

“The Elders of the Church” – James 5:13-18

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[What follows is the transcript of a sermon. It was originally intended to be heard, not read, so the tone is more conversational than academic. It has only been loosely edited, so forgive any grammatical, syntactical, or spelling errors. If you have questions please contact Southern Oaks Baptist Church through their official website, www.welovethegospel.com.]

Take a Bible and meet me in James 5...

Today is going to be a little different. It's something of an excursion for us, though related to the text we have come to in James. Last week pastor Evan (that has a nice ring to it, doesn't it?), took us through the first eleven verses of chapter 5. We have already, in recent weeks, looked at verse 12. So we have come to verse 13 and following, among the most difficult to interpret in the book. Follow along as I read them to us. Remember, this is God's Word...

“Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise. ¹⁴ Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. ¹⁵ And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. ¹⁶ Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working. ¹⁷ Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. ¹⁸ Then he prayed again, and heaven gave rain, and the earth bore its fruit.” (James 5:13-18)

It probably goes without saying, but there are a number of challenges tucked away in these verses. And not just these but the last two verses that close out this epistle. I intend to get to all of them, even if certain riddles will prove beyond our capacity to solve.

Today, however, my goal is much more modest—I would like for us to explore the meaning of a word. That's right. One word. It's not that this particular word is the most important in these verses. But it is a word that is sometimes accompanied by confusion and controversy. And that word is “*elders*”, which we encounter in verse 14.

Verse 14 contains the command that James gives the most elaboration. “*Is anyone among you sick?*”, James asks, “*Let him call the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.*” Who does James have in mind when he refers to “*the elders of the church*”? That's what I want us to consider together as we allow God's Word to inform our understanding. Clearly James' readers knew who he was referring to when he wrote of their “*elders*”, but, given our own historical vantage point and varying backgrounds, it's quite possible that the term may not be calling the right thing to our minds.

So a word study is in order. That's a little out of the ordinary for us—focusing all our attention in a sermon on one word—but I think it is both necessary for us to understand the meaning of this passage and for us to understand something important about God's design for the local church. We'll need to jump around a bit today in God's Word to get a sense of the meaning of this word. Again, that's a little unusual for us. You might even consider it a bit more topical than we are accustomed to at our church, where we place such a high value on expository preaching. But from time to time this is called for—especially when it comes to exploring key doctrines in Scripture. And we can progress faithfully, within the bounds of context and consistent with the intention of the biblical writers. That is what I will attempt.

So where do we begin? Let me start by giving my conclusion and then I'll show you how the Scriptures have led me to that conclusion. When James speaks of the "*elders*" he has in mind an office of the church. A group of leaders. These leaders have been called by God to serve local congregations and to carry out a very specific function among them. If you've been with us for a while, then you know who these leaders are. They are certain men who are often referred to as "pastors." Because of the popularity of that term—"pastor"—in recent decades (especially in Baptist circles), it's not uncommon for many church-folk to have forgotten the language that the Bible itself actually uses for that office. This has led to a lot of unnecessary confusion and strife in certain church settings. All of which, in my view, could have been avoided with a little more biblical attention.

Speaking of which, what does the Bible say about church leadership?¹ Well in the New Testament we find that there are two offices of the church that are spelled out a little for us: the office of pastor and the office of deacon. As it relates the first of these, there are three primary terms used for pastoral leaders. The first, as you have already surmised, is "elder" from the Greek word *presbuteros* (and its related forms), from which the English term "presbyter" and "Presbyterian" are derived. The second is "overseer" from the Greek *episkopos* (and its various forms), from which we get the terms "Episcopal" and "bishop." And finally there is "pastor," which is technically the word for "shepherd" (*poimén*), which is typically how it is translated in most English Bibles.

Elders. Overseers. Shepherds. These are the words used in the New Testament to call to mind what most people think of as the pastors in a local church. And while these words are not exclusively used in the Bible for that office, they are often enough that we can learn a thing or two about the role that God has called pastors to play in the local church. Before we get to that, let me read to you some of the key texts, not including our text in James...

