

Chapter 3

Shared Leadership

“You have to know—you never come to your Bible neutral. You never come to your Bible empty. You have all kinds of preconceived notions. You have all kinds of experiential assumptions. You have all kinds of theological givens and they shape the way you read the Word of God. And you have to be very, very careful that you’re not cutting and pasting without even realizing it.”

Paul David Tripp

What does the
Scripture say?

Romans 4:3

1. Equality and Functional Diversity Among the Twelve Apostles

1. Equality and Functional Diversity Among the Twelve Apostles

A. Equality Among the Apostles

... members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.

Ephesians 2:19-20

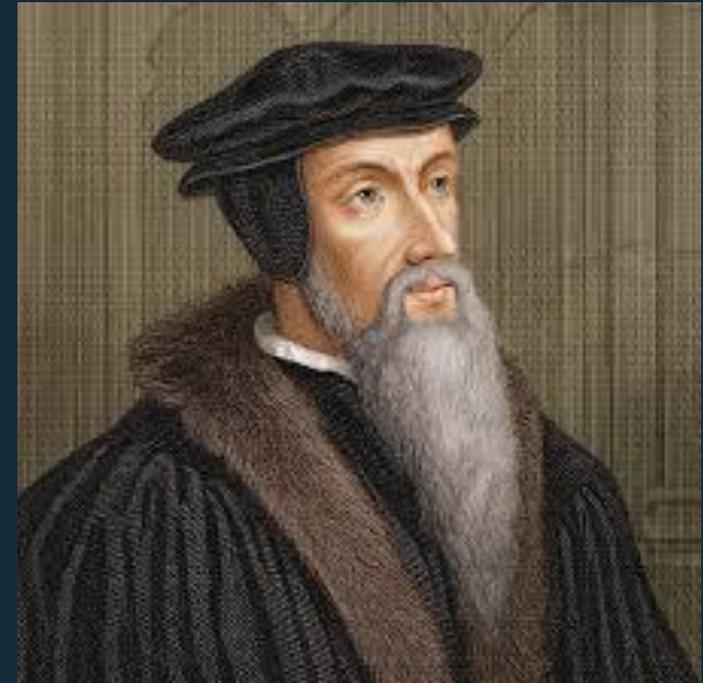
14 The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

Revelation 21:14

- 1. Equality and Functional Diversity Among the Twelve Apostles**
 - A. Equality Among the Apostles**
 - B. Diversity Among the Apostles**

“Jesus had no difficulty in teaching *equality* among the apostles and simultaneously acknowledging *diversity* of giftedness and leadership influence within the apostolic team.”

“We see that the Apostles usually left it to Peter to address the meeting, and in some measure take precedence in relating, exhorting, admonishing, but we nowhere read any thing at all of power.”

