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THE AUTHORITY OF CHURCH ELDERS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this work is to establish the New Testament teaching on the authority of elders in the church. The primary source material is the New Testament and the methodology is inductive. The first step is to establish the original meaning of each relevant passage according to its context. Second, based on the exegesis, historical examples and timeless principles relevant to the authority of elders are identified from each passage. These two steps comprise the majority of this dissertation, chapters two through six. The final step is to synthesize the examples and principles from the selected passages into a theology of the authority of church elders.

The criteria for selecting New Testament passages for consideration are as follows: (1) Passages are included that make reference to elders in the Christian community. (2) Passages are included that contain concepts of human authority within the Christian community. (3) Passages are included that contain concepts of human leadership within the Christian community. (4) Passages are included that contain concepts of decision making within the Christian community. Passages are identified as falling into these categories based on selected semantic domains from J. P. Louw and E. A. Nida's *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*. The primary passages included for research in this dissertation based on the four criteria are Matt 16:13–20; 18:15–20; 20:25–28; 23:8–12; Mark 10:42–45; Luke 22:24–27; Acts 6:1–6; 11:27–30; 14:23; 15:1–35; 16:4; 20:17, 28–35; 21:17–26; 1 Cor 5:1–13; 6:1–8; 14:26–35; 16:15–16; 2 Cor 8:19; 9:7; Eph 4:11–16; Phil 1:1; 1 Thess 5:12–13; 1 Tim

2:8–15; 3:1–7; 4:14; 5:17-25; Titus 1:5–16; Heb 13:7, 17, 24; Jas 5:13–18; and 1 Pet 5:1–5.

Since the English word authority has several possible meanings, an effort is made to establish a clear definition of authority and how it will be used in this work. One helpful way to understand authority is to see its use as falling into one of two categories reflecting its nature. These two categories may be called authority *de jure* and authority *de facto*. Authority *de jure* is authority by right or according to law, while authority *de facto* is authority in actual existence or possession.

The thesis of this work, based on exegetical and theological investigations, is that a body of elders has authority to care for a local congregation primarily through leadership and teaching. This thesis may also be explained more explicitly using the semantic distinctions made above. (1) Elders have authority *de jure* in that they hold a particular position that carries with it certain rights (which may be better described as responsibilities). (2) Among the responsibilities of elders is leadership, but not government or control, in the sense of authority to make decisions for the church. (3) Elders do not have authority *de facto* in the sense of power to enforce their will upon the church. (4) The elders of the church should have authority *de facto* of personal influence based on respect that is earned in accordance with the character, skill, and knowledge prescribed in Scripture for elders (1 Tim 3:1–7 ;Titus 1:5–9), without which their authority *de jure* is made void. (5) Elders are to lead as a group by consensus, without a lead elder who has more decision making power among the elders.

To my wife Dana, my children, my parents, and Highland Christian Fellowship.

Thank you all for making this possible.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The term elder is a translation of the Greek word πρεσβύτερος, which can refer to an older person or to someone who holds a position of leadership in the Jewish or Christian communities.¹ Elders functioning as leaders of the Christian community are the subject of this study. In the New Testament, an elder is also referred to as an overseer (ἐπίσκοπος) (Acts 20:17, 28; Titus 1:5, 7) and is responsible to oversee (ἐπισκοπέω) God’s people (1 Pet 5:1–2).² The aim of this work is to establish the New Testament teaching on the authority of elders in the church.

Hermeneutical and Historical Considerations

Establishing the New Testament teaching on church elders’ authority is an exercise of biblical theology.³ Inherent to the discipline of biblical theology are theological and hermeneutical presuppositions. Kevin Vanhoozer writes,

¹ See Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature* (3d ed.; rev. and ed. Frederick William Danker. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 862; J. P. Louw and E. A. Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (2 vols.; New York: United Bible Societies, 1989), 1:541.

² See John S. Hammett, *Biblical Foundations for Baptist Churches: A Contemporary Ecclesiology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2005), 163; Joseph Barber Lightfoot, “The Christian Ministry,” in *Saint Paul’s Epistle to the Philippians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1913, 1953), 193; Benjamin L. Merkle, *The Elder and Overseer: One Office in the Early Church* (New York: Peter Lang, 2003); and William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles* (WBC 46; Nashville: Nelson, 2000), 61.

³ See Donald A. Carson, “Unity and Diversity in the New Testament: The Possibility of Systematic Theology,” in *Scripture and Truth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 69; Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove:

Biblical theology [is] an activity that is practically identical with the theological interpretation of the Bible in its concern for hearing the word of God in the church today. If exegesis without presuppositions is impossible, and if some of these presuppositions concern the nature and activity of God, then it would appear to go without saying that biblical interpretation is always/already theological.⁴

The presuppositions of this study begin with the inspiration of Scripture (2 Tim 3:16–17).⁵ The Bible is the trustworthy, coherent revelation of God from which his people in each generation may understand his ways and intentions for them.

Since Christian elders are the subject, this investigation is limited to the New Testament. Much of the writing about church elders addresses their relationship to Jewish elders and the development of ecclesiastical offices after New Testament times.⁶ An important question is how such history and development should inform a theology of church elders' authority. If the New Testament is inspired by God and sufficient for establishing a theology of church elders' authority, then the New Testament may be explored on its own terms apart from the surrounding history of Jewish and Christian elders. Furthermore, a New Testament theology of the authority of church elders would be a prerequisite for answering questions concerning the continuity between Jewish and

InterVarsity, 1991), 263; and Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "Introduction," in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible* (ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 21.

⁴ Vanhoozer, "Introduction," 21. See also Carson, "Unity and Diversity," 84; and Craig G. Bartholomew, "Biblical Theology," in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible* (ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 88–90.

⁵ See Bartholomew, "Biblical Theology," 88, 90.

⁶ For examples see James Vernon Bartlet, *Church-life and Church-order During the First Four Centuries* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1943); James Tunstead Burtchaell, *From Synagogue to Church: Public Services and Offices in the Earliest Christian Communities* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Alastair Campbell, *The Elders: Seniority within Earliest Christianity* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1994); Kevin Giles, *Patterns of Ministry among the First Christians* (Melbourne, Australia: Collins Dove, 1989); Edwin Hatch, ed. *The Organization of the Early Christian Churches* (New York: Longmans, Green, 1892); Thomas M. Lindsay, *The Church and the Ministry in the Early Centuries* (The Eighteenth Cunningham Lectures; New York: A. C. Armstrong and Son, 1902); B. H. Streeter, *The Primitive Church: Studies with Special Reference to the Origin of the Christian Ministry* (New York: Macmillan, 1929); and Carl A. Volz, *Pastoral Life and Practice in the Early Church* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1990).

Christian elders.⁷ Such a study would also be required for identifying departures from the New Testament pattern in later developments of church government. Since the present investigation assumes that the New Testament is inspired and sufficient for theology, it will not be informed by the traditions of Jewish elders or later Christian developments. Instead, the findings of this work may be used as a basis for investigating the relationship of Jewish and Christian elders. It may also be used to test later developments of church government.

Much discussion concerning church elders also centers on identifying varying traditions in the Jewish and Gentile churches, as well as contrasting earlier and later traditions.⁸ It is possible that leadership in the Jewish and Christian churches developed in different ways or that leadership in the early church evolved as it grew. However, confidence in the inspiration of Scripture and the legitimacy of biblical theology presuppose the unity of the New Testament.⁹ Allowing for leadership development in the early church¹⁰ and the diversity of various pastoral concerns in the New Testament

⁷ For a good overview on the discussion of offices in the early church as it relates to the Jewish community structure, see Burtchaell, *From Synagogue to Church*. However, the New Testament evidence is not given priority.

⁸ For example, see Ernst Käsemann, "Ministry and Community in the New Testament," *Essays on New Testament Themes* (London: SCM, 1964).

⁹ See Carson, "Unity and Diversity," 71; and Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, 10. One of the bases for observing incongruent earlier and later traditions of leadership is that the Pastoral Epistles were not written by Paul. This is rejected as an unwarranted claim, and the Pastoral Epistles are considered authentic in this work. Even if Pauline authorship of the Pastoral Epistles remained in question, their canonicity is more fundamental to a biblical theology.

¹⁰ Evidence of the development of leadership in the early church may be observed in references to those who are fulfilling elder-like roles but are not named elders (1 Cor 16; 1 Thess 5:12); there were also functioning churches before elders were appointed in them (Acts 14:23; Tit 1:5). The presupposition of this study based on the inspiration of Scripture is that leadership principles from any phase in the process will contribute to an overall theology of leadership that generally applies to elders.

books,¹¹ it is anticipated that the New Testament presents a coherent overall paradigm for church elders' authority. This approach to the New Testament also recognizes its various genres and authorial intentions.¹² Therefore, historical examples of the exercise of elders' authority are synthesized with explicit teaching on elders' authority, with primacy given to didactic material.

Methodology

In order to establish the New Testament teaching on the authority of elders, the primary source material is the New Testament and the methodology is inductive. The first step is to establish the original meaning of each relevant passage according to its context.

Exegetical considerations may include aspects of historical, discourse, literary, semantic, textual, structural, and syntactical analyses. Second, based on the exegesis, historical examples and timeless principles relevant to the authority of elders are identified from each passage. These two steps comprise the majority of this dissertation, chapters two through six. The final step is to synthesize the examples and principles from the selected passages into a theology of the authority of church elders.

The criteria for selecting New Testament passages for consideration are as follows:

¹¹ See Carson, "Unity and Diversity," 84–86.

¹² Some disagree on the purpose of the Pastoral Epistles. Yarnell writes, "Mounce . . . discounts ecclesiology as relatively minor. A once popular but now mostly discredited thesis is that Paul intended to write a manual for church order, an ecclesiastical handbook. Reflecting a modern bias against this ancient hermeneutic, Donald Guthrie asserts, 'It is quite erroneous to regard these Epistles as manuals of church order in the sense in which later manuals were used, for there is an almost complete absence of instruction on administration, civil relationship or conduct of worship.' Although this statement is a timely warning against some of the grosser ecclesiologies put forward in church history, such statements can be patently misleading. The Pastorals most certainly are concerned with instruction, administration, conduct, relationships, and worship. This is especially evident in the epistolary formula explaining Paul's purpose for writing his first letter to Timothy." Malcolm B. Yarnell, "*Oikos Theou*: A Theologically Neglected but Important Ecclesiological Metaphor," *Midwestern Journal of Theology* 2/1 (Fall 2003): 56–57.

(1) Passages are included that make reference to elders in the Christian community. The terms in the New Testament that are commonly considered references to church elders¹³ include πρεσβύτερος (elder), πρεσβυτέριον (counsel of elders), ἐπίσκοπος¹⁴ (overseer), and ποιμήν (shepherd/pastor).¹⁵ The occurrences of πρεσβύτερος considered here are limited to those listed under meaning 2b in Bauer’s *Greek-English Lexicon*, “an official . . . among the Christians.”¹⁶ All of these are included in this study, except for John’s references to himself (2 John 1; 3 John 1)¹⁷ and those in Revelation that mention the twenty-four elders around the throne of God.¹⁸ All occurrences of ἐπίσκοπος are included, except for 1 Pet 2:25 in which it refers to Christ. The use of ποιμήν is only

¹³ The term elder is chosen here as the dominant, representative term for this church leadership position. One in this position may also be called “overseer” or “pastor.”

¹⁴ Two words related to ἐπίσκοπος are relevant, ἐπισκοπή (supervision) and ἐπισκοπέω (oversee). The uses of these words significant to this study appear in 1 Tim 3:1 and 1 Pet 5:2. Since these passages are already included for consideration based on their use of ἐπίσκοπος and πρεσβύτερος respectively, ἐπισκοπή and ἐπισκοπέω do not expand the passage selection.

¹⁵ See Daniel L. Akin, “The Single-Elder-Led Church: The Bible’s Witness to a Congregational Single-Elder-Led Polity,” in *Perspectives on Church Government: Five Views of Church Polity* (ed. Chad Owen Brand and R. Stanton Norman; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2004), 43; L. Coenen, “Bishop, Presbyter, Elder,” in *NIDNTT* (4 vols.; ed. Colin Brown; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 1:188; Norman Geisler, *Systematic Theology* (4 vols.; Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2005), 4:111–12; Gene A. Getz, *Elders and Leaders: God’s Plan for Leading the Church: A Biblical, Historical, and Cultural Perspective* (Chicago: Moody, 2003), 185–86; Hammett, *Biblical Foundations*, 161–62; Lightfoot, “Christian Ministry,” 193; Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 161; Paige Patterson, “Single-Elder Congregationalism,” in *Who Runs the Church? 4 Views on Church Government* (ed. Peter Toon and Steven B. Cowan; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 142–43; Robert L. Reymond, “The Presbytery-Led Church: Presbyterian Church Government,” in *Perspectives on Church Government*, 91–92; Alexander Strauch, *Biblical Eldership: An Urgent Call to Restore Biblical Church Leadership* (Colorado Spring: Lewis and Roth, 1995), 31–32; Roy L. Taylor, “Presbyterianism,” in *Who Runs the Church*, 84–85; James R. White, “The Plural-Elder-Led Church: Sufficient as Established—The Plurality of Elders as Christ’s Ordained Means of Church Governance,” in *Perspectives on Church Government*, 269–70.

¹⁶ This selection excludes references to an older person or time or an official among the Jews. See BDAG, 862.

¹⁷ John’s unclear use of this term, his apostolic position, and lack of any other information about elders in these passages make them unhelpful for the question of elders’ authority. Bauer writes, “Just how we are to understand the words ὁ πρεσβύτερος, applied to himself by the author of the two smallest Johannine letters 2J 1; 3 J1, remains in doubt.” BDAG, 862.

¹⁸ The scope of this study is limited to the earthly church of this age.

relevant when used figuratively to refer to a human church leader.¹⁹ Based on this criterion, the following passages are included: Acts 11:27–30; 14:23; 15:1–35; 16:4; 20:17–35; 21:17–26; Eph 4:11–16; Phil 1:1; 1 Tim 3:1–7; 4:14; 5:17–25; Titus 1:5–9; Jas 5:13–18; and 1 Pet 5:1–5.

(2) Passages are included that contain concepts of human authority within the Christian community. Such passages are identified based on selected semantic domains from J. P. Louw and E. A. Nida’s *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*. In volume two, under the concepts listed in the English index, the sub-domains and words that may be used to express each idea are designated. The English index includes the words “authority,” “authority to judge,” “authorize,” “right (authority),” and “sphere of authority.” All terms listed under these concepts were explored in order to identify passages that contain ideas of authority within the church. In addition, all the terms from the sub-domain “D. Rule, Govern” were considered.

Louw and Nida’s lexicon does not list under each term all the New Testament occurrences relevant to the sub-domain. Therefore, each term was looked up in Bauer’s *Greek-English Lexicon* and all occurrences under all relevant meanings were considered.²⁰ Many of the words related to authority are never used in the New Testament with reference to human authority in the Christian community.²¹ The words

¹⁹ See BDAG, 843.

²⁰ For example, ἡγέομαι may be defined in two ways: “to be in a supervisory capacity, *lead, guide*,” or “to engage in an intellectual process, *think, consider, regard*.” BDAG, 434. Only the verses listed under the first meaning were considered. In many cases, all the occurrences of a word were considered.

²¹ They are: ἀναδείκνυμι, ἀνθύπατος, ἀρχή, Ἀσιάρχης, βασιλεύς, βασιλεύω, βασιλικός, βασίλισσα, δεσπότης, διατίθεμαι βασιλείαν, δυνάστης, ἐθνάρχης, ἐπιτροπή, ἐξουσιαστικός, ἐπὶ τῆς Μωϋσέως καθέδρας καθίζω, ἐπίτροπος, εὐνοῦχος, θρόνος, ἡγεμονία, ἡγεμονεύω, ἡγεμών, Καῖσαρ, Κανδάκη, κοσμοκράτωρ, κρίμα, κρίσις, κτίσις, κύριος (used only of Christ in the church), κυριότης,

from these semantic domains used to describe authority within the church are ἀυθεντέω,²² δέω, ἔξουσία, ἡγέομαι, κρίνω, λύω, οἰκονόμος, and ποιμαίνω. Some terms of authority are used in contrast with authority in the Christian community: ἄρχω, ἄρχων, ἔξουσιάζω, κατακυριεύω, κατεξουσιάζω, and κυριεύω. Six terms are used to refer to human authority in the church but are not included in this study: βρόχον ἐπιβάλλω, ἐπιταγή, πρεσβεύω, γραμματεύς, and δύναμις. The passages containing γραμματεύς²³ and δύναμις²⁴ are not directly relevant to the authority of church elders. Passages describing human authority in the church using the terms βρόχον ἐπιβάλλω, ἐπιταγή and πρεσβεύω, as well as ἔξουσία and οἰκονόμος, describe the authority of apostles.²⁵

In order to establish what type of authority church elders have, it is also necessary to identify other forms of authority in the church. For this reason, the criteria for passage selection includes any form of authority, leadership, or decision-making in the church.

λαμβάνω βασιλείαν, πολιτάρχης, πράκτωρ, πρεσβεία, προκυρώ, ράβδοϋχος, ὁ Σεβαστός, σεβαστός, στρατηγός, συμβασιλεύω, τετράρχης, τετρααρχέω.

²² The term ἀυθεντέω is listed under sub-domain “A. Control, Restrain” in domain “37. Control, Rule.” This sub-domain was not mentioned anywhere under concepts of authority in the English index. See Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 1:473. This sub-domain was explored, and there are no other words in it used to describe authority in the Christian community. However, ἀυθεντέω appears in 1 Tim 2:12, in which ὑποταγή also appears and is relevant to the authority of elders. Bauer describes ἀυθεντέω, “to assume a stance of independent authority, *give orders to, dictate to.*” BDAG, 150. It is possible that ἀυθεντέω would more accurately be placed under sub-domains “C. Exercise Authority,” or “D. Rule, Govern.”

²³ In Matt 13:51–52, γραμματεύς (expert in the Law) refers to a person trained for the kingdom of heaven and therefore could be applicable to the Christian community. However, this vague reference, with no mention of elders, would have only indirect relevance to elders’ teaching authority.

²⁴ Louw and Nida include δύναμις in sub-domain “D. Rule, Govern” in the sense of “one who has power to rule.” Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 1:478. Bauer’s closest definition is “an entity or being, whether human or transcendent, that functions in a remarkable manner, *power*” and includes the example referenced in Louw and Nida’s *Lexicon*, Rom 8:38. BDAG, 263. There are no uses of this term in this sense with reference to human authority within the church.

²⁵ From this semantic field, the following words and passages describe apostolic authority: οἰκονόμος: 1 Cor 4:1; ἔξουσία: 1 Cor 11:2–16; 2 Cor 10:8; 13:10; ἐπιταγή: 1 Cor 7:6, 25; 2 Cor 8:8; Titus 2:15; and πρεσβεύω: 2 Cor 5:20; Eph 6:20.

Based on these criteria, many passages qualify that involve the authority of apostles or apostolic delegates. A study on apostolic authority requires a broader semantic range for passage selection and is a considerable topic by itself. Furthermore, since the purpose of this study is primarily theological, then only forms of authority that continue in the local church today are relevant for establishing a theology of church elders. While it is possible that some may still minister in the church with a gifting of “apostle” (Eph 4:11), the apostolic authority of the eye-witnesses of Christ, which functioned as a foundation for the church (Eph 2:20; 3:3),²⁶ necessarily ceased with the death of the eye-witnesses. The New Testament does not establish an ongoing office of apostle to which people are appointed and with which comes particular responsibilities. For these reasons, apostolic authority is not considered in this work.²⁷

The exploration of the semantic field used in this criterion reconfirmed the relevance of four passages already selected from the first criterion: Acts 15:1–35; 20:17–35; Titus 1:5–16;²⁸ and 1 Pet 5:1–5. It also added seven other passages: Matt 16:13–20; 18:15–20; 20:20–28; Mark 10:35–45; Luke 22:24–27; 1 Tim 2:8–15; and Heb 13:7, 17, 24.

(3) Passages are included that contain concepts of human leadership within the Christian community. The importance of leadership as a line of investigation is confirmed by the fact that two key words in domains “37. Control, Rule,” ἡγέομαι and

²⁶ See Markus Barth, *Ephesians* (2 vols.; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1974), 2:437.

²⁷ Included in apostolic leadership is that of Timothy and Titus, who did not appear to be elders but were sent with Paul’s authority to stabilize new churches, including appointment of elders.

²⁸ Based on the appearance of ἀνυπότακτος in Titus 1:6 and 10, Titus 1:5–9 is expanded to v. 16.

ποιμαίνω, also appear in domain “36. Guide, Discipline, Follow.”²⁹ The research for this criterion is based on all the terms listed in domain “36. Guide, Discipline, Follow.”³⁰ Many words from this group are not used to refer to human leadership in the church³¹ or are used to describe apostolic leadership.³² The words from this domain used to describe leadership in the church are ἀκούω, ἀνυπότακτος, κυβέρνησις, ὀπίσω, παρακούω, πατήρ, πείθομαι, προίστημι, στῦλος, ὑπείκω, ὑποταγή, ὑποτάσσω, and φυλάσσω. The exploration of this semantic field reconfirmed the relevance of seven passages already selected from the first two criteria: Matt 18:15–20; Acts 16:4; 20:28–35; 1 Tim 2:8–15; 3:1–7; Titus 1:5–16; and Heb 13:17. It also added four other passages: Matt 23:8–12; 1 Cor 14:26–35; 16:15–16; and 1 Thess 5:12–13.

(4) Passages are included that contain concepts of decision making within the Christian community. The research for this criterion is based on the terms listed in four sub-domains from domain “30. Think:” “D. To Intend, To Purpose, To Plan,” “E. To Decide, To Conclude,” “F. To Choose, To Select, To Prefer,” and “G. To Distinguish, To Evaluate, To Judge.” Many words from these sub-domains do not describe decision-

²⁹ Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 1:464, 465.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Words from sub-domain “36. Guide, Discipline, Follow” that do not refer to leadership in the church include: ἄγω, ἀκολουθέω, ἀναπληρώω, ἀπειθεια, ἀπειθέω, ἀπειθής, ἀπέρχομαι εἰς τὰ ὀπίσω, ἀποπληρώω, ἀρχηγός, ἀρνέομαι, γυμνάζω, δικαιοῦ, δογματίζομαι, εἰσακούω, ἐξακολουθέω, εὐλαβέομαι, κατευθύνω, μαθητεύω (in Matt 13:52, which was excluded above), μαθητής, μαθήτρια, ὀδηγός, παραβαίνω, παράβασις, παραβάτης, παραιτέομαι, παρανομέω, παρέρχομαι, παρακολουθέω, πειθαρχέω, προάγω, πρόδρομος, συμμαθητής, τελέω, τηρέω, τήρησις, υἱός, φέρω, ὑπήκοος.

³² From domain “36. Guide, Discipline, Follow,” the following words and passages describe apostolic leadership: ἐπιδέχομαι: 3 John 9; παιδεύω: 1 Tim 1:20; 2 Tim 2:25; στῦλος: Gal 2:9; τέκνον: 1 Cor 4:14, 17; Gal 4:19; 1 Tim 1:2, 18; 2 Tim 1:2; 2:1; Titus 1:4; Phlm 10; ὑπακοή: 2 Cor 7:15; Phlm 21; ὑπακούω: 2 Thess 3:14.

making in the Christian community.³³ The words that are used to describe decision-making in the church are ἀξιόω, γνώμη, διακρίνω, ἐκλέγομαι, ἐκουσίως, ἐπισκέπτομαι, εὐδοκέω, ἴσθημι,³⁴ κρίνω, ὀρίζω, προαιρέομαι, πρόκριμα, and χειροτονέω. The exploration of this semantic field reconfirmed the relevance of seven passages already selected from the first three criteria: Acts 11:27–30; 14:23; 15; 16:4; 21:17–26; 1 Cor 14:26–35; 1 Tim 5:17–25; and 1 Pet 5:2. It also introduced five new passages: Acts 6:1–6; 1 Cor 5; 6:1–8; 2 Cor 8:19; and 2 Cor 9:7.

Listed below are the primary passages included for research in this dissertation based on the four criteria. Following each passage are the words that appear in it from the selected semantic fields.

1. Matt 16:13–20, δέω
2. Matt 18:15–20, ἀκούω, δέω, παρακούω
3. Matt 20:25–28, ἄρχων, κατακυριεύω, κατεξουσιάζω
4. Matt 23:8–12, πατήρ
5. Mark 10:42–45, ἄρχω, κατακυριεύω, κατεξουσιάζω
6. Luke 22:24–27, ἐξουσιάζω, ἡγέομαι, κυριεύω
7. Acts 6:1–6, ἐκλέγομαι, ἐπισκέπτομαι
8. Acts 11:27–30, ὀρίζω, πρεσβύτερος
9. Acts 14:23, πρεσβύτερος, χειροτονέω
10. Acts 15:1–35; 16:4, ἐκλέγομαι, ἡγέομαι, κρίνω, πρεσβύτερος, φυλάσσω
11. Acts 20:17, 28–35, ἐπίσκοπος, ὀπίσω, ποιμαίνω, πρεσβύτερος

³³ Words from these sub-domains that do not refer to decision-making in the church are ἀδήλωσ, αἰρέομαι, αἰρετίζω, ἀνακρίνω, ἀποδιορίζω, ἀποδοκιμάζω, αὐτοκατάκριτος, βλέπω εἰς πρόσωπον, βουλευομαι, βουλή, βούλημα, βούλομαι, γίνομαι γνώμης, διάκρισις, δοκέω, δοκιμάζω, δόκιμος, ἐκλεκτός, ἐκλογή, ἐνεδρεύω, ἔννοια, ἐξαιρέομαι, ἐπιβουλή, ἐπικρίνω, ἐπιλέγομαι, ἐπιλύω, ἐπίνοια, ἐφευρετής, θέλημα, θέλω, καταβραβεύω, καταγινώσκω, καταφέρω ψῆφον, κληρώ, κρίμα, κρίσις, λαγχάνω, λαμβάνω, μελετάω, ὁ κληρος πίπτει ἐπί τινα οἰκονομία, ὀρμη γίνομαι, προβλέπομαι, προγινώσκω, πρόθεσις, προμελετάω, προορίζω, προτίθεμαι, προχειρίζομαι, προχειροτονέω, στηρίζω τὸ πρόσωπον, συμβιβάζω, συμβουλευομαι, συνεκλεκτός, συνωμοσία, συστροφή, τακτός, τίθημι ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ, τίθεμαι ἐν τῷ πνεύματι.

³⁴ Under the relevant meanings in Bauer's lexicon, the only passage that uses this term to refer to human authority in the Christian community is Acts 1:23. This passage potentially indicates the activity of all the believers participating in the selection of apostolic leadership. However, the lack of a reference to elders, the apostolic nature of the leadership, and the unique stage in the development of the early church diminishes its clear contribution to a study on the authority of elders.

12. Acts 21:17–26, κρίνω, πρεσβύτερος
13. 1 Cor 5:1–13, κρίνω
14. 1 Cor 6:1–8, διακρίνω, κρίνω
15. 1 Cor 14:26–35, διακρίνω, ὑποτάσσω
16. 1 Cor 16:15–16, ὑποτάσσω
17. 2 Cor 8:19, χειροτονέω
18. 2 Cor 9:7, προαιρέομαι
19. Eph 4:11–16, ποιμήν
20. Phil 1:1, ἐπίσκοπος
21. 1 Thess 5:12–13, προϊστημι
22. 1 Tim 2:8–15, ἀθθεντέω, ὑποταγή
23. 1 Tim 3:1–7, ἐπισκοπή, ἐπίσκοπος, προϊστημι, ὑποταγή
24. 1 Tim 4:14, πρεσβυτέριον
25. 1 Tim 5:17–25, ἀξιόω, πρεσβύτερος, προϊστημι, πρόκριμα
26. Titus 1:5–16, ἀνυπότακτος, ἐπίσκοπος, οἰκονόμος, πρεσβύτερος
27. Heb 13:7, 17, 24, ἡγέομαι, πείθομαι, ὑπείκω
28. James 5:13–18, πρεσβύτερος
29. 1 Pet 5:1–5, ἔκουσίως, ἐπισκοπέω, κατακυριεύω, ποιμαίνω, πρεσβύτερος, ὑποτάσσω

The Semantics of Authority

Since the English word authority has several possible meanings,³⁵ it is important to establish a clear definition of authority and how it will be used in this work.³⁶ One helpful way to understand authority is to see its use as falling into one of two categories reflecting its nature. These two categories may be called authority *de jure* and authority

³⁵ According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, authority can mean: I. Power to enforce obedience; 1 (a) Power or right to enforce obedience; moral or legal supremacy; the right to command, or give an ultimate decision; (b) *in authority*: in a position of power; in possession of power over others; 2 (a) Derived or delegated power; conferred right or title; authorization; (b) with *inf.* conferred right *to do* something; 3 Those in authority; the body or persons exercising power or command; II. Power to influence action, opinion, belief; 4 Power to influence the conduct and actions of others; personal or practical influence; 5 Power over, or title to influence, the opinions of others; authoritative opinion; weight of judgment or opinion, intellectual influence; 6 Power to inspire belief, title to be believed; 7 The quotation or book acknowledged; 8 The person whose opinion or testimony is accepted. See J. A. Simpson and E. S. C. Weiner, eds., *The Oxford English Dictionary* (2d ed., Vol. 1; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 798.

³⁶ “A study of what the sociological literature has to say on concepts such as ‘power,’ ‘authority,’ ‘violence,’ ‘legitimacy,’ etc. shows that there is no uniform nomenclature. It seems necessary for every author working in this field to make his own definitions, or at least inform the reader of which definitions will be used.” Bengt Holmberg, *Paul and Power: The Structure of Authority in the Primitive Church as Reflected in the Pauline Epistles* (Lund: LiberLäromedel/Gleerup, 1978), 125.

de facto.³⁷ Authority *de jure* is authority “of right, by right, according to law,”³⁸ while authority *de facto* is authority “in fact, in reality, in actual existence, force, or possession, as a matter of fact.”³⁹ These categories make a distinction between the authority a person may have by right, office, or law and a person’s authority of actual power or influence.⁴⁰

Other important distinctions may be made in the use of the word “authority” within these two categories. Authority *de jure* may, but does not always, relate to a position or office.⁴¹ Authority *de jure* also may, but does not always, include the right to govern or control.⁴² The authority to govern is usually related to a position. Therefore, authority *de jure* could refer to a person who has the right to take a specific, authorized action, but not govern or control.⁴³ Another distinction is that authority *de facto* manifests

³⁷ For the use of these categories, see Donald James Brash, *Pastoral Authority in the Churches of the First and Second Centuries* (Ph.D. Dissertation: Drew University, 1987), 38; Bill Patterson, *Christ-centered Servant-team Leadership* (Bloomington, Ind.: AuthorHouse, 2006), 53; and Thomas P. Rausch, *Authority and Leadership in the Church: Past Directions and Future Possibilities* (Wilmington, Del.: Michael Glazier, 1989), 38–39.

³⁸ Simpson and Weiner, *Oxford*, 2:280.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Scholars recognize this distinction in the dynamics of leadership, even if they do not use the terms *de jure* and *de facto*. See Walter L. Liefeld, “Leadership and Authority in the Church,” in *In God’s Community* (London: Pickering & Inglis, 1978), 29–30; and David A. Steele, *Images of Leadership and Authority for the Church: Biblical Principles and Secular Models* (New York: University Press of America, 1986), xv.

⁴¹ As in “*in authority*: in a position of power.” Simpson and Weiner, *Oxford*, 1:798.

⁴² As in “power or right to enforce obedience; moral or legal supremacy; the right to command, or give an ultimate decision.” Ibid.

⁴³ As in “conferred right *to do* something.” Ibid.

itself by either personal influence based on earned respect⁴⁴ or the power to enforce obedience.⁴⁵

A further distinction can be made between authority and power. Generally, the use of force without delegated or legal right is not considered “authority,” but only a form of power.⁴⁶ Based on these semantic distinctions, it is possible to have authority *de jure* without authority *de facto*. It is also possible to have authority *de facto* of personal influence without authority *de jure*.

Thesis

The thesis of this work, based on the following exegetical and theological investigations, is that a body of elders has authority to care for a local congregation primarily through leadership and teaching. This thesis may also be explained more explicitly using the semantic distinctions made above. (1) Elders have authority *de jure* in that they hold a particular position that carries with it certain rights (which may be better described as responsibilities). (2) Among the responsibilities of elders is leadership, but not

⁴⁴ As in “II. Power to influence action, opinion, belief. . . . 4. Power to influence the conduct and actions of others; personal or practical influence. . . . 5. Power over, or title to influence, the opinions of others; authoritative opinion; weight of judgment or opinion, intellectual influence. . . . 6. Power to inspire belief, title to be believed.” Ibid.

⁴⁵ As in “Power . . . to enforce obedience.” Ibid. In their work, *Authority*, Gunneweg and Schmithals make this distinction as foundational to their overall thesis. They quote Augustus and explain, “‘After that time I stood before all others in dignity, but of actual power I possessed no more than my colleagues in each several magistracy.’ Thus Augustus makes a distinction, characteristic of Roman thought in general, between *potestas* (power of office) and *auctoritas* (authority, dignity). *Potestas* involves the constitutional, legally regulated power of office, held by the official, who perceives his rights of authority as legally authorized and limited. *Auctoritas*, on the other hand, is not bestowed but won—with or without *potestas*.” Antonius Gunneweg and Walter Schmithals, *Authority* (trans. John E. Steely; Nashville: Abingdon, 1982), 17. For this distinction, see also Holmberg, *Paul and Power*, 130–35.

⁴⁶ Bernard Ramm writes, “Authority and force are not always united. A rightful heir may be unable to gain the throne. . . . It is obvious that a man may exert force without authority (for example, a criminal).” Bernard Ramm, *The Pattern of Religious Authority* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), 18. See also Rausch, *Authority and Leadership*, 38.

government or control, in the sense of authority to make decisions for the church.⁴⁷ (3) Elders do not have authority *de facto* in the sense of power to enforce their will upon the church.⁴⁸ (4) The elders of the church should have authority *de facto* of personal influence based on respect that is earned in accordance with the character, skill, and knowledge prescribed in Scripture for elders (1 Tim 3:1–7 ;Titus 1:5–9), without which their authority *de jure* is made void.⁴⁹ (5) Elders are to lead as a group by consensus, without a lead elder who has more decision making power among the elders.⁵⁰

Recent Research

While many works have been produced that discuss authority, leadership, and government in the church,⁵¹ fewer specifically address the authority of church elders.

⁴⁷ J. W. Kleinig argues for a similar understanding: “In sum: the apostolic teaching on subordination does not establish a chain of command for the exercise of power by those who sit at the top; it promotes a chain of transmission from the triune God for the delivery of blessings through his appointed agents in the church and in the world.” J. W. Kleinig, “Ordered Community: Order and Subordination in the New Testament,” *Lutheran Theological Journal* 39/2–3 (2005): 209.

⁴⁸ The elders’ lack of power would automatically follow if it is established that elders do not have authority to govern. This is based on the contention that the use of power without the right to govern is not legitimate authority.

⁴⁹ See Brash, *Pastoral Authority*, 211.

⁵⁰ It is important here to distinguish between decision-making power of the elders corporately in the church, and decision-making power among the elders as they decide how to lead. In addition, the denial of a lead elder does not exclude the fact that some elders may have more functional influence among the elders or be highly regarded in certain matters based on expertise and gifting. Mark Dever writes, “Though formal authority between elders in a church is equal, there will always be those who garner special regard in one area or another.” Mark Dever, *By Whose Authority? Elders in Baptist Life* (Washington, DC: 9Marks, 2006), 38.

⁵¹ Some important and helpful books published in the nineteenth to the twenty-first centuries on authority, leadership, and government in the church include Mal Couch, *A Biblical Theology of the Church* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1999); Giles, *Patterns of Ministry*; Gunneweg and Schmithals, *Authority*; Charles Hodge, *Discussions in Church Polity* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1878); Clyde Holdke and Lawrence O. Richards, *A Theology of Church Leadership* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980); Holmberg, *Paul and Power*; F. J. A. Hort, *The Christian Ecclesia* (London: Macmillan, 1914); Hans Küng, *The Church* (trans. Ray and Rosaleen Ockenden; New York: Sheed and Ward, 1967) and *Why Priests?* (trans. Robert C. Collins; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1972); John L. McKenzie, *Authority in the Church* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1965); Thomas Oden, *Pastoral Theology* (San Francisco: Harper, 1983); Ramm, *Religious Authority*; and Steele, *Images of Leadership*.

Numerous books attempt to trace the historical development of the authority of elders, including considerations of Jewish elders and later ecclesiastical development.⁵² The unique focus of this investigation of church elders' authority is its biblical and theological nature. There are many volumes written on church elders with the intention of developing a theological understanding of the ministry of elders, including discussions of their authority.⁵³ While these works are biblical in the sense that they interact with relevant passages, they are not exegetical in that they do not do so inductively or systematically.

Four recent publications that attempt to deal systematically with passages relevant to elders are *Elders and Leaders: God's Plan for Leading the Church: A Biblical, Historical, and Cultural Perspective* by Gene A. Getz, *40 Questions About Elders and Deacons* by Benjamin L. Merkle, *Elders in Congregational Life: Rediscovering the*

⁵² Publications on the historical development of church elders' authority include Octavian Bârlea, *Die Weihe der Bischöfe, Presbyter und Diakone in vornicänischer Zeit* (Monachii: Societas Academica Dacoromana, 1969); Bartlet, *Church-life and Church-order*; Burtchaell, *From Synagogue to Church*; Campbell, *The Elders*; Hatch, *The Organization*; Lindsay, *The Church and the Ministry*; Streeter, *The Primitive Church*; and Volz, *Pastoral Life*.

⁵³ Some theological works of the last three centuries that include discussions on church elders' authority include Phyllis B. Anderson, *Power and Ministry: A Theological Investigation of the Relationship Between Authority and Servanthood in Pastoral Ministry in View of the Ordination of Women* (Ph. D. Thesis; Aquinas Institute of Theology, 1984); N. W. Campbell, *The Twins: Or, Conversations on the Importance of the Office of the Ruling Elder; Its Scriptural Authority, Qualifications, and Duties* (Philadelphia: William S. Martien, 1854); Brand and Norman, eds., *Perspectives on Church Government*; Ulrich Brockhaus, *Charisma und Amt* (Wuppertal: Theologischer Verlag Brockhaus, 1972); Hans von Campenhausen, *Ecclesiastical Authority and Spiritual Power in the Church of the First Two Centuries* (trans. J. A. Baker; Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University, 1969); Edmund P. Clowney, *The Church* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1995); Larry Kreider, *The Biblical Role of Elders for Today's Church: New Testament Leadership Principles for Equipping Elders* (Ephrata, Penn.: House to House Publications, 2004); Gerald P. Cowen, *Who Rules the Church? Examining Congregational Leadership and Church Government* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2003); Dever, *By Whose Authority*; Getz, *Elders and Leaders*; Stanley J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994); Hammett, *Biblical Foundations*; A. von Harnack, *The Constitution and Law of the Church in the First Two Centuries* (ed. H. D. A. Major; trans. F. L. Pogson; New York: Putnam, 1910); Bill Patterson, *Christ-centered Servant-team Leadership*; P. G. Rea, *Presbyterian Polity: The Authority, Qualifications, and Powers of Ruling Elders and Deacons in the Presbyterian System* (Nashville: Cumberland Presbyterian, 1885); Dale Rosenberger, *Who Are You to Say? Establishing Pastoral Authority in Matters of Faith* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2005); Rudolph Sohm, *Kirchenrecht* (2 vols.; Leipzig: Dunker and Humblot, 1892); Eduard Schweizer, *Church Order in the New Testament* (Studies in Biblical Theology 32; London: S. C. M., 1959); and Toon and Cowan, eds., *Who Runs the Church?*

Biblical Model for Church Leadership by Phil A. Newton, and *Biblical Eldership: An Urgent Call to Restore Biblical Church Leadership* by Alexander Strauch. These books differ from the present study in that they do not focus exclusively on elders' authority. Therefore, the passage selection and depth of research is not sufficient for developing a New Testament theology of elders' authority. In *The Elder and Overseer: One Office in the Early Church*, Benjamin Merkle includes systematic, inductive consideration of relevant passages. However, since his objective is to establish that the terms overseer and elder refer to a single position in the church that constitutes an office, he only focuses on elders' authority *de jure* of office.

The monograph that comes closest to the present work is a Ph.D. dissertation from Drew University written by Donald Brash entitled *Pastoral Authority in the Churches of the First and Second Centuries*. The present study differs from Brash's in several significant ways. Brash's dissertation is a biblical and historical investigation. He gives equal space to non-biblical primary sources and to Scripture. This limits the depth of consideration and focus on the Scripture. More significant is the fact that he appears to view Scripture and non-biblical historical sources as equal in value for establishing a pattern for the authority of elders in the church. Most importantly, his use of the word authority and his conclusions differ significantly from the thesis of this dissertation. While Brash's subject is the same, the focus of his source material, hermeneutic, methodology, and conclusions are different.

According to a search of relevant literature, no single work is exclusively devoted to the New Testament theology of the authority of elders in the church.⁵⁴ In addition, it is

⁵⁴ Two publications have a similar title or subject: Roy Deaver, *The Authority of Elders* (Dallas: Christian Publishing Company, 1984); and Thomas B. Warren, *Duties and Authority of Elders* (Jonesboro,

notable that many significant works on elders either scarcely address their authority at all, lack clarity in the use of the term authority, or assume a particular definition of authority without explanation or justification.⁵⁵

Ark: National Christian Press, 1969). However, these are essays in booklet format or sermon outlines in a bound notebook. While addressing the same subject, these works are not attempting to construct a New Testament theology.

⁵⁵ Bill Patterson explains that one of the reasons he believes another book on leadership is needed is the common failure of studies on leadership to define authority. Patterson, *Christ-centered Servant-team Leadership*, xiv. For examples of all three of these concerns, see D. A. Carson, "Church, Authority in," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (ed. Walter A. Elwell; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 228–31; Cowen, *Who Rules the Church*; Getz, *Elders and Leaders*; Kreider, *The Biblical Role of Elders for Today's Church*; Merkle, *The Elder and Overseer and 40 Questions About Elders and Deacons* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2008); Phil A. Newton, *Elders in Congregational Life: Rediscovering the Biblical Model for Church Leadership* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2005); Patterson, "Single-Elder Congregationalism"; Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*; Taylor, "Presbyterianism"; and Samuel E. Waldron, "Plural-Elder Congregationalism," in *Who Runs the Church?*.

CHAPTER 2

THE AUTHORITY OF ELDERS IN THE GOSPELS

According to the criteria for passage selection described in chapter one, six in the Gospels may contribute to an understanding of the authority of church elders. These passages are Matt 16:13–20; 18:15–20; 20:25–28; 23:8–12; Mark 10:35–45; and Luke 22:24–27. This chapter presents a discussion of the exegetical issues in each passage that are relevant to the authority of church elders. Several of these passages are explored together because of significant parallels. Matthew 16:13–20 and 18:15–20 both contain the binding and loosing promise and are investigated together. The parallels in Matt 20:25–28, Mark 10:35–45, and Luke 22:24–27 are also examined together. They all record Jesus’ teaching on servant leadership among the disciples in contrast to leadership among the Gentiles.

Matthew 16:13–20; 18:15–20

The subject of church elders is not directly addressed in Matt 16:13–20 or 18:15–20, but both texts contribute to an understanding of authority in the Christian community. These passages are connected in two ways: they are the only two passages in the Gospels in which the term ἐκκλησία appears (16:18; 18:17),¹ and they both include the promise that whatever is bound on earth will be bound in heaven and whatever is loosed on earth will be loosed in heaven (16:19; 18:18). The use of ἐκκλησία establishes the context of the

¹ D. A. Hagner, *Matthew 14–28* (WBC 33B; Dallas: Word, 1995), 471.

Christian community for the investigation of authority.² The binding and loosing promise is an important part of both passages and contains two words from the selected semantic domains, δέω (to bind) and λύω (to loose). Louw and Nida place them in semantic domain “37. Control, Rule” and sub-domain “C. Exercise Authority” with the figurative sense of prohibiting (δέω) and allowing (λύω).³

There are several other indicators, along with the binding and loosing promise,⁴ that these passages deal with authority in the church. Although no additional words in Matt 16:13–20 are found in the selected semantic domains, another major expression of the concept of authority is its reference to “the keys of the kingdom of heaven” (τὰς κλεῖδας τῆς βασιλείας τῶν οὐρανῶν).⁵ This passage’s contribution to the nature of

² Most commentators understand ἐκκλησία to be the Christian community, with special reference to the local congregation in Matt 18:17. See Willoughby C. Allen, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Matthew* (ICC; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1912), 176; Alexander B. Bruce, *The Synoptic Gospels* (vol. 1 of The Expositor’s Greek Testament; ed. W. Robertson Nicoll; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 240; W. D. Davies and D. C. Allison, Jr., *The Gospel According to St. Matthew, 8–18* (ICC; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1991), 784; R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 691; and Hagner, *Matthew*, 471, 531.

³ J. P. Louw and E. A. Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (2d ed.; New York: United Bible Societies, 1989), 1:476. It appears that Louw and Nida’s placement of these words in this domain is based only on its use in these passages. They add this comment, “There are a number of different interpretations of the implication of this statement in Mt 16:19, and translators should carefully review this passage in various commentaries.” Ibid.

⁴ With reference to the promise, R. H. Hiers writes, “The term *exousia* does not appear in Matthew 16 or 18, but these chapters unquestionably report that Jesus authorized or empowered his disciples to do *something*.” R. H. Hiers, “‘Binding and Loosing’: The Matthean Authorization,” *JBL* 104 (1985): 240.

⁵ The following writers see the giving of the keys and this promise as a granting of authority: Allen, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 177; Pierre Bonnard, *L’Évangile selon Saint Matthieu* (Neuchâtel: Delachaux & Niestlé, 1970), 246; Bruce, *Synoptic Gospels*, 240; Davies and Allison, *The Gospel*, 635; J. D. M. Derrett, “Binding and Loosing (Matt 16:19; 18:18; John 29[sic]:23),” *JBL* 102 (1983): 112–17; France, *Matthew*, 625–26; Hagner, *Matthew*, 472; John S. Hammett, *Biblical Foundations for Baptist Churches: A Contemporary Ecclesiology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2005), 106; C. S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 429, 454; J. Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 677; S. E. Porter, “Vague Verbs, Periphrastics, and Matt 16:19,” *FilNeos* 1 (1988): 157; Mark Allan Powell, “Binding and Loosing: Asserting the Moral Authority of Scripture in Light of a Matthean Paradigm,” *Ex Auditu* 19 (2003): 83; and Michael J. Wilkins, *Matthew*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 620.

church leadership and authority has been the subject of great controversy throughout church history.⁶ The closely related terms ἀκούω and παρακούω from semantic domain “36. Guide, Discipline, Follow” and sub-domain “C. Obey, Disobey” appear in Matt 18:15–20.⁷ The issue of “church discipline” presented in this passage is significant for discussing authority in the church because it raises the question of who has the authority to remove members from the community.

Contexts and Exegetical Questions

Matthew 16:13–20 functions in the Gospel of Matthew as a climactic turning point. It is a geographical turning point because Jesus turned to the south and a theological climax as his disciples came to recognize Jesus as the Messiah.⁸ This passage records an interchange between Jesus and his disciples. When Jesus asked his disciples about his identity (v. 13), Peter correctly identified him as the Christ, the Son of the living God (v. 16). Jesus then spoke directly to Peter, declaring that the Father had revealed this to him, that Jesus would build his church on “this rock,” that the gates of hell would not prevail against the church, that he would give him the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and that whatever he bound or loosed on earth would be bound or loosed in heaven (vv. 17–19).

The keys and the promise in Matt 16:19 express concepts of authority.⁹ Exegetical questions that are relevant to understanding authority in the church, and thus the authority of church elders, are, “What authority or power is being granted here?” “To whom is

⁶ See Davies and Allison, *The Gospel*, 623; and Hagner, *Matthew*, 469.

⁷ Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 1:466, 468.

⁸ See Blomberg, *Matthew*, 49, 226; France, *Matthew*, 612; and Nolland, *Matthew*, 657.