Acts 14:21-23: "*When they [i.e., Paul and Barnabas] had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, ²² strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God. 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.*"

Acts 20:17-18, 28 (NIV): "*From Miletus, Paul sent to Ephesus for the elders of the church. ¹⁸ When they arrived, he said to them: '... Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.*"

1 Timothy 4:14: "*Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you.*"

1 Timothy 5:17-19: "*Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching. ¹⁸ For the Scripture says, 'You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain,' and, 'The laborer deserves his wages.' ¹⁹ Do not admit a charge against an elder except on the evidence of two or three witnesses.*"

Titus 1:5-9: "*This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you— ⁶ if anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife, and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination. ⁷ For an overseer, as God's steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, ⁸ but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined. ⁹ He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.*"

1 Peter 5:1-4 (NKJV): "*The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: ² Shepherd the flock of*

*God which is among you, **serving as overseers**, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; ³ nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; ⁴ and when the **Chief Shepherd** appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.”*

Philippians 1:1: “*Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the **overseers** and deacons...*”

1 Timothy 3:1-2: “*The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of **overseer**, he desires a noble task. ² Therefore an **overseer** must be above reproach, the husband of one wife...*”

Ephesians 4:11-12: “*And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the **shepherds** and teachers, ¹² to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ...*”

Now with these texts in our minds, a few observations are in order...

Number one, the biblical evidence exclusively describes this office as being occupied by men. This is a big topic today and we don’t have time to really explore it, but this is the pattern we see in Scripture and we should take it seriously.² We also should not misunderstand its implications. Jeramie Rinne offers a good word here:

“Does this mean that women can never teach or shepherd, confront sin or model godliness? Of course not. You can probably think of godly women whom God has used to shepherd and shape you, as can I. But the eldership is more than a gifting or a ministry. *Elder* describes a specific office, a divinely appointed role, a distinct position within the organizational structure of the local church, just as *father* is a distinct, divinely appointed position in the family. And as with the role of father, so God has sovereignly summoned qualified *men* to the role of elder.”³

Second, all of the biblical evidence seems to suggest that the primary term in the New Testament for this office seems to have been “elder.” Not only does the term occur more often in reference to these church leaders, but in passages where multiple terms are used, “elder” is always the first term used. And related to this, and this may come as a surprise to you, the noun for “shepherd/pastor” is hardly ever used in the New Testament and the only text where it is sometimes translated “pastor” is the last one I read (Eph. 4:11).

Next, while some denominations will treat these three terms as referring to two or three church offices, it seems to me that the biblical text does not support that conclusion. All three terms seem to be interchangeable, in the sense that they each refer to the same group of leaders in a local church. We can see this when we consider those passages where we find multiple terms being used in the same context. For example, look again at Acts 20...

“*From Miletus, Paul sent to Ephesus for the **elders** of the church. ¹⁸ When they arrived, he said to them: ‘... Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you **overseers**. **Be shepherds** of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.” (Acts 20:17-18, 28)*

Luke the author describes Paul as calling for the “*elders*” and giving them instructions. And as part of those instructions he reminds them of their role as “*overseers*” and their calling to be “*shepherds*.” He’s clearly referring to one group of people—the “*elders*”—who have a specific function of “overseeing” ministry and “shepherding” the flock of God in the local church. This suggests to interpreters that the primary term used in the early church to describe their pastors was actually “*elders*” and the other terms are more descriptive of what the elders do—oversee the work of the church and shepherd the people of the church (cf. 1 Pet. 5:1-4). And these were the leaders in all of the churches planted in the early church. Luke tells us that Paul “*appointed elders...in every church*” (Acts 14:23) and he instructed others, like Titus, to do the same (Titus 1:5). And as we plant churches in our day, we should do likewise and make sure they have these leaders in place, whether we

call them “elders,” “overseers,” “shepherds,” or “pastors.” As even the biblical witness attests, your preferred term is not as important as their presence and that they are functioning biblically.

Finally, did you notice in virtually all of the uses of these various nouns in the New Testament, they are plural—elders, overseers, shepherds. We are told that Paul and Barnabas appointed “*elders [plural] in every church [singular]*” (Acts 20:17). I just mentioned that Titus was told to do the same in each church he helped establish. The church at Philippi was led by “*overseers [plural]*” (Phil. 1:1). Paul told Timothy during his time in Ephesus that the “*elders [plural] who rule well [should] be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching*” (1 Tim. 5:17). The text we began with gives instructions related to the “*elders [plural] of the church [singular]*” (James 5:14). Peter told the elders of Asia Minor to “*be shepherds [a plural verb] of God’s flock [singular]*” (1 Pet. 5:1-2). You get the idea.

