

Eldership and the Church

Detailed Outline

Part 3 of 9

Now in defending biblical eldership, we come to letter E:

E. Eldership Promotes the True Nature of the Church.

We're dealing now with the theology of what is the church. Any form of leadership structure needs to harmonize with and promote the nature of the organization.

I'm arguing that biblical eldership best harmonizes with and promotes the true nature of the church, its mission, and its theology.

1) The church is a close-knit family of brothers and sisters.

We use the Greek word *ekklesia*: church, congregation, gathering, assembly. But one word cannot explain the multi-dimensional nature of the church. So the biblical writers use many metaphors, images, such as the body, the bride, the temple, the flock.

But one of the most frequently used metaphors for the church is that of the family—brothers and sisters. Or, the larger concept—the household of God. We are God's family; we truly are brothers and sisters. It's real.

Now, eldership is a form of government that harmonizes beautifully with the family nature of the church.

When you come to the churches of the New Testament you will see that they do not have special, exalted titles for their leaders but very simple titles: overseer, elder, leader. Or sacred clothes, chief seats, or special platforms.

Christ said to his twelve disciples, "*You are brothers*" (Matt. 23:8).

When a NT local church would look back at its heritage, the people of God in the Old Testament, it would see a form of government that matched perfectly a family, and that was eldership. As an extended family, eldership fits with what the church is.

Then second, notice:

2) The church is a humble servant community.

I'm convinced of the elder system of government matches the chief virtues that Jesus Christ taught his disciples: humility, servanthood, and love.

Eldership, unlike unitary leadership, promotes these virtues. It takes a greater exercise of humility and love to work as a group of leaders together. In order for eldership to operate effectively, the elders have to show mutual regard for one another. They have to submit one to another; they have to patiently wait on one another, something very difficult for alpha males.

This sounds so much like Philippians 2—have the attitude in yourselves which was in Christ Jesus, who humbled himself and served others—qualities that marked the servant church and the servant community of God’s people. In fact, the eldership is sort of a microcosm of how the whole church should operate.

3) The church is under Christ’s headship.

Biblical eldership promotes the preeminence of Christ over the local church.

Jesus left a beautiful promise to his disciples when he ascended to heaven: *I will always be with you. Where two or three are gathered (the smallest number), I will be in your presence.*

Jesus would be with us as ruler, head, lord, and master, overseer, high priest, and king. No one man would be king of the church. No one man would be ruler of the church. It would be governed by a plurality of Spirit-appointed, qualified, functioning shepherd elders.

Also, we are completely dependent upon our head, Christ, the source of all blessing and power.

May we be the kinds of people who always point people to Christ, not to self, which is our natural tendency.

4) Eldership promotes the protection and sanctification of the spiritual leaders.

We come to two extremely significant reasons and benefits of pastoral leadership by a plurality of qualified elders.

The first is that eldership provides necessary accountability and protection from the particular sins that plague leaders—such as pride, greed, and playing God.

Second, the eldership structure provides peer relationships and balances one another’s weaknesses. I believe a biblical eldership promotes each individual leader’s sanctification.

Accountability: The famous English historian Lord Acton said this: *“Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.”*

We are Bible-believing Christians. And if there is anyone who should understand the importance of accountability it should be us! Because of our biblical beliefs in the cruel realities of sin and human depravity, we should understand well why people in positions of power are easily corrupted. We know from our Bibles how corrupting sin is, how deceitful sin is, and how easily we’re distorted and perverted by power, authority, money, fame, and status.

Jesus knew this. That’s why he taught humility. It’s why he washed their feet and knelt down before them as an example. He said, “Now you’ve seen my example. You do that to one another.” Serve one another, even in the most humble ways.

To have authentic, real accountability—you have to want it. You have to see the need for it, scripturally, and see how weak you really are, and how easily you are tricked by the devil, and sin, and your own dark side.

Peer relationships: One of the great joys of my life has been working with a group of men who are peers. We have been partners in the work of God. Hence, we balance one another, sharpen one another, comfort one another, protect one another, strengthen one another, pastor one another, and pray for one another.

A healthy relationship with other men is important, very important to your spiritual health.

You know the two great things that God has used in my life to sanctify me and make me a much better leader: The first is my wife, and second is my fellow elders.

God wants you to learn to listen to other people and to learn to welcome correction and rebuke. This is part of your sanctification in Christlikeness. If you want to be more like Jesus, then listen to your brothers and sisters, listen to their criticism, listen to their statements that reveal who you really are. We need one another.

So, I'm saying to you that eldership harmonizes with and promotes the theology of the church, the mission of the church, and the character of the church.