IX

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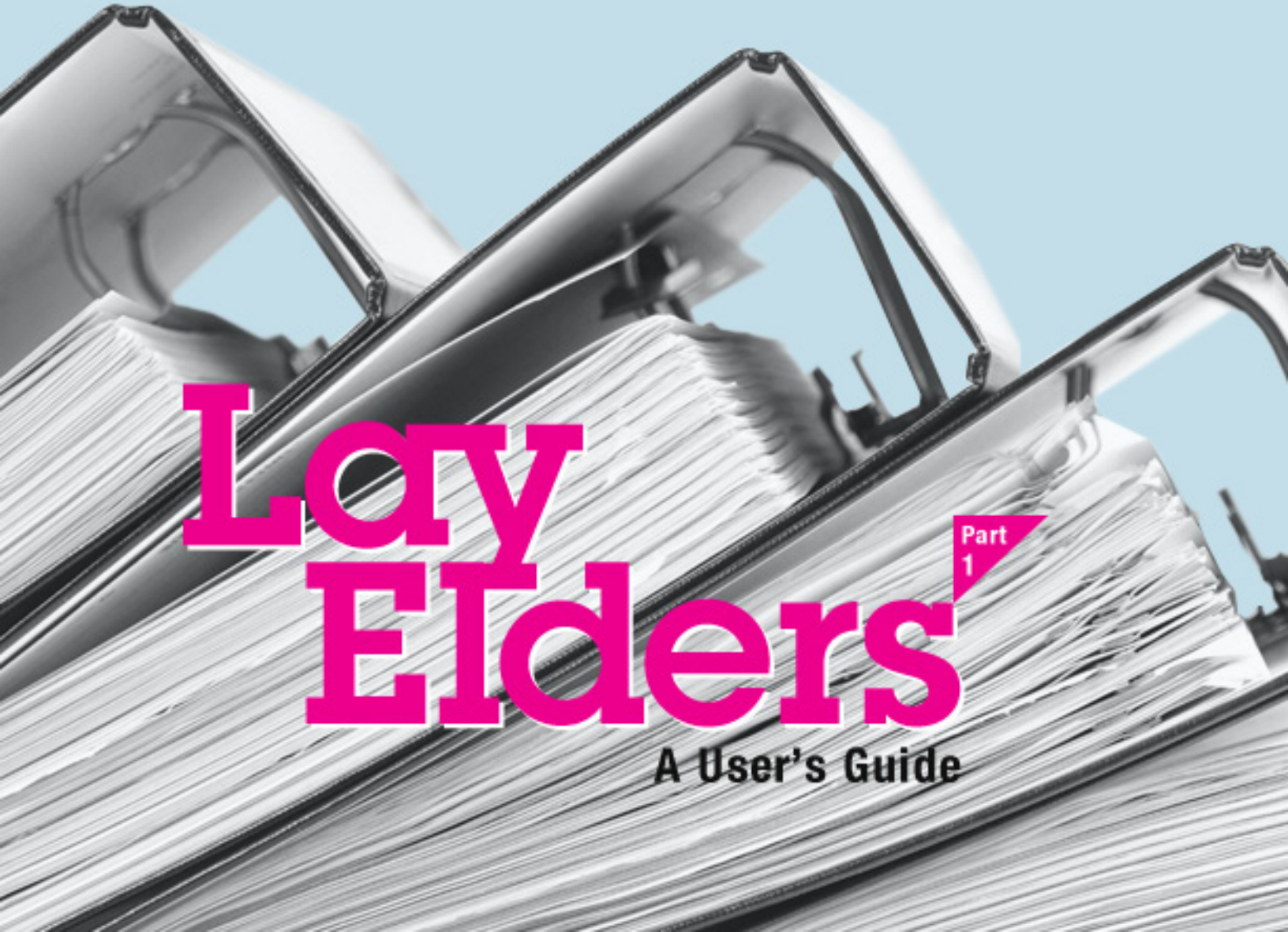
9Marks Journal

Biblical Thinking for Building Healthy Churches



Lay Elders

Part 1

A User's Guide

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Jonathan Leeman

Editor's Note

Do you want to know, like, the coolest thing? I live in a city where there are lots of powerful people. Big timers, you know. And some of those big timers show up in our church on Capitol Hill—the movers and shakers. So do the people who work for those big timers—the schmoozing and the sweaty. What's cool about that? Nothing. What's cool it that these positions are not exalted in our church; being an elder is! The office of elder is held up and given honor. Praise the Lord, right?

You might be a journalist, a lobbyist, a congressional staffer, an army general, or a partner in a law firm. But in the social economy of the church, none of that matters. What counts is your character and knowledge of the Scriptures. Ambitious young men enter the church, but if they have Holy Spirit-softened hearts, they begin desiring different things. They come to D.C. driven to succeed, but somewhere along the way they become ambitious about leading a small group, sharing the gospel, showing hospitality, helping the hurting, and teaching God's Word, even if it means sacrifices to their career. I could name dozens: Chris, Bill, Scott, Eric, Michael, David, Dave, Randy, Steve, Papu, Sebastian, Klon, Greg...want me to keep going?

I am not talking about the men who leave their careers to enter vocational ministry. I am talking about the men who remain in their careers, but who begin to shepherd anyway. These are the men I admire so much. They move from the big prestigious firm to the small peripheral firm; they take the pay cut; they let themselves get passed over for promotion. Why? Because they love the sheep, and they cannot help but spend the time it takes to shepherd sheep.

This issue of the 9Marks Journal and the next are devoted to these men: lay elders, or the pastors that a church doesn't pay, because they do all their work in the evenings and weekends. In this issue, Jeramie Rinne and Sebastian Traeger lay out the basic expectations for the job. Garrett Kell and Michael McKinley offer counsel on raising up such men within the flock. And Garrett, Steve Boyer, and I offer a few thoughts on equipping them once the work has begun.

In January, we will come back to address the relationship between staff and lay elders, the besetting sins of lay elders, building unity and friendship among the elders, and other practical matters. Stay tuned!

By Jeramie Rinne

A Job Description for Lay Elders

You were humbled—and a little surprised—when the pastor asked you to serve as an elder. You prayed about it, talked to your wife, and got the input of a few trusted church members. With a mixture of trepidation and excitement you accepted the nomination, and a few weeks later you were voted into office.

Now you sit at your first elders' meeting, waiting for things to start. And a nagging thought arises: "Okay, I am an elder. *Now what do I do*?"

WELL-INTENTIONED BUT ILL-INFORMED

Lay elders are often godly, well-intentioned men who love the Lord and serve the church faithfully. But they sometimes lack a well-rounded understanding of the biblical job description for elders. Unfortunately, we paid pastors often share in their confusion!

As a result, lay elders sometimes fill the gaps of their understanding with their own life experiences. They assume being an elder is roughly equivalent to serving on a board of trustees for a non-profit organization, or leading a company, or managing a project, or commanding a warship, or supervising sub-contractors. While aspects of those skills and experiences will prove useful, none of them adequately approximates the elder task.

So what is a lay elder's job description? What are they supposed to do? Attend meetings? Approve budgets? Distribute communion?

SHEPHERD GOD'S FLOCK

Here's the short answer from the apostle Peter: "I exhort the elders among you: shepherd God's flock" (1 Pet. 5:2; see also Jn. 21:15-16 and Acts 20:28). Elders serve the Good Shepherd by providing his local flocks with spiritual oversight. Elders feed, lead, protect, and nurture church members like shepherds do with sheep.

Let's get even more specific. While shepherding is a powerful metaphor for framing an elder's job description, our new elder needs concrete instructions. He needs an answer to his question, "Now what do I do?" Fortunately, God's Word lists very specific duties that help elders put the shepherding imagery to work.

FOUR PRIMARY DUTIES

Here are four duties that are central to the elder's job description. While this list is not exhaustive, I believe if lay elders devoted themselves to these four things, they would excel as shepherds.

1. Teach

An elder must be "an able teacher" (1 Tim. 3:2; see 5:17). He must hold "to the faithful message as taught, so that he will be able both to encourage with sound teaching and refute those who contradict it" (Tit. 1:9). Jesus' under-shepherds feed Jesus' sheep with Jesus' word.

If you're an elder, find venues for teaching the Bible regularly. Teach a Sunday school class, lead a home group, give a lesson to the youth group, or study Scripture with a member over coffee. And if you're offered a chance to preach, take it.

Further, tune in to the church's overall teaching ministry. Keep a finger on the pulse of what's being taught through congregational singing or in the Sunday school curriculum. Listen closely when members talk about what they're reading and be alert for rotten food in their spiritual diet.

Finally, remember that teaching includes training others to perpetuate the church's teaching ministry. As Paul said to Timothy, "What you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, commit to faithful men who will be able to teach others also" (2 Tim. 2:2). So bring along an apprentice teacher whenever you can.

2. Lead

Just as shepherds lead their flocks, so elders lead local congregations. The biblical writers also call elders "overseers," a title that highlights their role as leaders (Acts 20:28; 1 Tim. 3:1; Tit. 1:5, 7). Hebrews instructs Christians to "obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account" (Heb. 13:17).

Elders, be brave and lead your church. Don't hide among the baggage like King Saul. When you see challenges in your church, face them proactively and plot a course forward.

Courageous leadership might involve reaching out to a frustrated member who's stopped attending, or confronting an unrepentant member through church discipline. Or it could mean wrestling through staffing strategies, budget challenges, or important policies that affect the spiritual identity of the congregation.

