

The Senior Pastor

This is a brief explanation of why we have a senior pastor.

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Paul went to Corinth as recorded in Acts 18, and by grace, a Church formed.

When writing the Corinthians, Paul says, “Are you not the result of my work in the Lord?” (1st Corinthians 9:1). Paul saw himself as an apostle (one sent out) to the Corinthians, “Even though I may not be an apostle to others, surely I am to you!” (1st Corinthians 9:2).

There were those that challenged his pastoral shepherding of the church at Corinth. “Some of you have become arrogant, as if I were not coming to you.” (1st Corinthians 4:18). Paul's Pastorship of the Church was in question. More on the challenge of his leadership later in this article.

It is important that we understand a Church is started by a single person who is called by God to, “GO!” “Go into the world and make disciples of all nations...” (Matthew 28:19-20). Just as Paul was an apostle to the Corinthians, so in a similar way, the senior Pastor has been called by God and sent out to begin a work of God in a particular area. The Senior Pastor is not an Apostle, as in one that has seen the ministry, death & resurrection of Christ, (Acts 1:21-22), but an apostle in the sense of, ‘one that is sent out.’

Though there are other leaders that Paul mentions (i.e. Apollos in 1st Cor 3, Timothy in 1st Cor 4), Paul says that, “By the grace God has given me, I laid the foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it.” But each one should be careful how he builds.” (1st Corinthians 3:10). Paul sees himself as ‘the’ Pastor to the Corinthians. There are others that have continued the work he started for sure, but he appeals to himself as having, “laid the foundation.”

Timothy was sent to Corinth as an assistant of Paul to check on the Church. (1st Cor 4:17, 16:10–11; cf. Acts 19:22). Upon his arrival, Timothy found that the problems in Corinth had escalated. Notice that Paul has the authority to send others (those Paul approves) to Corinth to set things in order (cf. book of Titus).

The Corinthians were to see Paul as a servant of Christ and one that shares truth to the body of Christ at Corinth. “So then, people ought to regard us as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the secret things of God.” (1st Corinthians 4:1).

The Senior Pastor is the Shepherd of the flock. He is to be seen as the one leading the people as a servant of Christ. Though there are other Assistant Pastors, (Elders, Overseers), He is the leader of the Church. Timothy and others certainly shared truth with the Corinthians, but Paul appeals to his being the Shepherd of the flock. “For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.” (1st Corinthians 11:2).

In a similar pattern...Moses was the leader God called for Israel (Exodus). Moses also had assistants to be alongside him. “So Joshua fought the Amalekites as Moses had ordered, and Moses, Aaron and Hur went to the top of the hill.” (Exodus 17:10).

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These assistants were a help to Moses. “When Moses’ hands grew tired, they took a stone and put it under him and he sat on it. Aaron and Hur held his hands up—one on one side, one on the other—so that his hands remained steady till sunset.” (Exodus 17:12).

Assistant Pastors are under the leadership of the Senior Pastor. A Senior Pastor is called by God to relate the truth of God’s word to the people. He is to be an example of the power of God by his godly character and sound doctrine. “What do you prefer? Shall I come to you with a whip, or in love and with gentle spirit?” (1st Corinthians 4:20). “When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. My message and my preaching were not with persuasive words of wisdom, but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power, so that your faith would not rest on men’s wisdom, but on God’s power.” (1st Corinthians 2:1-5).

For an Old Testament example, in Exodus 18, Moses is given some advice by his father in law, Jethro. “What you are doing is not good. You and these people who come to you will only wear yourselves out. The work is too heavy for you; you cannot handle it alone.” (Exodus 18:17-18).

Moses was then given the advice to select, “capable men from all the people - men who fear God, trustworthy men who hate dishonest gain and appoint them as officials over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens. Have them serve as judges for the people at all times, but have every difficult case brought to you, the simple cases they can decide themselves.” (Exodus 18:21-22).

As we have read about Paul, we also see Moses was called by God to be the main man in charge. He was to have assistants (co shepherds) and leaders (deacons) around him in the ministry to the people. (Compare Exodus 18:21-22 with Acts 6:3-4 concerning deacons).

Was Moses' leadership in question by the people? (Read Numbers 12). Was Paul's leadership too questioned by the people? Yes! (Read 1st Corinthians 9, and the book of 2nd Corinthians). At times the leadership of the Senior Pastor will be questioned, and at times, despised.

It seems clear that the Senior pastor who is called by God to begin a work is the leader of the Church. It is also clear that his leadership will be questioned. The Senior pastor is to have assistants and deacons around him to help in the ministry to the body of Christ. But no one else in the Church is to usurp the authority of the Senior Pastor. They have been chosen and called by God to begin the work and lead the people. They have been sent out and equipped by God to share God’s truth with the congregation. They are to love the Church and guide the people to the truths of God’s Word. It is important and sobering to realize the Sovereignty of God in placing a Senior Pastor in your life!

This is a distinctive of Calvary Chapel churches. We believe this is a Biblical way of organizing and understanding the church.

1. Senior Pastor
2. Co Pastors, Elders, Overseers
3. Co Laborers, Deacons

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