

Church Leadership

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[0 : 00] Tonight, the mark of a healthy church is leadership.

! Scripture clearly establishes the context and the role of church leadership.! In this lesson, Dr. Dever explains how the context of leadership is the congregation and how the role of leadership is the faithful work of elders and deacons.

Hebrews 13.7, remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the Word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith. Alright, let's watch.

Okay, our questions. We'll do those together. Question number one, the New Testament reads like a straightforward manual for church polity. B, false.

Question two, Acts chapter 6 serves as an example of the responsibilities of a congregation and church leadership when the congregation chose the C, deacons.

[1 : 11] Number three, the New Testament teaches the need for a B, plurality of elders. Question four, a church model where a congregation is responsible for doctrine and discipline is only possible in congregationalism.

B, the answer is false. Plenum in the Greek word used in 2 Corinthians 2.6 for C, majority.

And six, elder can be used interchangeably with D, overseer. So again, that's 1B, 2C, 3B, 4B, 5C, 6D.

Okay, discussion questions. Microphone here. Not as many of us tonight, so everybody ought to be able to have plenty of opportunity. Question number one.

How does the New Testament assert the role of the congregation in the leadership of the church?

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[2 : 34] Maybe that was something that you hadn't really thought about before, about the responsibility that the congregation has in the leadership of the church overall.

What does the New Testament say about the responsibility of the congregation?

So, Matthew 18 was one Mark Dever used, right? Ultimately, that person who's in sin, who's unrepentant, goes before the church for dismissal.

That ultimately, it's the church who makes these major decisions that impact the church. Maybe you've seen it differently. That's not as popular today.

You see more of like a pastor-led or staff-led church where all the decisions are made from those who are on staff.

[3 : 40] And sometimes they bring in the church for some feedback, some decisions. Maybe they'll have business meetings. Some don't have any business meetings.

Or if they have a business meeting, it's really just to give information, but not vote on anything and maybe field some questions. And then some even also all the hiring and the terminating as well of staff is handled by the staff and not the church, which is different from what we see in Scripture and how it's supposed to be.

Some people, I think, like church like that because they feel like church is a place where they go because they want to come anonymously and leave anonymously as we've talked about.

And they've kind of not seen from Scripture that they have a greater responsibility than that to the church. And so either, one, they're ignorant of it, or two, they're just disobedient because they don't care that much, to have that much involvement.

I don't know if you guys have any ideas about if it's one way or the other. Wes? Possibly also that they kind of look at the church as like a business kind of thing where you have the president at the top, that's the pastor, and everything else.

[4 : 59] Everybody else is just like an employee just sitting back and, you know, along for the ride kind of thing that they don't have a big responsibility in the running of the church. Yeah, that's a

good observation. Maybe a part of it, too, is culturally.

Like you go to a, you work for a business, a company, maybe like Phillips 66 or ConocoPhillips, like a lot of you do. And who ultimately is the decision makers in those?

Well, maybe the, you know, the board, but it's the guy, the people at the very top. And if you're down below, then, you know, your say doesn't really have that much of an impact in ultimately whatever they decide to do.

And so maybe that's part of it. I think that that would be a part of it is we're used to kind of that business structure in our culture. And so we think, well, you know, those, the leaders are on top and they make the decisions that affect everybody below.

Keep quiet and keep your head low. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. I think, I think that the church has to be informed of what their responsibility is.

[6 : 08] Yeah. Because if they don't know, they can't do it. So it has to come from somewhere. Someone has to say, okay, we need elders. We need deacons. We need, and this is your responsibility to choose them like we do.

Yeah. But if they don't know, they can't do it. Yeah, that's true. So I do think there's a responsibility from the leaders to educate the church about their responsibility.

And the church is why I wish more people would have come because we're talking about elders and we have elders. And some people, they don't understand that because just that's not how they were brought up in church.

You had the pastor. You had some deacons. You maybe had some other staff. I don't think that there's any other Southern Baptist church in our association that has elders besides us. So it would have been nice to have some more people here for that purpose.

