

THE ELDERSHIP COOKBOOK

INTRODUCTION

The subject of *“leadership in the church”* is probably the most talked about, the most widespread, and perhaps the most distorted and lethal of all the twisted teachings that have been trumpeted down through the centuries inside the musty halls of the local institutionalized church.

(Google’s latest results for that term: 33,000,000 million!)

Leadership amongst God’s people is certainly of critical importance, both for clergy and laity alike and the Scriptures are not in the least bit silent on this subject either.

In putting together an article such as this, one of the biggest dilemmas you encounter is the huge brick wall that is placed in front of you by those who are under the influence and power of deception. Few things are sadder to see than church members entrenched in deception. Many are literally like brick walls that have been painstakingly baked and hardened to the point that will actually keep a person from ever seeing the truth, even though the truth may be right before their eyes!

This unfortunately, is the hallmark of deception.

We understand all-too-well how difficult it is for church members to understand or comprehend a different aspect of biblical truth that they are not accustomed to. In many cases, it has been shockingly and deliberately shielded from their eyes by their own *“church leaders”* or *“the Eldership”* under the guise of *“guarding the flock.”*

They have never heard it that way before. It is very different from the way they have been taught. It disturbs them at the very base of their religious life. So, they turn away from truth without understanding it. They will refuse to study or examine the matter. This is terribly sad. This is the “working of deception” in action. And what’s even sadder is that their *“leaders”* actually commend them for such behavior!

This is reality. This is the state of the religious world in which we live today.

So in approaching this subject, we are again reminded of the following Scripture and its importance in arriving at truth and understanding:

“Now the natural man receives not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot know them, because they are spiritually examined. But he that is spiritual examines all things, and he himself is examined of no man.” 1 Corinthians 2:14-15

As you go over this article, we would ask that you lay aside your preconceived ideas of what leadership in the church is all about and prayerfully, with the attitude and spirit of the *Bereans* (Acts 17:10-11), consider the Scriptures and the mind of the Spirit therein.

Part 2 - "The Pastors"

In Ephesians 4:11 we read: "...And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers."

This is the only verse in the NT where the word "*Pastor*" is used. One verse on which to hang an entire institutional church doctrine and practice! "*Pastors*" means shepherds, a metaphor describing a particular function in the "church." It is not an office or a title. A first-century shepherd did not organize official church meetings and set up programs and seminars, and neither was he invested with some kind of unquestionable official authority or position of mediation between the saints and their Lord, like we have today.

No, this passage does not envision a "*pastoral office*," but merely one of many functions in the church.

We have read the modern idea of the modern pastor back into the New Testament. Never would any first-century Christian conceive of the modern pastoral office! Haven't Catholics made the same mistake with the word "*priest*?" The word "priest" is used in the NT, yet a priest back then certainly bears no connection or likeness whatsoever to the Roman Catholic "priest" of today.

When "*church leaders*" today leave behind the biblical emphasis on the community of believers, on the family, on brothers and sisters, they will decidedly turn these kinds of passages to fit into their organizational institutional, local church context, which is absolutely foreign to the heart of the message that Scripture simply conveys.

Part 3 - "The Office"

The unscriptural use of the word "*office*" is just another example of the KJV translators hypocrisy of advancing their own hierarchal agendas.

Throughout the entire New Testament, the word *office* is found nowhere in the Greek text in connection with the *ecclesia* ("church") yet it is still inserted a few different times in the KJV to further their agenda. One fallacious use of the word *office* can be seen in 1 Timothy 3:1:

"Faithful is the saying, if a man seeks the office of a bishop, he desires a good work."

Again, as with the word "*church*," the King James translators were changing or adding words that were not present in the Greek text, like the word "*office*." In Vine's dictionary, he states: "...the word 'office' in the phrase 'the office of a Bishop,' has nothing to

represent it in the original." There is neither a word in the text for office NOR the idea of office outside their own model.

The phrase "to oversee" does not imply *office* in the sense of one being superior to another. It is a job description, a function, not an office or a title. It describes those who have the ability to see the needs of others and tend to those needs. They are caregivers, servants, not overlords "*possessing authority derived from Christ.*"

Another misleading verse is Romans 12:4:

"For, just as in one body we have many members yet, all the members have not the same office."

The word that was translated office is praxis, (prax'-is) which has absolutely nothing to do with office. Praxis means a function; a deed that was done; and this verse describes the function of individual members in the Body. Everybody does not have the same function. Praxis is not conveying a special caste of Christian in the Body or an official pastoral title or office.

This was deliberately mistranslated, designed to negate the "oneness" of the Body and instill a special aura of officiousness among an elite class of people.

