

Two Scenarios

Detailed Outline

Part 1 of 4

Introduction

Scripture presents the leadership of the local church as a body of men, a plurality called elders, who share in guiding and shepherding the church of God that is under their care.

So is there a place for one elder to be supported by the church to give more of his time to preaching and teaching of the word?

How does it affect the plurality and shared authority, when one elder gives his vocational time to the work of being an elder and the others are secularly employed and give less time to the ministry?

What are the practical challenges and cautions in making it work so that the Biblical concept of a plurality of elders is maintained? Should we call the full-time elder, “Pastor”? Or does the return us to the traditional “pastor-centered” style of church?

That is what we want consider in this series of sessions.

First, let’s compare the two scenarios: A church without a full-time, financially supported elder, and a church with a financially supported elder.

I. All Elders are Volunteer and Unpaid

There is no full-time elder or preacher supported by the church. This may seem radical to some, but I know of many churches like this. Let’s look at the positives to this:

A. The Positive

1. Scripture always refers to church leadership in the plural.
2. Never refers to one man being in charge, the pinnacle of a clerical hierarchy.
3. No indication from Scripture that one man is to do all the pulpit preaching.
4. Jesus warns of the difference between the one who is a genuine shepherd versus the “hired hand”, or as the KJV says, “hireling”.

“I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. He who is a hired hand, and not a shepherd, who is not the owner of the sheep, sees the wolf coming, and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. He flees because he is a hired hand and is not concerned about the sheep.” (John 10:11–13 NASB)

5. Easier to maintain the equality and shared leadership in the church
6. God will raise up gifted brothers who will rise to a higher level of service.
7. But this comes from their giftedness, not because they are paid.

B. The Difficulties

1. Elder burnout - As the church grows, the work of the elders increases.
 - a) Especially if they are younger elders with families
 - b) Many elders just don't have the time to do everything.
2. Congregation may suffer from lack of attention by the elders.
 - a) Main concern I hear from elders: not enough time, getting burned out.
 - b) Main concern I hear from people: elders are not aware of our needs.
3. Some elders' families may suffer.
 - a) Wife and children are your first discipleship group
 - b) Example: One adult told me that while growing up, his dad had time for the people at the church, but never had time for him.
4. Some elders' gift might be under utilized!
 - a) Not all elders are equally gifted.
 - b) Church may not be getting the full benefit.
5. Plurality in form does not always guarantee plurality in practice.
 - a) Plurality of weak elders doesn't guard against the Diotrophes syndrome
Diotrophes, who loves to be first among them... (3 John 9)
 - b) Some gain more influence by virtue of their personality, family ties or manipulation.

C. The Conditions for Working Well – Having one or more elders who:

1. Have a large capacity.
 - a) The work of an elder is on top of all the other responsibilities a man has: work, family, personal ministry,
 - b) Have wives capable of picking up the slack at home
 - c) Children are grown.
2. Can live on a shorter work week and still support themselves.
Example: A doctor who worked 4 days a week, spends the extra day in study of the Word.
3. Are retired (or early retirement).
 - a) Example: my father-in-law
 - b) Still have the energy and drive to shepherd God's people.
 - c) Years of experience and wisdom
4. Are independently wealthy.

Yes, it is possible to have a church with fully functioning elders none of whom are financially supported by the church. You need to be aware of the difficulties.

