

Pastors, Elders and Overseers (A study in New Testament Leadership)

Teacher: Pastor Paul LeBoutillier
Life Bible Ministry

Father, we do thank You so much for the opportunity to gather here this morning to open our hearts to You, Lord, to Your Spirit. We thank you for worship. We thank You, Father for just the fellowship and the comradery and the family that you've created here at Calvary Chapel, Ontario over the years. And Lord we pray that You would continue and do so powerfully.

We pray, Lord, that as we get into some passages today from the Word, that You would really speak to hearts and that You would bring clarity and understanding. So we look to You, Father God. We thank you Lord. In Jesus' precious name, amen.

I'm sure that most of you know that today is transition day and this is the day that I'm going to be passing along the Senior Pastor role to pastor Aaron Gam here at Calvary Chapel.

And so for my last teaching here at CCO, I felt that it was appropriate to do a study on biblical leadership because this is something that all believers need to know. This is important stuff for people to know when you are... When you show up at a church, you need to know how they operate as it relates to their leadership structure. Whether or not it is biblical, whether or not it is workable, and whether or not you can live under that leadership structure.

Just this past April I did a workshop at a regional conference, and I talked about these very things. I talked about leadership structure, particularly as it relates to pastors, elders, and that sort of thing. And so some of this is fresh in my mind, which is fun.

But I, what I'm going to share with you today is about the fact of what the Bible has to say on leadership because what I shared with those men at that breakout session up in the Tri-Cities last April, I want to share with you.

And that is that although the New Testament biblical writers do a really fine job of helping to define the roles of leadership within the New Testament Church, and they even give us wonderful qualifications as it relates to who can function

in those roles. Quite honestly, the Bible leaves some latitude for how you're going to organize those leadership roles. And you've probably noticed— some of you guys have come out of churches that did things very differently than we do here at Calvary Chapel as it relates to leadership. You've seen different kinds of leadership, and that's sort, and that's fine.

Well, it's mostly fine cause I got to tell you, some leadership structures are downright unbiblical, and in that way even dangerous. But there are others, several others, frankly, that function quite well, even though they differ from what we do here at Calvary Chapel.

And I could cite all the different, leadership styles and organizations, that have gone on in the church, but that's not really my goal. My goal here today is to help you to understand how Calvary Chapel approaches organizing leadership and how it works for our fellowships. And so that's what I want to do.

So as I get ready to depart my role that has been going on here at this Calvary Chapel for many years, and as pastor Aaron assumes that role, I just felt it was a good idea to make sure that everybody here understands how things have been done for 35 years.

And it's, we're going to start, I'm going to put a passage on the screen from Ephesians chapter 4. And this is a Scripture, this is a passage where the apostle Paul defines certain biblical or leadership, some leadership roles within the church.

And Ephesians 4:11 and 12, and I'm quoting this outta the NIV cause I like the wording here, okay. It says,

Ephesians 4:11-12 (NIV84)

It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that body of Christ may be built up

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And as we look at those various roles that Jesus gave to the church, we see that they're all important roles, and they were necessary, and continue to be necessary in the body of Christ.

But I want you to notice something. They're not all leadership roles. They're different roles, but they're not all leadership roles. For example, you can see that we've highlighted the various roles that he speaks about there:

Ephesians 4:11-12 (NIV84)

*It was he who gave some to be **apostles**, some to be **prophets**, some to be **evangelists**, and some to be **pastors** and **teachers**, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that body of Christ may be built up*

apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers.

But when you stop and look at those, you say, well, prophets, they aren't church leaders. They are individuals who are gifted to speak prophetically to the church from the Lord, but they don't have a leadership role in the day-to-day happenings of the church.

And then you've got evangelists. Evangelists are those who have the gift of being able to share the Gospel, and we're all supposed to share the Gospel. In fact, we're all supposed to do the work of an evangelist, but there are certain people who are uniquely gifted to do that work of evangelistic outreach and they just love doing it.

And you can always see it in their eyes. Their eyes get big whenever they talk about sharing the Gospel at work or wherever they meet somebody. Or they'll say, yeah, I was taking a plane ride and I was sitting next to a guy and I had three hours to talk about Jesus and a captive audience. And they just get so excited but they're not leaders. They're not leaders in the church.