Praxis is correctly translated in the following verses:

Romans 8:13: *"for if ye live after the flesh, ye must die; but if by the Spirit ye put to death the deeds (praxis) of the body, ye shall live. ASV*

Luke 23:51 *"...He had not consented to their counsel and deed, (praxis) a man of Arimathaea, a city of the Jews, who was looking for the kingdom of God..."*

Colossians 3:9 *"Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds." (praxis)*

One last example where the KJV substituted the word office is in Romans 11:13:

"For I speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch as I am the apostle of the Gentiles, I magnify mine office." (Diakonia – G1248) Nowhere else in all of the New Testament is this word (diakonia) translated *mine office*.

Look for example in Luke 10:40 to see its meaning. *"But Martha was cumbered about much serving (Diakonia) and she came up to him, and said, Lord, dost thou not care that my sister did leave me to serve alone? Bid her therefore that she help me."* Diakonia is translated as *"much serving."*

Was Martha magnifying *her office*, or was she just serving? Diakonia is translated "*my service*" as well in Romans 15:31, and "*to do you service*" in 2 Corinthians 11:8.

Diakonia is referring to “servicing of others,” not official places to fill or occupy! The word office is never used in connection with the ecclesia. The concept of office or a special priest is completely foreign to the purpose and nature of the body of Christ, where differences are defined by function, not by official managerial positions or offices! The foot has a different function than the hand but does that make one better than the other, so as to rule over and triumph over the operation of the other?

Part 4A - “The Qualifications” - 1st Timothy 3 and Titus 1

1 Timothy 3:1-7 KJV

This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desires a good work. A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behavior, given to hospitality, apt to teach; Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous; One that rules well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God? Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover he must have a good report of them which are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.

Titus 1:5-9 KJV

For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou should set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee: If any be blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of riot or unruly. For a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God; not self-willed, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre; But a lover of hospitality, a lover of good men, sober, just, holy, temperate; Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers.

In today’s institutionalized local church, anyone can clearly see that there exists a special standing; a special status; and special ranking of special Christians.

Whether you look through the doors of Catholicism and notice the priest carrying out his holy and reverential duties or you look through the doors of Protestantism and notice the so-called “pastor” or “an eldership” carrying out their holy and reverential duties, the result is the same:

The majority of the ministry is confined to just a few “*special*” people, while the rest being at best, spectators watching a performance, or at worst, pew warmers waiting for the show to be over at which time you are ushered out of your seat and pointed towards the exit sign until next week.

Such practices as this which occur week after week are as damaging as it is unscriptural.

Concerning the men referred to in the Bible as elders, bishops, overseers, and shepherds, “*church leaders*” have shamefully torn apart His Body, the people of God, by demanding that everyone submit to their infallible interpretation of the Scriptures. In any congregations, any thought or opinion that is contrary to the “*things that we have always believed and practiced,*” is considered heresy and unless you repent of “*your rebellion*” you will automatically be relegated to the company of the “*unfaithful,*” the “*disaffected,*” or worse.

Who are these elders or overseers? How do they become such? What is their work?

The references mentioned above, 1st Timothy 3 and Titus 1, are the banner passages that the church always put forth, not only in the establishment of church rule and church offices, but also in how the selection process of “*candidates*” is to be administered. Let us now take a look at and compare these two sections of Scripture.

(For an examination of the other favorite texts that the institutional church likes to put forth, namely: Hebrews 13:7,17, and 24; 1 Timothy 5:17; and 1 Peter 5:5, we ask that you would consider our short article: (["Obey Them"](#))

First off, please notice again the title of this brief section: “*The Qualifications*” – 1st Timothy 3 and Titus 1. For indeed, isn’t this what we are always told concerning these two portions of Scripture?

“Listed here in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus Chapter 1 are the qualifications for the office of an elder and deacon given to us by the apostle Paul.”

This is the standard talking point that you will hear invariably 100% of the time. In fact, when you pick up any standard dictionary and look up the term “*Qualifications,*” there you will read:

- 1) an accomplishment, etc., that fits a person for some, office, or the like;
- 2) a circumstance or condition required by law or custom for getting, having, or exercising a right, holding an office, or the like.

Sounds good. It even says “*a quality that fits a person for holding an office!*”

“That’s good enough for me. It’s concurring with the Bible’s position on qualifications and office bearing,” says the local institutional church leader and his members.

But as the reader already knows, there’s a problem. The word “*office*” is nowhere found in these texts. It was cleverly inserted by the KJV translators to buttress further and establish their hierarchical system of rule in the church. But unfortunately, many who compose the leadership of the Institutional church are clever too, seeing that most

church members are taught to think in terms of this dictionary definition of the word and as a result, believe it is God's will that men be selected to "fill" places and/or "occupy offices" in the church.