As you lead, don't lose sight of the destination. The goal isn't to lead a church to become an efficient organization, as important as that may be. Rather, elders should lead church members toward maturity in Christ. Jesus gave teaching shepherds to the church "to build up the body of Christ until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God, growing into a mature man with a stature measured by Christ's fullness" (Eph. 4:12-13).

Elders bring the flock to green pastures and still waters when they help members know Jesus more and increasingly reflect his glory together.

3. Model

Most importantly, elders lead by example. Shepherd the church "not [by] lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock" (1 Pet. 5:3). Not surprisingly, the New Testament lists of elder qualifications focus predominantly on character (1 Tim. 3:1-7, Tit. 1:5-9; 1 Pet. 5:1-4). An elder's most basic job is to say "Imitate me as I also imitate Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1).

The mandate to model maturity carries two critical implications. First, modeling means you must guard your godliness: "Pay close attention to your life and your teaching" (1 Tim. 4:16). Continue to live close to the Lord, nurture your wife and children well, resist sin, and love people. Open your life to the loving accountability of the other elders. Modeling maturity is a team project.

That leads to a second implication: modeling requires elders to *be among* the people. It only works if people see you up close. So open your life to church members. Invite them into your home, your hobbies, and your ministry. People need a firsthand experience of how you handle stress, relate to your wife, respond to difficult people, and humbly admit when you blow it.

4. Pray

Finally, elders should take up the apostolic shepherding mantle and say, "we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the preaching ministry" (Acts 6:4). Ultimately elders are powerless in themselves to mature anyone in Christ; only the Holy Spirit can do that through God's Word. The sooner an elder realizes this, the sooner he will hit his knees and plead for a continual work of grace among church members, as well as in his own life.

So if you're a lay elder (or a paid elder!), strive to be a man of prayer. Build regular prayer into your daily rhythms. Pray over your church's membership rolls during the commute or while you're walking the dog. Carve out time as an elder board for concerted prayer. And when you're talking to a church member, be sure to stop and pray for her right then and there.

SHEPHERD LIKE JESUS

Maybe we could sum up an elder's job description this way: shepherd the church members like Jesus shepherds his disciples.

"Maybe we could sum up an elder's job description this way: shepherd the church members like Jesus shepherds his disciples."

Like Jesus, make teaching central to your ministry, and make Jesus and the gospel the primary content of your teaching. In every decision, lead your people toward knowing and trusting Jesus. Let them see the character of Jesus exemplified in your life. And just as Jesus often turned aside to pray, so you as an elder should join Jesus in interceding for his people.

The under-shepherds of Jesus are at their best when they reflect Jesus, the Chief Shepherd.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Jeramie Rinne is the senior pastor of South Shore Baptist Church in Hingham, Massachusetts.

By Sebastian Traeger

How Much Time Can a Lay Elder Give to Ministry?

Serving as a lay elder is an awesome privilege and responsibility. As my good friend Ryan Townsend says, it's "glorious hard work." It also can create serious challenges for managing time well, since a lay elder also has a full-time job and (usually) a family. What I want to do in this article is briefly outline how much time a lay elder should expect to spend in shepherding his congregation.

TIME CRUNCH: JOB AND ELDERING

One of the greatest challenges of serving as a lay elder is that you live with a permanent tension between your job and your ministry in the church. Unlike a full-time staff elder, spending time as an elder normally can come at a cost of spending time at your job. And, while there may be some overlap between these roles, as a lay elder you'll need to exercise wisdom in how you allocate your time.

Let me give you a simple example of this. If I have a lunch slot open, I can use it to network with another business owner or to get to know a new member at my church. While there is some ministry value in reaching out to another business owner, it's primarily a networking lunch. Likewise, while there may be some "professional" value in getting to know a church member, this lunch is primarily a discipling lunch.

These types of tradeoffs also occur also the macro level. For example, while a staff elder's schedule is driven primarily by what's happening in the church, a lay elder's schedule is largely driven by what's happening outside it. And so scheduling by the week and even over seasons can require a more complex set of calculations.

This tension can sneak up on a lay elder. And it can lead a lay elder to feel frustrated that he can't do more at church, or even grow discouraged that he's not having more professional success at work. My advice is for lay elders to think realistically on the front end about where they are personally in their marriage and family, and professionally in their jobs, and to make overall time allocation decisions about eldering based on these two factors.

I've seen lay elders at my church make wise decisions which have led in each direction: One brother stepped down as an elder because he needed to spend more time at work in order to pursue becoming a partner in his firm. He did this in

conversation with and with the blessing of our elders. Another brother was able to double-down his efforts as an elder when he lost his job, only to scale back his time eldering once he was back in a busy job.

The bottom line: while serving as a lay elder is in many ways similar to serving as a full-time staff elder, one area where it's drastically different is the overall amount of time that you can realistically spend on ministry. So recognize this going in and order your days accordingly.

FACTORS THAT CAN MAKE THINGS CRUNCHIER

A lay elder's responsibilities to his job, family, and church create a time crunch. But there are some factors in the life of a church that can make things even crunchier.

First, the size of a church. Often, the smaller the church, the more time a lay elder should expect to give. Why? In part because members of smaller churches tend to expect more personal time from their pastors or elders. Also, growing churches normally grow in the number of full-time elders. As a result, some of the work can now be handed off to full-time elders. One example of this at my church is budgeting. What was once handled largely by volunteers, including lay elders, is now driven primarily by an associate pastor. In our case this is a good thing, as it coincides with how complicated our budget has become.

But a growing church can also make more demands on a lay elder's time. Quite simply, there are more sheep to care for, including ones who are hurting and wounded.

Second, the stage of a church. As a general rule, a church plant or church revitalization will require more time from a lay elder. Why? In the early stages of a church, big, direction-setting decisions are being made. When a church has been healthy for many years, there are fewer plate-shifting decisions that need to be made, fewer painstakingly-worded documents that need to be created.

Finally, regardless of size or stage, a church experiencing any sort of crisis will require more from a lay elder. Typically crises require more Bible study, prayer, elders' meetings, and private conversations than normal. This is only to be expected as crises require special wisdom and discernment.

DUTIES OF A LAY ELDER

Now that we've considered a few factors that shape how much time a lay elder can give, let's consider the general shape of what a lay elder will do. If you are considering serving as a lay elder, what should you expect to do?

1. Teaching

First, expect to teach publicly (1 Tim. 3:2; Tit. 1:9). At our church, this means:

- Teaching Core Seminars (our version of Sunday School);
- Giving an occasional Sunday evening message (a 15-minute devotional);
- Occasionally providing specific, topical teaching. Our elders give talks when they see a particular topic that the congregation can benefit from, such as "How to Honor a Difficult Parent" or an annual talk for single men on dating, marriage, and sexual purity.
- Additionally, in our church only the elders teach the membership classes.

2. Discipling and Hospitality

Expect to disciple others. This means you'll be in a few regular one-on-one discipling relationships, and that you'll possibly lead a small group.

Since an elder must be "hospitable" (1 Tim. 3:2), part of your eldering work will mean showing hospitality to others. Often this means having church members, newcomers, and other guests into your home. Some seasons of life might require you to show hospitality in other ways.

3. Counseling

Expect to counsel people through difficult circumstances and through habitual sin patterns. A big part of shepherding is walking through life with people whose lives have been affected by their sin or the sin of others. These messy situations can take up a lot of time, but it's glorious to see the power of the gospel at work in people's lives.

Additionally, as an elder, people are more likely to seek you out when they face bigger life questions. For example, they'd like wisdom for questions about pursuing marriage, changing jobs, or switching churches. You are going to be a natural go-to for these types of questions.

These three initial responsibilities are in essence the "organic" parts of serving as an elder. They should be similar to what you were doing before you were an elder and are things you will likely continue to do even if you're no longer an elder in the future. However, the public nature of eldering means these organic parts of the job will increase if and when you are formally recognized by the congregation as an elder. You may find more young men asking to spend time with you, or more young women asking you and your wife for relational advice.

These next three are new responsibilities that may come with the office, depending on how your eldership is organized.

4. Elders' Meetings

Our church has an elders' meeting about one every three weeks (so, 17 per year). They last from about 7 to 11 p.m. In addition to the four-hour meeting, I set aside another two to six hours of prep time (and possibly longer if there is a thorny issue) to read and study, prepare a memo, or discuss an issue with others.

We also have some "mini-meetings" in which we meet as elders for one hour before a members' meeting and at other times if we need to address a specific issue. So, to be safe, a lay elder at our church should budget ten hours every third week for the regularly scheduled elders' meeting. Obviously the time commitment will vary church to church, but in many churches the elders' meeting will require a substantial commitment of time from lay elders, especially since they will not be able to use time during the workday to prepare the way staff elders can.

5. Sub-Committees

Our elders have organized a few sub-committees to oversee specific areas such as compensation, outreach, and administration. These committees are like special forces in which some elders think more carefully about an issue before bringing it to the whole board of elders. None of these are required, but depending on your personal and professional expertise, you will likely be called into duty for at least one of them.

6. Extra Credit

A final category to be aware of is what I'm calling "extra credit" responsibilities. What I mean by this is that because you are an elder in the church, you'll now have a higher public profile than you did before. This isn't a matter of lording it over anyone or promoting yourself; it's just a fact of being a leader in the church. Your increased visibility is a stewardship to

be embraced—it's part of how God means for you to lead the church. Practically, it means you will likely be invited to more weddings and asked to participate in other events.

