

<b>Series</b>	Gamma 17 – Study 5
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Welcome back to Gamma 17. We are going to be looking down pastoral epistles again. Today's study is about gospel leadership. This week we will be dealing with elders. Next week, we will be dealing with deacons. So let's start with a word of prayer.

Lord, we ask, Oh Lord, that you grant us your spirit as we study your word so that we will understand how your church works, how the gospel is protected by the leadership which you have instituted. We asked for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Let's look at our journey down the Letter of Paul to Timothy. We have covered the steward of the gospel, countering enemies of the gospel, conduct of the gospel, conduct of the women, prayer and today we will be going to be dealing with gospel leadership. It is kind of leadership that will actually promote the gospel. All right. And there are four topics here. We are going to have:

1. Introduction to church leadership structures.
2. We're looking at what is an overseer and what relationship does it have with elders and pastors.
3. What is the criteria for an overseer or an elder and what role do they play in church governance?

### **Introduction to Church Leadership Structures.**

We've got various leadership structures that we can see all around. Many of you may have come from different churches, and basically if you look at the **Anglican church**;

- the Bishop is at the top,
- followed by priest,
- followed by deacons
- and then other leaders.

If you look at the Roman **Catholic church**, it is very hierarchical. Right at the top, you've got

- the Pope
- then you've got the Cardinals.
- Then you could the arch bishops
- then you got the bishops
- then you get the priests.
- and then you've got the ordinary congregation called the laity.

Look at a **Presbyterian**. We've got a bunch of leaders at the top called,

- the session,
- and then they've got a Presbytery.
- Then you've got a Synod
- then you've got the general assembly.

What about Baptist? Well, a Baptist structure is basically right at the top is

- the pastor. He runs everything.

- Under him is the deacons, ministers and deaconesses.
- And under the deacons, you've got worship, admin, Sunday school, women's ministry, cell group facilities and a whole bunch of other leaders there.

Are these biblical structures are not? Let's examine them with the lens looking at scripture. We go back to the basics. Okay. Why should we adopt biblical terminology and structure rather than could go back and look what is available in the world today. There are about three reasons.

First of all, authority for leadership is based on scripture, not on human wisdom. It is not because I think this is the best way. You have got one head honcho and then two second honchos and then third going down. Authority is based on scripture, it is not on human wisdom because the church is a church of Jesus Christ where Jesus Christ actually the head.

Second of all, it allows the congregation to know what to expect from the leadership, because the structure of leadership is actually given from the pages of the scripture itself.

Thirdly, we are able to hold leaders to biblical qualifications. They're all listed in 1 Timothy chapter three.

Gospel leadership in the Bible in the pastoral epistles is basically two tiers. You've got overseer or elder and we've got deacons only two.

We have got the introduction done. We're going to now look at what is an overseer and what relationship does it have with elders and pastors?

**1 Tim 3:1 The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task.**

So here we actually have someone who aspires. The task is a noble one. Some people think being a church leader is a godforsaken kind of role, because everybody complains about you. Everybody criticizes you. But what Paul is saying, and they have a difficult time during the church in Ephesus, because they're having great controversy over false teaching. Timothy himself was being criticized. Once don't you become a Christian leader? You're put up there and basically everybody's taking pot shots at you. And Paul is reassuring him, saying, if anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. It is a Godly right task, which you should actually aspire to.

The word here used of overseer is called 'Episkopos'. It has been translated variously. It is basically overseer, it is more of a Greek term. Or supervisor. Some people translate this Episkopos as bishop and others just generically as church leader.

What I'm going to put forward to you and prove to you from scripture is that overseer, the elder, the pastor and the leader are all the same. They're all interchangeable terms in the New Testament.

First of all, if we look at overseer, Episkopos and elder, which has got 'presbuteros' to Greek. Now the elder name actually comes from Jewish background, referring to the older person. There were some times caught advisers or member of that exclusive 70 people, Sanhedrin, which actually ruled Israel or city elders. All right. People in charge like a mayor. The elders come from a Jewish background where as Episkopos more from a gentile background.