But, you know, all of us can go from here. And if there's ever any question, be like, yeah, I know. Paul? Another place in the New Testament, obviously, was the choosing of the deacons that was done by the congregation.

[7 : 12] And I think what hit home for me more than anything else, not only tonight, but when we talked about discipline, how important the role of the congregation was even in disciplines.

If I remember right, when we did discipline as a mark of a healthy church, he really emphasized the importance of the congregation doing that. Yeah. And that is emphasized kind of throughout, not only in the discipline, but in the testing of the teachers to make sure that they are teaching according to scripture and how important that that is.

And so it is the responsibility of the congregation to hold the leaders responsible. And I know that when we first set up elders in our church, you weren't here at that time, but that was one of the things that was emphasized is that even the elders serve at the pleasure of the congregation.

Yeah. They're not, you know, they don't control the congregation, the congregation, they just serve at the pleasure. Yeah. Good. I thought that was interesting too, just because a lot of times in church we think, well, when it comes to discipline issues, then, you know, we take that to the pastor or to the leaders and they deal with it.

But that's not the sense that we get here in Matthew 18 and some of the other scriptures, that there's more responsibility within the congregation to do these things as a congregation instead of passing the buck along.

[8 : 42] Though it's not unwise at all, I would think, to bring those concerns to the leaders of the church out of respect for their position, their responsibility before the Lord for the congregation.

So, yeah, yeah, that should be the one that you should go to next. Absolutely. And another thing you said, Paul, and I think going back to the model of a business where the leader is on top in the church, it's the opposite where the leaders and the elders really are at the bottom.

And so that's what servant leadership is. It's like we serve the people who is the congregation. If you want to do a top and the bottom, I don't really like that. But you know what I'm saying? Like we serve here and we serve in our congregation and ultimately it's the congregation who leads, makes these decisions.

But of course, then again, they understand that God has called from within their congregation and to their congregation leaders who are responsible for providing that direction.

Mike? I'm questioning how I want to say this because it could come out very wrong. But I think that is another reason why we have to be careful on how we bring members into our church.

[10:10] Because I have heard of places where all of a sudden there's a new influx of new people into a church and suddenly being congregational led, they will take over.

And I think we need to have something to even test our members and new members.

Because otherwise, we may have varied opinions that are not biblical. And that's one thing I was glad he said is the congregation will lead in the leadership of the church according to biblical rules. And so I think that's the responsibility that we have. Who is our church made up of? And not can we trust them, but are they grounded biblically?

Yeah. Yeah, it's a good observation. Yeah, I think that's why it's important when we have new people come in too to make sure that they read the bylaws and understand this is, you know, this is what we believe as a church and this is how our church is governed.

[11:24] Not everybody is really interested in those, unfortunately, when they come to a church because, you know, for a lot of people they don't treat it as something that is as special as they should.

You said something else that brought something to my mind that now has flown away. Yeah, it will. Wes?

I just wanted to comment. And I thought it was pretty neat how they said choose from among yourselves. It's kind of like we've got this other stuff to do. You guys pick your people that you want to have. It wasn't something like we'll pick these people out that we're going to hand choose to be. It's from the congregation. I thought that was pretty good because it is putting responsibility in the congregation to find these seven men that they said to choose to be the deacons. I thought that was pretty good.

Yeah, exactly. I agree. I remember that congregations do make wrong decisions. You know, as you pointed out, he used the illustration of Jonathan Edwards, who's one of the great pastors and theologians of all time, and he was voted out of his church 90%.

[12:30] So, obviously, they got that one wrong. So, yeah, that's why I saw it is important. And maybe as a result of going through these series, I mean, these are some things that maybe we consider about with new members as well.

You know, I know we've talked about new member classes before, and you really need to have the new members in order to have the class. But I think that we've had them, and that's not a bad thing to think about.

But certainly to continue to make sure, okay, if you're going to join the church, have you read our bylaws and Constitution and are in agreement with these things? And even if they say we are, I mean, you never, especially you hear terrible stories about these small churches, and a group will come in, and before you know it, they've completely taken over everything.