According to their explanation, "*the qualifications*" listed in 1st Timothy 3 and Titus 1 must be appropriated by men before the congregation can "*vote them into office*" or "*appoint them to office*." This "*appointment*" is now said "*to make them elders or deacons*," something they were NOT before the "*appointment*," even though they "*possessed the qualifications*." Next would come the ordination or "*installation service*," putting the finishing touches on this whole rigamarole.

An ordination or installation service is necessary for bringing these men into *the eldership*. Before the special service takes place they were not in any way a Pastor/Elder/Overseer. They were just mere men like the rest of us. But with that ordination/installation ceremony they are exalted and lifted up to an official position over us! Before the ceremony they were on an "*equality*" with the rest of us. But now, with this hocus pocus ritual, these men are transformed "*above us*" and they are now "*over us*" as rulers and lords.

Almost like magic! And all done by men according to the doctrine of men! Oh! What wonders "*the local institutional church*" can perform with an ecclesiastical ritual!

You see, an "*office*" or a "*s-h-i-p*" (as an "*elder s-h-i-p*") is viewed as something "*empty*" until it is "*filled*." They liken it to the "*office*" of the President or the CEO, or the "*chairmanship*" of a corporation or board.

These ideas are wrong. They are unfounded and they are dangerous, especially since the Scriptures speak nothing of this. Nonetheless, it fits right into the institution's system of "*leadership in the church*."

This is the reasoning behind the local institutional church! This system or organization has "*places/s-h-i-p-s/offices/positions*" of authority to be filled by men said "*to meet the qualifications set forth for elders in 1st Timothy 3 and Titus 1*."

These men are then placed or ranked "*OVER*" the brethren, assigned special or divine authority, men who now stand in an "*office*," an "*office appointed by Christ and now en clothed with the authority of Christ*," governing all the affairs of the church.

All of these conclusions not coming from Scripture, but being put back into Scripture through the formulations of men.

Part 4B - "*Qualifications??*"

Along with the absence of the word "*office*" in the original texts, there is another problem that you are faced with.

Nowhere in 1st Timothy 3 and Titus 1, or anywhere else in the Scriptures, do you read, "*The qualifications for elders.*" Absolutely no one used this term. None of the apostles used this expression nor anything like it. The Holy Spirit did not designate 1st Timothy 3 and Titus 1, "*The Qualifications of Elders.*"

Uninspired, fallen men assigned that term! Theologians and "*church leaders*" have assumed that the apostle Paul wrote to Timothy and Titus and gave them "*the qualifications of elders.*" Just because this has been the conclusion talked about for hundreds of years does not make it true. Truth does not hinge upon how many people believe it to be truth.

How can 1st Timothy 3 and Titus 1 be Paul's "*lists of qualifications*" when both passages are "*sketchy*" to say the least? The apostle Paul did not say one word to Timothy or Titus about lying, gossiping, stealing, etc. Isn't this important? For if this is its content, (qualifications) then why are they not listed?

A little common sense will tell you that it was never meant to be a "*list of qualifications.*" You could see this as well from the fact that the passage in 1st Timothy 3 is different from the passage in Titus 1. The apostle Paul, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, told Timothy that an overseer should not be "*a novice, lest being puffed up he fall into the condemnation of the devil.*" (verse 6) Was this one of "*the qualifications?*" If so, why did Paul not feel the need to add this one to Titus' list?

And look at what Paul failed to tell Timothy. He told Titus that an overseer must be "*a lover of good...just, holy, holding to the faithful word, that he may be able both to exhort in the sound doctrine, and to convict the gainsayers.*" (verses 8-9) Are these important "*qualifications?*" Then, why did Paul keep them from Timothy?

It is clear that many have been assuming something that is not there, taking for granted all this time that these are the "*qualifications of elders.*"

Many have also assumed that we must put the two lists together to get one complete list of "*qualifications,*" but then again, even with that, after examination you are still forced to conclude that the apostle never intended for these passages to be taken as "*the qualifications of elders.*"

If they were, both Timothy and Titus would have received identical and exhaustive lists. Remember also that Timothy was in Ephesus when he received his letter from Paul and Titus was in Crete, hundreds of miles from Ephesus. They themselves did not have a "*combined list.*"

Again, it is clear that Paul never meant for these passages to be interpreted as "*a list of qualifications.*"

If these then are not qualifications, what are they? The answer is simple. It is the quality of a man that is in view.

"Oh cut it out," you say, "there're both the same thing!" No they are not!

Remember the dictionary's rendering of "qualifications?" It said, *"an accomplishment that fits a person for some office;"* concurring exactly with those of an institutional church mindset!

But the Scriptures do not speak this way; no, not in the least. Man is sinful. Man is wicked. His heart is deceitful above all things. THESE are the man's "qualifications!" These are his accomplishments that fit him for wrath, punishment, and destruction, and that goes for both church members and non-church members alike! Talk about qualifications? Man is *qualified* for nothing!