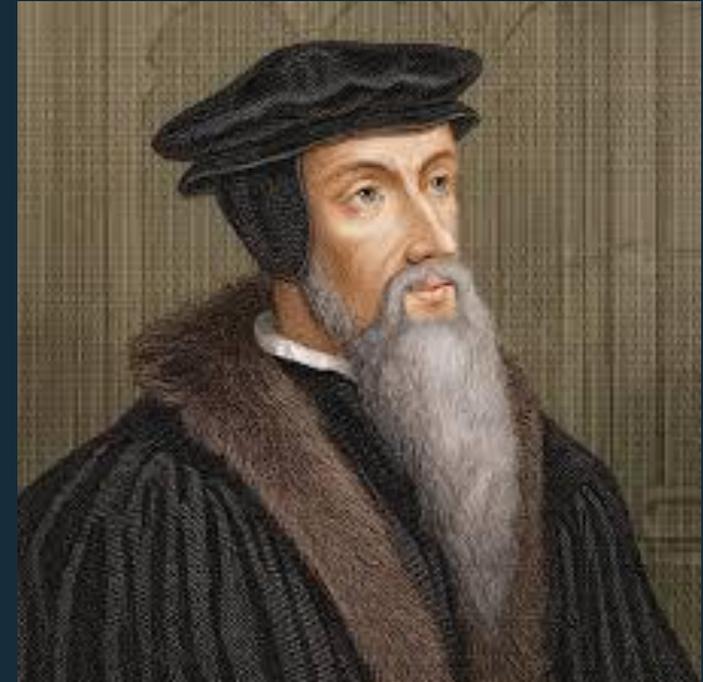


Institutes of the Christian Religion

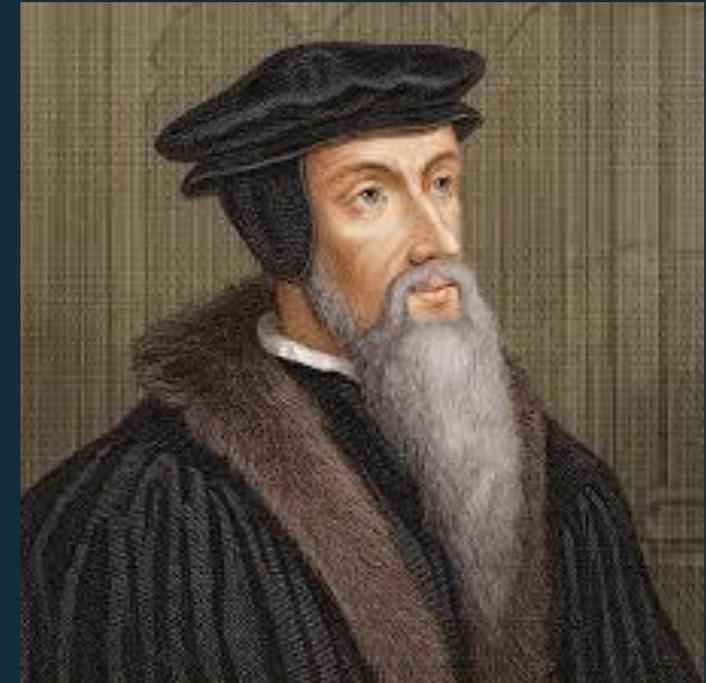
- 1. Equality and Functional Diversity Among the Twelve Apostles**
 - A. Equality Among the Apostles**
 - B. Diversity [of role or function] Among the Apostles**
 - C. No Special Title or Rank**

“I willingly concede to Peter the honour of being placed among the first in the building of the Church, or (if they prefer it) of being the first among the faithful; but I will not allow them to infer from this that he has a primacy over others...

Institutes of the Christian Religion



We see that the Apostles usually left it to Peter to address the meeting, and in some measure take precedence in relating, exhorting, admonishing, but we nowhere read any thing at all of power.”



Institutes of the Christian Religion

- 1. Equality and Functional Diversity Among the Twelve Apostles**
 - A. Equality Among the Apostles**
 - B. Diversity [of role or function] Among the Apostles**
 - C. No Special Title or Rank**
 - D. Model to Emulate**

- 1. Equality and Functional Diversity Among the Twelve Apostles**
 - A. Equality Among the Apostles**
 - B. Diversity [of role or function] Among the Apostles**
 - C. No Special Title or Rank**
 - D. Model to Emulate**
 - E. Local Leaders, not Apostles**

- 1. Equality and Functional Diversity Among the Twelve Apostles**
- 2. Equality and Functional Diversity Among the Elders**

“Plural Elders: The Pattern in All New Testament Churches: The next church office to be considered is that of “elder.”

Although some have argued that different forms of church government are evident in the New Testament,...



Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Bible Doctrine

...a survey of the relevant texts shows the opposite to be true: there is quite a consistent pattern of plural elders as the main governing group in New Testament churches.”



Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Bible Doctrine

- 1. Equality and Functional Diversity Among the Twelve Apostles**
- 2. Equality and Functional Diversity Among the Elders**
 - A. Equality**

28 Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.

