required to attend in person, as an online option was not offered. Due to the subject nature, instruction and discussions needed to be kept within the confines of the classroom.

The class consisted of eighteen men, including five elders and thirteen deacons. All were serving in leadership positions during the implementation of the project. The project originally called for pastors to take the curriculum; however, due to other responsibilities and the timing of the class, they were not able to participate. Nevertheless, five of the eight Session members were in attendance. This represented the majority of the Session—those who have governing authority at Calvary. It is also likely that some of the deacons who took the class will become elders in the future. Certainly, the Understanding Church Polity course helped increase participants' knowledge of the church leadership roles and polity.

After the curriculum was taught, the Church Overseer Assessment was given again to determine the change in knowledge. All 18 participants completed the pre- and post-class surveys.³ In the post-class survey, 14 of the 25 survey items produced an average score of 3.00 or higher (agree or strongly agree; see table 5). Three items scored below 2.00 (disagree; see table 6).

³ See appendix 3 for the Understanding Church Polity post-class survey results.

Table 5. Post-class survey response averages above 3.00

Survey item	Survey Statement	Average Score
1	Biblically, the terms pastor, elder, and overseer refer to the same church office.	3.61
2	Biblically, the qualifications for pastor and elder are the same.	3.44
3	Biblically, the responsibilities for pastor and elder are the same.	3.27
7	Elders and pastors should have equal say in decisions regarding spiritual matters.	3.22
14	Bible knowledge and theological acumen are important for elders at Calvary Church.	3.72
15	Elders must be teachers.	3.50
16	Pastors must be teachers.	3.72
17	Calvary's Constitution prohibits pastors from voting on matters that come before the Session.	3.50
18	Pastors must possess good leadership skills.	3.50
19	Elders must possess good leadership skills.	3.67
20	At Calvary Church, generally there is unity among the pastors and elders.	3.44
21	At times, the relationship between the pastors and elders at Calvary has been adversarial.	3.00
22	Pastors and elders must share responsibility for teaching and ruling in the church.	3.50
23	At Calvary Church, elders possess greater authority than pastors in church oversight.	3.11

Table 6. Post-class survey response averages below 2.00

Survey item	Survey Statement	Average Score
6	Pastors should have greater authority in church administration than elders.	1.72
8	Elders should have greater authority in spiritual matters than pastors.	1.67
13	Pastors should not participate in Session meetings.	1.67

The goal was met when a *t*-test for dependent samples indicated that a change in knowledge had occurred. The *t*-test demonstrated a positive difference between the pre- and post-class survey responses: $t_{(17)} = -2.88429349$, $p = .005149$. The hypotheses that the teaching would make a difference was confirmed by the *t*-test results.

Table 7. *T*-test: Paired two sample for means

	Pre-Test Total	Post-Test Total
Mean	67.55555556	71.38888889
Variance	15.79084967	16.60457516
Observations	18	18
Pearson Correlation	0.018567343	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	17	
t Stat	-2.88429349	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.005149796	
t Critical one-tail	1.739606726	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.010299593	
t Critical two-tail	2.109815578	

The average increase in knowledge for the participants was raised 3.833 points from 67.55 to 71.38. The greatest change in the survey occurred in item 22. Item 22 stated, “Pastors and elders must share responsibility for teaching and ruling in the church.” The average score increased by .67. This provided evidence that the participants learned that elders and pastors must teach and rule together and in unity, which was the primary goal of the project. Table 8 indicates items in which there were significant changes in the students’ understanding of church polity.

Table 8. Notable score changes after teaching the curriculum

Survey item	Survey Statement	Pre-class Average Score	Post-class Average Score
2	Biblically, the qualifications for pastor and elder are the same.	2.83	3.44
3	Biblically, the responsibilities for pastor and elder are the same.	2.78	3.27
7	Elders and pastors should have equal say in decisions regarding spiritual matters.	2.72	3.22
22	Pastors and elders must share responsibility for teaching and ruling in the church.	2.83	3.50
23	At Calvary Church, elders possess greater authority than pastors in church oversight.	2.61	3.11

Strengths of the Project

There were four strengths in this project. First, Scripture was foundational in all lessons in the curriculum. Indeed, all topics covered in this project were considered in light of Scripture. The Word of God was the means of evaluating the forms of church polity, roles and functions of the church offices, and Calvary's polity. The project's attention to Scripture also challenged class participants to think theologically and biblically.

Second, the discussion periods in each class session were invaluable. These times the class members to freely voice their thoughts, concerns, and questions. The men were provided with a rare environment in which they could talk openly about the issues relating to this project. As such, the discussion periods in each class seemed to strengthen the relationships between the brothers. Furthermore, their comments provided much needed qualitative information that was missed in the Church Overseer Assessment.

Third, the project provided class participants with a much need foundational understanding of church polity. Many in the class had not given significant thought about the topic, and certainly they had not considered how important biblical polity is to a church's health and vitality. In addition, most of the deacons appeared to have little to no idea about the nature of the working relationship between pastors and elders at Calvary. As some of these deacons will at some point likely become elders, the Understanding Church Polity course gave them a good indication of what to expect as a new elder on the Session.

Fourth, five of the eight Session members attended the class. A sixth elder was able to attend only two of the six sessions. Again, this represented the majority of the Session. In the class, then, were men who possessed the authority to make changes to Calvary's Constitution. Perhaps a seed was planted that could spark change in the Constitution in the future. Surely, this project left the men with the notion that Calvary's polity should be periodically revisited.

Weaknesses of the Project

There were two perceived weaknesses with the project. First, other than the instructor, there were no pastors in the Understanding Church Polity class. Ideally, it would have been helpful to have the pastors' voices speaking into this subject. Again, the pastors were not able to attend the class due to their Wednesday evening teaching responsibilities. Nevertheless, all the pastors who were aware of the project unanimously agreed that (1) pastors at Calvary Church are not elders and (2) pastors should be included in the Session as voting members. However, it was not appropriate for me to speak on behalf of all the pastors, especially given the sensitive nature of the subject. Therefore, this information was not communicated to the class.

Second, the wrong survey instrument was used in assessing the class participants. The first draft of the survey was used in error. A final version of the instrument, completed in the 80950: Applied Empirical Research seminar, would have used a broad survey to generalize results, and then incorporate qualitative, open-ended questions to help explain the quantitative five-point Likert scale survey. However, this final draft was not used. Instead, the first draft was emailed to class participants for pre- and post-class assessment. The survey used in the project incorporated twenty-five, four-point Likert scale questions and two multiple choice questions. Although class participants seemed comfortable sharing in the class, the qualitative section in the correct survey tool would have allowed the class to voice their opinions, concerns, and ideas in a more confidential way. Thus, an opportunity to gather additional information was lost. Even so, the first draft survey yielded measurable results.

What I Would Do Differently

There are three things I would do differently if I were to complete this project again. First, the project would have been better served if pastors were able to participate. Other than the Wednesday elective option, another possibility would have been to teach the curriculum on Saturdays or on an evening other than Wednesday. Still, the schedules

of the elders and pastors would have likely prohibited some from committing to additional time at church. The best option, therefore, may have been to have an elder/pastor retreat. Although it has been many years since the pastors and elders have been on a leadership retreat together, such an event would have provided a great opportunity for teaching these men. To be sure, a retreat would have captured the entire Session along with the pastors. A decision to do something like this would have been at the discretion of the senior pastor.

Second, a detail that could have been used to address the distinction between pastors and elders, as well as between elders themselves, is the existence of the Executive Committee. According to Calvary's Constitution,

The Session shall have an Executive Committee appointed annually by the Session and comprised of the Senior Pastor, the Chairman of the Finance Committee, the Clerk of Session, and up to three members at large. The Committee is to assist the moderator in staffing and preparing issues for consideration by the Session, and in other matters delegated to it by the Session.

In short, before any issues are presented to the Session, they are first filtered through the Executive Committee. The committee, therefore, determines the agenda for each Session meeting. Over the years, some elders have taken issue with this "super group of elders," as the Executive Committee creates another hierarchical level of church leadership. Injecting this subject into the curriculum would have provided the class an opportunity to evaluate this important aspect of the Session's day-to-day operations along biblical lines. This evaluation would have perhaps further supported the project's call for biblical eldership and unity.

Third, in addition to teaching the curriculum, I should have considered other avenues to help build consensus for this project. As my teaching style tends to be forceful and dogmatic, I can come across as one who wants to eliminate, or at least strongly refute, those who disagree with my position. While some may find this "all in" or "guns blazing" approach to be refreshing, when a project with sensitive subject matter is concerned, this

kind of instruction can put class participants further on edge. Some may even find my approach and tone to be off-putting.

Therefore, I should have made myself more available to individuals to answer concerns privately. Certainly, I could have intentionally sought out those most troubled by the curriculum to address concerns, alleviate worries, and ensure that they felt heard. This would have not only helped to build relationships, but also aided me in gaining insight into individual perceptions and opinions regarding the project's topic. In short, I should have been more attentive to the individuals serving as Calvary's leaders instead of simply taking aim at the leadership structure itself. After all, there is a relational component to the leadership environment at Calvary that does not necessarily hinge on theological principles.

Theological Reflections

Three primary theological reflections surfaced as a result of the preparation and presentation of the Understanding Church Polity curriculum. First, I cannot conclude that pastors at Calvary Church are elders, at least not in the biblical sense. Calvary's Constitution defines the elder in a manner that clearly differentiates this position from that of the pastor. As long as this distinction remains, it is going to be difficult, if not impossible, for Calvary to completely unify its leadership. Thus, I would like to see this polity more in line with Scripture.

Second, since pastor and elder do not constitute the same office, this brings into question the role of the pastor. It is clear that elders and pastors do not function in the same capacity, specifically with regard to church administration. While it can be argued that the pastors rule by managing ministries and various day-to-day operations, the buck still stops with the Session. Other than the senior pastor, the pastors have neither the authority nor the political cachet to administrate at the macro level. One must conclude, then, that a pastor's duties center around teaching and shepherding. My second theological reflection, then, is that I am primarily a teacher and a shepherd.

While teaching the curriculum, it was evident that many class participants consider administration to be the primary role of the elder, not the pastor. In fact, some elders refer to the Session meetings as “business meetings.” Although the “CEO/Board of Directors” model has practical benefits, especially for a large church, I cannot determine that this type of polity represents the best interpretation of Scripture. This is mostly because the pastors are not members of the Board of Directors. If pastors were to be included in the Session as voting members, then I could make a case that this model is more in line with Scripture, as pastors and elder should share authority in overseeing the flock. Yet, as long as Calvary is entrenched in this polity, the balance of power between elders and pastors remains unequal.

