

HAPPY CHURCH GOVERNANCE

FAILURES, FIGHTS, AND THE BYLAWS
TO PREVENT THEM

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Introduction:

Why Study Church Governments?

“Nobody thinks about church government when they join a church; but, a lot more think about it when they’re crawling away from a church disaster.”

Getting into church leadership is often like a Las Vegas Wedding: You said yes because it felt right at the time; but suddenly, a church crisis happened and you woke up the next morning thinking, *“How did I ever get myself into this position?”*

Most of us were never taught *“this is how to be an elder or trustee!”* Heck, I said yes to my first senior pastorate without even reading the churches’ bylaws! And even if I *would have* read them, I’m still not sure I would’ve known what a healthy church government looked like anyway.

Most of us just *inherited* our bylaws. Much like a child born in a Communist country, we didn’t choose our government. At my first church, I didn’t even know that I *could* question our churches’ governance! I mean, does the Bible mandate a certain form of governance?

To make this topic even more difficult, most church bylaws are boring! Most of us would rather gouge out our eyes than read documents filled with legal jargon. And ironically, many of these bylaws were drafted up by lawyers who’ve never even been to a successful church in their lives.

But if you’re wondering: Do church governments really matter? The answer is a resounding: *“HECK. YEAH.”*

Most people don’t give a rip about their church government – until things start falling apart. *“I mean, everything seemed great when Pastor Joe was still here!”* But now that Pastor Bob’s passion for shofar horns has been fully realized on Sunday mornings, people are starting to wonder: How did we get here? And why did we rename our church, “The Shofar Tabernacle?” I.e., The wisdom of a church government model is usually not even realized until times get tough.

Yet, the wake up call often starts in the same predictable way: a pastor falls into a scandal or the senior pastorate gets turned over to a lack-luster pastor; then, an elder decides to “save the church” (a.k.a., split the church) over [*fill in the blank*], and suddenly: a church can’t pay the bills; the giant auditorium looks painfully empty. And when the tension becomes too intense (or the staff transitions become too frequent), all of a sudden, the legal rules which govern a churches’ operation becomes everyone’s new obsession.

Believe it or not, when I read a churches’ bylaws, I can pretty much predict a huge number of things, such as:

- (1). The evangelistic life-expectancy of a church.**
- (2). The types of fights a church will have and when.**
- (3). The type and personality of the pastor who will *follow* the founding pastor: (Eg., a visionary or a bureaucrat?) *And even more...***

(4). The manner in which the church will eventually die – both when and how.

“But, how can you predict all these things based on bylaws alone?”

When you understand some of the basic psychological principles behind church decisions, suddenly, you'll see church decisions through an entirely different lens!

But, before I give you a snap-shot of this book, allow me to share *how* I first became curious about church governance. I became interested in it the same way most people become interested in it: *PAIN*.

The Story that Launched This Book

In my early twenties I took over a well-known regional church in small town Wisconsin. I affectionately describe it as a "wannabe mega-church in farmville." The founding pastor was a charismatic fellow. And by the time I took it over, we had over 70 acres of land; two sizable auditoriums; a K-12 Christian school, not to mention, a growing Bible college.

The city itself only had 19,000 people; yet, we could easily draw over 10,000 unique people to our conferences and events on a yearly basis. And even better, we were only a couple years from paying it all off. Overall, the church had a lot going for it, except for one thing: We had a terrible form of church governance.

Don't get me wrong: The people on my board were godly people. But as you're about to learn: *"a bad set of bylaws can cause good people to behave badly!"* And our great crisis was lurking around the corner.

The founder of our church was a hero to all of us. He and his executive had passed off the church to me so they could plant a sister church on the other side of the U.S. At the time, cross-state multisite churches were rather rare. And because I was a bit of a rookie – for a church of that size and reputation – our church wanted to keep a strong connection to our founder and his new church. To be specific, our church paid his salary for the first year. And my board of elders was *his* board of elders too.

The goal was quite simple: We wanted others to experience a church like we had. So, while our hero moved across the country to plant a sister church, we figured, let's give him time to grow before he sets up a local board to help him. And against all odds, that church grew to 5000 people in just two years. In many ways, it seemed like God's blessings were all over this expansion. But our bylaws were *not ready* for the test that awaited us.