You know, it's tragic. Let's move to question two. Dr. Dever mentioned a church's need for a right balance of trust and authority. What does that right balance look like in a local church, the balance of trust and authority?

What does it look like in a local church? I think one of the first things I can tell on how much a congregation trusts their leadership is how they love him.

[13:52] You know, when I see a church that the pastor is very withdrawn, a lot of aloof or whatever that term is, it makes me think that, okay, he doesn't have a lot to do with his congregation, and as a result, probably his congregation doesn't have a lot to do with him.

But I love it when a pastor is just one of the people. Sure. What does the right balance of trust and authority look like in a local church?

Yes. I think that the body of the church needs to feel free to approach anyone in those positions with any of their desires.

Their, not desires, that was wrong. Oh, sorry. We know what you mean, like prayer requests, concerns. Yes, prayer requests or there's something wrong in this part of the building and there's something over here and I have a misunderstanding with somebody.

But having the freedom that they know they're not going to be judged, they're going to be helped. Okay, good.

[15:13] Good. So going to somebody and believe that you're going to actually be heard, that they're not just going to nod their head until you are gone so they can move on to the next thing.

That's good. And needed. It's definitely a way that you build trust, right? Oh, okay. Paul? Yeah.

When I think of the balance of trust and authority, I think a lot of it has to do with discernment. We expect our leaders, our teachers, to be discerning and to have biblical knowledge and that type of thing.

But I think as individual Christians, we must realize that we cannot give away all discernment to somebody else. We need to have the Holy Spirit discerning things for us and capable.

We need to be mature enough to be capable of taking some of that discernment and discerning when things are right and wrong and holding our leaders and teachers then accountable.

[16:19] Not that we don't respect them, but like he was saying about the Apostle Paul, even if I come back and preach a different gospel, you must reject it.

Yeah. And the only way we'll know that is if we allow the Holy Spirit's discernment to insert in our lives. And that's, I think, where the balance actually has to be.

Yeah. It's in that area of discernment. Yeah. Good. Doylene? I was trying to figure this out, too. Some of these words and the way it's worded, I don't see as trust and authority being balanced as much as they have to go side by side and hand in hand.

Mm-hmm. So I'm a little, because if there's no trust there, to me there's no authority. Yeah. So I'm sort of trying to understand really, you know, is it balanced or don't they just need to be, you know, it needs to be 100% on both sides because it needs to go hand in hand.

Yeah. That's a good observation. If somebody, a leader, is exercising a lot of authority, typically they're not trustworthy by the people a lot of times because either they feel like, well, they're just going to do whatever they want.

[17:35] You know, they're kind of ruling the place with an iron fist and they're not listening to anybody or they're not considering the other leaders around them and their opinions and so you lose trust for that person.

I don't know. Well, I think sometimes you can see a church being too trusting of a pastor as well or maybe some of the leaders and, you know, they're just kind of like, well, you know, we trust them. But really it's because they don't really want to get their hands dirty maybe. So that would be, but I think you, but in a healthy church, they should go hand in hand. You ought to be able to trust the leaders who are in authority.

And if you don't, one or the other, I mean, that would be an unhealthy church. That's a good observation, though. Wes? I think that trust comes first before you hand over that authority. But you still have to be able to look at churches that have fallen because their leadership is, they're, you know, doing improper things with the church secretary or things with the money and things like that. Then all of a sudden they're finding out this is our leader, our pastor is doing all this stuff. So that's when they're overstepping that authority. But they're just leaving the trust part.

[18:48] It's like you said, oh, we just trust him. He'll take care of everything and not really be paying attention to what's going on. And just anything he says goes, that's fine. I trust him. So it has to be truly a deserved trust, not just you're at the top, so you're running the show.

It should be something where we're watching what's happening and paying attention to make sure everything is staying on board, not spiritually, but scripturally. Yeah, that's a good point too.

