

A blue, starburst-like background with white text. The text is centered and reads "Order in the Court of the King!".

Order
in the
Court of the King!

Volume V

By

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Welcome to Volume V of our special series, *Order in the Court of the King!* If this is the first time you've read this series, please read the first four volumes to acquaint yourself with our views on God's Eternal Kingdom.

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Elder Authority

For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you— if a man is blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of dissipation or insubordination. Titus 1:5-6

God does everything in an orderly fashion, so it makes sense that He would want things ‘set in order,’ especially those things that are lacking. Appointing elders to work together to oversee the ministries of each church is part of that process.

Even though I was an atheist before becoming a Christian, I had spent my childhood attending churches. So, I was familiar with the terms ‘pastor, preacher, evangelist, Bible teacher, deacon, etc.’ in a church setting. I knew they had positions of authority in the church, but I didn’t think of them as having any authority over me personally. That’s because I didn’t believe in a ‘God’ who had authority over me.

Atheists have it easy compared to Christians in my opinion. Who has authority over an atheist? From my years as an atheist the answer is clear – nobody. Sure, there were certain authorities at your place of employment or with the government, but otherwise atheists could come and go as they pleased.

All of that changed when I became a Christian as an adult. I became familiar with various authoritative positions in churches as I studied the Bible. I learned that their authority came directly from Jesus Christ (Matthew 28:18-20). I read Ephesians 4 where the Apostle Paul wrote about Christ giving His Church ‘apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastors and teachers.’ Paul wrote that their jobs in churches were –

for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness

of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ — from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.
Ephesians 4:12-16

I also learned in Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12 about how God gave Christians ‘spiritual gifts’ to bring glory to God and finish the work He had given them to do. Some of the spiritual gifts seemed to go along with people who had positions of authority in churches (e.g. leadership, apostles, prophets, teachers).

I also came across these names in my early studies of the New Testament – bishops, overseers, and elders. Who were they and what role did they play in the life of a Christian?

Elders in History

‘Elders’ have been ‘leaders’ in Judaism and Christianity for thousands of years. The first use of the word ‘elder’ was for Noah’s son Japheth because he was ‘older’ than Shem (Genesis 10:21). Ham is called Noah’s ‘younger son’ in Genesis 9:24, so Japheth may have been the oldest son.

The term ‘elder’ was used for an ‘older child’ in many places in the Bible, but the word was first used for leaders in Genesis 50 –

So Joseph went up to bury his father; and with him went up all the servants of Pharaoh, the elders of his house, and all the elders of the land of Egypt, as well as all the house of Joseph, his brothers, and his father’s house. Only their little ones, their flocks, and their herds they left in the land of Goshen. Genesis 50:7-8.

Notice that the term ‘elders’ referred to those of the house of Pharaoh, all the elders of Egypt, as well as the house of Joseph, his brothers, and his father’s house. The Hebrew word *zaqen* simply translates as ‘old.’ The age when someone was thought of as ‘old’ seems to have been people in their 60s or older.

The tombstone of one fifty-year old male from Roman Algeria in the third century C.E. recorded that he died “in the flower of his youth.” [Encyclopedia.com](https://www.encyclopedia.com)

Elders in Israel

When God spoke to Moses from the ‘burning bush,’ He told Moses to go back to Egypt and gather the ‘elders’ of Israel together to deliver this message –

Go and gather the elders of Israel together, and say to them, ‘The Lord God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, appeared to me, saying, “I have surely visited you and seen what is done to you in Egypt; and I have said I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt to the land of the Canaanites and the Hittites and the Amorites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites, to a land flowing with milk and honey.’ Exodus 3:16-17

Moses called for the ‘elders of Israel’ many times during his ministry. You’ll find what God expected of the elders in the Writings of Moses. You may find Numbers 11 especially interesting. You’ll also find ‘elders’ and their responsibilities mentioned in the writings of Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Job, Psalms, and many of the prophets (e.g. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Joel). Elders played an important role in the life of Israel, though not always for good.

Elders at the Gate

The 'gates' of cities were often the meeting places for 'elders' of cities –

Her husband is known in the gates, When he sits among the elders of the land. Proverbs 31:23

Elders were believed to have more knowledge and experience about the issues of life, thus able to help guide people of a city in making important decisions –

But if the man does not want to take his brother's wife, then let his brother's wife go up to the gate to the elders, and say, 'My husband's brother refuses to raise up a name to his brother in Israel; he will not perform the duty of my husband's brother.' Then the elders of his city shall call him and speak to him. Deuteronomy 25:7-8

And when he flees to one of those cities, and stands at the entrance of the gate of the city, and declares his case in the hearing of the elders of that city, they shall take him into the city as one of them, and give him a place, that he may dwell among them. Joshua 20:4

And all the people who were at the gate, and the elders, said, "We are witnesses. The Lord make the woman who is coming to your house like Rachel and Leah, the two who built the house of Israel; and may you prosper in Ephrathah and be famous in Bethlehem. Ruth 4:11

Elders and Jesus

The ‘elders of Israel’ did not accept Jesus Christ as God’s promised Messiah to Israel. They should have known from the ‘works’ of Jesus that He was the Messiah, but they didn’t want to believe because Jesus was a threat to their power and way of life. Jesus knew that and warned His disciples about the ‘elders’ of Israel. He told them that the ‘elders’ would be involved in killing Him and would persecute them as well –

From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day. Matthew 16:21

And while He was still speaking, behold, Judas, one of the twelve, with a great multitude with swords and clubs, came from the chief priests and elders of the peoples ... Now the chief priests, the elders, and all the council sought false testimony against Jesus to put Him to death. Matthew 26:47, 59

When morning came, all the chief priests and elders of the people plotted against Jesus to put Him to death.

Matthew 27:1

But the chief priests and elders persuaded the multitudes that they should ask for Barabbas and destroy Jesus.

Matthew 27:20

Jesus was right. The 'elders' of Israel were heavily involved in having Him murdered. When Jesus rose from the dead, the 'elders' helped pay off the soldiers who were supposed to protect the tomb (Matthew 28:12). The 'elders' also went after the apostles and disciples after Jesus returned to Heaven (e.g. Acts 4; 5; 6).

Elders in Christianity

The Greek word for 'elder' is *presbuteros* (the feminine singular, *presbytera*, does not occur in the New Testament). It means 'mature man' and carries the idea of someone who has experience and good judgment. It is the same word used for the 'elders' of Judaism and the 'elders' of Christianity. You'll know which one based on the context.

The first usage of the term for followers of Christ is found in Acts 11 –

Then the disciples, each according to his ability, determined to send relief to the brethren dwelling in Judea. This they also did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul. Acts 11:29-30

We see in Acts 14 that the Apostle Paul ‘appointed elders in every church’ from the very beginning of his missionary travels. Paul preached the Gospel, planted churches, and appointed elders in ‘every church.’ These ‘elders’ were mature men who Paul entrusted to guide Christians in obedience to Christ’s commands.

Paul revisited church elders during his second and third missionary journeys even as he was establishing new churches and appointing new elders. We see some of the interactions between Paul and various church ‘elders’ in Acts 15; 20; and 21. Though the term ‘elder’ was not always used, Paul revisited many of the leaders and members of churches he had planted in later missionary journeys.