⁹ See Hiers, “Binding and Loosing,” 240.

authority being granted?” “Does anyone hold this authority in the church today?” and “If so, how does that authority relate to the authority of elders?”

Matthew 18:15–20 is a part of a larger unit including all of ch. 18.¹⁰ This larger unit is the fourth of the five great discourses in Matthew and focuses on relationships among the disciples.¹¹ Verses 15–20 may be divided into two sections.¹² Verses 15–17 are directed toward the individual with singular verb and noun forms.¹³ Specific, step-by-step instructions are given for how one should respond to the sin of a brother. In vv. 18–20 the verb and noun forms are plural and the instructions do not continue.¹⁴ Instead, broader promises are given to support the instructions just given: the binding and loosing promise and a promise of answered corporate unified prayer.¹⁵ The promise of answered prayer is based on the promise of Jesus’ presence when two or three gather in his name.¹⁶ The general nature of these promises is revealed in their scope: the object of binding and loosing is “whatever” (ὅσα) and the prayers are “about anything” (περὶ παντός πράγματος). These promises also apply to other areas of community life.¹⁷

¹⁰ See Blomberg, *Matthew*, 49; France, *Matthew*, 672; and V. C. Pfitzner, “Purified Community—Purified Sinner: Expulsion from the Community According to Matthew 18:15–18 and 1 Corinthians 5:1–5,” *ABR* 30 (1982): 37.

¹¹ See France, *Matthew*, 672; and Pfitzner, “Purified Community,” 37.

¹² See France, *Matthew*, 694; Davies and Allison, *The Gospel*, 782; and Porter, “Vague Verbs,” 170.

¹³ See France, *Matthew*, 690, 695.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 695.

¹⁵ See Davies and Allison, *The Gospel*, 782; France, *Matthew*, 695; Nolland, *Matthew*, 749; and Porter, “Vague Verbs,” 170.

¹⁶ See France, *Matthew*, 698.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 749.

As with Matt 16, similar exegetical questions may be asked: “What authority or power is being granted here?” “To whom is it being granted?” “How does it relate to the steps given for responding to sin in the community?” and “What kind of authority or power is involved in the exclusion of a brother from the community?”

One of the keys to understanding the meaning of Matt 16:13–20 and 18:15–20 is to understand the meaning of the binding and loosing promise, which is not immediately apparent in either passage.¹⁸ Conversely, a key to understanding the binding and loosing promise is to understand how it fits into both of these contexts. Because of this dynamic and its importance to the question of authority, this promise is the starting point for the present investigation of these passages. When interpreting the promise, it is important to note that Matt 16:13–20 and 18:15–20 present it in two different contexts. This has the following two implications: 1) the promise’s meaning will fit both contexts, and 2) the promise has an independent or more general meaning than either of the contexts provide. The structure of Matt 18:15–20 confirms that it stands alone and may be a principle that supports the particular points of each passage.¹⁹

As the detailed instructions of Matt 18:15–17 end, the binding and loosing promise is introduced with “Truly, I say to you” (Ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν; v. 18). This is followed by a promise of answered prayer introduced by “Again, I say to you” (Πάλιν ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν; v. 19).²⁰ In addition to the introductions, these promises are also parallel

¹⁸ “Neither the precise nature of the imagery nor the manner of its application is at once clear.” Nolland, *Matthew*, 677.

¹⁹ See Davies and Allison, *The Gospel*, 782; France, *Matthew*, 695; and Porter, “Vague Verbs,” 170.

²⁰ See Nolland, *Matthew*, 749.

in their references to what is done on earth and what is done in heaven.²¹ They are brought forth in support of the procedure for responding to sin in the community.²² It is possible that they more specifically provide the bases for the final step, removing the individual from the community.²³ “Let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector” (ἔστω σοι ὡσπερ ὁ ἔθνικὸς καὶ ὁ τελώνης).²⁴

In the context of Matt 16:13–20, the binding and loosing promise is most closely connected to the giving of the keys of the kingdom of heaven (v. 19). The giving of the keys and the promise are grammatically connected by καὶ, so the relationship between the two is not immediately obvious. The connection between v. 19 and Jesus’ preceding declarations concerning the building and preservation of the church is also not clear. The meaning of the keys has generated nearly as much controversy and varied interpretation as the binding and loosing promise.²⁵ However, since the metaphor of the keys is not as mysterious, establishing its meaning first helps to provide the context of the promise in Matt 16.

The Keys of the Kingdom

Davies and Allison write, “The giving of keys manifestly means the bestowing of authority; to have keys means to have power, to be in control. Beyond that, exegetical

²¹ See Hagner, *Matthew*, 533.

²² See Davies and Allison, *The Gospel*, 782; France, *Matthew*, 695; Nolland, *Matthew*, 749; and Porter, “Vague Verbs,” 170.

²³ As suggested by Davies and Allison, *The Gospel*, 787.

²⁴ “To treat someone as a Gentile and toll-collector would involve the breaking off of fellowship and hence mean exclusion from the community. . . . The passage is therefore about excommunication.” Davies and Allison, *The Gospel*, 785. See also Allen, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 198; Blomberg, *Matthew*, 279; France, *Matthew*, 693–94; Hagner, *Matthew*, 532; and Nolland, *Matthew*, 748.

²⁵ See Davies and Allison, *The Gospel*, 635.

disagreement reigns.”²⁶ Most interpretations are built on the obvious significance that the possession of keys provides the ability to lock and unlock doors, thus allowing or prohibiting entrance (cf. Luke 11:52).²⁷ The sphere into which one may or may not find entrance is the kingdom of heaven.

The most common interpretations are that the keys represent authority to 1) allow or prohibit entrance into the kingdom of heaven,²⁸ 2) allow or prohibit entrance into the Christian community,²⁹ 3) allow or prohibit behavior,³⁰ and 4) care for God’s household.³¹ The most straightforward reading is the first: authority to allow or prohibit entrance into the kingdom of heaven. This phrase does not need to be overly symbolic since entrance into the kingdom of heaven is a common theme (Matt 5:20; 7:21; 18:3; 19:23–24; 21:31; 23:13).³² The second option, authority to allow or prohibit entrance into the Christian community, need not be seen as unrelated to entrance into the kingdom. The keys are given to Peter in the context of Jesus building his church (16:18). While the kingdom of heaven and the church should not be exactly equated,³³ one may see the

²⁶ Davies and Allison, *The Gospel*, 635.

²⁷ See Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 889.

²⁸ See Allen, *Matthew*, 176–77; Hagner, *Matthew*, 472; Keener, *Matthew*, 429–30; Nolland, *Matthew*, 676; and Wolfgang Wiefel, *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus* (THKNT 1; Leipzig, Germany: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1998), 300–301.

²⁹ See De Koster, “Church Discipline,” 238; Hammett, *Biblical Foundations*, 106.

³⁰ See Davies and Allison, *The Gospel*, 635.

³¹ See France, *Matthew*, 625.

³² See Nolland, *Matthew*, 676.

³³ See Allen, *Matthew*, 177.

church (especially the local assembly, cf. Matt 18:17) as the earthly manifestation of the spiritual and eschatological kingdom of heaven.³⁴

Not many hold the last two views of the keys.³⁵ France argues that the holder of the keys has authority as the steward of God's house to provide for God's people.³⁶ The more direct analogy of entrance into the kingdom and the context of the building and preservation of the church make this view less attractive. More importantly, the following discussion on the binding and loosing promise and its connection to Matt 18:15–20 confirms that this option does not fit the context. Davies and Allison take the binding and loosing promise to be the explanation of the keys and understand both to be the authority to allow and prohibit behavior.³⁷ This interpretation misses the more obvious analogy of the keys representing authority to allow or deny entrance into the kingdom. In addition, while closely related, it is argued in the next section that the keys and the binding and loosing promise are distinct from one another.

Binding and Loosing

In these passages, the actions of binding and loosing are metaphors for something that is done “on earth” by Peter (Matt 16:19) or the disciples (Matt 18:18) and has a corresponding reality “in heaven.” Relevant to the nature of what is being promised here is the order in which one sees the actions taking place. Some argue that the binding and

³⁴ See G. E. Ladd, “Kingdom of Christ, God, Heaven,” *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 611. He writes, “The kingdom is not the church. . . . The kingdom of God creates the church.”

³⁵ Of the commentators surveyed, the following suggest one of the last two views: Bonnard, *L'Évangile*, 246; Davies and Allison, *The Gospel*, 635; and France, *Matthew*, 625.

³⁶ See France, *Matthew*, 625.

³⁷ Davies and Allison, *The Gospel*, 635; see also Bonnard, *L'Évangile*, 246.

loosing in heaven occur before the binding and loosing on earth. Thus, the action of Peter (16:19) or the disciples (18:18) is in agreement with God's will or action.³⁸ Others argue that the phrase indicates that the binding and loosing in heaven occurs in response to the binding and loosing on earth.³⁹

Related to this order is how the future auxiliary and perfect passive participles (ἔσται δεδεμένον/λελυμένον) should be translated and understood. Suggestions for the translations include "will have been bound/loosed," "will be bound/loosed," and "shall be in a state of boundness/loosedness."⁴⁰ Some have based understanding of the order of action directly upon the grammar of the phrases. It is possible for this grammatical construction to be translated as a simple future, which would reflect the understanding that the action in heaven follows the action on earth.⁴¹ The question is whether some sense of the perfect should be expressed, and if so, does this change the order of action. J. R. Mantey argues that expressing the perfect requires that the action of heaven be seen as preceding the action on earth.⁴² Porter responds that this construction is periphrastic, and therefore, the way that the future auxiliary relates to the past participle is not best understood as a simple future perfect. He argues that the best translation is "shall be in a

³⁸ See France, *Matthew*, 627; Keener, *Matthew*, 454; and David McClister, "Where Two or Three Are Gathered Together': Literary Structure as a Key to Meaning in Matt 17:22–20:19," *JETS* 39 (1996): 557.

³⁹ See Campenhausen, *Ecclesiastical Authority*, 126; Davies and Allison, *The Gospel*, 638–39; Derrett, "Binding and Loosing," 113; Nolland, *Matthew*, 680–81; and Porter, "Vague Verbs," 162.

⁴⁰ Little support has arisen for H. J. Cadbury's suggestion that it should be translated "shall be once for all." H. J. Cadbury, "The Meaning of John 20:23, Matt 16:19, and Matt 18:18," *JBL* 58 (1939): 251–54. Porter responds, "Any undue emphasis on the permanence of the state (i.e. 'once for all') cannot be posited here on the basis of the participle alone." Porter, "Vague Verbs," 160–61.

⁴¹ See Blomberg, *Matthew*, 255.

state of boundness/loosedness,” which expresses an earth to heaven order.⁴³ While Porter’s argument is most convincing, it is probably best not to determine from the grammar alone whether those on earth or in heaven are acting first.

To best determine this order, it is necessary to further explore the meaning of binding and loosing. This promise does not appear anywhere else in the Bible, nor are these terms found together as a spiritual metaphor.⁴⁴ However, it seems as though Jesus expected his disciples to understand its significance.⁴⁵ The most common and convincing identification of the background of the promise is the legal rabbinic use of these terms.⁴⁶ Binding and loosing language was used to describe the authority of the rabbis to interpret the Law and thus prohibit (bind) or allow (loose) certain behavior. It was also used to describe the judgment of the rabbis in relation to certain cases; the accused was either guilty (bound) or not guilty (loosed). Finally, this same language represented the decision of the rabbis to exclude (bind) a person from or reinstate (loose) a person into the community.⁴⁷

⁴² J. R. Mantey, “Distorted Translations in John 20:23; Matthew 16:18–19 and 18:18,” *RevExp* 78 (1981): 409–16.

⁴³ Porter, “Vague Verbs,” 160.

⁴⁴ See Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature* (3d ed., rev. and ed. Frederick William Danker; Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 221–22; 606–607.

⁴⁵ See J. D. M. Derrett, “Binding and Loosing (Matt 16:19; 18:18; John 29[sic].23,” *JBL* 102 (1983): 112; and Mark Allan Powell, “Binding and Loosing: Asserting the Moral Authority of Scripture in Light of a Matthean Paradigm,” *Ex Auditu* 19 (2003): 82.

⁴⁶ See Bonnard, *L’Évangile*, 246; Campenhausen, *Ecclesiastical Authority*, 126–27; and Wiefel, *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus*, 300–301. Another solution, which has not gained much support, is that of R. H. Hiers. “In intertestamental writings and in the NT the terms ‘binding’ and ‘loosing’ refer to the binding of Satan or satanic beings (e.g., demons) and the loosing of such beings from their erstwhile victims.” R. H. Hiers, “‘Binding and Loosing’: The Matthean Authorization,” *JBL* 104 (1985): 235.

These three rabbinical uses of binding and loosing parallel the three most common interpretations of this promise. Binding and loosing is authority to 1) judge and declare what behavior is allowed or prohibited,⁴⁸ 2) forgive or withhold forgiveness for sins,⁴⁹ or 3) include in or exclude from the Christian community.⁵⁰ These possibilities are closely related and are often used in combination to explain the promise.⁵¹ Understanding how they logically relate to one another may help clarify their meaning. Before forgiveness can be given or withheld, a person's guilt must be established. In order for guilt to be established, particular behavior must be allowed or prohibited. Furthermore, a person's entrance or ongoing fellowship in a community may be allowed or denied based on whether or not he has forgiveness for a violation of the standard of behavior.

The best understanding of binding and loosing seems to be that binding is the judgment of one's behavior as prohibited and loosing is the granting of forgiveness based

⁴⁷ See Allen, *Matthew*, 177, 198; Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1993), 531–32; Hagner, *Matthew*, 473–74; Walter C. Kaiser, *Hard Sayings of the Bible* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1997), 385; and Porter, “Vague Verbs,” 163–65.

⁴⁸ For support of this view see Allen, *Matthew*, 177, 198; Davies and Allison, *The Gospel*, 787; Derrett, “Binding and Loosing,” 114–15; France, *Matthew*, 626, 696; Kaiser, *Hard Sayings of the Bible*, 385; Nolland, *Matthew*, 681, 748; Porter, “Vague Verbs,” 163–65; and Powell, “Binding and Loosing,” 82.

⁴⁹ See Craig Blomberg, *Matthew* (NAC 22; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2001), 280; BDAG, 222; and Wilkins, *Matthew*, 620.

⁵⁰ See Bonnard, *L'Évangile*, 246; John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Bellingham, Wash.: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997), S. IV, xii, 10; Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 889–90; Hammett, *Biblical Foundations*, 106; De Koster, “Church Discipline,” 238; and Wiefel, *Das Evangelium*, 325. Other writers acknowledge that the binding and loosing language was used in rabbinic contexts for excommunication from or reacceptance into the community. Most, though, regard binding and loosing as either declarations regarding behavior or forgiveness.

⁵¹ A combination of options one and two are most common. See Bruce, *Synoptic Gospels*, 240; Campenhausen, *Ecclesiastical Authority*, 126–27; Edersheim, *The Life and Times*, 531–32; J. I. Packer, *Concise Theology: A Guide to Historic Christian Beliefs* (Wheaton: Tyndale House, 1995; electronic ed.; Logos Research Systems, 1997), n.p.; and Hagner, *Matthew*, 472–73.

upon repentance.⁵² It is then based upon a person's condition of condemnation or forgiveness that a person is included in or excluding from the community. All these elements are present in Matt 18. Verses 15–17 explain that if someone sins then his brother is responsible and authorized to declare his behavior as sin. If the brother does not repent, then several brothers and finally the whole community are authorized to confront him. When a person is thus confronted, he is then “bound.” If he repents, he is to be forgiven or “loosed.” This is expressed here as “If he listens to you, you have gained your brother” (18:15) and more explicitly described in the parallel passage, Luke 17:3, “If he repents, forgive him.” Jesus continues in both passages to teach that forgiveness is always to be extended to the repentant (Matt 18:21–35; Luke 17:4). Each successive step in dealing with the sin of a brother is based upon a confrontation of sin and a failure to repent. Exclusion from the community is the final response to the confronted, unrepentant member (18:17).

Inclusion or exclusion from the kingdom of God, and thus his community,⁵³ is also present in Matt 16:19 through the granting of the keys.⁵⁴ In both passages the binding and loosing promise immediately follows the matter of inclusion or exclusion from God's people (16:19; 18:18). The authority of the disciples to forgive is confirmed in a similarly structured verse, John 20:23, “If you forgive the sins of any, they are

⁵² This is a combination of the first two interpretations, authority to judge behavior and authority to grant or withhold forgiveness. This suggestion is based on the contexts of Matt 16:13–20 and 18:15–20, especially Matt 18, which provides more explicit parallels to the rabbinical use of binding and loosing.

⁵³ Compare v. 18; Ladd, “Kingdom of Christ,” *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 611.

⁵⁴ See Allen, *Matthew*, 176–77; Hagner, *Matthew*, 472; Keener, *Matthew*, 429–30; Nolland, *Matthew*, 676; and Wolfgang Wiefel, *Das Evangelium*, 300–301.

forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld.”⁵⁵ This promise is given to the disciples in the context of their gospel mission (John 20:21), which relates well to the promise given to Peter in the context of building the church and granting entrance into the kingdom. Peter’s message of salvation that added many to the church was “Repent . . . for the forgiveness of your sins” (Acts 2:38–41). As the gospel is preached, a person becomes aware of his sin and is thus “bound.” If he does not repent, forgiveness is withheld and he remains “bound.” If he repents he is forgiven or “loosed” and thus enters the kingdom of heaven.

Based on this understanding of binding and loosing, as well as the parallel of John 20:23, it seems best not to translate the future auxiliary and perfect participle in such a way that earth is affirming heaven’s decision.⁵⁶ If this interpretation of binding and loosing best fits the historical background, the context of the passages, and the authority and mission of the disciples, then the promise is this: If a person does not repent when he is confronted with his sin and offered God’s forgiveness by a human agent, then he remains in a state of unforgiveness before God; if he repents, he is forgiven by God. The relevance of this promise in Matt 16 and 18 is this: If the sinner repents, he is forgiven and is allowed to enter into the kingdom/community (the keys, Matt 16:19) or remain in the community (Matt 18:15; Luke 17:3–4). If the person does not repent then he or she is not allowed into the kingdom/community (Matt 16:19) or is excluded from the community (Matt 18:17).

⁵⁵ See BDAG, 222; Blomberg, *Matthew*, 251; Campenhausen, *Ecclesiastical Authority*, 140; Hagner, *Matthew*, 473; and Wiefel, *Das Evangelium*, 325.

⁵⁶ Against Hagner, *Matthew*, 474; and Keener, *Matthew*, 430.

Who Has Authority?

In Matt 16:19, Jesus presents to Peter the keys of the kingdom and the authority of the binding and loosing promise. Jesus speaks to Peter directly and uses second person singular personal pronouns and verbs (σοι, δήσης, λύσης). However, according to the explanation of the keys and the promise presented here and the granting of the same promise to the church in 18:18 (cf. also John 20:23), it seems that Jesus is not giving Peter unique authority.⁵⁷ Instead, as the leader and representative of the apostles and the first to confess Jesus as the Christ,⁵⁸ Jesus explained the mission and authority he intended to confer upon all the apostles, and ultimately the church.⁵⁹ If so, then there is no succession of persons or office being established in this passage.

Matthew 18:15–20 affirms even more clearly that the authority presented here is not given to a particular leader or position of leadership. Instead, the initial, most basic authority for governing church behavior is given to the individual believer (v. 15).⁶⁰ The modifying phrase “against you” (εἰς σέ) in “if your brother sins against you,” which is probably original,⁶¹ does not necessitate that only private issues are in view.⁶² He may

⁵⁷ See Blomberg, *Matthew*, 255.

⁵⁸ Ibid.; Hagner, *Matthew*, 741; and Porter, “Vague Verbs,” 167–68.

⁵⁹ “Thus it is not wrong to say . . . that ultimately the power of the keys is given to the people of God as a whole.” Hagner, *Matthew*, 473. See also Bonnard, *L'Évangile*, 246; France, *Matthew*, 697; and Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 889–90.

⁶⁰ See France, *Matthew*, 692.

⁶¹ According to the USB 4th ed., εἰς σέ is missing from ⋈ B 1 579. It is otherwise well represented in all text types, including the Alexandrian text type (e.g. L Θ). Barbara Aland, Kurt Aland, Johannes Karavidopoulos, Carlo M. Martini, and Bruce M. Metzger, eds. *The Greek New Testament* (4th rev. ed. New York: United Bible Societies, 1998), 68. The phrase could have been omitted intentionally to make the instruction more general or in harmony with Luke 17:3, or accidentally by homoeoteleuton (following ἀμαρτήση). See Blomberg, *Matthew*, 278; Davies and Allison, *The Gospel*, 782; and Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (4th rev. ed.; New York: United Bible Societies, 1994), 36.

confront his brother for sin and offer forgiveness if he repents (18:15; Luke 17:3–4). If the sinner does not repent, he is authorized to involve other witnesses and bring it before the congregation (18:16–17). At no point in this process are leaders given particular authority to confront, grant forgiveness, or exclude from the fellowship.⁶³ This does not, however, rule out whatever leadership responsibilities they would have in such proceedings.⁶⁴ The last confrontation of sin and opportunity to repent is before the local church. The local church has the authority to confront sin, grant forgiveness, and exclude from the community.

⁶² Based on the phrase “against you” (εἰς σέ), many commentators understand the sin of the brother to be limited to personal offences. See Allen, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 197; Bruce, *Synoptic Gospels*, 239; Davies and Allison, *The Gospel*, 781–82; McClister, “Where Two or Three Are,” 555; and Packer, *Concise Theology*, n.p. Others understand it to refer to a broader responsibility of responding to the sin of a brother. See Calvin, IV, xii, 2; France, *Matthew*, 690; and Pfitzner, “Purified Community,” 37. According to the latter view, “against you” could delineate the jurisdiction and responsibility of a brother or sister who observes the sin. See Calvin, IV, xii, 3. Several reasons may be presented to argue that this process is not limited to those against whom a sin has been committed:

1) The broader context is sin in general: causing other brothers to sin (18:6–7), taking extreme measures to avoid sin (18:8–9), and the Father not wanting any to go astray and perish (18:13–14). “Gaining your brother seems to contrast the previous picture of sheep that stray away and perish. You have kept him as a brother safely in the community and under the care of the shepherd. Instead of ‘gained’ he would be lost. The overall concern, based on a commitment to holiness and the value of each brother, is to keep brothers out of sin.” France, *Matthew*, 690.

2) The parallel in Luke 17:3 does not include ‘against you’ initially and then does in the next verse.

3) Other passages direct brothers to confront and help others out of sin without reference to personal offense (Gal 6:1; Eph 5:11–13; 2 Tim 2:24–26; Jas 5:19–20).

4) The inclusion of others as witnesses and bringing it before the whole community, who also confronts the offender, implies that others also are able to testify to and against this sin. There is a difference between a sin that the church can agree to condemn according to Scripture and a personal grievance that could be handled in a court but should be handled in the community (cf. 1 Cor 5, 6). “The offender, faced by the disapproval of the whole local disciple community, ought surely to recognize that this was not just a personal grievance on the part of the initiator.” France, *Matthew*, 639.

5) The final action of casting the offender out of the community fits with 1 Cor 5, the offense of which is a observable sin prohibited by Scripture, and not simply a “grievance,” as in 1 Cor 6. Personal offenses seem to be dealt with in a different fashion according to 1 Cor 6.

6) All sin in the body is ultimately sin against the body, for all are affected by it (1 Cor 12).

7) Christians are encouraged by Jesus and Paul to disregard personal offenses (Matt 5:38–42; 1 Cor 6:7b).

8) The instructions in Deut 19:15, part of which is referenced here, include a wide set of circumstances—“for any crime or for any wrong in connection with any offense that he has committed.”

⁶³ See Blomberg, *Matthew*, 278; and Campenhausen, *Ecclesiastical Authority*, 128.

Matthew 20:25–28; Mark 10:42–45; Luke 22:24–27

The synoptic parallel in Matt 20:25–28, Mark 10:42–45, and Luke 22:24–27 is also relevant to an understanding of the authority of church elders. These three passages do not address church elders directly, but they contain the teaching of Jesus concerning the exercise of authority within the Christian community. Seven words from the selected semantic domains appear in these passages collectively.⁶⁵ The terms κατακυριεύω and κατεξουσιάζω both appear in Matt 20:25–28 and Mark 10:35–45. Luke 22:24–27 contains the closely related terms κυριεύω and ἐξουσιάζω. Matthew 20:25–28 and Mark 10:35–45 contain the related words ἄρχων and ἄρχω, respectively. One important word from the considered semantic fields that is unique to this parallel is ἡγέομαι, which appears in Luke 22:24–27.

Several observations may be made from the use of these words in the New Testament.⁶⁶ First, six of these seven words are used to describe the leadership of the Gentile rulers in contrast to leadership in the new community (ἄρχω, ἄρχων, ἐξουσιάζω, κατακυριεύω, κατεξουσιάζω, and κυριεύω). Second, all six of these words are never used elsewhere in the New Testament to describe leadership within the church. Third, two of these are used elsewhere in the New Testament to indicate how a Christian does not or should not lead (κυριεύω in 2 Cor 1:24 and κατακυριεύω in 1 Pet 5:3). Fourth, of the seven words from the selected semantic domains, the only one used to describe leadership within the new community is ἡγέομαι, which is unique to Luke 22:24–27.

⁶⁵ Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 1: 458, 477–78.

⁶⁶ These observations are based on the use of these words in the passages under consideration and an examination of all the uses of these words in the New Testament.

Finally, ἡγέομαι is used four other times to describe leadership in the church (Acts 15:22; Heb 13:7, 17, 24).

Several conclusions may be drawn from these observations. First, the use of ἡγέομαι in Luke 22 confirms that this tradition not only addresses honor and status, but more specifically, it addresses leadership in the community.⁶⁷ Second, the appearance of ἡγέομαι to describe Christian leadership in other passages confirms the relevance of this passage for the present study. Third, the failure to use the terms that describe the authority of the Gentiles to describe Christian leadership anywhere in the New Testament, and the use of ἡγέομαι to do so, suggests a clear conceptual distinction throughout the New Testament.

Finally, these observations provide an important clue as to how one should understand and translate ἡγέομαι. All seven of the Greek words cited above appear in sub-domain “D. Rule, Govern” in semantic domain “37. Control, Rule.”⁶⁸ However, ἡγέομαι also appears in semantic domain “36. Guide, Discipline, Follow” and sub-domain “A. Guide, Lead.”⁶⁹ The other words used to describe leaders in the community, μέγας and πρῶτος, can also be used to express important and prominent status, without implying control.⁷⁰ When interpreting and translating ἡγέομαι, one may see an emphasis on ruling or on leading. The clear contrast provided in these passages and the emphasis

⁶⁷ See BDAG, 434; and Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 1:458, 478.

⁶⁸ Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 1:477–78.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 1:458, 478.

⁷⁰ See BDAG, 624, 892–94; and Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 1:735, 737.

on service indicate that in this context ἡγέομαι does not carry the same semantic sense of ruling as those words with which it is contrasted.

The synoptic parallel of Jesus' teaching on servant leadership (Matt 20:25–27; Mark 10:42–44; and Luke 22:25–26) appears within a larger discourse unit in each passage (Matt 20:20–28; Mark 10:35–45; Luke 22:24–30).⁷¹ The parallel verses in Matthew and Mark function as sub-units within the larger units.⁷² Since all the words from the selected semantic domains are used within the parallel, these parallel verses are the focus of this discussion.

In the accounts of Matthew and Mark, Jesus' teaching on leadership follows the request of James and John for honored positions (Matt 20:20–24; Mark 10:35–41) and concludes with the reference to the Son of Man giving his life as a ransom for many (Matt 20:28; Mark 10:45). Luke places this teaching during the last supper, indicating the disciples were arguing over who would be greatest. While these passages may come from a common tradition,⁷³ it is probable that Jesus taught this on both of these occasions.⁷⁴ John also indicates that serving others was a topic at the Passover meal (John 13:14). Based on the conceptual and structural similarity, it seems legitimate to interpret these passages together.⁷⁵

⁷¹ See J. Nolland, *Luke* (3 vols.; WBC 35; Dallas: Word, 1990–93), 3:1062.

⁷² See C. A. Evans, *Mark 8:27–16:20* (WBC 34B; Nashville: Nelson, 2001), 113; R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 414–15; and Hagner, *Matthew*, 579.

⁷³ See Nolland, *Luke*, 3:1062.

⁷⁴ See D. L. Bock, *Luke* (2 vols.; BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994–96), 2:1737; and I. H. Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 811.

⁷⁵ As Bock notes, “The same basic contrast is found in all three accounts, despite their distinct settings.” Bock, *Luke*, 2:1737.

The structure of these passages is almost identical and may be divided into five lines.

Matthew 20:25–27

- 1 Οἶδατε ὅτι οἱ ἄρχοντες τῶν ἐθνῶν κατακυριεύουσιν αὐτῶν
- 2 καὶ οἱ μεγάλοι κατεξουσιάζουσιν αὐτῶν.
- 3 οὐχ οὕτως ἔσται ἐν ὑμῖν,
- 4 ἀλλ' ὃς ἐὰν θέλῃ ἐν ὑμῖν μέγας γενέσθαι ἔσται ὑμῶν διάκονος,
- 5 καὶ ὃς ἂν θέλῃ ἐν ὑμῖν εἶναι πρῶτος ἔσται ὑμῶν δοῦλος.

Mark 10:42–44

- 1 Οἶδατε ὅτι οἱ δοκοῦντες ἄρχειν τῶν ἐθνῶν κατακυριεύουσιν αὐτῶν
- 2 καὶ οἱ μεγάλοι αὐτῶν κατεξουσιάζουσιν αὐτῶν.
- 3 οὐχ οὕτως δὲ ἔσται ἐν ὑμῖν
- 4 ἀλλ' ὃς ἐὰν θέλῃ γενέσθαι μέγας ἐν ὑμῖν, ἔσται ὑμῶν διάκονος
- 5 καὶ ὃς ἐὰν θέλῃ ὑμῶν γενέσθαι πρῶτος, ἔσται πάντων δοῦλος.

Luke 22:25–26

- 1 Οἱ βασιλεῖς τῶν ἐθνῶν κυριεύουσιν αὐτῶν
- 2 καὶ οἱ ἐξουσιάζοντες αὐτῶν εὐεργέται καλοῦνται.
- 3 ὑμεῖς δὲ οὐχ οὕτως,
- 4 ἀλλ' ὁ μείζων ἐν ὑμῖν γινέσθω ὡς ὁ νεώτερος
- 5 καὶ ὁ ἡγούμενος ὡς ὁ διακονῶν.

The first two lines in each passage are parallel in that they name the leaders of the Gentiles and describe what they do; a different name and action is given in each line. The last two lines are also parallel in that they name positions in the community (among you; ἐν ὑμῖν) and the actions of those in the positions. Since each set of lines contains the names and activities of the two groups, lines one and two also parallel lines three and four.⁷⁶ All of this serves to accentuate the unparalleled line at the center.⁷⁷ Line three contains Jesus' main point and the fulcrum of the contrast between the Gentile rulers and

⁷⁶ See Nolland, *Matthew*, 823.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

how Jesus' disciples are to relate, "It shall not be so among you" (οὐχ οὕτως ἔσται ἐν ὑμῖν).

The terms used to describe the leaders of the Gentiles are "the rulers" (οἱ ἄρχοντες) and "the great ones" (οἱ μεγάλοι) in Matthew, "those who are considered rulers" (οἱ δοκοῦντες ἄρχειν) and "the great ones" (οἱ μεγάλοι) in Mark, and "the kings" (οἱ βασιλεῖς) and "those in authority" (οἱ ἐξουσιάζοντες) in Luke. Jesus points out that these rulers "lord it over" (κατακυριεύουσιν) and "exercise authority" (κατεξουσιάζουσιν) in Matthew and Mark and "rule" (κυριεύουσιν) and "are called benefactors" (εὐεργέται καλοῦνται) in Luke.⁷⁸ They exercise control over and receive honor from their subjects.⁷⁹

In lines four and five, the terms used to describe positions within the community are structurally and conceptually parallel to those among the Gentiles. They are "great" (μέγας) and "first" (πρῶτος) in Matthew and Mark and "the greatest" (ὁ μείζων) and "the leader" (ὁ ἡγούμενος) in Luke. While there are basic semantic differences in the two sets of positions,⁸⁰ the parallel is clear in the various uses of μέγας and the prominence of the

⁷⁸ Kenneth Clark argues that the translation of κατακυριεύουσιν as "lord it over" is inaccurate. It is sometimes suggested that the κατα prefix intensifies the verb. Clark claims that "lord it over" implies an abuse of authority, which this word does not express. Kenneth Willis Clark, "Meaning of [*kata*] *kurieuein*," in *Studies in New Testament Language and Text* (ed. J. K. Elliott; Leiden: Brill, 1976), 100–105. If Clark is correct, then the issue Jesus has with the Gentile leaders is not abuse of power, but the exercise of lordship or ruling at all. The parallel in Luke, which has κυριεύουσιν instead, supports this contention. Nolland writes that Clark's position "may be an overcorrection. While abuse of power may not be in the semantic range, pressure and control certainly are. The power realities are very evident as some dominate and others are dominated." Nolland, *Matthew*, 822. Even so, the parallelism of these verses reveals that the contrast is between acts of ruling and acts of service, not between good and bad ruling.

⁷⁹ See BDAG, 519, 531, 576; and Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 477–78.

⁸⁰ Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 1:458, 477–78, 735, 737.

positions.⁸¹ The similarity of terms describing the Gentiles and Jesus' disciples reveals that this is not the main point of Jesus' contrast. He is not teaching that his disciples should be unlike the Gentiles by having no leaders or prominent positions.

The striking contrast in this parallel is the description of the activity of the disciple community leaders. The prominent position is held by the one who is the “servant” (διάκονος) and “slave” (δοῦλος) and who is like the one that is “younger” (νεώτερος). Although they are expressed as nouns, the emphasis is on the action. The verses following the parallel in each passage further promote this point by using the verb διακονέω (Matt 20:28; Mark 10:45; Luke 22:27). In addition, the parallel of διάκονος, δοῦλος, and νεώτερος in lines one and two is the action of the Gentile leaders: κατακυριεύουσιν, κατεξουσιάζουσιν, κυριεύουσιν, and εὐεργέται καλοῦνται. These parallels make clear that the difference between the Gentile leaders and the leaders of Jesus' disciples is the activity of serving instead of ruling. The prominent and leading positions among the Gentiles are characterized by control, while the prominent and leading positions among Jesus' followers are to be characterized by service.⁸²

Matthew 23:8–12

Another Gospel passage relevant to the authority of church elders is Matt 23:8–12. Only one word, πατήρ, from the selected semantic domains appears in this passage. It appears in semantic domain “36 Guide, Discipline, Follow” and sub-domain “A. Guide, Lead.”⁸³

⁸¹ See Nolland, *Matthew*, 823.

⁸² See Blomberg, *Matthew*, 308; Evans, *Mark*, 118–19; Clyde Holdke and Lawrence O. Richards, *A Theology of Church Leadership* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980), 109; Nolland, *Matthew*, 823; and David A. Steele, *Images of Leadership and Authority for the Church: Biblical Principles and Secular Models* (New York: University Press of America, 1986), 3.

⁸³ Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 1:465.

In this sense, it may mean “one who is responsible for having guided another into faith or into a particular pattern of behavior.”⁸⁴ However, πατήρ also appears in other domains as well. Louw and Nida see the primary meaning of πατήρ in Matt 23:9 as “a title for a person of high rank” from domain “87. Status.”⁸⁵ This is the same domain to which μέγας and πρῶτος belong, which are important terms in Matt 20:26–27 and Mark 10:43–44. Louw and Nida also gloss πατήρ as “elder” and place it in domain “11. Groups and Classes of Persons,” in which πρεσβυτέριον also appears.⁸⁶ In Matt 23:8–12, it seems to function as a title as in domain 87, and in particular, the title of a religious guide as in domain 36.

This is another passage that does not directly address church elders. It is relevant for a study on the authority of church elders because it contains Jesus’ teaching on leadership in the Christian community.⁸⁷ Several other aspects of this passage also confirm its importance, one of which is the context. Verses 8–12 is a sub-unit of Matt 23:1–12,⁸⁸ which is a part of the larger discourse in which Jesus condemns the leadership of the Pharisees (Matt 23:1–39).⁸⁹ In vv. 1–7, Jesus describes the authoritative position of the scribes and the Pharisees as teachers of the law of Moses. He says they sit on “Moses’ seat” (τῆς Μωϋσέως καθέδρας), which Louw and Nida place in domain “37. Control,

⁸⁴ Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 1:465; See also BDAG, 786–87.

⁸⁵ Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 1:737.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 1:124.

⁸⁷ Hagner and Keener recognize that this passage addresses authority and leadership in the community. Hagner, *Matthew*, 662; Keener, *Matthew*, 543–45.

⁸⁸ See Hagner, *Matthew*, 658.

⁸⁹ See Blomberg, *Matthew*, 339.

Rule.”⁹⁰ After describing their hypocrisy and self-exaltation, he begins directly exhorting his disciples with the emphatic “but you” (ὁμοῖς δὲ).⁹¹ This resembles the way Jesus contrasted the leadership of the Gentile rulers with disciple community leaders in Matt 20:25–28. A connection between the themes of these passages is further established by the repetition of the teaching “the greatest among you shall be your servant” (Matt 23:11; cf. Matt 20:26b).

The relevance of Matt 23:8–12 is also confirmed by the terms that are structurally parallel to πατήρ. Verses 8–10 contain a tighter structural relationship, which D. Hagner calls a “symmetrical syntax.”⁹²

ὁμοῖς δὲ μὴ κληθῆτε, Ῥαββί
 εἷς γάρ ἐστιν ὑμῶν ὁ διδάσκαλος,
 πάντες δὲ ὁμοῖς ἀδελφοί ἐστε.
 καὶ πατέρα μὴ καλέσητε ὑμῶν ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς,
 εἷς γάρ ἐστιν ὑμῶν ὁ πατήρ ὁ οὐράνιος.
 μηδὲ κληθῆτε καθηγηταί,
 ὅτι καθηγητῆς ὑμῶν ἐστιν εἷς ὁ Χριστός.

Three lines contain an imperative form of καλέω. Each of these is followed by a phrase containing a causal conjunction (γάρ, ὅτι) and the word εἷς. The terms parallel with πατέρα, which Jesus’ followers are not to call others or be called, are Ῥαββί and καθηγηταί.

Ῥαββί is a title used to refer to “outstanding teachers of the law.”⁹³ Thus, διδάσκαλος is used interchangeably in the following phrase. The term καθηγηταί may be

⁹⁰ Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 1:476.

⁹¹ See Bruce, *Synoptic Gospels*, 280; and Hagner, *Matthew*, 660.

⁹² Hagner, *Matthew*, 658.

⁹³ BDAG, 902.

best understood as a tutor or personal instructor.⁹⁴ Since πατήρ was also used as a title for respected rabbis,⁹⁵ the parallel relationship of ῥαββί, πατήρ, and καθηγηταί supports the suggestion above that πατήρ is used here as title for a religious guide. The issue here, then, is not the use of πατήρ with reference to familial and ancestral relationships.⁹⁶ As Blomberg writes, these three titles “all commonly referred in Judaism to those who expounded the law.”⁹⁷ Jesus’ instructions here for teachers are relevant to church elders since one of their primary qualifications and duties is to teach (Acts 20:29–32; 1 Thess 5:12–13; 1 Tim 3:2; 5:17; Titus 1:9; Heb 13:7).

The basis for prohibiting such titles is repeated in parallel form after each imperative statement (εἷς γάρ ἐστιν . . . εἷς γάρ ἐστιν . . . ὅτι . . . ἐστιν εἷς). It is the reality of God (specifically naming the Father and the Christ) as the one teacher that makes such titles for humans inappropriate (vv. 9–10).⁹⁸ He is the preeminent teacher of the community, directly available to all believers. Another reason given under the first imperative is that “you are all brothers.” To exalt teachers in the church to a position of unique status above others distracts from, and may even deny, the unique position of God above all and the equality of all the brothers and sisters before God.⁹⁹

Following this tightly paralleled teaching are two maxims that address service and humility. The first is “the great among you shall be your servant” (ὁ δὲ μείζων ὑμῶν

⁹⁴ See Blomberg, *Matthew*, 342; Hagner, *Matthew*, 661; Keener, *Matthew*, 545.

⁹⁵ See Allen, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 245; Bruce, *Synoptic Gospels*, 280; and Keener, *Matthew*, 545.

⁹⁶ See Hagner, *Matthew*, 661; and Nolland, *Matthew*, 928.

⁹⁷ Blomberg, *Matthew*, 342.

⁹⁸ See Hagner, *Matthew*, 661.

ἔσται ὑμῶν διάκονος; v. 11). A similar statement was discussed with regard to Matt 20:26. Once again, μείζων is used in the context of positions of leadership. If understood in the sense of a prominent position, its use here serves to confirm that leadership positions are not prohibited and that μείζων does not imply ruling authority. The New Testament is clear that there are to be teachers in the church (e.g. 1 Cor 12:28; Eph 4:11; 2 Tim 1:11; Heb 5:12).¹⁰⁰ In addition, it will be argued elsewhere that eldership is a definite position of authority in the church (Act 14:23; 1 Tim 3:1–7; 4:14; Titus 1:5, 7). The lesson is that prominent positions in the community are characterized by service rather than by the kind of honor that creates a social hierarchy among the brothers.¹⁰¹

The second maxim, and the concluding verse of this section, is the promise that whoever exalts himself will be humbled and whoever humbles himself will be exalted (v. 12). The Pharisees and scribes exalted themselves by abusing their responsibility to instruct others (v. 4), doing good deeds and wearing exaggerated religious paraphernalia in order to receive attention from others (v. 5), and seeking seats and titles of honor (vv. 6–7).¹⁰² A leader is not to seek personal honor and status but humble himself by recognizing the preeminence of Christ and the equality of the brotherhood and by serving those he is leading.

⁹⁹ See Hagner, *Matthew*, 661; and Nolland, *Matthew*, 927.

¹⁰⁰ See Blomberg, *Matthew*, 342; and Hagner, *Matthew*, 661.

¹⁰¹ See Blomberg, *Matthew*, 342.

¹⁰² See Alexander Strauch, *Biblical Eldership: An Urgent Call to Restore Biblical Church Leadership* (Colorado Spring: Lewis and Roth, 1995), 89.

Concluding Observations

Based on the exegetical considerations above, principles related to elders' authority are preliminarily proposed. These observations, especially the non-prescriptive examples, are synthesized with all other related observations in the concluding chapter.

Matthew 16:13–20; 18:15–20

- 1) The initial, most basic authority for governing church behavior is given to the individual believer (Matt 18:15).
- 2) The congregation has authority to remove a member from the community (Matt 18:17).
- 3) If a person does not repent when he is confronted with his sin and offered God's forgiveness by a human agent, then he remains in a state of unforgiveness before God; if he repents, he is forgiven by God (Matt 16:19; 18:18). If the sinner repents, he is forgiven and is allowed to enter into the kingdom/community (Matt 16:19) or remain in the community (Matt 18:15; Luke 17:3–4). If the person does not repent then he or she is not allowed into the kingdom/community (Matt 16:19) or is excluded from the community (Matt 18:17).

Matthew 20:25–28; Mark 10:35–45; Luke 22:24–27

- 1) The term ἡγέομαι, in this context, means “lead” instead of “rule” when describing Christian leadership.
- 2) The prominent and leading positions among Jesus' followers are to be characterized by service, rather than control or rule.

Matthew 23:8–12

- 1) To exalt teachers in the church to a position of unique status above others distracts from, and may even deny, the unique position of God above all and the equality of all the brothers and sisters before God.
- 2) Prominent positions in the community are characterized by service rather than by the kind of honor that creates a social hierarchy among the brothers.
- 3) A leader is not to seek personal honor and status but humble himself by recognizing the preeminence of Christ and the equality of the brotherhood and by serving those he is leading.

CHAPTER 3

THE AUTHORITY OF ELDERS IN ACTS

According to the criteria for passage selection described in chapter one, six in Acts may contribute to an understanding of the authority of church elders. These passages are Acts 6:1–6; 11:27–30; 14:23; 15:1–35; 16:4; 20:17, 28–35; and 21:17–26. This chapter presents a discussion of the exegetical issues in each passage that are relevant to the authority of church elders. Second Corinthians 8:19 is mentioned with Acts 15 because both provide examples of the church appointing individuals to a task. Second Corinthians 9:7 is considered with Acts 11:27–30 since both passages refer to the decision making process in the community with regard to a collection for the Christians in Jerusalem.

Acts 6:1–6

The first passage in Acts that is relevant to this study is Acts 6:1–6.¹ While there is little agreement on the larger discourse structure and function of this unit, Acts 6:1–6 is generally recognized as a self-contained paragraph.² It is the first recorded conflict within

¹ Verse 7, which functions independently as a transitional status report, is sometimes included in the 6:1–6 paragraph.

² See C. K. Barrett, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles* (2 vols.; ICC; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1994), 302; D. L. Bock, *Acts* (BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 255; M. E. Boismard, Justin Taylor, and A. Lamouille, *Les Actes des Deux Apôtres* (3 vols.; Paris: Librairie Lecoffre: J. Gabalda, 1990), 3:97–102; F. F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles* (rev. ed. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), viii; J. D. G. Dunn, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Valley Forge: Trinity Press, 1996), 79; Rudolf Pesch, *Die Apostelgeschichte* (Zürich: Benziger, 1986), 224–25; J. B. Polhill, *Acts* (NAC; Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 178; and Ben Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), vi.

the new community. The importance of this passage is first confirmed by the appearance of three words from the selected semantic domains: ἐκλέγομαι, ἐπισκέπτομαι, and καθίστημι. In this context, the first two express the idea of choosing and are included in domain “30. Think,” and in sub-domains “E. To Decide, To Conclude” and “F. To Choose, To Select, To Prefer” respectively.³ καθίστημι is in domain “37. Control, Rule,” sub-domain “E. Assign to a Role or Function.”⁴

Preserved here is an account of the selecting and appointing of leaders in the church. While the passage does not mention elders or name the leadership position, it provides one example of the decision making process of choosing leaders in the early church. As an example, it provides principles to be synthesized with other relevant passages in order to establish patterns of decision-making authority and leadership in the church.

This selection of leaders was the solution to a problem in the community. The Hellenists complained that their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution (6:1). The twelve apostles called together all the disciples and proposed that they select seven men to carry out this ministry (6:2–4).⁵ Three parties are involved in this process, the apostles, the congregation, and the chosen leaders. This raises the questions of “What parts did the apostles and congregation play in the decision making process?” and “What were the qualifications of the newly selected leaders?”

³ See Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (3d ed.; rev. and ed. Frederick William Danker; Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 305, 378; and J. P. Louw and E. A. Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (2 vols.; 2d ed.; New York: United Bible Societies, 1989), 1:360, 362.

⁴ Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 1:483.

⁵ See Polhill, *Acts*, 181.

At this stage in the early church, it appears that elders had not been appointed and that the apostles were functioning as the leaders. In response to the complaint, they gathered “the full number of the disciples” (τὸ πλῆθος τῶν μαθητῶν) together and proposed a solution (v. 2). This is a particularly clear indication that the whole community was gathered.⁶ In light of the position and respect the apostles enjoyed at this time, it is conceivable that they could have decided what to do and chosen seven men on their own. Remarkably, they involved the whole community.⁷

While the solution of the apostles is presented in a direct imperative (ἐπισκέψασθε), Luke also writes that the solution “pleased the whole gathering” (v. 5). This may indicate that the solution was more of a proposal than a command. This possibility is also supported by the fact that the apostles provided the rationale for their proposal. They did not appeal to their own authority but instead to what was “right” (ἀρεστόν).⁸ Even more significant, though, is the fact that since the apostles directed the congregation to select the men, the congregation’s approval and cooperation was required to carry out the task. The wording makes clear that it is the “whole gathering” (παντὸς τοῦ πλήθους) that then “chose” (ἐξελέξαντο) men and “set” (ἔστησαν) them before the apostles.⁹

⁶ See Bruce, *Acts*, 122; and James Leo Garrett, Jr., “The Congregation-Led Church: Congregational Polity,” in *Perspectives on Church Government: Five Views of Church Polity* (ed. Chad Owen Brand and R. Stanton Norman; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2004), 163.