Acts 20:28

- 1. Equality and Functional Diversity Among the Twelve Apostles**
- 2. Equality and Functional Diversity Among the Elders**
 - A. Equality**
 - B. Functional Diversity**

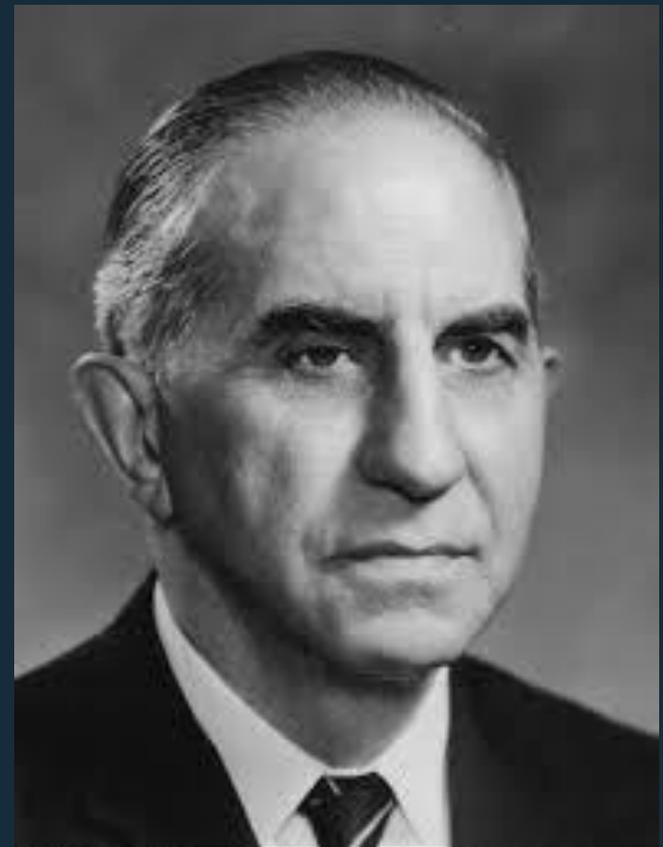
- 1. Equality and Functional Diversity Among the Twelve Apostles**
- 2. Equality and Functional Diversity Among the Elders**
 - A. Equality**
 - B. Functional Diversity**
 - C. Leaders Among Leaders**

22 Then the apostles and elders, with the whole church, decided to choose some of their own men and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They chose Judas (called Barsabbas) and Silas, two men who were leaders among the brothers.

Acts 15:22

- 1. Equality and Functional Diversity Among the Twelve Apostles**
- 2. Equality and Functional Diversity Among the Elders**
 - A. Equality**
 - B. Functional Diversity**
 - C. Leaders Among Leaders**
 - D. No Formal Hierarchy Within the Eldership**

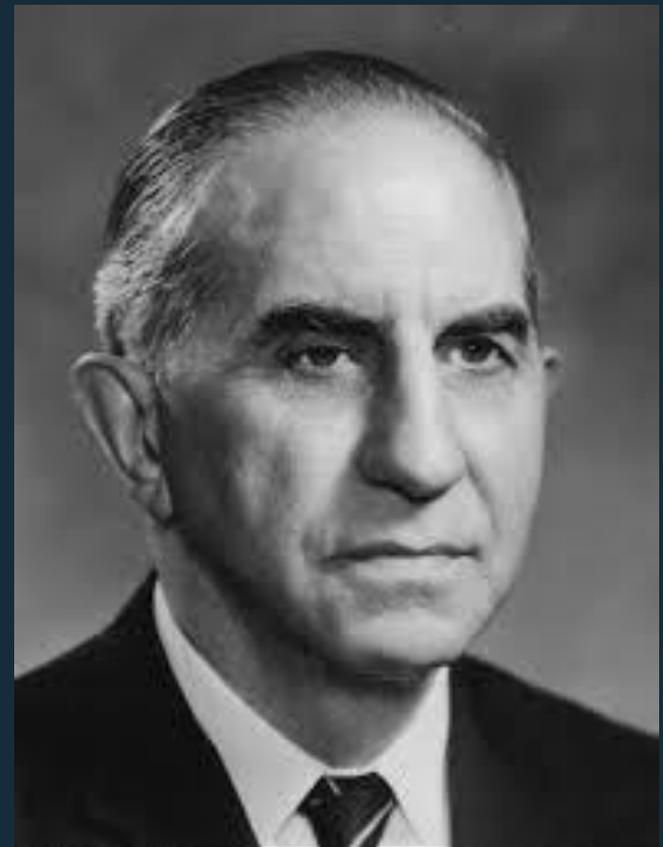
“The principle of parity [equality] is co-ordinate with that of plurality. Strictly speaking there can be no plurality if there is not parity. For if one is in the least degree above the others, then, in respect to that hegemony [superior authority], there is no longer plurality...”



