

The Decision-Making Process of the Local NT Church¹

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Background –

Over the last 20 (plus) years of life, ministry and study, the lecturer has had the privilege of witnessing a variety of decision-making (DM) models that are common within the framework of contemporary evangelicalism and fundamentalism. It has been a growing fear over the years, that many of the decision-making approaches one finds in a variety of conservative gospel-ministry movements are biblically unhealthy in leadership (in a general sense) and in decision-making (in a specific sense).

Unfortunately, the scriptures do not give one clear method to local church DM. Therefore it is up to the NT Christian and each congregation to examine the practice and flow of the early church in relation to the development of a DM model. It is then necessary for each congregation to consider which decisions most naturally belong to the elders, the deacons and which decisions ought to come back to the entire congregation.² Over the last decade of study and ministry, this lecturer has identified and applied an inductive model of DM to a local-church setting. This model was partially applied at Mildred Bible Chapel in Backus, MN (from 1996-99). The model has been fully applied at Southeast Valley Baptist Church in Gilbert, AZ (from 1999 – present). This model is pieced together with a deductive and exegetical understanding of the offices of the NT church, the practice of the early church, combined with other Biblical theological and philosophical consideration. This means that the model is not to be taken as a Biblical absolute! As important as this issue is, it should not be added to the *sine-quo-non* of fundamentalism! (practically or formally)

Importance of Decision-Making –

¹ This presentation is taken in part from the lecturer's D.Min Final Project. See Joel Tetreau, *The Deacons' Role in the Decision-Making Process at Southeast Valley Baptist Church* (Plymouth: Central Baptist Theological Seminary, 2004). This presentation interacts heavily with chapter two of the D.Min project. The lecturer apologizes for the nature of the footnote numbering. He did not have time to justify the numbers for this presentation. **Feel free to email me – pastorjoel@sevbc.org – I would be happy to help anyone think through their own approach of DM – especially those interested in moving a ministry through a shift in DM. There are challenges for any ministries wanting to change the DM approach. That is especially true of congregations that have a significant history in one DM model. It can be done Biblically, ethically and effectively.**

²This statement is made this way because of a belief in congregational polity on the part of the lecturer. The lecturer would call his view “the Plural Elder-led Congregational model.” To see a defense of the lecturers view of polity see “The Plural-Elder-Led Church: Sufficient as Established-The Plurality of Elders as Christ's Ordained Means of Church Governance by James R. White” in *Perspectives on Church Government: Five Views of Church Polity*. ed. Chad Owen Brand and R. Stanton Norman, (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2004).

Over the years leaders have made simple yet significant evaluations about the importance of effective decision-making. Napoleon Bonaparte said, “*Nothing is more difficult, and therefore more precious, than to be able to decide.*” Notice a few more quotes: “*No trumpets sound when the important decisions of life are made. Destiny is made known silently*” (Agnes DeMille); “*My basic principle is that you don’t make decisions because they are cheap; you make them because they’re right,*”(Theodore Hesburgh). Very good are the thoughts of Graeme Edwards, “*It’s not the plan that is important, it’s the planning.*” Perhaps my all-time favorite quote on DM comes from Peter Sinclair who said, “ ‘Do somethings’ are not moved by the criticism of ‘do nothings’!”

Purpose of this Presentation –

- 1) To identify the extremes of a few DM models.
- 2) To present an alternative model that attempts to honor the spirit of the NT text.
- 3) To identify the decision-makers of the NT church.
- 4) To identify a healthy approach for local church DM.

Motivation of this Presentation –

- 1) To glorify God by discovering NT practices and normative principles which should impact local church DM.
- 2) To rescue those who are presently being hurt by unbiblical models of DM.
 - a. Congregations are being hurt
 - b. Pastors and their families are often hurt
 - c. Deacons and their families are often hurt
 - d. The Lord’s testimony is being hurt
 - e. The Holy Spirit is often wounded.
- 3) To restore an understanding of the role and benefits of a team-approach to local church leadership and DM.
- 4) To protect the pastor’s shepherding responsibility.
- 5) To examine the advantages of pursuing “unity and consensus” in DM.
- 6) To nail shut a common reason young leaders reach for the exit doors of a responsible and careful historic fundamentalism.

Desired Result –

- 1) The listener will have a sense of the importance of DM.
- 2) The listener will begin to examine how DM should happen in his ministry context.
- 3) Those who are practicing a damaging model of DM will consider a different approach.
- 4) Leadership and congregations would know what their model of DM is and can foster a “ministry-wide” consensus of that model. For those of us who are congregational in polity – this would make sense!

- 5) That those who are truly dictators (not the benevolent kind) would repent.
- 6) That NT congregations would “buy in” to the biblical concept of mutual submission in local church life. This one adjustment would go along way to correcting a variety of challenges found often within Bible-believing ministries.

Introduction –

Throughout the history of the church, a constant tension has existed within many local assemblies of Bible-believers.³The core of this tension has focused upon the place of the church leader, his authority and his role in local church decision-making.⁴ What makes this tension even more complex is a variety of scriptural texts which seem to support entirely different church leadership models. Often times the believer is confused when comparing the different approaches to decision making.

This confusion is demonstrated by the variety of answers to the following questions. How does a congregation balance the biblical function of the pastor as leader and follow his leadership, while at the same time not allowing the pastor to “lord it over” God’s flock with an abusive and dictatorial demeanor?⁵ How do the deacons aid the pastor(s) in oversight and leadership? What is the relationship between the pastor’s authority and responsibility and the deacons’ authority and responsibility? Once one has an understanding of how these offices are related, how does one take that information and turn it into a working model of a local church? At the heart of these questions lies the issue of decision making.⁶

³One finds this tension as early as the first century, especially and surprisingly in the Eastern church with Ignatius of Antioch. His teaching that every bishop is a visible representative of Christ, and therefore should be obeyed just as one would obey Christ, aided in the process of the developing of an abusive church hierarchy which eventually found itself prominent in the Roman church. See Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. 2, *Ante-Nicene Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1910), 653-660. Also see chapter entitled, “Ignatius of Antioch” by Edwin M. Yamauchi in John D. Woodbridge, ed., *Great Leaders of the Christian Church* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1988), 35-38.

⁴This question can become especially problematic when the pastor is what Olan Hendrix calls, “The Strong Natural Leader.” While there is certainly nothing wrong with a pastor exercising leadership within the context of a local church, the gifted leader must exercise special care not to abuse his God-given ability and position. See Olan Hendrix, *Management for Christian Leaders* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976), 22-24.

⁵See Hans Finzel’s chapter entitled, “Dictatorship in Decision-Making” in *The Top Ten Mistakes Leaders Make* (Wheaton: Scripture Press, 1994), 81-96.

⁶Some of the issues concerning how a local church views decision-making will rest on its view of polity. The primary goal here is to demonstrate with scriptural data, principles which can give concrete help, no matter what form of polity the local church prefers. For an overview of the traditional categories of polity see David L. Larson, in *Caring for the Flock* (Wheaton: Good News Publishers, 1991), 32-34. For a great discussion concerning how polity should not be a divisive issue within historic fundamentalism see Rolland D. McCune, “Doctrinal Non-Issues in Historic Fundamentalism,” *DBSJ* 1 (Fall 1996): 178-179. A more recent treatment of Polity is

Examples of the Extremes -

1) Extreme #1 - “Pastoral Dictatorship Extreme”

A. The Problem: In this extreme the pastor or elder has what is called, “*The Messiah Syndrome*.” Here the assumption is that all decisions must have the senior pastor’s stamp and /or okay before they can legitimately be implemented. Often the underlying conviction is that the “pastor always knows best.” Often these leaders (so-called) lead with a harsh and unloving demeanor. This is not to suggest that a pastor (especially a senior pastor) can never be forceful or show strong emotion in his leadership. It is to say that he is to have that energy checked by a personal code of conduct and character that is consistent with 1 Tim 3. (There are some men, while functioning as a dictator do so with a loving demeanor. The lecturer would call these men “benevolent dictators.” They are not the same as a dictator. There are still problems with even the benevolent dictatorship that this lecturer will deal with later in this presentation.)

B. What God thinks about this attitude:

“The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by constraint but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock...”(1 Peter 5:1-3).

C. The best we can say about this approach:

Many believe that because they have a special degree of responsibility, that this gives them the authority for all the decisions of the local assembly. Some who function as a dictator – do so with a genuine warmth and love for both the Lord and his sheep. Their reasoning is well represented with this, “*hey, if I’m going to give an account of what we do, I will make sure we do right.*”

2. Extreme #2 – The “Board-Run” Extreme

A. The Problem: Here a small group of individuals (in our circles usually comprising of “deacons,” and/or “trustees” chosen from the laity) determine all or certainly most of the decisions for a church. The problem is similar to the former one except this one involves more than just one person in this unfortunate system of governance. Often the attitude from this “board” is one of “I’ll get my way,” as opposed to “May I serve you?”

Note: In Extreme #1, the pastor is abusing his authority. In Extreme #2, the pastor is often abused by being stripped of his rightful decision-making role. Many times the congregation is also stripped of its function in this system as well! In the extreme cases, the pastor and congregation become hostages to the will of a few controlling individuals or families! This may not always be a visible problem if these are God-loving and fearing leaders. It becomes especially disastrous when they are not!

found in *Perspectives of Church Government: Five Views of Church Polity*, ed. Chad Owen Brand and R. Stanton Norman (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2004).

B. What God thinks about this attitude:

“...The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those who exercise authority over them are called ‘benefactors.’ But not so among you; on the contrary, he who is greatest among you let him be as the younger, and he who governs as he who serves...” (Luke 22:25-26).

C. The best we can say about this approach:

Some ministries have rightly discovered the NT practice of a plurality in leadership. Many of these ministries want to protect against the first extreme. Again, often times one will find the small group of decision-makers in these ministries to be God-fearing and congregational caring men.