These can be wonderful opportunities to serve, but remember that they are not part of the "required" job description, but are more like extra credit. This means that they should be the last things on this list that you agree to do. If you are feeling stretched in shepherding your family and your church while also serving faithfully in your workplace, don't feel guilty if you have to say no to these things.

CONCLUSION

I've taken you through some of what it means to be a lay elder in the local church I serve. It's going to be different from church to church, and circumstance to circumstance. But, big picture, as a lay elder you might expect to spend up to 10 to 15 hours per week teaching, discipling, counseling, and prepping for and attending elders' meeting.

If you are considering serving as an elder in your church, discuss your schedule with the current elders and learn their expectations for lay elders' ministry involvement. Further, lay elders need to be wise in what they can handle at various stages of their lives.

Serving as an elder shouldn't be an ambition we should have because we want a notch in our belts, a trophy on our mantles, or a success on our resumes. Instead it should be a godly ambition born out of a desire to serve the sheep in our care.

So, if you desire to serve as an elder for the right reasons but can't during a specific season, there is no reason to feel guilty about this. God has given you other callings for a season to pursue faithfully.

But remember that Paul calls this a "noble task" (1 Tim. 3:1). If you are qualified and your schedule permits, then throw yourself into eldering. Our churches need qualified men who are willing to pour themselves into the lives of others for their spiritual good.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:
Sebastian Traeger is an elder of Capitol Hill Baptist Church and is the CEO of a real estate startup in Washington, DC.

By Mike McKinley

Raising Up Elders: Three Areas to Address

Like most church planters, I was concerned about church growth from the beginning. While the size of the congregation is not the most important thing about a church—and it's not nearly as important as most of us assume it is—there is nothing quite like preaching to eleven people on a Sunday morning to motivate you to go out and find more people.

My thinking was that if I poured myself into the hard work of getting more people, then eventually my burden would be eased. After all, many hands make light work. So I invested a lot of my early effort in getting people into the church, spending one-on-one time with visitors and potential new members.

A BODY WITH NO SKELETON

Over the course of our first year to eighteen months, the congregation grew steadily, if not spectacularly. What began on the far edge of single digits moved solidly into the triple digits. But while I had expected that having more people in the church would make my life easier, I found that I was more exhausted than ever. There were simply too many visitors for my wife and I to continue having everyone over for a meal. While good friendships had developed between members of the congregation, most of the church was relationally connected to my family and me. When people had a question or a problem or a suggestion or a complaint, they came to me.

It was at this point that I realized that I had made serious mistake. Instead of spending all of my energy on getting more people into the church, I should have invested a significant portion of my time into developing new leaders for the congregation. What I had done was work to build a church with insufficient leadership. It felt like a body with no skeleton. There was no structure that could support future growth.

"What I had done was work to build a church with insufficient leadership. It felt like a body with no skeleton. There was no structure that could support future growth."

Looking back, I can see why I made the mistake that I did. First of all, I'm not naturally very good at training people; I'm better at doing the work myself. Secondly, it takes foresight to develop leaders for a church that does not seem to require them. (It turns out that I'm not big on foresight either). And thirdly, training leaders does not feel like the most effective use of time when the church's most pressing need is more people.

Even though I came late to the party, I began to invest my time, energy, and resources into training men who could serve our church as elders. I started a leadership-training group that met on Saturday mornings. Any man who was a member of the church and willing to do the work was invited to attend. One might wonder if such an all-comers policy might raise false expectations about automatically becoming an elder at the group's end, since not all men will have the gifting or character to become an elder. But this has not been a problem. God has used the original group to raise up godly elders, deacons, small group leaders, and generally fruitful husbands and father and church members as a result of the training.

THREE AREAS TO ADDRESS

What I learned from that experience (and from picking the brains of other pastors who were better at it than I was) is that developing new leaders requires addressing three main areas.

Content

First, content. Scripture requires that an elder "hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it" (Tit. 1:9). A church needs leaders who can explain what the Bible says and instruct people who don't understand. My goal was to train men who could explain what we believed about various doctrines such as the doctrines of election or inerrancy and why such doctrines are important.

So any training program for potential elders should provide instruction in major points of doctrine. That said, you should resist the temptation to require all of your elders to be as invested in theological investigation as you are. They don't need to be able to outline Bavinck's Reformed Dogmatics in the original Dutch; they just need to know what your church believes, why you believe it, and why it matters. I find Wayne Grudem's Bible Doctrine to be just the right blend of depth, readability, and length for the task.

Character

An elder must be morally above reproach and personally disciplined (Tit. 1:7-8). Putting men, even theologically learned men, in positions of leadership when they lack godly character is simply suicidal for the church. Christian leadership must be exercised in word and deed. And so training potential elders requires both careful instruction in godliness and an honest assessment of the candidate's personal holiness.

In our training program, we assigned readings that fostered reflection on some of the sins that seem to particularly plague men and cripple leadership, like lust, anger, and pride. Then as a group we would have frank conversations, some lasting for two or three meetings, about where those sins manifested themselves in our lives and how we could put them to death. We also focused on ways that the gospel helped us to cultivate positive character traits like love, hospitality, and the ability to take criticism.

Competence

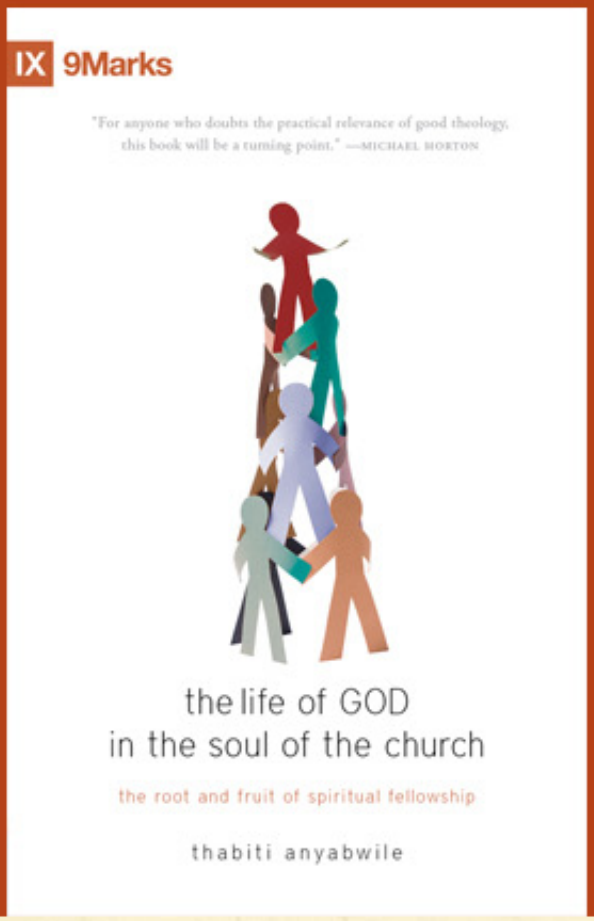
An elder also must able to teach (1 Tim. 3:2). It's not enough to have knowledge and character; he must be able to usefully minister the Word to other Christians. While books and resources can be helpful (Paul Tripp's Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands comes to mind), the only way to discover whether or not men are able to do this is to give them opportunities to teach. This teaching can take a number of different forms and should be followed up with specific

feedback so that they can improve. In our context we have given men an opportunity to teach Sunday school, preach on Sunday evenings, lead small groups, and disciple and counsel people in particular need.

INVEST FOR THE FUTURE

It may seem like your church has needs that are more pressing than training new elders. The regular life of a congregation will almost always generate more than enough work for a given week. But unless you are content for your congregation to be limited by the pastor's personal abilities, you would be wise to invest in seeing men grow in these areas.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:
Mike McKinley is the senior pastor of Guilford Baptist Church and is the author, most recently, of *Am I Really a Christian?* (Crossway, 2011).



WHAT IS SPIRITUAL FELLOWSHIP?

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By Garrett Kell

Raising Up Elders: Four Foundational Principles

The first time we sat down to talk, his life was a mess. His marriage was hanging by a thread, he was struggling with porn, and he was in a dead end job. If you would have told me that five years later, this man would be one of my best friends and a fellow elder in our church, I'm not sure I would have believed you. Thankfully, the Lord did abundantly more than I could have asked or imagined.

Finding faithful elders is an essential part of building a healthy church. Without godly pastors to lead, feed, and protect the flock, the congregation will suffer. But how do we raise up new elders? Is there a special potion we can put in the water to make them magically appear? Should we just sit back and wait for godly, theologically trained men to come knocking on our office door?

FOUNDATIONS FOR RAISING UP ELDERS

I believe God's Word provides principles that can help identify and train men to oversee Christ's church. Here are four.

1. Remember that Jesus gives elders as gifts to the church.

In a very real sense, we do not make elders, Jesus gives them.

Ephesians 4:11-12 says that Jesus "gave…shepherds…to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for the building up the body of Christ." Jesus builds up his flock by giving them qualified men who will lead them into maturity.

Similarly, Acts 20:28 points out that elders are men whom "the Holy Spirit has made…overseers to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood." Jesus, who shed his blood to purchase the church, then gives his bride elders to care for her.

So when you look for elders, remember what you are looking for. You are looking for gifts—men whom Christ raises up though his Spirit to love, instruct, and defend his beloved bride.