And if you look in Jewish leadership, it was a kinship-based community leadership where these elders were the senior members of respective families, who led basically exemplary lives. They were hospitable,

which means you can throw food for people or people come to the house to stay, which means they're in a certain kind of wealth, but they're not addicted to money. And they carried the traditions of people from one generation to another, and they also have the unique gift to be able to communicate and lead people. It is a little bit different from corporate management leadership, where is hierarchical, managerial, administrative and is basically impersonal. And that's the problem when we try to import corporate ideas into church leadership.

Here we actually have the question, Elders rule not overseers. The only time Paul mentions this in 1-Timothy is chapter three and the rest of the time he doesn't mention it at all. Instead, he mentions elders.

**1 Tim 5: 17 Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching.**

This is dual task. This is an overseeing, overseer task of teaching. Remember the qualifications for an overseers is actually teaching. In the same way elders are preaching and teaching. So there is overlap, right? So therefore overseers are equal to elders. Now elders are accountable, not overseers.

**1 Tim 5:19 Do not admit a charge against an elder except on the evidence of two or three witnesses.**

Here he starts off chapter three, telling you that they're overseers, but he doesn't talk about overseers anymore, everything else in 1-Timothy talks about elders. Do not admit a charge against an elder except one evidence of two or three witnesses. When you look in Titus 1:5-8

**Titus 1:5-8 (ESV) This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you— 6 if anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife, and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination. 7 For an overseer, as God's steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered ...**

Here you have Paul writing to Titus and he mentions the same leader; elders and overseers in the same passage. So therefore, they are the same person. Acts chapter 14,

**Acts 14: 23 And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed.**

Acts chapter 20, Ephesian church,

**Acts 20:28-29 (ESV) Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. 29 I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock;**

So here each office has distinct qualifications. You've got the overseers have distinct qualifications, deacons have distinct qualifications, overseers have distinct qualifications, but Paul never mentions the description of qualifications of elders. Why? Is because elders are equal to overseers. In the whole 1-Timothy overseer is mentioned one time. Elders are mentioned three times. So the terms are interchangeable. Both have similar functions, overseers and bishops. They actually teach. 1-Timothy chapter 1:9

**He may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.**

And in 1-Timothy chapter 5, elders preach and teach. In chapter 20 of Acts, overseers are carer for the flock of the church.

So both have similar function. So therefore overseers and elders are terms which are used interchangeably, equivalent terms.

### What about pastors?

If you've got overseers, you've got elders, they are the same people. What about pastors which is poimenon which actually mean shepherds. Well, Ephesians chapter 4

**Ephesians 4:11 And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, 12 to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ**

Actually the word pastors, shepherds and teachers are actually the same word. It means in Greek, it is such that they actually refer to the same person, not different people. All right. Not two different gifts. It is actually the same person. It is called the pastor teacher. All right. The shepherd teacher.

**1 Peter 5:1-3 (ESV) So I exhort the elders among you (he is talking about elders), as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: 2 shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight (remember overseer Episkopos), not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; 3 not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.**

Here you have in 1-Peter the three terms, elders, overseers and shepherd all in the same passage. So the terms are for the same person. The overseer is an elder, is a pastor and shepherd. If you look at the Old Testament elders are shepherds. If you look at the word of Ezekiel chapter 34:1

**Ezekiel 34: 1 The word of the LORD came to me: 2 "Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy, and say to them, even to the shepherds, Thus says the Lord GOD: Ah, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves! Should not shepherds feed the sheep?**

So elders are actually shepherds. So, these are interchangeable terms; overseer, elder, and pastor. Now the last word is leaders. Hebrews chapter 13 verse 7 talks only about leaders. It didn't talk about elders or overseers.

**Hebrews 13: 7 Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith...17 Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls**

So here are the leaders watching over your spiritual health. So therefore, all three of them mean the same thing; overseer, elders, pastors or leaders. So they are quite interchangeable in use.

### WHAT IS THE CRITERIA OF AN OVERSEER OR ELDER?

Three criterias;

1. Desire
2. Qualifications, which is actually situational or moral.
3. Spiritual capability.

## DESIRE:

So basically the one who becomes an elder or an overseer or a leader or a pastor is the one that should have desire. That's no compulsion, other people forcing you or you do it because of guilty. Nobody else is going to be an elder or a pastor of your church, or the situation forces you to it. You're led by a calling by your situation, by your gifting, by input of your church, people who recognize that God has laid his hand on you. And it's actually a noble task. It is a good worthwhile excellent task because it is honoring to God and if you've got to live your whole life with on great responsibility, this is a noble task because you are building up the church of Jesus Christ. There is no greater task as it were.