The third theological reflection is that the pastors can add a much-needed spiritual element to the Session’s business meetings. Again, Calvary is a large church and operates very much like a corporation, with the Session primarily focused on operations. Yet, church leaders cannot lose sight of the fact that the church is a living organism (2 Cor 6:16; 1 Pet 2:5). Hence, John Piper argues that the aims of pastoral ministry are “eternal and spiritual.” He adds that the failure to see this is the reason the church is dying.⁴

This is also a point I introduced in the Understanding Church Polity curriculum. In the class, I referred to Colin Marshall and Tony Payne’s *The Trellis and the Vine*. The book uses the analogy of the trellis (the frame used to support a growing plant) and the vine (the living plant). For the church, the trellis is the management, finances, programs, and ministries. These things have no life in themselves. While the trellis work is necessary, it should serve only to support the vine (that which is truly alive). It should never take priority over vine growing. God is growing people, not programs. In short, church leaders must be aware of spiritual things, not just the things that are transient (Rom 8:5; Col 3:2). Indeed, growth involves committed personal ministry in order see how the Word is being

⁴ John Piper, *Brothers, We Are Not Professionals: A Plea to Pastors for Radical Ministry* (Nashville: B & H, 2013), 2.

learned and applied to individuals in the congregation. As the pastors are more hands-on with the congregation, these men are more likely to “see” how the vine is doing. To be sure, paying attention to the flock of God is a significant part of a pastor’s responsibility (Acts 20:28). It would be wise, then, for the pastors to speak into the issues brought before the Session, as this would introduce a spiritual component otherwise missing from the business meetings. Indeed, this would result in a more holistic approach to church government.

Personal Reflections

Many of the men who participated in the Understanding Church Polity course seemed to genuinely appreciate the instruction provided in the class, as well as the opportunity to assess Calvary’s polity through the lens of Scripture. Certainly, the curriculum presented a biblical foundation from which these church leaders can consider issues regarding church polity moving forward. While the curriculum suggested that Calvary’s Constitution presents certain obstacles preventing elders and pastors from being wholly unified as a leadership team, the class recognized that the Constitution packs a lot of authority. After all, Calvary has eighty years of history on its side to indicate that its polity works.

Church polity is a topic that needs to be approached cautiously and wisely, as it is an issue that can divide leadership. As such, my first reflection is that change takes time. Mark Dever writes, “As a pastor, your greatest power to help your congregation change comes not through your forceful personality, but through years of faithful, patient teaching.”⁵ Indeed, any attempt to bulldoze over a church’s history or tradition is likely to be met with contempt. Therefore, it is best to carefully plant seeds and look for opportunities to water.

⁵ Mark Dever, “How to Change Your Church,” 9Marks, March 1, 2010, https://www.9marks.org/article/how-change-your-church/?utm_source=eml-article&utm_medium=eml-article&utm_campaign=eml-article&mc_cid=3e0b9c04bf&mc_cid=a2dea3c727.

My second personal reflection is that even though a biblical case for change can be presented, I do not suggest that Calvary's Constitution is in some way heretical. To be sure, Scripture does not provide in detail all the aspects of how a church government should be structured. How a church organizes itself hinges to a great extent on its interpretation of Scripture. As noted in the project, the interpretation of the Word as it pertains to polity has been debated for centuries. It would be nonsensical, therefore, to dismiss Calvary as a church that is not in line with Scripture. Calvary has a high view of Scripture, and its leaders rightly handle the Word of Truth. While Calvary is not a perfect church, it is a "true church." Gregg Allison explains that a true church is one in which people "can have effective ministry and in which they will experience Christian growth as well, and then should stay there and minister, continually working for the purity of that church."⁶ For that, praise the Lord. Without question, Calvary has its priorities right; namely, preaching and teaching the Word of God. Calvary is indeed a church worthy of its people's commitment.

Third, although I am not an elder, I can still have a voice in the Session. It was encouraging for me to hear the elders who participated in the Understanding Church Polity class extend to the pastors an invitation to attend the Sessions meetings. What is more, these elders indicated that they would appreciate pastoral input at the meetings. Currently, only pastors who are scheduled attend the meetings, but as result of this project, I plan to attend as many as possible. Although the pastors do not have a vote, we have a voice. We cannot make that voice known if we are not at the meetings. Having a pastoral presence is an opportunity to not only provide input but to show unity between pastors and elders. Thus, this is a step in the right direction.

Fourth, as a pastor at Calvary Church, this project helped me evaluate my effectiveness as a teacher and also as a consensus maker. While I would like to see

⁶ Gregg R. Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers: The Doctrine of the Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 166.

Calvary's leadership consider changing its polity to include pastors on the Session, during the course of this project I may have been "out running" some of brothers who were seriously wrestling with this topic. J. Oswald Sanders wisely concludes, "A leader shows patience by not running too far ahead of his followers and thus discouraging them. While keeping ahead, he stays near enough for them to keep him in sight and hear his call forward. He is not so strong that he cannot show strengthening sympathy for the weakness of his fellow travelers."⁷ Not that the men taking the curriculum were weak, but their presuppositions and opinions were earnestly challenged as this project examined Calvary's foundational beliefs. For some of the men, the information presented in this project came as a bit of a shock. Still others had never considered or even heard of some of the information taught in the course. Therefore, to create unanimity, varying reactions needed to be handled with patience and grace. Indeed, patience, gentleness, and kindness are to be hallmarks of my teaching. Furthermore, it is not necessary that these qualities are sidelined for the sake of personal conviction. Dealing with theological issues can be difficult; thus, it is not only wise to be faithful to Scripture, but also to be an agent of peace and grace. I think of the Lord's patience with his disciples. What an example of patient teaching; what an example of creating consensus in such an unlikely group of men.

Conclusion

When I began this project, I considered it to be a "labor of love" that would hopefully result in Calvary Church being healthier, more unified, and more atuned to spiritual things. As mentioned in chapter 1, Calvary had just been through an intense period in which some elders on the Session were divided against the pastors over a theological issue. The potential for a schism in the church was great. For some who were involved in

⁷ J. Oswald Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership: Principles of Excellence for Every Believer* (Chicago: Moody, 2007), 82.

leadership during this period, suspicion, animosity, and a general uneasiness still existed. Thus, I pursued this project with the hope that these issues could be remedied.

The course succeeded in not only giving participants sound instruction on church polity, but also challenging them to think biblically. As this information was given to a significant portion of the leadership team, I have hope that a seed was planted in the minds of these men that perhaps one day, in the Lord's timing, this project can be revisited. Until then, may Calvary's leadership continue to be united in its mission to "be and make authentic disciples of Jesus Christ."

APPENDIX 1

CHURCH OVERSEER ASSESSMENT

The Church Overseer Assessment was given to class participants pre- and post-class. Twenty-five items in the survey required a response in the form of a four-point Likert scale ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.” Two items in the survey allowed participants to indicate with a checkmark the responsibilities that apply to a pastor and those that apply to an elder.

CHURCH OVERSEER ASSESSMENT

Agreement to Participate

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to identify the current understanding of church polity as well as the offices of pastor and elder. This research is being conducted by Rob Reece at Calvary Church in Charlotte, North Carolina, for the purpose of collecting data for a ministry project. In this research, you will answer questions before the project and you will answer the same questions at the conclusion of the project. Any information you provide will be held strictly confidential, and at no time will your name be reported or identified with your responses.

Participation is strictly voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time. By completion of this survey, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this project.

Instructions: circle one

1. Biblically, the terms pastor, elder, and overseer refer to the same church office.
Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree
2. Biblically, the qualifications for pastor and elder are the same.
Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree
3. Biblically, the responsibilities for pastor and elder are the same.
Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree
4. Elders and pastors should have equal say in decisions regarding church administration.
Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree
5. Elders should have greater authority in church administration than pastors.
Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree
6. Pastors should have greater authority in church administration than elders.
Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree
7. Elders and pastors should have equal say in decisions regarding spiritual matters.
Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree
8. Elders should have greater authority in spiritual matters than pastors.
Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree
9. Pastors should have greater authority in spiritual matters than elders.
Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

10. Pastors are better equipped than elders to handle spiritual matters.
- | | | | |
|-------------------|----------|-------|----------------|
| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|-------------------|----------|-------|----------------|
11. Pastors are not equipped to handle administrative matters.
- | | | | |
|-------------------|----------|-------|----------------|
| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|-------------------|----------|-------|----------------|
12. Elders are better equipped than pastors to handle administrative matters.
- | | | | |
|-------------------|----------|-------|----------------|
| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|-------------------|----------|-------|----------------|
13. Pastors should not participate in Session meetings.
- | | | | |
|-------------------|----------|-------|----------------|
| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|-------------------|----------|-------|----------------|
14. Bible knowledge and theological acumen is important for elders at Calvary Church.
- | | | | |
|-------------------|----------|-------|----------------|
| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|-------------------|----------|-------|----------------|
15. Elders must be teachers.
- | | | | |
|-------------------|----------|-------|----------------|
| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|-------------------|----------|-------|----------------|
16. Pastors must be teachers.
- | | | | |
|-------------------|----------|-------|----------------|
| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|-------------------|----------|-------|----------------|
17. Calvary's Constitution prohibits pastors from voting on matters that come before the Session.
- | | | | |
|-------------------|----------|-------|----------------|
| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|-------------------|----------|-------|----------------|
18. Pastors must possess good leadership skills.
- | | | | |
|-------------------|----------|-------|----------------|
| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|-------------------|----------|-------|----------------|
19. Elders must possess good leadership skills.
- | | | | |
|-------------------|----------|-------|----------------|
| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|-------------------|----------|-------|----------------|
20. At Calvary Church, generally there is unity among the pastors and elders.
- | | | | |
|-------------------|----------|-------|----------------|
| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|-------------------|----------|-------|----------------|
21. At times, the relationship between the pastors and elders at Calvary has been adversarial.
- | | | | |
|-------------------|----------|-------|----------------|
| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|-------------------|----------|-------|----------------|
22. Pastors and elders must share responsibility for teaching and ruling in the church.
- | | | | |
|-------------------|----------|-------|----------------|
| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|-------------------|----------|-------|----------------|

23. At Calvary Church, elders possess greater authority than pastors in church oversight.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

24. At Calvary Church, pastors possess greater authority than elders in church oversight.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

25. At Calvary Church, pastors and elders equally share responsibility for church oversight.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

26. What are the primary roles of a pastor? (Check all that apply.)

- Praying
- Teaching
- Counseling
- Evangelism
- Discipling
- Administration
- Managing finances
- Setting policies
- Hospital visitations

27. What are the primary roles of an elder? (Check all that apply.)

- Praying
- Teaching
- Counseling
- Evangelism
- Discipling
- Administration
- Managing finances
- Setting policies
- Hospital visitations
- Counseling

APPENDIX 2

CHURCH OVERSEER CURRICULUM EVALUATION RUBRIC

Two Calvary pastors and one former deacon evaluated the Church Overseer Curriculum using the Church Overseer Curriculum Evaluation Rubric. The evaluators scored the curriculum in eight areas that measured (1) biblical and theological accuracy; (2) faithfulness to Calvary Church; (3) content and application; and (4) practicality. A score of “3-sufficient” or “4-exemplary” constituted approval for that area. A score of “1-insufficient” or “2-requires attention” prompted modification of the curriculum. The evaluators completed the rubric and gave recommendations for minor adjustments to the curriculum.