Practically, this means you do not need to feel the pressure of forcing an outcome, like King Saul who often pursued an unfaithful path due to fear or social pressure (e.g. 1 Sam. 15). Instead, you can be patient, trusting God to provide what your church needs. God may not always give us what we want when we want it, but he will always give us what we need when we need it. Trust him to provide the gift of faithful men to lead his church.

2. Prayerfully ask God to help you see whom he is raising up.

When Samuel went looking for the man God was raising up as king, he was tempted to look at the wrong criteria. We often do the same when trying to identify elders. First Samuel 16:6-7 recounts:

He looked on Eliab and thought, "Surely the Lord's anointed is before him." But the Lord said to Samuel, "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the Lord sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart."

Many times the men we least expect wind up being the Lord's choicest servants, while those we expect will be mighty in his kingdom prove to be less useful. To guard yourself from missing God's man, make sure your elder-identifying process is prayerful.

Prayer is easy to give lip service to, but are you really seeking God's will in this area?

As you seek to identify elders, ask God to help you see what he sees rather than being impressed with what first catches the eye. People skills, persuasive speech, and worldly success may endear someone to us for fleshly reasons, but we must ask the Lord to help us see not as man sees, but as he sees.

3. Remember that elders grow best in rich soil.

I'm not much of a gardener, but I do know that nutrient-rich soil is the best kind of soil for a crop. In the same way, we should cultivate an environment conducive to spiritual growth. This means leading our people to pray. It means explaining and applying God's Word in the pulpit, in counseling, and in everyday discipleship. It means building deep, authentic, sin-opposing relationships. We should also give away good books and God-glorifying articles.

As we do these types of things, the soil of our church becomes prime territory for a harvest of life to sprout up.

In my friend's case, God's Word, prayer, and honest, uncomfortable conversations began to take their toll on his flesh. He began to hate sin and turn from it. He began to love God's Word and share it with others. He began to have compassion and patience with others. He began to do what elders do, because he was growing in Christ-like maturity.

First Corinthians 3:6-8 reminds us that as we sow, plant, and water, God will give growth. In his mysterious way, the Lord works though our feeble efforts to display his faultless faithfulness in making people grow. And this is how elders are raised up. We sow with the gospel, we water with prayer, and we trust God to make it grow. So as you cultivate the soil of your church, do it in faith, trusting that in his perfect timing God will bring a harvest.

4. Invest your best efforts in faithful men.

While we are called to care for all the members of our church, we must guard our time and invest the best part of our ministry in those who will minister to others. What this means is, watch where God is working. If you see him raising up a man, make sure you or another elder invest time with him to fan the flame that God has sparked.

This idea of being intentional in our discipleship efforts is not rocket science, it is a basic leadership principle. Jesus had the twelve, but he invested extra time with Peter, James, and John. Paul had the churches, but he always had particular men with him like Timothy and Titus and Silas. Paul also told Timothy to be mindful of whom he invested in when he

said, “What you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also” (2 Tim. 2:2).

We should faithfully care for all the flock, but we must always watch out to see who is already exhibiting elder qualities. Who already takes initiative in evangelism and discipleship? Who already serves as a model in leading and loving his family? Who has good pastoral sensitivities and highly values God’s Word? Watch for these men and invest your life into theirs. Eat meals with them. Talk about Scripture with them. Pray with them.

“Who already takes initiative in evangelism and discipleship? Who already serves as a model in leading and loving his family? Who has good pastoral sensitivities and highly values God’s Word? Watch for these men and invest your life into theirs.”

Along with those basics, try to view your daily ministry duties as opportunities to develop these men. If you’ve recognized a potential elder, help him grow in caring for people by taking him on hospital visits or to funerals you perform. Help him grow as a counselor of God’s Word by having him sit in on marriage counseling that you are leading, or allow him to counsel people while you sit in. Help him grow as a teacher of God’s Word by giving up time in the pulpit, or at a Bible study, or in Sunday School. Finally, help him grow in understanding how elders think through difficult matters by allowing him to observe elders’ meetings.

JESUS WILL HELP

While the task of raising up elders can seem daunting, we know that Jesus will help us to do it. However, we must keep trusting and sowing and watering and waiting upon him. Jesus loves his church. Because of that, we have great hope that even now he is raising up men to love and lead his flock.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:
Garrett Kell is the senior pastor of Del Ray Baptist Church in Alexandria, Virginia.

By Garrett Kell

Four Ways to Equip New Elders

Each year the NFL and NBA host rookie symposiums for newly drafted players. The leagues use the meetings to instruct young, rich, popular men about how to handle all the pressures that come with their newfound fame and fortune. The players receive practical advice about budgeting money, avoiding groupies, and guarding their wallets from new "friends" and potential gold-diggers. Because of the great wealth and responsibility these men have been given, they need training to help them flourish in their new role of athletic icon.

FOUR WAYS TO EQUIP NEW ELDERS

If professional athletes need to be trained to handle the pressures of their enviable yet fleeting position, how much more should the men who serve as elders in the church of the eternal King receive training to carry out their responsibilities. In what follows, I lay out some simple ideas for helping new elders get settled in and begin to serve in their new role as under-shepherd.

1. Get him a brother.

One of the best things you can do to serve a new elder is to set him up with another, more experienced elder to help him adjust to his new role. This relationship allows the new elder to freely process questions and receive practical feedback. There are plenty of things elders can talk about over lunch or coffee, but here are a few suggestions.

Talk about meetings. Each elder board has its own culture, and it may be good for the experienced elder to help the new elder process what's happening in the meetings and understand any personal dynamics that may seem strange. If the new elder is overly talkative, the older elder might help him think about listening more. If he doesn't talk enough, the experienced elder can reassure him of the freedom he has to speak up.

Talk about pressure. New elders will often feel pressures they never have before. They'll feel a new kind of burden for the church. They may feel a sinful temptation to prove themselves among the other elders. They'll surely feel the pressure that comes with our inadequacies as ministers of the gospel. Having another elder to process pressure with is a must.

Talk about time. New elders are normally men who have demanding jobs, flourishing families, discipleship relationships, and countless other things that call for their attention. Add to that the new responsibilities of elder meetings and memos and counseling sessions and teaching responsibilities, and all of a sudden he's even more stacked up. Make sure one of the elders helps him process how to balance his schedule and discern what might need to be cut or rearranged.

Talk about family. Serving as an elder requires sacrifice from the man and also from his family. Make sure you help him think though how he should guard and lead his family under the new pressures he feels. He needs to think about how much of what he hears at the meetings he can share with his wife. He needs someone to make sure he remembers that his family is his first flock and that if he doesn't care for them, he is not qualified to care for the church (1 Tim. 3:4-5).

Talk about holiness. Satan is never pleased when another servant of the Lord is raised up. New positions are often accompanied by a new flood of temptations. Make sure that the new elder, like the rest, is having honest, sin-defying conversations with the other elders. Remind each other that we must first be men who love Jesus and hate sin. Positions of eldership can come and go, but our devotion to Christ cannot. Help each other fight for holiness.

Talk about God's grace. An incoming elder may be tempted to think that he needs to prove himself. Spend time with him to encourage him in the ministry that God is already doing in and through him. Help him to see how God is blessing his discipleship, evangelism, and teaching. Help him to recall how faithful God has been to him and to those around him. Encourage him to press into prayer and to actively fight for unity with others. Remind him that his ministry success is rooted in God's abundant grace, not in his amazing abilities.

Talk with each other. Encourage the existing elders to spend time with the new elder. Take him out to eat or go fishing or play chess or whatever you want, but spend personal time with him. Share your testimonies with one another. Pray together. Encourage each other. Consider an elder retreat. Go into the woods. Kill something together. Eat it. A band of brothers who do battle together need to be brothers, and this doesn't happen solely through meetings.

2. Get him some books.

One of the best gifts you can give a new elder is books. When he joins the team, greet him with some resources to help him grow as a minister of the gospel and as an elder in your church.

Give him "the stack." I'd encourage each elder team to put together a reading list that can be given to each new elder when they come on board. Our church has a set of 8 books that each new elder is given, along with a monthly reading plan to use as a guide for meetings with a more experienced elder. There are many good resources out there, but a few of my most highly recommended are *The Deliberate Church* by Mark Dever and Paul Alexander*, The Trellis and the Vine* by Colin Marshall and Tony Payne, *Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands* by Paul Tripp, the 9Marks volumes on *Church Membership* and *Church Discipline* by Jonathan Leeman, and *The Reformed Pastor* by Richard Baxter.

Consider a policy manual. A booklet of important minutes, major decisions or trend-setting issues may help the new guy get up to speed on where your church's elders have been in the past. I know when I read though my own church's booklet that contained our old minutes I learned much about what happened before I got here and why we do what we do today.

3. Get him a budget.

I am aware that not every church can swing this. But if you are able to give non-staff elders a small stipend to use on discipleship meals, resources, conferences, and other ministry-related expenses, it can go a long way in communicating that you value them and their development as faithful ministers of the gospel.

4. Get him on a billboard.

It is important for the church to see their elders lead publically as much as possible. This builds familiarity, trust, and love for them. So, do what you can to get all your elders, including the new guys, to publicly lead and teach the congregation. Is there an opportunity for him to pray during the service? Can he lead the service? Can he teach a membership class? Can he present new members to the congregation? Would you consider having him preach a sermon in the main

gathering or at another gathering? When can he share his testimony with the congregation? Ask the Lord to show you ways to get these new brothers before the church.