The weight of the evidence led Benjamin Merkle, who wrote his doctoral dissertation on the role of elders at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, to conclude:

“The church should be led by a plurality of elders/overseers. In each case that the term ‘elders’ is used in the New Testament it is found in the plural (except in 1 Tim. 5:19). This strongly suggests that the New Testament church was governed by a group of qualified leaders and not by one individual. The local church should not be structured in such a way that one leader has sole authority within the church. The model of Scripture is that a group of qualified leaders are needed which provides accountability, balance, and the sharing of responsibilities.”⁴

He’s right.⁵ But this needs qualification. This should not lead us to conclude that a church with only one pastor is necessarily in the wrong. The reason for that is that the Bible articulates certain qualifications for pastors and the fact is that in some settings there are not multiple people who have been both called to and made qualified for this office. In recognizing the pattern in the New Testament related to plurality of leadership, a church should not be too eager to appoint multiple pastors if the calling and qualifications are lacking. Instead, they should continue with their single pastor and be discipling to change that in God’s time. They should be praying and working towards a plurality of qualified leaders.

And what are those qualifications?

Well, we don’t have to speculate because the New Testament provides us with lists. For example, in 1 Timothy 3 we read:

“The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. ² Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, ³ not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. ⁴ He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, ⁵ for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God’s church? ⁶ He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. ⁷ Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.” (1 Timothy 3:1-7)

A similar list is found in Titus 1.

“This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you— ⁶ if anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife, and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination. ⁷ For an overseer, as God’s steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, ⁸ but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined. ⁹ He

must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.” (Titus 1:5-9)

And to these lists we could add a number of related passages that get at the character of a church’s elders, like, for example, in 1 Peter 5, where we read,

“So I exhort the elders 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: ² shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; ³ not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. ⁴ And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.” (1 Peter 5:1-4)

Now today is not the day to dive deep into these lists of qualifications, but a few overarching observations are warranted. You’ll notice, for example, that the list of qualifications is (with one exception) just a list of characteristics that every Christian should seek to embody. All of us should strive to be “*above reproach*” and faithful to our spouse (if we have one) and “*hospitable*” and “*self-controlled*” and not having an unhealthy relationship with alcohol or money and so on and so forth. We are all called to this kind of godliness and to set an example for others in these ways. That’s not a unique call to pastors, but pastors should, by God’s grace, be known for such things.

That does not mean that they have “arrived” spiritually. They are still themselves growing and have room for much progress in the faith. The Gospel is still transforming their lives. They still have regular need of repentance. All of this is true. But they should evidence spiritual maturity and model “gospel-dependent progress,” pointing beyond themselves with their words and lifestyles to encourage God’s people to “lift their gaze to Jesus, the One into whose image we are being transformed.”⁶

These are Christian virtues that are pretty universal. And an elder should model them. But “he is not the only example, not a perfect example, and not necessarily the best example in that congregation of every single Christian virtue.”⁷ Yet he (and they) should be an example and that is precisely because all of us are supposed to pursue the characteristics outlined in those qualifications.

There is one exception, however. One thing on the list that is not something that every Christian should be increasingly known for. And that is “*able to teach*” (1 Tim. 3:2). This is the primary task of elder/pastor/overseer.⁸ Not every person in the body of Christ is meant to have a position of teaching in the local church. Of course, we all teach when we make disciples. But teaching here is something more formal. It’s a specific role that they play among God’s people. Not every Christian serves in this way. But every pastor does. If God hasn’t gifted them in this way, then they are not called to this office. Their ministry is still vital to the health of the church, but if God is calling a man to serve as an elder then they are going to need this gift. And they will be called to account for their use of this gift, which is why we saw James warn: “*Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness*” (James 3:1).

Now with this bird’s eye view of what the Bible teaches on these matters, let me address some frequently asked questions.

First, “Brandon, are you considered a pastor, an elder, or an overseer?” The answer is “yes.” As we’ve seen the New Testament uses this language for the same office in the church.

Second, “If the biblical pattern is to have a plurality of elders, then do we have that at Southern Oaks?” Yes. At present we have four—myself (as the lead teaching pastor), Tony (as a minister for worship and senior adults), James (who leads our youth), and, as of last Sunday night, Evan Webster (who will be starting up in July and serving in areas of administration and discipleship). We expect, and you should expect, each of us to fit those

biblical qualifications and serve in the ways that the Bible describes when it refers to elders, overseers, and shepherds. In the case of our church, our elders are on staff and therefore could be described as “vocational elders.” Many churches also have “lay elders,” people who serve in this role but are not employed by the church. There is nothing wrong with that. And that would be a huge benefit to our church, I think, but it is not the present state of affairs. Nevertheless, the way we are constructed, we do have a plurality of elders.