⁷ “The fact that the apostles themselves were involved in the way the decision was reached makes what we find all the more remarkable.” Daniel L. Akin, “The Single-Elder-Led Church: The Bible’s Witness to a Congregational Single-Elder-Led Polity,” in *Perspectives on Church Government*, 29–30.

⁸ “The people were pleased by the proposal because they recognized that it was in agreement with God’s will (cf. v. 2), not simply because it came with the authority of the apostles.” Barrett, *Acts*, 314.

⁹ “The modern, and even pre-modern, English-language commentaries on Acts are almost unanimous in holding that the Seven were chosen by the entire congregation at Jerusalem.” Garrett, “The Congregation-Led Church,” 163. See also Bruce, *Acts*, 122; and Polhill, *Acts*, 181.

It is possible that it was not only the apostles who then prayed and laid hands on the seven men.¹⁰ However, unless “we” in “we will appoint” (καταστήσομεν) included the congregation with the apostles, then it seems natural to assume that the apostles appointed those the congregation selected. This fits the procedure of Acts 14:23, in which Paul and Barnabas appointed elders. It is instructive also to note that the words used to describe the selection of the men by the congregation (ἐκλέγομαι and ἐπισκέπτομαι) simply reflect a choice, while the action of the apostles, “appoint” (καθίστημι), includes the idea of assigning “someone a position of authority.”¹¹

By what authority did the twelve apostles appoint the seven new servants? The apostles seem to be the understood leadership of the new church. They were handpicked by Jesus (except Matthias) and fulfilled the specific tasks of praying and ministering the word (Acts 6:2, 4). As the recognized leaders of the community, it was appropriate for them, on behalf of the community, to expressly acknowledge the selected men for their particular task.¹²

Another indication that the participation of the community was required is that the qualifications given for the men included that they have a good reputation. While it is possible the apostles alone could have assessed the qualifications of the men in the church (their reputation, fullness of the Spirit, and wisdom), such an affirmation by the whole community ensured the truth of any such reputation. In addition, the confidence of all the people concerning the quality of the men chosen would be significant for the

¹⁰ See Barrett, *Acts*, 315.

¹¹ BDAG, 492.

¹² See Bock, *Acts*, 262.

effectiveness of their leadership.¹³ The men chosen were selected “from among” them (ἐξ ὑμῶν) and known directly by the community.

Some believe that this event is the installment of the first deacons.¹⁴ While the act of serving is present here (διακονεῖν), deacons are never named. It has also been suggested that it could be the first step toward establishing elders.¹⁵ It is not possible to determine with certainty what leaders are selected here. However, the identification of these leaders is unnecessary for exploring its more general contribution to authority and decision-making in the church. The relevance of this leadership selection process for the selection of elders is further established by several similarities: 1) elders are required to serve and meet the needs of the congregation (Acts 11:27–30; 20:33–35); 2) elders are to meet required character qualifications (even specifically to have a good reputation, 1 Tim 3:7);¹⁶ 3) Acts 14:23 and Titus 1:4 also record instances of those with apostolic authority appointing leaders, in this case elders;¹⁷ and 4) Paul indicates that the appointing of elders should include the laying on of hands (1 Tim 5:22).

Due to the purpose of Acts as a record of history and the unique circumstances of the early church, especially the presence of the Twelve, one must be careful in identifying principles that apply directly to authority in the church. At the very least, this passage

¹³ “You . . . are to search out the right men (having done so you will have confidence in them).” Barrett, *Acts*, 313.

¹⁴ See Pesch, *Die Apostelgeschichte*, 232.

¹⁵ Barrett writes, “It was to the Jerusalem elders (presbyters) that Barnabas and Saul delivered the assistance sent from Antioch.” Thus, it is possible that “the paragraph recounts the appointment of the first presbyters.” Barrett, *Acts*, 304.

¹⁶ See Witherington, *Acts*, 250.

¹⁷ See Benjamin L. Merkle, *40 Questions About Elders and Deacons* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2008), 39.

presents a clear example of a decision made in the community by the community (even under the leadership of the apostles).¹⁸ It should also be noted that this decision-making occurred in the context of the strong initiative (v. 2), guidance (v. 2–4), and appointment (v. 6) of the leaders. The leadership of the Twelve and the new leaders that were appointed provide examples of leaders functioning as a group and not as individuals. Some believe it is safe to conclude that this represents a normal and wise pattern for selecting ministers in the early church and today.¹⁹ Based on the similarities of selecting elders with this passage listed in the last paragraph, the importance and necessity of the congregation’s participation in the selection of church elders may be affirmed. This will be further tested as other passages are considered.

Acts 11:27–30 (2 Corinthians 9:7)

In Luke’s account, Christian elders are first introduced in Acts 11:27–30.²⁰ In addition to the mention of τοὺς πρεσβυτέρους, the relevance of this passage is established by the presence of another example of decision-making in the church. This is expressed, in part, by the term ὀρίζω (decide), which appears in the selected domains “30. Think,” “E. To Decide, To Conclude.”²¹ While there is disagreement on the larger discourse structure, most commentators recognize 11:19–30 as a unit describing the church in Antioch and

¹⁸ “The solution the apostles arrive at here is a rather novel one for antiquity. . . . Those with political power generally repressed complaining minorities; here the apostles hand the whole system over to the offended minority.” Witherington, *Acts*, 248. The contrast is significant. It is possible, though, in line with the thesis of the present work, that the apostles did not have political power. Instead of the act being unusual for those with power, what is in contrast is exactly what Jesus said in Matt 20:25–27: leadership in the church should function differently from that of the world.

¹⁹ See Akin, “The Single-Elder-Led Church,” 29–30; Barrett, *Acts*, 304; Bock, *Acts*, 257; Merkle, *40 Questions*, 39; and Polhill, *Acts*, 180.

²⁰ See Barrett, *Acts*, 566; Dunn, *Acts*, 158; and Witherington, *Acts*, 374.

²¹ Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 1:359.

11:27–30 as a sub-unit describing their sending of relief to Jerusalem.²² Paul also refers to the decision making process in the church with regard to this collection in 2 Cor 9.²³ The term προαίρεομαι (decide beforehand), also from the selected domains “30. Think,” “E. To Decide, To Conclude,” appears in 2 Cor 9:7.²⁴

In Acts 11:27–30, Agabus prophesied that there would be a widespread famine (v. 28). In response to this information, the disciples in Antioch decided to send aid to the brothers in Judea (v. 29). The syntax is not immediately clear and leaves some question as to how the decision was made. Did the disciples make the decision as a body or did each disciple individually decide what to do? Some translations place the disciples (plural) as the subject of ὥρισαν (decided) (ASV, ESV, NIV, NKJV, NRSV) while others indicate that each one (singular) decided (HCSB, ISV, NASB). The only nominative noun ἕκαστος, which is singular, follows the verb ὥρισαν, which is plural. Barrett explains, “As at 2:6, ἕκαστος (singular) takes a plural verb.”²⁵ An accurate translation, then, is probably something similar to the ISV, “So every one of the disciples decided, as he was able, to send a contribution to the brothers living in Judea.”

This translation accords well with Paul’s instructions for collecting such a gift in 1 Cor 9.²⁶ Although the funds are to be collected beforehand and thus presented as one gift from the community (9:5), the decision to give is left to the individual believers (9:7).

²² For example, see Bruce, *Acts*, ix–x; Dunn, *Acts*, 157; Polhill, *Acts*, 268–69; and Witherington, *Acts*, vii, 371.

²³ Scot McKnight, “Collection for the Saints,” in *DPL* (ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Reid; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1993), 143–44.

²⁴ Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 1:359.

²⁵ Barrett, *Acts*, 565.

²⁶ See Barrett, *Acts*, 565; and Bruce, *Acts*, 230–31.

Paul makes it abundantly clear that this is to be a free-will offering based on personal conviction: it is to be “a willing gift” and not “an extraction” (9:5), decided beforehand “in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion” (9:7). The basis for these instructions is that “God loves a cheerful giver” (9:7), which establishes the relevance of these principles to all matters of giving. These examples from Antioch and Corinth establish that the issue of giving in the community is not a decision that is made by community leaders or by the majority vote of the congregation.²⁷ Each believer gives according to his own ability and conviction.

The gift thus collected was sent by Barnabas and Paul to the elders in Judea (Acts 11:30). The elders are referenced in the plural, as a body of leaders in a particular area. The area mentioned is Judea, but many commentators assume these are the elders in Jerusalem.²⁸ One learns from this passage that elders were a defined, responsible group of leaders that were in a position to distribute financial support to the believers.²⁹

Acts 14:23

The next mention of elders is in Acts 14:23. In addition to the term *πρεσβύτερος*, *χειροτονέω* also appears in this passage from the selected semantic domain “37. Control, Rule,” sub-domain “E. Assign to a Role or Function.”³⁰ It is used to describe how Paul and Barnabas appointed elders. This particular sequence in the story begins in v. 21,

²⁷ See Bruce, *Acts*, 229; and Witherington, *Acts*, 374.

²⁸ See Bock, *Acts*, 418; Bruce, *Acts*, 231; Dunn, *Acts*, 157–58; Polhill, *Acts*, 275; and Witherington, *Acts*, 373.

²⁹ See Bock, *Acts*, 418; Alexander Strauch, *Biblical Eldership: An Urgent Call to Restore Biblical Church Leadership* (Colorado Spring: Lewis and Roth, 1995), 124.

³⁰ Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 1:483.

when Paul and Barnabas left Derbe and returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch. As they went, they strengthened and encouraged the believers and appointed elders for the churches (vv. 22–23).

The word χειροτονέω can express the act of choosing (possibly indicating a vote by a group) or the act of appointing someone to a particular task.³¹ Some have argued based on this first meaning that the congregation was involved in the choosing of the elders.³² However, the subject of χειροτονήσαντες is Paul and Barnabas, not the congregation.³³ Louw and Nida, as well as Bauer, indicate that here χειροτονέω expresses the second meaning, “to appoint.”³⁴

It is important to remember, however, that the apostles also appointed the Seven in Acts 6:1–6.³⁵ The words for appoint in these two passages (καθίστημι and χειροτονέω) are both in sub-domain “E. Assign to a Role or Function.”³⁶ Included in the process of appointing the Seven was the congregation’s selection of the men to be set apart. As noted in the examination of Acts 6:1–6, there are several similarities in the appointment

³¹ According to Louw and Nida, χειροτονέω may mean “to choose or select, presumably by a group and possibly by the actual raising of the hand—‘to choose, to elect, to select.’” Louw and Nida also provide this possible meaning: “To formally appoint or assign someone to a particular task—‘to appoint, to assign.’” Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 1: 362, 483. See also BDAG, 1083.

³² As noted by Polhill, *Acts*, 319; and Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 138–39.

³³ See Polhill, *Acts*, 319; and Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 136, 138–39.

³⁴ Bauer writes, “This does not involve a choice by the group; here the word means *appoint*, *install*, w. the apostles as subject.” BDAG, 1083.

³⁵ “Based on the pattern found in Acts 6, it is also possible that the respective congregation chose men from among themselves and then Paul and Barnabas ‘appointed’ them as elders publicly.” Merkle, *40 Questions*, 39. See also Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 136–37.

³⁶ Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 1:483.

of the Seven and the appointment of elders.³⁷ It may be argued that the community's participation in choosing elders is important, just as it was important in the choosing of leaders in Acts 6:1-6.³⁸ The probability that such involvement is assumed here, but not mentioned, is strengthened by the fact that Paul and Barnabas were not a part of the churches in Lystra and Iconium (as they were in Antioch). Thus, they would rely more heavily on the community's knowledge of the men qualified to be elders.

As in Acts 11:30, elders are mentioned in the plural. However, this time it is more explicitly stated that a plurality of elders served within "every church" (κατ' ἐκκλησίαν).³⁹ In this context, κατά probably functions as distributive marker of spatial aspect, "x by x,"⁴⁰ indicating that they appointed elders "in each individual church."⁴¹ In addition, one may assume from Luke's description that the elders selected for each church already belonged to the local communities to which they were appointed.⁴²

Acts 15:1–35; 16:4 (2 Corinthians 8:19)

The next passage in Acts that is relevant to the authority of church elders is Acts 15:1–35; 16:4, which relates the events of the Jerusalem Council. According to the qualifying

³⁷ 1) Elders are required to serve and meet the needs of the congregation (Acts 11:27–30; 20:33–35); 2) Elders are to meet required character qualifications (even specifically to have a good reputation, 1 Tim 3:7); 3) Acts 14:23 and Titus 1:4 also record instances of those with apostolic authority appointing leaders, in this case elders; and 4) Paul indicates that the appointing of elders should include the laying on of hands (1 Tim 5:22).

³⁸ While it is possible the apostles alone could have assessed the qualifications of the men in the church (their reputation, fullness of the Spirit, and wisdom), such an affirmation by the whole community insured the truth of any such reputation. In addition, the confidence of all the people concerning the quality of the men chosen would be significant for the effectiveness of their leadership. The men chosen were selected "from among" them (ἐξ ὑμῶν) and known directly by the community.

³⁹ Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 135.

⁴⁰ BDAG, 511–12.

⁴¹ Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 135.

terms, all four of the criteria used to identify relevant texts are met in this passage. They are ἐκλέγομαι,⁴³ ἡγέομαι,⁴⁴ κρίνω,⁴⁵ πρεσβύτερος,⁴⁶ τάσσω,⁴⁷ and φυλάσσω.⁴⁸ Elders are mentioned six times (15:2, 4, 6, 22, 23; 16:4) in the context of the Antioch and Jerusalem churches.

The verses included in the discourse unit of this event are most commonly 15:1–35.⁴⁹ Although there is disagreement as to the larger discourse structure, many agree that this chapter functions in the book of Acts as the literary and theological center.⁵⁰ After this event, the Jerusalem church fades out of focus, and Peter is not mentioned again.⁵¹ At

⁴² Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 135.

⁴³ ἐκλέγομαι can have the meaning of semantic domain “30. Think; E. To Decide, To Conclude” and meets criteria four, (4) Passages are included that contain concepts of decision making within the Christian community. Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 1:360.

⁴⁴ ἡγέομαι is included in semantic domains “37. Control, Rule; D. Rule, Govern” and “36 Guide, Discipline, Follow; A Guide, Lead.” Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 1:458, 478. Depending on its use here, it may fit into the second or third criteria: (2) Passages are included that contain concepts of human authority within the Christian community; (3) Passages are included that contain concepts of human leadership within the Christian community.

⁴⁵ κρίνω is included in semantic domain “30. Think” and sub-domains “E. To Decide, To Conclude” and “G. To Distinguish, To Evaluate, To Judge.” Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 1:358, 362. With either sense, it meets criteria four, (4) Passages are included that contain concepts of decision making within the Christian community.

⁴⁶ πρεσβύτερος falls into the first criteria, (1) Passages are included that make reference to the elder in the Christian community.

⁴⁷ In the sense of domain “37. Control, Rule; E Assign to a Role or Function,” τάσσω qualifies this passage according to criteria two, (2) Passages are included that contain concepts of human authority within the Christian community. Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 1:482.

⁴⁸ In the sense of domain “36. Guide, Discipline, Follow; C. Obey, Disobey,” φυλάσσω qualifies this passage according to criteria three, (3) Passages are included that contain concepts of human leadership within the Christian community. Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 1:467.

⁴⁹ See Bruce, *Acts*, x–xi; Polhill, *Acts*, 320; and Witherington, *Acts*, 439.

⁵⁰ See Barrett, *Acts*, 709; Polhill, *Acts*, 320; and Witherington, *Acts*, 439.

⁵¹ See Witherington, *Acts*, 439.

the Jerusalem Council, the important questions of the relationship of the gospel and the law are addressed.

Daniel Akin writes, “This text is crucial at a number of points in terms of ecclesiology. Issues of local church autonomy, voluntary cooperation between churches, and church polity all come to light.”⁵² Many questions arise from this sequence of events. Who has authority to make decisions? Does the local church have authority? Do the leaders have authority? Do individuals have authority? Is there evidence that authority existed outside of or above the local church? Is there any indication of hierarchy in leadership? What is the process for resolving conflict and decision-making? What kinds of authority are represented? One does not find easy answers to these questions but rather a complex dynamic of relationships expressed in a brief summary of events.

The story begins with Paul and Barnabas in Antioch debating with men from Judea who were teaching that one must be circumcised to be saved (vv. 1–2). To resolve this matter, the church appointed Paul, Barnabas, and some others to go to the apostles and elders in Jerusalem about the question (vv. 2–3). This action tells the reader something about the authority of the church in this situation. The word translated “appointed” is ἔταξαν, and is used in the sense of assigning someone to a task, function, or role.⁵³ This is the act of an entity with authority delegating authority to act as its representative.

⁵² Akin, “The Single-Elder-Led Church,” 30.

⁵³ Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 1:482; see also BDAG, 991.

While it is sometimes translated as a passive, the verb is an active third person plural without a named subject.⁵⁴ The implied subject as the church may be inferred by two observations: 1) the only other parties already mentioned are the teachers from Judea and “the brothers” (τοὺς ἀδελφούς), and 2) the next verse indicates that they were sent “by the church” (ὑπὸ τῆς ἐκκλησίας). Without excluding the probable involvement of the present leadership (elders were appointed in 14:23), it was the church that authorized Paul and Barnabas to represent their question in Jerusalem. Second Corinthians 8:19 more explicitly describes the authority of the church to appoint individuals to particular tasks. The church appointed (χειροτονέω) the brother who was famous for preaching the gospel to travel with Paul’s company.⁵⁵

Another observation that contributes to an understanding of authority in the church is how the early church functioned as an assembly. The reader witnesses various gatherings of the church in Acts 15 and finds a community that had a great deal of interactive discussion, open debate, and multiple teachers. The fact that the assembly was an open forum in Antioch allowed the men from Judea to teach their doctrine of circumcision (15:1). This is further affirmed by the ensuing debate (15:2). As leaders, it may be expected that Paul and Barnabas would be given audience in Phoenicia, Samaria, and upon their arrival in Jerusalem (15:3–4). As the Jerusalem church and leaders listened to them, some that belonged to the party of the Pharisees spoke up in the assembly about circumcision (15:6).

⁵⁴ See Bruce, *Acts*, 286.

⁵⁵ The terms χειροτονέω and τάσσω appear in the same semantic domain, “37. Control, Rule; E Assign to a Role or Function.” Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 1:482.

At the meeting of the apostles and elders, there was “much debate,” implying that many others participated, apart from those named (15:7, 12).⁵⁶ When Paul and Barnabas returned to Antioch, the church was assembled to receive the letter. Afterward, Judas and Silas, the men who accompanied them, encouraged the congregation with many words (15:32). After Judas and Silas returned, Paul and Barnabas taught in Antioch “with many others also” (μετὰ καὶ ἑτέρων πολλῶν, 15:35). While these scenarios show the prominence of well-respected prophets and teachers, they also reveal that there were many prophets and teachers and that the normal operation of the assembly was an open forum.

A significant question regarding authority in the church arises from the relationship between the church in Antioch and the leaders and church in Jerusalem. The question about circumcision was sent “to the apostles and the elders” (15:2). “The apostles and the elders” gathered to consider the matter (15:6)⁵⁷ and provided a response (15:23).⁵⁸ It is suggested below that the Jerusalem congregation was present at the council and affirmed the resolution. However, “the apostles and the elders” are clearly the primary source of authority in this proceeding. The fact that Antioch sought and willingly received the answer of the Jerusalem leaders about circumcision reveals that

⁵⁶ See Witherington, *Acts*, 450.

⁵⁷ The church is not mentioned here. If Luke wished to mention their presence, one may observe in v. 4 how he would have done so: “The church and the apostles and the elders” (τῆς ἐκκλησίας καὶ τῶν ἀποστόλων καὶ τῶν πρεσβυτέρων). This does not necessarily exclude the presence of the church, but it shows that the main participants in the discussion and resolution are “the apostles and elders.” Barrett comments, “The ἐκκλησία of 15:4 now disappears (to reappear in v. 22 and possibly, as τὸ πλῆθος, in v. 12); the serious business of the Council is to be done by *apostles and elders*.” Barrett, *Acts*, 712.

⁵⁸ Akin takes the reading of the NKJV, “the apostles, the elders, and the brethren.” Akin, “The Single-Elder-Led Church,” 31. However, the Greek construction does not support this (οἱ ἀπόστολοι καὶ οἱ πρεσβύτεροι ἀδελφοί) and most commentators recognize the apostles and elders as the senders of the letter. See Barrett, *Acts*, 740; Bock, *Acts*, 511; Bruce, *Acts*, 298; and Witherington, *Acts*, 468.

they exercised some level of authority over the Antioch believers. This leads one to ask the following questions: Why did they send the question to the Jerusalem leaders? and What kind of authority did they have?

Based on the definitions of authority presented in chapter one, one may ask whether the Jerusalem leaders had authority *de jure*, authority *de facto*, or both. The apostles and elders appear to have clearly defined positions with particular responsibilities (see Acts 6:2–4; 11:30; 14:23) and thus have authority *de jure*. There is reason to believe, though, that the jurisdiction of apostles and elders is limited to particular locations or people groups (Act 20:17, 28; 2 Cor 10:13–16).⁵⁹ Any authority the Jerusalem leadership may have over other local churches is not explicitly described in the New Testament, but rather is implied from examples of functional leadership like that presented in this passage.

One reason that some believe that the Jerusalem leaders had governing authority over local churches is the nature of the council’s resolution and letter. Some see the resolution as a binding judgment.⁶⁰ Witherington argues that “the language here is that of a formal decree—‘it seemed good to us . . .’—and should not be taken as the expression

⁵⁹ See D. A. Carson, “Church, Authority in,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (ed. Walter A. Elwell; Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1984), 229; and J. D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 578–79.

⁶⁰ See Bruce, *Acts*, 298–99; and Robert L. Reymond, “The Presbytery-Led Church: Presbyterian Church Government,” in *Perspectives on Church Government*, 108–109. Witherington writes, “Deliberating together, they determined the condition of church membership for the *entire* church and rendered their decision in the form of a ‘letter’ . . . In Acts 16:4 . . . the presumption on the part of the Jerusalem assembly is that its instructions were to be heeded and to be viewed by all the churches as church law. Clearly, the apostles and elders did not regard these congregations as independent and autonomous. . . . For any church to have rejected the assembly’s instructions would have placed that church beyond the pale of Christian orthodoxy.” Witherington, *Acts*, 469.

of a mere opinion.”⁶¹ The language of 16:4 and 21:25 also may lead one to see the resolution as a binding rule. They refer to the “the decision for observance” (φυλάσσειν τὰ δόγματα) and a “judgment that they should . . .” (κρίναντες φυλάσσεσθαι). The resolution is clearly a list of rules for behavior that were written for observance.

May one conclude, then, that the apostles and elders had legislative or governing authority? Several factors in this account, and in the dynamics of the early church, suggest that this resolution was the instruction of respected teachers, instead of legislation by a ruling body.⁶² The leaders state that what is presented as proper behavior “seemed good to the Holy Spirit” (ἔδοξεν γὰρ τῷ πνεύματι τῷ ἁγίῳ). The supreme goal of the council was to discern the will of God in the matter, not to create human rules.⁶³ This point is established by observing the discussion of the council. In response to the claims of those from the Pharisee party, Peter questioned, “Why are you putting God to the test?” (15:10). Peter believed that the real issue at hand was God’s will. Throughout the debate, two main lines of evidence were presented: what God has done and what God has said.

Upon their arrival in Jerusalem, Paul and Barnabas related all that God had done through them (15:4). This was probably the detailed description of the conversion of the Gentiles that they shared with the brothers on the way there (5:3). During the debate at the council, Peter reminded the assembly that God had chosen to bring the Gospel to the Gentiles through him, that God bore witness of this by giving them the Holy Spirit, and

⁶¹ Witherington points to similar language in the Decree of Domitian and a letter of Augustus concerning the decision of a council as evidence. Witherington, *Acts*, 469.

⁶² See Akin, “The Single-Elder-Led Church,” 31.

⁶³ See Dunn, *Acts*, 208.

that God will save both Jews and Gentiles by the grace of the Lord Jesus (15:8–11). Following this, Paul and Barnabas again related all the signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles (15:12). James, in his closing comments, also pointed back to Peter’s evidence of what God had done among the Gentiles (15:14). He then substantiated this testimony with “the words of the prophets” (15:15–17).

While the letter may have the tone of a formal resolution,⁶⁴ the language of the letter reveals that what was being exercised was teaching authority. The leaders explained that they would not lay a greater burden on the Gentile Christians than what was stated (ἐπιτίθεσθαι ὑμῖν βάρος πλὴν τούτων τῶν ἐπάναγκες, 15:28). Peter used similar language to describe what the teachers of circumcision were doing (ἐπιθεῖναι ζυγὸν ἐπὶ τὸν τράχηλον τῶν μαθητῶν, 15:10). “Laying burdens” is the activity of teachers, even unauthorized teachers (15:1, 5, 24), and therefore does not imply legislative authority.

In addition, the letter does not simply convey the resolution as a law, but presents reasoning and evidence that might persuade the recipients to obey the teaching. Most importantly the leaders stated that they were teaching what they believed to be God’s will for them (15:28). The leaders also substantiated their resolution by pointing out that they had “come to one accord” (γενομένοις ὁμοθυμαδὸν, 15:25). In the closing line, they encouraged obedience by declaring that following these requirements for behavior would be to their benefit (15:29). At the beginning of the letter, the leaders identified themselves as brothers. Barrett comments, “The elders, if not the apostles, are at the same time members of, brothers within, the local church, and it is as such that they address the

⁶⁴ See Witherington, *Acts*, 469.

members of the other churches.”⁶⁵ Such appeals give the letter a teaching, rather than a ruling, tone.

The leadership of apostles and elders is prominent in the New Testament, and they exercised considerable influence in the church. However, there is no evidence that there was a structure of governing authority that would place the apostles and elders in Jerusalem in a ruling position.⁶⁶ When Paul described the leaders in Jerusalem, he portrayed them as influential founding leaders, not as formal governors (Gal 2:6–9). Whatever position they held, he did not recognize any obligation to obey them, arguing that God shows no partiality (Gal 2:6).⁶⁷ F. J. A. Hort comments on Paul’s descriptions of James, Peter, and John. He states:

[They] show that with all his unflinching anxiety to have the concurrence of the Twelve, and not of them only but of the Ecclesia of Jerusalem at large, he was not prepared to obey if the Twelve had insisted on the requirement of circumcision and the Law. Hence in the letter to Antioch the authority even of the Apostles . . . was moral rather than formal; a claim to deference rather than a right to be obeyed.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Barrett, *Acts*, 740.

⁶⁶ F. J. A. Hort writes with reference to the apostles, “There is indeed . . . no trace in Scripture of a formal commission of authority for government from Christ Himself. Their commission was to be witnesses of Himself, and to bear that witness by preaching and by healing. But it is inconceivable that the oral authority with which they were thus clothed, and the uniqueness of their position and personal qualifications, should not in all these years have been accumulating upon them by the spontaneous homage of the Christians of Judea and ill-defined but lofty authority in matters of government and administration.” F. J. A. Hort, *The Christian Ecclesia* (London: Macmillan, 1914), 84. Strauch observes, “There is no biblical evidence to suggest that there was an established, supreme court in Jerusalem to which all Christian churches were answerable.” Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 126.

⁶⁷ See Hans von Campenhausen, *Ecclesiastical Authority and Spiritual Power in the Church of the First Two Centuries* (trans. J. A. Baker; Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University, 1969), 37.

⁶⁸ Hort, *The Christian Ecclesia*, 85.

Paul's attitude toward this body of leaders in Gal 2 once again affirms that the authority of legislation was established by God's truth not by a formal leadership position.⁶⁹

As the apostles were authorized to testify as eyewitnesses, so the authority of elders includes the qualification and responsibility to teach the truth (Acts 20:28–32; Titus 1:9). It is understandable, then, that the church in Antioch would voluntarily seek the counsel of the respected apostles and elders of the first believing community.⁷⁰ It is also reasonable for Paul and the council to expect the churches to obey their judgment as a clear directive from God, having been established by the evidence of God's activity, the support of Scripture, and the unity of those authorized to teach.

The nature of the decision as a teaching, rather than a ruling resolution, is further supported by the activity of the churches of Antioch and Jerusalem. Although only the apostles and elders are named as those who gathered for the council (15:6), there is reason to believe that a larger representation of the Jerusalem church was present and that they supported the resolution with a clear consensus. Witherington explains,

The main way to resolve such conflict in antiquity was to call a meeting of the ἐκκλησία, the assembly of the people (cf. vv. 12, 22), and listen to and consider speeches following the conventions of deliberative rhetoric, the aim of which speeches to overcome στάσις and produce concord and unity.⁷¹

⁶⁹ See Dunn, *Paul*, 572–73.

⁷⁰ “It is essential to note that the decision to go to Jerusalem was a voluntary decision on the part of the church in Antioch. . . . So for the sake of unity among the churches, respect for Jerusalem and the apostles, the future Gentile mission, and the defeat of the false gospel, the church in Antioch sent its key leaders to Jerusalem to further debate the issue.” Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 126. See also Akin, “The Single-Elder-Led Church,” 30–31; and Witherington, *Acts*, 451.

⁷¹ Witherington, *Acts*, 450; See also Dunn, *Acts*, 195–96.

As he indicates, vv. 12 (πάν τὸ πλῆθος) and 22 (σὺν ὅλῃ τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ) suggest the presence of the whole church.⁷² While it is possible to see a break in the narrative at v. 22, thus mentioning the presence of the congregation in a new meeting, it is best to take vv. 6–29 as a continuous narrative.⁷³ The temporal conjunction, τότε, is not used in Act as a marker of a new scene or unit but is almost always used in the flow of a single narrative.⁷⁴

Verse 22 explains that the apostles and elders, with the whole church, thought it was good to choose leading men to take the letter to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. Some writers take this as an indication that the whole church was involved in deciding the resolution of the council.⁷⁵ Others argue that the congregation only participated in the decision of sending the men, since the apostles and elders sent the letter (15:23) and were exclusively given credit for the judgment (16:4).⁷⁶ There is a possible middle road that makes sense of all the evidence and further confirms the suggestion that teaching authority was exercised in this letter.

⁷² See Witherington, *Acts*, 450; and Bruce, *Acts*, 289.

⁷³ Polhill writes, “Verses 6–29 are a continuous narrative, and one would assume the whole group was gathered together for the discussion.” Polhill, *Acts*, 326.

⁷⁴ A search of the twenty-one uses of τότε in Acts reveals that only one marks the beginning of a unit.

⁷⁵ See Bas van Iersel, “Who According to the New Testament Has the Say in the Church?” in *Who Has the Say in the Church?* (ed. Jürgen Moltmann, Hans Küng and Marcus Lefébure; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1981), 12; Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 127; Polhill, *Acts*, 333; Dunn, *Acts*, 207; Bruce, *Acts*, 297; and Norman Geisler, *Systematic Theology* (4 vols.; Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2005), 4:71.

⁷⁶ See Barrett, *Acts*, 738; Kevin Giles, *Patterns of Ministry Among the First Christians* (Melbourne, Australia: Collins Dove, 1989), 79; Witherington, *Acts*, 451, 467.

That the apostles and elders were the ones who decided on the resolution should be taken at face value (15:6, 23; 16:4).⁷⁷ However, there is also evidence that the congregation affirmed this decision.⁷⁸ The inclusion of the church in the decision to send men with the letter at least reveals that the whole church was in support of the resolution (15:22). Their affirmation may also be implied in the language of the letter, which states that “we,” in one accord, decided to send men. According to v. 22, this “we” includes the church. Without distinction of the subject, v. 28 indicates that it seemed good “to us to lay on you no greater burden than these requirements.” It is possible that the subject of making the resolution still includes the church.

There is other evidence as well that the two local congregations, Antioch and Jerusalem, functioned autonomously. In matters of congregational action in both locations, such as sending representatives from the church (15:2–3, 22), the corporate local church had decision-making authority. The whole Jerusalem congregation was present at the council (and may have even participated in the debate, 15:7) and the whole congregation in Antioch was gathered to hear the letter (15:30). The letter was written to the Gentile brothers, not to the elders (which had already been appointed in Antioch, 14:23). The positive reception of the resolution by both congregations was also noted (15:22, 25, 28, 31). The resolution itself was not a congregational decision or action, but a matter of doctrine that was discussed, agreed upon, and taught by authorized teachers. The presence of apostles with the respected elders of the first church presents a unique circumstance. D. L. Bock explains, “The letter does not represent a pattern of activity

⁷⁷ See Bock, *Acts*, 511; Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 127; and Witherington, *Acts*, 468.

⁷⁸ See Bruce, *Acts*, 297; Dunn, *Acts*, 207; and Polhill, *Acts*, 333.

between the churches but is a specific letter for this specific issue. Once this decision is made, local implementation is assumed.”⁷⁹

There is one final question relevant to understanding patterns of authority in the church. How did the apostles and elders function as a leadership group? This introduces the prominent role of James and the way the decision was reached within the council. It is clear that James was a prominent leader in the Jerusalem church (Act 12:17; 15:13–19; 21:18–26).⁸⁰ Did James hold a formal position among the leaders? Did he alone make the final judgment? Some contend that James held a hierarchical position of authority among the elders and apostles.⁸¹ Such a structure, or James’ possession of such a position, is not stated in the New Testament but is assumed from his prominent leadership.

One of the most significant factors is the claim that James personally made the final decision in the Jerusalem Council. This is understood from the fact that James is the last one to speak and pronounced, “Therefore, I judge . . .” (διὸ ἐγὼ κρίνω, 15:19). While some claim that this must have been an authoritative pronouncement,⁸² many scholars believe it was his own personal judgment presented as a proposal for the council.⁸³ The latter understanding is a better explanation because if he had positional authority to make such a decision, then the decree would have been credited to him. Instead, the credit of the decision is clearly given to the whole body of “the apostles and the elders” (15:23;

⁷⁹ Bock, *Acts*, 510.

⁸⁰ See Barrett, *Acts*, 729; Bock, *Acts*, 502; Bruce, *Acts*, 292; Dunn, *Acts*, 202; Joseph Barber Lightfoot, “The Christian Ministry,” in *Saint Paul’s Epistle to the Philippians* (London: Macmillan, 1890; repr., Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1913), 196–97; and Polhill, *Acts*, 328.

⁸¹ See Hort, *The Christian Ecclesia*, 78–79; and Lightfoot, “The Christian Ministry,” 196–97.

⁸² See Witherington, *Acts*, 457, 467.

16:4). The plurality and unity of the decision making body is stressed in the letter, “having come to one accord” (γενομένοις ὁμοθυμαδόν, 15:25). Presented here is not only an example of plurality of leadership but also a body that makes decisions by consensus.

Acts 20:17, 28–35

The next passage in Acts that contributes to an understanding of the authority of church elders is Acts 20:17, 28–35. It is the most significant passage investigated thus far for several reasons. Of the few passages in the Gospels and Acts that directly address church elders, this one describes in much greater detail the role and responsibilities of elders. In addition, it is not a narrative of an event that took place in the early church but the teaching of Paul delivered directly to the elders of Ephesus.⁸⁴ This reduces the hermeneutical task of discerning what is prescriptive and normative as opposed to what is simply narrative.⁸⁵

Verses 28–35 are a portion of a larger speech that begins in v. 18. The larger discourse unit is 20:17–38.⁸⁶ In v. 17, Luke sets the stage for the speech by explaining that Paul called for the Ephesian elders (πρεσβυτέρους, 20:17) and spoke to them. In vv. 18–27 Paul recounts his ministry among them, explains his plans and attitude about

⁸³ See Barrett, *Acts*, 729; Bruce, *Acts*, 295, 297; Dunn, *Acts*, 207, 195–96; Hort, *The Christian Ecclesia*, 80–81; and Polhill, *Acts*, 333.

⁸⁴ Strauch writes, “The only record of Paul speaking directly to elders. . . . This sermon provides us with an excellent synopsis of the uniquely Pauline, Christianized teaching on church elders.” Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 140.

⁸⁵ Bock notes its general nature, “What he says to the community of Ephesus could be said to any of the communities to which he has a ministry. Indeed, this is how the passage functions in Acts. It tells churches how to carry on now that they will minister without figures such as Paul present.” Bock, *Acts*, 623.

⁸⁶ See Witherington, *Acts*, viii.

future ministry, and tells them that they will not see him again. Verse 28 begins a new sub-unit with the introduction of the first imperative of the speech and the new topic of the elders' responsibility.⁸⁷ In addition to the term πρεσβύτερος in v. 17, three other terms from the selected semantic domains are present in vv. 28–35: ἐπίσκοπος and ποιμαίνω in v. 28 and ὀπίσω in v. 30.⁸⁸

As in chs. 11, 14, and 15, elders are referred to here in the plural. They are “the elders” (τοὺς πρεσβυτέρους) and “overseers” (ἐπισκόπους). They were the elders of “the church” (τῆς ἐκκλησίας) who were to pay attention to the “the flock” (τῷ ποιμνίῳ) and care for the “the church” (τὴν ἐκκλησίαν), which are all singular terms (20:17, 28). One may observe, then, an example of one church existing in a particular location being led by a plurality of elders.⁸⁹ These observations also show that elders are responsible for, and thus have authority in, a particular location. They are the elders of the church in Ephesus. The use of the term ἐκκλησία here is thus limited to a geographic area and understood to be a local church. This “flock” is the community “in which” (ἐν ᾧ) they were appointed. Paul predicted that fierce wolves would “come in among you” (εἰσελεύσονται . . . εἰς ὑμᾶς). These references serve to reveal that the jurisdiction of elders, at least in this case, is limited to a local congregation.⁹⁰

⁸⁷ See Bock, *Acts*, 625.

⁸⁸ Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 1: 465, 469, 541.

⁸⁹ See Phil A. Newton, *Elders in Congregational Life: Rediscovering the Biblical Model for Church Leadership* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2005), 68; Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 142–44; and James R. White, “The Plural-Elder-Led Church: Sufficient as Established—The Plurality of Elders as Christ’s Ordained Means of Church Governance,” in *Perspectives on Church Government*, 272. The argument that single elders led individual house churches in Ephesus also applies to other passages and will, therefore, be addressed in the concluding chapter.

⁹⁰ See White, “The Plural-Elder-Led Church,” 273.

The use of the two terms *πρεσβύτερος* and *ἐπίσκοπος* to refer to the same group of leaders in this passage is significant evidence that they are not used in Scripture to refer to two different positions in the church.⁹¹ Some argue that the designation *ἐπίσκοπος* is not the name of the office in view but a description of its function.⁹² Whether or not it is used as a title, it describes the function of a *πρεσβύτερος*. Even when *ἐπίσκοπος* is understood to be an official title, it still conveys the function of a person who safeguards and watches over something, in this case the church.⁹³ Paul's exhortation to the elders describes how this responsibility should be carried out in the church.

The indicative verb used to express the appointment of these men as overseers by the Holy Spirit (*ἔθετο*) is modified by a subordinate adverbial infinitive of purpose (*ποιμαίνειν*).⁹⁴ Therefore, the Holy Spirit appointed them as overseers for an intended purpose, that they might shepherd or care for God's church.⁹⁵ The relationship of these concepts is confirmed in the important parallel passage 1 Pet 5:2. Peter exhorted the elders to shepherd (*ποιμάνετε*) God's flock and further modified this with an adverbial participle of means (*ἐπισκοποῦντες*).⁹⁶ Therefore, the elders are to care for God's flock by means of overseeing. The relationship between these ideas in 1 Peter is even tighter

⁹¹ See Barrett, *Acts*, 974.

⁹² See Giles, *Patterns of Ministry*, 81.

⁹³ See BDAG, 379; Bock, *Acts*, 630; and Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 541.

⁹⁴ See Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 590–91.

⁹⁵ See Bock, *Acts*, 630.

⁹⁶ See Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 628–29.

than in Acts as the adverbial participle of means defines or explains the action of the finite verb.⁹⁷

As a description of the elders' responsibility and a clue to understanding the term ἐπίσκοπος, the term ποιμαίνω deserves further investigation. Here, ποιμαίνω is used as a figurative extension of the meaning "to shepherd."⁹⁸ Louw and Nida assign it two meanings and two semantic domains: 1) "guide and help" from domain "36. Guide, Discipline, Follow," sub-domain "A Guide, Lead" and 2) "rule" from domain "37. Control, Rule," sub-domain "D. Rule, Govern."⁹⁹ Bauer provides an overarching meaning, "To watch out for other people, *to shepherd*, of activity that protects, rules, governs, fosters," and then divides it into two senses: 1) "the sense of lead, guide, or rule" and 2) "*protect, care for, nurture*."¹⁰⁰

For the purpose of this study, it is important to notice that Bauer does not make the primary semantic distinction that Louw and Nida have made for ποιμαίνω. Louw and Nida see the senses of leading and ruling in completely different semantic domains, while Bauer groups lead, guide, or rule in the same meaning.¹⁰¹ Based on the definitions and semantic categories of authority presented in chapter one, it seems that Louw and Nida have made an important distinction. Although leading and ruling overlap conceptually and may be done simultaneously, they are not perfect synonyms. The following

⁹⁷ Wallace explains, "The participle of means could be called an *epexegetical* participle in that it *defines* the action of the controlling verb." Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 629.

⁹⁸ BDAG, 842; Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 1:465.

⁹⁹ Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 1:465, 478.

¹⁰⁰ BDAG, 842.

¹⁰¹ BDAG, 842; and Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 465, 478.

distinction is made for this study. A ruler necessarily possesses decision-making authority over a group of people and the governmental or coercive power to enforce his decisions.¹⁰² A leader may show the way or direct actions without decision-making authority or accompanying power. The meaning of ποιμαίνω here must be determined by its context in this passage.

Since the shepherding imagery is prominent in this passage (τῷ ποιμνίῳ, λύκοι βαρεῖς), it is possible to translate ποιμαίνω “to shepherd.”¹⁰³ However, observing the actions related to the other figurative shepherding terms will help explain ποιμαίνω in non-figurative language. The elders are to “pay careful attention” (προσέχετε) to the flock (20:28), with particular reference to looking out for need or danger.¹⁰⁴ They are also to “be alert” (γρηγορεῖτε) because of fierce wolves (20:29–31). These verbs reinforce the concept of an overseer who safeguards and watches over the church. The particular danger in view is doctrinal. The elders are to help make sure the church does not follow false teaching. This imagery and exhortation emphasizes the protective and guiding role of a shepherd. The second half of this unit does not use shepherding imagery. However, it is helpful as it moves from the elders’ protective role to their hard work that allows them

¹⁰² Louw and Nida note such a distinction when categorizing domains and sub-domains. They write, “The meanings in sub-domain A *Guide, Lead* imply a willingness on the part of others to be led. They also imply a minimum of control on the part of the one guiding or leading (compare Domain 37 *Control, Rule*).” Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 1:414. An examination of the definitions of rule, ruler, lead, and leader in the *The Oxford English Dictionary* demonstrates their conceptual overlap. It also confirms their basic difference. For example, rule may be defined, “To govern, to exercise sovereign power over, to control with authority,” and lead may be defined, “To guide with reference to action or opinion; to bring by persuasion or counsel *to* or representation *to* a conclusion; to induce to do something.” J. A. Simpson and E. S. C. Weiner, eds., *The Oxford English Dictionary* (vol. 14; 2d ed.; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 230–31, 745.

¹⁰³ This is in contrast to Bauer, who places Acts 20:28 under the use of ποιμαίνω with “imagistic detail retreating into the background.” BDAG, 842.

¹⁰⁴ BDAG, 879, Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 1:332.

to give to and help the weak (20:33–35). This draws out the helping, provisional role of a shepherd.

Based on the two senses of ποιμαίνω presented by Louw and Nida, to “guide and help” or “rule,” the first meaning better fits this context.¹⁰⁵ There is nothing here that points to a responsibility to rule. One may not conclude from this passage alone that ποιμαίνω never means to rule with reference to the overseer, but there is no evidence in this context that an elder has this responsibility. Therefore, in this passage, the intended purpose of appointing an overseer is to care for the church by protecting, guiding, and providing for it.

If not ruling authority, what type of authority is referred to in this passage? As appointed overseers, elders are responsible, and thus authorized, to respond to the threats of danger to the church.¹⁰⁶ The danger of the metaphorical wolves is described in the next verse as those who “speak twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them” (λαλοῦντες διεστραμμένα τοῦ ἀποσπᾶν τοὺς μαθητὰς ὀπίσω αὐτῶν, 20:30). This threat will both come from without and arise within the congregation (vv. 29–30). The trouble is a doctrinal issue that is brought about through teaching. One of the words in this phrase, ὀπίσω, is included in semantic domain “36. Guide, Discipline, Follow” and sub-domain “D. Follow, Be a Disciple.”¹⁰⁷ The word is not used to describe how disciples follow elders but how they may follow false teachers.

¹⁰⁵ Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 1:465, 478. See also E. Beyreuther, “ποιμήν,” *NIDNTT* 3:568; and J. Jeremias, “ποιμήν, ἀρχιποίμην, ποιμαίνω,” *TDNT* 6:498.

¹⁰⁶ See Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 153.

¹⁰⁷ Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 1:469.

How are elders to respond to this threat? Paul explains that they are to be alert by remembering how he “did not cease night or day to admonish everyone with tears” (20:31). The elders are to follow Paul’s example by tirelessly warning the congregation of the danger through compassionate teaching. The hope is that the congregation would choose to follow the elders that teach the truth instead of the false teachers. Elders are authorized to protect the church from false teachers by teaching the truth. The authority exercised here, as was also observed in ch. 15, is teaching authority and influence, not governmental authority.

It is in this context of teaching and doctrinal concerns that Paul commends the elders “to God and to the word of his grace” (20:32). Strength and wisdom from God and his word is necessary in order for the elders to carry out their responsibilities. This reality, and Paul’s initial warning for the elders to pay careful attention to themselves (20:28), reveals the importance of the character of the elders for fulfilling their duties. The qualifications for elders (1 Tim 3:1–7; Titus 1:5–9), which include their knowledge of the truth and blamelessness of character, confirm the dynamics of this passage.

Not only are the elders entrusted into God’s care but they are also appointed by the Holy Spirit to care for the church that was bought by and belongs to God. God is described as a dominant, active participant in the leadership of the local church. The human leadership of the church is not ultimately selected or appointed by humans.¹⁰⁸ Barrett explains how this relates to the appointment of elders by human agents. He writes:

As a procedure this does not necessarily differ from 14:23, but throws the process further back. Paul may appoint elders, but only those whom the Holy Spirit has

¹⁰⁸ See Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 148.

already singled out and has thus himself appointed. . . The Holy Spirit is at work in the church choosing and preparing by his gifts those who are to be ministers.¹⁰⁹

Neither does it exclude the probable selection of elders by the congregation as described above (Acts 6:1–6; 14:23).¹¹⁰ As in Acts 15, the ultimate desire of the congregation and its leaders is to discern God’s will. It is God who chooses and authorizes the leadership. Therefore, he remains the authority over the leaders and the church.¹¹¹

One final observation relevant to elders comes from the example of Paul’s motivation in serving God’s people. He did not desire material wealth from the Ephesians (20:33). Instead, he worked hard to meet his own needs and those of his co-workers (20:34). Elders are also exhorted to work hard so that they will be in a position to give rather than receive (20:35). The fact that Paul raised this matter implies that it was already an issue in the church. One may assume that elders were receiving some material compensation for their leadership (cf. 1 Tim 5:17–18). While Paul does not appear to exclude this possibility, he makes it clear that this is not to be their motivation. To present the possibility that an elder could be in a position to give, rather than receive, at least establishes the inappropriateness of the assumption that elders should receive full monetary compensation for their ministry as a general rule.

Acts 21:17–26

The next passage in Acts relevant to understanding the authority of church elders is Acts 21:17–26. The Jerusalem elders (πρεσβύτεροι) play a role in this narrative, offering

¹⁰⁹ Barrett, *Acts*, 974. See also Benjamin L. Merkle, *The Elder and Overseer: One Office in the Early Church* (New York: Peter Lang, 2003), 130; and Newton, *Elders in Congregational Life*, 77.

¹¹⁰ See Bock, *Acts*, 630; and Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 148.

¹¹¹ See Newton, *Elders in Congregational Life*, 77; and White, “The Plural-Elder-Led Church,” 273.

leadership to prevent a crisis in the church. The term κρίνω (judge) from the selected semantic domains appears again with reference to the resolution of the Jerusalem Council (21:25).¹¹² The significance of this verse is discussed above in relation to Acts 15.