## QUALIFICATION:

Who can be an elder or a pastor or an overseer? Well there are situational criteria as well as moral criteria. Husband of one wife, situational, which means in Greek it is actually one woman man, which means you're dedicated to one woman. Some people argue is one woman at a time. Actually, that is not what it means. It means the emphasis is on faithfulness. It is a protection against sexual immorality. So therefore, lots of pastors. Here is Carl Lenz who is the pastor in America, the pastor of Justine Bieber, recently found to have multiple affairs with multiple women. This is not a one woman man, so therefore he actually goes sack from Hillsong Church.

**4 He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, 5 for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church?**

What about his children? Titus gives you a better example. 1-Titus 1:6 talking about elders,

**Titus 1: 6 if anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife, and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination.**

Here there is a little bit of controversy because the actual Greek word does not say that the children are to be believers. The English standard version translate 'pistos' as believers, but you actually can translate it as faithful, reliable or trustworthy. It doesn't necessarily mean that they are going to be believers. What does this mean? Is Pistos believers or is it children who are faithful, reliable or trustworthy? We don't know. Well, it's determined by the context and the context is the children are to be faithful and not open to the charge of debauchery and subordination. This is the context. The meaning of pistos is children who are trustworthy or reliable, therefore not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination.

You see elders cannot guarantee their children will be born again. Being born again is something that you can't pass on. You can teach the gospel, but it's up to the children, whether they accept the Lord Jesus Christ themselves. So therefore elders should have been able to manage their household and they have got trustworthy children, not children running all over the place, wild into drugs or bank robbing, or totally immoral people, basically faithful, trustful, basically reliable children.

Not a recent convert. Now this depends on the context of the church, because historically they appointed elders within six months of the church being born because the church started. So therefore, if you got a church that has been in existence for six months versus a church who has been in existence for 20 years, so therefore the criteria should be a little bit different, but definitely not a recent convert.

Why? Because you want to avoid the temptation of pride. Because a recent convert, the power will go to his head and so therefore he will basically fall.

Good reputation in the community. He must be well-taught off by outsiders so that he may not fall into

disgrace because this grace of the elder, this grace of the pastor will bring disgrace upon the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Now looking at character, he must be above reproach, husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-control, respectable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not a violent but gentle, not quarrelsome and not a lover of money. Here above reproach. This is an overarching qualification that means not just judge on one instance. You know everybody loses the temper off and on, everybody messes up once in a while, but I'm talking about above reproach which is an overarching qualification when you look at the whole span of his life. This is godliness, not perfection. And a reasonable reputation in the community. He is sober-minded, which means he is spiritually clear about important matters in life. He has got balanced judgment and not emotional to one side or other. He is rational and has cool-headed decisions. Mentally and emotionally stable, not jumping from one end into another, leading his church in various directions. He has self-control, which means he exercises good judgment and discipline. He is prudent and is discreet. He is able to keep secrets as it were. He is respectable, which means character of well balanced virtuous, basically worth following. He has to be hospitable. In biblical times, a very important virtue because he is taking an interest in people's lives, invites people to his home, because in those days, there are no hotels and if they are hospitable means they are opening their homes to people to come in and stay, foreigners or basically strangers as it were.

Today, he is out there sharing his meal with friends and family, et cetera. He is gentle, which means he is kind and gracious and forbearing not overbearing to those, especially those who have sin, judgemental as it were. And he doesn't retaliate easily. He is not a drunkard, which means he is not someone who is open to substance abuse, under control of substance, because if you are under the control of a substance, you can't be in control of the church. He is not violent, which means he is not pugnacious, looking for fight all the time, irritable with bad temper, you know, and he takes interest in people's lives. He is not quarrelsome. You know, you just touch him a little bit and he gets upset. He retaliates. He is gentle, peaceable, peacemaker.

He is not a lover of money because if a person is lover of money then you've got a problem. Because you have got to go to the church tithing. For example, Judas lover of money. He complained about a woman who spent 300 denarii pouring expensive perfume at Jesus' feet. He says that money could have been used for the poor. Actually he was taking money from the till. All right. So even lover of money will fall into temptation and you have got divided passion. So, he must not be a lover of money. So, these are the moral character of an elder.

