

The book, *Biblical Eldership. An Urgent Call to Restore Biblical Church Leadership* by: Alexander Strauch is what I've been studying for the last six months. Paul gave Kip, Luke and me a copy of this book about six months ago. After reading through it we believe it is a powerful tool to be used for restoring the leadership structure as God designed it and what the Apostle Paul wrote about in many of his epistles. Then for 8 to 10 weeks we studied an outline Booklet of *Biblical Eldership* in the Monday night men's group. Typically there were six to fifteen men there who read through the booklet paragraph by paragraph. What I've come to believe is that that book brings out all scripture related to leadership in the church. There is a large amount of commentator quotes, both for and against, and the author makes a really good biblically based case that the New Testament (NT) church was led by a group of qualified men. This is how God designed the church family to function and this biblically mandated plural leadership has not changed over time.

Church leadership in the churches in Rome, Corinth, Galatia, Colossae, Ephesus etc, was inspired by the Holy Spirit. This was God's means to establish His kingdom on earth. This is where and how the church, the body of Christ, grows and functions as he leads us. The book pointed out that the Apostle Paul's and Peter's writing on biblical eldership is a dominate teaching. There is more instruction on church leadership than other issues such as the Lord's Day, the Lord's Supper, baptism and spiritual gifts. This brings out the reality of how God defines His church (or – This shows us how important the doctrine of elders is to the church).

In 1 Tim 3:15 He defines the church to be: "the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth." This is a place where God is living and moving in His people as the resurrection power from within. God is moving and teaching us. He is a living God. He's doing things individually, He's doing things in our families, He's doing things in our community, and He is doing things in our state, in our country and around the world. And He's doing things corporately right here amongst us to build us together. When we come together to worship, to rub shoulders with each other, we are the pillar and foundation of the truth.

The truth of God's plan includes: where did we come from? What are we doing here? Where are we going? Who is our Truth? "The mystery of God which is Christ in you all hope of glory." – Colossians 1:27. We guard and protect the gospel. We guard it from false doctrine, from teaching that would say, "You can't access God just through the blood of Jesus, you also have to _____ fill in the blank". The church is a lighthouse for this lost world. Think about the church being the pillar and foundation of the truth. Pillars and foundations are used for holding something up. We are holding up the gospel: Jesus plus nothing. I Timothy 2:5 says, "There is one mediator between God and man, the man Jesus Christ." The whole Bible is a "Him" book, it's all about Christ

Jesus. The Old Testament says He's coming. The gospels say He's here. The book of Acts proclaims Him. The Epistles explain Him. Revelations says He's coming again. John 1:3 says, "Everything was created through Christ". Col. 1:16 says, "All things are created by Him, through Him and for Him."

The truth needs to be guarded and God asked men, born of God's Spirit, washed in Jesus' blood to oversee it. The scripture is clear that this is to be done by biblically qualified overseers. The New Testament eldership is a collection of leaders. This core group of men encourages and protects each other. This group of men keeps each other accountable. If leadership goes off track and swerves away from the truth it is not good. The more qualified men involved in guarding the truth the less likely it is to go off track though it's not a guarantee.

The church is a large family. The New Testament writers, inspired by the Holy Spirit, use the family as an analogy to define the church more than any other analogy. God is our Father and we are brothers and sisters meeting in the house of the living God guarding, protecting and declaring the glorious truth of the gospel. This is prevalent through the scripture. The church is not a place to attend for one hour on Sundays, it is the family of God, the body of Christ that we should serve daily. I challenge you to do a word search on the word "brother" or "sister" and see how many times it shows up and how it is speaking about believers at a church location. In a family there has to be leadership and direction. The body of believers need men that they can trust to guard the truth within the scripture and inspire believers to love the Lord their God with all their heart, soul and mind and love their neighbor as themselves.

Also, leadership should be non-clergy (or - Church leaders are not professionals). It shouldn't be hierarchical or a pyramid of leadership. The Bible doesn't say that you have to have a seminary degree to become a leader. The Apostle Paul was schooled in Tarsus but Jesus didn't ask the fishermen He called to get degrees before they could share the gospel and be leaders in the local churches. They received the Spirit of the living God to empower them. Leaders are to be without fine robes and but rather always caring with them the servant's apron. The local church is a spiritual workshop. The world will know we are Christians by our love. The love in the church is not a natural love it is the love of God. God is working and moving/living in our relationships. This is not easy, if we come into the church of the living God He's going to work on us. This is called the process of sanctification with the goal of making us more like Jesus. The Holy Spirit teaches us to let Jesus on the inside express Himself though us.