On the other hand, what do the Scriptures speak of in regards to men being spiritual leaders to their brethren? Does it speak of them being rendered fit for an *"office?"* No, it speaks of them being rendered fit for SERVICE! Romans 12:1; 15:31; Ephesians 6:7

Quality has to do with the nature or with what's in the man's soul. The apostle Paul set forth one quality that a spiritual leader must possess. Here it is in a number of translations:

BLAMELESS: unaccusable, without fault, unimpeachable, without reproach, irreprehensible, irreproachable, without reproach, above reproach, above suspicion.

This is the apostle's main point to Timothy and Titus. This is why the *"lists of qualifications"* are incomplete. Any requirements not found in the text such as *"not to lie," "not to gossip,"* etc., are included in *"must be blameless."*

To be an elder in Christ's ecclesia requires humility and a heart for service. Remember, an *"elder"* is not a title or office. It's a function. *"Elder"* comes from the Greek word *presbuteros*, which simply refers to an older person. Within their culture, they were worthy of respect and deferment simply because of their age. In Leviticus 19:32, the Scriptural background is given for this respect: *"You shall rise before the gray headed and honor the presence of an old person, and fear your God: I am the LORD."*

Because of their age and assumed wisdom, they were expected to guide those who were younger. This responsibility was not something they could relinquish since they never asked for it. They received it because they grew old. As old people, the *presbuteroi* or the elders became the prime group to guide the brethren. This was their responsibility. They were guides! The weight of age coupled with an exemplary life was worthy of emulation.

These were the *"elders"* mentioned in the New Testament. There was nothing of *"rulership,"* nothing of being *"duly authorized,"* nothing of an *"eldership board,"* nothing of *"exercising authority,"* nothing of *"ministerial dignity,"* nothing of *"occupying a sacred office."*

If an older man (Elder) is above suspicion, spiritually matured, a good teacher, and truly interested in the genuine welfare of people, HE DOESN'T HAVE TO HAVE ONE OUNCE OF AUTHORITY to be of service to others and to advance the cause of Christ. He will never have ***to demand that people respect and listen to him***, for they will do that gladly. If he is Christ-like in every area of his life, showing the same quality of love for others as did Jesus, people will be persuaded by his teaching and example and will yield to his wisdom.

Power hungry men are the ones who have designed this system of "*an eldership*;" of "*appointing and installing officers*" over the people whom they can now control and as we have learned, these diabolical seeds were sown centuries ago and are totally contrary to the teaching of Jesus and the rest of the New Testament.

Part 5 - "*The Appointment*"

In Acts 20:28, Paul told "*the elders of the church*" at Ephesus that "*the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of the Lord which He purchased with His own blood.*"

The passage tells us clearly that the Holy Spirit "*made overseers*," not the pastor, not the church, not Paul. The making or appointing of overseers and shepherds is solely the work of the Holy Spirit. You do not have anything to do with it! Through the Spirit-led apostles the Holy Spirit has done this, setting it in place for all time to come.

Elders, the older men in the community, have been divinely appointed to serve the brethren as stewards of the Chief Shepherd and Bishop of our souls. They do not, and should not, wait until some clergyman or "*local church*" holds a congregational meeting, has an election, and then install them into "*the eldership.*" Church leaders are out of place and assuming unto themselves the prerogative of the Holy Spirit when they engage in ordaining and installing a specific, exclusive few to be *office bearers* of the local church corporation.

Nowhere in the New Testament do we read anything whatsoever about some "*local church*" selecting and appointing men to an "*Eldership*" or some other church official. No church was ever told to do such a thing and neither do you read of a church installing men into the *office of Elder*. We read all of this into these passages. It is assumed beyond a shadow of a doubt and then welded into a law of God that says "*the eldership*" now has the authority to rule over the congregation.

For anybody to presume authority over the church is to dishonor the Head. The concept of having an office in the church; electing and installing men to rule over the brethren, denies the priesthood of believers and undermines the leading of the Holy Spirit.

The Lord Jesus Christ is the only Scripturally recognized head of the Church: "(God) has put all things under His (Christ's) feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church" (Ephesians 1:22). "(Christ) is the head of the body, the church" (Colossians 1:18). "All authority hath been given unto me in heaven and on earth." Matt.28:18

The "appointment" of elders by Paul, Peter, Timothy, Titus and others was not anything like we see happening today. But again, need I beat an already dead horse to a pulp?

In the New Testament there is absolutely no instruction to any church anywhere to "select and appoint" elders! There is no example of any church ever doing such a thing. It would be between the second and third centuries when this practice emerges. But before that time, no church practiced such a thing.

They never had to worry about how to do something they were not to do. There was no selecting process. No lobbying, no kissing babies, no contest, no voting or balloting, no election. No one was running for the office or being nominated for election to the *Board of Elders*.