#### SPIRITUAL CAPABILITY:

**Titus 1: 9 He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.**

So basically he is able to teach. All right. There's a one criteria which the deacons do not have. He must be able to teach, not only teach, teach to an extent in 1-Timothy chapter nine to be able to rebuke those who contradict. So, if you have got a lot of false doctrine coming to church at every age. They're like wolves, and basically he's able to teach sound doctrine, correct doctrine, and also rebuke those who basically contradict it. You can't have an elder who cannot teach, unable to communicate in an effective manner and not contradict those people who basically run down the Bible or try to dilute it.

So not necessarily he is able to preach because teaching and preaching are double honor. There are those who are able to teach and preach, they have double honor. As long as he is able to teach or refute doctrine in a small or large group as it were.

Let's look at gospel leadership. What is the role which these elders play in church governance? WE are going to look at five things.

1. Function of elders.
2. Appointment of elders.
3. Whether they be single or plural.
4. Their authority.
5. Whether they're professional or lay.

These are all the important questions you might have regarding elders or pastors in the church. Well, the functions are quite simple. Elders or overseers or pastors, they lead, they teach, they defend the faith and their spiritual care because they're also shepherds.

Not all elders or pastors will have the same kind of function. There are distinctions within the eldership as well, because there are some who can teach and preach and those who teach alone.

How are they appointed? Well, they're voted on they are actually appointed. Acts 14

Acts 14: 23 And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

Titus 1:5 This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you

So basically elders are appointed. Acts 11.

Acts 11: 29 So the disciples determined, every one according to his ability, to send relief to the brothers living in Judea. 30 And they did so, sending it to the elders by the hand of Barnabas and Saul.

Acts 14: 23 And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

So elders are appointed, but there's a plurality. Every time you mentioned elders in the New Testament, there are multiple elders. Appointed elders, not elder. Acts 15, this is a council of Jerusalem where they had to discuss whether they had to circumcise gentile believers.

Acts 15: 4 When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they declared all that God had done with them.

Acts 20: 17 Now from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the church to come to him.

Plural again. 1-Timothy chapter 4 versus 14 to 15

1 Timothy 4:14-15 (ESV) Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you.

So therefore you don't have a council of one person, you have a council of elders. There is plurality of leadership. Titus 1:5 point elders and then you have got elders in James 5 and also in 1-Peter chapter 1, so leadership in a church, the top leadership is always a plurality. The advantage of the plurality of leadership is that you have got accountability. You can't have one man running the whole show,

perhaps taking all the money. There is balance because different gifts and temperament will be able to give you a better overall plurality of leadership. They share the burden, so one person doesn't burnt out and they keep the focus on Christ rather than one man. You see, if you've got a number of leaders, therefore all the credit goes to Jesus Christ, because he is the one that controls them all rather than one person acting as if he is Jesus Christ.

#### AUTHORITY:

Where do they get authority. 1-Thessalonians chapter five verse 12.

**1 Thess 5: 12 We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, 13 and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work**

So here the authority of the elders is to basically correct the people, the sheep, so that they can walk in God's path and the authority actually stems from their work, not because of their position. It is because they love you, because they work for you, to grow you in Christ that you actually esteemed them highly and it is in love. It's not kind of corporate kind of leadership. It's a family kind of leadership. The authority is based on their work, not their position.

Look at Hebrews talking about leaders.

**Hebrews 13: 7 Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith**

So leadership is not by ordering people to be faithful, ordering people to believe in the cross, basically it's living out your life and the authority of the leaders is actually authority of the example, not by their verbal orders. So leaders who can lead by imitating Christ and their sheep will imitate them, and the word obey your leaders. What does this mean? The word obey in this Greek context is actually be persuaded by. The word used is be persuaded by, which means they love you, they care for you and so therefore you need to be persuaded by their arguments, so that you will walk in the path of the gospel.

**1 Tim 5: 17 Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching**

So therefore there's also the authority of probably deciding one person got to decide or a few of them have to decide on what are the areas of non-doctrinal issues? What are the COVID SOP is going to follow, for example? So the authority of elders are there. They actually have to be obeyed in terms of their ruling. Now this is Benjamin Merkel, who writes quite a lot about eldership, and he is actually publish a very good book. He used to be in Penang, teaching the Baptist Theological Seminary, now is back in the US and he writes in his book on elders.