Appointing Elders in Every Church

And when they had preached the gospel to that city and made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying, "We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God." So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed. And after they had passed through Pisidia, they came to Pamphylia. Now when they had preached the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia. From there they sailed to Antioch, where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work which they had completed.

Acts 14:21-26

The Apostle Paul ‘appointed elders’ in every church he planted. Why? Because elders were an important part of how Jesus Christ was building His Church. God used ‘elders’ in the Old Testament as part of overseeing and guiding the children of Israel. God used ‘elders’ in the New Testament as part of overseeing and guiding members of the Body of Christ.

The Greek word for ‘elder’ is *presbuteros* (πρεσβύτερος). It is a ‘masculine adjective.’ The feminine singular, *presbytera*, is not used in the Bible. The word *presbuteros* carries the idea of someone who has experience and ‘seasoned judgment.’

We know that Paul continued the practice of appointing elders throughout his ministry. We see him speaking with the Ephesian elders in Acts 20, which was toward the end of his third missionary journey. As we follow Paul after his meeting with the Ephesian elders, we see him slowly making his way toward Jerusalem. (Acts 21)

Paul was attacked by a mob in Jerusalem that wanted to kill him. Roman soldiers took Paul into custody to save him from the mob. Paul made his defense to his accusers, but they plotted his murder. God promised Paul that he would not die at their hand. He had other plans for the apostle –

But the following night the Lord stood by him and said, “Be of good cheer, Paul; for as you have testified for Me in Jerusalem, so you must also bear witness at Rome. Acts 23:11

Paul’s nephew overheard the Jews talking about their plan to kill Paul, so he told Paul about it. Paul called one of the centurions and asked him to take his nephew to the Roman commander. Paul’s nephew told the commander about the plot to murder Paul the next day, so the commander called for two centurions to take a large number of soldiers to transfer Paul to Caesarea that night.

Paul spent more than two years in Roman custody in Caesarea, but had the opportunity of sharing the Gospel with many people during that time. Those people included the Jews who falsely accused him, Roman soldiers who guarded him, and rulers like Felix the governor, Porcius Festus who succeeded Felix, and King Agrippa and his sister Bernice.

Festus offered Paul the opportunity to return to Jerusalem and be judged before him concerning the accusations of the Jewish leaders. Paul knew that the Jews planned to kill him if he went to Jerusalem, so as a Roman citizen he appealed to Caesar. Once Paul arrived in Rome, he 'was permitted to dwell by himself with the soldier who guarded him.'

Then Paul dwelt two whole years in his own rented house, and received all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no one forbidding him. Acts 28:30-31

Paul had written a letter to the Christians in Rome a few years earlier (Book of Romans), so he most likely met with members of the church while living in Rome. Paul also wrote several letters to other churches during his time in Rome. Those included letters to the Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and to Philemon. Each of those letters have had a profound effect on the Church throughout the centuries. God used Paul in a powerful way during his confinement in Rome.

Another Journey

Acts ends with Paul living in the rented house in Rome. It's believed Paul was acquitted of charges against him after those two years and that he was free to travel again. Some people think of that travel as Paul's 'fourth missionary journey.' Based on information available in his letters to Timothy and Titus, it appears Paul traveled to Macedonia, Troas, Miletus, Crete, Nicopolis, and possibly Spain.

One of the important aspects of Paul's 'fourth' missionary journey was the time he spent preparing some of his closest fellow-workers for the ministry they would have after Paul's death. Paul knew that his time was growing short, so he wanted to ensure that God's 'orders' concerning the Church were understood and obeyed. Those 'orders' from God are still in place today.

Church Elders Defined

Paul used two primary Greek words to address the position of ‘church elders’ – *presbuteros* and *episkopos*. They are two names for a similar position in the church. In fact, we’ll see that Paul and Peter used the names interchangeably in some of their letters. Each name helps in understanding the important roles they plan in bringing about ‘order’ in God’s Church –

- *presbuteros* – elder, a *mature man* having seasoned judgment (adjective)
- *episkopos* – a superintendent, an overseer, a watchman, a bishop (noun)

Elders oversee the ‘Church of God.’ They are supposed to be mature men who have good judgment, and keep watch over God’s ‘flock.’ It’s a fairly simple and effective idea, if carried out faithfully by the Church. When leaders do their jobs well, the Church experiences ‘order.’ When leaders do not do their jobs well, the Church experiences ‘disorder.’

Paul called the ‘elders’ of the church in Ephesus to meet him at Miletus (Acts 20). In the same context, the apostle called the men ‘elders’ (*presbuteros* – vs 17) and ‘overseers’ (*episkopos* – vs 28). Paul said that their responsibility was to ‘shepherd’ (*poimainó* – verb – vs 28) the ‘church of God.’ He warned them that after his departure, “savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears.” Paul knew after God took him home to Heaven, the responsibility for watching over the church would be in the hands of the church ‘elders.’ Paul told them that their job would be difficult because of the attacks on churches from

both inside and outside the local assemblies. That's why Paul told the Ephesians elders to 'remember' that for a space of three years he 'did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears.' Paul knew that the elders would have to take over that work of oversight, protection, and warning night and day with tears.

It's interesting to note that the word 'shepherd' can also be a noun (*poimén* – protector), and is sometimes translated as 'pastor.' However, Paul used the term in Ephesians 4 as a 'gift' (*didómi* – to give, put, place) that Jesus gave to the Church (e.g. apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers). We don't find '*poimén*' used as a 'position' in the church in the same way as we do the terms *presbuteros* and *episkopos*. Pastoring and teaching are what elders and overseers do, but the term 'pastor' developed through the centuries to be used as a position. Your 'pastor' is an 'elder' and 'overseer' of the church. Shepherding (pastoring, protecting) is part of their responsibilities (Acts 20).

Changes

As we follow the terms used for church leaders following the apostolic period (1st century AD), we begin to see some changes. Some churches would have a single 'bishop' with multiple 'elders' and 'deacons' (those who serve). You may find it interesting to read some of the early Church writings to see how leadership terms were used.

We also find the term 'president' or 'presider' used by some leaders in 3rd century churches. Those terms were used for whoever 'presided' over church meetings when a bishop/elder was not present. That was most likely because churches often met in multiple homes in a city, too many to each have a bishop or elder present. The 'president' or 'presider' would lead the meetings, but under the oversight of the bishop/elders.

As for the title ‘priest,’ that term was used as Latin became more prominent in the western churches. The eastern churches continued to use Greek. The Latin word for ‘priest’ is ‘*sacerdos*.’ Though Peter spoke to all Jewish believers (‘pilgrims of the Dispersion’) as being part of ‘a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation,’ Peter did not use the term ‘priest’ for church leaders. He used the term ‘elders’ (*presbuteros*) and ‘overseers’ (*episkopeó*), telling them to –

Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. 1 Peter 5:2-3

The term ‘priest’ as a church ‘leader’ developed over time. The term tends to be used more often in Catholic, Orthodox, Anglican, and Episcopalian churches.

[Mormons, Church of the East, Hindus, NeoPagans, Taoists, Shinto, and some smaller religious groups (e.g. Mandaeism, Zoroastrianism,) also use the term ‘priest’ for leadership positions.]