That's a summary of this book Biblical Eldership and its deep theological content. It defines the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of truth. It describes the importance of elder leadership in the church and reminds us we are part of a spiritual workshop.

I want to talk briefly about our retreat in Cornville. Kip, Luke, Paul and I spent one night and two days there and it was time well spent. When we got there the owner gave us a tour. It was so cozy, beautiful and peaceful. We all thanked the Lord for bringing us together to this place. It was a really good fit and we were glad that we actually did a retreat. We've talked about retreats for the last five years and because of many unexpected events it just kept getting canceled. And finally it happened. We felt God's wisdom, joy and peace as we labored for hours in the book and in the scripture. We had good quiet time. Most of our discussion revolved around our personal walk, our families and our hopes for God's household, God's family. And we worshiped together a lot. Paul asked me to bring my guitar and song books and there was much worship going up. It was a really good time of learning, growing and learning to love each other more. A lot of the topics were very practical about love. The agape kind of love that love's without expecting anything in return. We focused on Jesus' love and humility. Oh brother's and sister's, God resists the proud. Jesus gave us His humility. We need to clothe ourselves with it as well as having an attitude of forgiveness.

We talked a lot about the culture right here at Wayside. How do we continue to share and protect the gospel? How do we guard the truth? How do we love each other more? The world will know we are Christians by our love. How can we foster and facilitate an environment of spontaneous serving that is natural and enjoyable. We also talked about revising the bylaws to reflect plural leadership and other practical issues.

My assignment for sharing this morning is to talk about two chapters in the book: 1) Male Leadership, and 2) Servant Leadership. As I prepared to talk this morning the chapters blended so well together. And along with the aspect of leadership is the consideration of power and how much people can be corrupted by power. We need to guard against the abuse of power, any kind of power. Power at work, power in the home, power anywhere. Power is very dangerous and we need to be careful.

The topic of Male Leadership in the church is clear in the scripture and it is God's design. It's undeniable; everywhere you read you see male leadership. From Adam to Moses to Abraham, the Kings, the Prophets, especially Isaiah, the Priesthood, the Disciples including but not limited to Mathew Mark, Luke and John. This scriptural mandate of male leadership brings a lot of criticism toward the Bible and leaders. All male leadership offends people. It is never the attempt of biblically based elders to offend anyone. It is always the intention of biblically based elders to follow the truth set forth in scripture and that is what God wants. This is what you should want and expect from leadership. That's what you should trust and be able to question if you need to.

Everyone knows that elders have weaknesses. All leaders have weaknesses and blind spots. The book brought out a general list of offenses. This list is not specific to Wayside but this is, in general, what offends people: Elders are prideful, they exercise

wrong judgment. They are accused of moving too slowly or too quickly. Changing too much or not changing enough. Being too harsh, being too passive. Meddling too much in people's lives or not involved enough. The worship is too loud or not loud enough. Elders must have seminary degrees. But out all these areas where people get offended the top offense is: all male leadership. Excluding women from church leadership is viewed as sexist and discriminatory. Understandably so, ungodly, unregulated male dominance is not acceptable. However, it's never the intention of leadership to offend people. It should always be the intention of your leaders to follow the doctrines in the scripture.

This matter of power is very troubling. This is a quote from Chuck Colson. In the 1970's, Mr. Colson worked in Washington D.C. for years and was involved in the Watergate scandal. He was a man that witnessed and was a part of governmental power. While in prison he got radically saved. This is a quote from him, "Nothing distinguishes the kingdom of man from the Kingdom of God more than their diametrically opposed views of power. One seeks to control people the other seeks to serve people. One promotes self and the other prostrates self. One seeks prestige and position and the other is to lift up the lowly and despised." In the Kingdom of God, Jesus, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords did not wear a cleric's robe but He wore a servant's apron when He washed His disciple's feet (John 13:5). Jesus did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many (Mark 10:4).

So what is the distinguishing factor of which kingdom we will serve? Brothers and sisters I believe there is only one way. This is what the Apostle Paul writes to the church in Galatia. He says, "I have been crucified with Christ. It's no longer I that lives but Christ that lives in me" (Galatians 2:20). The difference between the kingdom of man and the Kingdom of God is letting Christ live through us and not trusting in ourselves, prostrating ourselves, serving other people and being accountable to a multitude of counselors. Some of my most meaningful relationships in my life were with believers whom I rolled up my sleeves together with and served.