CHURCH OVERSEER CURRICULUM
EVALUATION RUBRIC

Church Overseer Curriculum Evaluation Tool					
1= insufficient 2=requires attention 3= sufficient 4=exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
Each lesson is faithful to Scripture. All Scripture is properly interpreted, explained, and applied.					
Each lesson is theologically sound.					
The content of the curriculum sufficiently covers each issue it is designed to address.					
The curriculum contains points of practical application.					
Each lesson provides opportunities for participant interaction with the material.					
At the end of the course, participants will have a greater understanding of church polity.					
At the end of the course, participants will have a greater understanding of the roles of pastor and elder.					
The curriculum is directly applicable to Calvary Church.					

APPENDIX 3

UNDERSTANDING CHURCH POLITY CURRICULUM

This appendix contains the outline and talking points for the Understanding Church Polity curriculum. It was designed to be taught in six, ninety-minute sessions, including time for discussion. The target audience was current elders, deacons, and pastors at Calvary Church.



Understanding Church Polity

“For the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ” (Rev. 1:9)

Lesson 1 September 7, 2022

1. Introduction

- a. A general introduction to church polity. This course will focus on:
 - i. The forms of church polity;
 - ii. The polity at Calvary Church;
 - iii. The office of elder/overseer/pastor as seen in Scripture;
 - iv. The functions and responsibilities of elders/overseer/pastor as noted in Scripture;
 - v. Presbyterianism and the elder/pastor
 - vi. Biblical issues concerning the roles of staff pastors and lay-elders,
 - vii. The concept of changing church polity, and
 - viii. The importance of unity in church leadership.

2. What is church polity?

- a. In week one, three types of church polity will be introduced. These are: Episcopalianism, Congregationalism, and Presbyterianism. Each of these will be presented from biblical and theological perspectives. The strengths and weaknesses of each of these forms of church government will be explored.
 - i. *Learning Outcome: By the end of this week, students will be able to articulate the core components of three church polities: Episcopalianism, Congregationalism, and Presbyterianism.*

3. General Church Polity

- a. Why is church polity important?
 - i. For elders/pastors/deacons to be effective in caring for the Lord’s church, they should have a working knowledge of church polity.

1. This knowledge matters because church polity shapes how people think and act, and determines how things get accomplished
 - ii. Many churches neither understand their current culture nor the preferred culture which would best help them achieve their goals.¹
 1. Furthermore, unbiblical deviations in leadership will undermine the congregation's view of the care, courage, and competency of its leadership.²
 - a. According to Al Mohler, a leader who does not know how the work is done cannot possibly lead with effectiveness.³
 2. In order to lead effectively, we need to have a clear understanding of biblical church polity.
 - a. To help protect the church from a potentially defective polity, Calvary's leaders should not only have a working knowledge of general church polity, but must also have a functional knowledge of their responsibilities as mandated in Scripture.
4. What is Church Polity?
- a. Working definition: Church polity is the organization or governmental structure of a local church or fellowship of churches, or as a form of church government adopted by an ecclesiastical body.”⁴

¹ Eric Geiger and Kevin Peck, *Designed to Lead: The Church and Leadership Development* (Nashville: B & H, 2016), 142.

² Geiger and Peck, *Designed to Lead*, 144.

³ R. Albert Mohler, *The Conviction to Lead: 25 Principles for Leadership That Matter* (Minneapolis: Bethany, 2012), 72.

⁴ R. Stanton Norman, “Is Polity That Important?” in *Perspectives on Church Government: Five Views of Church Polity*, ed. Daniel L. Akin, Chad Brand, and R. Stanton Norman (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2004), 15.

- i. In other words, church polity is typically understood as the way in which a church or group of churches organize and administrate themselves.⁵

- 1. Church polity must be biblical. Church leadership is always a theological endeavor.

- a. According to Bavinck, “The church as communion of saints is not autonomous; it is not free to decide whether or not it will organize itself at all or will organize itself this way or that, but is bound also in this regard to the Word of God and finds there the principles indicated and lines drawn that it has to follow in the government of its affairs.”

5. Three Forms of Church Polity

- a. Three types of government will be explored: episcopalianism, presbyterianism, and congregationalism.

- i. L. Roy Taylor analogizes episcopalianism to a monarchy, presbyterianism to a representative republic, and congregationalism to a pure democracy.⁶

6. What is Episcopalianism?

- a. Episcopalianism is the form of church government in which a bishop governs as ultimate authority.

- i. Leadership Structure:

- 1. In this form of polity, there is a difference between bishops and presbyter/elders.

- a. The authority of bishops is exercised in the act of consecrating other bishops, and ordaining priests and deacons.

⁵ Norman, “Is Polity That Important?,” 15.

⁶ L. Roy Taylor, “Presbyterianism,” in *Who Runs the Church? 4 Views on Church Government*, ed. Peter Toon and Steven B. Cowan, Counterpoints Series (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 67.

- i. Presbyters or priests, the second order of clergy, are ordained ministers of a local church with responsibilities to lead worship, preach, pray, and administer baptism and the Lord's Supper.
 1. Deacons constitute the third order of ordained clergy and are responsible for helping the bishops and priests.
 - ii. Strengths of Episcopalianism:
 1. Early church history
 - a. Proponents argue that this polity is not only in accord with apostolic teaching, but it also takes into account the results of evangelization, church planning, and the teaching of the apostles and their successors.
 - i. In fact, history shows that by early in the second century, a single bishop ruling over the church (monoepiscopacy) was encouraged by church leaders, and the threefold ministry of bishop, presbyter, and deacon were well established.
 1. By the end of the third century, the early church fathers placed such a strong emphasis on apostolic succession that the bishopric was recognized as an institution.
 - iii. Support from Scripture:
 1. Although no passage in the New Testament is an explicit endorsement of this polity, advocates argue that the "notion" of episcopacy is found in Scripture and is brought to maturity in the history of the church.
 - a. The Catholic Church, for example, suggests that its most important biblical warrant is Jesus's calling of

the twelve apostles (Matt 10:1-4) and Jesus's words to Peter after Peter's confession (Matt 16:13-20).

i. **Matthew 16:18-19**

¹⁸ And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. ¹⁹ I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”

b. It is also understood that a higher ecclesiastical structure has its origins in the Jerusalem council (Acts 15), suggesting that James functioned in a way similar to an episcopalian bishop.

iv. Criticisms of Episcopalianism:

1. A common criticism of Episcopalianism is that it is **not clearly taught** in the Scriptures and can only be learned from later tradition.

a. In fact, the Reformation was in total opposition to the notion of a hierarchical church and the disjunction between clergy and laity, as the New Testament speaks nothing of a separate clerical class.

i. With the Reformation, a new interest was shown in the Bible's teaching on church polity, and the New Testament evidence for the plurality of elders was rediscovered.

1. Both Presbyterianism and Congregationalism believe that Christ is the ultimate authority in the church, and reject the episcopal belief that bishops exercise apostolic authority over a group or local congregation.

- a. One of the reasons Presbyterians opposed episcopacy was due to the way this polity was abused by the medieval Catholic Church.

7. What is Presbyterianism?

- a. In Presbyterianism, there are two church offices: elders and deacons. The elders exercising authority in the congregation are called a session (Presbyterian) or consistory (Reformed). The session or consistory is comprised of teaching elders and ruling elders.

- i. Leadership structure:

- 1. The nature of presbyterian oversight is a divinely appointed authority and is strictly spiritual, moral, ministerial, and declarative.

- a. In this polity, the church is not a pure democracy, as the elders do not hold their office to simply carry out the congregation's agenda.

- i. Rather, the elders are to rule and oversee the congregation, not necessarily in agreement with the will of the congregation but in agreement with the Scriptures, and in accordance with the authority delegated to them by Christ.

- ii. Strengths of Presbyterianism:

- 1. Some of the strengths of Presbyterianism include a mutual accountability, cooperative ministry, and a system of checks and balances.

- a. L. Roy Taylor writes, "The presbyterian system of representative- connectional government by a plurality of elders in a gradation of church courts poses an effective check on the abuse of power by

an individual leader. Moreover, the presbyterian system features not only majority rule, but also preserves the rights of a minority within the local church and the larger church.⁷

iii. Support from Scripture:

1. While the minute details of church government are not necessarily found in Scripture, Presbyterians argue that the general principles of ecclesiastical polity are derived from the Bible.

a. Old Testament:

i. The office of elder originated in the Old Testament, as Israel was a patriarchal society.

1. In the Old Testament, Moses, the priests and Levites, the judges, and the kings of Israel were all assisted by “elders of Israel” or “the elders of the congregation” in governing the people (Exod 3:16; Num 11:14-15; Josh 7:6, etc.).

a. **Numbers 11:14-17**

¹⁴ I am not able to carry all this people alone; the burden is too heavy for me. ¹⁵ If you will treat me like this, kill me at once, if I find favor in your sight, that I may not see my wretchedness.”¹⁶ Then the LORD said to Moses, “Gather for me seventy men of the

⁷ Taylor, “Presbyterianism,” 89.

elders of Israel, whom you know to be the elders of the people and officers over them, and bring them to the tent of meeting, and let them take their stand there with you.

¹⁷ And I will come down and talk with you there. And I will take some of the Spirit that is on you and put it on them, and they shall bear the burden of the people with you, so that you may not bear it yourself alone.

b. New Testament:

- i. In the New Testament, Israel's practice of governance by elders continued as evidenced in Luke 22:66 where Jesus was brought before "the council of the elders [presbyterion] of the people," and in Acts 22:4-5 where Paul states that "all the council of the elders (presbyterion)" authorized him to persecute Christians.
- ii. The office of elder was firmly established in the church during the apostolic age, as Paul and Barnabas appointed elders "in every church" (Acts 14:23). Paul also instructed Titus to appoint elders "in every city."

1. **Acts 14:23**

²³ And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed

them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

iii. In addition to these verses, other passages of Scripture provide evidence that a plurality of elders existed in the early churches (Acts 11:30; 15:2; 14:23; 20:17).

1. **Acts 11:30**

³⁰ And they did so, sending it to the elders by the hand of Barnabas and Saul.

2. **Acts 15:2**

² And after Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them, Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and the elders about this question.

3. **Acts 20:17**

¹⁷ Now from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the church to come to him.

c. Criticisms:

i. I will pick this up later.

8. What is Congregationalism?

a. Congregationalism is a form of polity in which the local church governs its own affairs under the lordship of Christ. Generally, the authority of the church rests in each local body of believers, with Christ alone as the head.

i. Leadership structure:

1. Although congregational polity admits of different structures, such as the pastor and deacons structure, the units within any structure are subject to the final authority of the congregation.