With like, you know, like Evelyn does a lot. She handles a lot of our finances and we trust her. But we also have, you know, a committee that double checks all that she does and looks over.

And that's part of that balance, I think, of trust and authority, giving her too much trust and the authority goes with it. Yeah, like we have two people signing a check.

The staff is, you know, we have other elders as well that I don't, it's not something where a pastor goes into the meeting and is like, okay, this is what we're doing. And that's it. Because that's what the elders, that's part of their role as well.

[19:49] You know, we make decisions for the church together. Willard? One of the dynamics, I think, that we have to consider. I think more than likely the church, the early church that first appointed deacons was a church that was sensitive to the direction of the Spirit of God.

I've come to the conclusion through the years that the average Baptist church is not filled with a lot of people that are sensitive to the Spirit of God.

Those churches that have that are unique, and I think Highland is one of those, though I say I'm sure not 100%. But so decisions made by the body have a little different dynamic than the early church in so much that a lot of times personality and that type of thing are used to determine leadership.

So that's, and I'm glad God's in control of all of that, though. But that's a dynamic we have to be sure that we stress among the body.

Yeah. Is the necessity of being sensitive to the direction of the Spirit of God in any decision that is made by the body, in particular when you're choosing leadership.

[21 : 21] And when you're sensitive to the Spirit of God and you know this is the individual God has chosen, then you can trust that individual. Yeah. Because that individual is going to be sensitive to the Spirit of God, Spirit-led, and that type of thing.

So, you know, I like to, you know, when people get cross-legged with the pastor or the deacons or the elders, the best question to ask them is, did you vote to, did you say by your vote that you felt this was God's man for the church?

Yeah. Yeah. Okay. Enough said. Yeah. Good. Yeah. Yeah. So, healthy leadership a lot of times produces a healthy congregation.

Exactly. Yeah. Leaders who are discerning the Spirit, you know, and who are strong spiritually, oftentimes the congregation that results mirrors that.

Yeah. Because of that. And the healthy church will choose God's person. Yeah. One that God leads and God directs. Yeah. Or, you know, like Paul said, if they come with a different gospel, then they'll say, you know, see you later.

[22 : 36] Right. Right. No matter, yeah. Yeah. I had that same question asked of me or asked to me in Copan before I became pastor there. And with the turmoil they had prior to my coming, one of the men asked me one night, said, do you think a church can be wrong?

Do you think the majority of the church could be wrong? And he was alluding to the mess that they got themselves in with the man they called previously. And I said, certainly, certainly can't.

If that congregation is not sensitive to the direction of the Spirit of God, they're going to go by human emotion, personality, and everything else. Yeah. And so, yeah.

Yeah. And that was the truth of what happened there. Yeah. Yeah. And a lot do, unfortunately.

Yeah. Even the part about itching ears. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. So, we've just got to be really careful that we stress.

You know, churches get in such a hurry. And I think sometimes we get in such a hurry, we don't give God time to work in choices we make because we feel like we've got to make them right away and right now.

[23 : 49] Yeah. And so, we've just got to be sensitive to the Spirit of God. That's imperative. Yeah. Absolutely. A couple things I wrote down. Transparency. I think transparency with the leadership builds trust.

And with trust comes, you know, the congregation willing to submit to that authority because, well, they tell us what they can tell us.

And there's not any hidden things or secrets that we don't know about. I think so. Transparency is a big one. And I know I learned that the hard way when I was first pastoring.

I think it would have been my first year as senior pastor. The sanctuary we were in was small. There had always been this debate over pay off the debt or build a new sanctuary.

Well, we had one of our deacons who was the chairman of the deacon board at that time really wanted to build. And so, he, you know, talked to me about it. And he had us meeting with a contractor.

[24 : 53] And at the business meeting, he kind of told me, he's like, we're not going to tell them very much. I just say that we had a meeting and we're learning more information.

And so, I went up and I did that and I just got a lot of funny faces looking back at me because they wanted that transparency because they felt like there was something strange going on. Like, what are they doing? And so, after that, for me, I was like, I'm never doing that again.