Third, “What should we call you guys?” We answer to our first names (and even to “hey you”) and are not big on lording titles over people. Feel free to call us pastor. We love the term and what it means. But if you want to call us elders or overseers, that would be consistent with the language of the New Testament, even if it’s less common in our day.

Fourth, “Does it even really matter how a church is organized?” I understand the question. And I should say that the Bible does allow for a lot of freedom on how a church may organize itself in certain respects, which explains why there is such diversity among denominations and even within our denomination. *How* the elders are organized is not specified. I would never suggest that the way we are organized is the only way that is biblical. In truth, some of our church structure (or church polity or church government) exists in the form it does because the Bible requires it to and some of our structure is what it is because the Bible gives us freedom in certain areas and we believe our way makes the most sense in our context of ministry. But we should never say that the way a church organizes itself is “irrelevant and immaterial”.⁹ Alexander Strauch helps us understand why:

“Church organizational structure matters because structure determines how people think and act. Ultimately structure determines how things are done in the local church. I find it ironic that some evangelical leaders in America are more concerned about the structure of the United States government than the structure of the local church. I doubt many evangelical leaders would say, ‘It doesn’t matter how the U. S. government is structured as long as there is some form of leadership.’ Yet, that is precisely what I have heard some evangelical leaders say about the local church.”¹⁰

How unfortunate. “If we care about local church issues such as membership, doctrine, worship, accountability, missions, finances, relationships, and the like, then structure matters a great deal.”¹¹ More importantly, if we take seriously the Bible (and we do), then these things matter to us and we will take our marching orders from the biblical witness that God has entrusted to us and not our history or man-made traditions.

Maybe you’re sitting there thinking, “I don’t know, this doesn’t sound very Baptist (or Southern Baptist).” I can assure you, if that’s the case, it owes more to the churches you have been a part of than it does to the history of our denomination. What I have described is nothing unusual in our denomination, either in our day or historically. If you want a history lesson, just let me know and you can thank me or regret it later. But let me just give you a few examples. What did the first Baptist Faith and Message say about this? Go look at it sometime and you will find that it doesn’t even use the term pastor in the entire document. Instead what it says is this, when describing the leadership in a local church:

“Its Scriptural officers are bishops, or elders, and deacons.”¹²

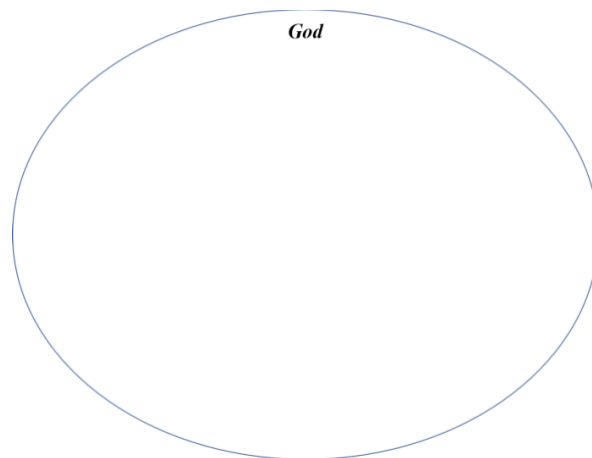
Not to confuse matters, but “bishops” comes from the old English form of the term “overseers.” Which was the preferred term, evidently, at the start of our denomination and the language was clearly seen as interchangeable. W. B. Johnson, the first president of the Southern Baptist Convention, employed these terms and argued that there should be a plurality of such leaders whenever possible. He was also a realist though, and recognized that it was not always possible, writing: “In a church where more than one [elder] cannot be obtained, that one may be appointed upon the principle that as soon as another can be procured there shall be a plurality.”¹³ So our denomination from its beginning has always been comfortable with the biblical language and with the biblical pattern of plurality. By 1965, when the Baptist Faith and Message was updated, the term “pastor” was much

more common in the vernacular of the day and so the wording was revised. The thinking and biblical convictions, however, were not.