- a. In many cases, a plurality of elders work alongside a pastor or pastors, whose primary work is preaching and teaching, to shepherd and direct the affairs of the church.
 - i. These men, assisted by deacons, are responsible for organizing and implementing practical ministry objecting in the life of the congregation.
 - 1. This occurs within the context of a congregation who possesses final authority.
- ii. Strengths of Congregationalism:
 - 1. This type of church polity is marked by the distinctives of local church autonomy and democracy.
 - a. In other words, the local church is independent and self-governing, and the authority with the local church resides in its individual members who participate in decisions through democratic processes.
 - i. Because all of God's people are empowered by God, gifted by God, have access to God, and know God, the entire congregation is involved in the governance of the church.
 - 1. However, this does not negate the importance of leadership offices in the church, specifically those of elder and deacon.
 - a. When a church functions rightly, a healthy balance exists between the leaders and the congregation.

iii. Support from Scripture:

1. Proponents of congregationalism maintain that biblical evidence that ecclesial responsibilities should be delegated to the congregation is found in Matthew 18:15-20, 1 Corinthians 5:1-5, and 2 Corinthians 2:6. All of these passages suggest that the church itself has the responsibility to exercise discipline, forgive, and reaffirm.

a. **Matthew 18:15-17**

¹⁵“If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. ¹⁶But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. ¹⁷If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church.

2. Other passages indicate that significant roles were played by the local church, including appointing people for specific responsibilities (Acts 11:19-24) and commissioning Paul and Barnabas for their missionary journey (Acts 13:1-3).

a. Furthermore, certain decisions were said to have “pleased the whole gathering” (Acts 6:2-6), and other decisions “seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church” (Acts 15:22).

i. Thus, it is not a bishop, pope, presbytery, or synod who has the final word—it is the assembly of believers who are the church.

1. **Acts 6:1-5**

Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists^[a] arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the

daily distribution.² And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, “It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables.”³ Therefore, brothers,^[b] pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty.⁴ But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.”⁵ And what they said pleased the whole gathering,

3. Congregationalism draws additional biblical support from the fact that the majority of the New Testament letters were written to church congregations.

a. With the exception of Paul’s letter to the Philippians which addresses the church, overseers, and deacons, each letter in the New Testament has the entire congregation in view.

iv. Criticisms of Congregationalism:

1. Opponents of congregationalism generally argue that it is anarchist, chaotic, and promotes individualism instead of unity. The ecclesiastical anarchy that stems from congregational polity can result in great harm to the health, fellowship, and witness of the church.

a. Many believe that much of Christianity is in a state of chaos because churches and pastors are accountable to no one. In addition, the impact of this disorder is serving to ruin the Christian witness.

9. Conclusion:

- a. Simply because a church has ecclesiastically correct terminology does not mean it necessarily reflects correct biblical ecclesiology.⁸ Therefore, to help protect the church from a potentially defective polity, the leaders at Calvary Church need to have a general knowledge of the pros and cons of the three general forms of government.
 - i. Certainly, any model of ministry that is “hierarchical, authoritarian, abusive, singular or exalts personality, or any model that exalts tasks to the exclusion of relationship, or growth to the exclusion of truth, would not be legitimate.”⁹

⁸ Joseph H. Hellerman, “Community and Relationships: Leadership in Pauline Theology,” in *Biblical Leadership: Theology for the Everyday Leader*, ed. Benjamin Forrest and Chet Roden, Biblical Theology for the Church (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2017), 423.

⁹ Derek Tidball, *Ministry by the Book: New Testament Patterns for Pastoral Ministry* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2008), 238.



Understanding Church Polity

“For the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ” (Rev. 1:9)

Lesson 2 September 14, 2022

1. What is the polity at Calvary Church?
 - a. In week two, the polity at Calvary Church will be addressed. Special attention will be given to Calvary’s Constitution and Articles of Faith. Advantages and disadvantages to Calvary’s polity will be explored.
 - b. *Learning Outcome: By the end of this week, students will be able to describe the advantages and disadvantages of Calvary Church’s polity.*

2. Outline
 - a. Introduction
 - i. The leaders at Calvary Church should have an increased understanding of Calvary’s church polity.
 1. With this increased understanding, Calvary’s leadership should be able to discern areas in which Calvary’s polity may be faulty, or areas in which they may be falling short.
 - b. What is the polity at Calvary Church?
 - i. From operational as well as spiritual perspectives, Calvary is a complex organization, as there are many “moving parts” within the church. This necessitates an engaged, committed, and qualified leadership team comprised of pastors, elders, and deacons. All church functions and operations fall under the leadership of this group of men, specifically the pastors and elders.
 1. Elders
 - a. *Elders* are active, non-employee members of Calvary Church and are elected by the congregation to serve four-year terms. *Elders* are men who meet the

spiritual qualifications (1 Tim 2:11-15, 3:1-7; Titus 1:6-9). They are characterized by spiritual maturity as seen in their personal character, love for people, ability to discern and communicate God's Word, personal leadership, and example to this church.¹⁰

2. Deacons

- a. *Deacons* are active, non-employee members of Calvary Church elected by the congregation to serve three-year terms. *Deacons* are men who meet the spiritual requirements described in 1 Timothy 3:8-13. They must be characterized by spiritual maturity as seen in their personal character, love for people, and example to this church. *Deacons* are to provide assistance to the elders. They shall assist in the conduct of all matters related to their assigned committees and be in readiness to help with special services such as communion, baptisms, installations, care of the flock, etc.¹¹

3. The Session

- a. At Calvary, the governing body is the Session, which is comprised of our elders and the Senior Pastor (a non-voting moderator). Elders are active, non-employee members of Calvary Church and are elected by the congregation to serve four-year terms.
 - i. The Session's duties include leading the congregation in the pursuit of Calvary's mission, providing spiritual and financial

¹⁰ Calvary Church Constitution.

¹¹ Calvary Church Constitution.

oversight to the body and ministries, and managing all church property.

ii. While the Session is also charged with the spiritual oversight of the church, it primarily governs through policy implementation.

1. The work of the Session is accomplished largely through its regular monthly meetings and its committees, which are chaired by elders. In addition, the Session utilizes its Finance Committee to oversee the financial affairs of the church.¹²

4. The Pastors

a. The role of *pastor* is not defined in Calvary Church's Constitution. Pastors are hired at the discretion of the senior pastor. *Pastors* should hold a master's degree from an accredited seminary, be ordained to pastoral ministry, and agree to Calvary's "Articles of Faith."

i. The pastors are directly involved in the spiritual life of the church, as these men have been ordained for pastoral ministry.

1. Not only are the pastors responsible for caring for the physical and spiritual wellbeing of the congregation, but they also directly oversee all of Calvary's ministries and programs.

¹² Calvary Church, "Calvary Governance & Elections," accessed April 17, 2022, <https://calvarychurch.com/election>.

- a. In addition, pastors are assigned various ministerial responsibilities which may not be allocated to lay-leaders. Such duties include preaching, officiating at weddings and funerals, and conducting baptisms.

c. A case of conflict

- i. Tensions and conflicts between the pastors and the Session have manifested over the years that have not only divided these two parties, but also have had the potential of damaging the church body.
 - 1. One such instance occurred in 2019 when the Session decided to revisit Calvary's divorce policy. Per the current policy, Calvary does not employ any pastor nor elect any elder who has been divorced. However, deacons who have been divorced are permitted to serve. In light of the interpretational disparity between the roles of elders and deacons, the Session spent much time deliberating the biblical qualifications for church leaders. A great deal of attention was specifically given to 1 Timothy 3:2.
 - 2. The Session's conclusion
 - a. The Session concluded that Paul's "husband of one wife" statement meant that no church overseer, whether pastor, elder, or deacon, is allowed to marry more than once. In other words, under no circumstances is an overseer allowed to remarry, even after the death of his spouse. Therefore, *any* remarriage would disqualify one from holding a church office.

- i. The Session's interpretation of Scripture not only sent shockwaves among the pastors, but also among those deacons who had been remarried. The Session's reading of Scripture and the proposed policy change would have resulted in resignations of current deacons, and would have permeated the church causing tremendous hurt and pain. Those who had previously held deacon or elder positions and who had been remarried, even after the death of a spouse, would now be regarded as unqualified.
3. The pastors' response
 - a. Without exception, the staff pastors interpreted Paul's statement in 1 Timothy 3:2 to mean "married to one woman." Nevertheless, the majority of the Session disagreed with this interpretation and made a motion to pass the proposed policy change. Again, in accordance with the church's Constitution, the authority to change the church policy rested solely on the Session, as the pastors are not permitted to vote.
4. The outcome
 - a. By the Lord's grace, one of the elders, who originally supported the change, made the decision to back the pastors' interpretation of Scripture and the proposed policy change did not pass. Still, this experience, and others like it, led to further distrust, animosity, and resentment among the leadership team. The current mindset in leadership is "we versus they" or "us and them." Unquestionably, this

mentality is not only detrimental to effective church leadership, but it is unhealthy for the greater church.

d. Four areas of concern regarding Calvary's polity

i. Although the Session and the pastors are both responsible for church administration and for the spiritual wellbeing of the congregation, there are significant areas of concern that have resulted in challenges to unity in the church leadership.

1. First, because only elders are allowed to vote on church matters, the pastors have seeming little influence in certain areas concerning church government.
2. Second, because pastors do not have a vote, few attend the monthly Session meeting. It should be noted, however, that these meetings are open to pastors. To the Session, the pastors' absence can reflect a lack of concern for governing issues, or even a lack of skills necessary to contribute in a meaningful way.
3. Third, only a handful of elders attend designated prayer times. These times of prayer are held before each Sunday worship service and on the Monday before the monthly Session meeting. As all pastors are present for these prayer meetings, there is some resentment among them that many elders are not in attendance. Therefore, some pastors attribute this to a lack of spiritual concern or maturity among the elders. In fact, some of the pastors' meetings can dissolve into unhealthy chatter and bickering about the Session.
4. Finally, the number of qualified elders has drastically dropped over the past several years. Originally, the Calvary's Constitution called for eighteen elders and thirty-six deacons. However, in 2020, Calvary's leadership team is comprised of eight elders and twenty-two deacons. Either due to lack of interest or disqualification among the men in

the congregation to hold these important positions, some among the pastoral staff have noticed a “relaxing” of biblical standards to allow the few who have been nominated into church leadership. In other words, with few men being put forth, more grace is given to allow them to pass through the vetting process. Thus, some men are appointed to these positions who seemingly possess a lack of maturity, competency, and a less than desired knowledge of Scripture.

ii. Other issues

1. Pastors have no voting authority

a. A significant challenge is that the elders generally fail to embrace pastoral responsibilities other than oversight, as they seem to see themselves as a board of governors rather than pastors. Furthermore, other than the senior pastor (a non-voting moderator), Calvary’s governing board of elders is not comprised of any staff pastors.

2. A potential imbalance in power

a. There is the concern that if pastors had voting privileges, there would be an imbalance in power. In short, should the pastors have voting rights, the senior pastor would have tremendous influence over and above his current authority. As all pastors ultimately report to the senior pastor, his potential influence over the pastoral votes would be undeniable. In theory, it would be difficult for any subordinate to vote contrary to his supervisor. Thus, it would be of greater advantage to the body if the pastors were prohibited from casting a vote.

e. Conclusion

i. Although the current church administration inherited policies, procedures, and even traditions from those saints who came before,

these cannot stand in the way of church unity. Granted, these parameters may have been put in place with the best of intentions, yet there are times when policies need to be revisited.