Although 21:17–26 is generally considered a discourse unit,¹¹³ it is closely related to the ongoing narrative of Paul’s ministry. This story sets up the circumstances for Paul’s arrest in the next unit and the subsequent events in the rest of the book.¹¹⁴

Upon arriving in Jerusalem, Paul meets with the elders (21:18). The language of this verse once again indicates the unique leadership role of James. Luke does not state that Paul and his companions went to see the elders. Instead, they went to see James and the elders were present (πρὸς Ἰάκωβον, πάντες τε παρεγένοντο οἱ πρεσβύτεροι). This has the potential of expressing James’ unique leadership role.¹¹⁵ On the other hand, the significance of this construction could be overstated. Since Paul interacts with the elders as a body, it seems that the elders are not coincidentally present. After v. 18, James is not mentioned again, and the personal pronouns and verbs are plural.¹¹⁶ The position of James is discussed in relation to ch. 15. The present passage affirms that James was an influential, respected leader among the elders. If he held a unique leadership position, which is not explicitly stated in the New Testament, it appears again that he did not act independently but that the elders functioned as a body.

¹¹² Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 1:361–62.

¹¹³ See Dunn, *Acts*, 208; Witherington, *Acts*, viii; and Barrett, *Acts*, 999 (Barrett includes vv. 15–16).

¹¹⁴ See Barrett, *Acts*, 1000.

¹¹⁵ See Bock, *Acts*, 645; Giles, *Patterns of Ministry*, 80; and Polhill, *Acts*, 446.

¹¹⁶ “The dialogue is clearly between Paul and the assembly of brothers. Note that Luke uses the plural form throughout this passage.” Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 132.

After the elders heard and rejoiced in Paul's report, they explained the potential trouble that he would face in Jerusalem because those zealous for the Law heard that he was teaching Jews to forsake the Law (21:20–21). The elders suggest to Paul a course of action to circumvent a crisis. Based on the leadership dynamics observed above in Acts 15 and Gal 2, it is most appropriate to understand the direction of the elders as a suggestion.¹¹⁷ There is no evidence that they held a position of governing authority over Paul or had the power to enforce any such ruling.¹¹⁸ Paul willingly submitted to their leadership on the matter.¹¹⁹ The submission of even the apostle Paul to these elders confirms the jurisdiction and importance of the elders' leadership in the local church, as well as the ultimate authority of truth over all believers.

Concluding Observations

Based on the exegetical considerations above, principles related to elders' authority are preliminarily proposed. These observations, especially the non-prescriptive examples, are synthesized with all other related observations in the concluding chapter.

¹¹⁷ This is in contrast to views such as that of Giles, who writes, The elders "are depicted clearly as a communal council of elders with James presiding. They *decide* how the returned 'missionaries' are to act now that they are back in Jerusalem. So far, the Christian elders (of Acts 11:30, 15:2ff and 21:18) are not drawn by Luke as pastors and teachers of the church. They are depicted rather as members of communal *governing* councils" (emphasis added). Giles, *Patterns of Ministry*, 80.

¹¹⁸ See Campenhausen, *Ecclesiastical Authority*, 37; Hort, *The Christian Ecclesia*, 84; and Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 126.

¹¹⁹ "Paul freely chose to submit to this request. There is nothing to suggest he was compelled to do it, though he may have felt it was necessary to maintain the bond of peace between the mother church and his converts. There was not, for instance, any threat by the Jerusalem authorities that if he did not comply he and his mission would be rejected by the Jerusalem church." Witherington, *Acts*, 651. See also Barrett, *Acts*, 1015; and Bock, *Acts*, 648.

Acts 6:1–6

- 1) The selection of the Seven is an example of a decision made in the community by the community.
- 2) This decision-making occurred in the context of the strong initiative, guidance, and appointment of the leaders.
- 3) The leadership of the Twelve and the new leaders that were appointed provide examples of leaders functioning as a group and not as individuals.
- 4) The congregation's participation in the selection of the Seven was important and necessary. The similarities between the selection of the Seven and the selection of elders may affirm the importance and necessity of the congregation's participation in selecting elders.

Acts 11:27–30 (2 Corinthians 9:7)

- 1) The action of the church in Antioch to send aid was the voluntary, collective action of its members.
- 2) The elders are referenced in the plural, as a body of leaders in a particular area.
- 3) Elders were a defined, responsible group of leaders that were in a position to distribute financial support to the believers.

Acts 14:23

- 1) The elders already belonged to the local churches in which they were appointed.
- 2) There was a plurality of elders within "every church."
- 3) The elders were appointed by apostles, which does not necessarily exclude the participation of the congregation (cf. Acts 6:1–6).

Acts 15:1–35 and 16:4 (2 Corinthians 8:19)

- 1) The early church was a community that had a great deal of interactive discussion, open debate, and multiple teachers.
- 2) The Jerusalem apostles and elders were not acting as legislating rulers but rather as influential, respected teachers of God's truth. The resolution of the Jerusalem Council was the teaching of respected teachers, instead of the legislation of a ruling body.
- 3) The supreme goal of the council was to discern the will of God on the matter, not to create human rules. The ultimate authority among the apostles, elders, and the whole church was God and his will for his people.
- 4) Two local congregations, Antioch and Jerusalem, functioned autonomously.
- 5) In matters of congregational action in Antioch and Jerusalem, such as sending representatives from the church (15:2–3, 22), the corporate local church had decision-making authority.
- 6) Presented here is an example of a plurality of leadership that makes decisions by consensus. No single leader, such as Paul, Peter, or even James, possessed governing authority.

Acts 20:17, 28–35

- 1) The Christians in Ephesus are an example of one church existing in a particular location being led by a plurality of elders (v. 17, 28).
- 2) Elders are responsible for, and thus have authority in, a particular location (v. 17, 28–29).

- 3) The use of the two terms πρεσβύτερος and ἐπίσκοπος to refer to the same group of leaders in this passage is significant evidence that they are not used in Scripture to refer to two different positions in the church (v. 17, 28).
- 4) The purpose of appointing overseers is that they might care for the church by protecting and providing for it (v. 28). ἐπίσκοπος conveys the function of a person who safeguards and watches over something.
- 5) The elders are to tirelessly warn the congregation of danger through compassionate teaching. Elders are authorized to protect the church from false teachers by teaching the truth (vv. 29–32).
- 6) Strength and wisdom from God and his word are necessary for the elders to carry out their responsibilities (v. 32).
- 7) The character of the elders is important for fulfilling their duties (v. 28, 32).
- 8) The human leadership of the church is not ultimately selected or appointed by humans; it is God who chooses and authorizes the leadership (v. 28).
- 9) Elders are to work hard so that they will be in a position to give rather than receive (vv. 33–35).

Acts 21:17–26

- 1) The elders function as a body.
- 2) Some leaders may have greater influence or fulfill particular functions based on earned respect and giftedness (James, v. 18).
- 3) In this case, elders offered leadership in response to a potential crisis.

CHAPTER 4

THE AUTHORITY OF ELDERS IN PAUL'S CHURCH EPISTLES

According to the criteria for passage selection described in chapter one, seven of Paul's letters to churches qualify: 1 Cor 5:1–13; 6:1–8; 14:26–35; 16:15–18; Eph 4:11–16; Phil 1:1; and 1 Thess 5:12–13. This chapter includes a discussion of the exegetical issues in each passage that are relevant to the authority of church elders.

1 Corinthians 5:1–13

First Corinthians 5:1–13 is relevant to the present study for two reasons. First, it contains the word κρίνω (“judge”), which is included in selected semantic domain “30. Think.”¹

Several other possible domains that may express its sense here are discussed below.

κρίνω appears in vv. 3, 12, and 13 with reference to the judgment of Paul (vv. 3, 12), the church (v. 12), and God (v. 13).² The nature of this judgment and the role of these various agents are pertinent to the dynamics of authority in the local church.³ Second, this

¹ J. P. Louw and E. A. Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1989), 1:348.

² See A. Y. Collins, “The Function of ‘Excommunication’ in Paul,” *HTR* 73 (1980): 220.

³ Gordon Fee sees authority as an underlying issue throughout chs. 5–6. He writes, “What seems to be at stake in the next three sections (5:1–13; 6:1–11; 6:12–20) is the *crisis of authority* that was a large part of what lay behind 1:10–4:21, and especially the authority of Paul vis-à-vis the ‘arrogant’ who were responsible for leading the church in its new direction, both theologically and over against Paul.” Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 194–95. David Garland disagrees, “The key issue in this section is not Paul’s need to reassert his authority over the community with a show of force. The root problem is their spiritual arrogance combined with moral laxity.” David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians* (BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 153. Based on the following study, it seems that the authority at issue is that of the Corinthian congregation to judge sin

passage is an important contribution to an understanding of “church discipline,” along with Matt 18:15–20. These passages spell out the responsibility and authority of the church to respond to sin within the community in order to keep the church pure.

First Corinthians 5:1–13 is commonly understood as a discourse unit since the subject, the removal of a person from the community, is clearly marked at the beginning and end (vv. 2 and 13).⁴ This unit is closely related to ch. 6, in which the judgment theme is maintained.⁵ First Corinthians 5:1–13 can be divided into two paragraphs: vv. 1–8 and vv. 9–13.⁶ Paul’s primary concern in addressing the sexual immorality of the offender was not the individual’s sin but the failure of the community to respond properly to the sin (v. 2).⁷ Therefore, he explained what the Corinthians were to do and why (vv. 2–13): the church is to remove the unrepentant sinner from the community (vv. 2 and 13) in order to keep the community pure (vv. 6–8).⁸

within the community. Paul’s reprimand for not responding to the sin assumes they have the responsibility and right, and thus the authority, to do so.

⁴ The theme of removal from the community “serves as an inclusio that marks off this unit and conveys the essence of what Paul expects them to do.” Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 164. See also Collins, “Excommunication,” 251.

⁵ R. F. Collins explains, “The judgment motif is one that recurs throughout the letter, but Paul’s use of the verb *krino*, ‘to judge’ is most dense in 5:1–6:11. The verb serves as a catchword that links together the three epistolary units (5:1–8; 9–13; 6:1–11) and provides them with a common theme, judgment, that ties the units together.” R. F. Collins, *First Corinthians* (SP 7; Collegeville, Minn: Liturgical, 1999), 220. See also Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 226.

⁶ See Collins, *First Corinthians*, 216; and Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 184.

⁷ See P. Minear, “Christ and the Congregation: 1 Cor. 5–6,” *RevExp* 80 (1983): 343; Archibald Robertson and Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians* (2d ed.; ICC; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1958), 95; and B. S. Rosner, “Οὐχὶ μᾶλλον ἐπενθήσατε: Corporate Responsibility in 1 Cor 5,” *NTS* 38 (1992): 471.

⁸ “On one point there is general agreement. The action involved expulsion of the offender from the community, a procedure which was called ‘excommunication’ later on in the history of the Church.” Collins, “Excommunication,” 253–54. See also C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (2d ed.; London: Black, 1968, 1971), 126.

Louw and Nida place κρίνω into four semantic domains: “30. Think,” “31. Hold a View, Believe, Trust,” “37. Control, Rule,” and “56. Courts and Legal Procedures.”⁹ Judgment, in this context, is a response to sin (vv. 1, 9–11); therefore, domains 31 and 37 do not seem to fit. Domain 30 is possible, but since the evaluation and punishment of a sin is at issue, the definitions in domain 56, sub-domain “E. Judge, Condemn, Acquit,” best describe its sense here.¹⁰ In vv. 12–13, Paul described two areas of judicial jurisdiction, those outside (τοὺς . . . ἔξω) and those inside (τοὺς ἔσω). This reaffirms his clarification in vv. 10–11: It is not the place of the church to judge those “of this world” (τοῦ κόσμου τούτου), that is God’s jurisdiction. Although those inside the church are certainly within God’s jurisdiction as well, the church has a particular responsibility to judge those within its congregation.

It is clearly established, then, that the corporate, local church body has the authority, the right and responsibility, to judge those within their community.¹¹ That is the point of Paul’s argument in vv. 12–13, that is what he instructed them to do (vv. 2, 5, 7, 11, 12), and that is what he admonished them for not doing (vv. 2, 6).¹² The judgment

⁹ Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 1:348, 364, 471, 477, 554–55.

¹⁰ Two definitions may fit: “to decide a legal question, to act as a judge, making a legal decision, to arrive at a verdict, to try a case,” and “to judge as guilty, to condemn, condemnation.” Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 554–55. See also Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (3d ed.; rev. and ed. Frederick William Danker; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 568.

¹¹ See Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 190–91; and Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 416.

¹² Referring to the fact that Paul reprimands them for not doing something about the sin, John Calvin reasons, “From which it also appears that churches are provided with this power, that they can correct or remove by strict discipline any fault that there may be in them; and those which are not vigilant about clearing away filth, cannot be excused.” John Calvin, *The First Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians* (trans. John W. Fraser; Calvin’s New Testament Commentaries; Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1960), 106.

of the church, as described by Paul, is the removal of the evil person from among them.

Two actions the church must take in order to carry out this judgment are delivering such a one to Satan (v. 5) and not associating with such a one (v. 11).

Most commentators understand the delivering of the man to Satan to be a reference to removal from the community. They reason that when a person is removed from the community, he is outside the protection of Christ through the church and exposed to the forces of Satan.¹³ This view renders the actual procedure for removing a person from the community implicit. Based on Paul's judgment and spiritual presence, the Corinthians were to gather together in the name of the Lord Jesus and take a particular action with his power.¹⁴ Following the reasoning above, but making the act more explicit, it is possible that the congregation was to corporately remove the man

¹³ See E. Bernard Allo, *Saint Paul: Première Épître aux Corinthiens* (Paris: J. Gabalda, 1956), 122–23; Calvin, *1 Corinthians*, 108; B. Campbell, “Flesh and Spirit in 1 Cor. 5:5: An Exercise in Rhetorical Criticism of the NT,” *JETS* 36 (1993): 332; Collins, *First Corinthians*, 207, 212; Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 208–209; Hans Conzelmann, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (trans. James W. Leitch; Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975), 97–98; Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 154, 173; Robertson and Plummer, *Commentary on the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians*, 99; Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 397; M. E. Thrall, *I and II Corinthians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1965), 40. One notable exception is J. D. M. Derrett, who argues that “handing over to Satan” means turning the criminal over to the state authorities for punishment. J. D. M. Derrett, “‘Handing Over to Satan’ An Explanation of 1 Cor. 5:1–7,” *RIDA* 26 (1979): 11. Collins argues that it signifies a more literal spiritual transaction. Collins, “Excommunication,” 255.

¹⁴ The syntax of vv. 3–5 is not clear and there are several possible translations. See Barrett, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 123; and Conzelmann, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 97. Most unclear is which verb is modified by ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ. Most writers take ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι as a modifier of συναχθέντων: Allo, *Saint Paul*, 121–24; Barrett, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 124; Collins, *First Corinthians*, 212; V. C. Pfitzner, “Purified Community—Purified Sinner: Expulsion from the Community According to Matthew 18:15–18 and 1 Corinthians 5:1–5,” *ABR* 30 (1982): 42; Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 393–94; Thrall, *I and II Corinthians*, 40; and Ben Witherington III, *Conflict & Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 158. Fee and Garland argue that ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι modifies Paul's judgment. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 207–208; and Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 166. Based partly on the important parallel in Matt 18, this author takes ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι as a modifier of the gathering of the Corinthian believers and σὺν τῇ δυνάμει τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ as a modifier of παραδοῦναι. See Barrett, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 125.

from the spiritual protection of Christ within the community through prayer. This may correspond to the promise of answered prayer as a basis for removal of a person from the community in Matt 18:15–20. The connection is further strengthened by the parallel reference to gathering in the name of Christ with his presence and power (1 Cor 5:4; Matt 18:20).¹⁵ In addition to the spiritual removal of a person from the community, the Corinthians were to take social action. They were not to associate, not even to eat, with such a one (v. 11).¹⁶

It is important to note the necessarily corporate nature of these actions. When delivering the man to Satan, the church must be assembled.¹⁷ Furthermore, in order for the social disassociation to be effective, it must involve the whole congregation. Paul’s reference to a similar, or possibly the same, situation in 2 Corinthians confirms the corporate nature of the action. “This punishment by the majority is enough” (2 Cor 2:6). It also reveals that while some in the body may not observe the disassociation, it is effective when a majority of the community participates.

While the authority of the church is clear, the authority and role of Paul in this sequence must also be considered. Verses 3 and 12 refer to the judgment of Paul. The only other occurrence in the New Testament of the act of delivering persons to Satan is that of Paul in 1 Tim 1:20.¹⁸ Some believe that Paul exercised unique apostolic authority

¹⁵ See Calvin, *1 Corinthians*, 108; and Pfitzner, “Purified Community,” 43.

¹⁶ Eating together probably included more than just the common meal enjoyed by the assembled community. See Barrett, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 132; Calvin, *1 Corinthians*, 114; Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 189; and Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 415.

¹⁷ See Barrett, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 124.

¹⁸ See William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles* (WBC 46; Nashville: Nelson, 2000), 70.

over the local churches for which he was responsible.¹⁹ By equating the delivery to Satan with excommunication, it may be implied that Paul exercised individual authority to remove a person from a local community. First Corinthians 5 makes it clear that Paul did not think so. Although he already judged the matter, it remained the responsibility of the Corinthians to take action.²⁰

Instead of exercising a unique individual authority, Paul emphasized his solidarity with the Corinthians. By the triple reference to his presence with them, Paul stressed that his judgment, and theirs in response to his letter, was based on his membership in their community (vv. 3–4).²¹ The parallel structure of v. 12 shows that he equated his own judgment with the Corinthians' judgment.²² The contrast of these phrases is the judgment of those outside and those inside. Paul and the Corinthians were insiders who were to judge those within the congregation.

The essentially corporate nature of excommunication observed here and in Matt 18:17 further confirms that Paul, or any other individual, could not possess such authority

¹⁹ Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 69–70.

²⁰ V. C. Pfitzner writes, "He has not been set over the church as a director or dictator of moral affairs, nor as president of an ecclesiastical court. Judgment in the community must be passed by the whole community, as in Matt 18:17, that is, when they are assembled in the name of the Lord." Pfitzner, "Purified Community," 43. The following commentators also believe that Paul made a personal judgment and instructed the Corinthians to follow suit: Barrett, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 124–25; Hans von Campenhausen, *Ecclesiastical Authority and Spiritual Power in the Church of the First Two Centuries* (trans. J. A. Baker; Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University, 1969), 49–50; Collins, *First Corinthians*, 207; Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 206; Witherington, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, 158. Garland sees Paul exercising some authority over the Corinthian congregation, but "he does not mete out a sovereign decision . . . The disciplinary process requires the involvement of the entire community." Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 165.

²¹ "Paul stresses his spiritual presence in the community (5:3–4). This gives him the right to speak as he does without destroying the responsibility of the congregation. He pronounces judgment on this sin, not by fiat, but with the community." Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 154. See also Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 190–91 and Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 391.

²² Garland explains, "The 'I' here is hortative; that is, Paul intends his readers to apply what he says to themselves." Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 190.

alone.²³ Paul's interaction with various local churches in Acts also reveals that he did not enjoy such governing authority (e.g. Acts 15:1–2). While Paul's authority as an apostle cannot be minimized in this letter, that authority is not judicial or governmental but didactic and prophetic.²⁴ What, then, is to be made of 1 Tim 1:20? Although this question merits further study, it may be suggested based on the evidence above that it is a reference to a corporate action in which Paul participated. It is also possible that since removal from a community is enacted by a church body, an individual delivering a person to Satan may be some other prayer or spiritual transaction.

One may observe from this passage that the local congregation has corporate authority to spiritually and socially remove an evil person from among them. There is no authority outside or above the local church that takes such action. No mention is made of elders,²⁵ or any leadership council or tribunal, that are responsible for taking such an action without the full assembly.²⁶ It is also important to note that this authority is of a spiritual and social nature, not governmental or institutional. The power to carry out the

²³ See Calvin, *1 Corinthians*, 107.

²⁴ See Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 214; Minear, "Christ and the Congregation," 342 and Pfitzner, "Purified Community," 43.

²⁵ This is an argument from silence, and it is possible that there were no church elders in Corinth at the time. However, the inherently corporate nature of the judgment of the church and the absence of a development in the New Testament that assigns this task to leaders leaves this authority safely in the hands of the congregation.

²⁶ See Daniel L. Akin, "The Single-Elder-Led Church: The Bible's Witness to a Congregational Single-Elder-Led Polity," in *Perspectives on Church Government: Five Views of Church Polity* (ed. Chad Owen Brand and R. Stanton Norman; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2004), 31; Barrett, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 125, 132–33; James Leo Garrett, Jr., "The Congregation-Led Church: Congregational Polity," in *Perspectives on Church Government*, 167–68; Benjamin L. Merkle, *40 Questions About Elders and Deacons* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2008), 42; and Witherington, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, 158.

spiritual aspect is that of the Lord Jesus²⁷ (1 Cor 5:4) and his promise of answered prayer (Matt 18:19–20). The power of the social aspect is the simple, daily submission of the individual members to the corporate decision to remove the person from the community (1 Cor 5:11; 2 Cor 2:6).²⁸

1 Corinthians 6:1–8

The theme of judgment within the community continues in 1 Cor 6:1–8.²⁹ It contains two terms, διακρίνω and κρίνω, from selected semantic domain “30. Think.”³⁰ However, as above, in this context κρίνω has more the sense of domain “56. Courts and Legal Procedures.”³¹ Paul admonished the Corinthians because they “go to law” (κρίνεσθαι) before the unrighteous instead of fellow believers when they have a grievance (v. 1). He showed that this was out of place by reminding them of the eschatological judgment of the world and the angels by the saints (v. 2, οἱ ἅγιοι τὸν κόσμον κρινοῦσιν; v. 3, ἀγγέλους κρινοῦμεν).³² Paul maintained the judicial jurisdictions outlined in v. 12: those outside and those inside the church. Not only are insiders not to judge outsiders, but he established that outsiders are not to judge insiders.

²⁷ See Barrett, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 125; and Calvin, *1 Corinthians*, 108.

²⁸ Calvin explains, “The power of excommunication is not granted to each member, but to the whole body. The point is that no believer ought to enter into friendly relations with anyone whom the Church has excommunicated. Besides, the authority of the Church would count for nothing, if individuals were allowed to invite to their own tables those who have been debarred from the Lord’s Table.” Calvin, *1 Corinthians*, 114.

²⁹ See Collins, *First Corinthians*, 220; and Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 226.

³⁰ Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 1:348.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 1:554–55. See also BDAG, 568; and Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 208.

³² See Calvin, *1 Corinthians*, 118; Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 232–33; Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 201–202; and Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 425–26.

The issue at hand is not an individual's sin, as in ch. 5, but a matter between two brothers that could be addressed in a court of law. One may suppose that an issue involving sin would be dealt with according to the procedures laid out in Matt 18:15–20 and 1 Cor 5. An indicator that a different type of situation is in view is Paul's significantly different solution: can they not find someone among them wise enough to judge (διακρίνω) such matters (v. 5)? For the purposes of this study, it is only necessary to note that such a judging responsibility is not explicitly assigned to any leadership position, such as that of elders.³³ The community, or at least the two parties involved in a dispute, may agree upon a qualified arbiter from among the brothers to decide their case.³⁴

1 Corinthians 14:26–35

The next relevant passage in 1 Corinthians is 14:26–35. Two terms from the selected semantic domains appear in this text: διακρίνω (judge carefully) and ὑποτάσσω (submit). This unit contains Paul's teaching on orderly worship and is a continuation of the topics of tongues and prophecy, which began in 14:1, and spiritual gifts, which began in ch. 12.³⁵ The context of the worship assembly established in v. 26 indicates that each one may have some form of edification to offer the congregation.

Verses 29–33a provide instructions about prophesying in the assembly. When prophets speak, the others are to carefully judge (οἱ ἄλλοι διακρινέτωσαν) what is said.

³³ As noted above, this is an argument from silence, and it is possible that there were no church elders in Corinth at the time. If they were present or appointed later, it is likely that elders would have fulfilled such a role. However, one may not assume this based on their office, but on their qualifications. Since this task is not given to the elders elsewhere in the New Testament, one may not assume the appointment of elders later would necessitate their claim to this task.

³⁴ See Calvin, *1 Corinthians*, 120.

³⁵ See Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 559.

The “others” may be the other prophets³⁶ but more likely refers to the rest of the assembly.³⁷ Wayne Grudem points out that in other instances where public speech is to be judged, the whole congregation seems to be included (1 Cor 12:3; 1 Thess 5:20–21; 1 John 4:1–6; Acts 17:11). He also suggests that Paul would not have used such general wording if the other prophets were intended.³⁸ A prophecy is not automatically taken to be true, but must be weighed and evaluated.³⁹

In relation to this study, it must be observed again that this responsibility is not given exclusively to any leadership position.⁴⁰ If there were elders in the church at Corinth, they would surely participate in this process since it is the responsibility of elders to guard the congregation from falsehood (Acts 20:28–32; Titus 1:9).⁴¹ However, since this is their responsibility, it is all the more striking that, if there are elders in Corinth, they are not specifically given this task.⁴² Instead, the whole congregation is responsible for discerning true teaching and valid prophecy.⁴³

³⁶ See Calvin, *1 Corinthians*, 302.

³⁷ See Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 694; Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 663; Wayne Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2000), 54–7; and Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 1140–41.

³⁸ Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy*, 56.

³⁹ Wayne Grudem explains, “As a prophet was speaking, each member of the congregation would listen carefully, evaluating the prophecy in light of the Scripture and the authoritative teaching that he or she already knew to be true.” Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy*, 57. See also Calvin, *1 Corinthians*, 302.

⁴⁰ Thiselton notes, “Traditions concerning elders, teachers, and chairperson or president are likely to have been carried over from synagogue tradition, but Paul draws no hard-and-fast line between different categories here.” Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 1140–41.

⁴¹ “We would expect the mature (cf. Heb. 5:14), the wise (cf. 1 Cor. 6:5), those perhaps with the gift of distinguishing between spirits (1 Cor. 6:5), to speak more often and with more authority. But nowhere do we find judging limited to those with one particular office or gift.” Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy*, 57. See also Allo, *Saint Paul*, 370.

The next portion of this passage, 33b–35, addresses the role of women or wives in the worship setting. They are to be in submission (ὑποτάσσω) by remaining silent. This section is controversial and difficult to interpret.⁴⁴ Three common views exist regarding this sub-unit.⁴⁵ First, some conclude, based on external and internal evidence, that it is a non-Pauline interpolation.⁴⁶ Most commentators place only limited weight on the external, or textual, evidence.⁴⁷ Thiselton summarizes the evidence:

The basic facts are that the Western, D, E, F, G, the later 88*, and fourth-century Ambrosiastor displace vv. 34–35 to after v. 40. However, the very early p⁴⁶ (Chester Beatty, c. AD 200, together with Ⲙ, B, A 33, 88 mg, Vulgate, Old Syriac, and most other MSS) read these verses in their normal, accepted place.⁴⁸

Those who argue for this position lean more heavily on the internal evidence.⁴⁹ This evidence consists of arguments related to the sub-unit’s interruption of the theme and

⁴² If elders are not mentioned because there were none, one may assume that the responsibility of judging prophecy remains with the congregation since there is no development in the New Testament assigning the task to elders alone.

⁴³ As is discussed in the next section, it is possible that women were excluded from verbally participating in this process. This does not diminish the fact that the responsibility was not given to those who hold a particular gift or office.

⁴⁴ See D. A. Carson, “‘Silent in the Churches’: On the Role of Women in 1 Corinthians 14:33b–36,” in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism* (ed. John Piper and Wayne Grudem. Wheaton: Crossway, 1991), 140; Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 664–65; Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 1147.

⁴⁵ See Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 665–73; and Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 1147.

⁴⁶ Fee concludes, “On the whole, therefore, the case against these verses is so strong, and finding a viable solution to their meaning so difficult, that it seems best to view them as an interpolation.” Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 705.

⁴⁷ Thiselton points out that Fee places more weight on the textual evidence than most who hold this view. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 1148.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ See Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 666; and Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 1148–49.

flow of the unit, apparent contradiction with 11:5, and use of non-Pauline language (his appeal to the law and the phrase “church of the saints”).⁵⁰

The second view is to regard these instructions as a Corinthian quotation that Paul rejects. It is argued that he stated the Corinthian position in vv. 34–35 and then responded with a sarcastic rebuttal in the form of rhetorical questions in v. 36. This is potentially one of the many Corinthian quotations used by Paul (possibly 1:12; 2:15; 6:12/10:23; 6:13; 7:1; 8:1, 4, 8; 11:2; 15:12) and the particle in v. 36 is an exclamation of disapproval.⁵¹

Finally, some interpreters understand Paul to be placing limitations on the participation of women in worship.⁵² Because of the flow of the context of vv. 26–35 and the freedom given to women to pray and prophesy in ch. 11, vv. 34–35 are not commonly understood to require absolute silence.⁵³ Some common interpretations are that Paul was instructing women to cease from disruptive or culturally inappropriate conduct,⁵⁴ to refrain from speaking in tongues, or to remain silent when prophecy is being evaluated.⁵⁵

⁵⁰ See Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 1150.

⁵¹ See Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 666–67.

⁵² See Allo, *Saint Paul*, 372–73; and G. G. Findlay, *St. Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians*, in *The Expositor's Greek Testament 2* (ed. W. Robertson Nicoll; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 914–15.

⁵³ See Carson, “Silent in the Churches,” 145–46.

⁵⁴ See Linda L. Belleville, “Women in Ministry: An Egalitarian Perspective,” in *Two Views on Women in Ministry* (ed. James R. Beck; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 70–78; Craig S. Keener, “Learning in the Assemblies: 1 Corinthians 14:34–35,” in *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity Without Hierarchy* (ed. Ronald W. Pierce and Rebecca Merrill Groothuis; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2005), 170–71; Walter L. Liefeld, “Women, Submission and Ministry in 1 Corinthians,” in *Women, Authority & the Bible* (ed. Alvera Mickelsen; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1986), 153–54.

⁵⁵ Craig L. Blomberg surveys these three views and argues for the last. Craig L. Blomberg, “Women in Ministry: A Complementarian Perspective,” in *Two Views on Women in Ministry* (ed. James R. Beck; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 162–65. Thiselton also concludes, “We believe that the speaking in question denotes the activity of sifting or weighing the words of prophets, especially by asking probing questions about the prophet’s theology or even the prophet’s lifestyle in public.” Thiselton, *The First*

This passage is relevant to the authority of elders because it may indirectly limit the office of elders to men. If one may assume that such leaders as elders would take a prominent role in the evaluation of prophecy, as is fitting for their responsibilities as overseers, then the exclusion of women from such activity necessarily excludes them from holding the position of an elder.⁵⁶ If the verses are an interpolation, then the passage makes no contribution to an understanding of gender and the elders' office. If Paul was arguing against those who would limit the participation of women in worship (by using the Corinthian quotation), or addressing disruptive behavior or speaking in tongues, then there is nothing from this passage that limits the elders' office to men.

It is not possible to adequately respond here to all the issues and arguments involved in these verses. In the view of this writer, the arguments for supposing that 14:34–35 are an interpolation or a Corinthian quotation are weak.⁵⁷ Instead, some limitation on a woman's participation in worship should be seriously considered. Most

Epistle to the Corinthians, 1158. Others that believe women are excluded from speaking when prophecy is being weighed include Carson, "Silent in the Churches," 151–53; James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 591–92; Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 667; Sharon Hodgkin Gritz, "The Role of Women in the Church," in *The People of God: Essays on the Believers' Church* (ed. Paul Basden and David S. Dockery; Nashville: Broadman, 1991), 302; Wayne A. Grudem, "Prophecy—Yes, but Teaching—No: Paul's Consistent Advocacy of Women's Participation Without Governing Authority," *JETS* 30 (1987): 11–23; Merkle, *40 Questions*, 154–55; and Thrall, *I and II Corinthians*, 102.

⁵⁶ Blomberg reasons, "It would ultimately have devolved to the leadership of the church to render a verdict on any disputed messages. If Paul believed the highest level of church leadership was reserved for men . . . , then it could be that he is telling the women (at least in his day) to be silent merely in that one specific context. . . . It is possible . . . that a . . . culture-transcending principle is presupposed—reserving the highest leadership role in the church for men—but if so, it is not explicitly stated." Blomberg, "Women in Ministry," 164–65. Understanding Paul to be prohibiting some form of teaching, Calvin reasons in a similar fashion, "The task of teaching is one that belongs to someone with oversight, and is for that reason inconsistent with being in subjection. . . . If the woman is under subjection, she is therefore debarred from having authority to teach in public. . . . Authority to teach is out of keeping with the woman's role, because, if she does teach, she is set over all the men, whereas she should properly be under subjection." Calvin, *1 Corinthians*, 306–307.

⁵⁷ Garland argues, "Identifying 14:34–35 as an interpolation seems driven more by the difficulty of finding a 'viable solution' to the meaning of these verses (see Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*,

importantly, if clearer passages restrict women from serving as elders, then the relevance of 1 Cor 14:34–35 to elders is already resolved. Therefore, the question of female elders is left for the discussion of 1 Tim 2:8–15, which is less complicated and deals more directly with the issue of gender and authority within the church.⁵⁸

1 Corinthians 16:15–18

The final passage relevant to the authority of elders in 1 Corinthians is 16:15–18. It contains the term ὑποτάσσω from selected semantic domain “37. Control, Rule.”⁵⁹ Paul instructed the Corinthians to “submit” (ὑποτάσσω) to people such as those who belonged to the household of Stephanas (vv. 15–16). He provided two qualifications that characterize such people as grounds for submitting to them:⁶⁰ they were the first converts and they devoted themselves to the service of the saints. Paul’s reference to their early conversion probably pointed to their relative maturity and proven faithfulness in the Lord.⁶¹ As for their service to the saints, he stated that it was of their own initiative, “they have devoted themselves” (ἔταξαν ἑαυτούς). Since no mention is made of these servants being appointed by Paul or the church, their self-devotion may imply they did not hold

281) than by the weight of the textual evidence. The external evidence is too weak to support this theory.” Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 666. See also Blomberg, “Women in Ministry,” 162.

⁵⁸ After pointing out that this passage does not explicitly speak to gender and leadership, Blomberg introduces 1 Tim 2:8–15 as “the primary battleground for debating that issue.” Blomberg, “Women in Ministry,” 165.

⁵⁹ Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 1:475.

⁶⁰ Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 828–29.

⁶¹ See Calvin, *1 Corinthians*, 356; and Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 1338.

formal leadership positions.⁶² Their activity, however, is clear: they were serving God’s people.

The Corinthians were also supposed to submit “to every fellow worker and laborer” (παντὶ τῷ συνεργοῦντι καὶ κοπιῶντι). Paul broadened the instruction from particular people to a general type of people.⁶³ They are to yield to and follow anyone who is working diligently in service of the church and the gospel.⁶⁴ Paul then urged the Corinthian believers to “recognize” (ἐπιγινώσκετε) such men as Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus. He explained that they visited Paul and refreshed him as they also refreshed the Corinthians. In this way, these men also were serving the saints, and in particular Paul.⁶⁵

The qualifications and relational dynamics described here share many similarities with church elders. They were mature and proven (1 Tim 3:2–7, esp. v. 6; Titus 1:5–9); they were serving the church (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet 5:2) by their own conviction and choice (1 Tim 3:1; 1 Pet 5:2); they were to be submitted to (1 Pet 5:5, also ὑποτάσσω); they were laborers (1 Tim 5:17); and they strengthened the church (Acts 20:35). It is significant, though, that elders are not mentioned. It is possible that elders had not been

⁶² Barrett writes, “They were not appointed by Paul; they were not appointed by the church; in a spirit not of self-assertion but of service and humility they appointed themselves.” Barrett, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 394. See also Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 829–30; Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 768; and Robertson and Plummer, *Commentary on the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians*, 395.

⁶³ “The list of exemplars is open-ended. The criteria for who can become a role model are functional, not formal. It does not depend on a person’s being appointed to a position in the church.” R. Banks, “Church Order and Government,” in *DPL* (ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Reid; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1993), 133.

⁶⁴ See Barrett, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 395; Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 831; Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 1339.

⁶⁵ See Barrett, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 395.

appointed in the church at Corinth. Paul’s approach in urging them to submit, the self-initiation of these servants, and the broad scope of co-workers included indicates that there was no structural basis for his request.⁶⁶ What qualified them to receive submission was their character and ministry to the saints.

Without a leadership structure to which to appeal, it is evident that the submission requested was voluntary. The imperative was not directed toward Stephanas, that he might bring others into submission. The request was made in the passive voice to those who are to submit, “submit yourselves” (ὑποτάσσησθε). While this term can signify obedience or be used in a hierarchical context, it is also used to express yielding to others in a mutual, relational sense.⁶⁷ It is the latter meaning that is expressed here.⁶⁸ Bauer explains ὑποτάσσω in this context as “submission in the sense of voluntary yielding in love.”⁶⁹ The request for voluntary submission is well served by Paul’s emphasis on and appeal to the mutuality of the brotherhood (παρακαλῶ δὲ ὑμᾶς, ἀδελφοί) and of the co-

⁶⁶ Garland reasons, “He is not lobbying for these three men to receive special authority in the church, since he also adds a commendation for *all* who labor like them.” Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 768; See also Conzelman, *1 Corinthians*, 298.

⁶⁷ In domain “37. Control, Rule,” Louw and Nida define ὑποτάσσω “to bring something under the firm control of someone—‘to subject to, to bring under control.’” Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 1:475. The middle form, ὑποτάσσομαι, is in a different domain, “36. Guide, Discipline, Follow,” sub-domain “C. Obey, Disobey.” Here it is defined “to submit to the orders or directives of someone—‘to obey, to submit to, obedience, submission.’” Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 1:467. Based on the above observations, these definitions seem to emphasize control and obedience more than seems appropriate for this context. Bauer defines the term more generally, “to cause to be in a submissive relationship, *to subject, to subordinate*.” BDAG, 1042. Fee writes, “Although this could possibly mean to be in submission to them in some form of obedience, both the context and the similar passage in 1 Thess. 5:12–14 suggest rather that it means ‘submission in the sense of voluntary yielding in love’ (BAGD), much the same as in Eph. 5:21, where all are urged to be ‘subject to one another out of reverence for Christ.’” Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 830.

⁶⁸ See Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 830; and Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 1339.

⁶⁹ BDAG, 1042.

workers (συνεργοῦντι).⁷⁰ There also may be a parallel between the voluntary submission of the Corinthians and the voluntary service of Stephanas' household.⁷¹ In this situation, submission is willingly offered to those who deserve it because of their service and ministry.

It is sometimes noted that Stephanas' household probably included women.⁷² If so, then Paul was suggesting that women who are devoted to serving the church should also be submitted to and recognized. Since this context lacks any signification of official structure, it does not speak to the issue of elders and gender. While this passage is not about elders, it presents a broader principle for relationships in the church that also applies to elders. As Garland writes, "Recognition should be based on function, not status, so that authority derives from selfless service and hard toil for others."⁷³ This does not rule out the possibility or need for formal positions of authority. Instead, it establishes the standard of service and character upon which the position of an elder is based (1 Tim 3:1–7; 5:17–25; Titus 1:5–9; 1 Peter 5:2–3). This example also demonstrates that

⁷⁰ Thiselton writes, "Paul enjoins *a mutuality and reciprocity of respect*. . . . The use of ἀδελφοί, here certainly brothers and sisters (denoting inclusiveness and reciprocal equality) as well as συνεργοῦντι, *co-workers* sharing in common work, underlines *mutuality and complementarity*." Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 1339.

⁷¹ Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 830.

⁷² Fee observes that his household "included at least two or more adult members, since the second verb is plural. . . . Which very well might include his wife and slaves and/or freedmen. In any case, for Paul the key to such respect or 'submission' is not sex or socioeconomic status but ministry." Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 829, 831; See also Barrett, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 394.

⁷³ Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 768. See also Calvin, *1 Corinthians*, 355; Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 833.

submission to Christian workers does not necessarily establish a hierarchy of governing authority, but may be based on voluntary love and respect.⁷⁴

Ephesians 4:11–16

The next passage that is relevant to elders' authority is Eph 4:11–16. One term from the selected semantic domains appears in this passage. Louw and Nida place ποιμήν in domain “53. Religious Activities; I. Roles and Functions.”⁷⁵ Here, it is a figurative extension of the literal meaning “shepherd” and designates a person who leads and cares for others in the body of Christ.⁷⁶ ποιμήν is often translated “pastor” and equated with an elder.⁷⁷ While it is not used anywhere else in the NT to refer to a Christian leader, one of the primary roles of an elder is “to shepherd” (ποιμαίνω) the church (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet 5:2).⁷⁸ Whether this is a direct reference to elders or not introduces a much-debated question from this passage, “Is v. 11 a list of gifts or offices?”

⁷⁴ Barrett writes, “It is now for the church to recognize this ministry, as Paul does. It is in this recognition of willingness to serve, and of spiritual equipment, that the origins of the Christian ministry lie.” Barrett, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 394.

⁷⁵ Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 1:541.

⁷⁶ Ibid.; and BDAG, 843.

⁷⁷ See Akin, “The Single-Elder-Led Church,” 50; Joseph Barber Lightfoot, “The Christian Ministry,” in *Saint Paul’s Epistle to the Philippians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1913, 1953), 194–95; and Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 915. Barth’s translation is “teaching shepherds,” but he also takes it as a reference to “bishops.” Markus Barth, *Ephesians* (2 vols.; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1974), 2:438–39.

⁷⁸ See Akin, “The Single-Elder-Led Church,” 50; E. Best, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Ephesians* (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1998), 392; F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 347–48; and Peter T. O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 299.

It is important to avoid two mistakes when discussing gifting and office. The first is to fail to make a distinction between the two.⁷⁹ While all believers are gifted, not all hold offices. The second mistake is to assume a false dichotomy between gifting and office.⁸⁰ Ministry in the church may include both gifting and office. While not all those gifted hold an office, those who hold an office function in their giftedness.⁸¹ Andrew Lincoln points out that in Eph 4:11 Paul was not referring to offices or gifts but to groups of people.⁸² The question is whether they are so named because of their function or office.⁸³ If one may assume that those holding an office are also functioning in the named ministry, then actual ministry is at least in view. Although it is possible that Paul had offices in mind, there is nothing in this context that requires it.⁸⁴ In addition, it would be difficult to establish that each of the ministries named is considered an office in the NT.⁸⁵ If this is a list of functioning ministries and not offices, then “shepherd” (ποιμήν) is not a

⁷⁹ See Harold Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 539.

⁸⁰ See Barth, *Ephesians*, 2:435; and O’Brien, *Ephesians*, 301.

⁸¹ See Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 540.

⁸² Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians* (WBC 42; Dallas: Word, 1990), 252. See also Akin, “The Single-Elder-Led Church,” 49; Best, *Ephesians*, 388; Bruce, *The Epistles*, 345; and O’Brien, *Ephesians*, 297.

⁸³ Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 252.

⁸⁴ See Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 540. O’Brien argues that “their ministries were accepted and recognized in the churches . . . [i]t is appropriate, then, to speak of them as ‘officers.’” O’Brien, *Ephesians*, 301. See also Best, *Ephesians*, 394. This seems to be a broad definition of office. For this discussion, office is understood as a particular position within a community to which a person is appointed and that has named qualifications and responsibilities.

⁸⁵ If they are not offices, then it may be best to translate ποιμένας “shepherds.” Best argues, “It is best to translate this as ‘shepherds,’ so retaining the original underlying image and avoiding all the overtones in the modern use of ‘pastor.’” Best, *Ephesians*, 394.

direct reference to the position of an elder.⁸⁶ It does, however, refer to the ministry for which an elder is responsible (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet 5:2).⁸⁷

That the ministry in which elders engage is in view is strengthened by the fact that ποιμένας are closely connected in this context with διδασκάλους.⁸⁸ Unlike the other groups listed, “shepherds and teachers” share a definite article.⁸⁹ This grammatical construction may indicate that the first noun is a sub-set of the second.⁹⁰ If so, then those who are shepherds are also teachers, but not all teachers are shepherds.⁹¹ The probability of this emphasis on the teaching function is strengthened by the fact that apostles, prophets, evangelists, and teachers are all ministers of the word.⁹² The rest of the passage confirms the importance of the word by signifying the centrality of truth for the growth of the body of Christ.⁹³ Teaching, along with shepherding, is named as a primary

⁸⁶ See Best, *Ephesians*, 388–89. Merkle argues, “Paul is not listing ‘offices’ in the church per se. . . . This is not to say, however, that those described as ‘pastors and teachers’ did not possess a designated and regular position in the church.” Benjamin L. Merkle, *The Elder and Overseer: One Office in the Early Church* (New York: Peter Lang, 2003), 113.

⁸⁷ See O’Brien, *Ephesians*, 299–300.

⁸⁸ See Barth, *Ephesians*, 2:438; Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 250; Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 1:541; O’Brien, *Ephesians*, 300; and Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 210.

⁸⁹ See Barth, *Ephesians*, 2:438; Best, *Ephesians*, 391; Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 542; Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 250; O’Brien, *Ephesians*, 300; and Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 284.

⁹⁰ Another possibility is suggested by Barth, “The conjunction *kai* . . . does not always mean ‘and’; it may also mean ‘that is’ or ‘in particular.’” However, he goes on to write, “The wording chosen is so ambiguous that it is difficult to decide the exact character of the fourth group.” Barth, *Ephesians*, 2:438.

⁹¹ See Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 545; Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 250; O’Brien, *Ephesians*, 300; and Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 284.

⁹² Barth comments, “All the ministers listed are persons who fulfill their service by speaking: they are ‘Ministers of the Word.’” This is “in distinction from 1 Cor 12:28–30; Rom 12:7–13; 1 Peter 4:10–11.” Barth, *Ephesians*, 2:436, 482. See also O’Brien, *Ephesians*, 298.

⁹³ “Unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God” (v. 13); “No longer . . . carried about by every wind of doctrine” (v. 14); and “Speaking the truth in love” (v. 15). Barth observes that ministers “instituted by Christ” stand in contrast to “the ‘trickery’ originating from ‘men.’” Barth,

responsibility of elders (Acts 20:29–32; 1 Tim 3:2; Titus 1:9).⁹⁴ All teachers may be in view here, which includes the shepherds, who are also teachers.

Verse 12 explains why apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastors and teachers were given to the church. Since elders are shepherds and teachers, the purpose stated here for these ministries applies to elders. This verse includes three prepositional phrases that may be understood in several different ways.⁹⁵

πρὸς τὸν καταρτισμὸν τῶν ἁγίων
εἰς ἔργον διακονίας
εἰς οἰκοδομὴν τοῦ σώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ

The most significant variation is whether “for the work of the ministry” (εἰς ἔργον διακονίας) is parallel to πρὸς and is, therefore, another purpose of the groups listed or if it is the purpose of equipping the saints.⁹⁶

The dominant approach is to understand the work of the ministry to be that of the saints, not of the groups listed in v. 11.⁹⁷ The strongest syntactical arguments for this view are 1) translated “equipping,” which seems to best fit this context,⁹⁸ then τὸν καταρτισμὸν requires an object, which is furnished in v. 12b;⁹⁹ and 2) “διακονίας

Ephesians, 2:483. O’Brien writes, “These in v. 11 are deliberately emphasized since they provide the church with the teaching of Christ for the edification of the body (v. 12) and for the avoidance of false teaching (v. 14).” O’Brien, *Ephesians*, 298.

⁹⁴ See Barth, *Ephesians*, 2:438–39; and Bruce, *The Epistles*, 348.

⁹⁵ See Barth, *Ephesians*, 2:478; Best, *Ephesians*, 395; Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 551; and O’Brien, *Ephesians*, 301.

⁹⁶ See Barth, *Ephesians*, 2:479.

⁹⁷ See O’Brien, *Ephesians*, 301–302; Barth, *Ephesians*, 2:478–81; Bruce, *The Epistles*, 345–46; and Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 551.