3. Extreme #3 – The Congregational/Democracy Extreme

A. The Problem: While legitimately there are a few important decisions that must be made by the congregation at large, these congregations are under the self-deception, that they are to instruct the leadership on what to do, instead of being willing to submit to God-ordained and placed leadership. Often the assumption in these churches is that the relationship between pastors and deacons is the equivalent to the relationship between the executive and legislative branches of American government. In other words, deacons serve a two-fold purpose: 1) they represent special interests of groups (this often generates a kind of ecclesiastical form of “lobbying” and “politics” in these types of churches) within the congregation and 2) they provide balance of power.

B. What God thinks about this attitude:

“Remember those who rule over you who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct (Heb 13:7).”

The author of Hebrews continues:

“Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you” (Heb 13:17).

C. The best we can say about this approach:

These ministries often have a deep appreciation for congregational polity. They are deathly afraid of loosing not only autonomy of the local church, but their ability to make sure they have Biblical leadership.

The writer believes that at least five different levels of decision making should exist in the local church. The first level is that of the senior pastor. The NT evidence will demonstrate that on some occasions only the senior pastor, may properly give the final word.⁷ This final

⁷On the opposite pole of dictatorship is the view that the pastor has no “command and control” power at all. In this view, the pastor’s sole existence is simply to preach, teach and leave

authority does not mean that the senior pastor should not consult or seek advice from other wise pastors (often called *elders* in the New Testament). Biblically, a senior pastor should consult the team of elders within that particular local church. Furthermore, pastors demonstrate wisdom in the consultation of other elders in other local churches. This truth means that a pastor would do well to consult both deacons and godly laymen in various settings. It also means that, after receiving advice and wisdom, the senior pastor must make the final decision in those areas that pertain to his specific responsibility⁸ The second level of decision making belongs to the group of pastors (elders) of the local church. Scripture gives examples of occasions when many pastors conferred together.⁹ While this second level may not exist in smaller churches that have only one pastor, the third level should exist in all churches, whatever their size. The third level consists of those decisions that the pastors and deacons make together.¹⁰ The fourth level includes those decisions that the deacons oversee.¹¹ They may gain

the running of the church to other leadership such as the elders, deacons, or trustees. Again this position undermines and misunderstands the Biblical data that will be examined in the following sections. Ultimately the congregation must decide, hopefully based on biblical principles, which functions and authorities reside with the pastor. Based upon that then, “individual members of the body have the obligation to submit to him in those areas in which he has . . . authority.” See Robert C. Anderson, *The Effective Pastor* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1985), 99-100.

⁸For some practical examples of decisions and functions which belong to the senior pastor, see chapter entitled, “Every team needs a leader” by Harold J. Westing, *Multiple Church Staff Handbook* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1985), 25-39.

⁹Ibid., 15-23.

¹⁰Homer Kent explains that Paul mentioned these two offices together for the purpose of not bypassing the order in the assembly. Additionally, it was a clear endorsement of the authority of both offices. Kent explains the possible connection between the monetary gift sent with Epaphroditus (cf. 2:25) and the joint leadership and mutual involvement of both the deacons and overseers in connection with the financial support of Paul’s ministry (cf. 4:14-16). See Homer A Kent, Jr., “Philippians,” in *EBC* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 11:103-104. See a similar understanding in William Hendriksen, “Philippians,” in the *New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1962), 48-49.

¹¹For a description of the creation of this office and how it was designed to aid both the local church congregation as well as other local church leadership, see R.C.H. Lenski, *The Interpretaton of the Acts of the Apostles* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1961), 239-247. This writer agrees with the position espoused by Lenski that these men are legitimate deacons (as opposed to some prototype of deacon unlike the contemporary deacon). Richard Longenecker points out that even though “the text does not directly call these seven by the ecclesiastical title ‘deacon’ (*diakonos*) . . . the ministry to which the seven were appointed was functionally equivalent to what Paul covered in the title ‘deacon’ (cf. 1 Tim 3:8-13).” Longenecker also reminds us that when speaking of the early church as found especially in the book of Acts, “ministry was a function long before it became an office.” See Richard N. Longenecker, “The Acts of the Apostles” in *EBC* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 9:331. To read a position that describes these men fulfilling a position similar but not identical to today’s deacon, see Stanley D. Toussaint, “Acts” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* (Wheaton: Scripture Press, 1988), 2:367-368. To see the position that these were not deacons, see John F. MacArthur, *The Master’s Plan For The Church* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1991), 207-210. To see

insight or wisdom from the pastor(s) or members of the congregation. Scripture sets aside certain decisions that fall under the leadership and stewardship of the deacons. The fifth level of decision-making requires the attention and action of the congregation of the local church.¹² Whatever their polity, most churches would agree that these five basic levels exist in the process of decision-making. It is the lecturer's contention that one may be able to discern helpful decision-making patterns from Scripture. These patterns can help construct a consistent decision-making model that will add to, and not detract from church health.

I. The Decision-Makers (Who should make decisions?)

One can observe how these decision-makers functioned in the early NT church. Once that task is done, application can then be made to contemporary decision-making.

A. Decision Maker #1: The Senior Pastor/Elder – “First Among Equals”

The lecturer has arrived at a position that he today appreciates a healthy tension. The tension is a dual commitment to the need for a strong, leader of leaders. While at the same time allowing for even the “leader of leaders” to be held accountable to a group of his peers. Gene Getz reflects the same journey of the lecturer when he recounts the following:

One of the great principles that grabbed my attention during this process was “plurality in leadership.” I’d always enjoyed working with a “team,” but as I ventured into church planting, I became even more committed to this concept. I saw no other “plan” in the NT story – and still don’t. . . Let me be perfectly honest. I was initially so committed to the principle of plurality in leadership that I, at times, downplayed and, in some respects, denied how important it is to have a strong primary leader. When I was asked, “Who leads the church?” I would always say, “The elders.” In essence, that was a very true statement. And when I was then asked, “Who leads the elders?” I’d answer, “We lead the church, together.” Again, this was a true response, but I didn’t answer the questions adequately. The facts are that “I led the elders” and together “we led the church.” I was then, and always have been, the primary leader in the Fellowship churches where I’ve served as senior pastor. Unfortunately, in those early years, I communicated a “model of leadership” I was not in actuality practicing¹³

an excellent rebuttal to MacArthur's view, note Alexander Strauch, *Minister of Mercy: The New Testament Deacon* (Littleton: Lewis and Roth Publications), 170-174.

¹²A good example of this is the above-mentioned context of Acts 6. As the text clearly indicates, “The choice of the seven candidates was made by the members of the church, and not by the apostles themselves.” See I. Howard Marshall, “Acts” in *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 127. **Please Note:** There actually is one more level that for sake of time and space will fall outside of this presentation. The sixth level is the decision-making responsibility that should rest on the shoulders of every NT church member. He or she ought to be able to make ministry decisions based on their giftendness as well as ministry function.

¹³See the outstanding volume by Getz. Gene A. Getz, *Elders and Leaders: God's Plan For Leading The Church*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 2003), p.18.

1 Timothy 5:17

One of the passages that implies that the pastor does have biblical authority appears in 1 Tim 5:17.¹⁴ Here the spiritual leaders are called upon to rule well the church. This verb, προϊστη appears four times to describe this duty (also see 1 Tim 3:4, 5; 1 Thess 5:12).¹⁵ The meaning of the verb is literally, “to stand first” or “to rule.” Reicke makes the point that “the verb has in the NT the primary sense of both ‘to lead’ and ‘to care for’ . . . this agrees with the distinctive nature of office in the NT, since according to Luke 22:26 the one who is chief . . . is to be as he who serves.”¹⁶ A similar term appears in Hebrews 13:7, 17, and 24. The term, ηγχεπομαι, suggests the same type of leadership. The most common meaning is simply, “to lead.” It was used specifically of one who was “to go before.” Additionally it referred to one whose job it was “to be a leader, to rule, command; to have authority over,” often in the context of military leaders. Further uses of the term illustrate the application of leading. It is also interesting to note that a secondary usage of this term is that of “think,” “consider” or “have regard for.” In reference to church leadership Paul uses the same term to instruct the Thessalonian believers to “respect” their leadership. It is consistent with the text to see this in reference to their pastoral leadership. Lenski, demonstrating the significance of this secondary usage to the first, states the following:

*To consider them very much in love on account of their work implies appreciation, esteem, and thus willingness to be led and trained. Intelligent Christian love is to be the inward motive for this consideration, and the work these faithful men do is to be the outward motive.*¹⁷

One more significant textual issue must be highlighted in this passage. The reader will note that these elders were deserving of double honor, not only because they were “ruling well,” but because they also were effective in “teaching.” Here, the Greek word διδασκαλιωα reveals that in the early New Testament church the pastor was expected to exercise both pastoral leadership and Biblical teaching.¹⁸ It is important to understand this

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵See BDAG 870c. While it is true that the congregation must grant τιμη ~, the writer understands that the implication of this passage, combined with the others of this section, is the responsibility of the pastor/elder/bishop to both manage and communicate God’s Word. Guthrie states, “The word *rule* (*proistemi*) means general superintendence, and describes the duties allotted to all presbyters.” Donald Guthrie, “The Pastoral Epistles,” in *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*, ed. R. V. G. Tasker (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), 105.

¹⁶B. Reicke, “προιστημι,” *TDNT* 6:700.

¹⁷Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul’s Epistles to the Colossians, to the Thessalonians, to Timothy, to Titus and to Philemon* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1961), 354.