DON'T HOPE IN TRAINING SYSTEMS, BUT IN THE LORD

As you consider how to develop the new elders that Jesus has raised up in your church, continue to trust that God's Spirit is working in the midst of the mess. Above all, focus your efforts on ensuring that the new elders continue to deepen their personal walk with Christ. In the end our hope is not in training systems but in the Lord, that he will use our feeble efforts to build his church for his glory.

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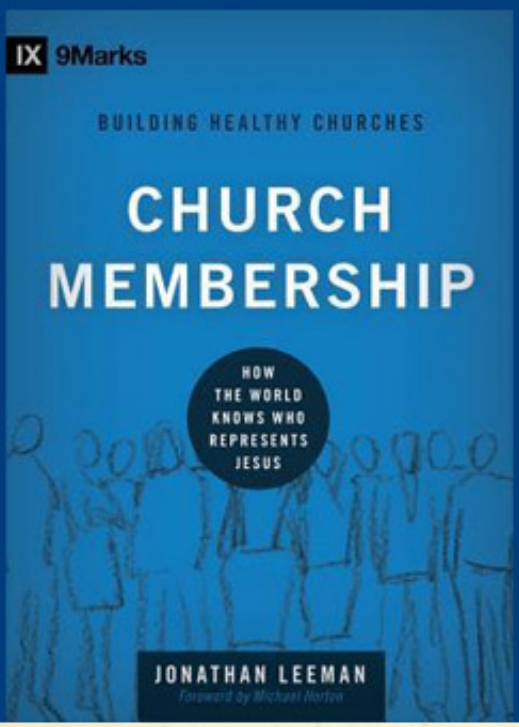
Is church membership really that important?



What does is matter whether someone is a member of a church?

Should churches even have formal membership?

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By Steve Boyer

Besetting Sins of Lay Elders

The biblical qualifications for an elder don't require an elder to be sinless (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Tit. 1:5-10). Otherwise, we wouldn't have elders! Rather, an elder must be *marked* by the qualifications listed in 1 Timothy and Titus. They must characterize his life as a whole.

But elders do sin, and sometimes an elder can be tempted towards certain sins because of the position he holds. So what might those sins be for lay elders, men who shepherd the church while supporting their families through another full-time vocation? (Some of this will also apply to bi-vocational pastors—men who preach every week while holding down another job.)

DON'T BE A DEMAS

A lay elder typically works in a secular environment. He's not on church staff, so he will daily interact with many people who don't hold to a Christian worldview. And of course a lay elder's non-Christian colleagues will not do much to hold him directly accountable to live consistently as a Christian. Therefore, while working full-time in a secular context provides great opportunities to share the gospel, it's also an environment that is comfortable and inviting to our sinful flesh.

Battling each day against the world's temptations makes us weary, and Satan loves nothing better than to see a leader in the church enticed and led away into sin. Take Demas, for example. Demas was a fellow worker of Paul's listed among the likes of Luke and Mark (Phm. 24), but in the end he deserted Paul because he "loved this world" (2 Tim. 4:10).

We're not sure what Demas loved about this world that made him leave Paul, but we can all identify with the pressure to conform to the world's evil desires. Our sinful flesh craves leisurely pursuits, lusts, wealth, power, and acceptance, and so we can be tempted to check our Christianity at the door on Monday morning.

Therefore, it's essential that a lay elder heed Paul's words to Timothy to watch his life and doctrine closely for the sake of his own salvation (1 Tim. 4:16). He must daily put his hope in God and not in wealth or the things of this world, which are passing away (1 Tim. 6:17). He must look to his Savior Jesus Christ who suffered in his body and arm himself with the same attitude and be done with sin (1 Pet. 4:1).

If you're a lay elder, are you watching your life closely as you go about your day? In what areas have you, or could you, become too friendly with the world's enticements? What can you do to protect yourself against them?

Don't be a Demas by loving the world.

DON'T BE A PHARISEE

But don't be a Pharisee, either.

One night I met with a younger brother who humbly confessed his sin to me. As we discussed the matter, he shared with me his reservation in confessing because he didn't want me to think less of him. His statement hit me like a ton of bricks.

I understand that this brother was rightfully shamed by his sin and that he also had a fear-of-man issue going on, but I kept turning the question over in my mind, "Why did he think I would think less of him?" After all, we are both sinners saved by grace. What gives?

"I understand that this brother was rightfully shamed by his sin and that he also had a fear-of-man issue going on, but I kept turning the question over in my mind, "Why did he think I would think less of him?" After all, we are both sinners saved by grace. What gives?"

As I reflected more on our relationship, I realized that although we were good friends and had good spiritual conversations, I rarely shared with him my own battle against sin and how I was doing in fighting for repentance and faith in the gospel. And what's worse is that by my silence I was unwittingly teaching him to do the same!

Lay elders are generally not in front of the congregation as frequently as the senior pastor or other full-time elders. Yet, as leaders in the church, our flesh wants to be out in front, also. We want to be well-regarded and noticed, and so we're tempted to show the church our good deeds *without* showing our failures and struggles with sin. In short, we're tempted to be Pharisees.

In doing this, we end up leaving others with a high view of ourselves instead of a high view of God. We fail to model before the church how to live a Christian life by humbly admitting our failures and boasting only in our Lord Jesus Christ for saving us (Gal. 6:14). After all, that's the message our church needs to hear most.

So do you confess your sins to others? Is it easy for others to confess their sins to you? In what ways have you stolen the glory of God's work in your life?

DON'T BE A JUDAS

There is another "church leader" we can learn from: Judas.

Certain privileges come with the responsibility of serving as a lay elder. I remember being given a key to the church building years ago. Cool, right? In laboring to give oversight to the church, a lay elder begins to utilize these privileges, such as access to staff and resources—privileges usually supervised by church staff.

Unfortunately, in a fallen world, privileges can sometimes lead to arrogance and selfish ambition, and lay elders can be tempted to control these privileges and overstep their bounds of authority. Of course, all elders are charged with oversight of the church, but each elder governs alongside others and doesn't need to exercise authority in every sphere in the same way. So where the plurality has delegated specific responsibilities to staff elders, such as often is the case with church staff and resources, a lay elder ought to take the posture of yielding to the staff elders' decisions in these matters.

Judas Iscariot misused privileges given to him. As one of Jesus' disciples, he was responsible for handling the moneybag, but he didn't like how Jesus used their resources. In John 12, Judas objected to Jesus allowing expensive perfume to be poured on him. Then in John 13, after Jesus washed his disciples feet and commanded them to do the same, you could see that Judas had had enough. This wasn't his kind of Messiah, so he betrayed him.

Every elder is going to lead somewhat differently, and that's okay. But lay elders must be careful not to usurp authority or privileges granted to staff elders. This includes decisions from how church staff should spend or prioritize their time to who can borrow the church van next weekend. These are decisions usually delegated to staff elders to oversee. Such usurping only creates tension, bitterness, and resentment.

It would be better to trust and respect those placed in the position to make these decisions, whether it's the senior pastor or church administrator, knowing that you both serve a sovereign, faithful God who has given each of you his Spirit. Lay elders can exercise their authority best by leading in humility.

So how do you handle the privileges you have or have not been given as a lay elder? How are your relationships with church staff? Do you interfere with decisions entrusted to staff elders?

DON'T BE A SAUL

Finally, we can learn from King Saul. Don't be a Saul.

The lay elder usually has two large spheres of work: his paying job and pastoring the church. Throw in family, exercise, eating, and sleep, and the lay elder is a busy man. Sometimes a lay elder can feel like he comes home from his day job only to go to his church job, trying to faithfully lead his family amidst both.

Unfortunately, a common misconception is that staff elders have it easy since they work for the church and don't have to work in the "real" world. But these brothers do the lion's share of the pastoral work in the church and are also regularly called on to serve after hours.

Given the demands of working and eldering, a temptation for the lay elder is to abdicate his pastoral responsibility, leaving staff elders to do all the work. This may look like foregoing teaching duties, urgent pastoral matters, hospital visitation, pastoral decision-making, and more.

Reasons for abdicating are many. King Saul abdicated his leadership responsibility when be failed to fight Goliath because of fear (1 Sam. 17). A lay elder may abdicate because of laziness, or selfishness, or envy—because the staff elders are getting paid for their work and he's not.

Whatever the reason, both lay elders and staff elders have the same biblical job description, and both must imitate our Lord Jesus who gave himself up for the church. Self-sacrifice is necessary for shepherding Christ's church. A lay elder must remember that he should serve because he's willing, not because he is obligated (1 Pet. 5:2). It comes down to his love for Christ and his church. When we're motivated by love for Christ's church, it's amazing how such sacrificial service becomes our desire and joy (1 Thess. 2:19).

So how is your love for the church? What areas of pastoral oversight do you abdicate to the staff elders? How can you help fellow elders more in caring for the church?

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By Jonathan Leeman

How Pastor Mark Passes Out Authority

Are you willing to read an article on authority not drawn from my own experience, but from my observations of another man? While I only have a couple coins clanging around in my pockets, the sides of this man's slacks look like a greedy chipmunk's cheeks.

"Pastor Mark," I'll call him, has had plenty of opportunities to accrue authority to himself over the years, some of which he keeps, many of which he passes out, especially to his lay elders. These are the men who share the pastoral burden of shepherding our church, but who do not receive pay for doing so.