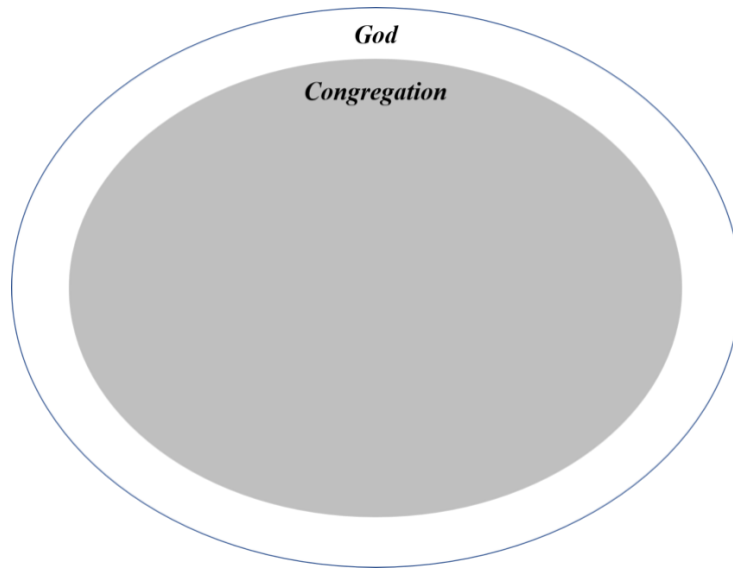
Here's another question, "Aren't we a committee led church?" No. We have committees. And those committees have a responsibility to lead in some ways. But that doesn't mean that the committees are the primary leaders in the church. In fact, our bi-laws make this clear (as do the various pastoral job descriptions), which speak of pastoral leadership in our committees and make pastors *ex officio* members of our committees. But usually when people hear "committee led" they think that it means that the committees are the top of the leadership hierarchy. They are not. And imagine if they were? What would that say about us? Would that be biblical? If you search the New Testament, you're not going to find mention of church committees and qualifications for leaders serving on committees. Such committees, as we practice them, are modern inventions. Would we really say that something that we created in the modern age should trump in the authority the structure and offices that God mandates in the New Testament? Of course not. So while we think our committees are important and they are, we believe, in keeping with biblical principles like the priesthood of all believers and the call of congregational involvement in the work of ministry, we should not be married to them in the same way as we are to the biblical offices and patterns.

Why don't we end with this question: "Pastor aren't we congregational?" Yup. We are. And while this is not the sermon for that, I can make a biblical case for why that is from places like Matthew 8, Acts 6, 13, 15, 1 Corinthians 5, 2 Corinthians 2, etc. We are a congregational church, as are all the churches in our denomination. But God still calls certain leaders (whatever we call them) to lead in congregational churches.

So how does all of this fit together? Some of you are visual learners, so think of it like this.

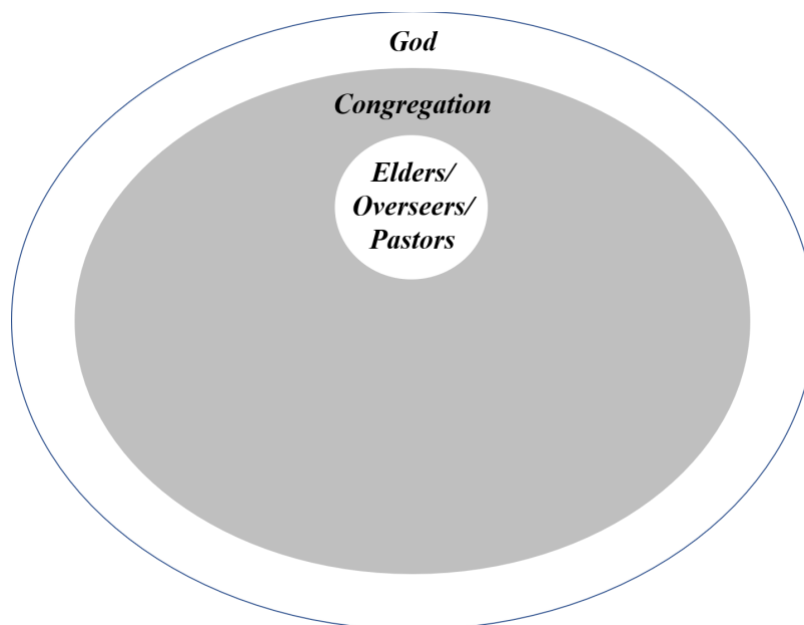


The highest authority in our church is God Himself. That is why we take seriously His Word. It trumps every preference and cultural norm. He is our Lord. Our highest authority. Period. End of discussion. Congregationalism functions under His authority.