1. While the Lord has blessed Calvary Church greatly over its eighty-year history, one can wonder how much more could be accomplished if true unity existed in church leadership. Moreover, the benefits of working to unify the leadership would surely spill over into the general congregation for the glory of the Lord.



Understanding Church Polity

“For the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ” (Rev. 1:9)

Lesson 3

September 21, 2022

1. Do the terms “elder,” “overseer,” and “pastor” refer to the same office?
 - a. Week 3 will focus on three references in Scripture in order to demonstrate that the terms “elder,” “overseer,” and “pastor” refer to the same office. Attention will be given to 1 Peter 5:1-2, Acts 20:28, and Ephesians 4:11-13.
 - b. *Learning Outcome: By the end of this week, students will be able to demonstrate that the terms “elder,” “overseer,” and “pastor” refer to the same office.*

2. Outline
 - a. Introduction
 - i. The roles of elder, overseer, and pastor are indeed one office, share the same functions, and are to be unified.
 1. An exegesis of 1 Peter 5:1-2 will indicate that elders, overseers, and pastors are three titles for the same office, and each of these terms are used interchangeably.
 2. A study of Acts 20:28 will reveal that that elders, overseers, and pastors share the same function of teaching and ruling the flock.
 3. Lastly, an analysis of Ephesians 4:11-13 will show that elders, overseers, and pastors are to be unified and labor together to care for Christ’s church.

b. An Exegesis of 1 Peter 5:1-2

- i. In 1 Peter 5:1-2, Peter addresses those charged with caring for the church regarding the nature of their pastoral call and relationships within the church.¹³ An examination of this passage concludes that elders, overseers, and pastors refer to the same office. Peter urges, “So I exhort the elders [*presbyteros*] among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: shepherd [*poimaino*] the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight [*episkopos*, overseer].”

1. *Prebyteros*

- a. Interpreters have explicitly focused on Peter’s use of *prebyteros* or “elder” as derived from Jewish tradition to describe a specific ministry.¹³ The word “elders” (*presbyterous*) is often used in the New Testament to refer to leaders in the church. For example, the church or churches in Jerusalem had elders (Acts 11:30; 15:2, 4, 6, 22-23; 16:4; 21:18). Scripture also indicates that Paul and Barnabas appointed elders at the churches they visited during their first missionary journey. So, there is significant evidence in Scripture that elders were widespread in the early church.¹⁴

2. *Sympresbyteros*

- a. In addressing these elders (*presbyterous*), Peter uses a word indicating that he held the same office (*sympresbyteros*, “fellow-presbyter”). Therefore, as

¹³ Earl Richard, *Reading 1 Peter, Jude, and 2 Peter*, Reading the New Testament Series (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2000), 201.

¹⁴ Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, The New American Commentary, vol. 37 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2003), 204.

an apostle and elder (*sympresbyteros*), Peter is able to authenticate the offices and instruct on proper order within the churches.¹⁵ However, by referring to himself as a “fellow elder,” Peter is expressing a sense of mutuality in the call that they share.¹⁶ There is no sense that Peter is “first” among the leaders of the churches; rather, he considers himself a partner with the others in the sharing of the same office.¹⁷ Peter, then, is simply underscoring a common bond of leadership within the community.¹⁸

3. Pastoral imagery

- a. When Peter speaks of church leaders as shepherds, he is also assimilating their work into the work of Christ, the Chief Shepherd (1 Pet. 5:4).¹⁹ Christ himself is the divine and human model for church leaders, as he is the one who gathers the straying sheep and is the shepherd (*poimena*) and guardian (*episkopon*) of their souls. The messianic church leadership must bear the image of Christ the shepherd and “exercise oversight” (*episkopountes*) as true shepherds.²⁰ This pastoral imagery, then, underscores the theological focus that Christ is the

¹⁵ Richard, *Reading 1 Peter, Jude, and 2 Peter*, 201.

¹⁶ Brian Lucas, “1 Peter,” in *A Collaborative Commentary*, ed. Peter R. Rogers (Eugene, OR: Resource, 2017), 139.

¹⁷ Wayne A. Grudem, *1 Peter*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, vol. 17 (Nottingham, England: Inter-Varsity, 2009), 184.

¹⁸ Richard, *Reading 1 Peter, Jude, and 2 Peter*, 204.

¹⁹ Grudem, *1 Peter*, 187.

²⁰ Grudem, *1 Peter*, 187-88.

Chief Shepherd, others act as under-shepherds, and the flock belongs to God.²¹ In fact, the phrase “shepherd the flock of God that is among you” could be translated, “shepherd the sheep of God.”²² Wayne Grudem concludes that it is “church leaders that Peter addresses, and he calls them in particular, in all times and places, and whether in formal offices or not, to a way of ‘shepherding’ the ‘flock’ (5:2) that reflects the character and manner of leadership of the ‘chief shepherd.’”²³

i. *Poimaino*

1. The verb Peter uses is the same one Jesus used when Jesus instructed him “tend [*poimaino*] my sheep” (John 21:16).²⁴ The word *poimaino*, meaning “to tend,” also includes the tasks of feeding, caring, leading, guiding, and protecting. All of these are duties and responsibilities that a shepherd has for his flock.²⁵ Richard confirms, “In the present case the term (*poimaino*) seemingly has a generic sense and envisions the overall activity of those in positions

²¹ Richard, *Reading 1 Peter, Jude, and 2 Peter*, 205.

²² Douglas Karel Harink, *1 & 2 Peter*, Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2009), 183.

²³ Grudem, *1 Peter*, 185.

²⁴ Grudem, *1 Peter*, 195.

²⁵ Raymer, “1 Peter,” 855.

of leadership as analogous to the care and activity of shepherds.”²⁶ Only in 1 Peter 5 and Acts 20:28 is the imperative form of this verb used in this manner. In both cases, the association between shepherding and careful oversight is evident.²⁷ It can be concluded, then, that the elders (v. 1) are ministers who exercise leadership over Christian communities, with their duties being described in pastoral terms as “tending to the flock of God.”²⁸

ii. Conclusion

1. In 1 Peter 5, it is clear that Peter is addressing elders who have the function of pastoral oversight and the responsibility of leading the community.²⁹ It would be nonsensical, then, if the elders and “pastors” or “overseers” are not the same people since they perform the same duties.³⁰ Furthermore, there is significant textual evidence (Acts 20:17, 28; Titus 1:5, 7) that the terms pastor, elder, and bishop refer to the

²⁶ Richard, *Reading 1 Peter, Jude, and 2 Peter*, 205.

²⁷ Timothy S. Laniak, *Shepherds after My Own Heart: Pastoral Traditions and Leadership in the Bible*, *New Studies in Biblical Theology* 20 (Leicester: Apollos, 2006), 232.

²⁸ Richard, *Reading 1 Peter, Jude, and 2 Peter*, 201.

²⁹ Greg W. Forbes, Andreas J. Kostenberger, and Robert W. Yarbrough, *1 Peter*, *Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament* (Nashville: B & H, 2014), 166.

³⁰ Mark Dever and Jonathan Leeman, *Baptist Foundations: Church Government for an Anti-Institutional Age* (Nashville: B & H, 2015), 247.

same office.³¹ To be sure, 1 Peter 5:1-2 brings all three of these terms together to describe one office in the church.³²

c. An Exegesis of Acts 20:28

- i. Paul writes, “Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood (Acts 20:28). Paul’s solemn exhortation to the elders in this passage is in anticipation of what he sees as soon taking place in the church—specifically persecution from outside and apostasy from within.³³ Darrell Bock argues that this text “makes a major statement about the responsibility of shepherding that is to be the task of God’s leaders.”³⁴ Indeed, this verse is the “practical and theological center” of Paul’s speech as he instructs the elders to fulfill their tasks conscientiously and effectively, while noting the significance of Christ’s death and the work of the Holy Spirit.³⁵

1. *Episkopos*

- a. The word Paul uses for elders in Acts 20:28 is not the word “elder” (*presbyteros*), but “overseer” (*episkopos*). *Episkopos*, from which we get the word “bishop,” is composed of two parts: *skopio* (meaning “to look”) and *epi* (meaning “over”). In the book of Acts, the word *episkopos* appears only once, in Acts

³¹ Dever and Leeman, *Baptist Foundations*, 246.

³² John MacArthur, *Shepherdology: A Master Plan for Church Leadership* (Panorama City, CA: Master’s Fellowship, 1989), 155.

³³ Richard N. Longenecker, *Acts*, in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 10, *Luke–Acts*, ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 1029.

³⁴ Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 634.

³⁵ C. K. Barrett, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Shorter Commentary* (London: T & T Clark, 2002), 316.

20:28. Due to the relatively few Gentiles in the church, the term was not commonly used. However, as more Gentiles were saved, the church began to “lose more of its Jewish flavor” and the Greek culture’s word *episkopos* was more frequently used to describe elders.³⁶ While the term “elders” has Jewish antecedents and highlights the dignity of the office, “overseers” is namely Greek in its derivation and emphasizes the responsibility of the office “to look after” others.³⁷

2. *Poimainein*

- a. Shepherding refers to all the care that must be given in relation to the flock.³⁸ In fact, the word “shepherd” is from *poimaino*, a term that encompasses the entire task of a shepherd.³⁹ Hence, the term conveys the idea of complete spiritual oversight and pastoral care.⁴⁰ Bock writes, “The present-tense infinitive (*poimainein*) means to shepherd continually and in this context also indicates the purpose of being an overseer. The elder is to protect, rule, and foster care (Acts 11:22-26; 13:2-3; Eph. 4:11-12).”⁴¹ In the New Testament, it

³⁶ MacArthur, *Shepherdology*, 156.

³⁷ Stanley D. Toussaint, “Acts,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament*, ed. John R. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 1983), 414.

³⁸ I. Howard Marshall, *Acts*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, vol. 5, North American ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2008), 262.

³⁹ John MacArthur, *Acts 13-28, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 1996), 224.

⁴⁰ Marshall, *Acts*, 262.

⁴¹ Bock, *Acts*, 630.

is also apparent that a bishop (overseer) is to teach, feed, protect, and generally nurture the flock (Acts 20:28).⁴²

- b. Furthermore, the shepherds of Christ's flock are not only called to feed the sheep by teaching the truth, but they are to protect them from wolves by warning of error.⁴³ Drawing again on the shepherd imagery, Paul compares false teachers to fierce wolves who devour and destroy (Matt 7:15; Luke 10:3; 2 Cor 10-13). The imagery Paul uses is similar to John 10, in which the true shepherd protects the flock against the thieves, whose goal is to draw people away from Christ's church.⁴⁴ Therefore, elders must not only hold firm the trustworthy Word and give instruction in sound doctrine, but also rebuke those who contradict it (Titus 1:9). Again, the idea of overseer was associated with being a guardian and protector (Phil 1:1; 1 Tim 3:2; Titus 1:7).⁴⁵

ii. Conclusion

1. Only in two places in Scripture are elders addressed directly (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet 5:2), and in each of these accounts they are charged to shepherd the flock of God.⁴⁶ The importance of the elders in the early church is seen in this responsibility,

⁴² MacArthur, *Shepherdology*, 156.