The Apostle John also used the term ‘elder’ to refer to himself in both his second and third letters –

The Elder, To the elect lady and her children, whom I love in truth – 2 John 1:1

The Elder, To the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth – 3 John 1:1

We do see John using the term ‘priests’ three times in Revelation, but each usage is for all members of the Church, not just the leaders –

To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. Revelation 1:5-6

And they sang a new song, saying: You are worthy to take the scroll, And to open its seals; For You were slain, And have redeemed us to God by Your blood Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, And have made us kings and priests to our God; And we shall reign on the earth. Revelation 5:9-10

Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years. Revelation 20:6

Paul's Leadership Legacy

But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. Acts 9:15

Paul did not choose to become an apostle and the primary figure in taking the Gospel of Christ to the nations. That was the Lord's choice. The Apostle Paul planted many of the churches we read about in the New Testament. Jesus used him to take the Gospel of Grace to the Gentile world, in addition to Jews worshipping in synagogues across the Roman Empire. God directed Paul in how to preach the Gospel and establish churches. Appointing 'elders' in every church was a vital part of God wanted churches to operate.

At some point after leaving his two years of ‘confinement’ in Rome, Paul knew that his time on earth was short. Jesus had given him the responsibility of establishing the doctrine and ‘orderly’ practice of the churches, so Paul wanted to leave both as part of the work that Jesus had given him to complete.

Before we look at the responsibility of ‘elder/overseers,’ let’s see four examples of how Paul used the terms in his writings to a church, and to Timothy and Titus.

Paul and Timothy, bondservants of Jesus Christ, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons. Philippians 1:1

This is a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work. 1 Timothy 3:1

Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine. 1 Timothy 5:17

For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you. Titus 1:5

Paul's Pattern

Jesus Christ chose Saul of Tarsus to take the Gospel of Grace to the Gentile nations –

... for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. Acts 9:15

Jesus also showed Saul, also named Paul, many amazing things prior to his missionary journeys that would prepare him for the ministry God gave him (2 Corinthians 12). Barnabas went to Paul's home town of Tarsus to bring him to Antioch, Syria, for the purpose of teaching the growing church there (Acts 11). After a year ministering in Syria, the Holy Spirit called Paul and Barnabas to a special ministry that would include traveling to different countries in the Roman Empire to preach the Gospel and establish churches (Acts 13). After establishing churches in several cities, Paul and Barnabas returned to appoint elders in every church (Acts 14).

As we read through the Book of Acts and Paul's letters to the churches, we find a pattern of appointing elders in every church. It's important to remember that 'Paul's pattern' was the 'Lord's pattern.' Jesus Christ, the Builder and Head of the Church, gave Paul the pattern to follow in all areas of Church doctrine and practice.

As Paul approached the time of his death he knew how important it was that the 'Church pattern' Jesus had given him would continue after he was no longer alive on earth. Paul shared much of the doctrinal and practical 'pattern' in his letters to churches, but he specifically addressed the 'leadership pattern' in his letters to Timothy and Titus. They both had worked with him in ministry for many years, and were well known among the churches. The Holy Spirit inspired Paul to write those letters for all church leaders and members to know the 'pattern.'

Titles

Just a reminder from the last part of our study that the title Paul used for leaders in churches are elder (*presbuteros*) and bishop/overseer (*episkopos*). The names are basically interchangeable in the way Paul used them in his letters. Paul did not use the words ‘pastor’ or ‘priest’ for church leaders, though those titles developed through the centuries. Paul did use the word *poimén* (shepherd) once in Ephesians 4 in reference to one of the gifts (*dórea*) Jesus gave (*didómi*) to His Church so that Christians would be equipped for their ministries. Peter and the writer of Hebrews both used the word *poimén* in reference to Jesus Christ being the ‘Shepherd and Overseer’ of His Church, and the ‘great Shepherd of the sheep.’

Whatever you think of any leader in your church or denomination, or anyone who would speak at a conference, or teach in a Bible college or seminary, please don't ever think of them higher than or even on the same level as Jesus Christ. No human being, no matter how well they lead, no matter how well they can preach and teach, can ever come close to the 'greatness' of our 'great Shepherd.' His Name is above "every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come." God "put all *things* under His feet, and gave Him *to be* head over all *things* to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all" (Ephesians 1:21-23). Any Christian leader who understands who they are in Christ will say the same. All Christian leaders should be deeply humbled that the King of Heaven would use them in a leadership capacity in the Church He is building.

Qualifications

How did Paul decide who to ‘appoint’ as elders in churches? Was it based on personality? Celebrity? Wealth? Influence? The ‘pattern’ that God gave Paul for selecting ‘elders/overseers’ is unlike the way humans often choose their leaders. Why? Because of who gets the ‘glory.’

For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence. But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God—and righteousness and sanctification and redemption— that, as it is

written, “He who glories, let him glory in the Lord.” 1
Corinthians 1:26-31

Let’s begin looking at the qualifications for being an elder/
overseer from Paul’s letter to Timothy –

This is a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work. A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach; not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous; one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence (for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?); not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the same condemnation as the devil. Moreover he must have a good testimony among those who are outside, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil. 1 Timothy 3:1-7

Paul then presented the qualification for ‘deacons.’ If you are interested in knowing more about that, I invite you to read [our series on deacons](#). After presenting the qualifications for both elders and deacons, Paul wrote this to Timothy –

These things I write to you, though I hope to come to you shortly; but if I am delayed, I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth. 1 Timothy 3:14-15

Notice the importance of having ‘order’ in the church – “*I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God.*” God wants ‘order’ in His Church and in individual churches. Thus, the ‘pattern’ He gave to the Apostle Paul.

Next we see the qualifications for elder/bishop (overseer) in [Paul's letter to Titus](#) –

For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you— if a man is blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of dissipation or insubordination. For a bishop must be blameless, as a steward of God, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but hospitable, a lover of what is good, sober-minded, just, holy, self-controlled, holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict. Titus 1:5-9

Now, let's see the qualifications from both letters in list form –

- he desires a good work
- must be blameless, as a steward of God
- the husband of one wife
- just
- holy
- not self-willed
- self-controlled
- holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict
- able to teach
- not quick-tempered
- temperate
- sober-minded
- of good behavior
- a lover of what is good

- hospitable
- not given to wine
- not violent
- not greedy for money
- gentle
- not quarrelsome
- not covetous
- one who rules his own house well, having *his* children in submission with all reverence
- having faithful children not accused of dissipation or insubordination
- not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the *same* condemnation as the devil
- he must have a good testimony among those who are outside, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil

What do you think of the ‘pattern’ Christ wants from church leaders? Imagine going for a job interview and having your potential boss give you a list of qualifications similar to that. What would you think?

Being a leader in God’s Church is not supposed to be easy. Being an elder/overseer is not for everyone. It’s for a small number of God’s people who ‘desire’ to do it. If church leaders follow the ‘pattern’ Paul lived up to himself and gave to Timothy and Titus to use in appointing elders in every church, what kind of churches should we be seeing and experiencing today?

I think Paul’s list of qualifications for elder/overseers speaks for itself, so I’ll give you time to digest it and consider how Christ’s ‘pattern’ for leaders is being followed in your church.