⁹⁸ See BDAG, 526; and Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 1:679

⁹⁹ See Best, *Ephesians*, 395.

normally has some word or phrase qualifying it and indicating the nature of the service or else this can be determined from the context The qualification may be found here in v. 12c (a ministry which works towards the building up the church).”¹⁰⁰ While the change in prepositions from πρὸς to εἰς cannot alone establish their relationship,¹⁰¹ it does fit well with the view that these three phrases build upon one another.¹⁰²

However, Lincoln does not accept these arguments, and Markus Barth claims that the choice cannot be made based on the Greek alone.¹⁰³ If so, it is still the contextual evidence that most convincingly establishes that the work of the ministry belongs to the saints.¹⁰⁴ The grace and gifts given by Christ is for all believers (vv. 7–8).¹⁰⁵ “Speaking the truth in love” seems to include the whole body (v. 15), and v. 16 explicitly concludes that the body grows “when each part is working properly.”¹⁰⁶ The overall emphasis of the entire unit is the unity and growth of the body as each member is gifted and participates.¹⁰⁷ The emphasis of the whole body of Christ in the letter of Ephesians and the participation of all the members in 1 Cor 12 also affirm this view.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁰ Best, *Ephesians*, 396.

¹⁰¹ See Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 253; and O’Brien, *Ephesians*, 302.

¹⁰² See Best, *Ephesians*, 398; and O’Brien, *Ephesians*, 302.

¹⁰³ Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 253; and Barth, *Ephesians*, 2:478.

¹⁰⁴ See Barth, *Ephesians*, 2:478.

¹⁰⁵ See Barth, *Ephesians*, 2:480; and O’Brien, *Ephesians*, 302.

¹⁰⁶ See Barth, *Ephesians*, 2:480; Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 549; and O’Brien, *Ephesians*, 302.

¹⁰⁷ See Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 549.

¹⁰⁸ Barth, *Ephesians*, 2:480.

Several observations may be made from this passage that are relevant to elders. First, the ministries of an elder, shepherding and teaching, may function in the church outside the elders' office. In other words, there may be believers gifted and serving in the church by shepherding and teaching who are not elders. Second, shepherding and teaching are closely related, and v. 11 may affirm that all who shepherd also teach.¹⁰⁹ Third, the ministries of shepherding and teaching are sovereignly given by Jesus Christ as gifts that are expressed functionally.¹¹⁰ Fourth, the purpose of the ministries of shepherding and teaching is to equip the saints for their work of ministry in order to grow the body of Christ.¹¹¹

Philippians 1:1

Paul addressed his letter to the church in Philippi "to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons." This reference to ἐπισκόποις in Phil 1:1 makes it relevant to a study on elders' authority, even though it does not address them any further.¹¹² A common question about this verse is whether overseers and deacons are people who hold positions in the church or people who merely carry out particular functions. The primary argument for claiming that it refers to functions rather than positions is that they lack definite articles. Wallace explains that when a noun does not have a definite article, it may be qualitative, placing "the stress on quality, nature, or

¹⁰⁹ See Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 545; Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 250; O'Brien, *Ephesians*, 300; and Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 284.

¹¹⁰ See Barth, *Ephesians*, 2:435; and Best, *Ephesians*, 394.

¹¹¹ See Barth, *Ephesians*, 2:481; Bruce, *The Epistles*, 345–46; and Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 551.

¹¹² Strauch writes, "Paul's brief mention of overseers and deacons provides a wealth of valuable information for our study of eldership." Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 174.

essence.”¹¹³ However, he also states, “It is not necessary for a noun to have the article in order for it to be definite.” The nouns in this phrase, *σὺν ἐπισκόποις καὶ διακόνους*, qualify for the second of ten conditions under which anarthrous nouns may be definite. Wallace continues, “There is no need for the article to be used to make the object of a preposition definite.”¹¹⁴ Therefore, the absence of a definite article does not by itself establish whether these nouns are indefinite, qualitative, or definite.¹¹⁵ Wallace also points out that a qualitative emphasis may be present in both definite and indefinite nouns.¹¹⁶

If the qualitative nature of these nouns is expressed, then the work of overseeing and serving is emphasized. Since a noun may include both a definite and qualitative emphasis and one may assume that an overseer is engaged in overseeing, then even if an office is in view, the functional nature of *ἐπίσκοπος* is understood.¹¹⁷ One must determine from the context whether or not a definite subject is intended. If so, Wallace explains that “a definite noun . . . has in view membership in a class,”¹¹⁸ which in this case would be the positions of overseers and deacons.

¹¹³ Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 244.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 247.

¹¹⁵ See Merkle, *The Elder and Overseer*, 108; and Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 175.

¹¹⁶ “There are no clear-cut distinctions between these three forces. . . . The qualitative aspect is sometimes close to being definite, sometimes close to being indefinite.” Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 243.

¹¹⁷ G. D. Fee writes, “While one need not doubt the titular implications of this usage, the accent is on function.” G. D. Fee, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 68.

¹¹⁸ Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 247.

The normal use of the term ἐπίσκοπος designated an official role of oversight in various spheres of life.¹¹⁹ Earnest Best argues, “A first century Greek could not have used it in a purely functional sense without suggestion that the person who exercised oversight held ‘official’ status.”¹²⁰ In addition, Paul’s greeting makes a clear distinction between all the saints and these two groups.¹²¹ Merkle asks, “If Paul is merely greeting all of those who serve freely and spontaneously, why is it necessary for him to greet those people separately?”¹²² Especially in the greeting of a letter to a community, it would be much more natural to expect such a reference to have its normal meaning of an office.¹²³ If one understands ἐπίσκοπος and πρεσβύτερος to be a reference to the same office (cf. Acts 20:17, 20; Titus 1:5, 7), the two designations in Phil 1:1 are confirmed by the dual offices described in 1 Tim 3.¹²⁴

Two additional observations may be made from this verse that are relevant to church elders’ authority. First, the overseers and deacons are both mentioned in the

¹¹⁹ See BDAG, 379; Earnest Best, “Bishops and Deacons: Philippians 1:1,” in *Studia Evangelica* (ed. F. L. Cross; Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1968), 4:371; and Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 166.

¹²⁰ Best, “Bishops and Deacons,” 4:371.

¹²¹ “This implies that he considered them to be persons with some kind of official status.” G. F. Hawthorne, *Philippians* (WBC 43; Waco: Word, 1983), 7. See also Beyer, “ἐπίσκοπος,” in *TDNT* 2:616; and Merkle, *The Elder and Overseer*, 107.

¹²² Merkle, *The Elder and Overseer*, 107.

¹²³ Those who understand ἐπισκόποις καὶ διακόνους to be references to those in formal positions include Best, “Bishops and Deacons,” 4:371; Ulrich Brockhaus, *Charisma und Amt* (Wuppertal: Theologischer Verlag Brockhaus, 1972), 100; Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 7–8; Joseph Barber Lightfoot, *Saint Paul’s Epistle to the Philippians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1913, 1953), 82; Merkle, *The Elder and Overseer*, 107–109; Peter T. O’ Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 48; M. Silva, *Philippians* (BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005) 40–41; and Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 175.

¹²⁴ See Silva, *Philippians*, 40; and Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 175.

plural, which confirms again that groups, not individuals, led the early church.¹²⁵ Second, the order of and the preposition used in this phrase expresses something of the relationship Paul expected the leaders and the community to have. “All the saints” are addressed first and primarily. The overseers and deacons are acknowledged “with” (σύν) them. Merkle and Peter O’Brien suggest that this phrase should be understood as inclusive, indicating that the overseers and deacons are not addressed separately from the church but as distinct groups within and a part of the whole congregation.¹²⁶ G. F. Hawthorne concludes, “One can infer from this that Paul did not perceive these as ‘lords’ over Christ’s church, but as individuals designated for special service within the church and perhaps subject to the church.”¹²⁷

1 Thessalonians 5:12–13 (Romans 12:8)

One term from the selected semantic domains appears in 1 Thess 5:12–13. Louw and Nida place προϊστημι in domain “36. Guide, Discipline, Follow; A. Guide, Lead.”¹²⁸ προϊστημι is one of three words that describe the activity of those that Paul wanted the Thessalonians to recognize. All three descriptions portray one group of leaders since they are preceded by one definite article.¹²⁹ Although elders are not named in this text, these

¹²⁵ “At the time Paul wrote there was no single chief officer (bishop) with his assistant (deacon) at Philippi.” Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 8. See also Fee, *Philippians*, 67; and Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 177.

¹²⁶ Merkle, *The Elder and Overseer*, 109; and O’Brien, *Philippians*, 48. See also Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 177.

¹²⁷ Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 8. See also Fee, *Philippians*, 67.

¹²⁸ Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 1:458.

¹²⁹ See F. F. Bruce, *I and II Thessalonians* (WBC 45; Waco: Word, 1982), 118; Kevin Giles, *Patterns of Ministry Among the First Christians* (Melbourne, Australia: Collins Dove, 1989), 32; G. L. Green, *The Letters to the Thessalonians* (Pillar New Testament Commentary; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 248; Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 283; and C. Wanamaker, *The Epistles to the Thessalonians* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 192.

three actions are used elsewhere in connection with the activity of elders: κοπιάω (1 Tim 5:17; Acts 20:35); προϊστημι (1 Tim 3:4–5; 5:17); and νοθετέω (Acts 20:31). First Timothy 5:17 provides a close parallel to 1 Thess 5:12–13.¹³⁰ Two questions relevant to the present study are “Is Paul referring to elders without naming them?” and “If not, how is this text relevant to elders’ authority?”

Verses 12–13 are part of a series of exhortations in the closing units of 1 Thessalonians.¹³¹ Paul singled out a particular group of people within the community that he wished the congregation to treat in a certain way. His first request was that they “respect” or “recognize” them (εἰδέναι). One’s understanding of this term may be affected by whether he sees the group as formally established leaders who deserved respect or merely functional leaders who deserved recognition.¹³² The exhortation does not implicitly reveal which is the case.¹³³

Several aspects of this passage, however, make it probable that these are not formally recognized leaders.¹³⁴ 1) As one of Paul’s earliest letters to a young church, it is possible that no leaders had been appointed in Thessalonica.¹³⁵ 2) According to Merkle, “The normal meaning of οἶδα is to ‘know’ or ‘recognize.’”¹³⁶ 3) No position is mentioned

¹³⁰ Merkle, *The Elder and Overseer*, 100.

¹³¹ See Wanamaker, *Thessalonians*, 190–91.

¹³² See Akin, “The Single-Elder-Led Church,” 50; Green, *Thessalonians*, 247; Merkle, *The Elder and Overseer*, 98; and Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 165.

¹³³ See Green, *Thessalonians*, 247; Merkle, *The Elder and Overseer*, 98; and Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 165.

¹³⁴ See L. Coenen, “προϊστημι,” *NIDNTT* 1:197–98; Green, *Thessalonians*, 247–48; Wanamaker, *Thessalonians*, 192; Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 165; and Ben Witherington III, *1 and 2 Thessalonians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 160.

¹³⁵ See Giles, *Patterns of Ministry*, 32; and Merkle, *The Elder and Overseer*, 98.

or appealed to as the basis for recognition.¹³⁷ Instead, they were to be recognized and esteemed for their work.¹³⁸ 4) In the parallel passage 1 Cor 16:15–16, the congregation is called upon to “recognize” (ἐπιγινώσκετε) those who are serving the church and who do not appear to hold any formal position (“they have devoted themselves,” ἑταξάν ἑαυτούς).¹³⁹ Finally, 5) Wanamaker writes, “If εἰδέναι were taken as ‘to respect’ then ἡγεῖσθαι in v. 13 would be tautological.”¹⁴⁰

One reason given for concluding that the group in view possesses a formal position is their distinction.¹⁴¹ A particular group that is characterized by specific activities is expressed by the single definite article governing three substantival participles.¹⁴² The implication is that the Thessalonians would be able to identify those within the community who deserved special recognition.¹⁴³ However, the existence of particular people in a community who are recognizable by their work does not establish the existence of formal leadership or authority.¹⁴⁴ In 1 Cor 16:15–16 is an example of

¹³⁶ Merkle, *The Elder and Overseer*, 98. See also BDAG, 693–94.

¹³⁷ See Witherington, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 160.

¹³⁸ See Akin, “The Single-Elder-Led Church,” 51; Bruce, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 119; Giles, *Patterns of Ministry*, 32; Green, *Thessalonians*, 248; and Merkle, *The Elder and Overseer*, 100–101.

¹³⁹ See Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 166; Barrett, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 394; Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 829–30; Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 768; and Robertson and Plummer, *Commentary on the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians*, 395.

¹⁴⁰ Wanamaker, *Thessalonians*, 192.

¹⁴¹ See Brockhaus, *Charisma und Amt*, 108; Leon Morris, *The Epistles of Paul to the Thessalonians* (rev. ed., TNTC 13; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 103; and Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 165.

¹⁴² See Bruce, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 118; Giles, *Patterns of Ministry*, 32; Green, *Thessalonians*, 248; Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 283; and Wanamaker, *Thessalonians*, 192.

¹⁴³ See Giles, *Patterns of Ministry*, 32; and Merkle, *The Elder and Overseer*, 98–99.

¹⁴⁴ See Coenen, *NIDNTT* 1:197–98; and Giles, *Patterns of Ministry*, 32.

members in a community who were identified by their work, were to receive respect, and did not hold formal positions of leadership.

Another reason given for concluding that the group in view possessed a formal position is the description that these individuals are “those who lead you in the Lord” (προϊσταμένους ὑμῶν ἐν κυρίῳ).¹⁴⁵ προϊσταμένους ὑμῶν is often translated “those who are over you” (ASV; AMP; ESV; KJV; NIV; NKJV). This translation and the NRSV’s “have charge of you” imply positional leadership and authority.¹⁴⁶ According to Bauer, the two meanings of προϊστημι that may apply are 1) rule, guide, lead; and 2) care for, give aid.¹⁴⁷ However, the relevant meanings presented by Louw and Nida are “guide” and “be active in helping.”¹⁴⁸ The fact that they do not include the meaning “rule” for προϊστημι is significant for this study on the authority of elders.

The question, “Do elders have authority to lead or authority to rule?” assumes that there is a distinction between leading and ruling. Louw and Nida observe, “In some languages it is difficult to distinguish readily between expressions for ‘leading’ and those which refer to ‘ruling’ or ‘governing,’ but it is important to try to distinguish clearly between these two different sets of interpersonal relations.”¹⁴⁹ The distinction made

¹⁴⁵ See Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 168; and Robert L. Thomas, *1–2 Thessalonians* (Expositor’s Bible Commentary 12; 2d ed.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 428.

¹⁴⁶ The translation “those who are over you” expresses position instead of action. Bruce writes, “From its position as the second in a series of three participles, of which the first and third are not official designations, προϊσταμένους is plainly not an official designation.” Bruce, *I and II Thessalonians*, 118. See also Merkle, *The Elder and Overseer*, 100.

¹⁴⁷ See BDAG, 870; and Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 1:464, 458.

¹⁴⁸ Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 2:207. For the meaning “guide” προϊστημι is placed in domain “36. Guide, Discipline, Follow,” sub-domain “A Guide, Lead.” Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 1:464.

between leading and ruling for this study, which is set out in the discussion of ποιμαίνω in Acts 20:28, is repeated here. A ruler necessarily possesses decision-making authority over a group of people and the governmental or coercive power to enforce his decisions.¹⁵⁰ A leader may show the way or direct action without decision-making authority or accompanying power. The claim that elders possess ruling authority is often based on an interpretation of προϊστέμι in 1 Tim 3:4–5 and 5:17, where it is frequently translated “rule,”¹⁵¹ and 1 Thess 5:12.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁹ Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 1:458. This quote was also noted with reference to ἡγέομαι in Luke 22:26. Strauch sees enough difference between “rule” and “lead” to prefer “lead” over “rule” in translating προϊστέμι in 1 Tim 5:17. Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 208.

¹⁵⁰ Louw and Nida note such a distinction when categorizing domains and sub-domains. They write, “The meanings in sub-domain A *Guide, Lead* imply a willingness on the part of others to be led. They also imply a minimum of control on the part of the one guiding or leading (compare Domain 37 *Control, Rule*).” Ibid., 1:414. An examination of the definitions of rule, ruler, lead, and leader in the *The Oxford English Dictionary* demonstrates their basic conceptual difference. For example, rule may be defined, “To govern, to exercise sovereign power over, to control with authority,” and lead may be defined, “To guide with reference to action or opinion; to bring by persuasion or counsel to or representation to a conclusion; to induce to do something.” J. A. Simpson and E. S. C. Weiner, eds., *The Oxford English Dictionary* (2d ed.; vol. 14; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 230–31, 745.

¹⁵¹ See Mal Couch, *A Biblical Theology of the Church* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1999), 156; Gerald P. Cowen, *Who Rules the Church?: Examining Congregational Leadership and Church Government* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2003), 52–53; Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 915; Walter Lock, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles* (ICC; New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1924), 34; Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 159, 162; and some Bible translations in 1 Tim 3:4–5 (ASV, KJV, NKJV) and 5:17 (ASV, ESV, KJV, NASB, NKJV, NRSV).

¹⁵² Moo writes, “We may . . . speak legitimately of the governing or ruling function exercised under God by some Christians over others (see 1 Thessalonians 5:12; Hebrews 13:17). In the pastoral epistles, this governing activity is ascribed to the elders (see 1 Timothy 3:5; 5:17).” Douglas Moo, “What Does It Mean Not to Teach or Have Authority Over Men?” in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism* (ed. John Piper and Wayne Grudem; Wheaton: Crossway, 1991), 187. Commenting on 1 Tim 3:4–5, Marshall concludes, “This qualification implies a ‘patriarchal’ rule of the church by persons who act like heads of households.” Marshall, *Pastoral Epistles*, 481; See also Andreas Köstenberger, *1–2 Timothy, Titus*, Expositor’s Bible Commentary 12 (2d ed.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 517.

One may “lead” and “care for” others without having a formal position. One who “rules” usually has a formal position.¹⁵³ With these options, the use of προΐστημι does not prove by itself that these leaders held formal positions. While the meaning “rule” cannot be excluded in 1 Thess 5:12, nothing in the context requires it. Based on the observations already presented that suggest that these leaders did not fill formal positions, the meanings “lead” and “care for” better fit the context. Therefore, the translation “those who are over you,” which implies position and does not follow the active nature of the parallel participles, does not best reflect the meaning here.

Another indicator that this function does not necessarily designate a formal position is its presence in the list of gifts in Rom 12:6–8.¹⁵⁴ This is most often translated “lead” or “care,” but is sometimes translated “those who rule.”¹⁵⁵ According to the distinction made here between ruling and leading in which ruling requires a position, “rule” does not seem to be a strictly functional spiritual gift. Paul described this as a list of how members of the body have various functions and gifts (vv. 4, 6). Here, then, is an example of one carrying out this action, whether leading or caring, without the implication of an official capacity.¹⁵⁶ Although either leading or caring may be intended here, “those who lead” corresponds more readily to the other uses of προΐστημι in the

¹⁵³ See the description of “leading men” in Acts 15:22, who are not designated as apostles or elders. προΐστημι and ἡγέομαι appear in the same semantic domains. Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 1:458, 464.

¹⁵⁴ See Bruce, *1 and II Thessalonians*, 118.

¹⁵⁵ The ASV, KJV, and Mounce translate ὁ προϊστάμενος in Rom 12:8 with the sense of rule. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 162. The translations of Louw and Nida and Wuest, “whoever has authority,” also seems to assume a position. Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 1:661; and Kenneth S. Wuest, *The New Testament: An Expanded Translation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997, c1961), Rom 12:8.

¹⁵⁶ Bruce writes, “In Rom 12:8 ὁ προϊστάμενος comes fourth in a series of five distinct categories of ministers. . . . Here too ὁ προϊστάμενος cannot be regarded as an official designation.” Bruce, *1 and II Thessalonians*, 118. See also L. Coenen, *NIDNTT* 1:197–98.

New Testament (1 Thess 5:12; 1 Tim 3:4–5, 12; 5:17).¹⁵⁷ In addition, the manner associated with this gifting, “with zeal” (ἐν σπουδῇ),¹⁵⁸ is similar to attitudes related to leading in other passages (Acts 18:25; 1 Pet 5:2).¹⁵⁹

Wanamaker argues that “care for, give aid” is the sense of προΐστημι in 1 Thess 5:12. He writes, “It was the relatively better off and those with relatively higher social status who could afford to toil and care for the community at their own expense, serving as its patrons and protectors.”¹⁶⁰ G. L. Green suggests it means both to lead and to care for, also appealing to the patron relationships of Greek culture.¹⁶¹ While such patron relationships no doubt existed and influenced the church, Paul’s overall leadership strategy seems to disallow a process in which only people in high social standing may become leaders. The parallels in 1 Cor 16:15–16 and 1 Tim 5:17 suggest that “those who lead” is probably the sense here. In 1 Cor 16:15–16, the congregation is to submit to those who are serving, and in 1 Tim 5:17 οἱ καλῶς προεστῶτες are also preaching and teaching. While some sense of care may be included in this leadership (cf. 1 Tim 3:3–4), leading is the primary sense.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁷ The argument by Reicke and Wanamaker that it must mean “those who care” because it is analogous to the two gifts that surrounded it fails to take into account the absence of any other order or relationships within this list. Bo Reicke, “προΐστημι,” *TDNT* 6:701; and Wanamaker, *Thessalonians*, 192.

¹⁵⁸ σπουδή can mean “to be eager to do something, with the implication of readiness to expend energy and effort—‘to be eager, eagerness, devotion.’” Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 1:297.

¹⁵⁹ σπουδή can also mean “to work hard” and thus may be compared to 1 Tim 5:17. Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 1:661.

¹⁶⁰ Wanamaker, *Thessalonians*, 195; see also Witherington, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 160.

¹⁶¹ Green, *Thessalonians*, 249.

¹⁶² See Bruce, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 119; Bo Reicke, “προΐστημι,” *TDNT* 6:701; Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 167; and Thomas, *1-2 Thessalonians*, 428.

The overall flow of this evidence suggests that Paul was not referring to those in formal leadership positions.¹⁶³ However, a distinct group existed within the congregation that was to be acknowledged and highly esteemed.¹⁶⁴ These leaders were not identified by an office but by their activity within the community.¹⁶⁵ They may not have possessed authority *de jure*, but they certainly exercised authority *de facto* of influence, especially by leading and admonishing.¹⁶⁶ Paul exhorted the congregation to respond properly to this kind of leadership. As in 1 Cor 16:15–16, this response probably included submission. In doing so, Paul established an order of leadership that was purely functional.¹⁶⁷ He also established an order that depended upon the free and loving recognition of the community.

While it may be said that the congregation should respect believers doing any one of these functions (e.g. all are exhorted to admonish the idle),¹⁶⁸ Paul appears to be

¹⁶³ See Giles, *Patterns of Ministry*, 32; Green, *Thessalonians*, 247; Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 165; and Witherington, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 160.

¹⁶⁴ Merkle writes, “It is important to note that the text makes a distinction between the ‘brothers’ and those whom they are to recognize. Apparently not every believer was to be honored and respected in the same way. Some, because of their gifts and function in the community, were to be considered worthy of special recognition.” Merkle, *The Elder and Overseer*, 98–99. See also Akin, “The Single-Elder-Led Church,” 51.

¹⁶⁵ See Akin, “The Single-Elder-Led Church,” 51; Bruce, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 119; Green, *Thessalonians*, 248; and Merkle, *The Elder and Overseer*, 100–101.

¹⁶⁶ Green describes admonishing as “their moral influence over others.” Green, *Thessalonians*, 250. See also Wanamaker, *Thessalonians*, 193.

¹⁶⁷ “The policy of Paul and his colleagues seems to have been to wait until qualities of spiritual leadership displayed themselves in certain members of a church and then to urge the others to acknowledge and respect those as leaders. One of the most obvious qualities of leadership was a readiness to serve the church and care for its needs. Such leaders did not do the appropriate work because they had been appointed as leaders; they were recognized as leaders because they were seen to be doing the work.” Bruce, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 120.

¹⁶⁸ “Paul encourages *the whole church* at Thessalonica to give themselves to admonishing each other (*nouthetein*) (5:14), and praises them all for their labours (*kopian*) in the Gospel (1 Thess 1:3, cf. 1 Cor 15:58)—using two of the very same words he uses to describe the functions of those who preside.” Giles, *Patterns of Ministry*, 32. See also Merkle, *The Elder and Overseer*, 100.

setting apart for recognition those who are doing all three.¹⁶⁹ There were “those who labor among you” (τοὺς κοπιῶντας ἐν ὑμῖν). Their work was carried out within and presumably for the community (cf. 1 Cor 16:15–16).¹⁷⁰ This affirms that Christian leadership is local and involves serving God’s people. There were “those who lead you in the Lord” (προϊσταμένους ὑμῶν ἐν κυρίῳ). The particular sphere in which this leadership is exercised is in relationship with and in things pertaining to God.¹⁷¹ There were also “those who admonish you” (νουθετοῦντας ὑμᾶς). These leaders were giving moral correction to the community.¹⁷²

If Paul was not referring to those in formal leadership positions, then one may not assume that he is talking about elders.¹⁷³ Nonetheless, since elders function in the same way as those mentioned here, the leadership principles established in this passage are relevant to an understanding of elders’ authority and are synthesized with the other principles in the conclusion.¹⁷⁴

Concluding Observations

Based on the exegetical considerations above, preliminary principles related to elders’ authority are proposed. These observations, especially the non-prescriptive examples, are synthesized with all other related observations in the concluding chapter.

¹⁶⁹ See Bruce, *I and II Thessalonians*, 118; Giles, *Patterns of Ministry*, 32; Green, *Thessalonians*, 248; Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 283; and Wanamaker, *Thessalonians*, 192.

¹⁷⁰ See Wanamaker, *Thessalonians*, 192.

¹⁷¹ See Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 168.

¹⁷² See Green, *Thessalonians*, 250; and Wanamaker, *Thessalonians*, 193.

¹⁷³ Those who believe Paul is referring to elders include F. J. A. Hort, *The Christian Ecclesia* (London: Macmillan, 1914), 126; Morris, *Thessalonians*, 103, 166; and Thomas, *1–2 Thessalonians*, 429.

1 Corinthian 5:1–13

- 1) The local congregation has corporate authority to spiritually and socially remove an unrepentant person from among them.
- 2) There is no entity outside or above the local church that may remove a person from a community. The essentially corporate nature of the act implies that no individual or committee may possess such authority alone.
- 3) The authority to remove a person from a community is of a spiritual and social nature.

1 Corinthians 6:1– 8

When settling disputes between brothers, the community, or at least the two parties involved in a dispute, may agree upon a qualified arbiter from among the brothers to decide their case.

1 Corinthians 14:29–33

The whole congregation is responsible for discerning true teaching and valid prophecy in public worship.

1 Corinthians 16:15–18

The community should submit to and recognize those among them who are serving the saints and working hard in ministry.

Ephesians 4:11–16

- 1) The ministries of an elder, shepherding and teaching, exist and function in the church outside the office of elder.

¹⁷⁴ See Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 164.

- 2) Shepherding and teaching are closely related, and v. 11 may affirm that all who shepherd also teach.
- 3) The ministries of shepherding and teaching, which comprise the responsibility of elders, are sovereignly given by Jesus Christ as gifts that are expressed functionally.
- 4) The purpose of the ministries of shepherding and teaching is to equip the saints for their work of ministry in order to grow the body of Christ (v. 12).

Philippians 1:1

- 1) Overseers are a distinct group of people in a formal position with the responsibility of overseeing believers in a particular location.
- 2) Overseers function within and are considered a part of the community.
- 3) The responsibility of oversight is given to a group of people, not one individual.

1 Thessalonians 5:12–13

- 1) προϊσταμένους ὑμῶν is best translated “those who lead you.”
- 2) A local community is to recognize and highly esteem those among them who are serving God’s people, leading them in the Lord, and admonishing them.
- 3) Leadership in the church is primarily functional.
- 4) Leadership in the church is local and is not held by one person.
- 5) The community is to offer recognition and respect to the leaders freely and in love.

CHAPTER 5

THE AUTHORITY OF ELDERS IN THE PASTORAL EPISTLES

According to the criteria for passage selection described in chapter one, five passages in the Pastoral Epistles contribute to an understanding of the authority of church elders: 1 Tim 2:8–15; 3:1–7; 4:14; 5:17–25; and Titus 1:5–9. This chapter includes a discussion of the exegetical issues in each passage that are relevant to the authority of church elders.

1 Timothy 2:8–15

The first passage in the Pastoral Epistles that contributes to an understanding of the authority of church elders is 1 Tim 2:8–15. Two terms from the selected semantic domains appear in this passage: ἀθεντέω is in domain “37. Control, Rule,” sub-domain “A. Control, Restrain;”¹ ὑποταγή is in domain “36. Guide, Discipline, Follow,” sub-domain “C. Obey, Disobey.”² These two terms appear in vv. 11–12, which will be the focus of this discussion. In vv. 8–10, Paul gave instructions to men concerning prayer (v. 8) and then to women concerning adornment and godliness (vv. 9–10). Verses 11–12 contain instructions regarding women, teaching, and authority. Verses 13–14 provide the basis for vv. 11–12, and v. 15 concludes the unit.

¹ J. P. Louw and E. A. Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (2 vols.; New York: United Bible Societies, 1989), 1:473.

² *Ibid.*, 1:467.

A potential contribution of 1 Tim 2:11–12 to this study is that if it limits a woman’s ability to teach and have authority over men, then this would exclude her from being an elder. This passage has been much debated by those interested in the relationship of gender and leadership in the church today.³ Most significantly for this study, it includes a term conveying the idea of authority (ἀθροεντέω). In addition to questions of gender, the use of this term here may provide insight into the nature of human authority within the church.

Two common evangelical views on women in church leadership are egalitarianism and complementarianism.⁴ While there are variations in these views, there is one basic distinction. Egalitarians maintain that according to Scripture women may hold positions of leadership authority over men.⁵ Complementarians believe that the Bible teaches that women should not hold positions of leadership authority over men, in particular the office of elder.⁶ First Timothy 2:11–12 is recognized as the primary text for discussion of women in church leadership.⁷

³ Mounce notes, “In recent years more has been written on vv 11–12 than on any other passage in the PE.” William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles* (WBC 46; Nashville: Nelson, 2000), 117.

⁴ See James R. Beck, ed. *Two Views on Women in Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005); Andreas Köstenberger, “The Crux of the Matter: Paul’s Pastoral Pronouncements Regarding Women’s Roles in 1 Timothy 2:9–15,” in *Studies on John and Gender: A Decade of Scholarship* (SBL 38; New York: Peter Lang, 2001), 235–36; and Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 103.

⁵ See the contributions of Linda L. Belleville and Craig S. Keener in *Two Views on Women in Ministry*.

⁶ See the contributions of Craig L. Blomberg and Thomas R. Schreiner in *Two Views on Women in Ministry*.

⁷ Linda Belleville explains that 1 Tim 2:11–15 is “at the center of the tempest” of the debate over women leaders in the church. Linda L. Belleville, “Teaching and Usurping Authority: 1 Timothy 2:11–15,” in *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity Without Hierarchy* (ed. Ronald W. Pierce and Rebecca Merrill Groothuis; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2005), 205. Thomas Schreiner writes, “The fundamental text on this matter is 1 Timothy 2:11–15.” Thomas Schreiner, “Women in Ministry: Another Complementarian Perspective,” in *Two Views on Women in Ministry* (ed. James R. Beck; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 307. See also Köstenberger, “The Crux of the Matter,” 237; Benjamin L. Merkle,

Complementarians begin the discussion by appealing to the natural reading of the text, “I do not permit a women to teach or have authority over a man.”⁸ Two important exegetical issues relevant to establishing a natural reading are 1) the meaning of ἀϋθεντέω and 2) the syntax of v. 12. Since ἀϋθεντέω only occurs here in the NT, it is more challenging to establish its possible meanings.⁹ The most convincing and thorough presentation of the semantic range of ἀϋθεντέω is presented by Henry Scott Baldwin in *Women in the Church: An Analysis and Application of 1 Timothy 2:9–15*.¹⁰ He concludes, “Upon analyzing these eighty-five currently known occurrences of the verb ἀϋθεντέω, it becomes evident that the one unifying concept is that of *authority*.”¹¹

In the same work, Andreas Köstenberger presents an analysis of the syntactical structure of 1 Tim 2:12 that has gained “virtually unanimous acceptance.”¹² The important question is how διδάσκειν and ἀϋθεντεῖν are related. Based on a study of the syntactical parallels to 1 Tim 2:12 in the NT, Köstenberger asserts, “The activities

“Paul’s Arguments from Creation in 1 Corinthians 11:8–9 and 1 Timothy 2:13–14: An Apparent Inconsistency Answered,” *JETS* 49/3 (Sept 06): 527; David M. Scholer, “1 Timothy 2:9–15 & the Place of Women in the Church’s Ministry,” in *Women, Authority & the Bible* (ed. Alvera Mickelsen; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1986), 527.

⁸ Andreas Köstenberger argues, “The presumption lies heavily in favor of interpreting the text to mean what it actually says. . . . The Reformation hermeneutical principle of the preferred status of the ‘natural’ reading still stands. Clearly, the burden of proof lies with those who urge a reading other than this natural reading.” Köstenberger, “The Crux of the Matter,” 249. See also Craig L. Blomberg, “Women in Ministry: A Complementarian Perspective,” in *Two Views on Women in Ministry* (ed. James R. Beck; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 168.

⁹ See Henry Scott Baldwin, “An Important Word: ἀϋθεντέω in 1 Timothy 2:12,” in *Women in the Church: An Analysis and Application of 1 Timothy 2:9–15* (2d ed.; ed. Andreas J. Köstenberger and Thomas R. Schreiner; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 39–40; and Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 126.

¹⁰ Baldwin, “An Important Word,” 39–51. Mounce concludes, “He has proven his point.” Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 128.

¹¹ Baldwin, “An Important Word,” 45.

denoted by the two infinitives διδάσκειν and ἀϋθεντεῖν will both be viewed either positively or negatively by the writer.”¹³ If so, this disallows the translation “to teach in order to dominate,” which understands the first infinitive to be positive and the second negative.¹⁴

Köstenberger argues that since διδάσκειν, “when used absolutely, in the New Testament always denotes an activity that is viewed positively by the writer,” then ἀϋθεντεῖν “should be regarded as viewed positively as well and be rendered ‘to have (or exercise) authority.’”¹⁵ This understanding of διδάσκειν stands against the suggestion that Paul prohibited women from false teaching. It may also be added that Paul could have used a more explicit word to express false teaching and would have also restricted men from false teaching.¹⁶

At the very least, Baldwin and Köstenberger establish what may be considered a natural reading of “I do not permit a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man.” It remains, then, to consider the arguments for why this straightforward reading would not restrict a woman from teaching or exercising authority over a man today. Some maintain that Paul’s instruction is limited to the original occasion. One approach to this position is

¹² Andreas J. Köstenberger, “A Complex Sentence: The Syntax of 1 Timothy 2:12,” in *Women in the Church*, 84.

¹³ Köstenberger, “A Complex Sentence,” 74.

¹⁴ Those who argue for this translation include Belleville, “Teaching and Usurping Authority,” 217–19; and Craig S. Keener, *Paul, Women & Wives: Marriage and Women’s Ministry in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1992), 108–109.

¹⁵ Köstenberger, “A Complex Sentence,” 74.

¹⁶ See Köstenberger, “The Crux of the Matter,” 239.

based on various views of the historical context such as an overcorrecting feminism in Ephesus or the lack of education for women.¹⁷

There are two strong arguments against these reconstructions of the original setting. First, S. M. Baugh's thorough study of the historical context of Ephesus causes serious doubt that the Ephesians were unusually feminist or that women were largely uneducated.¹⁸ Second, as Köstenberger explains, "All interpretations limiting the application of 1 Tim 2:12 on the basis of alleged background information ultimately flounder on the stubborn fact that they substitute unstated rationales in the place of the reasons actually supplied by the text (cf. 1 Tim 2:13–14)."¹⁹

Any other claims that the prohibition of 1 Tim 2:11–12 is culturally bound must also deal with the substantiation provided in the text. "For" (γάρ) introduces vv. 13–14, which provide the bases for the previous instructions.²⁰ Paul explained that Adam was formed first, and Eve was deceived first (vv. 13–14). A coherent interpretation of this reference to Adam and Eve that makes sense of the instructions it supports may be proposed. The order of creation established an order of responsibility, which was subverted by Satan in the Fall.²¹ The significance of this interpretation is that the order of

¹⁷ See C. C. Kroeger, "1 Timothy 2:12—A Classicist's View," in *Women, Authority & the Bible* (ed. Alvera Mickelsen; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1986), 227–28; and Keener, *Paul, Women & Wives*, 110.

¹⁸ S. M. Baugh, "A Foreign World: Ephesus in the First Century," in *Women in the Church*, 13–38.

¹⁹ Köstenberger, "The Crux of the Matter," 240.

²⁰ See George W. Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 142; and Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 131–32.

²¹ See Benjamin L. Merkle, *40 Questions About Elders and Deacons* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2008), 145; and Schreiner, "Women in Ministry," 315.

responsibility was established in the original design of God and provides a principle for all times and cultures.

Accurately defining the type of responsibility that is assigned to men in this passage is critical to the thesis of this work. It is readily recognized that women are not prohibited from all teaching. Older women are instructed to teach younger women (Titus 2:3–4). The particular type of teaching at hand is first defined by the object “man” (ἄνδρός), which is the object of both “teach” and “exercise authority over.”²² Based on the context of the Pastoral Epistles, many understand “teaching” to refer to authoritative doctrinal instruction.²³ The woman’s teaching restriction, then, is in her relationship to men in the function of authoritative doctrinal instruction. One may deduce from this that this type of teaching is the special responsibility of men in the church.

What kind of authority did Paul prohibit women from exercising? As with teaching, one may deduce that this exercise of authority is the responsibility of men in the church. It is commonly argued by complementarians that this authority refers to the type of authority that elders have.²⁴ Furthermore, it is assumed that the authority of elders thus referred to is ruling authority.²⁵ Two questions are proposed here to respond to this line of reasoning: 1) What type of authority is intended in the present context, 1 Tim 2:8–15?

²² See Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 140; Andreas Köstenberger, *1–2 Timothy, Titus*, Expositor’s Bible Commentary 12 (2d ed.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 520; Moo, “What Does It Mean,” 187; Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 123; Thomas R. Schreiner, “An Interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:9–15: A Dialogue with Scholarship,” in *Women in the Church*, 101.

²³ See Köstenberger, “The Crux of the Matter,” 240; Moo, “What Does It Mean,” 185; Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 118; and Schreiner, “An Interpretation,” 101.

²⁴ See Blomberg, “Women in Ministry,” 169–70; Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 142; and Alexander Strauch, *Biblical Eldership: An Urgent Call to Restore Biblical Church Leadership* (Colorado Spring: Lewis and Roth, 1995), 60.

²⁵ See Köstenberger, *1 Timothy*, 517, 520; Moo, “What Does It Mean,” 187; and Schreiner, “Women in Ministry,” 311.

and 2) Is there a connection between the type of authority intended in this context and that of elders?

While it may be sufficient to translate ἀθεντεῖν “to exercise authority over,” its semantic range according to Baldwin includes more specific descriptions of authority:

1. To rule, to reign sovereignly
2. To control, to dominate
 - a. to compel, to influence someone/something
 - b. middle voice: to be in effect, to have legal standing
 - c. hyperbolically: to domineer/play the tyrant
 - d. to grant authorization
3. To act independently
 - a. to assume authority over
 - b. to exercise one’s own jurisdiction
 - c. to flout the authority of
4. To be primarily responsible for, to do or to instigate something.²⁶

It is important to observe that the range of possible meanings for ἀθεντέω is not limited to ruling, which is one of the four options.²⁷ This confirms again that the concept of authority includes a wide range of meanings, which is set forth in ch. 1. While it seems accurate to understand ἀθεντέω to convey some idea of authority, it does not follow that this authority necessarily refers to the responsibility of ruling.

Which of the above possible meanings best fits the present context? A consideration of the structure of this passage will help clarify the context and use of this term. The paragraph unit is probably vv. 8 or 9–15. The instructions for women are in vv. 9–15, which appears to have a structure of its own. The larger section addressing the role

²⁶ Baldwin, “An Important Word,” 45.

²⁷ It may be Baldwin’s more extensive investigation of non-biblical literature that is the basis for a much broader semantic range than Louw and Nida present. They only include one of these meanings, “to control, to domineer.” Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 1:473. Bauer also supplies a single meaning that seems to combine options one and three. Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature* (3d ed.; rev. and ed. Frederick William Danker; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 150.

of women in vv. 9–15 begins and ends with σωφροσύνης.²⁸ William Mounce also notes the repetition of ήσυχία as an *inclusio* framing the instruction of vv. 11–12.²⁹ Within this *inclusio* there is an alternating parallel: learning (μανθανέτω) is in parallel contrast with teaching (διδάσκειν) and submitting (ύποταγή) is in parallel contrast with exercising authority (αύθεντεϊν).³⁰

Two other parallels may be added to these. Near the beginning and end of this unit are two contrasting lists, one of external adornments (μη έν πλέγμασιν και χρυσίω ή μαργαρίταις ή ίματισμῶ πολυτελεϊ) and one of internal qualities (έν πίστει και άγάπη και άγιασμῶ).³¹ There is also a contrast between the “good works” (εργων άγαθῶν) that women should focus on and the “transgression” (παραβάσει) of Eve. Altogether, these parallels may form a chiasmic structure.

A	self-control (σωφροσύνης)
B	external list (πλέγμασιν και χρυσίω ή μαργαρίταις ή ίματισμῶ πολυτελεϊ)
C	good works (εργων άγαθῶν)
D	quietly (ήσυχία)
E	learn (μανθανέτω)
F	submissiveness (ύποταγή)
E'	teach (διδάσκειν)
F'	exercise authority (αύθεντεϊν)
D'	quiet (ήσυχία)
C'	transgress (παραβάσει)
B'	internal list (έν πίστει και άγάπη και άγιασμῶ)
A'	self-control (σωφροσύνης)

²⁸ See Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 104.

²⁹ Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 117; See also Schreiner, “An Interpretation,” 99.

³⁰ See Köstenberger, “A Complex Sentence,” 62; and Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 117.

³¹ The list of external adornment is contrasted with “good works.” The parallel list—faith, love, and holiness—may be a good description of “good works.”

The center, and thus the focus, of this chiasm is E, F, E', and F'. The four lines together form the center since they do not continue the chiastic structure but have an alternating parallel structure of their own. This confirms the centrality of vv. 11–12 in this unit.³² These lines are framed by the idea of quietness (ἡσυχία). In the first occurrence, Paul emphasized that “quietly” is the manner in which a woman is to learn and that doing so is an act of submission (ὑποταγή).³³ Mounce explains that the prohibition of v. 12 “further defines in practical terms what learning in quietness/submissiveness means.”³⁴ This relationship is established again by the second mention of quietness, which is in concluding contrast to what has not been permitted: a woman is to remain quiet (ἡσυχία) instead of teaching or having authority over a man.³⁵

The emphasis of quietness and the relationships described above reveal that the primary concern and activity in view is that of verbal instruction.³⁶ This may be conveyed as well by the construction of v. 12, which places διδάσκειν at the very beginning of the sentence.³⁷ Since submission in this context is to learn quietly and ἀθηνεῖν is directly contrasted with remaining quiet, it seems best to understand the exercise of authority here

³² Mounce notes, “Verse 11 is the main point and is repeated in v. 12c for emphasis (inclusio).” Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 117.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Knight writes, “The adversative particle ἀλλά indicates that this clause is contrasted with what precedes (not to teach or exercise authority *but* to be in silence).” Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 142.

³⁶ I. Howard Marshall notes, “The specific focus on learning/teaching is further confirmed by the repetition of the contrast in the phrase ἀλλ’ εἶναι ἐν ἡσυχίᾳ.” I. Howard Marshall, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles* (ICC; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1999), 460; Mounce also comments, “The repetition of the initial phrase ἐν ἡσυχίᾳ here and v 11 serves to highlight quietness as Paul’s basic concern.” Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 120.

³⁷ Mounce writes, “The verb διδάσκειν, ‘to teach,’ is the first word in the sentence and as such stands as the most important and contrasts with the previous μανθανέτω.” Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 123.

to be directly linked to the act of teaching. While διδάσκειν and ἀθηντεῖν express distinct ideas, they are closely related.³⁸ The close relationship of these actions is also confirmed by the fact that they take the same object, “man” (ἄνδρως).

The exercise of authority in this context may be understood as the act of teaching. Thus, being in subjection is remaining quiet when teaching is the task at hand.³⁹ The bases for these instructions provided in vv. 13–15 also support the idea that in this context ἀθηντεῖν refers to teaching authority. As stated above, the order of creation establishes an order of responsibility (v. 13), and the event of the Fall occurred through a subversion of this order (v. 14).⁴⁰ Paul pointed to the cause of the Fall: “the woman was deceived” (ἡ δὲ γυνὴ ἐξαπατηθεῖσα). The question at hand was the truth and requirement of God, “Did God actually say . . . ?” (Gen 3:1). God later identified Adam’s mistake: “You have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree” (Gen 3:17). Adam was held accountable for not teaching and guarding the commandments of God; instead, it was the words of Eve that set the standard.

With this understanding, one may return to the question of the precise nature of this authority. If the authority is exercised here through teaching, then Baldwin’s evaluation of the first possible meaning is correct: “The context of 1 Timothy 2 appears to make meaning 1, ‘to rule, to reign sovereignly,’ impermissible.”⁴¹ The relationship of

³⁸ See Schreiner, “Women in Ministry,” 309.

³⁹ Marshall suggests that one possible way for these infinitives to be related is for the second to be “a closer definition of the previous one.” In this case, “the exercise of authority would take place in the act of teaching.” He goes on to argue, “ἀθηντεῖν as a reference to ‘authority’ (leadership) unrelated to teaching would exceed the scope of the discussion initiated at v. 11.” Marshall, *Pastoral Epistles*, 460.

⁴⁰ See Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 144; Merkle, *40 Questions*, 145; and Schreiner, “Women in Ministry,” 315.

⁴¹ Baldwin, “An Important Word,” 51.

διδάσκειν and ἀϋθεντεῖν, based on the syntax of the sentence, also makes such a definition unlikely. While the two infinitives carry distinct ideas, they are usually closely related by being “conceptual parallels” or by functioning together.⁴² If ἀϋθεντεῖν is ruling authority, then the infinitives would not be “conceptual parallels” nor would they function together. As Moo concluded, ἀϋθεντεῖν would only relate to διδάσκειν in that “both ministries often are carried out by the same individuals.”⁴³ Instead, understanding ἀϋθεντεῖν as the act of taking up an authorized activity, in this case teaching, keeps the ideas distinct and allows them to function together.

Baldwin identifies the most likely senses of ἀϋθεντέω in this passage: 2) “to control, to dominate”; 2a) “to compel, to influence”; 3a) “to assume authority over”; and 3c) “to flout the authority of.”⁴⁴ Köstenberger’s study on the syntax rules out the negative meaning of 3c.⁴⁵ As Köstenberger concludes, the best translation is probably 3a) “to assume authority over.”⁴⁶ This follows Baldwin’s finding that “the root meaning involves the concept of authority.”⁴⁷

However, the concept of authority is broad, and a more specific interpretation requires one to identify what type of authority the author has in mind. Meaning two, “to

⁴² See Köstenberger, “A Complex Sentence,” 57–60.

⁴³ Moo, “What Does It Mean,” 187.

⁴⁴ Baldwin, “An Important Word,” 45.

⁴⁵ Köstenberger concludes, “Since the first part of 1 Timothy 2:12 reads, ‘But I do not permit a woman to teach,’ and the coordinating conjunction οὐδέ requires the second activity to be viewed correspondingly by the writer, ἀϋθεντεῖν should be regarded as viewed positively as well and be rendered ‘to have (or exercise) authority,’ and not ‘to flout the authority of’ or ‘to domineer.’” Köstenberger, “A Complex Sentence,” 74.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 74.

⁴⁷ Baldwin, “An Important Word,” 51.

control, to dominate,” does not fit the teaching context well. Meaning 2a, “to compel, to influence,” relates well to teaching. However, the order of responsibility seems to be Paul’s concern, not influence. The woman is called to be submissive by learning quietly. This does not mean she is to submit to all teaching (the influence of any given teacher) but that she is to accept her role of not teaching men in the community setting. Furthermore, the order of creation establishes an order of responsibility, not influence.

One of the possible meanings that Baldwin excluded may fit best here: “(4) to be primarily responsible for, to do or to instigate something.”⁴⁸ Paul taught that the responsibility of teaching the community primarily belongs to men; only men are authorized to teach the community.⁴⁹ While older women are authorized to teach younger women (Titus 2:3–4), they are not authorized to teach men. For them to teach in the church would be to take a position of authority over men that they are not given by God.⁵⁰

Having explored the first question, 1) What type of authority is intended in the present context, one may now turn to the next question, 2) Is there a connection between

⁴⁸ Baldwin, “An Important Word,” 45. Baldwin wrote concerning this meaning, “It is difficult to imagine how . . . meaning 4, ‘to instigate,’ could make sense in 1 Timothy.” Ibid., 51.