About two years into this, the worst of all things happened: our beloved founder was caught having an extended affair. And as *often happens* in situations like these, the accusations and offenses continued to leak out, week after week.

Obviously, we were not only shocked. We were devastated. Members started quitting like crazy. People started second guessing almost every tough decision that leadership had ever made. And as a board, we started asking all of the classic autopsy questions: How did this happen? Could we have prevented this by adding more accountability mechanisms? And the ultimate question: What are we going to do now?

But, there wasn't much time to grieve. There were now two devastated churches to take

care of. To make matters worse, the politics quickly spun out of control. We endured months of legal threats from high powered lawyers. I was even told that, the I.R.S. could take my house away from me over this. Looking back, we were all in deep waters. Yet, I was just a young lead pastor – still learning how to swim.

Unfortunately, many of my board members became irreparably jaded. And to make matters worse, they all had lifetime appointments. Two of my board members became so cynical that, they started treating me as though, *I was the one who had the affair*. It was almost like: “*all pastors are corrupt*.” And because I was the protégé of this toxic leader, I was somehow predestined to the same fate. One of my board members even told me:

"My job is protect the church from dangerous pastors like you."

"Have I done anything to demonstrate that I'm dangerous" I asked?

"No, but all pastors like you need people like me to keep you humble" he responded – as if the job didn't already do that! And over the next several years, that's exactly what happened.

Even still, over the next five years, I made it my goal to win them all back to health. After all, that's what servant leaders do. But, after enduring years of silly church politics, I started to wonder: Would I be better off starting from scratch with a better set of bylaws? I mean, every little decision felt like an insurmountable debate.

And ultimately, that's what I did. I took the church through a year long search process. Seventy-two candidates later, I found them a pastor, and then I started from scratch three hours away.

And in fairness to the beautiful leaders in that church, I can honestly say, they all loved the Lord and had great intensions. Yet, as you'll hear me repeat, “*Bad forms of church governance cause good people to behave badly*.” I.e., the problem wasn't so much *the people* but rather, it was the bylaws.

Imagine playing the game of tackle football; yet, you happen to play in a league where the rules say: “*You must play on gravel and you cannot wear protective pads*.” As you'd expect, a fun game will suddenly become intolerably painful. But it's not the players. More fundamentally, it's the dumb rules of the game. It's a *systemic problem* as much as it's a *human problem*.

A New Beginning

Fast forward to 2004. We moved to Minneapolis, Minnesota, where we only knew about six people. But, with a dream in our hearts, we launched a brand new church called *Substance*.

Planting a church from scratch definitely had its own set of traumas. It was super humbling going from a large auditorium and a sizable staff to nothing. *Taking over a church* and *planting a church* are two totally different animals.

When you take over a church, you start out with lots of assets. But, you spend your first ten years earning *authority* to use those assets. When you plant a church, it's the opposite! Everyone in the church is there because they love you. You have all the authority in the world.

So, you spend your first ten years earning *assets*. But. Either way, you spend about a decade *earning something*. In other words, leadership pain is not an option! But, make no mistake, your church governance will definitely determine how fun this process can be.

After surviving both of these experiences, I started helping other pastors do the same. Back in 2007, I wrote the early manuscript of this book, called: "Church Government Revolution." And I posted it for free on my website. Within a couple years (and thousands of downloads later), I started to get endless calls about splits, mergers, and everything in between. Along the way, I was invited to join the Lead Team of the Association of Related Churches. We had a front row seat to helping launch church planting movements in Australia, UK, South Africa, Asia, and Europe. Suddenly, my free mini-book on bylaws started circling the globe.

Now, if you aren't yet familiar with the A.R.C., it's an international church planting organization that specializes in church startups. My church was ARC church plant #15. Yet, as of today, we've launched over 1000 churches – hundreds of which have grown into large multi-site mega-churches. Indeed, many of the largest churches in the U.S. are now ARC churches. And in just twenty years, we now offer start-up capital and coaching to entrepreneurial pastors on six different continents. In many ways, it's truly a move of God in this generation.