Who You Gonna Call?

... besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches. 2 Corinthians 11:28

In the context of ‘false apostles’ and suffering for Christ, Paul mentioned his ‘deep concern for all the churches.’ What did he mean by that?

We began this series a couple of years ago with a quote from 1 Corinthians. It concerned a ‘divisions’ in the church that were causing problems. The church in Corinth had elder/overseers, as did all the churches Paul founded, but they called on Paul to help them solve their problems. Why? Because of Paul’s ‘apostolic authority.’ Jesus gave Paul that authority and even predicted the suffering that would come with it (Acts 9).

As we read Paul's letters to churches in Corinth, Thessalonica, Colosse, Rome, and Galatia, we see leaders in those churches asking Paul to help them address divisions and doctrinal challenges. The fact that they sought Paul's help and Paul addressed their needs in his letters and visits has been invaluable to the Church for almost two-thousand years. However, we must not forget that Paul was human. That kind of pressure took a toll on him physically, mentally, and emotionally. I think that's one reason he mentioned his deep concern for all the churches in the context of how he suffered for the Gospel of Christ.

Because Paul was human, he knew his life and ministry on earth would come to an end. Who would have a deep concern for all the churches after he was gone? He told the elder/overseers from the church in Ephesians that after his departure, "savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock." He knew that men from within the church would "rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves." Paul, the prophetic apostle, knew what was coming. Question – who would church leaders call after he was gone?

That's one reason why Paul wrote to his ministry partners, Timothy and Titus, to ensure that they would communicate the importance of qualifications for elder/overseers in each church. Timothy and Titus weren't going to live forever. Peter and John weren't going to live forever. The apostolic period would come to an end and Paul knew that having qualified leaders in every church would be necessary in keeping 'order in the Church.' That 'order' would have to be based on sound doctrine and the 'pattern' Jesus Christ had laid down for His Church.

Training Elders to Face Challenges

Even as Paul's letters demonstrate how an apostle faced challenges in churches, his letters to Timothy and Titus taught them how to train elder/overseers to do the same. Let's begin with Timothy.

Timothy

Timothy became part of Paul's 'apostolic team' early in his life. We first learn about Timothy in Acts 16. Timothy traveled with Paul helping establish churches and learning how to serve Christ as a member of Paul's 'team' (e.g. Acts 17; 19; 20; Romans 16; 1 Corinthians 4; 16; 2 Corinthians 1; Philippians 1; 2; Colossians 1; 1 Thessalonians 1; 3; 2 Thessalonians 1; Philemon 1; 1 Timothy and 2 Timothy; Hebrews 13).

As you read through those chapters you'll see the vital role Timothy played in the life of the early Church. Sometimes he was with Paul; sometimes he was traveling to churches on Paul's behalf. Paul knew he could trust Timothy. That's why he wrote Timothy two very important letters; letters inspired by the Holy Spirit and thus part of the Canon of Scripture.

As I urged you when I went into Macedonia—remain in Ephesus that you may charge some that they teach no other doctrine, nor give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which cause disputes rather than godly edification which is in faith. Now the purpose of the commandment is love from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere faith, from which some, having strayed, have turned aside to idle talk, desiring to be teachers of the law, understanding neither what they say nor the things which they affirm. 1 Timothy 1:3-6

This is an example of leaving Timothy at one church as Paul traveled to other places to either preach the Gospel and establish churches, or visit churches he had already established. Paul wanted Timothy to stay in Ephesus to work with the elder/overseers and church members obey the will of God. Keep in mind that Paul wrote this letter to Timothy several years after warning the Ephesian elders about external and internal attacks on the church, and a few years after writing his letter to the Ephesians.

Paul addressed both doctrine (orthodoxy) and practice (orthopraxy) in his letter to the Ephesians. He addressed many problems that existed in the church at that time, which was several years before his letter to Timothy. The Ephesian elders, who obviously loved and respected Paul (e.g. Acts 20:36-38), would have probably done their best for a time to follow Paul's direction. I won't go into the problems Paul addressed in the letter to Ephesus, but you can read it for yourself as you have opportunity. Especially note some of the challenges in the church that Paul addressed in chapters 4 – 6.

Paul 'urged' (*parakaleó* – exhort, encourage, beseech) Timothy to 'charge' (*paraggelló* – warn, command with authority, order, entreat) people in the Ephesian church. This included elders who would 'teach' and members who would 'give heed to' –

- other doctrine (not what the Apostle Paul had taught)
- fables
- endless genealogies
- straying from love from a pure heart
- straying from a good conscience
- straying from sincere faith
- turning aside to idle talk
- desiring to be teachers of the law
- understanding neither what they say nor the things which they affirm

Paul also told Timothy that he wanted men in the church to pray ‘without wrath and doubting.’ He wanted women to ‘adorn themselves in modest apparel, with propriety and moderation, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing,’ which the apostle wrote, ‘is proper for women professing godliness, with good works.’ Paul wrote that women in the church should ‘learn in silence with all submission.’ Paul did not ‘permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence.’ (1 Timothy 2:8-15)

Paul listed the qualifications for elder/overseers in 1 Timothy 3 (along with qualifications for deacons and their wives). Paul also wrote that he wanted Christians to know how they should conduct themselves in the ‘house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.’

Paul also told Timothy that a time was coming when –

- some will depart from the faith
- giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons
- speaking lies in hypocrisy
- having their own conscience seared with a hot iron
- forbidding to marry
- *and commanding* to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.

Elder/overseers had their work cut out for them. They would face some very tough challenges in leading, guiding, and protecting their church.

One of the challenges of any church is how members should treat each other. I started my Christian life as a young adult. I am now an old adult. What I've seen in almost 55 years as a child of God has shown me how poorly Christians treat each other at times. One of the problems I've seen is a disinterest, even disrespect, based on age. That should not be the case in the church. Paul summed up the proper way for people of different ages to treat one another in church situations –

Do not rebuke an older man, but exhort him as a father, younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, younger women as sisters, with all purity. 1 Timothy 5:1-2

If Christians would just do that, so many of the church problems we witness today would disappear.

Paul then went into more depth with Timothy to explain how the church should treat widows and how the church should honor elder/overseers, “especially those especially those who labor in the word and doctrine” (1 Timothy 5:17).

In 1 Timothy 6, Paul addressed those Christians who were ‘bondservants’ (*doulos* – slaves). Many people were slaves in ancient times. Even though Christ had freed them from spiritual slavery, they were still in physical slavery. Paul told Timothy to tell them this –

Let as many bondservants as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honor, so that the name of God and His doctrine may not be blasphemed. And those who have believing masters, let them not despise them because they are brethren, but rather serve them because those who are benefited are believers and beloved. Teach and exhort these things. 1 Timothy 6:1-2

Paul told Timothy that if anyone taught otherwise and did not consent to wholesome words, 'even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which accords with godliness' –

... he is proud, knowing nothing, but is obsessed with disputes and arguments over words, from which come envy, strife, reviling, evil suspicions, useless wranglings of men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain. From such withdraw yourself. 1 Timothy 6:4-5

Error and greed were another problem elder/overseers would face, which is one reason why some of the qualifications of being an elder were based on holding to sound doctrine and not being greedy.