So when Paul told Titus to "appoint elders in every city," and when pastors and overseers read this, they immediately claim that these were special people who met the qualifications and were ordained and installed into the "ecclesiastical office of elder."

It should be obvious to any careful reader, that appointing elders simply means an older person; someone whose maturity and wisdom and quality of life had already been established whom Titus was to stand /present/establish ("appoint": G2525 from G2476 histemi - his'-tay-mee) before the Ecclesia.

In Acts 14:23, under the direction of the Holy Spirit, it is said that Paul "appointed elders for them." What happened here? One thing for certain is that the language does not say that he appointed men to be elders!

Again, that is a practice we read into the passage. The appointing was done to elders, those men who were already elders. It is that simple!

The apostle merely recognized trustworthy elders (older, wiser, spiritually mature brothers) among the people and exhorted them to care for and guide God's people. This was not an appointment to lord it over others or to join the ranks of the existing "eldership" and organize official church meetings, setting the criteria for "worship services" and policies and rules related to church attendance. These elders were appointed to the service of being guides and examples to the community; just exactly the service that Paul had while he was there.

Notice as well that the passage says that they "appointed elders for them in every church," not "over them," as dictatorial despots.

This same kind of *"appointment"* can be similar to that of the *"spiritual"* in Galatians Chapter 6. Paul wrote in Galatians 6:1, *"Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, you which are spiritual, restore such a one in the spirit of meekness."*

It is a responsibility given to the *"spiritual."* Isn't that an appointment of the Holy Spirit? Who are *the spiritual*? What are their qualifications to serve in this way?

Being *"spiritual"* was all that was necessary, and that because they were spiritual, the responsibility belongs to them to thus serve. Is *"spiritual"* some kind of church office or some sort of *"ministerial dignitary?"* Should the local institutional church select, elect, and then install someone to fill this position with the idea that no one else can perform this service until they are inducted into the *"office of the spiritual?"*

If this sounds ridiculous, that's because it is. But it is no more ridiculous than what we see happening today in church after church. We see the local institutional church nominating, voting, electing, and then installing men, both young and old, into a so-called *"office of an elder.!"*

In the Scriptures, we see the *"spiritual"* being directed by the Lord to be going about and doing what is expected of them. The work of seeking and restoring the straying and fallen brother or sister is vital. There are many so-called *"pastors and elders"* who fail to do even this on a regular basis!

The Lord Himself has arranged for the proper functioning of His people in their concern and care for one another. The Holy Spirit has done all the *"appointing"* that is necessary. It is really simple, clear and devoid of any institutional trappings and wisdom of men.

The Holy Spirit *"appointed"* older (elder) women to teach the younger women. *"Elder woman"* is not a church office to be filled by the selection and appointment of the local church. Elder women do on their own, what the Holy Spirit has appointed them to do.

James 5:19-20. Who is appointed to *"convert or turn a sinner from the error of his way and save a soul from death?"*

Is that the responsibility of some duly authorized church official? How about, *"The Eldership?"* No. James specifically addresses the *"appointment"* to *"My Brethren."*

The Lord has many *"appointments"* found in the New Testament. There are appointments to old men and young men, to husbands and wives, to fathers and mothers, to old women and young women, to disciples, to slaves, to children, to evangelists and to elders!

Something as simple as this has been distorted and deformed into the monstrosity we see all around us today. How sad it is when men ignore and distort the Lord's own words to build and maintain their religious kingdoms and rule.

Part 6 - "ELDERSHIP RULE"

There were elders (older men) in the New Testament ecclesia (church) but where do we find an "eldership?"

The "eldership" is an invention of men. In fact, through the centuries, men have created a whole fleet of "s-h-i-p-s". Funny isn't it, that many of these "s-h-i-p-s" are found floating inside a local institutional church, yet you will not find one of them in the New Testament. Many elders for example do not even know that "eldership" is a non-biblical term. The belief and practice is accepted automatically and questioning it will not be tolerated.

Whenever men designate something as a "s-h-i-p," you invariably establish and form a board or a body that governs in some form. An "eldership, deaconship," etc., suggests a body of rulers. Do you understand now why it was invented?

As referenced earlier, Paul told the Ephesian elders to "feed the church over which the Holy Spirit had made them overseers," but to use this to establish an "eldership" or a "ruling board" is to misuse the passage. There is a difference in an overseer and a ruling board. Peter said, "Feed the flock of God which is **among** you." The term "among" is used 106 times. And related terms which describe the members of the body without indicating the rank or "ship" of any kind are used many more times! There is not a *chiefs-and-Indians* mindset in the New Testament ecclesia.

You hear all of the time elders saying, "We'll make the decisions," but does anybody ever stop to see how many "decisions" the elders of the New Testament made? The more and more a "s-h-i-p" in connection with elders is promoted, preached, and implemented, the more it morphs into a ranking, ruling, rotten board of abusers, rather than elders ("older men") working among the flock.