John Murray, cite in Biblical Eldership: Restoring the Eldership to Its Rightful Place in the Local Church

... Plurality applies to all government of the church, and there must therefore be parity in the plurality. There is not the slightest evidence in the New Testament that among the elders there was any hierarchy; the elders exercise government in unison, and on a parity with one another.”

John Murray, cite in Biblical Eldership: Restoring the Eldership to Its Rightful Place in the Local Church



- 1. Equality and Functional Diversity Among the Twelve Apostles**
- 2. Equality and Functional Diversity Among the Elders**
 - A. Equality**
 - B. Functional Diversity**
 - C. Leaders Among Leaders**
 - D. No Formal Hierarchy Within the Eldership**
 - E. Two Unbiblical Extremes**

“One unbiblical view is to sacralize one gifted elder, making him in effect the Protestant priest, the ordained clergyman, the minister of the word, the one who alone can bless, preach the word, administer the Lord’s Supper, wear clerical garments, and take the title of “Reverend.””

“The other unbiblical extreme is to force complete uniformity upon the elders, allowing for no special giftedness, calling, function, or financial provision for any member.”

- 1. Equality and Functional Diversity Among the Twelve Apostles**
- 2. Equality and Functional Diversity Among the Elders**
- 3. Reasons for Leadership by Multiple Elders**

- 1. Genuine accountability**
- 2. Familial closeness**
- 3. Shared labor**
- 4. Balance against faults and deficiencies**
- 5. Promised presence**

- 1. Equality and Functional Diversity Among the Twelve Apostles**
- 2. Equality and Functional Diversity Among the Elders**
- 3. Reasons for Leadership by Multiple Elders**
- 4. Faulty Examples of One-Pastor Rule**

- 1. Equality and Functional Diversity Among the Twelve Apostles**
- 2. Equality and Functional Diversity Among the Elders**
- 3. Reasons for Leadership by Multiple Elders**
- 4. Faulty Examples of One-Pastor Rule**
 - A. Special Apostolic Delegates**

- 1. Equality and Functional Diversity Among the Twelve Apostles**
- 2. Equality and Functional Diversity Among the Elders**
- 3. Reasons for Leadership by Multiple Elders**
- 4. Faulty Examples of One-Pastor Rule**
 - A. Special Apostolic Delegates**
 - Timothy**
 - Epaphras**
 - James**

- 1. Equality and Functional Diversity Among the Twelve Apostles**
- 2. Equality and Functional Diversity Among the Elders**
- 3. Reasons for Leadership by Multiple Elders**
- 4. Faulty Examples of One-Pastor Rule**
 - A. Special Apostolic Delegates**
 - B. Angels of the Churches**

20 The mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand and of the seven golden lampstands is this: The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.

Revelation 1:20

“Therefore, angeloι is better rendered “messengers,” as in Luke 7:24; 9:52; and James 2:25. Some suggest that these messengers were representatives from each of the seven churches who came to visit John on Patmos and take the book of Revelation back with them.