Now godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many

foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. 1 Timothy 6:6-10

Paul went on to tell Timothy how elder/overseers should address those in the church who were 'rich' in worldly goods

—

Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy. Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life. 1 Timothy 6:17-19

Paul ended his first letter to Timothy with a command to –

Guard what was committed to your trust, avoiding the profane and idle babblings and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge— by professing it some have strayed concerning the faith. 1 Timothy 6:20-21

That's good advice for every church leader today. Whatever your position in your church, 'guard' (*phulassó* – protect, watch, preserve by keeping an eye on) what God has placed in your trust. Whether you are an elder/overseer, a youth worker, Sunday School teacher, worship leaders, trustee, usher, etc., keep your eyes open for people causing problems in the church through their 'profane and idle babblings and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge.

Training Elders to Face Challenges

In the last part of our series we looked at how the Apostle Paul guided Timothy in addressing problems in churches that often cause divisions (schisms). Let's move next to Paul's letter to Titus to see what he shared with him.

Keep in mind that the purpose of this series is to glorify God and finish the work He has given us to do. We want to help the Church come together wherever and whenever it can to accomplish those great goals of our Lord and Savior, King Jesus (John 17).

Even as Paul's letters demonstrate how an apostle faced challenges in churches, his letters to Timothy and Titus taught them how to train elder/overseers to do the same. If you have not read our article about Timothy, you can read it [here \(LINK\)](#).

Titus

Whereas Timothy was Jewish from his mother and Gentile from his father, Titus was a full Gentile –

Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, and also took Titus with me. And I went up by revelation, and communicated to them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but privately to those who were of reputation, lest by any means I might run, or had run, in vain. Yet not even Titus who was with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised.

Galatians 2:1-3

Titus accompanied Paul and Barnabas from Antioch, Syria, to the Jerusalem Council that we read about in Acts 15. Paul called Titus ‘a true son in *our* common faith’ (Titus 1:4). Paul would probably have met Titus after Barnabas brought Paul to Antioch to help lead and teach the young church (Acts 11:25-26). Followers of Christ were first called ‘Christians’ in Antioch.

The Holy Spirit called Paul and Barnabas to leave Antioch and begin a journey to other parts of the Roman Empire (Acts 13). There is no mention of Titus accompanying Paul and Barnabas. John Mark went with them as an ‘assistant,’ but left them to return to Jerusalem after a brief time.

At the conclusion of Paul’s first missionary journey (Acts 14) he and Barnabas returned to Antioch, Syria, ” they reported all that God had done with them, and that He had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles. So they stayed there a long time with the disciples.”

Some men came from Judea to Antioch and taught the brethren, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.” (Acts 15:1) Paul and Barnabas ‘had no small dissension and dispute with them.’ Why? Because what the men from Judea taught was contrary to what Jesus had given Paul to teach. The church at Antioch, Syria, faced a very serious challenge. How would Paul and Barnabas solve it? They went to Jerusalem to meet with the other apostles and the elders to discuss a solution. They took Titus with them.

After some heated discussion from all parties involved, the decision was made that Gentile believers did not need to be circumcised or obey the Law of Moses to be followers of Christ. That was the importance of what Paul said about Titus earlier – “Yet not even Titus who was with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised.” You can read the full story of how the apostles and elders solved the potential division in Acts 15 and Galatians 2. Through obedience to the Holy Spirit, the apostles and elders understood the mission of the Church going forward –

But on the contrary, when they saw that the gospel for the uncircumcised had been committed to me, as the gospel for the circumcised was to Peter (for He who worked effectively in Peter for the apostleship to the circumcised also worked effectively in me toward the Gentiles), and when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that had been given to me, they gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. They desired only that we should

remember the poor, the very thing which I also was eager to do. Galatians 2:7-10

According to the timeline of the Book of Acts, Paul met Titus before he met Timothy (Acts 16:1), but they were both some of the apostle's earliest disciples. Both of them played a vital role in what God was doing in bringing eternal life to Gentiles and Jews living in the Roman world.

Titus and the Corinthians

Titus was involved in many missions with Paul, even as was Timothy. They were both very important in supporting Paul's apostolic ministry to the Church. Titus was especially helpful in handling some delicate issues at the church in Corinth. He may have delivered 2 Corinthians to the elder/overseers, which was a follow up to 1 Corinthians. The church at Corinth had many divisions and Paul wanted to get them resolved so the church could glorify God and complete the work He had given them to do. Titus was a great help in working personally with the church leaders and members do that –

For indeed, when we came to Macedonia, our bodies had no rest, but we were troubled on every side. Outside were conflicts, inside were fears. Nevertheless God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus, and not only by his coming, but also by the consolation with which he was comforted in you, when he told us of your earnest desire, your mourning, your zeal for me, so that I rejoiced even more. 2 Corinthians 7:5-7

Therefore we have been comforted in your comfort. And we rejoiced exceedingly more for the joy of Titus, because his spirit has been refreshed by you all. For if in anything I have boasted to him about you, I am not ashamed. But as we spoke all things to you in truth, even so our boasting to Titus was found true. 2 Corinthians 7:13-14

In the context of raising an offering for suffering believers in Jerusalem, Paul wrote this to the Corinthian church –

But thanks be to God who puts the same earnest care for you into the heart of Titus. For he not only accepted the exhortation, but being more diligent, he went to you of his own accord. And we have sent with him the brother whose praise is in the gospel throughout all the churches, and not only that, but who was also chosen by the churches to travel with us with this gift, which is administered by us to the glory of the Lord Himself and to show your ready mind, avoiding this: that anyone should blame us in this lavish gift which is administered by us— providing honorable things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men. And we have sent with them our brother whom we have often proved diligent in many things, but now much more diligent, because of the great confidence which we have in you. If anyone inquires about Titus, he is my partner and fellow worker concerning you. Or if our brethren are inquired about, they are messengers of the churches, the glory of Christ. Therefore show to them, and before the

churches, the proof of your love and of our boasting on your behalf. 2 Corinthians 8:16-24

Paul also mentioned Titus in the context of the apostle's love for the Corinthian church –

Now for the third time I am ready to come to you. And I will not be burdensome to you; for I do not seek yours, but you. For the children ought not to lay up for the parents, but the parents for the children. And I will very gladly spend and be spent for your souls; though the more abundantly I love you, the less I am loved. But be that as it may, I did not burden you. Nevertheless, being crafty, I caught you by cunning! Did I take advantage of you by any of those whom I sent to you? I urged Titus, and sent our brother with him. Did Titus take advantage of you? Did we not walk in the same spirit? Did we not walk in the same steps? Again, do you think that we excuse ourselves to you? We speak before God in Christ. But we do all things, beloved, for your edification. For I fear lest, when I come, I shall not find you such as I wish, and that I shall be found by you such

as you do not wish; lest there be contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, backbitings, whisperings, conceits, tumults; lest, when I come again, my God will humble me among you, and I shall mourn for many who have sinned before and have not repented of the uncleanness, fornication, and lewdness which they have practiced. 2 Corinthians 12:14-21

Titus and the Cretans

After Paul was released from imprisonment in Rome, he proceeded on what some have called his ‘fourth missionary journey.’ Those journeys are not recorded in the Book of Acts, but we know some of what he did through his letters to Titus and Timothy.