II. One or More Elders are Supported by the Church

A. The Positive

1. 1 Timothy 5:17-19 instructs us to recognize the elder who worthy of “double honor.”
The elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, “You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing,” and “The laborer is worthy of his wages.”
(1 Tim. 5:17-18)
 - a) We have looked at this verse in detail elsewhere in this curriculum
 - b) All elders are to be held in honor.
 - c) Elders who work at hard at preaching and teaching worthy of “double honor.”
2. Money is in view.
3. Quotes
 - a) Deuteronomy 25:4 - “You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing”
 - b) 1 Corinthians 9:9 - Paul quotes this verse as well to support the idea that people giving their full time to the work of the Lord are worthy of being financially supported.
 - c) Luke 10:7 - “The worker is worthy of his wages.”
 - 1) Luke is recording the words of Jesus.
 - 2) Sent out 70 disciples on short-term mission trip.
 - 3) Authorized them to accept support as they served on their mission..
 - 4) Paul quotes Gospel according to Luke as authoritative Scripture!
 - 5) Point: Paul uses the same argument,
 - 6) Using the same phrase – applied to elder
 - 7) An elder may accept material support for his work of preaching and teaching.
4. In 1 Corinthians 9,
 - a) The apostle Paul was apparently responding to criticism of the apostles receiving financial support for their ministry.
 - b) Although he took no support from the Corinthians, he defended his right to it:
⁷ Who at any time serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat the fruit of it? Or who tends a flock and does not use the milk of the flock? ⁸ I am not speaking these things according to human judgment, am I? Or does not the Law also say these things? ⁹ For it is written in the Law of Moses, “YOU SHALL NOT MUZZLE THE OX WHILE HE IS THRESHING.” God is not concerned about oxen, is He? ¹⁰ Or is He speaking altogether for our sake? Yes, for our sake it was written, because the plowman ought to plow in hope, and the thresher to thresh in hope of sharing the crops. ¹¹ If we sowed spiritual things in you, is it too much if we reap material things from you?
(1 Cor. 9:7-11)

- c) Same language is used for apostles and missionaries as for elders who work hard teach and preach.
- d) Churches are justified financially supporting elder who works hard at teaching & preaching Word.

B. The Difficulties

1. Non-supported elders may abdicate from their responsibilities.
2. There can be a tendency to put the pastor/fulltime elder on a proverbial pedestal.
3. Supported elder can gain too much control. People can tend to think of him as the “Pastor”
4. Pastor is a gift, not an office. There are many pastors in the church, why not call them all pastors?
5. Scripture warns of shepherding for personal gain:

“... A hired hand, and not a shepherd, who is not the owner of the sheep, sees the wolf coming, and leaves the sheep and flees” (John 10:11–13)

“Shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness ...” (1 Peter 5:2)
6. Congregation can use finances to control the full-time elder.
 - a) “He who controls the purse can control the person.”
 - b) Keep him from speaking the truth, for fear of loss of support
7. Burnout
 - a) By letting him do too much: preach, counsel, teach, lead, administration, etc.
 - b) By trying to be everything to everyone

C. The Conditions for Working Well

1. Having elders who are:
 - a) Strong, biblically qualified men
 - b) Have a good grasp of the biblical pattern of the plurality of elders
 - c) Take their shepherding role seriously, and not looking for an easy out
 - d) Provide protection for the full-time elder
 - 1) From fall into death spiral of trying to be everything to everyone.
 - 2) From the unrealistic expectations of people.
 - e) Support him well, so he is not distracted by the lack of money.
 - f) Don’t assume the attitude, “Well, we pay him to do that.”

2. The full-time elder who:

- a) Has a strong sense of biblical ecclesiology, plurality of leadership and gifts.
- b) Is humble to be held accountable, to share leadership.
- c) Who is patient - willing to allow the other elders time to process, to work through things.
- d) Recognizes and builds up others who have the gift of teaching and preaching.

“And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ...” (Eph. 4:11–12)

- e) Willing to share the pulpit
 - 1) Here in North America, there is an erroneous mindset that the pulpit is the pinnacle of ministry, reserved for the seminary-trained.
 - 2) This is a false notion. God can and will raise up those of his own choosing.
 - 3) I have known of men that are gifted communicators and students of the word, but the church is impoverished because they have no opportunity to preach to whole church.

III. God Can Use Both Kinds of Leadership.

When God raises up a man from the body who works hard at preaching and teaching the Word, turn him loose, relieve him of the time and energy spent in secular work, by supporting him in the work of the Lord.

We still need to consider how the secularly employed elders and the full-time supported elder inter-relate and serve together, side by side. There are some dynamics involved – some obvious, some subtle. We will look at those shortly. But first let’s consider some issues concerning the financial support of an elder.