But, as a result of this success, we now receive a huge number of questions about church governance. Everywhere I go, pastors ask me the same questions: *How do the best churches structure their teams?* And, although there are many good answers to this, my pastor, Chris Hodges of Church of the Highlands, often says: "*Let's talk about two things: Your prayer life; and your bylaws.*" And this book is about the latter topic: How to structure your church government.

But before I give you a snap-shot of each chapter, it's critical you understand a few assumptions:

Assumption #1: This Book is Not a Substitute for Legal Advice. Every country and state has different rules for churches and non-profits. So, don't just copy and paste ideas. And be sure you have a good lawyer in your area who specializes in churches.

Keep in mind, there are a lot of lawyers who will happily set you up with bylaws. Yet, many of them are clueless! Most of these same lawyers couldn't quote a single study on *how* their bylaws affect church health. Most of them have never actually pastored a successful church before. And most of them do not have to mediate church splits or cry with pastors after these disasters happen. Indeed, many of these lawyers actually *make more money* during church splits.

Before I sound cynical, there are also many godly lawyers who give good advice. In fact, I could not have written these bylaws without them! But, if you are a pastor or board member, remember this: *you are the race car driver. You are the one investing the most time, money, and emotions into this. They are the car mechanic who makes money off of you. And you are the one who can get sued or hurt if the engine blows up.* So, the goal of this resource is to help you form an opinion on church government as well as how to run it. The lawyer's job is simply to make sure it's legal.

Assumption #2: There Are No Perfect Bylaws

Without humility and good leadership, it doesn't matter what form of church government

you have. There will always be more conflict in a place where there is pride & prayerlessness. If your church is filled with cynical gossips who lack honor and good communication skills, there is no bylaw system that will fix that.

When Elder John is convinced that the Holy Spirit longs for more shofar horns on the youth worship band, and when Pastor Steve is convinced that Calvinism and tithing need to be preached 52 Sundays a year, your church will probably experience stress. No church government will compensate for bad leadership and immature behavior.

“There is no church government that can be a substitute for love and humility.”

So as we talk about the various approaches to governance, it's critical that you are aware of your unhealed wounds. Over the years, I've noticed that wounded Christians always tend to gravitate towards the church government model that gives them the greatest feeling of control. But trust me in this: You really can't fix *character* and *communication* problems with a legal system. Even worse, when Christians get wounded here, they often find Biblical reasons to rationalize their need for more control. And this leads to our next critical assumption.

Assumption #3: The Bible Prescribes Character Attributes of Leaders More than Flow-charts for Leaders

Over the centuries, many theologians have split hairs trying to pin down the exact functions of “Elders” (Greek: *presbyteroi*); Overseers/Bishops (*episkopoi*); and Deacons (*diakonoi*) – not to mention, *apostles, prophets, pastors, evangelists and teachers*. And the fancy name for this theological topic is called, *Ecclesiology*.

However, the vast majority of evangelical scholars are in agreement that, although we can infer many governance ideas from scriptures, nowhere does the Bible specifically say: “*This is the precise government structure that God loves.*”¹ The truth is, we don't know for sure how each of these roles functioned – nor do we know if these roles were intended to be a permanent prescription for churches throughout the ages.

Even more, a careful study of the New Testament (and early church history) will show that governance systems seemed to be in a constant state of evolution. It would seem that authority structures were primarily based upon common sense and practicality (as we saw in Acts chapter 6) and not some eternally specific plan of God.

Honestly, I could probably give a good biblical argument for every classical form of church government – which we'll investigate in upcoming chapters. And yes: It's o.k. to have strong opinions about these things. However, it's rather ignorant for us to claim that any one model is “the exclusively Biblical one.” After all, if we were really trying to be “Biblical,” then we would communally share all of our possessions (Acts 2) and cast lots for our leaders (Acts

¹ Respected scholar, George Eldon Ladd remarked: “*It appears likely that there was no normative pattern of church government in the apostolic age, and that the organizational structure of the church is no essential element in the theology of the church.*”

1).²

So, here's my take on this: As we talk about “Biblical church governments,” we would be wise to acknowledge the grayness of scripture on this topic. If you're looking for deep exegesis on church ecclesiology, you'll probably be disappointed. I have no intension of claiming that my ideas are the “true restoration of the Book of Acts.” In fact, my ambitions with this book are much more practical.