¹⁸Some commentators believe that “effective teaching,” actually defines what “ruling well” means. To see this view note Ronald A. Ward, *Commentary on 1 & 2 Timothy & Titus*

because many insist that the position of pastor does not inherently contain the right to exercise oversight or authority. Unfortunately, Richards and Heltdke have taken this position:

The emerging picture of the local church leader (speaking of the elder/bishop/pastor), then is not that of the manager of an enterprise or a decision maker, but of one who with the wisdom gained by personal experience builds an intimate relationship with others whom he cares for . . . The responsibility of leaders is not to manage the church. They are not to be God's voice of authority in the body. The responsibility of leaders is the care and nurture of believers.¹⁹

The NT pastor/elder/bishop has the responsibility to exercise pastoral leadership and at the same time has a responsibility to care for the sheep.²⁰ The senior pastor today has the responsibility to lead the other pastors in making sure soul-care takes place. While it may be true and valid that some pastors (including some senior pastors) abuse their authority and, in so doing, fail to understand and demonstrate the Christ-like quality of servant leadership, just as important is that Christians do not over-react by asserting that the pastor has no significant authority in making decisions for a local congregation.²¹

Seeing then that Scripture, both through the titles and descriptions of the pastor's work and responsibility, gives the pastor authority for oversight, three questions need to be answered. First, does Scripture limit that authority? Second, if Scriptures does limit

(Waco: Word, 1974), 87. Most commentators, while noting the relationship between ruling and teaching, do not see these two directly connected. They are viewed most often as independent functions of the elder. See R. Kent Hughes and Bryan Chapell, *1 & 2 Timothy and Titus* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2000), 130-132. This writer does not believe the two functions of "teaching" and "ruling" are one and the same. The sense of this passage (when combined with other cogent passages dealt with in this project) is that all elders rule. All elders must be able to teach (see 1 Tim 3). But some elders are worthy of double honor because they excel in

expounding the Scriptures. The concepts of ruling and teaching then, while related in this passage, are two separate functions. To see this idea expanded and defended plus an analysis of the concept "double honor," note William Hendriksen, "Exposition of The Pastoral Epistles," in *New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1957), 179-181. For a good discussion of Hebrews 13:17 see Leon Morris, "Hebrews," in *EBC* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 152-153. Also see BAGD, 191.

¹⁹Lawrence O. Richards and Clyde Hoeldtke, *A Theology of Church Leadership* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980), 92.

²⁰It is this dual purpose of "feeding and leading" which drives Kenneth Gangel's work on pastoral leadership. See Kenneth O. Gangel, *Feeding and Leading*, 9-12.

²¹This balanced concept of behaving in a way that on the one hand is decisive and yet not abusive (based on a commitment to Christ-like, servant-leadership) is developed well in the chapter "Identifying True Leadership." See Douglas R. McLachlan, *Reclaiming Authentic Fundamentalism*, 22-51. For an additional understanding of servant-leadership and how that will affect the "leadership team" (consisting of both clergy and laity) and the "team mentality" of the local church see "Servants of the Church & Fellow Workers," in David L. Larsen, *Caring for the Flock*, 115-121.

the authority, how and to what extent is it limited? Third, how should the pastor exercise the rightful authority that is legitimately his responsibility?

Colossians 1:18

While the previous passage indicates that the pastor functioning as elder, bishop and shepherd does have authority, Scripture also sets at least four limits to that authority.²² First, as seen in this text, one sees that ultimate and sovereign authority rests not with the man, but with Jesus Christ.²³ Second, is the pastor's relationship to the other elders. The third and fourth limits to the pastor's authority appear from an exegetical analysis of Acts 6, which discusses the roles of the deacons and congregation in decision-making.

"First among equals"

Although the scriptural evidence points to a multiple eldership, the authority ascribed to each elder is not necessarily equal. Evidence points to a hierarchy of authority.²⁴ **1 Timothy 5:17 indicates that some elders are worthy of double honor. This implies that some elders are more wisely followed than others. This does not mean that the writer sees a division within the office of elder/bishop/pastor. The senior pastor does not have a higher rank. It is simply that he is leading his peers who are equal in rank, but not in the scope of pastoral responsibility.**²⁵ The first evidence of this hierarchy appears in 1 Timothy 3:1, where the reader notices that Paul lists the qualifications of the ἐπισκοπη~, (Titus also uses the singular in Titus 1:7). When this verse is contrasted with verse eight, the reader notices that Paul lists the qualifications of the deacons in the plural (διακωνου~). In contrast to the plural number of the deacons is the role demonstrated by James in the Jerusalem Church (**second evidence**). While James did not lead without the wisdom and leadership of the rest of the elders, he did function as a sort of "first among equals." This relationship between James and the other Jerusalem elders is apparent in Acts 15, the occasion of the

²²By "limits" the author means to demonstrate how the pastor's authority is not absolute, unquestioned authority. For a good understanding of how Baptist polity has viewed the nature of, including the limits of, the pastor's authority see John Gill, *A Body of Practical Divinity*, 862-876. Also see the comments of Greg Wills, in a section titled, "Church Officers – Pastors, Elders, and Deacons" in *Polity*, ed. Mark E. Dever, 33-35. The reader of this passage in Colossians 1 will learn that God has placed Christ as the only unquestioned, sovereign authority of the local assembly.

²³Ibid.

²⁴David Doran, "The Foundation of the Pastorate" (unpublished class notes in M-524 Pastoral Leadership, Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary, Fall 1994), 1-2. Also see the section titled, "Does Government by Elders Eliminate the Role of a Special Leader?" by John MacArthur, *Answering the Key Questions About Eldership*, 27-30. 1 Timothy 5:17 indicates that some elders are worthy of double honor. This implies that some elders are more wisely followed than others. This does not mean that the writer sees a division within the office of elder/bishop/pastor. The senior pastor does not have a higher rank. It is simply that he is leading his peers who are equal in rank, but not in the scope of pastoral responsibility.

Jerusalem Council. A similar phenomenon is also seen in Acts 21 in the position of Peter within Paul's report to the Church.⁵⁴ A **third evidence** of a hierarchy of elders, with one serving as a "presiding" elder, is the mentioning of the "angel" (αγγελω) within the context of each of the seven churches of Asia Minor addressed by John.²⁶ A **fourth evidence** appears in the theological discussion of the work and character of God, where one notices that in the other God-ordained institutions an order of authority appears (as found within civil government, Israel, and the family). **The fifth and perhaps strongest argument** for this internal leader among equals is 1 Timothy 5:17. Here Paul speaks of an elder who receives "double honor" for his excellent leadership in ruling the congregation. The elder is worthy of this type of honor because of his careful attention word and doctrine. This speaks of a special recognition by the congregation at large, especially honoring the presiding, pastor-teacher.

While the evidence emphasizes the idea of a hierarchical relationship within the eldership of a local church, it does not give the senior pastor the right to ignore the wisdom and leadership of other elders. This is analogous to the authority of a husband. While the wife is to submit to the husband (Eph 5:22), the husband and wife are also to submit to each other (Eph 5:21).²⁷ In this relationship, the husband is to be the leader of the home, but, within the domestic sphere, he needs to submit to the wisdom of his wife.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Ibid. This argument assumes that the "angel" (αγγελω) is a senior elder who oversees other leaders as well as the local congregation. For an additional defense of this position, see John F. Walvoord, "Revelation" in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* (Wheaton: Scripture Press, 1988) 2:933. For the position that αγγελω, as used in this context, does not refer to the pastor of each local assembly listed, see John MacArthur, Jr., *Answering The Key Questions About Elders*, 26. See BDAG, 8b.

²⁷John R. W. Stott does an outstanding job in demonstrating exegetically the tie between the individual believer's "being filled with the Spirit" and that same believer's ability to "submit to one another." Based on the information Stott brings to light, it seems consistent to say that whether the individual in question is a senior pastor who refuses to submit to other elders within the institution of the local church, or whether the individual is the husband who refuses to submit occasionally to the wisdom and discernment of a godly wife within the institution of the home, an individual who never submits to others based on his understanding of the position of authority is not leading as God intended. The analogy of the wife and husband to the elders is similar. Just as the husband is wise to submit to the domestic expertise of a wife who is gifted in a certain area, so is there wisdom in a senior pastor's submission to wisdom of a fellow elder who is gifted in a specific field of ministry. When a senior pastor consistently refuses to submit to the wisdom of fellow elders, based on the teaching in Galatians 5, he is ministering in a way that is not consistent with "Spirit-filled" leadership. That is to say that Paul presents as one of the evidences of being filled with the spirit (v. 18), the ability to practice "mutual submission" (v. 21). See Stott, *The Message of Ephesians*, 206-209. For an excellent discussion about how this "mutual submission" should work while at the same time honoring the God-given role distinctions in the home see John Piper and Wayne Grudem, "An overview of Central Concerns: Questions and Answers" In *Recovering Biblical Manhood & Womanhood*, 62-63. In the same work see chapter 10 entitled, "Wives Like Sarah, and the Husbands Who Honor Them," 198-201

However, after listening closely and honestly to his wife’s suggestion, the husband does have the right to make a different choice as long as he does so in a loving manner.

In a similar fashion, the senior pastor needs to learn to submit to the wisdom of other elders as well as to the wisdom of godly laymen within the context of his biblical relationship to the deacon(s) and to the collective discernment of the congregation.

B. Decision Maker #2: The Elders

Acts 20:17, 28

In this passage the Apostle Paul addresses the same office with three different titles. First, Acts 20:17 Paul summons the *πρεσβυτερων*²⁸ After calling these men “elders,” he instructs them in verse 28 to watch carefully over themselves and God’s flock because God has called them to the task of being overseers (*επισκοπου*) and that, by being such, they have the added responsibility to shepherd (*ποιμαινωνειν*) the church. Obviously, from a comparison of the two verses, Paul assumes that the elder is also to serve as “bishop” in addition to being “the shepherd.” Here Paul stresses the point that the pastor, who feeds the children of God, should also lead and guide them through loving leadership. Paul is laying the responsibility of spiritual oversight upon the office of pastor. Paul also commands these elders to care for God’s flock, the church. This reminds the pastor that the sheep ultimately do not belong to him, but to God. The pastor should view his job as that of a steward.