⁴⁹ Understanding ἀϋθεντέω as authority to do something does not have the same effect as taking the construction to be a hendiadys. Moo rightly argues that as a hendiadys “only one activity is prohibited: teaching in an authoritative way. If the meaning of *authentēin* is ‘exercise authority,’ this interpretation would not materially change the first prohibition identified above—for the teaching Paul has in mind here has, as we have argued, some authority in itself—but would eliminate entirely the second prohibition (against having authority over a man).” Moo, “What Does It Mean,” 187. Authoritative teaching is when the content of the instruction is intended to be binding upon the listeners. A further distinction may be made between what teachers intend to be authoritative and what is actually binding because it is in line with God’s truth. Authoritative teaching is not the same as having authority to teach. The difference is between the content and intention of the teaching (authoritative) and the right and responsibility to teach (authority).

⁵⁰ The implication of this interpretation for the “women in ministry” debate is that 1 Tim 2:8–15 does not address leadership or authority in general but specifically the leadership and authority that is exercised by teaching. It seems that much of this discussion would be greatly helped by recognizing the broad semantic range of authority and the biblical evidence of the type of authority that humans may exercise in the church.

the type of authority intended in this context and that of the elder? The next paragraph states that elders are required to be “able to teach” (1 Tim 3:2). In his letter to Titus, Paul explained that he must be able to teach because his responsibility is “to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it” (Titus 1:9). Since elders are responsible for the whole flock (Acts 20:28) and are responsible for teaching them, based on 1 Tim 2:11–15, a woman is not be permitted to be an elder.⁵¹ If it is true that elders are granted ruling authority, it is possible for the term ἀθροεντέω to refer to the same type of authority. However, there is no evidence that ruling authority is intended in 1 Tim 2:11–15.

1 Timothy 3:1–7; Titus 1:5–16

First Timothy 3:1–7 is a key passage for understanding the authority of church elders. Four terms from the selected semantic domains appear here, ἐπισκοπή, ἐπίσκοπος, προϊήται, and ὑποταγή.⁵² Because of significant parallels,⁵³ Titus 1:5–9 is considered here with 1 Tim 3:1–7. The terms ἀνυπότακτος, ἐπίσκοπος, καθίστημι, and οἰκονόμος from the selected semantic domains are used in Titus 1:5–9.⁵⁴ Verses 5–9 form a

⁵¹ Knight reasons, “Paul’s prohibition of women teaching would prevent them from serving as elders or ministers, but it is unwarranted to limit it to such a restriction from office-bearing. Paul uses functional language (‘to teach’) rather than office language (‘a bishop’) to express the prohibition. Here he prohibits women from publicly teaching men, and thus teaching the church.” Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 141. As Knight indicates, it seems better to let Paul’s prohibition refer to the activities mentioned and not to see it as a prohibition of the elders’ office in particular, although the restriction from office logically follows.

⁵² Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 1:464, 467, 540.

⁵³ See Gerald P. Cowen, *Who Rules the Church? Examining Congregational Leadership and Church Government* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2003), 55; Marshall, *Pastoral Epistles*, 474; and Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 156–58.

⁵⁴ Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 1: 468, 476, 483, 541.

discourse unit that describes the qualifications of elders.⁵⁵ The next unit, vv. 10–16, contains instructions about dealing with false teaching and again includes the term ἀνυπότακτος.⁵⁶ Since vv. 10–16 are logically connected to vv. 5–9 (γάρ),⁵⁷ they are also considered here.

Paul wrote that ἐπισκοπή is something to be desired and is a noble task (v. 1). This term is often translated “office of overseer.”⁵⁸ The use of ἐπισκοπή in Acts 1:20 seems to refer to a particular position or office, and elders also hold particular positions since they must be qualified (1 Tim 3:1–7; Titus 1:5–9) and are appointed (Acts 14:23; 20:28; Titus 1:5).⁵⁹ One may notice, however, the emphasis on the *activity* here. ὀρέγεται and ἐπιθυμεῖ are parallel in their expression of strong desire.⁶⁰ Continuing the parallel, ἐπισκοπή is described as “a noble task” (καλοῦ ἔργου). Without denying the positional nature of the elders’ task, it seems “responsibility of oversight” is in view here.⁶¹

⁵⁵ See Marshall, *Pastoral Epistles*, 145 and Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 384–85.

⁵⁶ Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 1:467.

⁵⁷ See Walter Lock, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles* (ICC; New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1924), 132–33; Marshall, *Pastoral Epistles*, 146, and Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 392.

⁵⁸ See L. Coenen, “ἐπίσκοπος,” in *NIDNTT* (4 vols.; ed. Colin Brown; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 1:192; Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 1:540; Köstenberger, *1–2 Timothy*, 522–523; Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 154; Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 162, 168.

⁵⁹ See Marshall, *Pastoral Epistles*, 476.

⁶⁰ Both appear in semantic sub-domain “B. Desire Strongly.” Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 1:289–90. See also Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 154.

⁶¹ See BDAG, 379; and Louw and Nida’s third definition for ἐπισκοπή, “C. position of responsibility—the position of one who has responsibility for the care of someone—‘position of responsibility, position of oversight.’” With reference to Acts 1:20, they write, “Though in some contexts ἐπισκοπή has been regarded traditionally as a position of authority, in reality the focus is upon the responsibility for caring for others, and in the context of Acts 1:20 the reference is clearly to the responsibility for caring for the church.” The same may be said of 1 Tim 3:1. This meaning of ἐπισκοπή belongs in domain “35. Help, Care For,” sub-domain “D. Care For, Take Care Of.” Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 1:462.

As discussed in Acts 20:28, the closely related term ἐπίσκοπος (1 Tim 3:2; Titus 1:7) refers to a person who has the responsibility of oversight and sometimes refers to the official position of such a person.⁶² Whether ἐπισκοπή and ἐπίσκοπος indicate an office and a title or not, they describe the primary responsibility of elders, to care for and safeguard the church.⁶³ Titus 1:5–7 is the second passage (cf. Acts 20:17, 28) in which ἐπίσκοπος and πρεσβύτερος are used to refer to a single position of leadership.⁶⁴ Elders (πρεσβυτέρους, plural) are to be appointed in every town (v. 5). Assuming there is one church in each town, this indicates a plurality of elders in each church.⁶⁵ The use of ἐπίσκοπος as a singular noun in 1 Tim 3:2 and Titus 1:7 need not contradict this plurality of elders since it may be considered a generic singular agreeing with τίς.⁶⁶ All other occurrences in the NT are plural.⁶⁷

⁶² ἐπισκοπή and ἐπίσκοπος are both in domain “53. Religious Activities,” sub-domain “I. Roles and Functions,” and domain “35. Help, Care For;” sub-domain “D. Care For, Take Care Of.” Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 1:462, 541. See also BDAG, 379.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ See Benjamin L. Merkle, *The Elder and Overseer: One Office in the Early Church* (New York: Peter Lang, 2003), 142–48; John Calvin, *The Second Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians and the Epistles to Timothy, Titus and Philemon* (trans. T. A. Smail; Calvin’s Commentaries; ed. David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance; Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1964), 359; F. J. A. Hort, *The Christian Ecclesia* (London: Macmillan, 1914), 90; Marshall, *Pastoral Epistles*, 160; and Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 162.

⁶⁵ See Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 288. Verner notes, “Thus, in the author’s conception, local congregations were in the beginning governed as city-wide entities. . . . Although there is a reasonably good possibility that, at least in the larger cities, Christians would normally have assembled for worship and instruction in several smaller groups.” David C. Verner, *The Household of God: The Social World of the Pastoral Epistles* (SBL Dissertation Series 71; Chico, CA: Scholars, 1983), 154. The smaller meeting groups do not constitute separate independently governed local churches.

⁶⁶ See Marshall, *Pastoral Epistles*, 160, 477; Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 163; Thomas R. Schreiner, *Paul, Apostle of God’s Glory in Christ: A Pauline Theology* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2001), 387; and Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 187.

⁶⁷ See Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 155; and Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 163.

Paul instructed Titus to “appoint” (καθίστημι) such elders, or overseers (v. 5). καθίστημι conveys the idea of assigning “someone a position of authority.”⁶⁸ As in Acts 6, where the same term is used with reference to the seven servants, καθίστημι indicates that a definite position or office is in view.⁶⁹ The definite article with “overseer” (τὸν ἐπίσκοπον) in v. 7 “identifies . . . ‘the overseer’ as a special class appropriate for a general statement.”⁷⁰ That a man must be qualified to serve also demonstrates that an overseer holds a particular position or office.⁷¹

1 Tim 5:22–25 probably indicates that Timothy is also involved in appointing elders. What role did Timothy and Titus play in appointing elders? The language here allows for the possibility that they simply selected and authorized men to be elders. However, there are reasons to believe more is involved. In Acts 6 the Twelve appointed the seven servants after the congregation selected qualified men.⁷² The participation of the congregation in the selection process ensures that the qualifications are met and that

⁶⁸ See BDAG, 492 and Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 1:483.

⁶⁹ Benjamin Merkle explains, “In both classical and biblical Greek καθίστημι is used with the meaning of appointing someone to office—the office being in the accusative case. . . . Since the term ‘elder’ (πρεσβυτέρους) is the only accusative in the text, those who fail to see elder as an office, in essence, argue that Paul is commanding Titus to appoint some to be older men.” Merkle, *The Elder and Overseer*, 144.

⁷⁰ Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 170.

⁷¹ It is reasonable to assume that elders should be tested just as deacons are. Referring to the phrase καὶ οὗτοι δὲ (1 Tim 3:10), Strauch comments, “Through these words Paul emphasizes that deacons must be tested in the same way that elders must be tested. Thus, ‘and . . . these also,’ refers back to the overseer mentioned in the previous section.” Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 203. See also Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 201; and Verner, *The Household of God*, 155. The qualification “not a recent convert” (μὴ νεόφυτον) also affirms this need for testing.

⁷² See Lock, *Pastoral Epistles*, 129.

the church has confidence in its new leadership.⁷³ The local churches know best whether aspiring elders have proven to be above reproach.⁷⁴ It is possible Timothy and Titus were authorized to oversee the selection of elders, teach the qualifications, and appoint the men to their positions.

By what authority did Timothy and Titus appoint elders? Paul left Titus in Crete to put what remained in order, appoint elders, and teach sound doctrine (Titus 1:5; 2:1). He left Timothy in Ephesus to preserve sound doctrine and teach how the church should conduct itself (1 Tim 1:3; 3:15).⁷⁵ Timothy was commissioned, and thus authorized, by the Ephesian elders to fulfill his ministry according to his gifting (1 Tim 4:14).⁷⁶ However, there is no indication that Timothy or Titus held official leadership positions in these locations.⁷⁷ Timothy and Titus had authority as apostolic delegates and teachers of the truth.⁷⁸ These letters granted them authority from Paul, who possessed apostolic authority, to appoint elders according to his instructions (Titus 1:5).

⁷³ Knight reasons, “It would appear that both Paul, addressing Titus, and Luke in Acts 14 are compressing what takes place by speaking only of the last act, i.e., appointment or laying on of hands, and do not feel it necessary to relate the steps that lead up to that act (which are related in Acts 6). Moreover, Paul has not written the list of qualifications that follows in vv. 6ff. for Titus’s benefit but more probably as a guide for the Christians on Crete.” Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 288. See also C. K. Barrett, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles* (ICC; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1994), 313; and Marshall, *Pastoral Epistles*, 152.

⁷⁴ Similar to Paul and Barnabas appointing elders in Acts 14, it is unlikely that Titus would personally know if the qualifications of the men in each town were met.

⁷⁵ See Verner, *The Household of God*, 148–49.

⁷⁶ See Marshall, *Pastoral Epistles*, 565, 568; and Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 261. See also the discussion of 1 Tim 4:14.

⁷⁷ Mounce observes, “As true of Timothy, Titus stands outside the structure of the Cretan church as an apostolic delegate; he is never identified as an overseer or bishop.” Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 387. See also Verner, *The Household of God*, 148.

⁷⁸ Timothy and Titus “are portrayed, as in Acts and in Paul’s letters, as Paul’s assistants who visit churches as his personal representatives, commissioned with specific instructions. . . . They are vehicles of

Both lists of qualifications in 1 Tim 3 and Titus 1 begin with terms that may be translated “above reproach” (ἀνεπίλημpton and ἀνέγκλητος).⁷⁹ Their initial position and the repetition of ἀνέγκλητος in Titus 1:7 give the impression that “above reproach” is the overarching quality that the lists describe.⁸⁰ The next quality in both lists is “the husband of one wife” (μιᾶς γυναικὸς ἄνδρα/ἄνήρ). Four interpretations are commonly proposed for this phrase: an elder must 1) be married; 2) be married only once; 3) have only one wife at a time; and 4) be faithful to his wife.⁸¹ The following reasons, among others, make “4) be faithful to his wife” the best option: 1) the existence of a similar Roman concept indicating marital fidelity; 2) polygamy was not widely practiced in this cultural context; 3) Paul’s emphasis in these qualifications is on character; 4) the parallel in 1 Tim 5:9 that indicates marital fidelity; and 5) remarriage by widows is not discouraged in the Bible.⁸² Therefore, an idiomatic translation such as “faithful husband” or “one-woman man” is best.⁸³ The reference of this qualification to husbands confirms the implication of 1 Tim 2:11–12 that a woman may not be an elder.⁸⁴

Paul’s presence and power, and, as such, of the apostolic gospel/teaching.” Verner, *The Household of God*, 148–49.

⁷⁹ See BDAG, 76–77; Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 1:435, 437; and Marshall, *Pastoral Epistles*, 477.

⁸⁰ See Köstenberger, *1–2 Timothy*, 524, 607; Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 156; Marshall, *Pastoral Epistles*, 477; Merkle, *40 Questions*, 117; and Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 189.

⁸¹ See Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 157–58.

⁸² See Ed Glasscock, “‘The Husband of One Wife’ Requirement in 1 Timothy 3:2,” *BSac* 140 (1983): 244–57; Andreas J. Köstenberger, *God, Marriage, and Family: Rebuilding the Biblical Foundation* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2004), 259–69; and Sidney Page, “Marital Expectations of Church Leaders in the Pastoral Epistles,” *JSNT* 50 (93): 105–20.

⁸³ See Glasscock, “‘The Husband,’” 249; Köstenberger, *God, Marriage, and Family*, 263; Marshall, *Pastoral Epistles*, 478; Merkle, *40 Questions*, 124–28; and Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 170–73.

⁸⁴ See Köstenberger, *1–2 Timothy*, 524.

In addition to the elder's wife, both letters contain a reference to the elder's children (1 Tim 3:4–5; Titus 1:6). In 1 Timothy, Paul mentioned the man's household (τοῦ ἰδίου οἴκου) along with his children (1 Tim 3:4). Paul explained to Timothy that the condition of a man's household, and in particular his children, is a reflection of his ability to be an elder (1 Tim 3:5). This reasoning indicates that there is a parallel between a man's role in his family and the elders' role in the church.⁸⁵

The term used to describe a man's role in his household is προϊστημι, which is parallel to ἐπιμελέομαι, the elders' role in the church. This parallel and the use of προϊστημι in 1 Tim 5:17 confirms that this term describes the role of elders. As noted in the discussion of 1 Thess 5:12–13, the claim that elders possess ruling authority is often based on an interpretation of προϊστημι from 1 Tim 3:4–5; 5:17, where it is frequently translated “rule.”⁸⁶ Based on the semantic distinctions established in the discussion of προϊστημι in 1 Thess 5:12–13, one may ask whether it means “rule,” “lead,” or “care for” in 1 Tim 3:4–5. Its meaning here is important to the question “Do elders have authority to lead or authority to rule?”⁸⁷

⁸⁵ See Malcolm B. Yarnell, “*Oikos Theou*: A Theologically Neglected but Important Ecclesiological Metaphor,” *Midwestern Journal of Theology* 2/1 (Fall 2003): 59; and Marshall, *Pastoral Epistles*, 480–81.

⁸⁶ See Mal Couch, *A Biblical Theology of the Church* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1999), 156; Cowen, *Who Rules the Church*, 52–53; Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 915; Lock, *Pastoral Epistles*, 34; Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 159, 162; and some Bible translations in 1 Tim 3:4–5 (ASV, KJV, NKJV) and 5:17 (ASV, ESV, KJV, NASB, NKJV, NRSV).

⁸⁷ A ruler necessarily possesses decision-making authority over a group of people and the governmental or coercive power to enforce his decisions. A leader may show the way or direct action without decision-making authority or accompanying power. See Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 1:414; and J. A. Simpson and E. S. C. Weiner, eds., *The Oxford English Dictionary* (2d ed.; vol. 14; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 230–31, 745.

The meaning of ἐπιμελέομαι is “care for, give attention to.”⁸⁸ The parallel of these words suggests that προΐστημι expresses its second meaning, “care for.”⁸⁹ However, the state of the household includes having his children in submission (τέκνα ἔχοντα ἐν ὑποταγῇ), which implies leading or ruling.⁹⁰ It is possible that προΐστημι may signify both caring for and ruling/leading.⁹¹ ὑποταγή may denote obedience as to a ruler⁹² or voluntary submission to proper order,⁹³ such as the authorized teaching roles addressed in the last unit, 1 Tim 2:11. As a description of the response of children to their father, the idea of obedience to a ruler seems appealing. Several observations should be considered. First, in this context ὑποταγή does not directly contrast προΐστημι; προΐστημι applies to the household while ὑποταγή describes the children. Either the children are submissive in the same way as the rest of the household, which includes the man’s wife and other

⁸⁸ See BDAG, 375; Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 1:354, 462.

⁸⁹ See Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 178; and Jerome D. Quinn and William C. Wacker, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy: A New Translation with Notes and Commentary* (The Eerdmans Critical Commentary; ed. David Noel Freedman; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 261. Mounce reasons, “It provides a commentary on the nature of a Christian father’s role within his family: his leadership should be not dictatorial but caring and protecting. . . . The overseer’s managing is to be characterized by a sensitive caring, not a dictatorial exercise of authority and power.” Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 178. If elders rule, this is an appropriate qualification. However, the type or manner of ruling does not answer the question of whether ruling is the appropriate form of government for the family and church.

⁹⁰ Verner writes, “Both [προσῆναι and ἐπιμελέομαι] can refer to service that one performs for another, as in Titus 3:8. But the emphasis here is on keeping proper order, as keeping one’s children ἐν ὑποταγῇ.” Verner, *The Household of God*, 152.

⁹¹ Knight suggests that they are not “mutually exclusive alternatives” and “may both be present.” Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 161.

⁹² See Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 1:467.

⁹³ See Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 119.

adults,⁹⁴ or having submissive children is only a part of having the whole household in order.⁹⁵

Another consideration for understanding the submission of the children is the parallel in Titus 1:6. Paul explained that an elder's children must be πιστά, which could mean "believing" or "faithful."⁹⁶ "Faithful" seems a better translation in this context for at least two reasons: 1) Several difficulties are raised by requiring that an elder's children be believers;⁹⁷ and 2) This term seems to be further described by the contrast of the next phrase, "not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination" (μὴ ἐν κατηγορίᾳ ἄσωτίας ἢ ἀνυπότακτα).⁹⁸ The possibility of a charge (κατηγορία) and the potential accusations make it likely that the children, though still in their father's household, are of the age of public accountability. "Debauchery" (ἄσωτίας) is a word used to indicate an absence of self-control in adults.⁹⁹ The term translated "insubordination" (ἀνυπότακτα) is

⁹⁴ See Marshall, *Pastoral Epistles*, 479; P. H. Towner, "Households and Household Codes," in *DPL* (ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Reid; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1993), 417; Verner, *The Household of God*, 152; and Yarnell, "*Oikos Theou*," 61.

⁹⁵ This distinction is only as meaningful as one's view of the difference between a husband's authority and a father's authority. It is assumed here that corporal punishment is appropriate for fathers of younger children. This is power that would make "ruling" an appropriate description of his role. Without such power over his wife, a wife is to voluntarily submit to her husband. This maintains a distinction between ruling and leading.

⁹⁶ See BDAG, 820; Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 2:198; Marshall, *Pastoral Epistles*, 157.

⁹⁷ "What if a child is not old enough to understand the gospel and make a credible profession of faith? . . . What if an elder has seven believing children but his eighth child forsakes the faith? . . . Even if a father brings up his children 'in the discipline and instruction of the Lord' (Eph 6:4), there is no guarantee that his children will become Christians." Merkle, *40 Questions*, 133.

⁹⁸ See Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 289–90; Merkle, *40 Questions*, 130–34; Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 229. Marshall, however, makes a strong argument for "believing." Such a view also confirms the reasoning that the children are of the age of accountability. Mounce understands the phrase μὴ ἐν κατηγορίᾳ ἄσωτίας ἢ ἀνυπότακτα to be a description of the elder. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 389.

⁹⁹ Marshall explains, "ἄσωτίας . . . is a broad term which can have a number of nuances, such as drunkenness, excessive behaviour with regard to money, gluttony, and fornication." Marshall, *Pastoral*

also used in v. 10 to describe the false teachers.¹⁰⁰ If older children were in view, their submission would look much like the voluntary submission of believers to one another (Eph 5:21; ὑποτάσσω), of a wife to her husband (Eph 5:22; ὑποτάσσω from 5:21),¹⁰¹ or of the community to unofficial ministers (1 Cor 16:15–16; ὑποτάσσω).¹⁰² One may conclude, then, that submission, even with reference to children, does not necessitate the idea of ruling.

Even so, one may point out that heads of households of this time period had ruling authority over their entire households.¹⁰³ Such a cultural reality does not necessarily correspond to a biblical standard for how the family or church should be governed. More importantly, the description of an overseer as God’s steward (θεοῦ οἰκονόμου) in Titus 1:7 corresponds to the household imagery of 1 Tim 3:5, 15.¹⁰⁴ Malcolm B. Yarnell explains:

Epistles, 158. Verner comments, “ἄσωτίας is a stereotypical vice of young men rather than of children.” Verner, *The Household of God*, 154.

¹⁰⁰ See Marshall, *Pastoral Epistles*, 193; and Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 396. ἀνυπότακτα expresses the concept of submission and obedience negatively and is in the same domain and sub-domain as ὑποταγή and ὑποτάσσω, “36. Guide, Discipline, Follow;” “C. Obey, Disobey.” Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 1:467.

¹⁰¹ Knight writes, “In the relationship of husband and wife the concept of submission is used of a voluntary and willing compliance on the part of the wife, an equal, to one whom God has called to be the ‘head’ in that relationship.” Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 139.

¹⁰² Louw and Nida group ὑποτάσσω and ὑποταγή together with one definition in the same semantic domain “36. Guide, Discipline, Follow;” sub-domain “C. Obey, Disobey.” Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 1:467.

¹⁰³ Ruling is an accurate description of how many households were run. Mounce explains, “In Roman law the father had the right and responsibility of discipline, extending even to the determination of life and death with authorization from the family council.” Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 179. “The head of the household . . . possessed wide authority over the household property, his wife, his children and his slaves.” Yarnell, “*Oikos Theou*,” 61. “One would thus suppose that, on this analogy, the office holder in question would be invested with such wide ranging authority . . . invested with supreme authority in the household.” Verner, *The Household of God*, 152.

¹⁰⁴ See Verner, *The Household of God*, 153

Because of the reference to managing the household of God, one might assume that the bishop was the οἰκοδεσπότης, “householder,” or κύριος, ‘master’ of the house (cf. Luke 12:39, Mark 13:34–35). However, Titus 1:7 makes clear that the bishop is ‘God’s steward’, θεοῦ οἰκονόμον. This . . . indicates a lead servant who is given authority by the householder to manage his household. In other words, the church is like a house which has God as its householder and the bishop as a delegated manager.”¹⁰⁵

Household leadership ability is a prerequisite for an elder because he is a steward of God’s household, the church, not because he is the head.¹⁰⁶ This order of relationships accords with Jesus’ warnings in Matt 23:8–9, “You have one teacher, and you are all brothers. And call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven.” Even as Paul referred to Timothy and Titus as sons in the faith, he recognized God as Father (1 Tim 1:2; Titus 1:4).¹⁰⁷

However, establishing the elders’ role as stewards instead of household heads does not settle the question of whether elders rule or lead. A steward is one who is entrusted with the responsibility of managing the household of another. Involved in this responsibility is the granting of authority from the head of the household to oversee and direct the affairs of the house.¹⁰⁸ The authority granted to a steward could include decision-making and disciplinary power, or he may be expected to direct affairs according to the master’s rule, with all members accountable to the master. In summary, the use προΐστημι of in these verses does not conclusively determine whether it is best

¹⁰⁵ Yarnell, “*Oikos Theou*,” 59.

¹⁰⁶ “God himself is twice identified as the head of the house known as the church in the central thematic passage of the first letter to Timothy: ‘the church of God’ is the ‘house of God’ (3:15).” Yarnell, “*Oikos Theou*,” 64.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 62.

¹⁰⁸ See BDAG, 698; Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 291; Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 1:476, 520; Marshall, *Pastoral Epistles*, 160; and Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 231.

translated “lead” or “rule.” Whether God grants elders ruling and disciplinary authority must be established on other grounds.

In addition to leading or ruling, one other task is assigned to elders in these passages. Elders are to be able to teach (1 Tim 3:2), engaging in instruction and correction (Titus 1:9). The content of their teaching is to be “sound doctrine” (τῆ διδασκαλίᾳ τῆ ὑγιαίνουσα), which is why they must “hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught” (ἀντεχόμενον τοῦ κατὰ τὴν διδαχὴν πιστοῦ λόγου). The importance of this responsibility is revealed in the next unit. Titus 1:9–16 begins with γάρ. Therefore, it provides the reason why elders must teach and correct.¹⁰⁹ there are false teachers who lead whole families away from the truth (Titus 1:10–11). The first description of these false teachers is that they are “insubordinate” (ἀνυπότακτοι). Since it appears that elders have not yet been appointed, the insubordination of the false teacher is not to elders but to sound doctrine, which is the last object in view (1:9).¹¹⁰

Paul instructed Titus, and presumably the future elders, how to handle the false teachers.¹¹¹ They must be silenced (ἐπιστομίξειν; v. 11) and rebuked sharply (αἰτίαν ἔλεγε; v. 13). How are the false teachers to be silenced? Since Titus has no authority of

¹⁰⁹ See Lock, *Pastoral Epistles*, 132–33; Marshall, *Pastoral Epistles*, 146; and Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 392.

¹¹⁰ Mounce explains, “The word cannot refer to someone fighting church rule since there was no church structure yet in Crete (1:5). Rather, it speaks of a person who rebels against the gospel (v. 9) as taught by Paul and Titus.” Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 396. See also Marshall, *Pastoral Epistles*, 194.

¹¹¹ Marshall comments, “This section gives the reason why elders apt at teaching are required. . . . What we have here, then, is concerned with the problem that church leaders need to face and with the way in which they must deal with it, and although the writer addresses his injunction directly to Titus in v. 13b, he envisages that Titus will instruct the new elders accordingly.” Marshall, *Pastoral Epistles*, 191.

office,¹¹² this does not appear to be an act of governing authority. Rather, one method for handling the false teachers is presented: they are to be silenced by sharp rebuke.¹¹³

Aside from the tasks of leading or ruling and teaching, these lists of qualifications for elders in 1 Tim 3 and Titus 1 focus on qualities of character.¹¹⁴ While these are primarily important for carrying out the elders' task, they also contribute to their authority of influence among the people.¹¹⁵ The qualifications require elders to relate rightly to others and to have established credibility inside and outside of the community.¹¹⁶ These relational skills and credibility establish and maintain the elders' ability to lead others effectively (authority *de facto*).

1 Timothy 4:14

A brief and unique description of a group of elders is mentioned in 1 Tim 4:14. Paul reminded Timothy of when “the council of elders laid their hands on you” (ἐπιθέσεως τῶν χειρῶν τοῦ πρεσβυτερίου). Some writers have suggested that τοῦ πρεσβυτερίου is a genitive of purpose or rabbinic formula, indicating the office to which Timothy was

¹¹² See Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 387; and Verner, *The Household of God*, 148.

¹¹³ Mounce writes, “When Paul tells Titus that the Cretan opponents must be muzzled, they are to be muzzled through the proper teaching of the gospel (1:11; Cf. 1 Tim 4:11–16; 2 Tim 3:16–17).” Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 392; see also Marshall, *Pastoral Epistles*, 196.

¹¹⁴ See Cowen, *Who Rules the Church*, 55; John S. Hammett, *Biblical Foundations for Baptist Churches: A Contemporary Ecclesiology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2005), 166; and Marshall, *Pastoral Epistles*, 146.

¹¹⁵ Calvin writes, “He ought not to be marked by any disgrace that would detract from his authority. . . . Thus, in order that the bishops may not lack authority, he gives charge that those who are chosen should be of good and honourable reputation, and free of any extraordinary fault.” Calvin, *The Epistles to Timothy*, 223.

¹¹⁶ “A good reputation both inside and outside the church is required, and one’s behavior forms the basis upon which the reputation is evaluated.” Marshall, *Pastoral Epistles*, 154.

ordained.¹¹⁷ However, “the vast majority of scholars assume that this is the meaning here: a group of elders laid their hands on Timothy.”¹¹⁸ This interpretation is due to the consistent use of πρεσβυτέριον in the NT to refer to a group of elders.¹¹⁹ Knight also points out that “elsewhere the genitive after the phrase ἐπίθεσις τῶν χειρῶν is subjective, indicating those that lay on hands.”¹²⁰ In addition, the laying on of hands is not only carried out for the appointing of elders (cf. Acts 6:6; 13:3).¹²¹ Although Timothy has pastoral duties, there is no other indication in the NT that he held the position of an elder.¹²²

It is likely that the prophecies of 1 Tim 1:18 and the gift and laying on of hands in 1 Tim 1:6 are the same as those in 1 Tim 4:14.¹²³ It appears to be a type of commissioning for ministry that occurs elsewhere in the NT.¹²⁴ Marshall notes, “What we find in the NT is the acknowledgment by the church of a person’s appointment to some task of ministry and hence the recognition of, or the conferring of, the appropriate

¹¹⁷ Calvin, *The Epistles to Timothy*, 247; D. Daube, “The Laying on of Hands,” in *The New Testament and Rabbinic Judaism* (London: Athlone, 1956), 244–45; and J. Jeremias, “ΠΡΕΣΒΥΤΕΡΙΟΝ ausserchristlich bezeugt,” *ZNW* 48 (1957): 127–32.

¹¹⁸ Marshall, *Pastoral Epistles*, 567.

¹¹⁹ See BDAG, 861; Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 209; Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 1:133; and Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 262.

¹²⁰ Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 209.

¹²¹ See Marshall, *Pastoral Epistles*, 569.

¹²² Mounce writes, “In neither of these passages in the PE [1 Tim 4:14; 2 Tim 1:6] is there the idea that Timothy is an elder. . . . 1 Tim 4:14 sounds more like a commissioning along the line of Paul and Barnabas (Acts 13:3) than an ordination.” Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 263. See also Marshall, *Pastoral Epistles*, 569.

¹²³ See Marshall, *Pastoral Epistles*, 568; and Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 262.

¹²⁴ See Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 263; and Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 205.

authority for the task.”¹²⁵ One may presume that the role that Paul encouraged Timothy to fulfill in Ephesus was the ministry that the Ephesian elders had previously affirmed. Without necessarily implying a particular position, Timothy enjoyed a certain level of authority in Ephesus as they recognized his gifting and ministry.¹²⁶ It is possible this encouragement to Timothy also served as a reminder to the congregation of their authorization of his ministry.¹²⁷

The consistent pattern of the appointing of elders by apostolic authority (Acts 14:23; 1 Tim 5:22–25; Titus 1:5) leaves the question of procedure for appointing elders in post-apostolic times. This brief glimpse of the elders functioning in this way presents the possibility that they also participated in the appointing of elders and continued to do so on an ongoing basis.¹²⁸ Regardless of this possibility, this πρεσβυτέριον in 1 Tim 4:14 affirms the existence of an official, plurality of elders serving in a particular location.¹²⁹ In addition, this body of elders takes part in recognizing gifts and commissioning individuals to particular ministries.¹³⁰

¹²⁵ Marshall, *Pastoral Epistles*, 569.

¹²⁶ “The gift is one which was bestowed in connection with an act of prophecy and the laying on of hands. The thought of conveying of authority in the congregation is not stressed in this connection, although the position is one that carries a certain authority with it.” Marshall, *Pastoral Epistles*, 565.

¹²⁷ See Marshall, *Pastoral Epistles*, 568; and Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 261.

¹²⁸ “The implication is that he was made into a kind of ‘superintendent’ in the Pauline mission field with the approval of the congregations themselves. It may be assumed that appointments of elders and other leaders took place in a similar fashion.” Marshall, *Pastoral Epistles*, 569.

¹²⁹ Kevin Giles writes, “The existence of a formally constituted council of Christian elders at Ephesus is attested to in 1 Timothy 4:14.” Giles, *Patterns of Ministry*, 87; See also Calvin, *The Epistles to Timothy*, 247; Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 262; Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 205.

¹³⁰ See Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 205.

1 Timothy 5:17–25

Another passage relevant to the authority of church elders is 1 Tim 5:17–25. In addition to the reference to elders (πρεσβύτεροι), three terms from the selected semantic domains appear: ἀξιώω, προΐστημι, and πρόκριμα.¹³¹ While some have suggested that vv. 17–25 are not a single unit, they make more sense as a discourse unit with the unified theme of how the community is to relate to elders.¹³² This focus on elders continues the pattern of how the community should relate to various members: older and younger members (5:1–2), widows (5:3–16), elders (5:17–25), and slaves/masters (6:1–2).¹³³ This unit addresses at least three topics related to elders: remuneration (vv. 17–18), accusation (vv. 19–21), and appointment (vv. 22–25).¹³⁴ Verse 23 is a personal side note to Timothy in the context of purity.¹³⁵

Verses 17–18 continue the honor theme introduced in 5:3.¹³⁶ While there are various interpretations of “double honor” (διπλῆς τιμῆς),¹³⁷ v. 18 reveals that honor at least includes the idea of material support.¹³⁸ Double honor may refer to giving elders

¹³¹ Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 1: 359, 414, 458, 464.

¹³² Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 918; Merkle, *40 Questions*, 220; Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 304; and Quinn and Wacker, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy*, 465.

¹³³ See Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 304; and Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 206.

¹³⁴ See Köstenberger, *1 Timothy*, 545; Marshall, *Pastoral Epistles*, 608; and Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 305.

¹³⁵ See Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 318.

¹³⁶ See Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 231; Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 304; Quinn and Wacker, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy*, 458; and Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 206.

¹³⁷ Marshall discusses seven interpretations. Marshall, *Pastoral Epistles*, 613–14.

¹³⁸ See Calvin, *The Epistles to Timothy*, 261–62; Giles, *Patterns of Ministry*, 86; Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 304; Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 212; and Verner, *The Household of God*, 156.

both respect and material support.¹³⁹ Two qualifications are given for those who deserve double honor, those who lead well (οἱ καλῶς προεστῶτες) and work hard in teaching (οἱ κοπιῶντες ἐν λόγῳ καὶ διδασκαλίᾳ). These qualities emphasize the functional nature of the elders' leadership. Not only should elders be qualified in order to be appointed (1 Tim 3:1–7; Titus 1:5–9), the quality of their service is the basis for due respect.¹⁴⁰ This is reaffirmed by the implication that elders' may become disqualified for office by failing to maintain a life that is above reproach (vv. 19–21).¹⁴¹

The description of the elders' activities in v. 17, leading and teaching, repeat the responsibilities explicitly stated in the qualification lists (1 Tim 3:5; Titus 1:9). While μάλιστα may be translated “namely,”¹⁴² it is most often syntactically subordinate with the sense “especially.”¹⁴³ If this is the case here, the second description, those who labor in preaching and teaching, is a sub-set of the first, those who lead well.¹⁴⁴ Many attempts have been made to deduce from this construction different types and functions of

¹³⁹ See BDAG, 1005; Köstenberger, *1 Timothy*, 546–47; Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 1:575; and Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 305, 309.

¹⁴⁰ Calvin writes, “The honour is due not to the title, but to the work performed by those appointed to the office.” Calvin, *The Epistles to Timothy*, 261–62. Noting the parallel to widows, Marshall writes, “In both cases the ‘real’ thing is to be honoured, and a group is to receive some kind of support from the congregation. Also in both cases there is the danger of unworthy people being involved.” Marshall, *Pastoral Epistles*, 609.

¹⁴¹ See David A. Mappes, “Studies on the Role of the New Testament Elder: The Discipline of a Sinning Elder,” *BSac* 154 (July-Sept 1997): 339.

¹⁴² See Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 232; Marshall, *Pastoral Epistles*, 612; Merkle, *40 Questions*, 87; and Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 308.

¹⁴³ See BDAG, 613; and Köstenberger, *1 Timothy*, 548.

¹⁴⁴ See Köstenberger, *1 Timothy*, 548; and Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 207.

elders.¹⁴⁵ Some of the more rigid categorizations draw more distinctions that the syntax and logic require.¹⁴⁶ It is unnecessary to assume, for example, that some elders do not lead, but only teach.¹⁴⁷ Neither must one conclude that some elders do not teach.¹⁴⁸ In fact, the qualifications seem to indicate that not only are all elders qualified to teach (1 Tim 3:2), but they are also actively engaged in teaching (Titus 1:9).¹⁴⁹ Instead, those who are preaching and teaching are set apart in the great amount of work or skill they exercise in doing so.¹⁵⁰ The syntactical relationship at least indicates that one way in which elders may lead well is by laboring in preaching and teaching.

The semantic range of προΐστημι (in οἱ καλῶς προεστῶτες) and its significance for understanding the elders' authority is explained above with reference to 1 Tim 3:4–5. The same question of its meaning remains, “Do elders have authority to rule or authority

¹⁴⁵ See Calvin, *The Epistles to Timothy*, 262; Giles, *Patterns of Ministry*, 86; Hort, *The Christian Ecclesia*, 197; Marshall, *Pastoral Epistles*, 610; Quinn and Wacker, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy*, 459; and Verner, *The Household of God*, 150.

¹⁴⁶ See Mounce's discussion. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 307–308.

¹⁴⁷ See Verner, *The Household of God*, 150.

¹⁴⁸ “Of course 1 Timothy 5:17 doesn't limit other elders from teaching, it merely states the fact that some labor in the Word.” Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 210. Those who conclude that some elders do not teach include Calvin, *The Epistles to Timothy*, 262; and Hort, *The Christian Ecclesia*, 197.

¹⁴⁹ “1 Tim 3:2 requires that all overseers be able to teach. If the elders here are the same group as the overseers in 1 Tim 3:1–7, it seems unlikely that there was such a person as a nonteaching elder/overseer.” Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 307. See also Cowen, *Who Rules the Church*, 82; Gene A. Getz, *Elders and Leaders: God's Plan for Leading the Church: A Biblical, Historical, and Cultural Perspective* (Chicago: Moody, 2003), 132–33.

¹⁵⁰ Grudem explains, “Here Paul seems to imply that there is a special group of elders who ‘labor in preaching and teaching.’ This means at least that there are some among the elders who give more time to the activities of preaching and teaching, and may even mean that there are some who ‘labor’ in the sense of earning their living from that preaching and teaching.” Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 915. Strauch writes, “What is the difference between these elders? The answer is found in the participle ‘those who work hard.’” He goes on to suggest that it is the time, work, and skill that are the difference with regard to teaching, not the teaching itself. Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 209. See also Cowen, *Who Rules the Church*, 82; Lightfoot, “The Christian Ministry,” 195; Lock, *Pastoral Epistles*, 62; Merkle, *40 Questions*, 85–86; and Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 308.

to lead?”¹⁵¹ The fact that preaching and teaching is a particular manifestation or form of the activity in question (προΐστημι) is helpful. Based on the above distinction, leading is a better description of preaching and teaching than ruling.¹⁵²

Some see προΐστημι here as parallel in some way to ἀϋθεντέω in 1 Tim 2:12¹⁵³ and understand both to be expressing ruling authority, therefore excluding women from being elders.¹⁵⁴ Instead, since the elders’ leadership (προΐστημι) is at least in part fulfilled by teaching, and only men are authorized (ἀϋθεντέω) to teach the church, then women may not be elders. Together, 1 Tim 2:12 and 5:17 suggest that the exercise of authority and leadership by men and elders is primarily through teaching.¹⁵⁵

The next topic Paul introduced is accusations against elders (vv. 19–21). In v. 19 Paul required an accusation against an elder to be established by two witnesses, which follows the tradition of Deut 19:15 and is required by Jesus for accusations against all brothers (Matt 18:16).¹⁵⁶ Verse 20 explains that if an elder is found guilty he is to be rebuked in the presence of all. Some see v. 20 as a simple parallel to Matt 18:17, in which

¹⁵¹ A ruler necessarily possesses decision-making authority over a group of people and the governmental or coercive power to enforce his decisions. A leader may show the way or direct action without decision-making authority or accompanying power. See Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 1:414; and Simpson and Weiner, *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 230–31, 745.

¹⁵² Strauch presents similar reasoning, “The *New American Standard Bible*’s translation of *prohistemi* as ‘rule’ is a bit strong, and the translation ‘care for,’ which some scholars prefer, is too weak unless one clearly understands that the care involved is that of leading and teaching people. The idea conveyed here is that these leaders exercise effective pastoral leadership.” Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 208.

¹⁵³ See Blomberg, “Women in Ministry,” 169–70; Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 142; and Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 60.

¹⁵⁴ See Köstenberger, *1 Timothy*, 517, 520; Moo, “What Does It Mean,” 187; Schreiner, “Women in Ministry,” 311.

¹⁵⁵ “Teaching was doubtless the most important form in which guidance and superintendence were exercised.” Hort, *The Christian Ecclesia*, 197.

¹⁵⁶ See Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 235–36.

an unrepentant brother is brought before the church.¹⁵⁷ However, David Mappes presents a compelling argument that the procedure for elders is unique. He writes:

Since the goal of Matt 18:15–20 is the immediate restoration of a sinning believer that may preclude public rebuke, the supposition surfaces that the elder discipline process need continue only until repentance occurs. . . . The consequences of the rebuke in 1 Tim 5:20 (“so that the rest also may be fearful”) differs from the Matthean account. A guilty elder who repents during or after the process of discipline must then be restored to fellowship with Christ and should be forgiven by the church community. However, the nature of the sin may disqualify the leader from functioning as an elder, even though he has been forgiven. Even if the sin is of a less severe nature, the rebuke (presumably public) must take place, since the accusation (presumably with some public awareness) would impede the elder from functioning as an elder.¹⁵⁸

It is important to recognize that the public nature of an elder’s office and the requirement that he be above reproach means that a disqualifying sin cannot simply be forgiven without effect upon his position.¹⁵⁹

On the other hand, since “above reproach” does not mean perfection,¹⁶⁰ an elder may be confronted on certain issues according to the Matt 18 pattern without being disqualified from office.¹⁶¹ What seems clear enough is that if an elder is rebuked publicly, he is no longer above reproach.¹⁶² Since the purpose here is to cause the rest to

¹⁵⁷ See Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 235–36; and Marshall, *Pastoral Epistles*, 618.

¹⁵⁸ Mappes, “The Discipline of a Sinning Elder,” 338–39. See also Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 218.

¹⁵⁹ “In First Timothy, of course, at this point the presbyteral order is concerned not about prerequisites but about conduct that could even disqualify a presbyter already in office from continuing to preside.” Quinn and Wacker, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy*, 463; See also Getz, *Elders and Leaders*, 141.

¹⁶⁰ See Calvin, *The Epistles to Timothy*, 223.

¹⁶¹ Calvin writes, “Paul speaks here of crimes or heinous sins which give rise to public scandal, for if any presbyter commits a fault not in that category, it is clearly preferable that he should be admonished privately rather than openly accused.” Calvin, *The Epistles to Timothy*, 264.

¹⁶² Mappes disagrees with the interpretation that τοὺς ἀμαρτάνοντας is one who is in persistent, unrepentant sin. He argues, “It seems preferable to see the participle τοὺς ἀμαρτάνοντας as simply referring to elders who have been legitimately accused of sin and found guilty. . . . The focus is on the

fear (not to bring repentance; cf. Matt 18:17; 1 Cor 5:5) and there is no mention of the condition of unrepentance (cf. Matt 18:15–17),¹⁶³ it is possible that this public rebuke results in a removal from office. The warnings of vv. 21–25 fit well into this interpretation. Such accusations and rebukes must be handled with complete integrity, and elders must be appointed with great care lest a hastily chosen elder later prove himself disqualified.¹⁶⁴

Most commentators agree that the laying on of hands in v. 22 is a reference to the appointment of elders.¹⁶⁵ Others conclude that the laying on of hands symbolizes the reinstatement of sinning brothers back into fellowship, or of sinning elders back into office.¹⁶⁶ That the appointment of elders is in view is supported by the following evidence: 1) The laying on of hands to appoint people to leadership or ministry was a common practice (Acts 6:6; 13; 2 Tim 1:6) and is even mentioned in 1 Tim 4:14;¹⁶⁷ 2) The passage up to this point is entirely about elders, and it makes perfect sense for the

present position of guilt associated with the substantiated accusation.” Mappes, “The Discipline of a Sinning Elder,” 338. See also Merkle, *40 Questions*, 221; and Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 218.

¹⁶³ See Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 218.

¹⁶⁴ See Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 239; Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 306; and Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 220–21.

¹⁶⁵ See Calvin, *The Epistles to Timothy*, 266; Giles, *Patterns of Ministry*, 87; Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 918; Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 231; David A. Mappes, “Studies on the Role of the New Testament Elder: The ‘Laying on of Hands’ of Elders,” *BSac* 154 (Oct-Dec 1997): 475; Marshall, *Pastoral Epistles*, 622; Merkle, *40 Questions*, 220; Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 316; Quinn and Wacker, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy*, 473; Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 221; and Verner, *The Household of God*, 159. Although he disagrees, Hort writes that most commentators understand the laying on of hands to be ordination of elders. Hort, *The Christian Ecclesia*, 214–15.

¹⁶⁶ See Hort, *The Christian Ecclesia*, 214–15; and Lock, *Pastoral Epistles*, 64.

¹⁶⁷ See Marshall, *Pastoral Epistles*, 621; and Merkle, *40 Questions*, 220.

remaining verses to also refer to elders;¹⁶⁸ and 3) The appointment of leaders is an important theme in the Pastoral Epistles (1 Tim 3:1–7, 8–13; Titus 1:6–9).¹⁶⁹ The warnings of vv. 19–25 make it clear that a person must not only be qualified in his character to become an elder (1 Tim 3:1–7; Titus 1:5–9), he must maintain this quality of character as an elder. As a reference to the recognition of elders, the laying on of hands reaffirms the existence of an official body of elders to which qualified men are appointed.¹⁷⁰

Based on the instructions of vv. 19–22, some have deduced that Timothy possessed authority to judge and to appoint elders in the church.¹⁷¹ This is often extended to conclude that church leaders possess this authority in the church today.¹⁷² The instructions to not admit a charge (παράδεχου), to rebuke a sinning elder (ἐλεγχε), to keep these rules (φυλάξις) with impartiality, and to not lay hands on men hastily (χειρας ταχέως μηδενὶ ἐπιτίθει) are written to Timothy in the second person singular. Paul was speaking directly to Timothy and assumed that as a commissioned leader, teacher, and apostolic delegate he would engage in these activities. His involvement, however, does

¹⁶⁸ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 918; Merkle, *40 Questions*, 220; Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 304; and Quinn and Wacker, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy*, 465.

¹⁶⁹ See Marshall, *Pastoral Epistles*, 621.

¹⁷⁰ See Calvin, *The Epistles to Timothy*, 266; Giles, *Patterns of Ministry*, 87; Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 918; Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 231; Lock, *Pastoral Epistles*, 62; Mappes, “The ‘Laying on of Hands’ of Elders,” 475; Marshall, *Pastoral Epistles*, 622; Quinn and Wacker, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy*, 458–59; and Verner, *The Household of God*, 159.