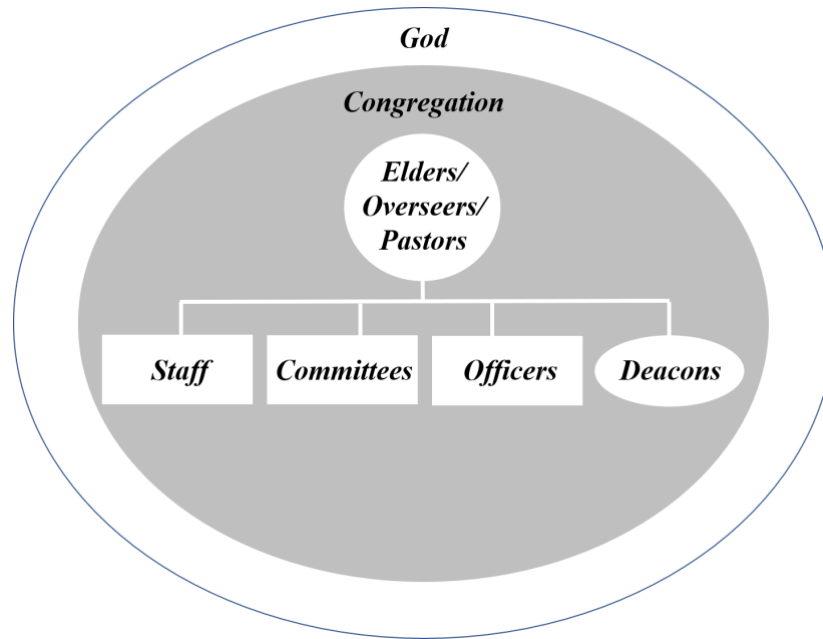


All church members should be born-again (regenerate), that is people who have come into a right relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ. This reality is theirs by grace, it's undeserved because it's not based on their works. It's based entirely on the work of Jesus Christ in our place. He died for our sins. He rose from the dead. He defeated death for us. And for those who believe—turning from sin and trusting in Christ alone—there is forgiveness of all sins and life eternal. Every member of the church should embrace this Gospel and have experienced its saving power. If that's the case, then the Bible says that the Holy Spirit has been deposited within us and He leads us—individually and corporately. So under God, in congregational churches, the congregation has the highest authority, which derives from God's Word and Spirit. And there are decisions that we make as a church that rely on the Spirit to collectively move us as one.

One example of this is in discerning—by God's Word and Spirit—who God is calling to serve as our pastors/elder/overseers. God calls. He moves among His people to affirm that call. That's what happened last Sunday night with Evan.



And these leaders are called to lead. They oversee (overseers) and they shepherd (pastor) the flock of God. The congregations are meant to follow that leadership, as they follow God. And in our church that leadership is seen, in part, in their oversight of the various ministry groups of the church.



This is where we find the other church staff. They are led by our pastoral staff. This is also where we find the various committees of the church. And the officers of the church (like clerk and treasurer). And the deacons of the church (which are like pastoral assistants, who lead by serving the congregation under the direction of the pastors). By the way, we are going to look at the biblical passages related to the office and calling of deacons, Lord willing, after we finish James. But the point is that all of these are led by the pastoral staff. We serve the congregation by leading and teaching the congregation. But the congregation is free to remove us and should, if we become disqualified.

But notice the shapes in this diagram. There are circles and squares. The circles represent things that the Bible spells out for us. They represent the things in our structure that are non-negotiable because we believe the Scripture prescribe them. The squares are not mandated in God's Word. We believe they are consistent with biblical principles and make sense for doing ministry at this point in history and in this context. But we are not married to them in the same way, because we don't believe our ideas are more authoritative than God's ideas. Make sense?

There is much more that we could say, but we are going to have to stop there. But I hope today's excursion was clarifying for us. Sometimes we get in the habit of doing things a certain way, but we forget the biblical reasons why we do them that way. Periodically, we need reminders like today. And, I think now, we are in a better position to understand the complicated text related to "elders" that we find next in James. To be continued...