And frankly, although I think teaching should go along with the pastoral role, there are some people in the body of Christ who are teachers without being pastors. And that too is a wonderful, a very important role, but not necessarily a leadership role. We've got people in this fellowship who are very gifted teachers, but they're not really functioning in a leadership role in the body of Christ.

So that essentially leaves us with only two leadership roles that we see in this passage, and they are essentially that of apostles and pastors.

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It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that body of Christ may be built up

And we see the leadership role that the apostles played out in the New Testament, and we've seen in our own experience the way pastors also function in that leadership role.

But here's what's interesting about these two leadership positions that really remain. When you get into what we call the Pastoral Epistles, which are 1 and 2 Timothy, and Titus, this is where the apostle Paul wrote to these young men to talk to them about raising up leaders in the church, he never said anything about apostles. Have you ever realized that? Paul gave nothing in the way of instruction on how to raise up apostles.

You see, I don't believe that was a perpetuating role within the body of Christ. The other roles are, the other leadership role of pastor that is perpetuating, and that is why Paul talked a lot about that. But he used the term, elder when he was talking to both Timothy and Titus. He gave qualifications for elders and he talked about what those men were supposed to do.

You might say, well, pastor Paul, I think I remember him giving qualifications and instructions about deacons too. He did, but they too are not leaders. They're servants. They're get their hands dirty kind of people. They're the folks who just serve the body of Christ and we need those people. And deacons are very important, but they're not leaders.

Elders are leaders. But here's what's interesting about the title, Elder. As you read through—if you were reading the Bible for the first time and you got to the pastoral epistles, you started in 1 Timothy and you read through 1 Timothy and then 2 Timothy. And then you read through Titus, you would hear the word, elder repeatedly.

But you really wouldn't know what they do because the term elder is not a descriptive title. In fact, all it means is, old person. So that's all you know about that person. You don't know anything about what they do.

Well, thankfully, as you get into the rest of the New Testament, you find that the Bible gives clarification on the role of an elder and that sort of thing. And one of the areas where we see that clarification is in the Book of Acts where the

Apostle Paul is speaking to the elders in Ephesus. Let me put this on the screen for you, from Acts chapter 20. It says,

Acts 20:17-18, 28 (NIV84)

From Miletus, Paul sent to Ephesus for the elders of the church. 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 brought with his own blood.”

From Miletus, Paul sent to Ephesus for the elders of the church. (we know who he's talking to, don't we made it very clear. He's talking to the elders. Alright, what does he say to them? And it says) 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 brought with his own blood.”

Once again, I'm quoting this out of the 84 revision of the NIV just cause I like the wording here. And as we look at this passage, we see the apostle Paul giving clarity on what an elder does, except sit around and talk about his aches and pains because he is old. We see here in this passage. In fact, let's highlight these various areas.

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Notice the elders of the church are being spoken to, but Paul tells them, first of all, that they're to keep watch over the flock of which, who made them, gave them this role? It says “*of which the Holy Spirit made you overseers.*”

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And then he says, “*Be shepherds...*” Why is that name or that title, shepherd an important one? Well, because that's the very same Greek word that we translate pastor. In fact, some Bibles actually put pastor in there and that's fine. Either

translation works and we get a heart of understanding about what elders are supposed to do. They're to keep watch over the flock and they are to be overseers. And they are to shepherd the people.

Now, thankfully, this isn't the only passage in the New Testament that uses this kind of language to describe these leadership functions. Peter actually does the same thing. Let me show you from 1 Peter on the screen, chapter 5. Peter writes this and says,

1 Peter 5:1-3 (NIV84)

To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ's sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed: Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.

To the elders among you, (who's he talking to? He's talking to the elders) I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ's sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed: (here's his exhortation to these men) Be shepherds (again, it means, pastor, be pastors) of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.

Now see, we see the very same thing. We have elders being talked to, just like Paul did with the elders of Ephesus, exhorting them to shepherd the flock being overseers.

And so we find here that these titles have been, have, at least the title of elder, has been given more clarity and dimension for us to understand the function of these people.

So as we start to look at these individually, we want to talk about them and their meaning. So the first thing we'll put up on the screen here is the term, elder.

- **Elder** - Greek: presbuteros (old men)

And this is the Greek word, presbuteros. And again, I put in parentheses there, it means old men.