I'm not going to. I just don't want to. It was really uncomfortable and I didn't want that. Years ago, I had a friend that told me the story that he had been asked to come to a church in Florida in view of a call.

A nice church. Large church. A good church. A healthy church. Evangelistic church. So, they went. Went for the weekend and did a number of things.

And come time for Sunday night, after he preached on Sunday night, then the church was going to take a vote. And he and his wife were going to wait and see what the result was.

[25 : 57] So, they went back to the back room and waited. And while they were waiting, I mean, they had a great service all weekend. Great services. People got saved.

People added to the church. That type of thing. He looked at his wife. He said, what do you think? What are you sensing? What are you feeling about our coming here?

She looked at him. She said, God's not in it. And he said, I agree. And so, someone came in from the congregation. And he said, well, the votes come in.

And the church voted not to call you. And he asked him this question. He said, if you don't mind me asking, what was the vote? He said, you didn't get a single yes vote.

Oh, my. Yeah. And he was a good preacher. I mean, he's a good man. Yeah. But that just told me that that church was sensitive to the spirit of God.

[27 : 00] Yeah. Yeah. As they were as well. Yeah. So, yeah. I just, if only, if only. Yeah. All of them were that way. I never heard of nobody even getting one yes.

Let's move on to question three. What are the benefits of a plurality of elders to the local church for pastors and congregations? What's the benefit of having elders both for the pastor and for the church?

What have you noticed? What's the benefits of a pastor? What's the benefits of a pastor? What's the benefits of a pastor? In our church with elders and a pastor, a couple pastors. The benefits. Wes? Well, it's always good to have more than one opinion about something. You don't want it to be a one-man show and things like that. Sure. And with just one elder, you're all going to be going in his direction all the time. So, it's good to always have someone else to bounce ideas off of. And you look at study Bibles and all the people that contribute to putting a study Bible together. They don't just give one person, okay, you got Genesis. Yeah. I got it.

[28 : 05] It's a whole bunch of people come together. So, you're going to get a better blend and you're going to get that synergy that happens from, you know, people talking together and ideas bouncing off. And, well, that's pretty good, but what if you did it this way instead?

You know, and then just better things happen that way. Yeah. Okay. Others? Eileen? I think when we've been between staff members, like the pastor and the music director, which either one of those levels, some churches just fall apart when the pastor leaves.

They're floundering. Mm-hmm. And we don't, I feel like the last few years while we've had this elder body plus the deacons, that there's still been a foundation, a stability there that led us through the interim and through the transition.

So, I think that keeps the, yeah, just sort of the glue that keeps everything still going forward. We didn't just stop and quit trying to teach and, you know, quit trying to do activities.

It sort of kept the body going and our congregation going. And so, I just feel like that's a big plus to have that many people who have an inkling of what needs to still happen in the leadership of the church to keep it going.

[29 : 22] Yeah. Good. Anybody else? I know, you know, I really appreciate the elders that we do have, and I'm very thankful to be in a church that has.

That's one of the things that, you know, when talking with Highland Park that I was really, that I was excited about, that this church has already gone that way. And it's helpful because it's kind of like he, like Mark Devers said, each man has different gifts that contribute to the whole.

And I appreciate, I appreciate all the different gifts that we have from the different men that we have on our elder board because they do care a lot about their church and very much love their church.

And I feel like they care about Dan and I very much as well. And I know that whatever decisions that we make, that they're not just like, well, okay, whatever, that sounds good.

I mean, there's a lot of consideration. Part of which has helped me too because, you know, the more in some of these things that we do have to talk about that may be bigger decisions, I know more of like the questions that will be asked of me.

[30 : 36] So that helps me too because I know, well, you know, this question will be asked. This person might be concerned about that. And so that helps. That's helpful as well because, you know, then you're thinking more deeply through certain things that have an impact for the church.

So it's very helpful because, I mean, we have, like I said, we have guys who have different skills. But then, you know, what's amazing too, and which is neat, is the unity in decision making.