But let me close on this note. Never forget that your pastors (your shepherds) are themselves sheep. Just like you we follow the Chief Shepherd. While we are called to shepherd among you, it is only as under-shepherds. We are not the heroes. Jesus is the Hero and worthy of all glory and honor. God, in His grace, has always provided shepherds to lead His people and they all, without exception, have failed to do that perfectly. All but one, that is. And that One was His very Son. The Great Shepherd to the sheep. The Good Shepherd who laid down His life for the sheep. And whatever platform He gives any of us in ministry—whether that's a more public role, like the pastors, or a more private role behind the scenes helping to do the dirty work that no one sees to prepare for a VBS—we should do it for His glory and leverage the opportunity to make much of Him. Amen?

Let's pray...

¹ Much of the content of this sermon has been shaped by an unpublished document, produced for a church plant (SBC), that I was once asked to edit by J. Scott Duvall and Scott Jackson called “A Case for Elder-Led Congregationalism.” These men, along with some others, have done the most for clarifying my understanding of what the Scriptures teach on this subject and I owe them a great debt, not only for their mark on this sermon, but also for their mark on my thinking and ministry over the years.

² For a more thorough examination of the relevant texts and debates, see Wayne Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth: As Analysis of More than 100 Disputed Questions* (Colorado Springs, CO: Multnomah, 2004).

³ Jeramie Rinne, *Church Elders: How to Shepherd God’s People Like Jesus* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2014), 28.

⁴ Benjamin L. Merkle, *The Elder and Overseer: One Office in the Early Church* (New York: Peter Lang, 2003). Cited in Duvall and Jackson, “A Case for Elder-Led Congregationalism.”

⁵ The two passages that are sometimes used to justify a single elder are 1 Timothy 3:1-2 and Titus 1:7. Daniel B. Wallace, arguable the leading Greek Grammarian in recent decades, argues persuasively that this is not how these texts should be understood in “Who Should Run the Church? A Case for the Plurality of Elders” (1997). Biblical Studies Press. Available from <http://www.bible.org>. Similarly, Duvall and Jackson write, “The singular term ‘overseer’ [in these verses] is used here as a generic singular to specify a class as opposed to an individual. The context of 1 Timothy 3 includes references to many classes of individuals. For example, in 2:9-10 he addresses ‘the women’ and in 2:11-12 reverts to the singular—‘a woman should learn quietly.’ Paul is not speaking of a particular woman, but is using a generic singular to speak of women as a class. Also, the larger context in both letters supports [this] conclusion (the ‘elders who rule well’ in 1 Tim. 5:17 and ‘appoint elders in every town’ in Tit. 1:5). We would not go so far as to say that a Baptist church is unbiblical when it has only one pastor, but we do believe the Bible recommends a plurality of elders.”

⁶ Rinne, 106-107.

⁷ Ibid., 101.

⁸ Thabiti M. Anyabwile, *Finding Faithful Elders and Deacons* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), 78. He goes on to clarify, “Paul’s criterion ‘able to teach’ refers to the ability to communicate and apply the truth of Scripture with clarity, coherence, and fruitfulness. Those who have this ability handle the Scripture with fidelity, and others are edified when they do. This ability is not limited to public teaching from the pulpit. Men with this ability might be gifted public teachers, or they might simply be gifted for one-on-one or small-group settings. Some men are not exceptional public speakers, but they are teaching and counseling the people around them from the Scriptures all the time. Such men should not be disqualified from the office of elder.”

⁹ Duvall and Jackson, “A Case for Elder-Led Congregationalism.”

¹⁰ Alexander Strauch, *Biblical Eldership: An Urgent Call to Restore Biblical Church Leadership* (Colorado Springs, CO: Lewis and Roth, 1995), 102.

¹¹ Duvall and Jackson, “A Case for Elder-Led Congregationalism.”

¹² Baptist Faith and Message (1925), which can be accessed and searched in its entirety at the following website: <http://baptiststudiesonline.com/wp-content/uploads/2007/02/baptist-faith-message-1925.pdf>.

¹³ W. B. Johnson, “The Gospel Developed through the Government and Order of the Churches of Jesus Christ” (Richmond: H. K. Ellyson, 1846), 194, quoted in Phil A. Newton, *Elders in Congregational Life: Rediscovering the Biblical Model for Church Leadership* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2005), 29. Newton’s resource as a whole is quite helpful and his chapter on “Why Baptist Elders Is Not an Oxymoron” is apropos.