Now it came to be figuratively understood to mean a person in a position of leadership, right? And the term, elder made its way into the New Testament, borrowed from the old. You might remember, as those of you who've studied through the Old Testament, check out on the screen. Exodus chapter 4, it says,

Exodus 4:29 (ESV)

Then Moses and Aaron went and gathered together all the elders of the people of Israel.

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These were the leaders of their clans and tribes. These were men of standing who would represent their people, right? And so Moses would speak into them and they would speak then into the lives of the people.

And last week we finished the Book of Ruth, right? You remember how that ended? Let me show you this from Ruth, chapter 4. It says,

Ruth 4:1-2 (ESV)

Now Boaz had gone up to the gate and sat down there. And he took ten men of the elders of the city and said, "Sit down here."

Now Boaz had gone up to the gate and sat down there. And he took ten men of the elders of the city and said, "Sit down here."

And then you know how the story goes. So these were elders of the city, of that particular city. Men of standing, older men, but men of standing. Men in positions of leadership. And so then we take the same title and we find it sprinkled all through the New Testament in terms of church leadership. But again, like I said, elder doesn't tell you anything about what they do.

So the next title that we see here in the New Testament as we zoom in a little closer is this reference to, Shepherd or Pastor.

- **Elder** - Greek: presbuteros (old men)
- **Shepherd/Pastor** - Greek: poimen

And it is the Greek word poimen. And we remember that Peter told the elders, be shepherds of God's flock, be pastors of the flock that is under your care. And thankfully that's, that term is very descriptive. We know what a shepherd does. I

really don't even have to put a definition for the word shepherd, because it's self-explanatory. What does a shepherd do? He is shepherds. You don't have to, you're not left wondering.

When we talk about king David, before he was king David, he was just a keeper of his father's sheep. Well, what would he do? He was out taking care of the sheep. He would make sure they had food, he made sure they have water. He made sure they were protected when predators came around. Sometimes he even had to confront predators.

Well, do you know that elders have to confront predators too in the church? In fact, that's one of the things that the apostle Paul warned the elders of Ephesus about. Let me show you on the screen from, once again, Acts 20. Paul says,

Acts 20:29-31 (ESV)

I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be alert...

I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; (and he's not talking about animals here, he is talking about men who have evil intentions. And he says even) ...from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be alert...

We get a sense of understanding that elders in the church have to be guys who have their head on a swivel, and they're thinking about what's going on here, and are we good? And are the people safe? And they're the ones that, that we call upon to make sure the body of Christ is safe.

And then the last title as we zoom in is that title, overseer.

- **Elder** - Greek: presbuteros (old men)
- **Shepherd/Pastor** - Greek: poimen
- **Overseer** – Greek: episkopos
Episkopeo; - to look upon, (fig. to care for) to provide oversight

And it's the Greek word episkopos. And sometimes it appears in the Greek as, episkopeo, and it means to look upon. Figuratively, it means to care for. And it also means to provide oversight. Now you guys know what oversight means, right? To provide oversight.

This is one of the things that I've had to encourage our elders about throughout the years, and that is, guys, I know that you're all going to be involved in some area of ministry within the church, and all of our elders do that. They lead some area, but when we get together as elders, they can't just sit and talk about their area of ministry because they're overseers. They got to be watching over the whole shooting match. They've got a—and we got a lot of ministries going on here at Calvary Chapel, Ontario.

I mean, from the youngest child to the oldest adult, there's tons of things happening, and the elders are overseers. They're watching, they're keeping an eye on things, and they're maintaining safety, and biblical accuracy, and so on, and so forth.

So now as you look at these Greek words for elder and overseer, you might notice that you, it sounds a little bit like some denominations you might have heard of. For example, that word elder, that Greek word is *presbuteros*, and that sounds a little bit like Presbyterian, doesn't it?

Well, the Presbyterian church was named after what they called the Presbyterian form of leadership, which is an elder rule. When the pastor comes in, he's a higher-ling actually. He doesn't really have a voice. It's the elders who rule the church. That's not what we do here at Calvary Chapel. We have elders, but they don't rule in the sense of their final oversight. We give that role to the pastor. But that's one of the reasons why the Presbyterian Church has that name.

And then you have that Greek word for overseer, which is *episkopos*. And that sounds a little like Episcopal. And that's the kind of leadership structure that the Episcopal church has embraced, which is having men in positions of regional oversight, right? Where the pastor, he leads his own church, but he is under the regional overseer. In other words, he answers to the regional overseer. And that's just the way they do those things.