1 Peter 5:1

As Peter addresses the “elders” in this passage, he speaks of himself as a *συμπρεσβυτερω*,³² literally as a “co-elder” or “fellow elder.”³³ Other or “fellow” pastor(s) are the second limitation to the pastor’s authority. Peter is not basing his appeal on his position as apostle, (although clearly he was one) but on the fact that he is a

²⁸The meaning of this term is “elder.” See BDAGa 862. *πρεσβυτερω* has two major uses. First, the term speaks to one who is “advanced in life.” The second usage describes one who has a specific rank or office (such as a member of the Sanhedrin). This term became connected with this second meaning in the context of church leadership. Joseph Henry Thayer makes this linguistic point, “That they did not differ at all from the bishops or overseers (as is acknowledged also by Jerome on Tit. 1:5. . .) is evident from the fact that the two words are used indiscriminately . . . and that the duty of presbyters is described by the terms *επισκοπει* . . . and *επισκοπη*. . .” See *The New Thayer’s Greek - English Lexicon of the New Testament*. s. v. “*πρεσβυτερω*,” 535 - 536. Also see BDAG 379b; 862a.

³²Hiebert makes much of this term by informing the reader that this word “occurs only here in the New Testament and places the writer on a level with the elders being addressed. He is not speaking down to them as a superior to inferiors. Paul reflects the same attitude in his frequent use of ‘fellow worker’ (Rom. 16:3, 9, 21; 2 Cor. 8:23; Phil. 2:25; 4:3; Col. 4:11) and ‘fellow servant’ (Col 1:7).” See Heibert, *1 Peter*, 300.

³³Ibid.

“fellow elder.”³⁴ Beginning in the book of Acts, and stretching on into the epistles, one can detect the role and importance of the elders of each local church.³⁵ This was a consistent practice in the early church.³⁶ While Scripture does give evidence of a type of senior pastor, or first among equals, the practice of a plurality of elders seems to be consistent with the New Testament.³⁷ Concerning this point, MacArthur states,

*Nearly every church we know in the New Testament is specifically said to have had elders. For example, Acts 20:17 says, ‘And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church.’ It is significant that the church at Ephesus had elders, because all the churches of Asia Minor . . . such as those listed in Revelation 1:11 . . . were extensions of the ministry at Ephesus. We can assume that those churches also identified their leadership by the same terms that were set as a pattern in Ephesus . . . a plurality of elders.*³⁸

Unfortunately, many Baptist leaders are under the impression that it is impossible to have a plurality of elders and maintain a commitment to a congregational form of ecclesiastical government.³⁹ Commenting on the biblical precedent of a plurality of elders, nineteenth century American Baptist pastor and leader W. B. Johnson states the following:

It is worthy of particular attention, that each church had a plurality of elders, and that although there was a difference in their respective department of service, there was a perfect equality of rank among them. Let us now endeavor to ascertain the respective departments of service assigned to the members of the bishopric...The particular department of service which each shall occupy, will be determined by the talent which he has for one or the other line of duty. For example, one of the bishops

³⁴Edwin A. Blum, “1 Peter,” in *EBC* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 250.

³⁵See Appendix 1, “Answering The Key Questions About Elders,” in MacArthur, *The Master’s Plan For The Church*, 179-199.

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷Ibid. Also see the section, ‘First Among A Council of Equals: Leaders Among Leaders’ in the chapter entitled, “Shared Leadership,” in Alexander Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, (Littleton: Lewis and Roth Publications, 1995), 45-48. For more evidence of the practice and pattern of a plurality of elders for New Testament churches that still believe in a congregational form of polity see Rodney J. Decker, “Polity and the Elder Issue”, *GTJ* 9 (Fall, 1988): 258-279. To see a historic presentation on Baptist Churches that believed in and utilized a plurality of elders see Samuel Jones, *A Treatise of Church Discipline*, in *Polity* (Washington: Center for Church Reform, 2001) ed. Mark E. Dever, 34, 136-158.

³⁸Ibid.

³⁹Many Baptist leaders and congregations today would agree with Greg Wills’ assertion that in the early nineteenth century, many Baptist churches (such as those found within South Carolina’s Tyger River Baptist Association) found the idea of a plurality of eldership not necessary because the “eldership of the church consisted of the ministers and deacons.” Greg Wills, *Polity*, ed. Mark E. Dever, 34.

*may have a particular talent for presiding over the body, for regulating its affairs by advice, admonition, rebuke. Let such an one be the presiding bishop. Another may have a particular capacity for reaching the flock by exposition or scripture and exhortation, and in visits to the members. Let this be his department. A third may be endowed with the talent for superintending a Sabbath school, directing the course of studies, gathering up children for the school, and alluring them to the reading of the Scriptures and religious work. To this service, then, let him be devoted. And a fourth may be endowed with the gift of laboring in the word and doctrine, that is, of preaching the gospel of Christ. This one should give himself wholly to the ministry of the word.*⁴⁰

Some try to suggest that because the plurality of elders simply is seen historically, as opposed to commanded didactically, the modern church is not under compulsion to seriously consider the number of elders in each congregation. This writer would counter with the observation that, unlike the practice of head coverings in the Corinthian church, the practice of a plurality of elders is seen regularly in the NT, and not relegated simply to one region.⁴¹ This is not to say that a church that does not have more than one pastor is necessarily out of order. It is to say that the health of the congregation is usually improved when it is served by more than one elder.⁴²

The word elders, in the plural (πρεσβυτεροι), is found fifty-nine times in the NT, while it is found in the singular only four times (πρεσβυτερου). The burden of proof seems to be more on those who assert that the NT practice of a plurality of eldership has fallen out of practice rather than with those who believe it has stayed in practice.⁴³ That is especially true when one considers passages such as Acts 14:23 and Titus 1:5, which speak of a fairly normative practice of having πρεσβυτεροι in each congregation.⁴⁴ This writer struggles to understand how a common and seemingly important leadership practice in the early church could be considered to have fallen out of practice without a single verse to explain its end or reveal a transition to a different system. This is not to say a plurality of elders is imperative. It is to suggest that it is superior.⁴⁵ J. L. Reynolds, a Baptist contemporary of Johnson, asserted that while a plurality of elders did exist in the

⁴⁰W.B. Johnson, “The Gospel Developed Through The Government and Order of the Churches of Jesus Christ,” in *Polity*, ed. Mark E. Dever, 192-193.

⁴¹Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 36-38.

⁴²Ibid., 39 – 44. In this section Strauch examines the benefits of a plurality of elders in contrast to the single pastor system.

⁴³BDAG 862a. Also see Gunther Bornkamm, “πρεσβυτερο~,” TDNT 6:651-672.

⁴⁴Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 36-38.

⁴⁵For a description of the nature of the eldership, see Ed Glasscock, “The Biblical Concept of Elders,” in *BSac*, 144 (Jan 1987):66-79. Especially good is Glasscock’s discussion of the connection between the New Testament elder and his OT counterpart.

NT, it functioned more consistently as represented by Baptist polity than with Presbyterian.⁴⁶

A distinction has sometimes been made between teaching and ruling elders. This was formerly the custom of Congregational churches, and obtains, at the present time, in the Presbyterian Church. For the support of this distinction, the passages of Scripture principally relied on are 1 Tim. 5:17; 1 Cor. 12:28. The latter passage is too indefinite in its phraseology to establish the distinction, and would probably never have been supposed to contain it, had not an erroneous interpretation of the former passage previously led to the belief that such a distinction really existed.⁴⁷

D. Decision Maker #3: The Deacons

Christians need to understand the part that deacons legitimately play in local church's decision making. An exam of the description and genesis of the office can explain how deacons should contribute to the decision-making process.

An Etymological Analysis of διακονεπω, διακονιπα, and διακονο~

While some help is gained through a study of the etymology of a word, the ultimate meaning and significance of the office and function of the διακονο~ is determined by the context of each scriptural passage.⁷³ While context is paramount to understanding the intended meaning of a word, the literal meaning of the word is relevant. The project will now examine the meaning of διακονεπω, διακονιπα, and διακονο~.

διακονο~

This noun form, found twenty-nine times in the New Testament, primarily denotes a person who is a "servant," as in Matthew 20:26. This word also refers to someone who serves as a "helper of people who render service as Christians." In this sense, the word is used as a description of how all believers should serve both the Lord and others (2 Cor 6:4; 11:23; Eph 6:21). Some time after the establishment of the church, the term became an official title for the office of "deacon" (Rom 16:1; Phil 1:1; 1 Tim 3:8, 12).⁷⁴

⁴⁶Reynolds does a good job demonstrating how the Presbyterian and Congregationalist assertion that a division of labor must exist between teaching elders and ruling elders is not biblically consistent. Reynolds, *Church Polity or The Kingdom of Christ, in its internal and external development in Polity*, ed. Mark E. Dever, 350. Also see MacArthur, *The Master Plan For The Church*, 183-186.

⁴⁷Ibid.

⁷³When certain universal applications of a word are used in linguistic analysis without looking at the context of each usage, one can be guilty of "the root fallacy." See D.A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 26-32. In this writer's opinion, those that want to argue that deacons have no authority and should simply take orders from others because of the original linguistic usage of this word prior to its application to the office of deacon, are guilty of this fallacy.