But since Christ is said to hold them in His right hand, they were more likely leading elders and pastors (though not the sole leaders, since the New Testament teaches a plurality of elders), one from each of the seven churches.”

“A central tenet of sound biblical hermeneutics is to build one’s doctrine on the clear, core, teaching passages of the subject in question, and not on secondary, speculative, irrelevant, or obscure passages.”

“In other words, let the clear didactic passages interpret the unclear and obscure, and let the core teaching control the peripheral.”

- 1. Equality and Functional Diversity Among the Twelve Apostles**
- 2. Equality and Functional Diversity Among the Elders**
- 3. Reasons for Leadership by Multiple Elders**
- 4. Faulty Examples of One-Pastor Rule**
 - A. Special Apostolic Delegates**
 - B. Angels of the Churches**
 - C. The Moses Model**

- 1. Equality and Functional Diversity Among the Twelve Apostles**
- 2. Equality and Functional Diversity Among the Elders**
- 3. Reasons for Leadership by Multiple Elders**
- 4. Faulty Examples of One-Pastor Rule**
 - A. Special Apostolic Delegates**
 - B. Angels of the Churches**
 - C. The Moses Model**
 - D. One Elder per House Church**

In response to this suggestion, we must note that this is a theory without any evidence to support it, for no verse in the New Testament hints at the idea that there was one elder in each “house church.” In terms of supporting evidence, this suggestion stands in the same category as the statement, “Perhaps all the elders in Crete were blind in the left eye.”



Grudem, cited in *Biblical Eldership: Restoring the Eldership to Its Rightful Place in the Local Church*

Of course, scholars can say “perhaps” to any event for which there is no evidence, but such statements should carry no weight in our attempts to determine what pattern of church government actually existed in the first century.



Grudem, cited in *Biblical Eldership: Restoring the Eldership to Its Rightful Place in the Local Church*

- 1. Equality and Functional Diversity Among the Twelve Apostles**
- 2. Equality and Functional Diversity Among the Elders**
- 3. Reasons for Leadership by Multiple Elders**
- 4. Faulty Examples of One-Pastor Rule**
 - A. Special Apostolic Delegates**
 - B. Angels of the Churches**
 - C. The Moses Model**
 - D. One Elder per House Church**
 - E. One Pastor-Teacher**

There is a different aspect to this problem which comes up rarely, but deserves an answer. Suppose someone suggests that, while the elders and bishops may be the same (and exist in plurality, as we shall see later), perhaps the office of “pastor” is different and may be singular? Let me answer this with three arguments, touching on all the passages which speak at all of “pastors.”

(1) Let us remember that the term “pastor” or “to pastor” is used only three times in the entire New Testament as a designation for church leaders. All of these are plural references. Thus, it would seem quite unlikely that the term “pastor” would stand as a valid candidate to be the one term which depicts the singular head of a local church.

(2) Two of the three references are those cited above, Acts 20:28 and 1 Peter 5:2. In both passages, the word is used to describe the function of all the elder-bishops in the passage. The only sensible conclusion is that elders and overseers are those who also do the pastoring.

(3) This leaves but one remaining passage (the *only* place where the noun is used), found in Ephesians 4:11... When the question of equivalence is in discussion, the only hermeneutically honest conclusion must be reached from the passages which speak of both elder-bishops *and* pastors (Acts 20:28 and 1 Peter 5:2), where they are shown to be the same.

- 1. Equality and Functional Diversity Among the Twelve Apostles**
- 2. Equality and Functional Diversity Among the Elders**
- 3. Reasons for Leadership by Multiple Elders**
- 4. Faulty Examples of One-Pastor Rule**
- 5. Closing Thoughts**

A central tenet of sound biblical hermeneutics is to build one's doctrine on the clear, core, teaching passages of the subject in question, and not on secondary, speculative, irrelevant, or obscure passages. In other words, let the clear didactic passages interpret the unclear and obscure, and let the core teaching control the peripheral.