*Elders are not to be obeyed simply because they are elders. Rather, they are to be obeyed because they have the responsibility of shepherding and teaching the congregation. They shepherd because the Word calls upon elders to shepherd. They teach because the Word calls upon elders to teach.*

Which is very good description on the authority of elders. Now that authority on elder is not intrinsic to the person. The authority of the elder is the proximity to the word of God. The authority of elder is present as long as he is walking close to the word of God. He doesn't have the kind of authority to tell you as a church member to basically disobey the word of God. The closer he is to the word, the greater his authority. Now in a local congregation, the authority is in selecting other leaders, sending missionaries out, determining the theological position of the church and also elders are involved in



church discipline. We actually believe in the Baptist circles of the priesthood of all believers.

1 Peter 2: (ESV) 4 As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, 5 you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

We are all priests. We all have access to God basically. So therefore we as a congregation also are involved in affirming what God has done in terms of choosing elders and deacons. We come together in a Baptist church as a congregational church, we design to budget, church discipline, probably constitutional amendments and maybe major spending. So therefore, that is how our church puts into practice this concept of the priesthood of all believers. So here in First Baptist, we've got elders and deacons and then we have got the congregation.

Before, we actually have elders and deacons in First Baptist Church, we had an assembly of leaders where people are transitioning to become elders and deacons within the church.

What about professional or lay? Is there a different in full-time worker or non full-time worker? In the past Os Guinness described this as the Catholic distortion. You've got clergy different from the laity. Eusebius Bishop of Caesarea described the perfect life and the permitted life, which means the clergy or the pastors or leaders and elders, basically the perfect life, try to be Holy and then the rest of us, we lived the barely permitted life.

Augustine of Hippo and Thomas Aquinas describe, contemplative life which is the clergy. They sit and contemplate salvation and all the esoteric issues and active life the one who actually does planting the crops and looks after carpentry that is the laity. This is actually an artificial dichotomy between two kinds of life. God is in control of every portion of our lives. Martin Luther in the Reformation actually wrote,

*The works of monks and priest however holy and arduous they be, do not differ one whit in the sight of God from the works of the rustic labourer in the field or the woman going about her household tasks, but that all works are measured before God by faith alone*

So therefore God regards all works to glorify him. So therefore actually, when we apply that there's no difference between full-time and part-time. The full-time pastors, are all of them elders. Well, you need to apply biblical type criteria. You can may have full-time workers in church, but if they don't meet the biblical criteria yet, or they are too young, too inexperienced, or the church is unfamiliar with them, they need to go through an interim period of time until they fulfill all this criteria to become a pastor or elder.

Titles are not important. If a person serves simply because he has a title, then I think it's basically he has got the wrong idea.

Matt 23: 8 But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all brothers. 9 And call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven. 10 Neither be called instructors, for you have one instructor, the Christ. 11 The greatest among you shall be your servant. 12 Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.

It's very clear. It doesn't matter you are elder, pastor, bishop, they are all servants. And if title is that important before you actually serve, then I think you shouldn't be serving at all.

Advantages of professional elders and pastors, which mean full time. Well, full-time means more time devoted. More productive time for them to get biblical education and training, so they better train, better steep in God's word, able to respond to emergency if you are in a hospital, the full-time person can drop everything and go and visit you in hospital and then presence in the church all the time. These are advantages of having professional elders and pastors who are on full-time payroll.

Advantages of lay elders and pastors. Well, you actually have the full utilization of gifts if you have lay elders or pastors in church, because even though they may be involved in a secular job, they have gifts that could be used for the church. It protects the church because the budget won't be so heavy. Right. You reduce the financial burden because lay people work for free. And it also inspires more lay people to see their whole life as a calling to serve God, not just full-timers as it were. So therefore professional or full-time and part-time they're the same. And hopefully in our church, we want to come to a stage in our lives here that we've got elders and pastors who are all full-time or lay united in one council of elders.

Let me just end with what Bill Mlounce, who has basically written the commentary for Book of Timothy,

*Church leadership is composed of godly people who are serious and controlled, whose behavior does not bring reproach, whose management skills and Christian maturity are already visible, and in the case of overseers are able to teach the truth and refute error.*

May God add a blessing to His word.