

I. Review

A. There are five primary ministry giftings that Jesus has given to individuals in the church that build the church up in love for Jesus and for one another. These gifts are the essential and God-ordained vehicle through which the church is built up or grows up into the fullness of love and maturity. Apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor, and teacher. (Rom. 12:1-13; Eph. 4:16)

B. Critical Understandings

Concerning the Church

1. Fellowship with Jesus (Personal)
2. Fellowship with others receiving from the church
3. Fellowship with others supplying the church
4. 7 Facets (Family, society, temple, army, bride, priesthood, and body)

Concerning the Gifts

1. Jesus is All
2. We have access to all the gifts by the same Spirit
3. These gifts equip the whole church for ministry
4. These gifts are given by grace alone, not spiritual merit
5. Leadership is granted based upon spiritual merit alone, not upon gift
6. Only function rightly in relational unity and trust
7. Diverse yet equal

C. Government - In the last four sessions as we have presented the foundational or critical understandings of church function and purpose along with the spiritual gifts that are given by Jesus to usher her into the fullness of love and destiny. What has not been made clear and presented as of yet is the question of governing or leadership authority in the church.

II. Church Authority

A. The subject of individuals who have God-given authority in the church is very clear biblically. The practical outworkings and of this clear biblical theme, however, can carry much confusion. I believe that most confusion exists as a result of a higher relevance given to our experience and expression of church authority rather than the clarity of the word. Therefore I believe it would be advantageous for this session to leave our practical experience and expressions at the door and seek to realign to the word on this subject.

Those who say that biblical church structure is not essential do not realize the long-term, debilitating effect that it has upon the people of God. It is only by returning to our source of life through the word of God that we can check our continual waywardness, test our ideas, and reform the endless abuses of humanistic authority and unbiblical tradition - Alexander Strauch

- B. Biblically - The biblical clarity on the subject of church leadership structure is undeniable. The very will and authority of our great God and savior is behind the multiple exhortations to have a plurality of elders leading the church. With this in mind, the church for hundreds of years has either ignored, replaced, or misapplied the leadership structure that Jesus intended for us. Such ignorance or disobedience to God's clear word always results in some form of diminishment to God's people. There is more emphasis in scripture concerning the subject of leadership of elders than the subject of communion, baptism, and spiritual gifts.
1. The Charge - From the inception of the church until the final letters to the churches, a team of elders, not a pastor, were put in place and considered to be the leaders of the church. In fact, Paul did not consider a church to be fully developed or planted until it had functioning elders. The charge was clear that a team of men selected by Godly character, not gifting, were to lead the church in every expression in every city. (Acts 14:21-23, 20:17; Phil 1:1; Titus 1:5, 5:1)
 2. The Qualifications - Scripture tells us authoritative leaders within the church should be identified, selected, and submitted to based upon their Godly character not their gifting. Once again, church culture today massively deviates from this point and grants authority to gifted ministry personalities and, in general, looks to character in a secondary way. (Mt. 7:15-25; 1 Tim. 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9)
 3. The Distinctive Role - The elders were exhorted to do three primary things in order to fulfill their role and calling as the primary authoritative leaders in the church. We have chosen to use the term “covering” to describe the reality of elders walking out these three responsibilities.
 - a. Oversee - The word translated, overseer or bishop, literally means, “the duty of making sure things done by others are done rightly”. This suggests that the elders not only had the role of providing and organizing the environment for ministry, but they would also direct, encourage, and correct it. (Acts. 20:28; Phil 1:1; Heb. 12:15; 1 Tim 3:2; Titus 1:7; 1 Pet. 2:25)

- b. Nourish - The word translated, shepherd, is best understood as feed or nourish. The word speaks of holding the primary responsibility of making sure the church is being fed or nourished. The word strongly suggests oversight or stewardship of proper delegation of nourishing rather than the direct work of nourishing. (Acts. 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:2)
 - c. Rule - The word translated, rule/lead/maintain, literally means to be, “set or placed over in order to guard, protect, and give aid”. This is seen most clearly in the action and activity of identifying the false ministry from the true, and correcting or eliminating the false. (Rom. 12:8; 1 Thes. 5:12; 1 Tim. 3:4-5,12, 5:17; Titus 3:8,14)
- C. Unbiblical Authority - The elders were called to be servant leaders who lead through gentleness, humility, and sacrifice. Wherever there is authority there is always the potential for abuse. Examples of abuse or unbiblical authority would be the following.
- 1. Seeking to direct issues in one’s domestic life (unless sin is involved).
 - 2. When those in authority take more privilege and embrace less sacrifice.
 - 3. When those in authority manipulate through fear, by intimidation of negative circumstances in your life if you disobey.
 - 4. By operating with an authority that is rigid and leads without kindness.
 - 5. Leading without embracing the things that they require of others.
 - 6. Any time there is not a “safe” environment for appeals of differences or constructive criticism to be expressed.
- D. Cultural Disparities - There are a few major disparities between what we see biblically when it comes to church leadership and what we see culturally in most churches today. The purpose of this section is to align us to the word, not to shame or slander the cultural expression.
- 1. Plurality of Leaders - There is absolutely nothing in scripture that even suggests a singular person who is especially anointed to rule the local church. This concept is foreign to the assemblies in scripture and historically up until around 500 A.D. Every time we see issues arise in the church where leadership action is needed, it's the “elders” who are called upon to lead.

2. Equality of Leaders - Another foreign form of leadership structure to the scriptures is the idea of the “first among equals” or the “head elder”. The issue of the buck stopping with someone is demanded by the culture not by the word. The elders of a church share the office of authority and mutually submit to one another and lead through the unity of the Holy Spirit. The elders lead the way and provide the example of humbly deferring to and serving one another that is to be emulated throughout the entire family of God.
3. Skilled to Lead not Gifted to Minister - Culturally the primary metric used to determine which authoritative leaders are within the church is the metric of effective ministry. We desire to promote ministry vessels to leadership positions and if an elder or leader does not seem strongly gifted for some form of ministry we question the validity of the office of their leadership. An elder team may have one or more elders who are gifted for ministry (One of the five-fold or other gifts) or you may have some or even no elders who have ministry giftings. It does not matter or hold any bearing on the elders as an equally authoritative team to share the role of “covering” or leading the church.
4. Paid vs Unpaid - In the church today it is fairly safe to say that the highest paid person carries the most authority and likely the person who is expected to do the most ministry. It is absolutely biblical that those who labor in ministry are worthy of receiving financial honor through monetary wages. However, those wages were given as compensation for ministry they were already doing; they were not given in expectation of ministry they were supposed to do. Furthermore, those wages held no weight in validation of leadership or authority in the church. (1 Cor. 9:5-14; 1 Tim. 5:17)

In practice, the ordained clergyman - the minister, the reverend, the lone pastor - is the modern day Roman Catholic or Jewish high priest. He alone is qualified and called upon to lead in the assembly, administer the Lord's supper, preach, and baptize. The myriads of other believers in the assembly are unqualified to carry out such sacred tasks. The awful result of this cultural doctrine are thousands of congregations who are clerically-dependent and greatly hindered from growing into spiritual maturity. The concept that only a professional, or lawfully ordained man is qualified to perform “the ministry” as the “minister” totally contradicts the truth that the church is a ministerial body. However, the persistence and fierce belief in this cultural doctrine is the chief reason why most believers will reject and never accept biblical eldership. Most simply cannot fathom a church expression in any other form than the cultural one. - Alexander Strauch

Church Leadership and the Five-fold Ministry Gifts
Part 5 - An Elder Led Church

Sunday, Feb. 28, 2021
(1 Tim. 3:1-13)