διακονιᾶ

This form, found thirty-two times in the New Testament, is used in reference to “service” (Acts 6:4; 2 Cor 11:8; Eph 4:12). It also refers to those people who “aid, support, or distribute.” (See Acts 6:1; 11:29).⁷⁵ Beyer notices the clear connection between this word and its connection with the office of deacon because its wider meaning is “the discharge of a loving service.”⁷⁶ Beyer makes the point that διακονιᾶ of Stephanas is an example.⁷⁷ He also states that the term, “. . . is linked with works, faith, love, and patience in Rev. 2:19.”⁷⁸ However, this type of activity is not limited to the deacon. One will see that διακονιᾶ refers to “the discharge of certain obligations” as it relates to apostles (Rom. 11:13; 2 Cor 4:1), evangelists (2 Tim 4:5), or assistants, such as Mark (2 Tim 4:11).⁷⁹ This reference should not be surprising when one considers the occasional universal usage of διακονο~ in reference to all believers as opposed to the official function of deacon.⁸⁰

διακονεῶ

This verb, found thirty-four times in the NT, speaks primarily of those who are “serving.” In Luke 12:37 and John 12:2, the usage is that of one who is “waiting on tables.” In 2 Corinthians 3:3, the term speaks of those who would take care of the needs of others.⁸¹ Beyer makes the point that for the Greeks, this type of service was considered “undignified.”⁸² By contrast, Jews believed this concept of service was noble.⁸³ Beyer also notes that this concept of serving in Judaism came to be viewed as sacrificially meritorious.⁸⁴

88. ⁷⁴See linguistic data in BDAG, 230b. Also see H. W. Beyer, “διακονο~,” *TDNT*, 2:87-

⁷⁵BDAG 230a. Also see H. W. Beyer, *TDNT* 2:87-88.

⁷⁶Ibid.

⁷⁷Ibid.

⁷⁸Ibid.

⁷⁹Ibid.

⁸⁰Ibid.

⁸¹Ibid. also see BDAG, 229a.

⁸²Ibid.

⁸³Ibid.

⁸⁴Ibid., p. 153.

Acts 6

In order to understand the deacons' role in the decision-making process, one must examine the origins of this important office.⁸⁵ Clearly the spiritual leadership (then "apostle," today "elders") was initially overwhelmed with the load of temporal ministry in the early church.⁸⁶ Because the Hellenistic Christian widows were being neglected, a new group of ministers was needed in order to relieve the spiritual leadership from such duties.⁸⁷ The intended benefit was to allow the spiritual leader the time they needed to focus upon ministry of "the Word," and "prayer." The temporal ministry was specifically given to these "proto-deacons" in order to allow a stewardship of Word and prayer.⁸⁸

From the beginning of the church at Pentecost until Acts 6, the church's shepherds and overseers were the apostles themselves ("the twelve," as Luke calls them).⁸⁹ They were not only responsible for the spiritual care of the early church, but also for the collection, oversight, and distribution of finances for the benevolent needs of the early church.⁹⁰ These material tasks began to accumulate to the point that spiritual aspects of the ministry were choked.⁹¹ Greek speaking Jews (called "Hellenist Jews") began to be converted at an aggressive rate.⁹² Hellenistic Jews, unlike the Aramaic speaking Palestinian Jews,

⁸⁵For an early witness that the origin of the NT office of deacon was found with these seven men in Acts 6, see Irenaeus. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 3:12:10.

⁸⁶When one compares the information found in Ephesians 2:20, and 3:5, concerning the foundational and temporary nature of the prophets and apostles for the purpose of the launching of the early church, and then compares that to the instruction from Paul (an apostle) to the elders of the church of Ephesus (Acts 20:20-27), one can see an example of the passing of spiritual leadership from a temporary office (apostle), to a permanent office (elder). Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 144.

⁸⁷Harold Nichols, *The Work of the Deacon and Deaconess* (Valley Forge: The Judson Press, 1964), 9-10. Also see Howard B. Foshee, *The Ministry of the Deacon* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1975), 15-18.

⁸⁸To see this group as legitimately the origin of deacon, even without the official term *διακονο*~ see the section titled, "Missing Word, But Not Missing Concept," in Alexander Strauch, *The NT Deacon*, 47-49.

⁸⁹This writer is not suggesting that the authority or decision-making responsibility of the primitive church apostle is identical to today's elder, but that the NT church was still in the foundational stage. Furthermore, the responsibility for spiritual leadership of each congregation belongs today to the elders, in place of the apostle. See Rodney J. Decker, "Polity and the Elder Issue," in *GTJ* (Fall, 1988): 257-279.

⁹⁰I. Howard Marshall, "Acts," 125-126.

⁹¹*Ibid.*, 126.

often carried a more “foreign” identity (often thought of as being more Greek or Roman than Jewish). Quickly, a division began to unfold.⁹³ With the majority of the Jerusalem church having a more Palestinian identity, the material needs of many Hellenist widows were being neglected.⁹⁴

With the arrival of this potential conflict, the apostles recognized the need for a God-honoring solution. The apostles cut to the core of the issue by stating; “It is not desirable for us to neglect the Word of God in order to serve tables.”⁹⁵ They were accounting, serving and overseeing the finances of early church ministry; as a result, their involvement with these tasks undermined the spiritual ministry of God’s Word.⁹⁶

1 Timothy 3:11/Romans 16:1 – What about the deaconess?

Probably γυναῖκα in 1 Timothy 3:11 refers to the wives of the deacons. Phoebe, however most likely did serve as a deacon.¹⁰⁷ Phoebe would have ministered as a deaconess in such a way as not to violate the prohibition of women exercising authority over men (1 Timothy 2:12).¹⁰⁸ Therefore churches that appoint deaconesses do have some biblical basis.¹⁰⁹ Furthermore, the wives of the deacons could also function as

⁹²Ibid. Concerning these Hellenistic widows, Marshall makes the point that the need was especially great for many of these believers who were Jews of the Dispersion and had come back to settle in Jerusalem. The point is well made that these Greek-speaking Jews had a strong attachment to the Temple. Many would have already given away much of what they owned for the continued Christian work associated with the Temple.

⁹³Stanley Toussaint makes the point that perhaps some of the tension that is found here was the result of the common tension found between the Greek Jews and the Aramaic-speaking

Jews in the culture of the day. Stanley D. Toussaint, “Acts,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* (Wheaton: Scripture Press, 1988), 2:367.

⁹⁴Longenecker, “Acts,” 330-331.

⁹⁵See the excellent chapter, “The Shepherd’s Priorities: Word and Prayer,” in Strauch, *The NT Deacon*, 15-24.

⁹⁶Ibid.

¹⁰⁷D. Edmond Hiebert makes the case that in the early church, there had been developed out of necessity a “regular order of deaconesses.” See Hiebert, *First Timothy*, 70-71. To see an excellent grammatical case for how Phoebe can and should be viewed as a deaconess, see Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans*, 898 – 901.

¹⁰⁸For a simple, yet complete explanation of the prohibitions of this passage and how they impact women and ministry, see Hiebert, *1 Timothy*, 60-61. Notice that Hiebert argues that it is possible for Christian women to have great impact in ministry and still submit to the limitations placed on them by this passage.

deaconesses just as Phoebe did.¹¹⁰ The local church faces practical needs that suit the nature of women.¹¹¹ On some occasions women make better ministers than men.¹¹² The NT seems to leave room for women to help as deaconesses by assisting the deacons in some ways.¹¹³ Most churches have a group of women who already function in this capacity even if they are not designated as deaconesses.¹¹⁴ They are typically found cleaning the floors and kitchen and vacuuming the nursery. These are also the ones who minister to the personal needs of other women in the church. As long as these women understand the nature of their tasks and continue to heed both the spirit and the letter of 1 Timothy 2:12, the local church may be enriched by their ministry.

This writer disagrees with churches that appoint women to exercise authority in the office of deacon.¹¹⁵ If a church does employ the use of deaconesses, the nature and authority of the office of deacon must be distinguished from the function of the deaconess.¹¹⁶ While SVBC at the time of this writing does not have officially designed

¹⁰⁹Many churches (such as the Fourth Baptist Church of Plymouth, Minnesota) appoint women to serve in this capacity and yet do so without violating the NT teaching of male exclusivity in ecclesiastical executive leadership.

¹¹⁰C. A. Trentham, makes this observation about the setting of this passage and its probable application to the wives of deacons: “It seems very plausible to interpret this passage in the light of the fact that deacon’s wives who made pastoral visits with their husbands would easily fall prey to the temptations to gossip and over-indulgence in drink and would, therefore, need to be warned against these. Where the deacons handled church monies, their wives would also share in the responsibility of guarding the money given through them to the church, and must refrain from laying greedy hands upon it.” C. A. Trentham, *Studies in Timothy* (Nashville: Convention Press, 1955), 46.

¹¹¹Donald Guthrie, “The Pastoral Epistles,” in *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), 85.

¹¹²*Ibid.*

¹¹³*Ibid.*

¹¹⁴Perhaps the NT office of deaconess depends upon the congregation officially recognizing that women could function with the spiritual gift of “helps.”

¹¹⁵Hoch demonstrates how “Evangelical Egalitarians” have misunderstood the interpretation of Galatians 3:28. Hoch calls this passage the “Magna Carta” of feminism. To see the exegetical gymnastics used by the evangelical feminists, see ‘The Evangelical Egalitarian Approach,’ in Hoch, “The Role of Women in the Church: A Survey of Current Approaches,” *GTJ* 8, no. 2 (fall, 1987): 244 – 246.

¹¹⁶This writer is aware of those who would accuse his position of opening the door for evangelical egalitarianism. Hoch demonstrates that one does not need to give up the possibility of a legitimate office of deaconess in NT times to hold a consistent and hierarchicalist view of the role of women and the church. For a great discussion on the crucial exegetical and theological underpinnings to these issues, see the section titled, “The Hierarchicalist Approach,” in Hoch, “The Role of Women in the Church: A Survey of Current Approaches,” *GTJ* 8, no. 2 (fall, 1987),

deaconesses, the church expects that some women (especially the wives of the pastors and deacons) will function in the spirit of Phoebe. With the agreement and blessing of the deacons these women oversee much of the cleaning, minister to women, aid in the general hospitality, and help to organize and meet the physical and practical needs of church functions (such as dinners, fellowships, and activities).