Jesus singled out the power to rule that was exercised in His day, and said that it had no place in his spiritual realm. "It shall not be so among you," He said directly to his disciples. If there is a direct command in the Scriptures, this is one of them. The apostles followed this command. Their leadership was one by example and inspired teaching, not by dictate.

Why did Jesus emphasize that the great in His kingdom must not be at the top of the pyramid, but at the very bottom, as servants of all? The answer is that one does not command from the bottom. One does not make decisions which are binding on others when he is at the bottom. One cannot throw his weight around; bark out phrases as "pastoral authority," or demand submission to some fabled "office" when he is at the bottom.

And so, as a result, the modern eldership system has rejected the command of Jesus and has done just the opposite in putting themselves on par with the elite, at the peak of

the pyramid! They do bind their will upon others. They do issue commands. They do demand unquestioning obedience to their will. They do "*bind the consciences*" of the tender sheep. They not only rule, they rule as absolute monarchs. Their decisions are not subject to review by anybody. They do not submit themselves to the many. They require the many to subject themselves to them!

When you look at the apostle Paul's example in writing to the brethren in Corinth and Galatia, you can see very clearly that it goes contrary to the principles of the so-called "*eldership rule*" that we see coming from the local institutional church. There were serious relational problems, doctrinal problems, preeminence problems, control problems, and a host of other issues in both places! Yet Paul did not write the elders to straighten out these problems. He wrote the members and put the burden on the many.

Yet again, we can see that in today's local institutional church system of "*rule by elder,*" the apostle Paul's practice and application is an example to be avoided! It has been replaced by the official ruling office of the pastor/elder.

As already stated many times, there were elders in the assemblies of the Lord established by the apostles, but there was no "*eldership.*" The former were older and spiritually mature persons who were primarily guides and also leaders by example. The latter is a collective authoritarian institutional ruling class devoted to commanding, controlling, dominating, and taking over and regulating every area of life.

The sad consequences of this anti-biblical, unscriptural "*eldership system,*" and "*rule by elder*" nonsense is that it has deliberately fractured and made mincemeat of Christ's Body.

You say, "...*Those are strong words. How so?*"

Let me list a few.

The "*eldership rule*" system rivals the functional Headship of Christ in His church. It illegitimately holds the unique place of centrality and headship among God's people.

That's how so!

The Pastor/Elder displaces and supplants Christ's Headship by setting himself up as the church's human head.

That's how so!

"*Eldership Rule*" fails "*to prepare God's people for works of service.*" Ephesians 4:12 It has stolen your right to function as a member of Christ's Body! It has shut your mouth and strapped you to a pew.

That's how so!

It has rendered you a mute spectator who is proficient at taking sermon notes and passing an offering plate.

That's how so!

It has overthrown the main thrust of the letter to the Hebrews - the ending of the old priesthood. It has made ineffectual the teaching of 1 Corinthians 12-14, that every member has both the right and the privilege to minister in a church meeting. It has voided the message of 1 Peter 2 that every brother and sister is a functioning priest.

That's how so!

The authoritarian system of eldership rule and control discourages thinking for yourself, imposes uniformity instead of unity, creates legalistic and judgmental attitudes, and makes fear rather than love a controlling force.

That's how so!

It reduces the members from participants to attendants.

That's how so!

It discourages study and dialogue and puts the stamp of approval on passivity.

That's how so!

It promotes division.

That's how so!

As "*eldership rule*" increases more and more in dominating the use of power over the people, it moves further away from the example and command of Jesus.

In our final section, let us look more closely at Jesus, our Example.

Part 7 - Jesus: Our Example

All one has to do is look at the Lord Jesus as to our example of leadership and service. In Matthew Chapter 20, the mother of James and John said to Jesus, "*Grant that these two sons of mine may sit, one on your right hand and the other on the left, in your kingdom.*"

Of course, the other disciples made a great show of indignation as though they had not wanted the same honor for themselves. So Jesus expounded on what His impending

community structure is going to be like. The leadership in His assembly or community would be unlike worldly authority and the religious system of things represented at that time by Jewish Scribes and Pharisees, the Jewish Sanhedrin (elders), and Roman secular rule.

Jesus rejected the authoritarian structure of his own religious heritage as well as anything that would approach the empires and kingdoms of men. Jesus explains this plainly as he continues.

"You know that the rulers of the Gentiles are lords over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. YET IT WILL NOT BE SO AMONG YOU; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave, just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many."

"Greatness is attained through service, NOT positions or titles. You want to attain greatness in My kingdom, then serve. This is the quality that I desire. You must set the example in serving. Those of you who desire honor, recognition, power, rule, and authority in my assembly are setting the wrong example. You're in the wrong religion guys! You will not exercise authority over my people!"