Watching him give authority to others ever since I first met this senior pastor in 1996 has been instructive for me. And it has shaped the culture of our church in countless ways. I will start with the ways I have seen him distribute authority, and then I will list some of the ways I have seen this shape our church's culture. Most of these lessons apply firstly to senior pastors and secondarily to the rest of us.

WAYS TO DISTRIBUTE AUTHORITY TO LAY-ELDERS (AND OTHERS)

1. **Build the church on the gospel.** No matter who is teaching, the gospel is front and center in every sermon and Sunday School lesson in my church. Pastor Mark established this pattern. When relationships and power structures are grounded in the gospel, people use their authority not to lord it over one another, but to serve one another (Matt. 20:25-28).

2. **Establish a plurality of staff and non-staff elders.** In an elder board composed exclusively of staff elders each man may possess one vote, but the staffing structure necessarily maintains a hierarchy among the elders. Adding non-staff elders to the board disrupts and flattens that hierarchy.

3. **Limit the percentage of main-slot preaching.** Every church has a main gathering. For most it is the Sunday morning slot. Mark, with the elders' agreement, limits himself to preaching 50 to 65 percent of Sunday mornings. That way, other voices have the chance to grow and gain authority, and the congregation is less dependent on Mark and more on the Word.

4. **Create many other opportunities to teach.** Our church has about 80 teaching slots for adult Sunday School classes over the course of the year (each slot consists of a 7 to 13 week class), as well as 52 chances to preach a Sunday evening devotion, as well as a couple dozen chances to teach a Wednesday night Bible study. All told, there are around 150 chances for other men to teach the congregation, and I have not even mentioned small groups. When men prove proficient in teaching, they accrue an appropriate authority.

5. **Seldom (or never) preach the Sunday evening service.** Mark never preaches in our church's Sunday evening service. Instead the church hears from an elder or a would-be elder, though when in town, Mark is always there leading the service, sitting in the front row listening to others preach.

6. **Give young teachers the chance to make mistakes.** I can think of one or two instances where a teacher or preacher said something so inappropriate that he was not asked to teach again. But generally speaking, young teachers have a lot of leeway in our church to be boring and make mistakes. Since the church is more dependent on the Word than on Pastor Mark, they have much patience for the young men. The church loves what they are learning no matter the source, and they have seen these young men improve over time and be sent out to other churches.

7. **Let others steal your ideas.** Mark freely lets other teachers inside the church adapt his anecdotes, borrow his best lines, and mimic his messages. For instance, the elders have been teaching his "Why Join a Church?" class for years as a membership class. And never is credit claimed.

8. **Be willing to lose elder votes.** I've heard it said of other senior pastors, "He never loses a vote among the elders. And even when he does, he finds a way to bring it back up again and win." When that's the case, you *almost* might as well get rid of your elders. Talk about undermining their leadership!

9. **Be slow to speak, and speak sparingly in elders meetings.** Three times a year, the elders welcome a number of pastors from other churches to sit in on our elders meetings and observe. These pastors often mention their surprise at how little Mark speaks, and how willing the other elders are to disagree with them.

10. **Don't be the chairman in elders meetings or members meetings.** Giving another man the chance to be chairman who both sets the agenda and leads the meeting is an easy way to distribute authority.

11. **Let other elders lead the congregation through difficult issues in members meetings.** When it comes to leading the church through church discipline cases, big financial decisions, or tough topics of this kind, whichever elder has been most involved is the one to lead the church publicly.

12. **Use an "invitations committee."** If you are a pastor who receives regular invitations to speak outside your church, use a committee of staff members and/or elders to help you review those invitations. And be willing to let them guide and even determine the decision.

13. **Be devoted to one thing in the church and give freedom elsewhere.** Mark is utterly devoted to preparing sermons and keeps a loose grip on most everything else. So if you want to see the church doing more in small groups, for women's ministry, in caring for the poor, or for any number of things, Mark will give you the freedom to do it yourself, and generally keep his hands off of your ministry. This might be construed as being unsupportive. But in fact, it is a way of requiring other natural leaders to grow up within the church and, in the end, helping more to get done.

14. **Don't micromanage.** When it comes to staff members (including staff elders) being present at meetings and services, Mark micromanages. He wants *all* his chicks in the nest at all times—and on time! But when it comes just about everything else, he lets the chicks have free reign of the pond and barnyard. Micromanagement not only exhausts a leader, it undermines the initiative of others.

15. **Review weekly services.** Structuring a time into the weekly schedule for giving and receiving feedback over Sunday's services teaches men to evaluate, to think, and to love the congregation better. It grows them as leaders. Plus…

16. **Be willing to receive criticism.** Whether in the weekly service review or at other times, being willing to receive criticism gives other leaders or would-be leaders room to spread their wings. If you can never receive criticism, you are teaching everyone around you that they must conform to your preferences or be punished. Leaders don't grow in this kind of environment. They either whither or leave, or, what's worse, instead of growing, they become set in proud ways.

17. **Invite lay elders to give feedback on services.** Mark does not require lay elders to attend the weekly service review times, but he always invites them to attend and give their feedback.

18. **Pray for other churches and other denominations.** Publicly praying for other churches and denominations helps to defeat tribalism and keeps people focused on the gospel. It teaches people that your ministry is not about *you* and *your ministry*, but about Christ. This creates mental space for elders and others to think that they, too, can begin their own initiatives toward gospel ends.

19. **Be quick to forgive.** It is hard for a carping individual to give away authority. The people around you will always be imperfect, and if you're quick to find fault, you will never give away authority. If you are quick to forgive—genuinely forgive—you will find it easier to entrust and empower others. Forgiveness involves not only clearing debt, it involves re-authorization.

20. **Rejoice in the victories of others.** Do you have to be the one to make the shot, or are you happy to make the assist, so long as the ball gets through basket? Mark appears to rejoice in the ministry victories of others as much as his own. If someone else can do the job, he would prefer for them to do it, leaving him free to do something else.

HOW GIVING AWAY AUTHORITY SHAPES A CHURCH CULTURE

When the leader "on top" is characterized by continuously and generously giving authority to his lay elders (and others), he shapes the church's culture in wonderful ways.

1. **It helps to keep the gospel uppermost.** When a man's ministry is characterized by giving away authority to others, he helps them keep their eyes focused on the ministry's gospel purposes rather than on him.

2. **It keeps a church from being tribalistic.** A man who continually gives away authority teaches those around him that he is most interested in the success of the gospel, regardless of its source. "I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me [imprisonment] has really served to advance the gospel" (Phil. 1:12). And Paul treats this as a good thing even when the sources of gospel ministry are not as reliable as one would hope (see 1:15).

3. **It encourages church members to share resources.** When I see that the leader is not out for himself, I'm inclined to share my goods (from my best ideas to the food on my table) with others.

4. **It destroys natural social hierarchies.** Our church is filled with people who have "impressive" jobs, the kind of jobs that might be intimidating to others and create social hierarchies. But what's striking to me is that members interact as equals. Why? Primarily because the gospel is first and foremost. We're all sinners saved by grace. But also, Mark does not lord it over others, and that sets a pattern for everyone.

5. **It cultivates trust.** When I see that the leader is not out for himself, I'm more inclined to trust his motives, even when he is asking me to do something difficult or make a sacrifice.

6. **It cultivates teachability and the willingness to receive criticism.** Again, if I trust the man, that he is not interested in lording it over me but has a pattern of giving away authority, I will become more willing to listen to his criticisms of me. I will be more inclined to think they are rooted in love rather than power.

7. **It promotes "real" relationships.** In an environment where authority is jealously guarded, relationships are characterized by politics and strategy. Guards remain up, vulnerabilities are not exposed, and transparency diminishes. But when people feel empowered they are more likely to be transparent and honest.

8. **It promotes a willingness to forgive.** When the leader is quick to forgive the faults of others, he will more willing to entrust others with authority. That in turn will help others to do the same.

9. **It encourages the church to be training-minded**. A church which sees a pastor continually work to train and empower and others will have a hard time not catching the vision and sharing it. After all, they will be the beneficiaries of it and its fruit.

10. **It helps a church to be outward focused**. The process of raising up, authorizing, and sending out leaders helps a church realize that the goal of the gospel is not just to make our own house the best it can be, but to help other houses become happier and healthier, too.

Now, delegation can be done poorly or lazily. You can assign responsibility to people who don't know what they are doing. You can be too busy or too afraid to provide feedback. You can treat every idea as a good idea. You can send the wrong guy on the right mission, or the right guy on the wrong mission. Much wisdom is required to delegate and authorize well. I've heard Mark say that he assumes that God has given everyone *some* instrument in the orchestra to play, and part of his job is helping people figure out which instrument is theirs.

The question comes down to heart posture: are we happy to see others gain authority, or do we jealously guard it, afraid that people might surpass us? If the former, what are we doing to spread it?