⁴³ John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Acts*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1990), 329.

⁴⁴ Bock, *Acts*, 630.

⁴⁵ Bock, *Acts*, 630.

⁴⁶ Alexander Strauch, *Biblical Eldership: An Urgent Call to Restore Biblical Church Leadership* (Littleton, CO: Lewis and Roth, 1988), 147-48.

specifically ruling and teaching the flock.⁴⁷ Biblically, then, there is no difference in the roles of elder and bishop.⁴⁸ Strauch concludes, “Since the elders’/overseers’ duty is to shepherd God’s church, we see all three terms (elders, overseers, shepherds) used in the same context to refer to the same group of church leaders.”⁴⁹ Certainly, the shepherd imagery is a reminder of the flock’s need for leadership and protection, and God has entrusted elders with this important responsibility.

d. An Exegesis of Ephesians 4:11-13

- i. An exegesis of Ephesians 4:11-13 reveals that elders, overseers, and pastors are to be unified and labor together to care for Christ’s church. Paul proclaims, “And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Eph 4:11-13).

1. *Poimen*

- a. Paul mentions “pastors” (*poimen*), better translated as “shepherds,” as it is their role to guard and lead the flock. They also carry out the function of overseer (*episkopos*) because it is their responsibility to rule the body (Rom 12:8; Phil 1:1; 1 Thess 5:12; 1 Tim 3:1; Heb 13:17). As previously noted in the exegesis of 1 Peter 5, the role of pastor is

⁴⁷ Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 98-99.

⁴⁸ MacArthur, *Shepherdology*, 156.

⁴⁹ Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 88.

interchangeable with elder (*presbyteros*).⁵⁰ F. F. Bruce suggests, “‘Pastors’ may readily be identified with the ministers who are elsewhere called ‘elders’ (*presbyteroi*) or ‘bishops’ (*episkopoi*, rendered ‘guardians’ in [our preceding citation of] Acts 20:28: ‘shepherd the flock of God that is in your charge’ is the injunction given to ‘elders’ by a ‘fellow elder’ in 1 Pet. 5:2).”⁵¹ As 1 Peter 5 makes it clear, this ministry imitates the “chief shepherd,” Jesus Christ. Yet, only in Ephesians 4 are the pastors listed as designated gifts to the church.⁵²

ii. Conclusion

1. Paul’s letter to the Ephesians provides the distinct concept of unity in diversity in the church as the body of Christ. This picture of diversity includes the contributions of each member, while highlighting unique roles—the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. From Paul’s perspective, these gifted believers are Christ’s means of equipping the church to attain unity and maturity.⁵³ Unity, stability, and maturity in the church are essential if the church is going to provide the responsible witness to the surrounding society.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ William W. Klein, *Ephesians*, in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 12, *Ephesians-Philemon*, ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 115.

⁵¹ F. F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1988), 158.

⁵² Thomas R. Neufeld, *Ephesians*, *Believers Church Bible Commentary* (Waterloo, Ontario: Herald, 2002), 180.

⁵³ Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 42 (Dallas: Word, 1990), 268.

⁵⁴ Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 269.

e. Conclusion

- i. In conclusion, 1 Peter 5:1-2 reveals that all three New Testament terms (“pastor,” “bishop,” and “elder”) refer to the same office of church leadership. Again, all three terms are found in this passage of Scripture.⁵⁵ Second, Acts 20:28 indicates that “elders” were appointed by the Holy Spirit to give oversight over the congregation, and considering the work assigned to them, these men were also called “overseers.” It is evident, therefore, that the elders were charged with the oversight, government, and guidance of the church.⁵⁶ Third, Ephesians 4:11-13 shows that Christ has gifted his church with pastor-teachers (elders, overseers) to work together to equip, edify, and unify the saints. Throughout the ages, pastor-teachers have continued to build on the foundation of the apostles and prophets by proclaiming the gospel of grace and preaching Word of God.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue, eds., *Biblical Doctrine: A Systematic Summary of Bible Truth* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 759.

⁵⁶ Herman Bavinck, *Holy Spirit, Church, and New Creation*, vol. 4, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 342.

⁵⁷ MacArthur and Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine*, 755.



Understanding Church Polity

“For the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ” (Rev. 1:9)

Lesson 4

September 28, 2022

1. What are the roles and functions of elder/overseer/pastor according to Scripture?
 - a. Week 4 will consider the roles, responsibilities, and goals of the church offices.
 - b. *Learning Outcome: By the end of this week, students will be able to identify the fundamental roles, function, and goals of the elder/pastor.*

2. Outline
 - a. Introduction
 - i. There are many similarities and differences between the offices of pastor and elder at Calvary Church; however, the general lack of knowledge about these roles, from biblical and historical perspectives, has quite possibly contributed to decreased effectiveness among the leaders. Furthermore, this lack of understanding has added to confusion, animosity, and deteriorating relationships. Thus, it is advantageous for Calvary’s leadership team to have a clearer understanding of these offices and to comprehend how they have historically worked together.
 1. Effective church leaders must be equipped with a functional knowledge of their responsibilities as issued in Scripture.

b. The primary roles of the elder/overseer/pastor

i. Shepherding

1. Throughout Scripture, the relationship of leaders to their people were described metaphorically as a shepherd-like relationship.

a. As shepherds cared for their flock, so were church leaders to care for the church. These metaphors are, in fact, grounded in the description of God himself as a Shepherd to his people.

i. Shepherding refers to all the care that must be given in relation to the flock.⁵⁸ In fact, the word “shepherd” is from *poimaino*, a term that encompasses the entire task of a shepherd.⁵⁹ Hence, the term conveys the idea of complete spiritual oversight and pastoral care.⁶⁰

ii. This pastoral imagery, then, underscores the theological focus that Christ is the Chief Shepherd, others act as under-shepherds, and the flock belongs to God.

1. The leaders of God’s people must display in their leadership the kind of servant lordship that Christ himself displayed so that the flock might in fact see in them a “type” after which they themselves might pattern their lives.

⁵⁸ Marshall, *Acts*, 262.

⁵⁹ MacArthur, *Acts 13-28*, 224.

⁶⁰ Marshall, *Acts*, 262.

ii. Overseeing

1. Serving as overseers” (*episkopountes*) denotes another task of the elders; namely, overseeing the church and superintending it.

a. Elders have the function of pastoral oversight and the responsibility of leading the community.

i. The overseer is the “superintendent, guardian, manager, inspector, and protector.”⁶¹

iii. Teaching

1. In addition to ruling or governing the flock of God, the overseers are to teach.

a. Matthew Henry concludes, “They must feed the church of God, must lead the sheep of Christ into the green pastures, must lay meat before them, must feed them with wholesome doctrine, and must see that nothing is wanting that is necessary in order to their being nourished up to eternal life.”⁶²

i. Elders must not only hold firm the trustworthy Word and give instruction in sound doctrine, but also rebuke those who contradict it (Titus 1:9). Again, the idea of overseer was associated with being a guardian and protector (Phil 1:1; 1 Tim 3:2; Titus 1:7).⁶³

⁶¹ Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 90.

⁶² Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary in One Volume* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1960), 1719.

⁶³ Bock, *Acts*, 630.

- c. Three goals for elders, overseers, and pastors (Eph. 4:11-16)
 - i. Although church leaders will differ according to giftedness, church ministry is a team effort. All offices are vital, and all contribute to the overall strength of the church.⁶⁴ Churches, therefore, depend on faithful men to oversee and lead them to be strong, healthy, productive, and fruitful.⁶⁵ As such, church leaders will be all the more diligent in their ministry if they remember that the flock is the church of God, which he purchased with his own blood.⁶⁶
 - 1. Stott concludes, “They are the flock of God the Father, purchased by the precious blood of God the Son, and supervised by overseers appointed by God the Holy Spirit. If the three persons of the Trinity are thus committed to the welfare of the people, should we not be also?”⁶⁷
 - ii. Elders, overseers, and pastors are to be united in common goals (Eph. 4:11-16)
 - 1. Unity in faith and knowledge
 - a. The first goal is unity in faith and knowledge, which is identified as shared faith and knowledge of the Son of God.⁶⁸ Paul clearly teaches that there is one unified and proper understanding of Christ and the central components of the faith.⁶⁹ To be sure, Christians are to be united in the biblical truths that

⁶⁴ MacArthur and Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine*, 768.

⁶⁵ MacArthur and Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine*, 759.

⁶⁶ Stott, *The Message of Acts*, 326.

⁶⁷ Stott, *The Message of Acts*, 329.

⁶⁸ Neufeld, *Ephesians*, 185.

⁶⁹ Clinton E. Arnold, *Ephesians*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament Series (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 253.

define the Christian faith.⁷⁰ The “teaching arm” of the church (v. 11), then, is charged with training the saints in core Christian doctrines.⁷¹ These gifted leaders are to help impart correct knowledge, which is essential to the unity and maturity of the church.⁷² The unity of the church is constituted and preserved by holding to and rehearsing shared convictions.⁷³

2. Mature manhood

- a. The second goal is “mature manhood,” or literally, “a mature man.”⁷⁴ While Paul’s aim is to “present every person mature in Christ,” in Ephesians 4:11-16 the church is seen as a corporate entity, not as disparate individuals.⁷⁵ Paul’s emphasis is on the necessity for corporate growth rather than on interdependence itself.⁷⁶ Hence, the use of “man” is similar to that of the “new humanity” of 2:15, referring to the body of believers that constitutes the church.⁷⁷ The saints must be aware that they must draw on these gifted people to live up to their identity as Christ’s body and grow more fully into

⁷⁰ Grant Osborne, *Ephesians Verse by Verse, Osborne New Testament Commentaries* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2017), 48-49.

⁷¹ Osborne, *Ephesians Verse by Verse*, 48-49.

⁷² Arnold, *Ephesians*, 253.

⁷³ Neufeld, *Ephesians*, 185.

⁷⁴ Osborne, *Ephesians Verse by Verse*, 48-49.

⁷⁵ Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 256.

⁷⁶ Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 262.

⁷⁷ Osborne, *Ephesians Verse by Verse*, 48-49.

that identity.⁷⁸ The goal of these gifted people is to lead the church to Christ-like maturity, which is characterized by unity in doctrine, a relationship with Christ himself, and a stable adherence to the truth.⁷⁹

3. The measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ
 - a. The third goal builds upon mature manhood by emphasizing growth to the “measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.” The final goal, therefore, is full Christlikeness.⁸⁰ By emphasizing that the body of Christ must grow up to maturity, Paul intends for his readers to think of the church as eventually reaching Christ’s full height.⁸¹ This growth is necessary in order to resist the forces that threaten the health and effectiveness of the church. Again, full maturity is marked by “the unity of faith and knowledge of the Son of God,” and is attained through accepting the various ministries he lists.⁸²

⁷⁸ Neufeld, *Ephesians*, 184.