How utterly ironic that the teaching in today's local institutional church on authority and leadership is exactly the type of leadership style Christ specifically warned His disciples not to practice!

If that left the disciples in doubt about what positions they were to enjoy in the Lord's community, He certainly cleared it up by attacking the prevailing system of the religious leaders and their love of titles and position in Matthew 23.

"Then Jesus spoke to the multitude and to his disciples, saying: The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. Therefore whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do, but do not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do. For they bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers. But all their works they do to be seen by men. ..They love the best places at feasts, the best seats in the synagogues, greetings in the marketplaces, and to be called by men, Rabbi, Rabbi. But you, do not be called Rabbi, for One is your Teacher, and you are all brothers. Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, who is in heaven. And do not be called leaders; for One is your leader, even the Christ. But those who are great among you shall be your servant. And whoever exalts himself will be humbled and the one who humbles himself will be exalted." Matthew 23:1-12

Jesus, in these few sentences, is making it very plain what the nature and quality of leadership in His community was going to be. His leaders would NOT assume titles or positions. *"But you, do not be called Rabbi!"* They were not to assume the title or position of Rabbi (master, teacher).

As if this was not basic enough to persuade them, He continues in this vein by saying, *"And do not be called leaders."* Even though the KJV translates the word "leader" master, the correct translation could actually render the Greek "guide".

Another example of Jesus was washing the disciple's feet in John 13. He knelt before them one by one, until every dirty foot in the room was clean. Then He said, *"Do you know what I have done to you?" "If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them."* John 13:17

Again, we see that the model of leadership in God's ecclesia is not a group of men ruling, and reigning; barking out their demands of authority and headship and submission to every beck and call. No, it's the household slave! For from His knees in the upper room, Jesus said, *"For I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you."*

Yes, Jesus did leave us an example to follow - one that stands in stark and total antithesis to the current notion of *"leadership in the church."*

Those who posture themselves to *"rule over God's people"* refuse to see Christ in this light, or if they do, pay the most pathetic, empty lip service imaginable, and then turn around next week and do just the opposite! The Lord's call to *"let this mind be in you"* falls upon deaf ears to the majority of those in *"leadership positions in the local church."*

They possess absolutely nothing of *"the mind of Christ."* Historically, and indeed, right down to this very moment, the institutionalized local church of today has looked nothing like the Serving Christ. The servant's towel has been replaced with a business suit and tie. Many today are above the washing of feet, as they gloat over their so-called *"Sacred Pastoral Office"* and glorify themselves in their so-called *"Ministerial Dignity"* and *"Eldership rule."* How far we have fallen from the divine standard only God fully appreciates.

The Lord has never intended any man, or group of men, to hold a position *"OVER"* others, and to exercise special authority by which to *"RULE"* them. Elders were to GUIDE and SERVE others, being EXAMPLES.

Remember, according to Jesus, not even the apostles would *"exercise authority"* over the people of God, *".....NOT SO SHALL IT BE AMONG YOU"* Matthew 20:25-26

This is very significant, for if Jesus emphatically withheld "divine authority" from the apostles, surely, He did not delegate it to elders or an *eldership!*

The example of Jesus is the most powerful argument against the idea of an official ruling clergy. Did He model one thing, only to build another? Did He come serving, only to elevate His people's status later down the road?

We think not!

Conclusion

A certain man together with his wife invited a respected friend to watch over their house as they went away on a two week cruise. Before leaving, they instructed their guest to make himself comfortable. Two weeks later, when they returned, they found their friend had rearranged their kitchen, because he felt his arrangement to be more efficient. To their shock and dismay, they also discovered he had removed a newly installed wood burning stove because he felt the house to be more safe without it. The garage was replaced with a library stocked with his own view of life and the world, saying it would be for the good of the family. He also added a swimming pool, replacing the greenhouse, citing the former was too cumbersome and outdated. He assured his hosts he had made these changes with the best of intentions.

If you were the host, what would you do? How would you feel? What would you say to your guest?

This is exactly what has been done down through the centuries in matters relating to *“leadership”* in the Lord’s ecclesia. Haven’t we taken the same unauthorized liberties with the Lord’s instruction and his *“house?”* Haven’t we made changes that He never gave us permission to make? The Lord sees what we are doing. He knows what we’ve added. He knows what we’ve taken away. He knows what we’ve changed.

Do you think He’ll be pleased with our good intentions? What do you think He is saying when He sees *“offices”* and *“pastors”* and *“ministerial dignity”* and *“pastoral authority”* and *“installation services”* and *“ordinations”* and *“eldership rule and power”* when He Himself has declared, “NOT-SO-SHALL-IT-BE-AMONG-YOU?” Matthew 20.