Indeed, here are my goals with this book: I want to explore, *what are some of the scenarios that split churches and amplify politics? What are some of the systemic causes of these problems? How do the four classical approaches to church governance play into these problems. And ultimately, is there a way to take the best ideas from each model and merge them into a hybrid? Can we create safeguards without stalemates? Can we minimize politics while maximizing fruitfulness? And ultimately, can leading a church actually become fun and fulfilling? And ultimately, I believe the answer is "Yes!"*

The Roadmap for this Book

So, here is where we're going: ***In Chapter One***, we're going to explore the four classic forms of church governments. I want to expose you to a few basic models and terms. But we won't be critiquing these models right away.

In chapters two through four, I introduce five critical “Building Blocks” that many churches miss when constructing their bylaws. *How and why do churches tend to split? And rather than focusing on the obvious things, like pride, insecurity, and moral failures we will instead focus on systemic causes.* I.e., How might the “legal rules” amplify tension and disunity.

After mediating dozens of church splits, I've observed a few predictable “systemic patterns” that create church splits. So, if you're a pastor who wants to dive into the “psychology of unity,” then be sure to take your time. It will certainly be worth your while.

To get more specific, I could summarize ***Chapter Two*** like this: “*Opinions are like arm-pits; everyone's got them and they all stink.*” Well... O.K.... I'm sure that *some people* have great smelling arm-pits. But, how do you find them without having to smell everyone's pits? (I'm probably getting lost in the metaphor here). But, you get the idea: When it comes to big church decisions, how do we get the right people at the table with the right qualifications?

In Chapter Three, we're going to explore interesting questions like: “*Can a person be called to the church yet not to the senior leader?*” It might sound like a simple question, but it can get complex. Research will show, when people are “called to the church” but not the lead pastor, their church tends to get stuck in a permanent plateau. The same occurs when staff members are called to the paycheck or platform but not to the Senior leadership. And some of these paralyzing situations are actually the natural result of certain dysfunctional bylaws.

² In their book [How to Read the Bible for All it's Worth](#), hermeneutical scholars Fee and Stuart essentially argue: “*just because the Apostles did something does not mean that we should emulate their behavior nor assume that such a precedent is God's explicit intension for ourselves.*” *Jacob, in the Old Testament, had two wives; yet, we don't assume that polygamy is Biblical. So why, then, do we uncritically assume that every New Testament precedent is the glorious ideal pattern for the modern Christian? Certainly there are valuable patterns to follow; yet, we must be discerning between the explicit teachings of scripture (primary doctrine) verses the implicit teachings (secondary doctrines) that are based upon inferences – rather than clear commands.*”

In that same chapter, we'll ask another deep question: *Can your bylaws empower unity under great duress? And how can we really know this?* Along the way, you will hear a lot of sad church stories. But, don't lose heart: We can learn from the *school of wisdom* instead of the *school of hard knocks!*

In Chapter Four, we're going to ask the question: *How do we know if a church is dying?* Many churches can live on life-support for quite some time. They continue doing church services; but, they haven't grown in years. These same churches make spiritual sounding excuses: "We have *depth*, not *growth!*" Yet, if you're consistently downsizing or selling off assets to make budget, you probably have neither *depth* nor *growth*. So, in this chapter, I unpack a critical key to church revitalization called, *Corporate Subservience*.

In Chapter Five, I tie a lot of these principles together by unpacking how the hybrid bylaws work. After explaining the basics about the three-board system, we will explain why this model employs all of the group-psychology lessons of the previous chapters.

Many of you will be tempted to skip straight here. But, each chapter is designed to add a critical building block that many people overlook.

At the very least, check out chapter one, so you won't get confused about the basics of each model.

And finally, be sure to check out the free companion book: "***Church Bylaws and the Disasters that Created Them.***" This is where you can actually read through an educational set of the hybrid bylaws (Go to www.PeterHaas.org/bylaws).

To make it fun, I added over 30 church-split stories into the actual legal clauses explaining how each clause came to be. Almost every paragraph in these bylaws emerged from a church disaster. So, much like a true crime story, I try to keep the bylaws interesting by giving you "the why behind the what."