¹⁷¹ Marshall reasons, “It is implied that Timothy had regional authority to deal with problems of church discipline, just as Titus has authority to appoint elders. . . . The implication is that he has authority to ‘hold court’; if he is in charge of a group of churches, presumably he was the ‘higher authority’ to whom accusations and appeals would be made.” Marshall, *Pastoral Epistles*, 617–18. See also Mappes, “The Discipline of a Sinning Elder,” 334; and Quinn and Wacker, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy*, 463.

not necessitate that he acted alone.¹⁷³ In fact, the following six reasons suggest that Timothy did not possess absolute judicial or appointing authority.

1) Three of the four other times that the laying on of hands was a commissioning to ministry more than one person participated (Acts 6:6; 13:1–3; 1 Tim 4:14). In the fourth, Paul reminded Timothy of when he laid hands on him (2 Tim 1:6). It is likely that this is the same event referenced in 1 Tim 4:14 (see also 1 Tim 1:18). If so, it is not an example of an individual commissioning someone alone, but of a reference to one laying on hands while assuming participation within a group. In a survey of the laying on of hands in the NT, Eduard Lohse concludes, “There is no mention of a power of consecration restricted only to certain individuals.”¹⁷⁴

2) Other instructions in this paragraph assume the participation of others. Giving elders double honor, which includes material support, obviously includes the whole community, not only Timothy. The rebuking of a sinning elder also requires the presence of the community.¹⁷⁵ The parallel of vv. 19–20 with Matt 18:15–17 makes it likely that the “all” before which the rebuke is to be given is the church.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷² Verner reasons, “If 1 Tim 5:22 concerns the ordination of elders, then this passage too indicates that one was admitted to the ranks of the leadership by the leadership itself.” Verner, *The Household of God*, 159. See also Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 218.

¹⁷³ Although Marshall believes Timothy has judicial authority, he writes, “There is nothing to indicate that he was to act unilaterally.” Marshall, *Pastoral Epistles*, 621.

¹⁷⁴ Eduard Lohse, “χείρ,” *TDNT* 9:434.

¹⁷⁵ One may not assume that it is Timothy alone who delivers the rebuke. See Köstenberger, *1 Timothy*, 549. Marshall argues that Paul assumes the other elders are participating in the rebuke. Marshall, *Pastoral Epistles*, 618.

¹⁷⁶ See Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 236; Köstenberger, *1 Timothy*, 547; Mappes, “The Discipline of a Sinning Elder,” 341; Merkle, *40 Questions*, 221; and Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 313–14.

3) In the last paragraph, Paul instructed Timothy in the second person singular to honor qualified widows (5:3) and refuse to enroll younger widows (5:11). Paul intended for him to participate in these activities, but they are not for him to carry out alone.

4) The purpose of this letter to Timothy is to explain “how one ought to behave in the household of God” (1 Tim 3:15). Paul focused on the following community relations throughout the letter: false teachers, prayer, teaching and gender roles in worship, qualifications of elders and deacons, relating to different age groups, caring for widows, relating to elders, and the relations of slaves and masters. Paul encouraged Timothy to do well in his ministry, which was primarily to explain and teach his instructions on community relations (1 Tim 1:3; 4:6, 11; 5:7; 6:2, 17). The overall purpose of the letter was to explain what the church should do, not just Timothy.

5) As argued above, based on the pattern of Act 6:1–6 where the congregation selected and the Twelve appointed the seven servants, the authority of Paul and Barnabas (Acts 14:23), Titus (Titus 1:5), and Timothy (1 Tim 5:22) to appoint elders does not exclude church participation.

6) The other primary passages addressing discipline in the church do not give judicial authority to individuals, or even leaders, but to the congregation (see discussions on Matt 18:15–20 and 1 Cor 5). There is also no other evidence in the NT as to an established individual office that includes such appointing or judicial authority.

Based on these observations, there is no reason to conclude that this passage contradicts the disciplinary authority of the congregation established in Matt 18:15–20 and 1 Cor 5. At the very least, one may observe that elders are held morally accountable within the church. The most likely explanation of vv. 19–21 is that the public rebuke of a

sinning elder means that he is removed from office because he is no longer above reproach. If the sin is established by two or three witnesses and brought before the congregation as in Matt 18, the proper procedure is for the church to confirm the accusation and by doing so the elder would be disqualified from office.

Concluding Observations

Based on the exegetical considerations above, preliminary principles related to elders' authority are proposed. These observations, especially the non-prescriptive examples, are synthesized with all other related observations in the concluding chapter.

1 Timothy 2:11–16

Only men are authorized to teach the whole community. Since elders are responsible for the whole flock (Acts 20:28) and are responsible for teaching them, a woman is not permitted to be an elder.

1 Timothy 3:1–7 and Titus 1:5–16

- 1) ἐπίσκοπος and πρεσβύτερος are used to refer to a single position of leadership (Titus 1:5, 7).
- 2) As overseers, elders are responsible to care for and safeguard the church (see ἐπισκοπή and ἐπίσκοπος; 1 Tim 3:1; Titus 1:5).
- 3) A plurality of elders are to lead in each church (Titus 1:5).
- 4) Elders hold a particular position or office (see required qualifications, 1 Tim 3:2; Titus 1:7; καθίστημι in Titus 1:5; and τὸν ἐπίσκοπον in Titus 1:7).
- 5) Timothy and Titus were authorized to oversee the selection of elders, teaching the qualifications and appointing the men to their positions (Titus 1:5; cf. 1 Tim 5:22–

25). The congregation's role in the selecting of elders may be assumed (cf. Acts 6:3).

- 6) *προΐστημι* may be translated “rule” or “lead” in 1 Tim 3:4–5. Since these terms have distinct meanings, the best choice may be informed by other passages.
- 7) Elders are responsible to rule or lead and to teach (1 Tim 3:2, 4–5; Titus 1:9).
- 8) False teachers are to be dealt with by teaching and correcting (Titus 1:9–16).
- 9) The qualifications require elders to relate rightly to others and to have established credibility inside and outside of the community. These relational skills and credibility establish and maintain the elders' ability to lead others effectively (authority *de facto*).

1 Timothy 4:14

- 1) Elders function as an official body.
- 2) Elders take part in recognizing gifts and commissioning individuals to particular ministries.

1 Timothy 5:17–25

- 1) Elders serve as a body (v. 17).
- 2) Elders are responsible for leading the church (v. 17). Οἱ καλῶς προεστῶτες πρεσβύτεροι is best translated “the elders who lead well,” instead of “the elders who rule well” since laboring in preaching and teaching is an example of this activity.
- 3) Elders should be honored, including remuneration, for leading well and working hard at teaching (vv. 17–18).

- 4) Elders are an official body of leaders to which qualified men are appointed (vv. 22–25).
- 5) Elders are held morally accountable and may be disqualified from remaining an elder by being publicly rebuked on the evidence of two or three witnesses (vv. 19–21).

CHAPTER 6

THE AUTHORITY OF ELDERS IN THE GENERAL EPISTLES

According to the criteria for passage selection described in chapter one, three relevant passages are found in the General Epistles: Heb 13:7, 17, 24; Jas 5:14–15; and 1 Pet 5:1–5. This chapter includes a discussion of the exegetical issues in each passage that are relevant to the authority of church elders.

Hebrews 13:7, 17, 24

The first passage that is relevant to church elders' authority is Heb 13:7, 17, 24. Three terms from the selected semantic domains appear here, ἡγέομαι, πείθομαι, and ὑπέικω. Louw and Nida place ἡγέομαι, which appears in all three verses, in domains “36. Guide, Discipline, Follow; A. Guide, Lead” and “37. Control, Rule; D. Rule, Govern.” Πείθομαι and ὑπέικω both appear in v. 17 and are included in domain “36. Guide, Discipline, Follow,” sub-domain “C. Obey, Disobey.”¹ Πείθομαι is also included in sub-domain “D. Follow, Be a Disciple.”²

¹ J. P. Louw and E. A. Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (2 vols.; New York: United Bible Societies, 1989), 1:466–67.

² *Ibid.*, 1:469.

H. Attridge suggests that the references to leaders in vv. 7 and 17 mark the boundaries of the unit 7–19.³ He explains that vv. 8–9 relate to v. 7 and vv. 18–19 relate to v. 17.⁴ The subjects in v. 7 were probably former deceased leaders while those in v. 17 were the present leaders of the congregation.⁵ The leaders in v. 7 “spoke” (ἐλάλησαν; aorist) and those in v. 17 “are keeping watch” (ἀγρυπνοῦσιν; present).⁶ It is possible, though, that some of present leaders also participated in the proclamation of the word that established the church.⁷ The church is exhorted to “remember” (μνημονεύετε) and “consider” (ἀναθεωροῦντες) their former leaders. In particular, they were to consider “the outcome of their way of life.”⁸ This probably refers to the ending or sum total of their lives so that the congregation was encouraged to persevere in the faith.⁹

³ H. Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989), 390–92; See also G. H. Guthrie, *Hebrews* (NIVAC; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 434, 438; and W. L. Lane, *Hebrews 9–13* (WBC 47B; Dallas: Word, 1991), 502.

⁴ “Both of these references are extended, the former with a solemn proclamation about Christ’s eternity (v. 8) and a warning against strange teachings (v. 9); the latter with a comment on the author’s behavior, coupled with a request for prayer and a personal wish (vv. 18–19).” Regarding v. 8, Attridge writes, “This festive affirmation, formally unconnected with either the preceding or following verses, provides a thematic transition between the two. While previous leaders have departed, the ultimate source of their faith remains forever; while many strange teachings may be afoot, Christ is ever the same.” He comments on v. 18, “The concern for the community’s present leadership leads naturally to remarks on the author, who, by virtue of his whole message of exhortation, has some position of authority over, or responsibility for, his addressees.” Attridge, *Hebrews*, 390–92, 402. See also Lane, *Hebrews*, 502.

⁵ See Attridge, *Hebrews*, 390–91; Samuel Bénétreau, *L’Épître aux Hébreux* (Vaux-sur-Seine, France: Edifac, 1989-1990), 214–15; Guthrie, *Hebrews*, 438, 441; Lane, *Hebrews*, 526; and Benjamin L. Merkle, *The Elder and Overseer: One Office in the Early Church* (New York: Peter Lang, 2003), 114.

⁶ See Lane, *Hebrews*, 527.

⁷ See Guthrie, *Hebrews*, 438.

⁸ Attridge reasons, “The leaders were apparently deceased, since the outcome of their lives was an object of emulation.” See Attridge, *Hebrews*, 392.

⁹ See Bénétreau, *L’Épître aux Hébreux*, 214–15; John Calvin, *The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews and the First and Second Epistles of St. Peter* (Calvin’s Commentaries; ed. David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance; trans. William B. Johnston; Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1963), 207; Guthrie, *Hebrews*, 438; C. R. Koester, *Hebrews* (AB 36; New York: Doubleday, 2001), 567; and Lane, *Hebrews*, 527.

In v. 17, the author presents instructions for how the community is to respond to their current leadership. They are to “follow” (παίθομαι) and “submit” (ὑπέικω) to them. According to Bauer, παίθομαι in Heb 13:17 means “3. To be won over as the result of persuasion . . . b. obey, follow.”¹⁰ Louw and Nida define it as “to submit to authority or reason by obeying.”¹¹ Since παίθω has the overall sense of persuasion,¹² then the response of obedience is of one who is convinced. It is possible that the translation “obey” does not best convey this meaning in English since its definition generally does not require understanding or persuasion.¹³ Instead, the community should “follow” its leaders. In concurrence with “follow,” the act of submission (ὑπέικω) also allows for freedom to yield (see discussion on ὑποτάσσω in 1 Cor 16:15–16).¹⁴

That the recipients of this letter were to choose to follow their leaders with understanding and conviction, having been persuaded, is confirmed by the exhortation itself. The author did not urge the leaders to bring the congregation into submission, which would imply they had some power to do so. These instructions were given to the

¹⁰ Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (3d ed.; rev. and ed. Frederick William Danker; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 792.

¹¹ Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 1:466.

¹² See BDAG, 791–92.

¹³ Lane writes, “This verb certainly demands obedience. But the specific quality of the obedience for which παίθεσθαι asks is not primarily derived from a respect for constituted structures of authority. It is rather the obedience that is won through persuasive conversation and that follows from it.” Lane, *Hebrews*, 554. Koester translates παίθομαι “heed.” He explains, “Some take the verb in a rigorous sense for the kind of obedience that would suit a servant or child . . . but this seems overstated.” Koester, *Hebrews*, 572. See also Bill Patterson, *Christ-centered Servant-team Leadership* (Bloomington, Indiana: AuthorHouse, 2006), 89; and Timothy M. Willis, “‘Obey Your Leaders’: Hebrews 13 and Leadership in the Church,” *ResQ* 36/4 (1994): 316–26.

¹⁴ Louw and Nida present ὑποτάσσω and ὑπέικω as synonyms with the same meaning. Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 1:467.

congregation; they had the freedom and responsibility to follow their leaders. The author provided several reasons to persuade them to follow their leaders.¹⁵ The basis provided for submission was not the structure that apparently existed, but the important function of the leaders and the pragmatic consequences of not submitting.¹⁶

This freedom to submit with conviction fits well into the type of authority that seems to be exercised by these leaders. It is the authority of leading and teaching rather than governing.¹⁷ The leaders of v. 7 were characterized as those who spoke to them the word of God.¹⁸ The believers were to consider “the outcome of their way of life” and “imitate their faith” (cf. 1 Pet 5:3, leaders provide an example).¹⁹ The author revealed in v. 9 the reason he reminded them of these leaders and pointed to the unchanging Christ

¹⁵ See Attridge, *Hebrews*, 402; and Gene A. Getz, *Elders and Leaders: God's Plan for Leading the Church: A Biblical, Historical, and Cultural Perspective* (Chicago: Moody, 2003), 176–77.

¹⁶ “The necessity of submission is founded not on a theory relative to the structure of the church, nor on the need of good order, but on taking into consideration the nature and importance of the task of its leaders, ‘they watch over your souls.’” Bénétreau, *L'Épître aux Hébreux*, 229. The leaders were “identified by their function.” “The rationale for this appeal first concerns what the leaders do *for the* listeners What is at stake is not obedience for its own sake, but what is ultimately either beneficial or unprofitable for the listeners.” Koester, *Hebrews*, 566, 578.

¹⁷ Guthrie writes, “The admonitions to obey and submit probably relate to the leaders as deliverers of proper instruction, a focal role of early Christians elders (1 Thess 5:12; 1 Tim 5:17). Thus, these two commands involve yielding to and respecting the leaders as they give direction concerning right Christian doctrine.” Guthrie, *Hebrews*, 442. See also Bénétreau, *L'Épître aux Hébreux*, 230; Calvin, *The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews*, 207, 213; Getz, *Elders and Leaders*, 175–76; Koester, *Hebrews*, 578; and Willis, “Obey Your Leaders,” 316–26.

¹⁸ Bénétreau explains that the leaders’ authority is derived from the authority of the Word. Bénétreau, *L'Épître aux Hébreux*, 229. Lane writes, “From this fact they may be characterized as charismatically endowed leaders, whose authority derived exclusively from the word they proclaimed and whose precedence was enhanced by preaching alone. . . . No other grounding and safeguarding of the position of the leaders is provided than the authority that results from the word proclaimed.” Lane, *Hebrews*, 526.

¹⁹ Calvin comments, “Those who persisted in a true faith to the very end, and who both in death and in their whole life bore faithful testimony to sound doctrine.” Calvin, *The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews*, 207.

(v. 8):²⁰ “Do not be led away by diverse and strange teachings.”²¹ C. Lane explains how vv. 7–17 fit together:

The intervening unit of expository parenthesis in vv. 10–16, which is framed by 7–9 and vv. 17–19, appears to have been drafted in response to the challenge to the word of God represented by the foreign teaching. . . . The members of the house church will be able to offer the sacrificial service desired by God only if they obey their leaders and submit to their authority.²²

He argues that “the pastoral injunctions in v. 7 and v. 17 are complementary to one another.”²³ Therefore, the authority exercised in v. 17 is teaching authority, just as in v. 7.²⁴

The work of these leaders, “keeping watch over your souls,” also reveals the nature of their authority. Not only is this the reason given for the believers to submit to them, it describes the sphere in which they provided leadership (cf. 1 Thess 5:12, “those who lead you in the Lord”).²⁵ Several helpful parallels may be observed in Acts 20:28–32 and 1 Pet 5:1–4.²⁶ The elders in Acts and 1 Peter are responsible for caring for (ποιμαίνω) and watching over (ἐπίσκοπος, ἐπισκοπέω) God’s people.²⁷ Jesus is the shepherd (ποιμήν) and overseer (ἐπίσκοπος) “of your souls” (τῶν ψυχῶν ὑμῶν) (1 Pet

²⁰ See Attridge, *Hebrews*, 390–92; and Lane, *Hebrews*, 528.

²¹ See Bénétreau, *L'Épître aux Hébreux*, 229; and Koester, *Hebrews*, 567.

²² Lane, *Hebrews*, 554.

²³ *Ibid.*, 553.

²⁴ See P. Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 722.

²⁵ See Calvin, *The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews*, 212; and Phil A. Newton, *Elders in Congregational Life: Rediscovering the Biblical Model for Church Leadership* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2005), 90.

²⁶ See Lane, *Hebrews*, 555.

2:25) and is the chief shepherd who will appear and reward the elders for their shepherding (1 Pet 5:4). Believers were entrusted into the care (κλῆρος) of the elders (1 Pet 5:3).²⁸ Caring for the church is not merely a charismatic function but is the specific responsibility and purpose of the Spirit's appointment (Acts 20:28). That this is an assigned responsibility is also confirmed by the requirement to give an account (Heb 13:17; 1 Pet 5:4).²⁹

The authority in view, then, is not only functional, but also official in the sense that particular people have been given a specific responsibility.³⁰ The manifestation of caring for God's people in Acts 20:28–32 is the protection of the people from “twisted” teaching (cf. Heb 13:9).³¹ Caring for souls with an eye to eschatological judgment is a matter of doctrine, faith, and perseverance.³² All this serves to confirm that teaching and

²⁷ ἀγρυπνέω, ἐπίσκοπος, and ἐπισκοπέω all appear in semantic domain “35. Help, Care For; D Care For, Take Care Of.” ποιμαίνω also includes the idea of helping. Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 1:462, 465.

²⁸ κλῆρος is also in semantic domain “35. Help, Care For” with ἀγρυπνέω, ἐπίσκοπος, and ἐπισκοπέω. Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 1:463. See also Lane, *Hebrews*, 555.

²⁹ See Merkle, *The Elder and Overseer*, 114.

³⁰ Merkle writes, “If a leader must give an account, he needs to know not only that he is a leader (which implies some formal position recognized by the church) but also who he is accountable to lead (which implies a distinction between the leaders and the followers.” Merkle, *The Elder and Overseer*, 114. This disagrees with Lane, who writes, “The authority of the leaders is not officially bestowed but derives directly from the authority inherent in the word of preaching.” Lane, *Hebrews*, 555. The ultimate authority of these leaders is indeed “in the word of preaching,” for if they do not faithfully do so, they should not be followed (See Calvin, *The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews*, 213). However, not all those who preach have been given the responsibility of caring for the souls of a particular congregation. See also Bénétreau, *L'Épître aux Hébreux*, 230; and Alexander Strauch, *Biblical Eldership: An Urgent Call to Restore Biblical Church Leadership* (Colorado Spring: Lewis and Roth, 1995), 271.

³¹ See Newton, *Elders in Congregational Life*, 82.

³² Koester observes, “Watching over souls involves tending the hope that anchors the soul to heaven (6:19) and fostering the perseverance that leads to salvation (10:39).” Koester, *Hebrews*, 578. See also Attridge, *Hebrews*, 402.

leading by example are the primary outworkings of this responsibility.³³ The recipients of Hebrews were to follow and submit to their leaders because they had been given the responsibility, and thus the authority, to care for the wellbeing and salvation of their souls.³⁴ This responsibility ties the authority of the leaders directly to the word that is preached. Their position as leaders grants them the authority to care for souls by teaching and leading. However, the nature of this responsibility also limits their authority to the faithful presentation of the word of God, to whom they will give account.³⁵

The author provides two additional reasons why the community should follow and submit to its leaders. A failure to do so would result in groaning on the part of the leaders, instead of joy, and would be unprofitable to the believers (v. 17). These consequences once again point to the freedom of the congregation to submit.³⁶ No indication is given here that the leaders possess any power of discipline with which to respond to insubordination. This may be contrasted with the consequences of disobedience to “the governing authorities,” which may execute judgment with the sword

³³ George Guthrie writes, “By guiding the church in doctrinal integrity the leaders ‘watch over’ (*agrypne*) the lives of those committed to their charge.” Guthrie, *Hebrews*, 442; see also Lane, *Hebrews*, 555; and Newton, *Elders in Congregational Life*, 82–84.

³⁴ Guthrie explains, “The admonitions to obey and submit probably relate to the leaders as deliverers of proper instruction, a focal role of early Christians elders (1 Thess 5:12; 1 Tim 5:17). Thus, these two commands involve yielding to and respecting the leaders as they give direction concerning right Christian doctrine.” Guthrie, *Hebrews*, 442. See also Lane, *Hebrews*, 555.

³⁵ Lane writes, “According to v. 7a, the function of the ἡγούμενοι consisted in preaching the word of God. From this fact they may be characterized as charismatically endowed leaders, whose authority derived exclusively from the word they proclaimed and whose precedence was enhanced by preaching alone. . . . No other grounding and safeguarding of the position of the leaders is provided than the authority that results from the word proclaimed.” Lane, *Hebrews*, 526. Calvin confirms this dynamic, “The Spirit commands us to receive obediently the teaching of holy and faithful bishops, and to obey their wise counsels. . . . While we are bidden to obey our pastors we must carefully and shrewdly distinguish those who are true and faithful rulers, because if we give this honour indiscriminately to anyone we like, wrong will be done to the good, and moreover the reason added here that they are worth of honour because they watch for our soul will have no force.” Calvin, *The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews*, 213. See also Newton, *Elders in Congregational Life*, 90.

(Rom 13:1–4). Patterned after the right of parental discipline, the author of Hebrews explained that God disciplines his children (Heb 12:7–11). Even more significant is the pending judgment of God for those who do not persevere, to which “unprofitable” may be an understated reference.³⁷

The term ἡγέομαι is most often translated “leaders.” Its use here in the plural confirms again that individuals alone do not provide leadership.³⁸ Their description as “your leaders” (ἡγουμένοις ὑμῶν) may indicate that their leadership was limited to the location of the destination of the letter. ἡγέομαι is a general term for leaders in various spheres of life³⁹ and was used later as a title for church leadership in Rome.⁴⁰ While ἡγέομαι may not be the title of a specific leadership position, its use here seems to refer to leaders who hold formal positions within the church.⁴¹ Its use in Luke 22:26 also conveys positional leadership.⁴² Most likely, based on the description of these leaders, those who function as elders are in view.⁴³

³⁶ See Bénétreau, *L'Épître aux Hébreux*, 229.

³⁷ See Attridge, *Hebrews*, 402.

³⁸ See Newton, *Elders in Congregational Life*, 81; and Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 269.

³⁹ See Attridge, *Hebrews*, 391; Bénétreau, *L'Épître aux Hébreux*, 214–15; Lane, *Hebrews*, 526; and Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 269.

⁴⁰ See Attridge, *Hebrews*, 391; and Guthrie, *Hebrews*, 438.

⁴¹ See Merkle, *The Elder and Overseer*, 114.

⁴² See the discussion of the parallel structure and contrast of Matt 20:25–28, Mark 10:42–45, and Luke 22:24–27.

⁴³ See Attridge, *Hebrews*, 391; Calvin, *The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews*, 212; Newton, *Elders in Congregational Life*, 81; and Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 265.

One's understanding of ἡγέομαι is relevant to identifying the authority of elders because it also may be translated "rule" instead of "lead."⁴⁴ In the discussion of Matt 20:25–28, Mark 10:42–45, and Luke 22:24–27, it is argued that the clear contrast of Jesus' teaching and the emphasis on service indicate that ἡγέομαι does not carry the same semantic sense of ruling as those words with which it is contrasted.⁴⁵ Based on the type of authority identified in Heb 13:7, 17, it would not be accurate to translate ἡγέομαι as "rule" here. This confirms the suggestion in the discussion on Matt 20:25–28, Mark 10:42–45, and Luke 22:24–27 that there is a clear conceptual distinction throughout the New Testament between leading and ruling.⁴⁶

James 5:14–15

In a paragraph encouraging the church to pray (Jas 5:13–18),⁴⁷ James exhorted any among them who are sick to call for the church elders so that they may pray over him or

⁴⁴ See Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 1:458, 478. For example, in Hebrews 13 ἡγουμένοις is translated "rulers" in the ASV, KJV, and NKJV, and by Calvin and Kenneth S. Wuest. Calvin, *The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews*, 207; and Kenneth S. Wuest, *The New Testament: An Expanded Translation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997, c1961; Bellingham, Wash.: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997), n.p.

⁴⁵ All seven of the Greek words cited above appear in sub-domain "D. Rule, Govern" in semantic domain "37. Control, Rule." However, ἡγέομαι also appears in semantic domain "36. Guide, Discipline, Follow" and sub-domain "A. Guide, Lead." The other words used to describe leaders in the community, μέγας and πρῶτος, can also be used to express important and prominent status, without implying control. See Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 1: 458, 477–78, 735, 737; and BDAG, 624, 892–94.

⁴⁶ The failure to use the terms that describe the authority of the Gentiles to describe Christian leadership anywhere in the New Testament, and the use of ἡγέομαι to do so, suggests a conceptual distinction throughout the New Testament.

⁴⁷ See Peter H. Davids, *The Epistle of James* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 191; P. J. Hartin, *James* (SP; Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical, 2003), 264; D. J. Moo, *The Letter of James* (Pillar New Testament Commentary; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 234; and Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 255. Some commentators include v. 12 in this unit. See W. F. Brosend II, *James and Jude* (NCBC; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 148–49; Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Letter of James: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 37A; New York: Doubleday, 1995), 325; and R. P. Martin, *James* (WBC 48; Waco: Word, 1988), 197.

her (v. 14).⁴⁸ Several observations about elders may be made from this brief reference. Most commentators understand the elders to be the particular leaders of the Christian community and not just the older members.⁴⁹ Luke Timothy Johnson reasons, “The characterization ‘elders of the assembly’ suggests something more than the older members of the community; it points to official leaders. Note the similarity to Acts 20:17.”⁵⁰ James indicated that the dispersed Jewish Christians have a distinct, recognized body of elders serving each congregation.⁵¹ In this responsibility of praying for an ill person who has called them, a single elder does not come and pray but more than one (προσευξάσθωσαν, plural), and thus they function as a group.⁵²

This scenario reveals an aspect of the role James expected the elders to fulfill.⁵³ Responding to and caring for the needs of a sick person is an example of the elders’ shepherding role among God’s people.⁵⁴ In addition, the service they are expected to offer is particularly spiritual in nature. They are to pray over the sick person, anointing him or her with oil in the name of the Lord (v. 14). The faith required for healing is

⁴⁸ It is sometimes suggested that physical sickness is not in view, but some other weakness, such as a spiritual weakness. See Daniel R. Hayden, “Calling the Elders to Pray,” *BSac* 138 (1981): 258–66.

⁴⁹ For example, see Brosend, *James*, 158; Davids, *James*, 192–93; Martin Dibelius, *A Commentary on the Epistle of James* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976), 253; Giles, *Patterns of Ministry*, 84; Hartin, *James*, 266–67; Johnson, *James*, 330; Martin, *James*, 207; Merkle, *The Elder and Overseer*, 117; Moo, *James*, 237; and Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 255.

⁵⁰ Johnson, *James*, 330; See also Merkle, *The Elder and Overseer*, 117.

⁵¹ D. J. Moo writes, “Both Peter (1 Pet 5:1) and James assume the ministry of elders in the church, showing that the office was well established in the early church.” Moo, *James*, 237. See also Brosend, *James*, 159; Davids, *James*, 192–93; Johnson, *James*, 331; Martin, *James*, 207; and Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 253.

⁵² “The elders as a group, not the individual who holds that office, are pictured as performing this ministry.” Martin, *James*, 207. See also Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 255.

⁵³ See Davids, *James*, 194; and Hartin, *James*, 267.

⁵⁴ See Martin, *James*, 207; Moo, *James*, 237; and Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 255.

probably that of the elders who are praying (v. 15).⁵⁵ In this context of praying for sickness, the forgiveness of the sins of the sick person is also addressed (v. 15).⁵⁶ According to James' explanation of prayer here and throughout his letter, the faith and righteousness of the one praying is critical (1:6–8; 4:1–4; 5:15–18). This emphasizes the importance of the spiritual and moral character of the elders for fulfilling their responsibilities.

The effectiveness of this ministry of prayer is explicitly attributed to God.⁵⁷ The action of the elders is “in the name of the Lord” (v. 14) and “the Lord will raise him up” (v. 15). Not only does the power come from God, not from the elders or by virtue of their position,⁵⁸ but the responsibility of praying for believers in need and the promise of answered prayer is not limited to the elders. Verse 16 seems to move beyond the elders to the whole congregation as they are called to confess their sins to one another and pray for one another.⁵⁹ While these principles of prayer are available to all, James may have exhorted the sick to summon the elders because of their responsibility to care for the

⁵⁵ See Davids, *James*, 194; Hartin, *James*, 268; Moo, *James*, 244; and Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 259.

⁵⁶ Strauch writes, “The visiting elders may need to deal with far more than sickness. Their visit may turn out to be a time for spiritual counsel, confession, encouragement, or restoration.” Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 262.

⁵⁷ See Davids, *James*, 194; Martin, *James*, 207; and Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 259.

⁵⁸ For example, Dibelius writes, “They must be bearers of the miraculous power by virtue of the fact that they are the elders, for otherwise why would they be called upon and not others? . . . These must be official ‘elders’ of the congregation, and their healing power must be connected with their official character.” Dibelius, *James*, 252–53.

⁵⁹ R. P. Martin explains, “By saying that church members other than elders can take part in a ministry of intercessory prayer (which is effective; see 5:16b), the author is showing that the prayer, not the person (i.e., not the elders), is the channel through which God’ power to heal is conveyed.” Martin, *James*, 211. See also Davids, *James*, 195; Giles, *Patterns of Ministry*, 84; Hartin, *James*, 270; and Moo, *James*, 238.

body and expectation that they would be exemplary in faith and righteousness for effective prayer.⁶⁰

1 Peter 5:1–5

First Peter 5:1–5 is an important passage for understanding church elders' authority. It contains six words from the selected semantic domains, more than any other qualifying passage: ἔκουσίως,⁶¹ ἐπισκοπέω, κατακυριεύω, ποιμαίνω, πρεσβύτερος, and ὑποτάσσω. In his first letter, addressed to “the elect exiles of the dispersion” (1:1), the apostle Peter addressed the elders, explaining their responsibilities, how they were to carry them out, and how others should respond to them. Most commentators agree that the particulars of this passage make it clear that the elders were the leaders of the community, and not just older people.⁶² Peter identified himself as a fellow elder (συμπρεσβύτερος). Although he wrote from his position as “an apostle of Jesus Christ” (1:1), he appealed to the elders also as a colleague. He was not an elder in relation to those to whom he was writing. He

⁶⁰ “Elders were those spiritual leaders who were recognized for their maturity in the faith. Therefore, it is natural that they, with their deep and rich experience, should be called on to pray for healing.” Moo, *James*, 238.

⁶¹ All of occurrences of ἔκουσίως were considered for this study since it appears in semantic domain “30. Think; D. To Intend, To Purpose, To Plan.” However, in this context, its meaning as “willingly” fits into semantic domain “25. Attitudes and Emotions; E. Be Willing.” Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 1:295.

⁶² See P. D. Achtemeier, *1 Peter* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 321; John Calvin, *The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews and the First and Second Epistles of St. Peter* (Calvin's Commentaries; eds. David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance; trans. William B. Johnston; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963), 315; J. H. Elliott, *1 Peter* (AB 37B; New York: Doubleday, 2000), 813; J. B. Green, *1 Peter* (The Two Horizons New Testament Commentary; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 164; Wayne Grudem, *The First Epistle of Peter: An Introduction and Commentary* (The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 185; Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Epistles of Peter and the Epistle of Jude* (New Testament Commentary; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), 188; I. Howard Marshall, *1 Peter* (The IVP New Testament Commentary Series; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1991), 160; T. R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude* (NAC; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2003), 230–31; and Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 239.

was an elder in the same way those he addressed were elders in their communities.⁶³ His identification as a fellow elder establishes his solidarity and identification with the elders and the position from which he exhorted them.⁶⁴

The instructions of the next two verses are subordinate to the one responsibility of the elders to “shepherd the flock of God” (v. 2). The term translated “shepherd” (ποιμαίνω) is explored in relation to Acts 20:28, in which Paul explained that the Holy Spirit appointed them as overseers that they might shepherd God’s church.⁶⁵ A semantic distinction between “rule” and “lead” is established in that discussion, which is significant for understanding elders’ authority.⁶⁶ Shepherding may represent care for others that includes leading without an implication of ruling.⁶⁷ It is suggested here, based on the following discussion of the context, that in this passage ποιμαίνω means “help and guide,” rather than “rule.”

The first clue to the meaning of ποιμαίνω is that it is modified with an adverbial participle of means (ἐπισκοποῦντες), which defines or explains the action of the finite

⁶³ See Calvin, *The First and Second Epistles of St. Peter*, 315; Elliott, *1 Peter*, 817; Green, *1 Peter*, 164; Grudem, *The First Epistle of Peter*, 186; Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Epistles of Peter and the Epistle of Jude*, 188; Marshall, *1 Peter*, 160; and Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 241.

⁶⁴ See Elliott, *1 Peter*, 821; Jobes, *1 Peter*, 300; Marshall, *1 Peter*, 160–61; and Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 241.

⁶⁵ In Acts 20:28, the indicative verb used to express the appointment of these men as overseers by the Holy Spirit (ἔθετο) is modified by a subordinate adverbial infinitive of purpose (ποιμαίνειν). See D. L. Bock, *Acts* (BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 630; and Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 590–91.

⁶⁶ See discussion of ποιμαίνω in Acts 20:28–33. Compare Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 1:465, 478 and BDAG, 842. See also J. A. Simpson and E. S. C. Weiner, eds., *The Oxford English Dictionary* (2d ed.; vol. 14; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 230–31, 745.

⁶⁷ J. H. Elliot observes this distinction when he writes, “Shepherding included such activities as leading, guiding, gathering, feeding, and defending a flock, whether used literally . . . or figuratively. . . . In a secondary sense, the verb also had the sense of ‘rule’ or ‘govern’ when applied figuratively to God, gods, or humans in authority.” Elliott, *1 Peter*, 822.

verb.⁶⁸ ἐπισκοποῦντες is omitted from \aleph^* , B, 322 323⁶⁹ but should be included because of its otherwise strong, widespread attestation.⁷⁰ It may have been excluded by later scribes who did not want to confuse the roles of elders and bishops.⁷¹ ἐπισκοπέω means “to oversee, care for.”⁷² Therefore, the elders are to “shepherd” God’s flock by means of watching over and caring for them. While the further description of ποιμαίνω as overseeing does not prohibit the meaning “rule,” it certainly includes the responsibility of caring for others. The explanation of the responsibility of elders as overseeing (ἐπισκοπέω) confirms again the connection between elders and those who are called overseers (ἐπισκόποι) (cf. Acts 20:17, 28; Titus 1:5, 7).

The participle ἐπισκοποῦντες is modified by three sets of contrasting adverbial phrases that describe how the elders should care for God’s people.⁷³ The first contrast asserts that they should not serve by compulsion (ἀναγκαστῶς), but willingly (ἑκουσίως). Compulsion probably refers to a sense of obligation or pressure that one may receive

⁶⁸ Wallace explains, “The participle of means could be called an *epexegetical* participle in that it *defines* the action of the controlling verb.” Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 629. See also Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, 325; and Jobes, *1 Peter*, 303.

⁶⁹ Barbara Aland, Kurt Aland, Johannes Karavidopoulos, Carlo M. Martini, and Bruce M. Metzger eds., *The Greek New Testament* (4th rev. ed.; New York: United Bible Societies, 1998), 796.

⁷⁰ Wayne Grudem writes, “The phrase should be include in the text here. . . . The three main manuscripts omitting it are all from one geographical area, while those including it are diverse in location, and several are also quite early.” Grudem, *The First Epistle of Peter*, 187. See also Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, 320; Elliott, *1 Peter*, 824; and Jobes, *1 Peter*, 310.

⁷¹ See Jobes, *1 Peter*, 303; Marshall, *1 Peter*, 161; and Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (4th rev. ed.; New York: United Bible Societies, 1994), 625.

⁷² See BDAG, 379; and Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 1:462, 541.

⁷³ See Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, 326; Elliott, *1 Peter*, 827; Jobes, *1 Peter*, 304; and Marshall, *1 Peter*, 162.

from others.⁷⁴ ἔκουσίως conveys a willingness “to do something without being forced or pressured.”⁷⁵ In 2 Cor 9:5–7, ἀναγκαστῶς is parallel to “extraction” (πλεονεξία) and contrasted with giving that is decided in the heart.⁷⁶ The contrast in both contexts is inward versus outward motivation. This warning may imply that others are involved in the selection and appointment of elders, which is confirmed by other accounts of appointments to ministry (Acts 6:1–6; 14:34; 1 Tim 3:1–7; 4:14; 5:22; Titus 1:5–9).⁷⁷ Although elders are not self-appointed, they must be free to serve willingly (cf. 1 Tim 3:1).

The elders’ willingness (ἔκουσίως) is modified by the phrase “according to God” (κατὰ θεόν). This may indicate that God wants elders to shepherd willingly (e.g. “as God would have you,” ESV).⁷⁸ It could also signify that an elder should serve willingly as he submits to God’s will for him to be an elder.⁷⁹ Paul told the Ephesian elders that the Holy Spirit made them overseers (Acts 20:28). Such divine management of the relationships of the shepherds and flock may also be expressed in the phrase “those in your charge” (τῶν κλήρων; v. 3). This term is probably a parallel reference to “the flock” and denotes those

⁷⁴ ἀναγκαστῶς is related to ἀναγκάζω, which means “to compel someone to act in a particular manner, *compel, force*.” BDAG, 60. Achtemeier suggests that compulsion may refer to a wrong inward motivation, such as for “shameful gain.” Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, 326. This is not the best understanding of the exhortation since the contrast is between inward and outward motivation. This would also render these two antitheses indistinct. See also Grudem, *The First Epistle of Peter*, 188.

⁷⁵ Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 1:295.

⁷⁶ See *Ibid.*, 1:757.

⁷⁷ Elliott writes, “The Petrine mention of willingness may indicate that the function of leadership ‘was conferred by designation or election.’” Elliott, *1 Peter*, 828. See also Jobes, *1 Peter*, 304.

⁷⁸ See Grudem, *The First Epistle of Peter*, 188; Jobes, *1 Peter*, 305; and Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 245–46.

⁷⁹ See Elliott, *1 Peter*, 828; and J. R. Michaels, *1 Peter* (WBC 49; Waco: Word, 1988), 284.

believers that God had entrusted into the care of the elders.⁸⁰ While others are properly involved in the selection of elders, and they also must be willing, it is the direction of the Chief Shepherd to which all are seeking to submit.

The second contrasting description of how elders are to serve also relates to their motivation. Their incentive should not be for “shameful gain” (αἰσχροκερδῶς), but they should serve “eagerly” (προθύμως). The final antithesis is that elders are not to care for the flock by “ruling” (κατακυριεύοντες) but by “being examples” (τύποι γινόμενοι). These both relate to ἐπισκοποῦντες as adverbial participles of means and thus describe by what means overseeing is to be accomplished.⁸¹ κατακυριεύω is often translated “lord it over” based on the addition of κατα- to κυριεύω and is understood to express a harsh or dominating rule.⁸² This interpretation implies that the warning is against ruling harshly, and therefore, elders should rule well.⁸³ However, κατακυριεύω can also simply be

⁸⁰ Karen Jobes writes, “In context *kleron* corresponds to *poimnion* (flock) in 5:2, and both words refer to the people who have been allotted in God’s providence to the *presbyteroi*. . . . The use of this peculiar word is possibly a metaphor suggesting the idea of divine appointment of these particular people to the care of these particular elders Similarly the believers need to acknowledge the *presbyteroi* as their allotted leaders.” Jobes, *1 Peter*, 306. See also Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, 328; and Elliott, *1 Peter*, 831. Marshall suggests that “*those entrusted to you* implies that elders have to tell other people how to live; they may well have to exercise discipline over others.” Marshall, *1 Peter*, 163. However, one may be entrusted with the care of others without the implication of governance or discipline.

⁸¹ Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 628.

⁸² “This idiom in modern English conveys a sense of arrogance and oppression and an abuse of power.” Kenneth Willis Clark, “Meaning of [*kata*] *kurieuein*,” in *Studies in New Testament Language and Text* (Leiden: Brill, 1976), 100. Grudem understands it this way, “The fact that they are to act as shepherds of the flock of God, and the fact that they are not to domineer (that is, not to rule harshly or oppressively), strongly suggest that elders have ruling or governing functions in the churches to which Peter is writing. This is consistent with his charge that especially those who are younger should ‘be subject to the elders’ (v. 5).” Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 915. See also Grudem, *The First Epistle of Peter*, 188; and Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 246–47.

⁸³ “Peter’s strong warning against lording it over others certainly demonstrates that elders had authority to govern.” Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 248. See also Calvin, *The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews and the First and Second Epistles of St. Peter*, 316; Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 915; and Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Epistles of Peter and the Epistle of Jude*, 192.

translated “rule.”⁸⁴ If “rule” is intended here, then the issue is not a good or a bad ruling but ruling at all.⁸⁵

There are several reasons that “ruling” is the best translation of κατακυριεύω in this passage. 1) Most obvious is the contrast of this third antithesis. Instead of κατακυριεύοντες, elders should be “examples” (τύποι) to the flock. While a ruler may also be an example, providing an example is not a form of ruling and thus not a reference to ruling well.⁸⁶ 2) There is nothing in this context that would necessitate the view that elders have authority to rule, which would limit this to a warning of ruling harshly. 3) Kenneth Willis Clark argues, “There is no place in the New Testament, nor in the wider expanse of Greek literature, for the translation ‘to lord it over.’”⁸⁷ He explains, “In so inclusive a sweep of the literature, from Septuagint to Byzantium, in private documents on papyrus and in formal essays, both secular and religious, we find the meaning of [κατα]κυριεύειν to be consistent ‘to rule over, to be lord over,’ with shades of meaning influenced by the context.”⁸⁸ 4) The term κατακυριεύω is used to describe the actions of Gentile rulers in Jesus’ teaching on servant leadership (Matt 20:25–28; Mark 10:42–45).⁸⁹ The disciples are not to follow their example. In Luke’s parallel, κυριεύω is used,

⁸⁴ See Clark, “Meaning of [kata] kurieuein,” 105; and Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 1:477.

⁸⁵ “Christians are not the subjects of the elders, as is the case in the secular realm with leaders and subjects, but rather all Christians belong to God, and so the presbyters must carry out their duties as servants of God, not as lords of the Christians under their care.” Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, 329.

⁸⁶ “The antithesis as a whole contrasts a hierarchical exercise of authority to a horizontal demonstration by example.” Elliott, *1 Peter*, 830.

⁸⁷ Clark, “Meaning of [kata] kurieuein,” 105.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 103.

⁸⁹ “The first half of the bicolon is likely a Petrine reminiscence of Jesus’ critique of a preoccupation with precedence on the part of his disciples and his holding up the ideal of service as

which simply means “to rule,”⁹⁰ instead of κατακυριεύω (Luke 22:26). In addition, the parallel structure of these passages reveals that the primary contrast is between ruling and serving, not between ruling well and ruling badly.⁹¹

This third warning to elders is in harmony with the custom of Eastern shepherds who led their flocks by going ahead of them instead of driving them (cf. John 10:3–5).⁹² That elders are to lead instead of rule is also fitting in light of the preeminence of Christ in this passage. The flock is identified as God’s flock, the elders are to serve willingly in accordance with God’s will, and they are to care for those that God has entrusted to them. The Chief Shepherd in v. 4 is Christ, who was named “the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls” in 2:25. Elders, therefore, are undershepherds who are accountable to the Chief Shepherd, who will reward them when he comes.⁹³

Another important word in this passage that relates to authority is “submit” (ὑποτάσσω). In v. 5 Peter instructed the younger people (νεώτεροι) to submit to the elders. The referents of νεώτεροι are difficult to identify. Although it appears to be a particular group within the community, one may not assume that these are the only ones who are to submit to the elders. Wayne Grudem understands elders to have a ruling or

exemplified by himself as a servant. The Petrine verse and the Jesus saying are close in language . . . , form (contrast between negative and positive), and point (model of conduct).” Elliott, *1 Peter*, 830. See also Jobes, *1 Peter*, 305.

⁹⁰ See BDAG, 576; and Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 1:477.

⁹¹ See discussion on Matt 20:25–28, Mark 10:42–45, and Luke 22:24–27. Clark writes, “The Christian virtue is service to his fellows rather than political preeminence and power over them. This contrast has no reference to ‘lording it over’ and there is here no suggestion of arrogance and oppression on the part of Gentile rulers.” Clark, “Meaning of [*kata*] *kurieuein*,” 103–104.

⁹² See Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 248

⁹³ See Elliott, *1 Peter*, 824.

governing function based on the use of this word.⁹⁴ However, this does not necessarily follow. It is possible to voluntarily submit to those who do not hold a particular position of authority (cf. 1 Cor 16:15–16; Eph 5:21). It is also possible to submit voluntarily to those who have positional authority to lead (cf. Heb 13:17).⁹⁵ Bauer defines ὑποτάσσω in this verse as “submission in the sense of voluntary yielding in love.”⁹⁶ Therefore, submission in this context does not necessarily imply ruling authority; it may refer to submission to those who have authority to lead. This seems to be the distinction made in the warning that leadership is to be carried out by providing an example to the flock, instead of by ruling or controlling them (v. 3).⁹⁷

Several final observations may be made from this passage regarding elders’ authority. Elders are again named in the plural. While this may be explained by the fact that this letter was not written to one church, it is also possible that a plurality of elders lead each congregation. Peter’s instructions also reveal a particular, local jurisdiction for elders. First, he identified the elders as those “among” the recipients of the letter (ἐν ὑμῖν). Second, he identified the flock that the elders are to shepherd as those “among” or

⁹⁴ Grudem, *The First Epistle of Peter*, 189.

⁹⁵ In this letter Peter also exhorts believers to submit to all human institutions, slaves to submit to masters, and wives to submit to husbands. Based on the distinction made in this work between leading and ruling, state government may be said to rule since it has the God given right to establish and enforce law (“to punish those who do evil,” 1 Pet 2:13). The same is true of a master, for he has the legal (but not the moral) right to give commands and power to enforce his will (“when you . . . are beaten,” 1 Pet 2:20). A husband, however, is granted no such power, but loves and leads his wife, who must voluntarily follow. Here is an example, then, in 1 Peter, of one who is to submit to a person who has authority to lead, but not power to rule.

⁹⁶ See also BDAG, 1042.

⁹⁷ See Green, *1 Peter*, 169. Elliott explains, “Those who domineer (*katakryrieuein*) do so as *kyrioi*; that is, as persons having power or legal authority. By contrast, those who lead by example do so with a moral authority deriving only from their own integral life-style. This authority is not intrinsic but conditional upon one’s ability to inspire in others the desire to follow and obey.” Elliott, *1 Peter*, 832. This dynamic does not negate, but works within, the elders’ positional authority to lead.

“with” them.⁹⁸ This delimits those that the elders lead to the people that are in their local proximity.⁹⁹ This terminology is also strikingly non-hierarchical. Peter then referred to those who have been allotted or entrusted to them. The whole flock of God, of which Jesus is the Chief Shepherd, is cared for by undershepherds who are responsible for a particular part of God’s flock related to them by proximity.¹⁰⁰

Concluding Observations

Based on the exegetical considerations above, preliminary principles related to elders’ authority are proposed. These observations, especially the non-prescriptive examples, are synthesized with all other related observations in the concluding chapter.

Hebrews 13:7, 17, 24

- 1) ἡγέομαι is best translated “leaders.”
- 2) πείθομαι is best translated “follow.”
- 3) Leadership in the church is local and plural.
- 4) Some leaders have formal positions with the particular responsibility of caring for the spiritual well being of the community.

⁹⁸ It is also possible to understand ἐν as a dative of sphere and translate ἐν ὑμῖν “within your care.” See Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, 325.