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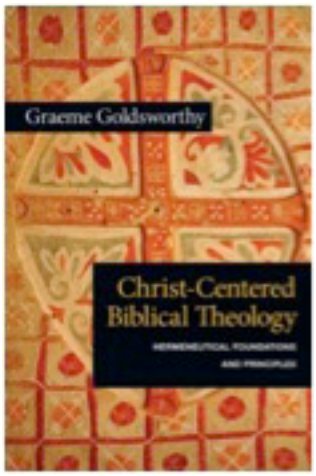

BOOK REVIEW:
Christ-Centered Biblical Theology

Reviewed by Stephen J. Wellum

Graeme Goldsworthy. *Christ-Centered Biblical Theology: Hermeneutical Foundations and Principles*. InterVarsity Press, 2012. 240 pages. $20.00

Graeme Goldsworthy's name is rightly associated with the discipline of biblical theology (BT). Through many years of teaching and pastoral ministry, and especially in his many publications[1], he has challenged preachers, teachers, and indeed all Christians to grasp God's big picture for the life and health of the church. Further, Goldsworthy has repeatedly reminded us that BT is at the heart of evangelical hermeneutics and is thus indispensable to our preaching, doctrinal construction, and pastoral ministry.

EXPOUNDING A VISION FOR BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

In his new work *Christ-Centered Biblical Theology: Hermeneutical Foundations and Principles*, Goldsworthy returns to the subject of BT with a twofold focus. First, it is obvious throughout the work that Goldsworthy wants to honor Donald Robinson, his former professor and colleague at Moore Theological College in Sydney, Australia, who was so instrumental in the development of his own thinking on BT.

Second, he wants to explore and defend Robinson's approach to BT, along with Gabriel Hebert's contribution, which he labels "The Robinson-Hebert schema," as the best way to structure the Bible on its own terms (22). Goldsworthy rightly notes that among those who practice BT there is not universal agreement concerning methodology. So, he spends the first three chapters explaining why BT has been neglected in the church and the academy (33-37), how he defines BT (38-42), and the theological presuppositions which undergird the discipline (42-55), and providing a robust defense of the Bible's conception of salvation history (56-75) and a restatement of what he believes is the central theme of Scripture, namely "the kingdom of God defined simply as God's people in God's place under God's rule" (75). He then devotes the

remainder of the book (chapters 4-11) to defending what he believes is the Bible's own internal structure over against other evangelical approaches to BT.

Goldsworthy rightly contends that BT consists in more than simply relating the events of the biblical story in order. Instead, BT must first grasp the Bible's own internal structure and then draw conclusions based on how the Bible unfolds *on its own terms*. Given the lack of consensus among evangelicals on how the Bible is put together, Goldsworthy proposes that the "Robinson-Hebert" scheme best reflects the Bible's structure. The rest of the book defends this scheme. In chapters 4-5, Goldsworthy sets the context for his discussion by summarizing the various methodological proposals of leading evangelical biblical theologians such as Geerhardus Vos, Edmund Clowney, Dennis Johnson, Willem VanGemeren, William Dumbrell, Sidney Greidanus, Charles Scobie, Craig Bartholomew and Michael Goheen, Gerhard Hasel, and Elmer Martens. He spends most of his time critiquing the Vos-Clowney approach which divides redemptive history into various epochs. Goldsworthy's main critique is that their epochal divisions are not consistent to the way the Bible structures itself (111-132). Thus, for example, the last great epoch of the OT in addition to creation, the fall, the flood, and the call of Abraham is the period from Moses to the coming of Christ. But Goldsworthy rightly questions whether this is how the OT divides redemptive history and whether this does justice to the watershed revelation associated with David and Solomon, let alone the later prophetic eschatology which focuses on the return from exile, the restoration of the people, and the anticipation of the renewal of all things.

Goldsworthy's Proposal: Three Stages of Revelation

What does Goldsworthy suggest is a better proposal? In chapters 6-8 he argues for the threefold structure of Robinson-Hebert as best reflecting how the Bible itself moves from creation to new creation. He proposes that God's plan unfolds in three main stages: 1) the basic biblical history from creation to Abraham, and then from Abraham to David and Solomon; 2) the eschatology of the later writing prophets; and 3) the fulfillment of all things in Christ.

As Goldsworthy develops these three stages, he argues that the first stage of biblical history not only provides the rationale and backdrop to the calling of Abraham and the covenant with Israel, it also establishes the typological patterns which are later developed in the prophets and fulfilled in Christ. In addition, he argues that the high point of the first stage is found in David and Solomon and in the building of the temple which represents God's presence among his people, an echo of Eden of old.

The second stage begins with Solomon's apostasy. Biblical history from this time on primarily features judgment overlaid with the prophetic promises that the Day of the Lord will come and bring ultimate blessing and judgment. In this stage of revelation, the typological patterns laid down in the earlier history are now recapitulated as they project a greater future fulfillment.

In the last and final stage, the fulfillment of the previous stages now takes place in Christ who fulfills all the previous patterns in himself in an "already-not yet" fashion (170-174).

Macro-Typology

Viewing the structure of the Bible this way not only leads us to read the entire Bible Christologically, it also allows for what Goldsworthy labels "macro-typology." Instead of restricting typology to certain persons, events, and institutions, Goldsworthy proposes that whole stages of revelation are typological and, as such, "there is no limit to types in Scripture other than Scripture itself, which embraces the whole of reality" (185).

Yet in making such a sweeping statement Goldsworthy does not want to open the door to allegory. He writes that the "removal of limits to typology does not mean that anything goes, or that we take a cavalier attitude to finding types of Christ in every little detail on the basis of some association of ideas" (186). For example, he rejects the redness of Rahab's cord as a type of Jesus' blood since this represents "fanciful, non-contextual associations that avoid the real theology behind these things" (187). Rather the entire stage of revelation is the context of typology and the "typological

value of a person, event or institution is governed by the role that each plays in the theology of the redemptive revelation within the stage of revelation in which it occurs" (187).

Unpacking Robinson, Drawing Conclusions

In chapter 10, Goldsworthy pays tribute to his mentor Donald Robinson by unpacking what he believes are some of the more seminal points of Robinson's work, such as his understanding of the Israel-church relationship, eschatology, and baptism. In regard to the latter, Goldsworthy agrees with Robinson that in the NT water baptism signifies nothing more than what it signified in John the Baptist's mission: a person's gesture of repentance toward God in hope of forgiveness and the fulfillment of the promises of the covenant (212). Goldsworthy then concludes that Scripture gives no indication that baptism is considered an initiation into the church, nor is it essential to the apostolic mission. Ultimately he thinks that baptism should be viewed as a matter of indifference which may be applied to believers and the children of believers. This is a very unfortunate conclusion and it is hard to see how this follows from his entire discussion, much less how it follows from Scripture itself. This certainly is the weakest point of the book despite Goldsworthy's intent to honor his mentor.

Chapter 11 finishes the book with a helpful chapter on how to do BT. In it Goldsworthy illustrates his method by sketching a BT of the temple and prayer.

ASSESSING GOLDSWORTHY'S APPROACH TO BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

Overall this is a helpful work on BT and a careful study of it will pay rich dividends. Goldsworthy is on target in seeking to describe the Bible's own internal structure and thus how the Bible fits together *on its own terms*. In this regard his discussion of the three stages of revelation is helpful for thinking through how redemptive history is structured. Unfortunately this discussion is often neglected in BT. Too often the practice of BT leads people merely to work out broad themes across the canon without ever asking whether those themes are being structured the way Scripture structures them.

Progression of the Covenants is a Better Backbone

However, even though I am sympathetic with Goldsworthy's proposal, I think a better case can be made for thinking that the *progression of the biblical covenants* is the backbone of the biblical storyline and that a proper unpacking of the covenants will make better sense of the three stages of revelation that Goldsworthy rightly notes.

So, beginning in Genesis 1-11, what frames these chapters is God's covenant with creation first made in Adam and then in Noah. As God's promise of redemption from Genesis 3:15 is given greater clarity and definition through the respective covenants tied to Abraham, Israel, and David, we can make better sense of how God's grand plan of redemption progressively unfolds in promise, prophecy, and type. As the covenants develop and unpack the various typological structures, and especially as the prophets recapitulate and project forward the typological patterns developed in those covenants and look forward to the arrival of a new and better covenant, the developing revelation Goldsworthy rightly draws attention to is better structured along the plotline of Scripture in terms of the progression of the covenants.

Is Everything Typological?

In this light, I do not find persuasive his discussion of macro-typology and the unlimited number of types, despite the restraint he places upon this discussion. If types are unlimited in number then it seems difficult to argue that something is or is not a type. A better way to proceed is to argue that typology is indeed limited and that it is through the biblical covenants that typological structures are developed, clarified, and projected toward their eschatological fulfillment in Christ.

A SERVICE FOR THE CHURCH

In this book Goldsworthy has once again done a service for the church, despite the caveats I raise. May the Lord use this work to sharpen our thinking and enable us to become those who "correctly handle the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15).

[1] E.g., Gospel and Kingdom (1981), now published in The Goldsworthy Trilogy (2000), Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture (2000), According to Plan (2002), and Gospel-Centered Hermeneutics (2006).

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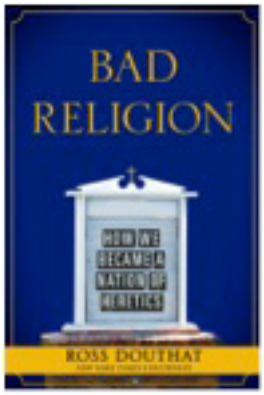

BOOK REVIEW:

Bad Religion: How We Became a Nation of Heretics

Reviewed by Matt McCullough

Ross Douthat, *Bad Religion: How We Became a Nation of Heretics*. Free Press, 2012. 337 pages. $26.00

Throughout *Bad Religion*, *New York Times* columnist Ross Douthat's third book, the wit, precision, and rhetorical power of the author's weekly columns are on full display. But here Douthat, a devout Roman Catholic, puts his skill as a cultural critic to work to explain the shape of American Christianity and its fading role in American society since the middle of the 20th century.