Colossians 3:15. "Let the peace of Christ rule in your heart (*like an umpire saying, gentle gentle, say yes to that, don't go that way, say you're sorry for that*). Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly." (*Parentheses added*). This is not a Sunday only thing. This is a daily walk with your Savior. Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly, not cheaply, not minimally. Any time you can cash in on some of God's word take advantage of it. God declares that this type of (Spirit led servant) man shall lead families and churches.

Of course we all know there are two types of male leadership. We just saw the difference between the kingdom of man from the Kingdom of God, what a contrast. The scripture puts it this way, "the first man Adam was created a living soul, earthly." 1 Corinthians 15:45 Man's sin nature is motivated and animated by the prince of the

power of the air and the rulers and authorities that despise God. The rulers that manipulate truth, "did God really say not to eat the fruit?" The last Adam (Christ) became a life-giving spirit. It is clear there are two types of males: the first Adam-earthbound and the last Adam as the life-giving spirit, Jesus, the last Adam, was heaven bound. Now the spirit of Christ can motivate and animate the believer through His life giving spirit. John 11:25 says that Jesus is our resurrection life living on the inside. God wants families and churches led by men living according to the life giving spirit, living according to the peace of Christ and the rich Word of God. This is God's design. It is similar to how the moon rotates around the earth and moves the ocean tides. This is the perfection of God's design. Get a man filled with Christ and let him lead (by serving the Lord and the congregation). That's how God designed it.

1 Corinthians 11:3- The head of every man is Christ, the head of the woman is man and the head of Christ is God. God needs men under the headship of Christ to think like Christ. Even in Philippians 2:5 Paul tells the church in Philippi, "let the mind of Christ be in you". Let your emptied prostrated vessel be filled and express the spirit of the humble servant. God wants to provide women with men like that. My wife occasionally tells a story about when we were dating. I wanted to buy a world map and this purchase was very important to me. So while we were driving I prayed, "Lord, help me pick the right map". I was seeking the mind of Christ. Today, Shera will occasionally say, "I knew I was in good hands because David asked God for guidance on something as simple as a map". I tricked her, lol.

Now back to the subject of biblically qualified council of overseers also called: plurality of elders, shared leadership and collective leadership. Whatever you call it we want you to know that we are all on board, we are committed to working together, by the power of the Holy Spirit, in humble, Christlike love. To work together in unity, oneness, prayer, trust, forgiveness and servanthood.

You may say, "How many leaders do you need"? Well, it's better to have just two qualified than it is to have eight biblically unqualified elders. However, if there are biblically qualified men there could be ten. The number is not the issue the qualifications laid out in 1 Timothy and Titus are -so there's not really a limit.

All the verses I've mentioned are about the inner life. The inner life is pivotal for authentic Christian leadership. It's no longer I that live but Christ that lives in me. All leaders have weaknesses and blind spots. Leaders need help from one another, we need accountability, and we need guidance, direction, council and wisdom.

When it comes to choosing an elder it is critical that they meet the qualifications laid out in scripture. Leadership has to be servant leadership. No robes allowed, only a servant's apron for washing feet.

Matthew 11:29 When we are yoked to Jesus we're not power hungry, we're not greedy, we're not seeking robes, we're not seeking a pyramid, we're not seeking to be the greatest. We're asking, how can I elevate you? How can I lift you up? How can I bring you closer to God? How can I figuratively wash your feet?

Mark 9:33-35 The disciples are arguing about who will be the greatest. They wanted to get the seat next to Jesus and look what happens. Immediately there's strife, jealousy erupts, quarrel arises, and there's rivalry between them.

Power is like saltwater, the more you drink (get) the thirstier you became and too much makes you crazy.

It is difficult to stand on a pedestal and wash the feet of those below.

In closing: Jesus is Lord, we are His people. He wants to build His church of which He is the head and cornerstone. He's the great High Priest. He is overseeing His one body and Jesus Christ is our Senior Pastor, (elders are his undershepherds, and we are all brothers and sisters.) and all others are His under shepherds.

Questions:

1. Do you believe the church family functions best with plural leadership?
2. Do you think excluding women from church leadership is wrong?
3. What does it mean to, "Let the peace of Christ rule in your heart"? (Col. 3:15)
4. Is there anyone here at Wayside that you are close to like a brother or sister in Christ?
5. Have you ever thought of the church as a spiritual workshop?
6. Do you agree that nothing distinguishes the kingdom of God from mans kingdom more than the use of power?
7. The church is the pillar and foundation of the truth, what does that mean to you? (1 Tim. 3:15)
8. Have you ever thought, "I know those people are Christians by their love"?