But that's not the way we do things here at Calvary Chapel. And by the way, for those of you who might be new, you need to know that Calvary Chapel is not a denomination. I get notes all the time from people asking what denomination is Calvary Chapel? It's not any denomination. We are, every Calvary Chapel around the world is considered to be an independent, non-denominational church.

We are, however, part of an affiliation of churches and as such, we have, we have a collective sense of who we are. It's kind of like, I've heard it said at conferences, it's kind of like going to McDonald's. Doesn't matter whether you

go to McDonald's in Chicago, or New York, or Ontario, Oregon, and you order a Big Mac, it's going to be the same burger, right?

And it's similar in the sense of Calvary Chapel. We are all committed to teaching through the Word of God, chapter by chapter, verse by verse. And there is a basic functional leadership structure that you're going to find in all of the Calvary Chapels even though we do some minor things a little differently. Alright. But as I said at the outset, the Bible gives latitude for churches to organize this in the way they seem best.

But I want to just talk to you here about how we do it at Calvary Chapel and how we arrange that leadership structure. It's patterned after the ministry of Moses actually.

So we take the operational titles, roles, that are given to us in the New Testament, and we organize it according to Moses' leadership structure in the Old Testament where Moses led the people of Israel. And he had elders come alongside to carry the ministry and to help him do the work of the ministry.

And I'm not here to tell you that the Calvary Chapel's style of leadership is the only style that I think should ever be used within the body of Christ. I'm not really willing to do that. I will tell you this, it has worked very well for Calvary Chapel, and it's worked very well for this fellowship.

For 35 years now, as the pastor of Calvary Chapel, Ontario, I have always had men who stood by me, and they were godly men. And they've helped me carry the load, so to speak, and they have been wonderful. But I, you need to know that these men also have the authority to act if things were to ever go off the rails because there has to be that kind of safety.

You can't have a one man leadership show. You just can't. So if you ever go to a church and there's one guy in charge and he answers to no one? Don't walk, run for the door, because that's not a safe place to be. That's why we also give to elders, and this is all lined out in our bylaws as a, kind of a rainy day clause, if you will, that if any, if anything, was to ever go bad.

And what I mean by that is if the senior pastor ever became unbiblical in his behavior and teaching, if he ever became immoral, if he ever did anything that was illegal, frankly, the elders have the ability, they have the power to step in and say, you're done. And like I said, we've got to have that. We have to have that kind of a accountability. It's never going to be completely a one man show because that's not a safe place for you to attend church.

But again, these powers of the elders are tucked away for a rainy day. And it's not something that these guys are constantly thinking about. I mean, they know that they have this authority, but they're not just sitting there just with their arms crossed, waiting for somebody to mess up. That's a relationship you don't want to have with anybody, frankly.

But what is so great about this leadership structure is that as long as the pastor's teaching the Word of God, and he's walking according to the Spirit, and he's doing things legally, morally, and biblically, the elders of Calvary Chapel let the pastor lead and to hear from God. Just like Moses was responsible to hear from God as he led the people of Israel in the wilderness.

And I can say to you with a heart of very deep appreciation, that our elders have given me the freedom to be the leader of this fellowship for 35 years. And although I am, I'm not willing to say that our leadership structure is the only thing that should ever exist in the body of Christ. I can tell you that it's worked here, and we have flourished, and I trust that this fellowship is going to continue to flourish, because there's safety built in to leadership. There has to be, there has to be safety.

Now, I was raised as a kid in a church that was congregational rule and that means the congregation sets the course. They vote on everything. They hire the pastor. By the way, there's some things the Bible has to say about being a higher-ling and they're not good. But the fellowship hires the, and they tell them what to do. He's an employee of the church, and that's a, personally, I think that's a disaster waiting to happen. I'll be honest with you. I've never seen a flock of sheep that led the shepherd, never once. So I just don't think that's a particular it's... A democratic republic works great for the United States of America, it doesn't work good for a church.

You need leaders who are called by God. And that's what you saw in those passages we were looking at in acts as they were exhorting, as Paul exhorted them to say, watch over the flock of whom the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. The Holy Spirit did that. They weren't voted into position. They didn't have the people come together and say, well, I think this guy would be a good leader or whatever. It's the Holy Spirit who calls these individuals into these roles.