And I know I'm just speaking from two years and many of our elders have been elders for longer than that. And they could testify to the same thing that, you know, decisions, a decision where

somebody feels strongly opposed to the decision, even if it's won, won't get approved because, you know, that's why it's so important.

I think, you know, the men who serve as elders understand the responsibility, and they understand too that if there's disunity within that group, then it's going to affect the rest of the body, and that's going to be a really bad thing.

So I think, you know, we ought to be thankful too for the elders that we do have in our church. You know, there's Pastor Appreciation Month, but they deserve some appreciation as well because they don't get paid.

[31 : 56] And I'm not saying all these things to butter them up or whatever, you know. But it is a responsibility. They do volunteer to do it, and it does take their time, but they do so willingly.

And we should be thankful too that we have elders who have been a part of this church for a long time. And that definitely helps in decision making as well.

And I think that also plays a part into the trust for the church because when a pastor comes and you're just trying to get to know the person and you're trying to determine whether or not this is somebody that you can trust, then you at least know that, well, at least he's surrounded by these other men who we do trust.

And so that's a benefit. Wes? I'll kind of save you there. I really appreciate our elders as well. They all know their Bible so well, and that's, you know, part of the thing that they should be able to give a witness and understand.

And they all just, they're really sharp as far as that goes, and many of them teaching really well. I've heard several of them preach, and that's just a great thing to have, you know, just more, a bigger bench to go on, right?

[33 : 08] So you have other people that can step in for you. And then if they ever want to give you guidance or anybody guidance, they know Scripture. That's really a comforting thing for me to know you've got that kind of experience that you can draw from.

Yeah. If you think about it, most of our elders are serving in some kind of teaching role within the church, and those who may not be are capable. James? I was going to say, you know, anybody that thinks that they're in a position of power and authority as an elder, that's not true.

You're as much a servant as anyone else in the church. Yeah. And if we have that attitude and that heart that we look at ourselves as servants, and we're there to serve alongside not only the deacon body but the congregation, because the congregation is the one that's put us into those positions.

So we're serving the whole entire congregation, and we're serving the Lord because it's His church. Yeah. So you have to have that servant attitude, that servant heart.

Yeah. To be in those leadership roles. Yeah. Yeah. And if you use that as like your trump card, then you shouldn't be serving in that role anymore. Well, I'm an elder, so. Or I'm a pastor, so.

[34 : 25] This is what we're going to do. Yeah. You shouldn't be in that role any longer if that's the case. Any other thoughts or comments there about the benefits?

Okay. Well, we'll pray and we'll be dismissed. We didn't get to question four, but anyhow.

We can talk about it later on. We can go home and call each other on the phone or whatever. All right. Let's pray. Lord, we thank You for Your church. We thank You, Lord, for the responsibility that You've given us to be a healthy church, which means, Lord, that we see that every person has a responsibility to adhere to Your Word and to be not just hearers but doers.

Lord, we know that, unfortunately, that's not always the case. And even more so, it doesn't seem like it's often the case in a lot of churches that they would rather come and leave and not have any more of a role than that.

And, Lord, unfortunately, part of that is just ignorance on their part and churches deciding to govern themselves in a way that Your Word hasn't instructed.

[35 : 53] And so, God, I pray that we wouldn't look down on them, but that, Lord, hopefully, I'm not saying in any way that we're perfect or we have it absolutely right, but, Lord, hopefully in the way that we lead that that would draw attention, that they would understand that this isn't just a decision that we've made, but that it's biblical and that it's scriptural and that it's needed for a church to be healthy.

And so, Lord, we pray for the health of this church. We pray for the health of Your church and that we would consider more how we ought to react and serve as members of the congregation, as leaders, and that, Lord, that we would take greater care and consideration over this great

responsibility and that, Father, the result would be a church that is in tune with Your Word, that Your Word would be abiding within us, that we would be then discerning of Your Spirit and making decisions, Lord, that You would be pleased with.
We hope for this and we pray that this would be the case, and we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.
Amen. Amen.