Philippians 1:1

Deacons are here named along with bishops in Paul's greeting to the church at Philippi. While most of the time διακονο~ is used to mean a "servant," one finds the Apostle Paul using the term in a more technical way.¹¹⁷ Here and in 1 Timothy 3:8, 12, Paul uses the term to designate an office.¹¹⁸ While this text says little about the nature of these deacons, one can nevertheless draw several conclusions from it. First, the office of deacon was apparently part of the established order of local church government by the time of the writing of Philippians (A.D. 61).¹¹⁹ This means that from the time of Acts 6, the office of deacon had progressed past its introductory stage. Second, Paul recognized deacons as an identifiable group.¹²⁰ Third, Paul's recognition of both deacons and elders implies an endorsement of their leadership and service.¹²¹ Perhaps Paul pointed out the deacons because of their role in the collection and subsequent sending of the church's gift to Paul by the hand of Epaphroditus (2:15, 4:18).¹²² Building on this observation, Strauch argues that the work and qualifications of deacons indicate that the "diakonate" was indeed a recognizable office.¹²³

The last point to be made here is that these deacons were identified in the plural, not the singular. This provides evidence of a team approach to ministry.¹²⁴

247 – 250. Especially good are the discussion and application questions posed at the conclusion of the article. It is the opinion of the writer that the majority of these questions have been answered by Piper and Grudem's work on *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*.

¹¹⁷Strauch, *The NT Deacon*, 71.

¹¹⁸Ibid.

¹¹⁹Ibid., 69. This writer disagrees with Strauch on the date. Strauch gives a date of 62 A.D. The writer would give a date of A.D. 61.

¹²⁰Homer Kent, Jr. "Philippians," in *EBC* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 103.

¹²¹Ibid.

¹²²Ralph P. Martin, "The Epistle of Paul to the Philippians," *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959), 57-58. This would of course be very consistent when one sees the work of the proto-deacon of Acts 6.

¹²³Strauch, *The NT Deacon*, 71.

¹²⁴This point will be built upon later in this project. The writer does mention this here because it can be clearly seen in the text. This point will be further developed and correlated into the strategic plan and tactics for the role of deacons and their decision-making procedures at SVBC.

James Boice correctly notes,

...there is no reference anywhere in the New Testament to the appointment of only one elder or one deacon to a work. We would tend to appoint one leader, but God's wisdom is greater than our own at this point. In appointing several persons to work together, the church at God's direction provided the mutual encouragement among those who shared in the work . . ."¹²⁵

1 Timothy 3:8-13

One of the most compelling reasons to see the deacon as a significant leadership role in the local church is found in the comparison between the qualifications for the overseer and the qualifications for the deacon.¹²⁶ These similar qualifications imply an important slate of tasks for deacons as one of the primary purposes for their existence.¹²⁷ The establishment of deacons in Acts 6 was intended to allow the spiritual leadership to give themselves to the ministry of the Word, and prayer.¹²⁸

This passage focuses attention on the qualifications for the office of deacon.¹²⁹ First, Paul mentions four personal qualifications (found in v. 8). These deal with the deacon's character. He is to be a man of dignity, one who controls his tongue, one who is not a drunkard, and one who demonstrates financial integrity.¹³¹ Second, Paul names two

¹²⁵While this writer disagrees with the way polity is applied by most Presbyterian churches, he agrees with the statement of Boice as it stands. James M. Boice, *Foundations of the Christian Faith* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1986), 632.

¹²⁶Hiebert makes the point that this underlines the importance of following the instructions found in verse 10. It is imperative that time be permitted to examine whether or not an individual is spiritually qualified to be either a deacon or an elder. Hiebert's examination of the grammatical structure emphasizes that the "time" considered here is not a short probation period to examine someone's "credentials." Instead, it is the examination of a life history of a man who has the character the office demands. This again underlines the importance of the deacon's role. Concerning this importance, Hiebert observes, "...they constitute the second class of officers in the apostolic church." Hiebert, *First Timothy* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1957), 68 - 72.

¹²⁷Ralph Earl notes the importance of this office in reference to the context of Acts 6. Earl emphasizes the importance of the role distinctions. He states that, "this distinction of two groups with differing functions is prominent in the pastoral Epistles." Earl, "1 Timothy," 367.

¹²⁸Ibid.

¹²⁹For a helpful list of biblical qualifications for deacons, which integrates the data from Acts 6 with the information from 1 Tim 3, see the Appendix D. For a comprehensive look at each one of these see "Part Three: The Qualifications For Deacons," in Strauch, *The NT Deacon*, 83 - 143. This comprises the last third of his book.

spiritual qualifications (found in v. 9). The deacon is to know and obey the Word of God.¹³² Third, Paul lists three domestic qualifications (found in vv. 11-12). These include having a wife of godly character, consistently being a “one-woman-man,” and being in control of his family.¹³³

Paul concludes this passage by noting that the deacon who serves faithfully, will enjoy a special standing. This standing is based on the extended observation of the deacon’s character. It includes an external testimony that demonstrates the quality of the inner man. This special standing or rank is probably alluding to the opinion in which God and perhaps others in the church would hold the deacon.¹³⁴ The deacon himself would enjoy a greater amount of faith and assurance.¹³⁵

E. Decision Maker #4: The Congregation

The Relationship between the Congregation and the Elders

Before examining the decision-making relationship between the deacon and the congregation one must understand the relationship between the pastor/elder/bishop and the congregation. In many churches the relationship that exists between the deacons and the congregation is actually one that the elders should fulfill. Baptists typically believe that the ultimate human authority of a church resides within the congregation. Each individual within the assembly must choose to submit himself to the office of pastor or deacon.²⁰⁸ John Gill explains the necessity of this delegation of authority and the decision of the church member to submit to leadership when he states,

*... unless persons voluntarily give up themselves to a church and its pastor, they can exercise no power over them, in a church-way; they have nothing to do with them that are without, they have no concern with the watch and care of them; nor are they entitled thereunto, unless they submit themselves to one another in the fear of God; they have no power to reprove, admonish, and censure them in a church-way; nor can the pastor exercise any pastoral authority over them, except by agreement they consent to yield to it; nor can they expect he should watch over their souls as he that must give an account, having no charge of them by any act of theirs...*²⁰⁹

¹³¹A. Duane Litfin, *1 Timothy*, 737-738.

¹³²*Ibid.*, 738.

¹³³*Ibid.*

¹³⁴Earle, “1 Timothy,” 368 – 369.

¹³⁵*Ibid.*, 369.

²⁰⁸Hiscox defends this view, using not only scriptural analysis but also observations and quotation from church history. Hiscox, *Principles and Practices for Baptist Churches*, 142-159.

²⁰⁹John Gill, *A Body of Practical Divinity*, 2:858.

Once that occurs, the congregation should lovingly submit to the guidance and wisdom of these duly appointed leaders.²¹⁰ In answer to those who ask *why?* Gill again explains that,

*These pastors, teachers, bishops and elders are called rulers, guides and governors. A pastor, or shepherd is the governor and guide of his flock; a teacher, and a ruling elder are the same, 1 Tim. v. 17...1 Tim. iii. 1, 4, 5. These, indeed are not to lord it over God's heritage, or rule according to their own wills, in an arbitrary manner; but according to the laws of Christ, as King of saints; and then they are to be respected and obeyed...*²¹¹

God has given the elders of each congregation the responsibility to oversee decision-making within the spiritual sphere. Each local assembly must apply these principles to its own process for decision-making. At SVBC the elders oversee the church calendar, the maintenance of ministry staff, special speakers, ministry policy (with the help of the deacons where those policies affect their sphere). They make final decisions on standards of conduct for worship, Christian education curriculum and expectations for leadership. Areas that pertain directly to the communication of biblical truth, corporate living, and fidelity and doctrine are areas that the elders must lead. This is not to say that ultimately the congregation is not responsible for Biblical conduct in these areas. It is to say that the elders lead the congregation in these matters at SVBC.

Those who disagree with the last paragraph have to answer why an elder is also called a bishop or overseer.²¹² If the elders do not have decision-making authority within the spiritual sphere of ministry, how is it that they are expected to “rule well” the flock of God? Why is it that the assembly has given the obligation to submit to those who “rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you...” (Hebrews 13:7)? In the writer’s opinion, if elders (who are called bishops) cannot make decisions in the spiritual sphere of ministry, they simply cannot rule.²¹³ If they cannot rule they cannot administrate (Acts

²¹⁰Edward T. Hiscox, *Principles and Practices of Baptist Churches*, 99-100.

²¹¹Gill, 2:864.

²¹²Stretching back into Classical Greek, the student will discover that ἐπισκοπο~ was used often in the context of a decision-making officer. See ἐπισκοπο~, Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996) revised and supplemented ed. 657. H.W. Beyer makes the following observation about this term, “Athens uses *episkopoi* for state officials, e.g., supervisors sent by Athens to other cities of the Attic League. b. We also read of similar officials in other states, whether as secret police or as officials with judicial functions (this would perhaps include judicial “authority?”) . . . d. An interesting use occurs in the Syriac in relation to the erection of a public building in which it is clear that those who have the episcopo are supervisors of the work in the interests of the builders and perhaps with control of the funds...There is no clearly defined office of episkopos in the LXX but the term is used for ‘overseer’ in various senses, e.g., officers in Judg. 9:28, Is. 60:17, supervisors of funds in 2 Chr. 34:12, 17...” Beyer, *TDNT*, 2:608-620. Commenting on the term προεστω̄ τε~, as found in 1 Timothy 5:17, Duane Litfin remarks that these leaders were to, “direct the affairs of the church. Elders have the oversight of the affairs of the congregation...” Litfin, “1 Timothy” 2:744.