Paul and Titus apparently traveled together through various cities on the Ancient Greek island of Crete. It was located in the Eastern Mediterranean. After preaching the Gospel and establishing churches in various cities on the island, Paul traveled to other areas and left Titus on Crete –

For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you. Titus 1:5

We looked at the qualifications for elder/overseers in the last part of our series. What I'd like to share here is what Paul expected those leaders to do in each of the churches. Keep in mind that the members of 1st century churches are not unlike members of 21st century churches. People are people. Different times, but similar challenges. Take note of what Paul told Titus to tell the elder/overseers to do. It's what today's leaders need to do as well –

- For there are many insubordinate, both idle talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole households, teaching things which they ought not, for the sake of dishonest gain.
- rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith, not giving heed to Jewish fables and commandments of men who turn from the truth.
- speak the things which are proper for sound doctrine
- the older men be sober, reverent, temperate, sound in faith, in love, in patience

- the older women likewise, that they be reverent in behavior, not slanderers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things— that they admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, *to be* discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed.
- exhort the young men to be sober-minded
- in all things showing yourself *to be* a pattern of good works; in doctrine *showing* integrity, reverence, incorruptibility, sound speech that cannot be condemned, that one who is an opponent may be ashamed, having nothing evil to say of you.
- *Exhort* bondservants to be obedient to their own masters, to be well pleasing in all *things*, not answering back, not pilfering, but showing all good fidelity, that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in all things.
- denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age

- looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself *His* own special people, zealous for good works.
- Speak these things, exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no one despise you.
- Remind them to be subject to rulers and authorities, to obey, to be ready for every good work
- to speak evil of no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing all humility to all men.
- those who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable to men.
- avoid foolish disputes, genealogies, contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and useless.
- Reject a divisive man after the first and second admonition, knowing that such a person is warped and sinning, being self-condemned.

- let our *people* also learn to maintain good works, to *meet* urgent needs, that they may not be unfruitful.

I think you'll agree with me that this is quite a list for God's people to do. One of the primary reasons established the elder/overseer system was because multiple leaders would be necessary in every church to lead people to obey God's will.

Jesus Christ is our 'Pattern.' The apostles followed Christ's pattern and became a pattern for the early church. The apostles gave authority to people like Titus and Timothy to select the men who would become leaders in each church. Those elder/overseers were to be 'patterns' of how Jesus wanted His people to believe and behave.

It really is fairly simple system. Just follow the pattern. Follow Christ. Follow the teachings of the apostles. Easy to say, but difficult to do. Why? Because our 'human nature' rebels against being told what to believe and how to behave. God knows that and established an 'orderly' path for Christians to follow.

Finishing the Race

Paul wrote Titus that he would send Artemas or Tychicus to Crete to continue the work Titus had started. Once they arrived, Paul wanted Titus to join him at Nicopolis, “for I have decided to spend the winter there.” We know that at some point Paul was arrested again and returned to Rome where he would die a martyr’s death.

We read about that in Paul’s second letter to Timothy. Paul was in prison and knew that his time to ‘depart’ was near at hand. The apostle had glorified God and finished the work Jesus had given him to do –

For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. 2 Timothy 4:6-7

Paul told Timothy to “Hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus” (2 Timothy 1:13).

Paul asked Timothy to be diligent in coming to him as quickly as he could. Demas had forsaken Paul, “having loved this present world.” Only Luke was with Paul at the time. Where was Titus? Paul had sent him to Dalmatia. Paul sent Tychicus to Ephesus. Paul also asked Timothy to bring John Mark with him. It is so good to know that the division that Mark had caused between Paul and Barnabas years earlier had apparently been resolved.

It was time for Paul to depart for Heaven. He did what Jesus called him to do back in Acts 9 –

... he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel.

Paul's Legacy

Paul left the Church a great legacy, a 'pattern' for living Christian in the present age. He didn't just talk or write about it. Paul lived it. He lived it in private as well as public. Titus, Timothy, and others who worked closely with Paul saw how he lived out the commands of Christ. They watched as Paul carried the deep concern of all the churches (2 Corinthians 11:28). They knew that Paul was the 'real deal.'

We have Paul's apostolic commands, his letters, his openness and honesty about being sold out to Jesus Christ. We know how he resolved serious divisions in local churches; how he brought about repentance and healing. We witnessed how important 'unity and order' were to both Paul and to God. The Church needs to reconsider what Paul taught then and what he continues to teach now. Remember, Paul wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Paul wasn't 'making stuff up' as he traveled from town to town, church to church. The Spirit of Almighty God spoke to Paul in a way that only a small number of men have ever experienced. Paul saw things

and heard things that God would not allow him to reveal (2 Corinthians 12:4).

Elders/overseers – check your qualifications. Are they what God demands? Check your responsibilities? Are they what God demands? If so, that is wonderful. Your people are blessed to have you in church leadership. If not, then ask yourself a serious question. Are you willing to become the man God wants to use in His Church? If you are, what do you need to do or change to qualify for the work God has given you to finish? What steps are you ready to take to be able to say with Paul one day?

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing. 2 Timothy 4:7-8

Women Teaching Men?

One of the primary ways that God brings ‘order’ to His Church is through ‘qualified’ elder/overseers. We’ve recently looked at those church leadership qualifications in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. Even as the apostles solved divisions in the churches they established, they taught their ministry partners how to solve divisions and teach elder/overseers in each church to do the same. Those divisions include both heretical and non-heretical schisms or disagreements.

I was introduced to church leaders early in my Christian life. I met some of them while I was still an atheist investigating the truth claims for Christianity. Two of the men were university-level teachers, and one was an evangelist. I met many other church leaders after becoming a Christian. An early observation I made was that all of the leaders I met were men. That seemed to square with what I had read in the Bible, but it wasn’t long before that was challenged.

A woman who was involved in the music ministry of a church also taught a Bible class at her home. Women and men attended her home class, so that became a divisive issue in the church. The 'elder/overseers' (all men) said that women were not permitted to teach men or have authority over them. They quoted from Paul's first letter to Timothy as support for their position –

Let a woman learn in silence with all submission. And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. 1 Timothy 2:11-13

Some in the church disagreed with the elders, which led to a division among Christians about the issue. Who was right?

As a young Christian I wanted to better understand Paul's command and what the Bible taught about women teaching men or having 'authority over a man.' Another situation that prompted me to study the subject was when some churches would not become involved with a popular evangelist because his advance team announced that a woman pastor would be on stage with the evangelist and other church pastors. While that kind of response might seem a bit strange to many now, keep in mind that this happened more than 50 years ago.