⁷⁹ Peter S. Williamson and Mary Healy, *Ephesians*, Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), 195.

⁸⁰ Osborne, *Ephesians Verse by Verse*, 48-49.

⁸¹ Frank Thielman, *Ephesians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010), 282.

⁸² Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, 159.



Understanding Church Polity

“For the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ” (Rev. 1:9)

Lesson 5

October 5, 2022

1. How does Presbyterian polity view the role of elder, specifically regarding teaching and ruling?
 - a. Week 5 will further explore the nature of eldership in Presbyterianism, which is the polity of Calvary Church. Using Ephesians 4:11-13 and other Scripture, a case will be presented that all elders should be involved in teaching and ruling the flock. Evidence will show that the office of elder is not divided in two components or two separate offices – teaching and ruling.
 - b. *Learning Outcome: By the end of this week, students will be able to demonstrate that all elders should be involved in teaching and ruling.*

2. Outline
 - a. Introduction
 - i. Presbyterianism – a review
 1. The nature of presbyterian oversight is a divinely appointed authority and is strictly spiritual, moral, ministerial, and declarative.⁸³ Scripture speaks to the congregation’s responsibility to submit to its elders (1 Thess 5:12-13; Heb

⁸³ Robert L. Reymond, “The Presbytery-Led Church: Presbyterian Church Government,” in *Perspectives on Church Government: Five Views of Church Polity*, ed. Daniel L. Akin, Chad Brand, and R. Stanton Norman (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2004), 109.

13:7, 17, 24). The decisions of the elder board are authoritative regardless of the consent of the church as a whole.⁸⁴ All the same, the congregation elects the elders to the session.⁸⁵

ii. Teaching and ruling elders

1. In presbyterianism, a distinction is made between “teaching elders” and “ruling elders.” While all elders are responsible for the government and spiritual oversight of the church, including teaching, only elders who are gifted, called, and trained may serve as “teaching elders.” Generally, teaching elders or pastors are vocational ministers while ruling elders are laypersons.⁸⁶ Teaching elders or pastors are often paid staff and the elders are laypeople who make governing decisions, sometimes in conjunction with the staff and other times in authority over the staff. The ruling elders, then, often function like a church board, while the pastors serve as ministry program directors.⁸⁷

iii. Is this polity biblical?

1. To advocate this position biblically, presbyterians cite Ephesians 4:11-13 and 1 Timothy 5:17. Early presbyterians argued that Paul’s reference to shepherds and teachers in Ephesians 4:11 referred to two offices. The office of “pastors-teachers” that Paul identifies in Ephesians 4:11

⁸⁴ Samuel E. Waldron, “A Plural-Elder Congregationalist’s Response” in Toon and Cowan, *Who Runs the Church?*, 174.

⁸⁵ Taylor, “Presbyterianism,” 68.

⁸⁶ Nathan A. Finn, “The Rule of Elders: The Presbyterian Angle on Church Leadership,” in *Shepherding God’s Flock: Biblical Leadership in the New Testament and Beyond*, ed. Benjamin L. Merkle and Thomas R. Schreiner (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2014), 200.

⁸⁷ Finn, “The Rule of Elders,” 201.

consists of “teaching elders” only, not ruling elders.⁸⁸ In 1 Timothy 5:17, Paul also appears to be addressing two distinct groups: “elders who rule well” and “those who labor in preaching and teaching.” Based upon 1 Timothy 5:17, many Presbyterians believe that a *presbyteros* is always a ruler, but not always a teacher.⁸⁹ Other support is found in Romans 12:7-8 in which Paul makes yet another distinction between “teaching” and “leading.”⁹⁰

- a. Bavinck claims that 1 Timothy 5:17-18 provides proof that there is a clear distinction between overseers charged with governing and others charged with teaching, preaching, and the administration of the sacraments.⁹¹ Bavinck proposes that the Lord takes care of the needs of his church by three distinct offices: “By the teaching office he instructs, by the office of elder he leads, and by the diaconal office he takes care of his flock.”⁹²

2. Another view

- a. Those who counter this polity generally doubt the Presbyterian interpretation of 1 Timothy 5:17 and the distinction between ruling elders and teaching elders. Here, Paul is not describing two different groups, but rather a sub-group within the larger

⁸⁸ Gregg R. Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers: The Doctrine of the Church*, Foundations of Evangelical Theology (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 219.

⁸⁹ Finn, “The Rule of Elders,” 202.

⁹⁰ Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers*, 219.

⁹¹ Bavinck, *Holy Spirit, Church, and New Creation*, 344.

⁹² Bavinck, *Holy Spirit, Church, and New Creation*, 388.

group.⁹³ To be sure, all elders should be able to teach as well as exercise leadership in the church (1 Tim 3:4-5).⁹⁴ Furthermore, Ephesians 4:11 refers to “pastor-teachers” as one entity and does not distinguish teaching elders from the ruling elders.⁹⁵

3. Pastors and teachers in Eph. 4:11

- a. In Ephesians 4:11, Paul lists pastors and teachers together as they are governed by one article (“the” occurs before “pastors” but not before “teachers”), and because the word “and” (*kai*) differs from the other “and’s” (*de*) in this passage. While this could refer to two kinds of gifted people, it is likely that Paul is referring to two characteristics of the same person who is pastoring and instructing believers. To be sure, Scripture indicates that overseers or elders are to be able to teach (1 Tim 3:2; Titus 1:9).⁹⁶ John Pohill agrees that the structure of the Greek suggests that pastors (“shepherds”) and teachers designate a single group of leaders who are responsible for teaching.⁹⁷ MacArthur concludes, “Although teaching can be identified as its own ministry (1 Cor 12:28), it is best to regard ‘shepherds and teachers’ in Ephesians 4:11 as describing two facets of a single

⁹³ Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers*, 221.

⁹⁴ Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers*, 222.

⁹⁵ Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers*, 222.

⁹⁶ Harold W. Hoehner, “Ephesians,” in Walvoord and Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, 635.

⁹⁷ John B. Pohill, *Paul and His Letters* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1999), 369.

office of pastoral leadership.”⁹⁸ Due to the fact that teaching is an essential part of the pastoral ministry, it is appropriate, then, that “pastors and teachers” should be joined to denote one order of ministry.⁹⁹

iv. Teaching

1. Elders are teachers

- a. Leadership, according to Mohler, is “explicitly centered in the responsibility to teach.”¹⁰⁰ Though the call to teach all that the Lord has commanded is placed on every follower of Christ in the Great Commission (Matt 28:20), the New Testament is clear that elders have a specific responsibility to teach the Word of God (1 Tim 3:2). As such, an elder must be firmly committed to apostolic doctrine and must be able to instruct people in biblical doctrine.¹⁰¹
- b. Alexander Strauch comments, “This requires that a prospective elder has applied himself for some years to the reading and study of Scripture, that he can reason intelligently and logically discuss biblical issues, that he has formulated doctrinal beliefs, and that he has the verbal ability and willingness to teach others.”¹⁰²

⁹⁸ John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue, eds., *Biblical Doctrine: A Systematic Summary of Bible Truth* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 757.

⁹⁹ Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, 158.

¹⁰⁰ Mohler, *The Conviction to Lead*, 42.

¹⁰¹ Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 79.

¹⁰² Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 79.

- i. For the apostle Paul, teaching is of utmost importance, as it is a key function of the church leader.¹⁰³

2. Conclusion

- a. The New Testament is clear that an elder is primarily a teacher (1 Tim 3:2). The calling to teach distinguishes elders from deacons, and the role of teaching is inseparably connected with the function of the pastor in Ephesians 4:11.¹⁰⁴ Thus, all elders should be involved in some kind of teaching. It would seem odd for Paul to require that all elders be able to teach if they are not involved in any type of teaching.¹⁰⁵ Merkle concludes, “The importance of solid, gospel teaching in the church is vital to the church’s existence. The Word must be preached, and it is the task of elders to preach that Word.”¹⁰⁶

v. Ruling

1. Elders are administrators

- a. In addition to shepherding, teaching, and equipping the congregation, all elders and pastors are responsible for running the church.¹⁰⁷ The basic function of elders/pastors is overseeing (Acts 20:28;

¹⁰³ Andrew D. Clarke, *A Pauline Theology of Church Leadership*, Library of New Testament Studies 362 (London: T & T Clark, 2008), 152.

¹⁰⁴ Benjamin L. Merkle, *40 Questions about Elders and Deacons*, 40 Questions Series (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2008), 92.

¹⁰⁵ Merkle, *Elders and Deacons*, 111.

¹⁰⁶ Merkle, *Elders and Deacons*, 93.

¹⁰⁷ Merkle, *Elders and Deacons*, 22.

1 Pet 5:2).¹⁰⁸ The core competency for any elder is that he must be a proven manager of people. While any qualified elder can gain experience, managerial ability must be to some measure visible before he is appointed to the position of elder.¹⁰⁹ The fundamental requirement that an overseer is to “manage his household” is because this is an essential element of the job description.¹¹⁰

i. Leadership and management are, in fact, inseparable. Leaders who leave management to others are not leaders.¹¹¹

1. Mohler concludes, “The leader’s task is to define and articulate certain values, and then work to see them driven throughout the organization. The leader cannot do this without involving himself in the machinery of the organization.”¹¹²

2. Conclusion

a. Elders must possess the skills necessary for effective leadership, as theological acumen is not enough. A man must prove that he has the skill and ability to lead others, or else he should not be leading as an

¹⁰⁸ John MacArthur, *Pastoral Ministry: How to Shepherd Biblically* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 89.

¹⁰⁹ William D. Mounce, “The Noble Task: Leadership in the Pastoral Epistles,” in Forrest and Roden, *Biblical Leadership*, 448.

¹¹⁰ Clarke, *A Pauline Theology of Church Leadership*, 185.

¹¹¹ Mohler, *The Conviction to Lead*, 70.

¹¹² Mohler, *The Conviction to Lead*, 72.

elder in the Lord's church.¹¹³ Indeed, the future of the church depends greatly on the pastor's ability to lead.¹¹⁴

b. Conclusion

- i. For an elder to understand his primary responsibilities of teaching and ruling, it is important to clarify that there is no scriptural or practical differentiation between ruling elders and teaching elders. every congregation needs to be led by men who possess both pastoral and administrative skills.¹¹⁵

1. This will be discussed in more detail in week 6.

¹¹³ Robert H. Thune, *Gospel Eldership: Equipping a New Generation of Servant Leaders* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth, 2016), 70.

¹¹⁴ MacArthur, *Pastoral Ministry*, 229.

¹¹⁵ Phil A. Newton and Matt Schmucker, *Elders in the Life of the Church: Rediscovering the Biblical Model for Church Leadership*, 9Marks (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2014), 52.