BAD RELIGION: A STORY OF SLOW MOTION COLLAPSE

According to Douthat, the widely bemoaned decline in America's national life is due not to too much religion or too little religion but to bad religion: "the slow motion collapse of traditional Christianity and the rise of a variety of destructive pseudo-Christianities in its place" (3). It's an argument that deserves careful attention. Used well, this book could be very helpful to pastors. Used poorly, I fear this book could reinforce some of the very trends it seeks to redirect. In this review I want to offer a hearty recommendation tempered by a gentle warning.

The Story of the Past Sixty Years of American Christianity

The book's first part tells the story of American Christianity in the latter half of the twentieth century. In Douthat's telling, it is not a pretty story. If you're unfamiliar with this phase of American religious history, this section of the book deserves special attention. His account is admittedly selective, and religious insiders and professional historians have found legitimate reasons to quibble with details here and there. But overall, the narrative bears all the marks of keen journalism: its analysis is deeply insightful, sharply focused, and eminently readable.

Douthat's story begins in the post-war era, what he calls "The Lost World," a time when orthodox Christianity enjoyed a revival of sorts along with a new place of prominence and respect in American society. In our cultural moment, the 1950s have come to represent anything but a golden age. They're seen as an era defined more by Mad Men and McCarthyism,

by Stepford families and segregation, than by a robust and effective Christian witness. But in a way, Douthat's onto something.

The 1950s did see a notable rise in church attendance, probably spurred by the trauma of the WWII years, the specter of a godless communism, and the possibility of nuclear holocaust. But more than church attendance, Douthat points to the prominence of orthodox Christians in positions of cultural power. He points to Reinhold Niebuhr, whose realism about sinful human nature even won the respect of atheists like Arthur Schlesinger. He points to a string of Christian thinkers who landed on the cover of *Time*. He points to Oxford's C.S. Lewis in the mainstream of the transatlantic literary and intellectual culture. He points to the faith-based activism of Martin Luther King, Jr. He even points to the widespread popularity of the Protestant Billy Graham and the Catholic Fulton Sheen. These figures were obviously different from each other in critical ways, but what they shared—and what ultimately matters most for Douthat—was a sturdy confidence in the truth and relevance of Christian orthodoxy in the modern world.

In the 1960s this golden age began to crumble. Douthat suggests several contributing factors, from the polarizing partisanship of Christian leaders to the forces of sexual liberation and the distancing of American common sense from Christian morality. But what matters more for this story is the response of American Christians to the new climate, a response that drove a deep wedge between left and right.

According to Douthat, the response of the left was defined by accommodation, an attempt to hold on to cultural prominence by updating Christian conviction to suit modern tastes. This decision—evident in elements of both Protestantism and Catholicism—backfired as mainline churches saw numbers plummet through the 1960s and 70s. Having traded Christian convictions for partisan causes, little remained to make Christian institutions necessary. Douthat's conclusion is typically witty and on-point: "Political activism wasn't enough: Why would you need to wash down your left-wing convictions with a draft of Communion wine, when you could take the activism straight and do something else with your weekends?" (109).

The response of the right, he argues, was different in substance but similar in result. Social shifts of the 1960s, especially the sexual revolution and its legal enshrinement in *Roe v. Wade*, galvanized conservative Christianity and rejuvenated an evangelical base that was still laboring to move beyond the cultural retreat of the fundamentalist decades. Douthat celebrates the political partnership of evangelicals and Catholics and the ECT concord. He celebrates Carl Henry, Francis Schaeffer, and their tribe, who reengaged evangelicals with secular culture.

But in the end this conservative reaction fared no better than liberal accommodation in one crucial respect: "the growth and momentum and confidence of post-World War II Christianity was still a distant memory...The awakening that some believers claimed was happening around them was often more evident in their particular subcultures than in the culture as a whole" (131). At the turn of the century, he argues, there is plenty of vibrant religiosity, but it is powerless and largely irrelevant. The culprit, Douthat believes, is a widespread embrace of heresy.

Analysis and Indictment of Heresies

Part two represents the central contribution of the book. Its chapters offer analysis and indictment of the several heresies Douthat blames for Christianity's loss of relevance in American life. In turn, he considers:

- the revisioning of Jesus and the witness of the Gospels by popular authors like Bart Ehrman and Dan Brown,
- the "pray and grow rich" gospel of Creflo Dollar, Joel Osteen, Bruce Wilkinson and, in his own way, Larry Burkett,
- the amorphous, un-tethered, self-affirming spirituality of Oprah Winfrey and *Eat, Pray, Love*,
- and, finally, the corrosive idolatry of Christian nationalism.

This section of the book will prove very useful to pastors. As pastor of a church near a college campus, I plan to make the chapter on the Gospels my go-to resource for students feeling the pull of revisionist histories. Douthat's critique

of Ehrman and others is informed by all the right sources but is thoroughly accessible and, to this reader anyway, thoroughly compelling. The other chapters in this section are cut from the same cloth and are ready for use when you need them. I was especially pleased by the nationalism-as-heresy chapter, an unexpectedly trenchant and accurate critique of the causes and ecclesiological effects of worshipping at the altar of America.

Underlying each of these chapters is an important insight into the nature of heresy in all its varied forms. Heresy, Douthat suggests, is typically a dismantling of orthodoxy's central paradoxes. Heresy makes of the God-Man either god or man. It makes of Jesus a one-dimensional figure, embracing the friend of sinners but neglecting his call to repent and commitment to transforming sinners. It celebrates the dignity and uniqueness of the human soul made in God's image but discards the fact of original sin. It affirms material comforts as blessings of a loving God but turns these blessings to faith's entitlements, leaving no room for the suffering of the faithful or a God who disciplines those he loves.

Heresies such as these, Douthat admits, have been features of American Christianity since colonial days. But what sets our time apart is their strength, their pervasiveness, and the relative weakness of any orthodox response.

REMEMBER, THE GOSPEL IS BOTH WISDOM AND FOOLISHNESS

This book is a call for a renewed, robust, public confidence in the power of Christian orthodoxy. All faithful pastors should resonate with this plea. But we would also do well to note the locale in which this book aims to see orthodoxy resurge.

Douthat acknowledges the flourishing of traditional Christianity in a variety of subcultures; the continued existence and even vibrancy of orthodoxy is not the problem. His problem is the public irrelevance of orthodoxy in the culture at large. Readers will likely perceive that at least part of the angst that drives *Bad Religion* is a nostalgia for a time when orthodox Christians were not merely confident in their convictions but respected for them, a time when orthodoxy was freely deployed in positions of cultural influence for its constructive wisdom and its prophetic power. This nostalgia wants the *Time* cover, the Oxford job, the ear of the president.

And insofar as this book evokes such a desire, whether Douthat himself intends this or not, it could tempt its readers to smooth out yet another of orthodoxy's central tensions: our gospel is both wisdom and foolishness.

There's a striking parallel here with the way Douthat speaks of the deceptive danger of the prosperity gospel. The Bible portrays wealth as a gift of God and the root of all kinds of evils, a tension the prosperity gospel insists on smoothing out. Douthat perceptively suggests that Christians who aim at wealth as a target, if not an entitlement, overlook its inevitable danger to the Christian soul. I think we should see cultural influence and respect in this same light. On one hand, we believe that the view of the world buttressed by Christian orthodoxy offers the best explanation for life's biggest questions. We insist that Christianity makes better sense of the world than any other worldview. We believe that Christian orthodoxy undergirds a way of life that maximizes human flourishing on the individual and corporate levels. But Paul also promised our message would always be foolish (1 Cor. 1:21-25), imperceptible to natural man (1 Cor. 2:14), and we have the promise of our crucified master that his faithful followers will get what he got (Matt. 10:24-25). We aren't entitled to acceptance by the wider culture, much less the respect of non-believers. Christian truth is at once relevant and foolish. This is a tension we can't afford to smooth out. To round off the comparison, Douthat argues that the problem with the "union of God and Mammon" is that "it succumbs to a naivete about how riches are often accumulated and about the dark pull that money can exert over the human heart" (207). Substitute "cultural power" and "approval" for "riches" and "money" and the statement remains precisely true.

Of course we must claim opportunities to seek the improvement of our culture as an extension of our call to neighbor-love and as an expression of God's love for justice. Praise God for Douthat's models—Reinhold Niebuhr, C.S. Lewis, Billy Graham, and others like them—believers who've gained cultural prominence and used that influence to add salt and shed light. But plenty more through the centuries have been just as faithful and have been ridiculed or even killed by the

powers that be. Where we fall on that continuum is in God's hands, and to whatever extent we aim at the respect of the world we're asking for trouble.

WHAT WE SEEK, WHAT GOD ADDS

In fairness, I believe this is a danger Douthat recognizes (see 292-93). After all, he concludes his book with Matthew 6:33: "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you." But here we need to be crystal clear on what belongs to the kingdom of God we're responsible to seek and what belongs with all God may choose to add. In this time between the times the tangible, institutional shape of that kingdom is not the centers of power but local churches of visible saints. Especially for pastors, the health of local churches must be the focal point of our labor and the primary incentive for doctrinal faithfulness. Because ultimately this faithful presence and witness—neither accommodationist nor isolationist—is the best thing we can offer the world.

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