⁹⁹ “The translation ‘among you,’ although appropriate for the same phrase in v. 1, does not work as well here, for the members of congregations are not ‘among’ the elders in quite the same sense in which the elders are ‘among’ the members of the congregations. Here it is better understood as ‘near you’ or ‘with you’ in the respective cities or villages where the elders were exercising their ministry.” Michaels, *1 Peter*, 283.

¹⁰⁰ It is unnecessary to conclude with Green that “His use of ‘allotment’ likely refers to the grouping of Christian communities into small units for purposes of oversight.” Green, *1 Peter*, 168. See also Giles, *Patterns of Ministry*, 82. Michaels’ understanding is preferable, “If the ‘flock of God’ is universal in scope (cf. ‘your brotherhood throughout the world,’ v. 9), then the ‘shares’ are portions of the universal flock under the care of various elders, or groups of elders, i.e., their respective congregations. . . . They are not spheres of authority assigned to different elders within each local congregation, but the local congregations themselves, the ‘flock of God that is in your care’ (v. 2).” Michaels, *1 Peter*, 286.

- 5) Leaders with the responsibility of caring for the spiritual well being of the community will give account to God for their work.
- 6) The church should willingly follow and submit to the leadership of those who care for their spiritual well being.
- 7) Caring for the spiritual well being of the church includes providing an example of a faithful life and speaking the word of God so that they are not deceived by false teaching.
- 8) The authority of leaders who have the responsibility of caring for the spiritual well being of the community is based on and limited to their faithfulness in leading in and teaching God's word.

James 5:14–15

- 1) A plurality of elders leads each local congregation.
- 2) One way elders may care for the church is to visit and pray for those who are sick.
- 3) Prayer as a part of the elders' ministry reveals the spiritual nature of their role and the importance of their faith and character.

1 Peter 5:1–5

- 1) Elders are a group of leaders within a local Christian community who are responsible for caring for and watching over those in that community.
- 2) Elders are to serve willingly as God directs them, not because of outside pressure.
- 3) Elders are to serve eagerly, not for selfish gain.
- 4) Elders are to serve by example, not by ruling over those entrusted to them.
- 5) Elders are accountable to Jesus Christ for the way they care for those entrusted to them.

- 6) The Christian community should submit to the leadership of their elders.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION: THE AUTHORITY OF CHURCH ELDERS

In this chapter, the exegetical results of the previous chapters are synthesized. The combined evidence is examined to determine if elders possess four basic types of authority. The first two are types authority *de jure*: authority as position and authority as responsibility. The last two are types of authority *de facto*: authority as power and authority as influence.¹

Authority as Position

Office

There are several reasons to conclude that elders fill a recognized position within the church.² Most of the New Testament references to elders in the church denote a distinct group of leaders, not simply older men (Acts 11:27–30; 15:1–35; 20:28–35; Phil 1:1; 1 Tim 3:1–7; 5:17–25; Titus 1:5–9; Heb 13:7, 17, 24; Jas 5:14). Furthermore, these leaders carried out clearly defined responsibilities. It is possible, though, for a distinct group of leaders to carry out definite responsibilities within a community without holding an

¹ See the discussion on the semantics of authority in chapter one.

² Wayne Grudem writes, “A church officer is someone who has been publicly recognized as having the right and responsibility to perform certain functions for the benefit of the whole church.” Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 905. See also Carl A. Volz, *Pastoral Life and Practice in the Early Church* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1990), 13.

official position.³ Passages such as 1 Cor 16:15–16 and 1 Thess 5:12–13, for example, appear to depict leaders who are functional, but not official. However, passages such as Acts 14:23, 1 Tim 3:1–7; 5:17–25; and Titus 1:5–7 demonstrate that Paul intended for elders to have a recognized position. He and Barnabas appointed elders in several churches, and he instructed Titus to appoint elders in Crete. Paul also advised Timothy about appointing elders by the laying on of hands. Elders do not exist merely by functioning in a certain way; they are appointed to the position and thus recognized by others.

That elders hold a recognized position is also confirmed by the fact that they must meet certain qualifications before they are appointed (1 Tim 3:1–7; 5:22–25; Titus 1:5–9).⁴ In addition, that elders may be confronted for failure to maintain these qualifications implies that they may be removed from their position (1 Tim 5:19–21). The existence of functional, but not official, leaders does not contradict the evidence that elders hold a recognized position.⁵ It is probable that such functional leaders provided guidance for

³ Alastair Campbell makes some valid points in trying establish his thesis that elders “constituted a form of leadership that was collective and representative, with an authority derived from their seniority relative to those they represented, whether household, clan, tribe or nation. ‘The elders’ was shown to be a term of honour for those whose power was based on relationships that already existed, rather than a precise office, entered through appointment, election or ordination.” Alastair Campbell, *The Elders: Seniority within Earliest Christianity* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1994), 238. Indeed, the authority *de facto* of influence precedes and maintains the ministry of an elder. However, the final claim that elders do not have recognized positions is not supported by the New Testament evidence as discussed in this work. See also Benjamin Merkle’s important work *The Elder and Overseer: One Office in the Early Church* (New York: Peter Lang, 2003).

⁴ See David C. Verner, *The Household of God: The Social World of the Pastoral Epistles* (SBL Dissertation Series 71; Chico, California: Scholars, 1983), 159.

⁵ Some argue that there were always offices in all the early churches even if they were not called elders. See Ronald Y. K. Fung, “Charismatic versus Organized Ministry,” *EvQ* 52 (1980): 200; Bengt Holmberg, *Paul and Power: The Structure of Authority in the Primitive Church as Reflected in the Pauline Epistles* (Lund: LiberLäromedel/Gleerup, 1978), 111–12; and Merkle, *The Elder and Overseer*, 118–19. However, in order to conclude that church elders held a recognized position, it is not necessary to argue that all transitional leaders did as well.

churches before elders were appointed.⁶ In addition, some of the ministries for which elders are responsible are not limited to elders. Believers may minister as teachers, leaders, or shepherds without necessarily being elders (Act 15:22; Rom 12:7–8; Eph 4:11).

The passages that address elders demonstrate that those holding this position are also referred to as overseers (Acts 20:17, 28; Titus 1:5, 7; see also 1 Pet 5:2).⁷ While this term conveys the responsibility of elders to watch over and care for the church, it was also commonly used as a title for those who held positions of leadership and responsibility.⁸ The use of the definite article with overseer in Titus 1:7 and with elders in 1 Tim 4:14 gives the impression that a particular category of people were in view, such as those who hold a recognized position.⁹ It is important to remember, however, that the

⁶ “It is true that there is some organizational development found in the New Testament.” Merkle, *The Elder and Overseer*, 90. See also Karen H. Jobes, *1 Peter* (BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 302–303.

⁷ See John S. Hammett, *Biblical Foundations for Baptist Churches: A Contemporary Ecclesiology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2005), 161–63; Joseph Barber Lightfoot, “The Christian Ministry,” in *Saint Paul’s Epistle to the Philippians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1913, 1953), 193; Merkle, *The Elder and Overseer*; William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles* (WBC 46; Nashville: Nelson, 2000), 161; Alexander Strauch, *Biblical Eldership: An Urgent Call to Restore Biblical Church Leadership* (Colorado Springs: Lewis and Roth, 1995), 177–80; James R. White, “The Plural-Elder-Led Church: Sufficient as Established—The Plurality of Elders as Christ’s Ordained Means of Church Governance,” in *Perspectives on Church Government: Five Views of Church Polity* (ed. Chad Owen Brand and R. Stanton Norman; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2004), 270. Even if one argues, as Hort does, that ἐπίσκοπος is not a title but a function, the terms still describe the same person. Hort, *Ecclesia*, 190–91.

⁸ ἐπισκοπή and ἐπίσκοπος are both in domain “53. Religious Activities,” sub-domain “I. Roles and Functions,” and domain “35. Help, Care For;” sub-domain “D. Care For, Take Care Of.” Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 1:462, 541. See also BDAG, 379.

⁹ The definite article with “overseer” (τὸν ἐπίσκοπον) in Titus 5:7 “identifies . . . ‘the overseer’ as a special class appropriate for a general statement.” Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 170. Kevin Giles writes, “The existence of a formally constituted council of Christian elders at Ephesus is attested to in 1 Timothy 4:14.” Kevin Giles, *Patterns of Ministry among the First Christians* (Melbourne, Australia: Collins Dove, 1989), 87; See also John Calvin, *The Second Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians and the Epistles to Timothy, Titus and Philemon* (Calvin’s Commentaries; ed. David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance; trans. T. A. Smail; Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1964), 247; Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 262; Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 205.

existence of recognized positions does not contradict the charismatic nature of the church.¹⁰ Ministry in the church may include both gifting and office. While not all those gifted hold an office, those who hold an office function in their giftedness.¹¹ However, there is validity in the suggestion that a governmental hierarchy would inhibit the intended spiritual operation of the body.¹² It is possible for someone to have authority *de jure* of office without having governing authority. These aspects of authority are addressed in the section on authority as power.

Number and Parity

In the twelve passages that mention church elders and overseers, all references but three are in the plural.¹³ Several passages indicate that there was a plurality of elders within a single local church or town (Acts 14:23; 15:1–35; 20:17, 28; 21:18; Phil 1:1; 1 Tim 5:17–25; Titus 1:5; Jas 5:14; see also 1 Thess 5:12; Heb 13:7, 17, 24).¹⁴ The use of ἐπίσκοπος as a singular noun in 1 Tim 3:2 and Titus 1:7 need not contradict this plurality of elders since it may be considered a generic singular agreeing with τίς.¹⁵ It is likely that the

¹⁰ See Markus Barth, *Ephesians* (2 vols.; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1974), 2:435; Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 159; and Peter T. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 301.

¹¹ See Harold Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 540; Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 165.

¹² See the extended discussion of the relationship of gifting and office by Sohm, *Kirchenrecht*, and A. Harnack, *The Constitution and Law of the Church in the First Two Centuries* (ed. H. D. A. Major; trans. F. L. Pogson; New York: Putnam, 1910) and later by Hans von Campenhausen, *Ecclesiastical Authority and Spiritual Power in the Church of the First Two Centuries* (trans. J. A. Baker; Stanford, CA: Stanford University, 1969); and Ernst Käsemann, "Ministry and Community in the New Testament," *Essays on New Testament Themes* (London: SCM, 1964).

¹³ See George W. Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 155; and Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 163.

¹⁴ White, "The Plural-Elder-Led Church," 271.

church in a large city would meet in several houses for worship,¹⁶ and it is possible that there was an elder or elders at each of these meetings. However, one may not assume from this possibility that a single elder was assigned to and responsible for smaller congregations within a city.¹⁷ There is no evidence of such a structure in the New Testament.¹⁸ What is clear is that no matter how believers in larger cities met, they were always considered a single local church that was led by one group of elders.¹⁹

Leadership by a plurality of elders in local churches is confirmed by the occasions in which elders functioned together as a group. The elders met as a group with the apostles to consider the question of circumcision (Acts 15); all the Jerusalem elders met with Paul and discussed the crisis at hand (Acts 21:17–26); a council of elders laid hands on Timothy (1 Tim 4:14); and a group of elders prayed over a sick believer (Jas 5:14). While there is no direct instruction on the matter, it appears that local church elders existed and functioned as a group of equals.²⁰ Acts 15 and 21:18 reveal that James played a leadership role among the Jerusalem elders. Whether or not James held a particular

¹⁵ See I. Howard Marshall, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles* (ICC; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1999), 160, 477; Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 163; Thomas R. Schreiner, *Paul, Apostle of God's Glory in Christ: A Pauline Theology* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2001), 387; and Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 187.

¹⁶ See Verner, *The Household of God*, 154.

¹⁷ See Merkle, *The Elder and Overseer*, 132–34.

¹⁸ Strauch writes, “Such claims are pure guesswork, however. The fact is, there is absolutely no biblical evidence that a single overseer presided over an individual house church. There is, indeed, evidence to the contrary.” Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 142.

¹⁹ See Merkle, *The Elder and Overseer*, 160–61; Phil A. Newton, *Elders in Congregational Life: Rediscovering the Biblical Model for Church Leadership* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2005), 68; Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 143; and Verner, *The Household of God*, 154.

²⁰ The leadership of the Twelve and the new leaders that were appointed in Acts 6:1–6 also provide examples of leaders functioning as a group and not as individuals. See also Fee, *Philippians*, 67; Merkle, *The Elder and Overseer*, 160–61; and White, “The Plural-Elder-Led Church,” 280.

position among the elders is unknown, but these passages do not indicate that he exercised decision-making authority within the group. In Acts 21:18, the elders functioned as a group after the initial mention of James.²¹ In Acts 15, James provided leadership among the apostles and elders, but the final decision of the counsel was made by consensus (“having come to one accord,” Acts 15:25; see also vv. 15:23; 16:4). It is notable that even the words of Peter and Paul did not resolve the matter.

That particular individuals ministered within a group of elders in varying degrees of influence and skill is confirmed in 1 Tim 5:17. Some elders put more time and effort into teaching than others.²² Such varied giftedness or function does not necessarily indicate that there were head elders or different types of elder offices. Although some were laboring in preaching and teaching, all were expected to teach (1 Tim 3:2; Titus 1:9).²³ Those who labored in preaching and teaching were not a separate group from those leading well; instead, this was a particular way in which elders led well.²⁴ Without any other evidence of structures within elder bodies, one may be content to assume that various gifts, skills, and levels of influence are exercised among elders.²⁵

²¹ Since Paul interacted with the elders as a body, it seems that the elders are not coincidentally present. After v. 18, James is not mentioned again, and the personal pronouns and verbs are plural.

²² See Gerald P. Cowen, *Who Rules the Church?: Examining Congregational Leadership and Church Government* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2003), 82; Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 915; Lightfoot, “The Christian Ministry,” 195; Walter Lock, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles* (ICC; New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1924), 62; Benjamin L. Merkle, *40 Questions About Elders and Deacons* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2008), 85–86; Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 308; and Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 209.

²³ See Cowen, *Who Rules the Church*, 82; and Gene A. Getz, *Elders and Leaders: God’s Plan for Leading the Church: A Biblical, Historical, and Cultural Perspective* (Chicago: Moody, 2003), 132–33.

²⁴ See Andreas Köstenberger, *1–2 Timothy, Titus*, Expositor’s Bible Commentary 12 (2d ed.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 548; and Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 207.

²⁵ Lightfoot argues, “Nevertheless there is no ground for supposing that the work of teaching and the work of governing pertained to separate members of the presbyterial college. As each had his special

Jurisdiction

The sphere in which elders were appointed and identified is the church of God that existed in a particular location (Acts 14:23; 15:1–35; 20:17, 28; 21:18; Phil 1:1; 1 Tim 5:17–25; Titus 1:5; Jas 5:14; see also 1 Thess 5:12; Heb 13:7, 17, 24). Peter’s language also suggests that the relationship between the elders and the church was defined by proximity (ἐν ὑμῖν, 1 Pet 5:1–2; cf. Acts 20:29). Added to this is the evidence from Acts 15 that although local churches related to one another they also functioned autonomously.²⁶ The resolution of the council was not a congregational or regional decision but a matter of doctrine that was discussed, agreed upon, and taught by respected teachers.²⁷

The church in Corinth also functioned as an autonomous body. Paul’s letter reveals that although Paul had judged what should be done with the evil person among them, it was only the assembled and cooperative effort of the church in Corinth that could carry out church discipline (1 Cor 5). While there is no explicit teaching on the jurisdiction of elders, the consistent New Testament pattern is that the leadership of elders was limited to local, independent congregations. This is also confirmed by the accountability of elders to the community. If there were accusations against the elders,

gift, so would he devote himself more or less exclusively to the one or the other of these sacred functions.” Lightfoot, “The Christian Ministry,” 194–95. See also White, “The Plural-Elder-Led Church,” 280–81.

²⁶ In matters of congregational action in both locations, such as sending representatives from the church (15:2–3, 22), the corporate local church had decision-making authority. The whole Jerusalem congregation was present at the council (and may have even participated in the debate, 15:7) and the whole congregation in Antioch was gathered to hear the letter (15:30). The letter was written to the Gentile brothers, not to the elders (which had already been appointed in Antioch, 14:23). The positive reception of the resolution by both congregations was also noted (15:22, 25, 28, 31).

²⁷ D. L. Bock explains, “The letter does not represent a pattern of activity between the churches but is a specific letter for this specific issue. Once this decision is made, local implementation is assumed.” Bock, *Acts*, 510.

they were brought by two or three witnesses before the whole congregation (1 Tim 5:19–20).

Authority as Responsibility

The elders' authority *de jure*, which exists in the form of a recognized position, includes specific responsibilities. These responsibilities are directly delegated to the elders by God. Paul reminded the Ephesian elders that it was the Holy Spirit who made them overseers for the particular purpose of shepherding his flock (Acts 20:28). Peter also indicated that people are entrusted to the care of elders, who are to serve according to God's will (1 Pet 5:2–3). The people that elders shepherd are God's people (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet 5:2), and Jesus is the Chief Shepherd (1 Pet 2:25; 5:4). Accordingly, God holds elders accountable for their fulfillment of these responsibilities (Heb 13:17; 1 Pet 5:4).

The overarching responsibility delegated to elders is described as shepherding and overseeing. Those who hold this position of leadership are called overseers (ἐπίσκοπος) in Acts 20:28, Phil 1:1, 1 Tim 3:2, and Titus 1:7 and are exhorted to watch over (ἐπισκοπέω) God's people in 1 Pet 5:2. They are also told to shepherd God's people in Act 20:28 and 1 Pet 5:2 (cf. Heb 13:17). ἐπισκοπέω modifies ποιμαίνω as an adverbial participle of means in 1 Pet 5:2, indicating that the elders are to shepherd God's flock by means of watching over and caring for them. The primary objective of elders, then, is the well-being of the flock. They are not to serve with any motivation of gain for themselves (Acts 20:33–35; 1 Pet 5:2).

One of the roles of a shepherd that is also delegated to elders is to protect the sheep. False teaching is the danger from which elders protect the church. They give warnings, correction, and provide accurate teaching in response to false teaching. The

apostles and elders wrote a letter in response to those who claimed that Gentiles must be circumcised to be saved (Acts 15). Paul alerted the Ephesian elders that men would speak twisted things to draw away the disciples. They were to follow his example by tirelessly and compassionately warning the congregation (Acts 20:29–31). Paul explained to Titus that elders must be able to correct those who contradict sound doctrine (Titus 1:9–16). Protecting the church from false teaching is a part of the larger responsibility of teaching sound doctrine (1 Tim 3:2; 5:17; Titus 1:9; Heb 13:7–17).²⁸

Another role of a shepherd that is also delegated to elders is leading (προϊστημι; 1 Tim 3:3–4 and 5:17). In Heb 13:17, those who were keeping watch over their souls were referred to as “your leaders.” In Acts 21:17–26, the elders provided leadership by giving counsel concerning a potential crisis. Elders are also to lead by providing an example for the church to follow (Heb 13:7; 1 Pet 5:3). That elders are authorized to provide guidance is also signified by the instructions given to the church to follow, submit to, honor, and recognize those who are leading in the church (1 Cor 16:15–18; 1 Thess 5:12–13; 1 Tim 5:17; Heb 13:7, 17; 1 Pet 5:5). The receiving and administration of gifts from other congregations (Acts 11:30) and praying for sick believers in the community (Jas 5:14) are examples of how elders may lead and care for the church.

Some responsibilities traditionally given exclusively to elders are noticeably absent from these passages. In particular, the New Testament does not assign specific activities such as presiding over the Lord’s Supper or baptism exclusively to elders.²⁹

²⁸ “Leadership is the apostolic church was largely based on proper teaching (cf. 1 Tim 3:2).” Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 392.

²⁹ Banks writes, “Nowhere in Paul’s letters, disputed or undisputed, is anyone identified as the presider or celebrant of this meal. . . . Baptism also took place through other than leading figures in a group (1 Cor 1:14–17).” Banks, “Church Order and Government,” 134. See also Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 113.

More broadly, “ministry” is not reserved for elders and deacons, but is the responsibility of the entire body of Christ (Eph 4:7–16; 1 Cor 12).³⁰ Instead, the role of the leaders is to equip the body for the work of the ministry.³¹

Authority as Power

Church Discipline

Church discipline may be characterized as authority *de facto* of power because it is the authorized ability to enforce a standard of behavior within the community.³² Jesus outlines the process that leads up to the removal of a person from the community in Matt 18:15–17. The first step is for a brother or sister to confront a fellow believer about his sin (Matt 18:15). Every believer is authorized to respond to sin in his or her community.³³ If the one in sin does not repent, the brother or sister is authorized to bring other witnesses to appeal to him (Matt 18:16). If he still does not repent, then the brother or sister is authorized to bring him before the church so that the church may appeal to him. If the one in sin still does not repent, then the brother or sister is authorized to regard him as one who does not belong in the community any longer (Matt 18:17). Although the focus in v. 17 is still on the original confronting individual, the implication is that all the believers in the church would respond in the same way.

³⁰ See Barth, *Ephesians*, 2:479–80.

³¹ The idea that elders have exclusive ministry rights is parallel to the function of the priesthood under the Old Covenant. Sometimes this parallel is made intentionally, as by John E. Johnson, “The Old Testament Offices as Paradigm for Pastoral Identity,” in *Vital Church Issues: Examining Principles and Practices in Church Leadership* (ed. Roy B. Zuck; Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1998). Such paradigms fail to take account of critical differences of leadership under the New Covenant. The conclusions proposed here reinforce an understanding of the priesthood of all believers.

³² See Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 887–88.

³³ See R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 692.

The involvement of the whole church is confirmed by Paul's description of church discipline in 1 Cor 5. He instructed the Corinthians to remove the evil person from among them by taking two courses of action. First, they were to remove corporately the man from the spiritual protection of Christ within the community through prayer (1 Cor 5:4–5; cf. Matt 18:20).³⁴ Second, they were not to associate or eat with such a one (1 Cor 5:11).³⁵ These instructions reveal that the power of church discipline is necessarily corporate, requiring the assembly of the community and everyone's subsequent cooperation in disassociating with the person thus removed (cf. 2 Cor 2:6).³⁶ Therefore, no individual or group within the community, such as elders, may possess the power of church discipline.³⁷

The power of church discipline is also spiritual and social in nature.³⁸ The social action helps keep the church pure and may motivate the sinner to return to the protection and comfort of the community. The spiritual action, however, represents the real power behind church discipline. Jesus promises in Matt 16:19 and 18:18 that if a person does not repent when he is confronted with his sin and offered God's forgiveness by a human agent then he remains in a state of unforgiveness before God. If he repents, he is forgiven

³⁴ See John Calvin, *The First Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians* (trans. John W. Fraser; Calvin's New Testament Commentaries; Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1960), 108; and Pfitzner, "Purified Community," 43.

³⁵ Eating together probably included more than just the common meal, or the Lord's Supper, enjoyed by the assembled community. See Barrett, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 132; Calvin, *The First Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians*, 114; Garland, *I Corinthians*, 189; and Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 415.

³⁶ Cowen, *Who Rules the Church*, 85–6.

³⁷ See Calvin, *The First Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians*, 107.

³⁸ Grudem describes church discipline as spiritual power. See Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 887–89.

by God (Matt 16:19; 18:18) and is allowed to enter into the kingdom/community (the keys, Matt 16:19) or remain in the community (Matt 18:15; Luke 17:3–4).³⁹ If the person does not repent then he or she is not allowed into the kingdom/community (Matt 16:19) or is excluded from the community (Matt 18:17). Therefore, a person's place inside or outside the community should reflect his or her actual state of forgiveness before God.

The ultimate power of church discipline is that God will hold people accountable for their response to confrontation by individual members and the assembled body. The corporate, social, and spiritual nature of church discipline does not depend, therefore, on any governmental structure within the community. In addition, as members and leaders of the community, elders are also subject to the local church's authority to discipline (1 Tim 5:19–20).

Decision Making

The authority to make decisions in the church may be considered authority *de facto* because it is the ability to determine the action taken by the church. Decision-making authority does not necessarily require power to enforce the decision if a government structure has been established by a higher authority that holds involved parties accountable for the structure.

It is often concluded that elders possess decision-making authority based on passages that appear to indicate that elders rule the church.⁴⁰ The term προΐστημι is used

³⁹ John McKenzie explains, "The nature of authority in the Church and the use of authority are determined by the mission of the Church, which is to proclaim the gospel. . . . The mission of proclamation is the mission of the whole Church; it does not belong exclusively to the organs of authority in the Church. . . . Authority in the Church belongs to the whole Church and not to particular officers." John L. McKenzie, *Authority in the Church* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1965), 84–85.

⁴⁰ προΐστημι is often translated "rule" in 1 Tim 3:4–5; 5:17. See Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 915; Lock, *Pastoral Epistles*, 34; Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 159, 162; and some Bible translations in 1

in 1 Tim 3:4–5 and 5:17 to describe the activity of the elders and in 1 Thess 5:12 with reference to unidentified leaders.⁴¹ προϊστημι may refer to ruling, leading, or caring for others.⁴² As is noted in the exegetical discussion of these passages, a semantic distinction should be made between leading and ruling. A ruler necessarily possesses decision-making authority over a group of people and the governmental or coercive power to enforce his decisions.⁴³ A leader may show the way or direct action without decision-making authority or accompanying power.

Those who are leading or ruling in 1 Thess 5:12 are not given titles, and no formal positions are mentioned. Paul was probably instructing the Thessalonians to recognize those who were informally functioning in the ways he described.⁴⁴ Since legitimate rulers usually hold recognized positions, προϊσταμένους ὑμῶν is best translated “those

Tim 3:4–5 (ASV, KJV, NKJV) and 5:17 (ASV, ESV, KJV, NASB, NKJV, NRSV). See also Köstenberger, *1–2 Timothy*, 517; and Marshall, *Pastoral Epistles*, 481. In 1 Thess 5:12, προϊσταμένους ὑμῶν is often translated “those who are over you” (ASV; AMP; ESV; KJV; NIV; NKJV). This translation, and the rendering of the NRSV, “have charge of you,” imply positional leadership and authority. See Douglas Moo, “What Does It Mean Not to Teach or Have Authority Over Men?” in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism* (ed. John Piper and Wayne Grudem; Wheaton: Crossway, 1991), 187.

⁴¹ προϊστημι is also listed as a gift in Rom 12:8.

⁴² See BDAG, 870; cf. Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 1:464, 458.

⁴³ Louw and Nida note such a distinction when categorizing domains and sub-domains. They write, “The meanings in sub-domain A *Guide, Lead* imply a willingness on the part of others to be led. They also imply a minimum of control on the part of the one guiding or leading (compare Domain 37 *Control, Rule*).” Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 1:414. An examination of the definitions of rule, ruler, lead, and leader in *The Oxford English Dictionary* demonstrates their basic conceptual difference. For example, rule may be defined, “To govern, to exercise sovereign power over, to control with authority,” and lead may be defined, “To guide with reference to action or opinion; to bring by persuasion or counsel to or representation to a conclusion; to induce to do something.” J. A. Simpson and E. S. C. Weiner, eds., *The Oxford English Dictionary* (vol. 14; 2d ed.; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 230–31, 745.

⁴⁴ See L. Coenen, “προϊστημι,” *NIDNTT* 1:197–98; Giles, *Patterns of Ministry*, 32; G. L. Green, *The Letters to the Thessalonians* (Pillar New Testament Commentary; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 247–48; Merkle, *The Elder and Overseer*, 98; Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 165; C. Wanamaker, *The Epistles to the Thessalonians* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 192; and Ben Witherington III, *1 and 2 Thessalonians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 160.

who lead you” instead of “those who are over you.”⁴⁵ There is nothing in the context that specifies that Paul was referring to rulers. In 1 Tim 3:4–5, προϊστημι may mean ruling or leading. Both senses fit well and nothing in the context requires one or the other.

In 1 Tim 5:17, those who labor in preaching and teaching are described as a subset of οἱ καλῶς προεστῶτες πρεσβύτεροι. Since preaching and teaching are more accurately described as activities of leading rather than ruling, then οἱ καλῶς προεστῶτες πρεσβύτεροι is best translated “the elders who lead well.”⁴⁶ In Rom 12:8, Paul included ὁ προϊστάμενος in a list of how members of the body have various functions and gifts (vv. 4, 6). Since ruling implies an official position, it does not seem to be a strictly functional spiritual gift. Therefore, ὁ προϊστάμενος is better understood as “the one who leads.”⁴⁷

Another term sometimes understood to refer indirectly to the ruling authority of elders is ἀθροιστέω in 1 Tim 2:12.⁴⁸ However, an examination of the context and structure of this passage reveals that ἀθροιστέω refers specifically to the authorization to teach.

Paul taught that only men are authorized to teach the community. Since elders are

⁴⁵ While “those who care” could also fit this context, the parallels in 1 Cor 16:15–16 and 1 Tim 5:17 suggest that “those who lead” is probably the sense here.

⁴⁶ P. T. O’Brien writes, “Their elders and leaders were to rule over the church, teaching the members, and urging them to follow the apostolic gospel and traditions (1 Thess 5:12–13; 1 Tim 3:5; 5:17; cf. 1 Cor 16:15–16).” P. T. O’Brien, “Church,” in *DPL* (ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Reid; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1993), 131. O’Brien’s description of ruling by teaching and urging reveals a question of semantics. It is suggested here that the term rule has clear governmental meanings and that teaching and urging are not ruling activities.

⁴⁷ Bruce writes, “In Rom 12:8 ὁ προϊστάμενος comes fourth in a series of five distinct categories of ministers. . . . Here too ὁ προϊστάμενος cannot be regarded as an official designation.” F. F. Bruce, *I and II Thessalonians* (WBC 45; Waco: Word, 1982), 118. See also L. Coenen, *NIDNTT* 1:197–98.

⁴⁸ See Moo, “What Does It Mean,” 187; and Thomas Schreiner, “Women in Ministry: Another Complementarian Perspective,” in *Two Views on Women in Ministry* (ed. James R. Beck; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 311.

responsible for teaching the whole flock (Acts 20:28–33), then based on 1 Tim 2:11–15 a woman is not be permitted to be an elder.⁴⁹

Another passage often cited in support of ruling elders is Heb 13:17. A common translation is that the church is to “obey” its leaders. Since *πείθω* has the overall sense of persuasion,⁵⁰ then the response of obedience is of one who is convinced. It is possible that the translation “obey” does not best convey this meaning in English since its definition generally does not require understanding or persuasion.⁵¹ Instead, the community should “follow” its leaders. In concurrence with “follow,” the act of submission (*ὑπέικω*) also allows for freedom to yield (see discussion on *ὑποτάσσω* in 1 Cor 16:15–16).⁵² The survey of words that indicate submission to leaders in the qualifying passages demonstrate that submission may be offered voluntarily in love, based on functional ministry or order of authority as responsibility, without implying a governmental structure (1 Tim 2:11–12; 1 Thess 5:12–13; Heb 13:17; 1 Pet 5:5).

⁴⁹ See Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 141.

⁵⁰ See BDAG, 791–92.

⁵¹ Lane writes, “This verb certainly demands obedience. But the specific quality of the obedience for which *πείθεσθαι* asks is not primarily derived from a respect for constituted structures of authority. It is rather the obedience that is won through persuasive conversation and that follows from it.” W. L. Lane, *Hebrews 9–13* (WBC 47B; Dallas: Word, 1991), 554. Koester translates *πείθομαι* “heed.” He explains, “Some take the verb in a rigorous sense for the kind of obedience that would suit a servant or child . . . but this seems overstated.” C. R. Koester, *Hebrews* (AB 36; New York: Doubleday, 2001), 572. See also Bill Patterson, *Christ-centered Servant-team Leadership* (Bloomington, Ind.: AuthorHouse, 2006), 89; and Timothy M. Willis, “Obey Your Leaders’: Hebrews 13 and Leadership in the Church,” *ResQ* 36/4 (1994): 316–26.

⁵² Louw and Nida present *ὑποτάσσω* and *ὑπέικω* as synonyms with the same meaning. Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 1:467. See also Samuel Bénétreau, *L’Épître aux Hébreux* (Vaux-sur-Seine, France: Edifac, 1989-1990), 230; John Calvin, *The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews and the First and Second Epistles of St. Peter* (Calvin’s Commentaries; ed. David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance; trans. William B. Johnston; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963), 207, 213; Getz, *Elders and Leaders*, 175–76; G. H. Guthrie, *Hebrews* (NIVAC; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 442; Koester, *Hebrews*, 578; and Willis, “Obey Your Leaders,” 316–26.

While several passages contain terms that could legitimately convey the concept of ruling authority, based on the context of each one, none unequivocally grants ruling authority to elders. Instead, the church is called to submit to and follow the godly teaching and example of the elders. Furthermore, there are passages that may explicitly prohibit church elders and leaders from ruling the church. The term translated leader in Heb 13:7, 17, 24 (ἡγέομαι) also appears in Luke 22:26, where Jesus teaches that the prominent and leading positions among his followers are to be characterized by service, rather than control or rule (Matt 20:25–28; Mark 10:35–45; Luke 22:24–27). Based on the parallels and contrasts identified in this passage, ὁ ἡγούμενος should be translated “the leader” instead of “the ruler.”

It is also notable that all six terms used to describe the authority of the Gentiles as rulers are never used to describe Christian leadership anywhere in the New Testament. In fact, two of them are used to indicate how a Christian does not or should not lead (κυριεύω in 2 Cor 1:24 and κατακυριεύω in 1 Pet 5:3). The best translation of κατακυριεύω is “rule” instead of “lord it over.”⁵³ The translation “lord it over” implies that elders have governing authority.⁵⁴ Instead, Peter explained that elders are to serve by example, not by ruling over those entrusted to them (1 Pet 5:3).⁵⁵

⁵³ For “rule” as a legitimate translation see BDAG, 519; and Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 1:477.

⁵⁴ See Calvin, *The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews and the First and Second Epistles of St. Peter*, 316; Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 915; Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Epistles of Peter and the Epistle of Jude* (New Testament Commentary; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), 192; and Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 248.

⁵⁵ See discussion of 1 Pet 5:1–5. See also Kenneth Willis Clark, “Meaning of [kata] kurieuein,” in *Studies in New Testament Language and Text* (Leiden: Brill, 1976), 100; J. H. Elliott, *1 Peter* (AB 37B; New York: Doubleday, 2000), 830.

Another indication that elders primarily exercise teaching and leading authority and not ruling authority is that the common danger and source of insubordination they face is false doctrine (Acts 20:29–30; Titus 1:9–10). When there is such insubordination in the church, the solution is not legislation but correction and sound teaching (Acts 20:31–32; Titus 1:11, 13; cf. Acts 15). It is also notable in Heb 13:17 that no indication is given that the leaders possess any power of discipline with which to respond to insubordination. A failure to submit only results in groaning on the part of the leaders, instead of joy, and unprofitability to the believers (v. 17). This may be contrasted with the consequences of disobedience to “the governing authorities,” which may execute judgment with the sword (Rom 13:1–4).

The proposal that elders do not possess decision-making authority is also substantiated by observing the New Testament examples of decision making in the church. The selection of the Seven in Acts 6:1–6 is an example of a decision made in the community by the community. The action of the church in Antioch to send aid was the voluntary, collective action of its members (Acts 11:27–30; cf. 2 Cor 9:7). In matters of congregational action in Antioch and Jerusalem, such as sending representatives from the church, the corporate local church had decision-making authority (Acts 15:2–3, 22; cf. 2 Cor 8:19). The exercise of church discipline upon a member can only be carried out by the whole congregation (Matt 18:17; 1 Cor 5).⁵⁶ When settling disputes between brothers, the community, or at least the two parties involved in a dispute, may agree upon a

⁵⁶ “Evidence for the autonomy of the local church is garnered from the key role the congregation is given in the process of church discipline. . . . Because the final step in the church disciplining process is given to the church, this indicates that the local congregation is to deal with its own problems and does not need a higher ecclesiastical body making decision for it. As believers who are filled with the Holy Spirit and gifted according to God’s wisdom, they are capable of following God’s Word and God’s will.” Merkle, *40 Questions*, 41. See also Calvin, *The First Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians*, 107; and O’Brien, “Church,” 131.

qualified arbiter from among the brothers to decide their case (1 Cor 6:1–8).⁵⁷ Finally, the whole congregation is responsible for discerning true teaching and valid prophecy in public worship (1 Cor 14:29).

One example cited as evidence of decision-making by church leaders is Acts 15. However, the resolution of the Jerusalem Council was the teaching of respected teachers, instead of the legislation of a ruling body. Another possible example of decision-making in the church by leaders is the appointment of elders by the apostles. The example of the appointment of the seven servants in Acts 6:1–6 is helpful because a distinction is made between their selection and appointment. The congregation selected the servants, and the apostles appointed them. Therefore, the appointment of elders by Paul and Barnabas, Timothy, or Titus does not necessarily indicate that they selected them.⁵⁸

The qualifications of the servants in Acts 6:3 and the elders in 1 Tim 3:1–7 and Titus 1:5–9 demonstrate the importance of the involvement of the whole congregation in affirming the godliness and respected reputation of the leaders.⁵⁹ First Timothy 5:22–25 also emphasizes the importance of observing prospective elders over time to ensure their purity. The New Testament records of elder appointment implies that the elders were members of the community who had proven their qualifications and skill.⁶⁰

The involvement of the Apostles, Paul and Barnabas, Timothy, and Titus does not provide examples of decision-making by leaders. Instead, it demonstrates the importance of the initiative, teaching, and guidance of the leaders in the appointment of new

⁵⁷ See Cowen, *Who Rules the Church*, 89–91.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 87.

⁵⁹ See Larry Kreider, *The Biblical Role of Elders for Today's Church: New Testament Leadership Principles for Equipping Elders* (Ephrata, PA: House to House Publications, 2004), 48.

leadership. Respected leaders within a community guide the congregation in making wise choices and represent the congregation as they confer leadership authority by appointing them. The commissioning of Timothy by the council of elders in 1 Tim 4:14 presents the possibility that elders are an appropriate group of leaders to teach about, oversee the selection of, and appoint new leaders.

The appointment of elders in the church provides a good illustration of the dynamic and spiritual decision-making process presented in the New Testament. Not only are the congregation and current leadership involved, but the prospective elders must also serve freely of their own conviction (1 Pet 5:2; 1 Tim 3:1). The elders' willingness, however, is not merely a matter of personal desire. They serve "according to God" (1 Pet 5:2). It is God who entrusts portions of his flock into the care of the elders (1 Pet 5:2). The Holy Spirit made the Ephesian elders overseers (Acts 20:28), just as he called Paul and Barnabas to their mission (Acts 13:1–3) and Timothy to his ministry through prophesy (1 Tim 1:18; 4:14). Jesus Christ sovereignly bestows the gifts of leading, shepherding, and teaching (Rom 12:8; Eph 4:7–11). Accordingly, elders will be held accountable for the care they provide to God's church (Heb 13:17; 1 Pet 5:4).

That Jesus Christ is the Chief Shepherd of the flock and the head of the church is not presented in the New Testament as a sentimental idealism but as a dynamic reality. The supreme goal of the Jerusalem council was to discern the will of God, not to create human rules. The ultimate authority among the apostles, elders, and the whole church was God and his will for his people (Acts 15:1–35). Although God gives teachers and leaders to his people, they are not to be exalted above the rest of the brothers and

⁶⁰ See Kreider, *The Biblical Role of Elders*, 16.

sisters.⁶¹ God is to remain in focus as the one Father and Jesus Christ as the one teacher of his people (Matt 23:8–12). Human leadership in the church, then, does not include ruling and legislation⁶² but a body of believers following Christ together with the benefit of the leadership of godly, gifted members.⁶³

If Jesus Christ can truly lead the local church through his Word and Spirit then there is no need for rulers in the church.⁶⁴ Furthermore, the nature of the gospel and the community of faith do not permit rulers in the church.⁶⁵ Wayne Grudem writes:

In the new covenant, membership in the church and allegiance to Christ must be voluntary. They cannot be compelled by family or by the state. In fact, faith in Christ, to be truly held and practiced, cannot be compelled by force. If it is compelled, it changes its essential quality and is no longer a voluntary act of the individual, and cannot be true faith.⁶⁶

⁶¹ Barth writes, “Their place is not above but below the great number of saints who are not adorned by resounding titles. Every one of the special ministers is a *servus servorum Dei*. He is a ‘pastor’ of God’s flock, who understand himself as a minister to ministers.” Barth, *Ephesians*, 2:481.

⁶² “The church does not have authority on its own to legislate what is morally right and wrong in an absolute sense, for the authority to define right and wrong belongs to God alone (see Rom 1:32; 2:16; 3:4–8; 9:20; Ps 119; 89, 142, 160; Matt 5:18). The church can only declare and teach what God has already commanded in his Word.” Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 891.

⁶³ See Merkle, *40 Questions*, 99–100.

⁶⁴ Lightfoot acknowledges the teaching of the priesthood of believers, but then claims that it does not work. “It must be evident that no society of men could hold together without officers, without rules, without institutions of any kind; and the Church of Christ is not exempt from this universal law. The conception [of the priesthood of all believers] in short is strictly an *ideal*.” Lightfoot, “The Christian Ministry,” 181.

⁶⁵ McKenzie writes, “In a sense far more profound than in democratic constitutions, authority in the Church must be supported by the free consent of those whom it governs. There is an irremovable opposition between love and constraint. This element of the mystery is surely the most difficult to incorporate into practice. There are so many other ways in which authority can make decisions, all of them recommended by good political, or military, or commercial experience, all much quicker and more expeditious, and all protecting authority from the need of humbling itself before those whom it governs—that is, from adopting the attitude recommended by Jesus in the gospels. All of these ways achieve the end of The Organization more surely than the way of the mystery can achieve it; all these ways fail to achieve what the way of the mystery achieves, the fulfillment of each person in the Church.” McKenzie, *Authority*, 181.

⁶⁶ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 892.

Since there are no decisions made or actions taken in the church that are not a matter of faith, then the voluntary yielding of each member to one another, to leadership, and to Christ is imperative.

Authority as Influence

Elders have authority *de jure* of position that grants them the authorization to carry out certain responsibilities. The authority *de facto* that elders possess is not that of power but that of influence.⁶⁷ According to the New Testament, the kind of influence that elders are to exercise is based on their credibility, character, relationships, and skill.⁶⁸ This is in contrast to influence based on power of persuasion, charismatic personality, or political maneuvering. In the case of church elders, their authority *de jure* of position is, to some extent, dependent upon their authority *de facto* of influence.

Before a man is recognized as an elder, he exercises authority *de facto* of influence in the church.⁶⁹ Since the gifts of shepherding, leadership, and teaching are not confined to the elders' office (Eph 4:11; Rom 12:8; 1 Cor 16:15–18; 1 Thess 5:12), members of the community may demonstrate their abilities in these areas before

⁶⁷ Campenhausen writes, "The dispensation of the Spirit and of the new righteousness . . . possesses in its gentleness and moderation a different, more powerful and more resplendent glory than that of the old Mosaic law, with its letter that killed, because this dispensation is effected through candour, love, and patience, and the winning and reconciling power of forgiveness, and no longer through punishment and destruction, imposed by an external authority." Campenhausen, *Ecclesiastical Authority*, 51.

⁶⁸ Calvin connects these qualifications with authority. "He ought not to be marked by any disgrace that would detract from his authority. . . . Thus, in order that the bishops may not lack authority, he gives charge that those who are chosen should be of good and honourable reputation, and free of any extraordinary fault." Calvin, *The Epistles to Timothy*, 223.

⁶⁹ "The policy of Paul and his colleagues seems to have been to wait until qualities of spiritual leadership displayed themselves in certain members of a church and then to urge the others to acknowledge and respect those as leaders. One of the most obvious qualities of leadership was a readiness to serve the church and care for its needs. Such leaders did not do the appropriate work because they had been appointed as leaders; they were recognized as leaders because they were seen to be doing the work." Bruce, *I and II Thessalonians*, 120.

becoming elders. This is implied by the prerequisites of leading and teaching given by Paul (1 Tim 3:2–4; Titus 1:9). The community may also observe the ability to lead and care for others by his ministry to his family (1 Tim 3:3–4; Titus 1:6). These qualifications also require elders to relate rightly to others and to have established credibility inside and outside of the community (1 Tim 3:2–3, 7; Titus 1:6–8). Such relational skills and credibility establish and maintain the elders’ ability to lead others effectively. This again emphasizes the fact that prospective elders were members of the community in which they were to serve. They were observed as men in ministry and proven as men of character (1 Tim 5:22–25).⁷⁰

Not only are their character and ministry skills prerequisites for becoming elders, they are also necessary for carrying out their responsibilities. Elders are uniquely authorized to teach and lead, but since these are not governmental responsibilities enforced by structure or power, then this authorization does not guarantee success. The reason given for why the church should honor and submit to their leaders is the work that they do, not their office (1 Cor 16:15–18; 1 Thess 5:12–13; 1 Tim 5:17–18; Heb 13:7, 17).⁷¹ They are called upon to pray for the sick because of their exemplary righteousness and faith (Jas 5:14–18). They are to lead by the example of a godly life (Heb 13:7; 1 Pet 5:3). Therefore, although elders are authorized to lead, the real influence of their leadership is based upon sound teaching, wise leadership, and godly character. Elders

⁷⁰ Kreider writes, “The early church did not recruit elders from a distant seminary. Seminary experience was not a prerequisite to leadership in the New Testament church. . . . Elders were found from within the local church and developed into leaders over time on the basis of their willingness to serve and their moral and spiritual maturity.” Kreider, *Biblical Role*, 16.

⁷¹ “The congregation was responsible for discerning true from false ministries. Ecstatic utterances notwithstanding, ministers of the word were subject to the community for confirmation of their authenticity; false teaching or immoral conduct would lead to a negative verdict.” Brash, *Pastoral Authority*, 211.

must also maintain their purity of character in order to keep their position in the church. If they do not, they may be disqualified from their positions by being publicly rebuked on the evidence of two or three witnesses (1 Tim 5:19–21).⁷²

That elders in sin are to be confronted demonstrates that the church is not to submit to their leaders blindly. Instead, they are to follow as those who are persuaded (Heb 13:17).⁷³ Elders and leaders who teach twisted things are not to be tolerated (Acts 20:29–31; Titus 1:9–16). The ultimate basis of the authority of an elder, therefore, is not his office or his authorization to lead and teach. The basis for his authority is the alignment of his life and teaching with the truth of God’s word.⁷⁴ While elders have authority *de jure* of position and responsibility, the primary authority that elders exercise in the community is authority *de facto* of influence based on sound teaching, wise leadership, and godly character.⁷⁵

⁷² See David A. Mappes, “Studies on the Role of the New Testament Elder: The Discipline of a Sinning Elder,” *BSac* 154 (July–Sept 1997): 338–39; and Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 218.

⁷³ The dynamic of Paul’s authority as a teacher is also true of elders. “However imperiously Paul the apostle may demand a hearing for Christ, however ingenuously he may put himself forward as a pattern for imitation, yet he cannot simply give orders. He does not himself create the norm, which is then to be obeyed without further ado, but instead the congregation of those who possess the Spirit must follow him in freedom; and it is this freedom which he has in mind when he addresses them. They must themselves recognize in his instructions the ‘standard of teaching’ to which they are committed, and to which Paul in a sense merely ‘recalls’ them, in order that they may affirm it for themselves, and freely and joyfully make it their own once more.” Campenhausen, *Ecclesiastical Authority*, 47.

⁷⁴ Schreiner explains, “Leaders in the churches exercised authority, but their authority is always subordinate to the gospel. . . . Even Peter (and Barnabas!) are to be resisted and rebuked if they ‘do not live in accord with the truth of the gospel’ (Gal 2:14). Authority ultimately resides in the gospel, not the ministers themselves.” Schreiner, *Paul*, 393. “Paul’s emphasis upon models rather than positions itself indicates that it is the person, not the office, that is central for him and that government of the church has more to do with a way of life than a designated post.” R. Banks, “Church Order and Government,” in *DPL* (ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Reid; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1993), 133. See also Merkle, *40 Questions*, 97.

⁷⁵ Schreiner writes, “The overseer-elders . . . are to teach and lead. These two functions . . . provide the superstructure under which overseer-elders do their work. Their primary calling is to pass on the tradition and truth of the gospel. Their leadership, in other words, is not primarily bureaucratic Overseer-elders exert their leadership through their teaching ministry and by their adherence to the gospel (1 Tim 5:17).” Schreiner, *Paul*, 389–90.

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