²¹³To see the clear connection between the elder/bishop/pastor and the concept of ruling, managing and administrating see the comments of Ralph Earle who states that these elders were “...to supervise the work of the local congregation.” Earle, “1 Timothy,” 380.

20:17; 28). If they cannot administrate they cannot carry out their tasks as bishops. If they cannot accomplish the tasks of bishop, they cannot fulfill their tasks as elders or pastors (1 Peter 5:1-2). Furthermore, if elders do not have the right to exercise decision-making in the spiritual sphere, how can they lead or feed the flock?

For example, if the congregation is to be the primary decision-maker in the spiritual sphere, the pastor should take a poll each Sunday to see what he should preach (i.e., “feed”). The words of Christ seem to indicate that the shepherd is to exercise his discernment in the details of feeding (John 21:15-17; Acts 20:17; 28). How is that devoid of decision-making? If the congregation holds decision-making authority in the spiritual sphere, then the elders should poll the congregation as to where the church is headed and what will be fed. This is contradictory to 1 Peter 5:1-2.

In 1 Peter 5:1-2, elders are commanded to “shepherd,” which deals with the task of nurturing and feeding. That means they will need to determine what is fed. This demands decision-making. As elders they are leaders. Therefore, they will need to determine the direction they will lead the congregation. This also demands decision making. Then they are commanded to oversee or manage the church of God.²¹⁴ This also demands decision making. The very fact that 1 Peter 5:1-3 warns about abuse of decision-making, indicates that elders do exercise a legitimate form of decision making.²¹⁵ The congregation does share in the burden of responsibility for the spiritual health of the congregation. Passages such as 2 Corinthians 5 demonstrate that the congregation is responsible to make sure that the elders are making decisions in a way that is consistent with scriptural demands.²¹⁶ This balance is a difficult but important. Elder rule without congregational accountability results in changing a Baptist church into a Presbyterian church. Congregational polity without elder leadership changes a Baptist Church into a pure democracy.

The Decision-Making Relationship between the Congregation and the Deacons

In many cases, congregations give the elder’s rightful duties to the deacons. Then because no one is left to accomplish the deacon’s work, they invent the office of trustee. What is the decision-making relationship between the deacon and the congregation? Deacons are responsible for the areas that concern the physical, financial, benevolent, or service ministries. Qualified deacons must “rule” their families well, just as the bishop must (1 Tim 3:12). This ruling involves some form of responsible decision making. Again we see the Scriptures teaching that if a man cannot manage well at home, he

²¹⁴Commenting on the place of the elder in the church, Benjamin Griffith, a leading Baptist in the eighteenth century, writing in behalf of the Philadelphia Baptist Association in 1743, states the following, “Ruling elders also are to be respected, seeing they are fitted of God, and called by the church to go before the church, or to preside in acts of government and rule, 1 Tim. 5:17.” Benjamin Griffith, “A Short Treatise Concerning a True and Orderly Gospel Church,” in *Polity*, 103.

²¹⁵To see a good description as to the abuse of decision-making see Roger M. Raymer, “1 Peter,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* (Wheaton: Scripture Press, 1988), 2:856. Raymer ties the practice of harshly driving sheep with the practice of the false shepherds in Ezekiel 34:4-5.

²¹⁶Hiscox demonstrates the relationship between the elders and the congregation and demonstrates the role that each plays in the area of church discipline. Hiscox, *Principles and Practices for Baptist Churches*, 160-191.

cannot manage well at church. If elders have already been given the responsibility of managing the spiritual sphere of ministry, what is left for the deacons to manage? John Gill describes the type of oversight the deacons are to exercise: “. . . the office of a deacon lies chiefly in the management of temporal things.”²¹⁷ The deacon has been given to the local assembly to serve the benevolence of the congregation and to exercise oversight over the material sphere of ministry.

Some decisions affect both the spiritual and material spheres of ministry. These decisions are best made by the two leadership groups working together. This does not mean the congregation has no role. Passages such as 2 Corinthians 5 imply that the congregation does bear a responsibility for church life. The individual member as well as the congregation at large have specific obligations toward the deacons. Benjamin Griffith, comments,

*The officers of the church, whom Christ hath appointed, are to be respected. (1.) the deacons of the church, though they officiate but in the outward concerns of the church, as in the section about deacons is noted, if they are faithful, do purchase unto themselves a good degree, 1 Tim. 3:13, are therefore to be respected.*²¹⁸

That is to say the corporate body has the right to veto any decision made by the leadership.²¹⁹ Indeed, the congregation decides who the leaders will be. In Acts 6, the congregation was involved in both the nomination and election of their deacons, though the apostles ratified the decision through the laying on of hands.²²⁰ The apostles did not ultimately choose the first deacons.²²¹ Therefore congregations must have direct involvement in major decisions.²²²

²¹⁷John Gill, *A Body of Practical Divinity*, 2:885.

²¹⁸Benjamin Griffith, “A Short Treatise Concerning a True and Orderly Gospel Church,” in *Polity*, 103.

²¹⁹If the congregation believes that the leadership is taking the church in an unbiblical direction, its responsibility is not to follow wrong leadership. The congregation, however, must normally submit to their leaders, even when they are not in total agreement, unless the decision violates biblical principles. Again this is based on the speakers understanding of Baptist polity.

²²⁰As noted by Stanley Toussaint, these men, “were selected by the Christian community,” (the congregation’s part); yet they were, “commissioned by the apostles” (the spiritual leadership’s part). Toussaint, “Acts,” 367.

²²¹*Ibid.*

²²²To see biblical evidence and a number of suggested areas where the congregation could become directly connected as opposed to the elders or deacons, see Edward T. Hiscox, *Principles and Practices for Baptist Churches*, 153-159. Alexander Strauch gives several biblical illustrations of the congregation concurring with and participating in significant decision-making and problem solving. He demonstrates that there are times when the decision-making is not simply an elder domain, or a deacon domain, but a church-wide issue. Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 291-295.

F. Decision Maker #5: The Church Member

SHAPE

II. The Decision-Making Process (How should decisions be made?)

A. A Commitment to mutual submission – Eph 5:18

B. A Commitment to the wisdom of a multitude of counselors

Concerning the value and wisdom of having more than one person's insight in the decision-making process, Solomon writes this: "For lack of guidance a nation falls, but many advisors make victory sure" (Proverbs 11:14). Of course, this passage assumes the value of multiple counselors when the counselors are "wise and intelligent."

C. A Commitment to allowing Spiritual Gifts to influence the sphere of decision-making. (See Quote by W.B. Johnson on page 16)

Another scriptural principle is the variety of gifts, as seen in a variety of leaders. When one considers the emphases the NT places on team ministry, and that no one believer has all of the gifts, it would seem to follow that the church would benefit from a team of leaders in stead of only one man exercising leadership and decision making. In 1 Corinthians 1, Paul, Cephas and Apollos each appears as a talented man in his own right.²²³ An important message in 1 Corinthians 3:4-8 is that ultimately God gives both "the gifts" as well as "the increase." The NT says much concerning the giving of spiritual gifts. Clearly, the message is that no one has all the gifts; and, therefore, every believer needs every other believer (1 Corinthians 12:8, 27-30; Romans 12:3-8). This same principle is true of the leaders of the Church, as described in Ephesians 4:11.²²⁴

D. A commitment to the same Biblical process that individuals face when working through a decision. Notice these Biblical sources for direction:²²⁵

1. God's Word
2. Prayer
3. Circumstances

²²³Harold Westing addresses the issue of each elder and member of the leadership team having different strengths and weaknesses (based on a combination of both natural talents and spiritual gifts) and the importance of functioning effectively together. See chapter four entitled, "Maintaining A Balanced Team" in Harold J. Westing, *Multiple Church Staff Handbook*, 58-71

²²⁴David Lowery notes that here Paul stresses that, "God alone produced results. God made the seed grow (3:6). Therefore God alone should get the credit (v. 7). As servants, Paul and Apollos were not competing against each other but were complementing each other's ministries (v. 8)." See David K. Lowery, "1 Corinthians" in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* (Wheaton: Scripture Press, 1988), 2:511.

²²⁵ Consider the work done by Gary Friesen, *Decision-Making & the Will of God* (Portland: Multnomah Press, 1980).

4. Wisdom from counselors
5. Considerations from “common sense”
6. God-given desire
7. Humility and openness
8. Submissive spirit to the will of Christ
9. Commitment to the process of unity and consensus
10. Sensitivity to the internal, subjective work of the Holy Spirit

Conclusion – Two dangerous tendencies in ministry decision-making

1. Danger of the “Pyramid and Box” Syndrome

“The Pyramid”

This approach places one man at the top of the pyramid. He directs many resources to a project in order to achieve a quick and effective result. In some cases, this one man is the senior pastor; in other cases, he is the chairman of the deacon board. In a few confused situations these two may fight for top position within the pyramid, straining the entire structure. In any case the strict “pyramid” approach identifies one man as the only person who can make the final decision on just about everything. Often times this leader becomes such a CEO he loses touch with the shepherding side of ministry all together. These ministries and organizations display very centralized leadership.

The pyramid approach often leads to a dictatorial attitude on the part of the leader. Everyone assumes that all decisions must have one individual’s approval before they can be implemented. Too often, the assumption is that the chairman or the pastor “always knows best”. Even when the item falls outside of the leaders’ area of expertise. Many of these leaders display a harsh and unloving demeanor.²²⁶ While a Godly leader might be forceful or show strong emotion, he is to have that energy “checked” by a personal code of conduct and character that is consistent with 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1.