God's Design for Women

To understand what Paul meant, writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, I needed to go back to the beginning – to another Spirit-inspired writing –

So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. Then God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth. Genesis 1:27-28

If we read Genesis 1 and 2 and stopped, we would believe that men and women share authority (dominion – רָדָה *radah*, rule, dominate). It would appear that Eve, the first woman, shared a position of authority (rulership) with her husband, Adam. So, why would Paul have a problem with a woman teaching a man or having authority over him? Let's add more context to the earlier verses in 1 Timothy 2 –

Let a woman learn in silence with all submission. And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression. Nevertheless she will be saved in childbearing if they continue in faith, love, and holiness, with self-control. 1 Timothy 2:11-15

We have to read Genesis 3 to understand how and why things changed from God's original design of men and women sharing joint 'rulership' in the world. The serpent in the Garden of Eden deceived the woman and she 'fell into transgression.' Here's what God did in response –

To the woman He said: I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception; In pain you shall bring forth children; Your desire shall be for your husband, And he shall rule over you. Genesis 3:16

The two English versions of the Bible that I used as a young Christian were the King James Version and the Amplified Bible. I found the Amplified helpful as I studied Greek and Hebrew. Here's how each version translated Genesis 3:16 –

Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee. KJV

To the woman He said, I will greatly multiply your grief and your suffering in pregnancy and the pangs of childbearing; with spasms of distress you will bring forth children. Yet your desire and craving will be for your husband, and he will rule over you. AMPC

Two important phrases I had to consider were –

- Your desire *shall be* for your husband
- And he shall rule over you

What did God mean by that and how did those words change a woman's role in 'ruling' with her husband? I went to the Hebrew language to get some answers. I was fortunate that to have a good friend who taught Hebrew and loaned me some Hebrew dictionaries and commentaries by Hebrew language scholars.

The Hebrew word for 'Your desire *shall be*' is *teshuqah*. It means 'a longing, desire, an affection which is drawn out towards a superior.' The only other two verses that use the word are Genesis 4:7 and Song of Solomon 7:10. The Hebrew for, 'And he shall rule over you,' are *wəhū yimšāl bāk*. The word *yimšāl* (*mashal*) means 'rule, have dominion, reign, have authority over.' It's not the same word for 'rule, dominion' that we saw in Genesis 1:28 (*radah*).

So, what do we make of that? Something changed in a woman's relationship to her husband because of Eve's 'transgression.' What did it mean that her desire, her 'longing,' would be for her husband? What did it mean that her husband would 'rule' over her?

While God ‘cursed’ the ‘seed’ of the serpent (Genesis 3:14), and cursed the ‘ground’ for Adam’s ‘sake’ (Genesis 3:17), God made a promise to the woman as He was speaking to the serpent – “And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, And you shall bruise His heel” (Genesis 3:15). As we now know, that ‘Seed’ promise was the Son of God coming from Heaven to earth to destroy the works of the devil. He would come through ‘the woman.’ We know that ‘woman’ was Mary, the earthly mother of Jesus Christ.

God said four things directly to the woman –

- I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception
- In pain you shall bring forth children
- Your desire *shall be* for your husband
- And he shall rule over you

Based on the Hebrew wording, it appeared that the woman would experience sorrow and pain in childbirth (and possibly child rearing), and that she would have a desire for her husband that would be different than what she would have experienced if she had not transgressed.

One of the first Hebrew commentaries I read in the early 70s was *Keil and Delitzsch Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament*. This was their thoughts on this part of Genesis 3:16 –

The woman had also broken through her divinely appointed subordination to the man; she had not only emancipated herself from the man to listen to the serpent, but had led the man into sin. For that, she was punished with a desire bordering upon disease (תשוקה) from שוק to run, to have a violent craving for a thing), and with subjection to the man. “And he shall rule over thee.” Created for the man, the woman was made subordinate to him from the very first; but the supremacy of the man was not intended to become a despotic rule, crushing the woman into a slave, which has been the

rule in ancient and modern Heathenism, and even in Mahometanism also-a rule which was first softened by the sin-destroying grace of the Gospel, and changed into a form more in harmony with the original relation, viz., that of a rule on the one hand, and subordination on the other, which have their roots in mutual esteem and love.

I read other Hebrew commentaries that shared a variety of views concerning the passage –

thy desire, &c.] LXX ἡ ἀποστροφή σου, i.e. “thy turning or inclination,” with a very slight change of one letter in the Hebrew. But, again, there is no need to alter the reading. The two clauses present the antithesis of woman’s love and man’s lordship. Doubtless, there is a reference to the never ending romance of daily life, presented by the passionate attachment of a wife to her husband, however domineering, unsympathetic, or selfish he may be. But the primary reference will be to the condition of subservience which woman occupied, and still occupies, in the East; and to the position of man, as head of the family, and carrying the

responsibility, as well as the authority, of “rule.”
Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges

Thy desire shall be to thy husband — That is, as appears from Genesis 4:7, where the same phrase is used, Thy desires shall be referred or submitted to thy husband’s will and pleasure, to grant or deny them as he sees fit. She had eaten of the forbidden fruit, and thereby had committed a great sin, in compliance with her own desire, without asking her husband’s advice or consent, as in all reason she ought to have done in so weighty and doubtful a matter, and therefore she is thus punished. He shall rule over thee — Seeing for want of thy husband’s rule and guidance thou wast seduced, and didst abuse the power and influence I gave thee, by drawing thy husband into sin, thou shalt now be brought to a lower degree; and whereas thou wast made thy husband’s equal, thou shalt henceforward be his inferior, and he shall rule over thee — As thy lord and governor. Benson Commentary

... and thy desire shall be to thy husband, which some understand of her desire to the use of the marriage bed, as Jarchi, and even notwithstanding her sorrows and pains in child bearing; but rather this is to be understood of her being solely at the will and pleasure of her husband; that whatever she desired should be referred to him, whether she should have her desire or not, or the thing she desired; it should be liable to be controlled by his will, which must determine it, and to which she must be subject, as follows: and he shall rule over thee, with less kindness and gentleness, with more rigour and strictness: it looks as if before the transgression there was a greater equality between the man and the woman, or man did not exercise the authority over the woman he afterwards did, or the subjection of her to him was more pleasant and agreeable than now it would be; and this was her chastisement, because she did not ask advice of her husband about eating the fruit, but did it of herself, without his will and consent, and tempted him to do the same. Gill's Exposition of the Entire Bible

I found four varying views of the words in Genesis 3:16 based on the Hebrew words and comparison with Genesis 4:7 –

1. the relationship between husband and wife would continue to be positive, though with differing roles
2. the husband's relationship would be negative towards his wife, while his wife's would be positive
3. the wife's relationship would be negative towards her husband, while her husband's would be positive
4. the relationship of the husband and wife would be negative towards each other

An Historical View

Looking at the history of humanity from both the Bible and non-biblical sources, we see that men were dominant in their rule of households, cities, and kingdoms. While some women ruled in positions of power, they were in the minority.

What about ‘elder/overseers’ in the Bible? The first mention of ‘elders’ in that sense is found in Genesis 50 –

And Pharaoh said, “Go up and bury your father, as he made you swear.” So Joseph went up to bury his father; and with him went up all the servants of Pharaoh, the elders of his house, and all the elders of the land of Egypt, as well as all the house of Joseph, his brothers, and his father’s house. Only their little ones, their flocks, and their herds they left in the land of Goshen. Genesis 50:6-8

This concerned the burial of Jacob, also known as Israel (Genesis 32:28). Jacob was the son of Isaac and grandson of Abraham. The number of Hebrews in the land of Egypt at that time was a little more than 70 people (e.g. Genesis 46; Exodus 1; Acts 7 – Joseph and his family were already in Egypt when Jacob traveled there with his other sons and their families). Even so, we already see the idea of ‘elders’ of the house of the Pharaoh, the elders of the land of Egypt, and the elders of the house of Joseph, his brothers, and his father’s house. The Hebrew word is *zaqen* and means ‘old.’