Look at church history, even from as far back as the 2nd century! Look at the many *“fathers”* that have arisen! Why do we have the sheer, unmitigated gall to think we can do it better than what the Scriptures have laid out for us? Is anyone prepared to make the preposterous statement that we have actually figured out a better way than what the Holy Spirit has provided us with?

What happens when you reject the teachings of Scripture and the example of the apostles? Isn’t the answer clear? You reject Jesus Christ! Didn’t He say, *“whosoever accepts anyone I send accepts me; and whoever accepts me accepts the one who sent me.”* John 13:20?

Jesus also said that if the world obeyed His teaching, they would obey his apostles teachings also. John 15:20. So what does that tell you about church leaders; the eldership; the pastor; church officials, who build, organize, function, operate and rule their own way, and not the apostles way?

It means that they reject the apostles way and they reject Jesus’ teachings!

Men! Puny, carnal minded, power hungry men have taken the liberty to reorganize, reinvent, add, replace, eliminate, and to ultimately ignore the instructions and the examples God has provided for His people as to how His ecclesia ought to operate.

Without a doubt, the establishment of Christendom's local institutionalized church, epitomized by "*eldership rule and control*," has become a mammoth institution, enlisted with many adherents.

When you touch this system, (nerve) the whole body quivers. People who remove themselves from this unscriptural system out of faithfulness to Christ and His Word will have a heavy price to pay.

Nevertheless, as from the outset, the daunting question still remains:

Is our confession that "*the New Testament is sufficient for faith and practice*" a reality or a sham?

If we are serious about following Christ, how can we remain party in perpetuating a system of "*an Eldership ruling in the church*" which contradicts the very essence of the ecclesia our Savior purposed to build? When is enough, enough?

When a situation gets to the place where an *elder* or an *eldership* literally turn children against parents, parents against children, wives against husbands, brethren against brethren, then it is time to speak loudly and clearly. When believers are taught to actually hate another believer simply because he dared to challenge the pastor, or dared to expose a long standing cherished tradition, the cultic mentality must be exposed. When a *church tyrant* uses his anti-scriptural "*office*" to get control of an individual's conscience, personal revolt is nearly impossible.

The poor sheep become scared of everything and everybody. When he is cut off from asking or sharing the questions and difficulties in his heart, then he literally has no one to help him.

Believe it or not; like it or not; this is the description of today's local institutional church system encompassing a wide spectrum of denominations. It is a man-made, man-sustained system that is fueled by pride, greed, lust, power, money, and control; a system which has gone far, far "*beyond the things which are written.*"

Contrary to John Calvin's statement earlier, it is NOT a necessity. It is not a blessing. It is a fungus growth upon the *church*, the body of Christians, dwarfing its growth; draining the very life out of its oft wearied and stupefied devotee's....and until the *church* gets rid of them, it will never prosper!

When are we going to wake up and realize that the evil one and his ministers of righteousness has tricked us into squandering our time, our energies, and our resources for an institutional system that is unknown and opposed to the New Testament.

Just think for a minute and look at what happens on Sunday's. The members arrive on schedule, obeying the dictates of the eldership *to be present at all of the meetings unless providentially hindered*; they sit quietly in pews and watch and listen to the pastor who is up front, center stage, whose position and presence takes over and literally dominates the entire "service."

If the people in the assembly began to get a vision that the "church" is not a formal association but a community; that gifts are distributed, apart from ordination to each person; that everyone must actively participate and contribute for the "church" to work; that no one's gift is more important than another's, and that everyone's participation will ensure a full, healthy church life; in short, a vision of a biblical view of church life, many would correctly and biblically begin to ask themselves, "*What are we paying our Pastor for? Why do we need an Eldership?*"

Ideally, if this anti-biblical system of hierarchical rule and control was eventually jettisoned, the members of that assembly would have to, probably for the first time in their spiritual lives, stand up on their own two feet; get out of their pews; come together and figure out who would lead the worship, who would visit the sick, who would teach, etc., etc.

With a bit of insight and discernment, they would realize that the Bible calls the body as a whole to do these things together, prompting each to consider what gifts they have to contribute, what role they could play to build up the body. And with a little bit of courage to throw in, the people might actually take the painful steps in the direction of long-term change.

Some might leave for other so-called churches with their anti-scriptural, pastoral rule/eldership system. But those who remained to participate would most assuredly mature and grow faster and further in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ than they ever would have with an "Eldership" deliberately keeping you as a slave and a spiritual child under their thumbs. Things that tear churches apart and cause them to go astray mostly originate in the "Eldership," wherein resides the most slanderous, abominable abuses imaginable against God's people.

The *Eldership cookbook* has been, and will continue to be a recipe of disaster and destruction, leaving Christ's sheep corralled, mistreated and imprisoned by thieves and robbers.

By
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