Understanding Church Polity

“For the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ” (Rev. 1:9)

Lesson 6

October 12, 2022

1. Can church polity be changed?
 - a. Week 6 will consider the view that church polity is fluid, and can be revisited and adjusted according the times, the culture, and the needs of the church.
 - b. *Learning Outcome: By the end of this week, students will be able to recognize that church polity should occasionally be revisited, examined, and potentially adjusted.*

2. Outline
 - a. Introduction
 - i. Many decades ago, the leaders at Calvary Church instituted what they believed was a biblical church polity. While Calvary rightly recognizes the Bible as God’s divine revelation, leaders must also acknowledge that exegesis and theology are human conceptual endeavors. As such, ecclesial backgrounds and church experience can shape a person’s theology, including one’s formulation of the doctrine of the church. Human understanding of God’s revelation can change and grow; therefore, there are times in which theologies need to be reworked to reflect changes in understanding.
 1. According to Robert Welch, change should occur “when the present polity, policy, or procedure hurt, when stagnation or status quo will not satisfy the needs of the

church or organization. They also change when they learn a better way of doing what needs to be done.”¹¹⁶

b. Polity is a theological endeavor

i. Church leadership is always a theological endeavor.¹¹⁷

1. Bavinck adds, “The church as communion of saints is not autonomous; it is not free to decide whether or not it will organize itself at all or will organize itself this way or that, but is bound also in this regard to the Word of God and finds there the principles indicated and lines drawn that it has to follow in the government of its affairs.”¹¹⁸

a. Christian leadership must be open to evaluation and change.

i. This does not imply that Scripture is to be ignored or warped to fit issues it never intended to address; rather, biblical teaching is to be expounded and applied to issues that confront the church in one’s own day.¹¹⁹ Such is the case regarding church government. Church polity, in fact, requires ongoing theological and practical dialogue.¹²⁰

c. Conclusion – room for change

i. It is time to reevaluate Calvary Church’s polity.

¹¹⁶ Robert H. Welch, *Church Administration: Creating Efficiency for Effective Ministry* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2005), 71.

¹¹⁷ Mohler, *The Conviction to Lead*, 81.

¹¹⁸ Bavinck, *Holy Spirit, Church, and New Creation*, 386.

¹¹⁹ Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers*, 18.

¹²⁰ Norman, “Is Polity That Important?,” 21.

1. Calvary's leadership should be able to discern areas in which the polity may be faulty, or areas in which they may be falling short.
 - a. Although the Holy Spirit can work through faulty church polity, it is not acceptable to replicate those models. Preserving ways of doing things should not take precedence over conserving, nurturing, and extending core values.
 - b. Scripture should be allowed to deconstruct and reconstruct ways of thinking and living.¹²¹
 - i. In a healthy organization there is always room for change. When church leaders manage and change church culture effectively and accurately according to Scripture, God can change presuppositions, foundational beliefs, and core identities.¹²²
 1. Therefore, Christian leadership must be open to evaluation and change

Part 2

1. How can church leaders work together in unity?
 - a. Week 6 will focus on the need for unity within church government. Scripture will be analyzed to highlight the biblical call for unity in the church. A case will be presented that unity will stem from staff pastors and lay-elder having equal authority in governing the church.
 - b. *Learning Outcome: By the end of this week, students will be able to develop a strategy for helping Calvary pursue change in its own church polity while maintaining unity.*

¹²¹ Thune, *Gospel Eldership*, 28.

¹²² Geiger and Peck, *Designed to Lead*, 144.

2. Outline

a. Introduction

i. Effective church leaders must work together to maintain unity in the church.

1. For the leaders at Calvary Church to effectively work together, two important principles need to be understood.

a. First, Christian ministry is, in fact, a collaborative effort.

b. Second, elders and pastors are to look to Christ, the Good Shepherd, as their example and authority.

b. Christian ministry is a collaborative effort.

i. A cooperative approach to ministry is not simply the bestowal of power, but it requires the sharing of power.¹²³ To be clear, Christian leadership is *shared* power. Putting this concept into practice helps to prevent individualism, isolation, and self-centered empire building.^{267F}¹²⁴ Church leadership is never solely about personal authority or a management process, but rather about the faithful future of faith traditions and communities.¹²⁵

1. Warnings

a. Most of Christianity has embraced a management philosophy and principles from the secular business world that are humanistic and materialistic.

Authority and power are seen as a means of manipulating, using, and controlling people.¹²⁶ For

¹²³ Stephen K. Pickard, *Theological Foundations for Collaborative Ministry*, Explorations in Practical, Pastoral, and Empirical Theology (Farnham, England: Ashgate, 2009), 2.

¹²⁴ Kenneth O. Gangel, *Team Leadership in Christian Ministry: Using Multiple Gifts to Build a Unified Vision* (Chicago: Moody, 1997), 59.

¹²⁵ Lovett H. Weems Jr, *Church Leadership: Vision Team Culture Integrity* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2010), 1.

¹²⁶ Myron Rush, *Management: A Biblical Approach* (Colorado Springs: Victor, 2005), 2.

instance, in the “CEO/Board Model” of church polity, the pastor functions as the CEO or the “point-leader” of the church, and elders are viewed as a governing board instead of pastors. The function of the elder board is, according to Robert Thune, is “to keep the pastors in check and provide a system of checks and balances (lest the ministry staff or pastors have too much power).”¹²⁷ Unfortunately, secular models of leadership, such as the “CEO/Board Model,” have been appropriated in many churches with large infrastructures.¹²⁸

ii. Conclusion – a collaborative effort

1. The apostle Paul’s use of the metaphor of the body signifies the mutual dependence of each member and the inherent value of each person.¹²⁹ This metaphor not only frames Paul’s view of ministry, but also seeks to accommodate the hierarchical structure of the church. While the church has leaders, it is primarily a community in which there is equality of grace and discipleship.¹³⁰ Thus, the overarching ethic of any church leadership team should be mutual “upbuilding.”¹³¹ This involves working in concert with each other to engage in team ministry.¹³²

- c. Elders and pastors are to look to Christ, the Good Shepherd, as their example and authority.

¹²⁷ Thune, *Gospel Eldership*, 28.

¹²⁸ Hellerman, “Community and Relationships,” 423.

¹²⁹ Clarke, *A Pauline Theology of Church Leadership*, 135.

¹³⁰ Tidball, *Ministry by the Book*, 90.

¹³¹ Clarke, *A Pauline Theology of Church Leadership*, 154.

¹³² Gangel, *Team Leadership in Christian Ministry*, 63.

i. All church leaders are unequivocally located within a hierarchical structure in which all should lead, teach, and command.¹³³ As such, elders have the requisite authority to execute these tasks, including shepherding, at the highest levels of authority. Yet, this authority is a delegated one. As leaders, they are always under the supreme authority of the head of the church, Jesus Christ.¹³⁴ While authority is a feature of the role of the shepherd, elders have no proprietary rights. Elders, then, need to be mindful that they are caring for the Chief Shepherd’s flock.¹³⁵ Hence, shepherding calls for the benevolent use of authority—a “subtle blend of authority and care.”¹³⁶

1. Tim Laniak concludes, “To be a good shepherd—and this is consistently the biblical concern—means to be accountable for the lives and well-being of the sheep. For this reason, the designation is used for prophets, priests and kings in the Old Testament, and for ruling elders in the New Testament church.”¹³⁷

a. A life of sacrifice

i. It should also be noted that Christian leadership is inseparable from the life of sacrifice first demonstrated by Christ who abandoned divine prerogatives and “emptied himself” for the sake of others (Phil 2:7). Those in leadership roles must also deny

¹³³ Clarke, *A Pauline Theology of Church Leadership*, 186.

¹³⁴ Gregg R. Allison, *The Church: An Introduction*, Short Studies in Systematic Theology (Wheaton, IL: Crossway., 2021), 49.

¹³⁵ Laniak, *Shepherds after My Own Heart*, 234.

¹³⁶ Laniak, *Shepherds after My Own Heart*, 247.

¹³⁷ Laniak, *Shepherds after My Own Heart*, 247.

themselves for the sake of others.¹³⁸ Indeed, Christian leadership is always cruciform in nature.

ii. Conclusion – Christ is the example

1. Those who bear these offices are to pattern the love they have for the flock after God’s love, and the concern for the flock after God’s concern for his people. The Lord is the Shepherd of his sheep, and he is the standard for the work of the office bearers. Christ gives the church offices their content and meaning; therefore, the elders are to represent and reflect the Lord’s wishes, criteria, and interests.¹³⁹ Accordingly, the power that a leader exercises is not the leader’s but Christ’s. The position to which the leader is called is not sovereignty over the flock but stewardship within the community, submitted to the leadership of Christ.¹⁴⁰

d. Conclusion

- i. Without question, the issue of power, authority, and control is unescapable. In a fallen world, power corrupts, coerces, and oppresses. Yet, power also influences and guides. The issue, then, is what kind of power a leader should possess and how that power should be used.¹⁴¹ In the church, all elders should be equal in value, power, and rank.¹⁴² Any diversity that exists among the

¹³⁸ James W. Thompson, *The Church according to Paul: Rediscovering the Community Conformed to Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2014), 242.

¹³⁹ Cornelis Van Dam, *The Elder: Today’s Ministry Rooted in All of Scripture*, Explorations in Biblical Theology (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2009), 18.

¹⁴⁰ Timothy Paul Jones and Michael S. Wilder, *The God Who Goes Before You: Pastoral Leadership as Christ-Centered Followership* (Nashville: B & H, 2018), 4.

¹⁴¹ Mohler, *The Conviction to Lead*, 66.

¹⁴² Merkle, *Elders and Deacons*, 174.

eldership does not equate to a diversity of office.¹⁴³ Therefore, leaders in the church must exemplify unity as a model for the flock.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴³ Merkle, *Elders and Deacons*, 176.

¹⁴⁴ Gangel, *Team Leadership in Christian Ministry*, 37.

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ABSTRACT

ESTABLISHING UNITY AMONG THE PASTORS AND LAY ELDERS AT CALVARY CHURCH IN CHARLOTTE, NORTH CAROLINA

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This project is designed to establish unity among the pastors and lay elders at Calvary Church in Charlotte, North Carolina. The training process involves assessing and increasing the knowledge of pastors and elders in regard to church polity and the functions of church offices.

Chapter 1 introduces the ministry context of Calvary Church, along with the rationale, purpose, goals, research methodologies, definitions, and limitations of this project. Chapter 2 provides the biblical basis for the ministry of pastor and elder. Foundational to the design of the training curriculum are three biblical passages: 1 Peter 5:1-2, Acts 20:28, and Ephesians 4:11-13. These first two passages indicate the definitions and responsibilities of the pastor and elder offices. Ephesians 4:11-13 addresses unity within church leadership. Chapter 3 presents church polity, the roles and responsibilities of pastors and elders, and the call for unified leadership. Chapter 4 details the curriculum and lesson plans. Chapter 5 evaluates the efficacy of the project based on specified goals.

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