The next use of ‘elders’ is found in Exodus 3 when God told Moses –

Go and gather the elders of Israel together, and say to them, ‘The Lord God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, appeared to me, saying, “I have surely visited you and seen what is done to you in Egypt. Exodus 3:16

The same word is used for ‘elders’ – *zagen*. However, it is used differently than for just someone who is old. As I read through Exodus, I found that the ‘elders’ were men who held ‘leadership’ positions for the people of Israel. Here are a few examples –

Then Moses and Aaron went and gathered together all the elders of the children of Israel. Exodus 4:29

So Moses came and called for the elders of the people, and laid before them all these words which the Lord commanded him. Exodus 19:7

Then Moses went up, also Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, and they saw the God of Israel. And there was under His feet as it were a paved work of sapphire stone, and it was like the very heavens in its clarity. Exodus 24:9-10

I found the use of the word ‘elders’ throughout the Old Testament and they always appeared to be men. What about in the New Testament? I found the same there as well. Whether for the ‘elders’ of Israel or the ‘elders’ of Christian churches, they always appeared to be men.

When Jesus, the Son of God, came from Heaven to earth and began His ministry, He chosen twelve men as apostles. After His resurrection and ascension back to Heaven, Jesus called another man to be an apostle, Saul of Tarsus (Paul). Women played an important role in the ministry of Jesus and the apostles, but they didn’t hold the position of ‘elder/overseer.’

So, why would churches have women in that position after the apostolic period if there was no precedent when the apostles were alive and speaking and writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit?

Conflicting Views

I came across conflicting views during my search through the history of the Church. One view, known as ‘**Complementarianism,**’ sees men and women serving in ‘complementary’ roles in the home and the church. God values all of His people equally, but established differing roles for men and women after the ‘Fall.’ He has a plan for ‘order’ in the home and Church, even in the midst of a world that is in ‘disorder.’

Here are three examples from Paul’s writings –

But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God. 1 Corinthians 11:3

Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ,

*so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything.
Ephesians 5:22-24*

For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression. Nevertheless she will be saved in childbearing if they continue in faith, love, and holiness, with self-control. 1 Timothy 2:13-15

Another view is known as '**Egalitarianism.**' It views men and women as equals in the home and in church. That includes equality in serving in similar roles for men and women. A Scriptural example used comes from Galatians 3 –

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. Galatians 3:28

The idea is that God sees all of His people in an equal fashion, whatever their race (Jew nor Greek), position in life (slave nor free), or gender (male nor female). They are all 'one in Christ.'

I would add that it is important to read the full context of all of the Scriptures used in presenting evidence for both views. Context often changes our understanding of a particular verse or small portion of Scripture. Studying Galatians 3:28 in light of the full context of chapters 2, 3, and 4 will help us understand its meaning and purpose.

I remembered Paul's declaration in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 that an 'elder/overseer' was to be "the husband of one wife." That seemed to support the view that only men were to serve in that church leadership position since men were 'husbands.' I would also add that God gave husbands a great responsibility in the home as well –

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. For no one

ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church. For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. “For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church. Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband. Ephesians 5:25-33

How To Resolve Opposing Views

My primary concern as a young Christian was to follow God's direction for His Church. It continues to be the same as an older Christian. It is vital to bring Him glory and finish the work He has given us to do. Jesus is building His Church and He gave the 'pattern' for the Church to His apostles. I believe we should follow that pattern and use it in resolving any opposing views.

What is not oppositional is that God loves all His children. We find that throughout Scripture. Christians with opposing views on this subject should not doubt God's love for them or His desire that they love each other. The high command of loving God and others remains true in all of these situations. That doesn't mean we disregard the 'truth' God has given His Church about how people should work together toward bringing Him glory, but it does mean that we demonstrate love to each other.

The history of *'Egalitarianism'* is not that old. I found some references to women 'lay preachers' in the 18th century, and the ordination of women as 'pastors' during the 19th century. However, the 'Egalitarian' movement within Christianity grew rapidly during the 20th and 21st centuries. The rise of feminism and gender equality are often mentioned in relation to the growth of women's roles as 'elder/overseers' in many churches.

If women leaders in churches are teaching 'heretical' doctrines, then Christians should address those issues first – just as they would with a man teaching 'heresies.' However, if women 'elder/overseers' are teaching 'sound doctrine,' then Christians from both views should be able to sit together and discuss what the Bible teaches about men and women in leadership roles in the home and church. If they can agree, wonderful. If not, then we know the Builder of the Church will sort it out in His timing.

Conclusion

We must be faithful in following the ‘pattern’ Jesus Christ gave to His apostles, who then taught and demonstrated that same ‘pattern’ to the early Christians. We can look to how the disciples of the apostles (known as Apostolic Fathers) and their disciples (Early Church Fathers) led the churches of the late 1st century, and the 2nd and 3rd centuries. What role did men play in church leadership? What role did women play in church leadership? I recommend the Bible as the ‘pattern’ and guide to truth in this and all other matters of importance to God. Though the writings of the earliest Church Fathers is helpful, their words were not inspired by the Holy Spirit as Scripture – unless they were quoting Scripture.

I reached the conclusion as a young Christian that God’s ‘pattern’ was for men to be ‘elder/overseers.’ I have not changed that view after more than 50 years of further study. However, that does not mean I believe men are always correct in how they lead or make decisions as it pertains to the Church.

I also want to be clear that the behavior of many male church leaders toward women has been very disappointing – even appalling at times. Their bad behavior has included verbal, physical, and even sexual abuses. This has been going on for centuries, but we can do something about the problem we face now.

Any church leader who is accused of abusing women (or children or other men for that matter), should be confronted biblically by their accusers along with the most senior and trusted ‘elder/overseers.’ Gathering the truth and being objective in the process is of paramount importance. If the accusations are found to be true, the ‘offending’ church leader should be removed from his position and the church should be notified of the reasons. He should apologize to those he abused and to the church. He should take full responsibility for his abusive actions. He should undergo a period of discipline leading to repentance. Just as we read in 2 Corinthians, the church should forgive a repentant church member. Whether that person ever holds a leadership position in that church or any church again is questionable, but that’s for the church to decide. A formerly qualified ‘elder/

overseer' who is no longer qualified would have to meet the biblical qualifications for the position again. 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 should be used for that purpose. The type and extent of the abuse should also be taken into consideration before allowing someone to re-enter a leadership position.

I know this may sound harsh to some, but God's Word is clear and we must abide by His Word if we are to bring glory to His name and finish the work he has given us to do.

Next Volume

In the next part of our series, *Order in the Court of the King!*, we will turn to another ‘division’ in the Church that I experienced early in my Christian life. It concerns whether Genesis chapters 1 – 11 are to be understood as literal or figurative (allegory). Can we resolve this division in a biblical manner? I believe we can and must.

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