“The Box”

Another common characteristic of the “pyramid” approach is the development of little pyramids within the big pyramid. It tends to shift the priority away from people toward the expansion of tangible resources. When a ministry leadership team views people as just another resource for the existence, success, and future of “the ministry,” this signifies the attitude that the author has labeled, “the box.” “The Box” is an approach to ministry that place the

²²⁶See Finzel’s comments on this type of a so-called, leader. Finzel, *Top Ten Mistakes Leaders Make*, 22-35.

tangible existence of buildings, vehicles, and other assets above the value of the individuals that these resources theoretically exist to serve. This attitude accounts for the ease with which some ministries direct resources toward buildings while withholding adequate compensation from those who depend upon the ministry for their livelihood. When the building or the budget of a ministry becomes more important than adequate support for its servants, then its priority is out of order. One of the more obvious examples of this approach occurs when ministries pay a large salary to one leader, invest heavily in the buildings, but then support the rest of the staff at or below the federal poverty line. Those who labor in these ministries often harm their families by doing without adequate health insurance, clothing, transportation, and other necessities. The point is not that Christian servants should never make sacrifices. Blame must be laid upon leaders, however, who lay an unreasonable burden on ministry staff to live in near poverty. The problem here is the ease with which certain ministries are willing to ignore the biblical responsibility to take care of those who serve full-time. How can such ministries claim the label *fundamentalist*, when the clear teaching of Scripture is that one does not “muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain,” (Deuteronomy 25:4, quoted by Paul in 1 Corinthians 9:9) and that “the laborer is worthy of his wages,” (Luke 10:7, quoted by Paul in 1 Timothy 5:18).²²⁷ A new generation of leaders is attempting to change this problem and is aggressively putting into place strategies to replace the “box.” Once a strategy is in place to rectify the financial injustice, local ministries can eventually reverse much of the damage incurred by the “box” mentality.²²⁸

²²⁷The Deuteronomy passage teaches that under the Mosaic Law even the needs of the working animals were to be a priority. Earl S. Kalland explains the passage by stating, “In the threshing process oxen or other heavy animals (especially donkeys) were led around a threshing floor, sometimes harnessed to a central pivot. The stalks of grain were laid on the floor, and the hooves of the animals and sometimes a sledge drawn by animals would separate the kernels from the stalks and hulls.” Earl S. Kalland, “Deuteronomy.” in *EBC* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 3:149. Paul applies this verse to the responsibility of the local church to care for those who minister the Word (1 Timothy 5:18, 1 Corinthians 9:9). This does not preclude Christian workers from exercising their right to give up that rightful compensation. This is what Paul and Barnabas did according to 1 Corinthians 9. This is what several of the elders do at Southeast Valley Baptist Church. They volunteer their time and energy as elders yet choose to work a secular job to meet the financial needs of their families. That does not make their position any less honorable. If anything it adds to their honor. The church’s commitment must be to pay what the servant needs and is worthy of. The servant may exercise the right to do without and supplement through other employment. That is very different than a church that chooses to ignore its responsibility because of a larger commitment to the “pyramid” or the “box.” To see clear evidence of this failure amongst contemporary ministries, especially within the context of Christian education, see the work done by Jeffrey P. Tuttle, “An analysis of Christian School Compensation Patterns In Pennsylvania” (D.Ed. diss., Bob Jones University, May 1988).

²²⁸Other characteristics of the box mentality, which lie outside the scope of this presentation, deal with a ministry focus that views and restricts the ministry of the local assembly to the confines of the physical plant of the church property. This is consistent with a centralized view of ministry. This writer believes this to be one of the chief hesitations of some toward an aggressive small group ministry. The decentralized approach to ministry and the real application of an “every-member-ministry” (The New Testament concept of edification), threatens those with

2. Danger of “Diatrophesic” Decision-Making (compare 3 John with Jer 23)

In Col 1:18, the Apostle Paul argues that Jesus, and He alone, is to have the place of πρωτοπτοκο~.²²⁹ While it is true that the passages examined in Acts, 1 Tim, and Heb 13 all point to the pastor’s authority, Scripture ultimately places the κεφαλη; (literally “head”) of the church in Jesus of Nazareth.²³⁰ The New Testament appears to show that even the early church had pastors who, because of a misunderstanding of their own importance, abused the authority that was delegated to them. One example is probably that of Diotrefes in 3 John.²³¹ In contrast to John’s disciple Gaius, who has a consistent testimony of “walking in the truth,” Diotrefes was publicly repudiated because he falsely acquired the position of φιλοπρωτευπων. Clearly connected with Diotrefes’ abuse

a centralized view of ministry and decision-making. The more institutionalized a ministry becomes, the more important the “box” becomes. It’s nice to have a box. We at SVBC have a “steal box.” The early church didn’t have much of “a box.” Many churches spend a lot of money on their box. The lecturer enjoys telling his friends when viewing their new auditoriums – “nice box!”

²²⁹The meaning here emphasizes that which is “to be first,” “to have first place,” or “to hold the chief place.” BDAG, 892d

²³⁰The language found in the Greek here in verses 17 - 18 stresses strongly that, “Christ, and no one else, is the head.” See a great exegetical analysis of this in Murray J. Harris, “Colossians & Philemon,” in *Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament*, 46-49. For a statement about the problem of someone other than Christ taking on himself the role of “head,” see John Calvin, “Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians,” in *Calvin’s New Testament Commentaries*, ed. David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance, 11:310-311. BDAG, 541d.

²³¹ A very clear description of Diotrefes and his abuse of power is seen in Lenski, *The Interpretation of I and II Epistles of Peter, the Three Epistles of John, and the Epistle of Jude* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1966), 584 - 589. While Lenski asserts that the passage does not clearly define the official capacity of Diotrefes, this writer believes that Diotrefes was in fact an “elder.” This conclusion is based on the following observations: First, they were both evidently involved in some significant leadership function. Second, this leadership capacity was significant enough that John called them out by name. Third, their function and influence (positive or negative) parallels that which would be expected from an elder. Fourth, the level of damage being inflicted by Diotrefes and his refusal to extend hospitality in behalf of the community of believers seems to suggest a significant position of authority. Fifth, the corporate effect and level of hospitality and fidelity exhibited by Gaius indicates a positive influence from a significant position of leadership. There seems to be a comparison between the godly leader, Gaius, and the self-centered leader Diotrefes. Most commentators concur with this contrast and comparison. Stephen Smalley entertains the notion that this Gaius could have been the first Bishop of Pergamum as indicated by the fourth century *Apostolic Constitutions* (7.46.9). Smalley also admits that this Gaius could have been a different ordained leader under the Apostle John. Stephen S. Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John*, WBC 51 (Waco: Word, 1984), 334. Glen Barker, who does not believe Gaius was an elder, but postulates that Diotrefes was, notes, “The elder does not object that Diotrefes should have authority, but he does object to its misuse to the detriment of the truth.” Glenn W. Barker, “3 John,” in *EBC* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 12:375.

of power and authority is his action of excommunication from the fellowship brethren who were not willing to abide by his abusive authority and power.²³² A similar injunction against this spirit occurs in 1 Peter 5:3, where Peter states that the πρεσβυτερων are not to abuse those whom they are to feed by κατακυριευοντες. ²³³The NASB has correctly translated this as “not lording it over those allotted to your charge.” In this verse, Peter no doubt remembers the Lord’s explanation that this attitude of “lording it over,” while certainly characteristic of the world’s perversion of authority, should never characterize God’s ministers and servants (Matthew 20:25-28).²³⁴

²³² Ibid. This attitude and action is often masked with the dictatorial leadership’s abuse of the Matt 18, “church-discipline” process. It is common in these cases that though the senior pastor forcefully asserts his right and authority to challenge (in the name of Matt 18) anyone not following his dictatorial and abusive leadership, others cannot question him in the same spirit. To do so is thought to be a refusal to submit biblically to those who are in authority (often with an appeal to Heb 13). The result of all of this is an abusive, heavy handed approach to leadership and decision-making. It is the opinion of this study that this is what John was speaking about in the case of Diotrephes found in 3 John.

²³³ BDAG 862a. Hiebert helps our understanding of this term when he shows that, “the simple verb κυριευω means “to control, rule, to be lord or master of.” The preposition κατα, “down,” indicates intensity and depicts a heavy-handed use of authority for personal aggrandizement that manifests itself in the desire to dominate, accompanied by a haughty demand for compliance.” Hiebert continues by explaining that, “Jesus directly condemned such abuse of authority among His followers (Matt. 20:25-27; Mark 10:42-44).” But he also aids against the over-reaction of stripping the pastor of any authority by stating that κατακυριευουσιν implied, “that they did exercise a real authority in the congregations; the subtle danger was the temptation to misuse that authority.” See D. Edmond Hiebert, *1 Peter*, 305. For more evidence that this attitude is not to be normative for followers of Christ, the same root word is used on three other occasions in the NT. Two out of the three are used in the strong condemnation of Christ to abusive leaders in Matthew 20:25 and Mark 10:42. See Wingram and Green, *The New Englishman’s Greek Concordance and Lexicon*, 473. See BDAG 519b. When one takes the injunction of 1 Peter 5 and compares that to what Christ says in Matthew and Mark, one learns that the problem is not in decision-making, per se, but the abuse of and spirit of decision-making. Clearly these passages demonstrate that the pastor does have a certain type of authority in his charge of leadership and in his function as a Bishop. However, he is to exercise great care that he does not abuse that authority in decision-making so that he does not become abusive as characterized by the Gentiles.

²³⁴ Hiebert, *1 Peter*, 303-305. In commenting on 1 Peter 5:2, McLachlan draws out that servant leaders, “lead by feeding not beating!” He also correctly asserts, “Christian sheep who are consistently well fed by the shepherd will gladly follow their shepherd’s biblical leadership.” McLachlan, *Reclaiming Authentic Fundamentalism*, p. 51.