Keep in mind, the reason why many legal documents are so frustrating to read is because, many of them use big overcomplicated legal words. Early on, I wanted to simply delete many of them; but, some of these words are legally significant. I.e., Some of these antiquated words are used because of the significant legal precedents they are based upon. The unfortunate consequence is that normal people like you and me can easily get confused when we read them. Hence, we hire lawyers and avoid reading bylaws.

I also add dozens of additional essays and cheat-sheets like: *How to pick a trustee? What to look for in an overseer?* And other practical tips. And, if all goes well, the process of running a healthy church will become both *fun* and *legal*.

But here the goal: What if church government planning could be done better? What structures would give us the best shot at growth? What models would give us the best shot at surviving crisis? What is the best way to balance power within our congregations? And can we do this in such a way that would *actually be fun*? I know that this sounds like a tall order. And, admittedly, I don't have all of the answers. However, God is doing a new thing in churches all over the world. And, at the very least, I believe these ideas will help *your church* to be a part of God's move.

Enjoy.

Peter Haas – 2021

Chapter One: The Classical Forms of Church Government

What are the four main categories of governance that churches have gravitated towards throughout history?

Church governments are similar to secular governments: In theory, *all governments are supposed to help the people*. But when you study history, we all know this intension doesn't always play out so well.

For example, Soviet-styled Communism advocated all sorts of idealistic pro-human principles; yet, in the end, that system caused millions of people to go hungry. The people who advocated that system failed to understand the value of freedom of speech and healthy competition. On the other hand, free-market capitalism has its own set of flaws: In America, we like to think that we have a democracy; and yet, these same multinational corporations that fuel our wealth just might also own us! One study alleges that Google's search engine alone can sway public opinion by upwards of 20%!³ Thus, if our government doesn't have the clout to break up monopolies and create checks and balances for these corporate power-players, then, we're going to experience a different set of problems.

Now, I bring up these philosophical discussions because, the classical forms of church government have similar pros and cons. Pastors across America obsess about church growth; yet, very few look in the direction of their government – mainly because most denominational churches don't have a choice. In order to belong, they must accept the dictated format – regardless of how antiquated the system is.

As one pastor friend told me: *“Politically, I can't afford to question our governance!”* But, research is starting to show: *You can't afford NOT to*. After all, church splits aren't merely due to human immaturity. Many of these problems are ironically *caused* by the accountability mechanisms created by our bylaws.

So, it begs the question: What are the classic models of governance that churches have gravitated towards over the centuries? And what are some of the basic critiques of each system? Without going too deep, the first and oldest of the four models is known as the **Episcopalian** model:

The Episcopal Model (*a.k.a., the Bishop Model*) This model is essentially based on the Catholic concept of *Bishops*. In scripture, the Greek word *episcopoi* refers to the overseer of the church. The key idea that formed this model was that that, "there is an apostolic line of leaders who have presided over the churches of God since the days of the Apostle Peter." And, to this day, the Catholic church believes it is the only institution who's maintained this "divine" chain of leadership.

³ See: <https://www.judiciary.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Epstein%20Testimony.pdf>

But, the concept behind this model is that: Every church will still have a teaching elder (Greek, *presbyteroi*) who is called either a pastor, priest or vicar. However, the local leader (pastor/priest) is *not* the one who's truly in charge. Rather, the power is ultimately found in the bishop.

Bishops have varying levels of authority depending on the actual system; but, local churches need to submit to these non-local leaders.

Common advocates of the Episcopalian model are: Catholics, Episcopalian/Anglican, some Lutherans, and most Methodists.

The most common critique is that bishops are too detached to be functional leaders. In church history, many bishops were seen as out of touch. Many local church leaders resented when bishops would meddle in localized issues – or even worse, seize assets that they did nothing to steward. And these types of problems gave birth to the second common model:

The Presbyterian Model (*A.k.a., Board-Run Model*): This model is essentially the “Elder-run” system. Gaining steam through the Reformation, this oligarchic model essentially gives final authority to a group of elders within a local church. Elders are not merely focused on finances (which the I.R.S. might term a trustee or director); but, in the Presbyterian model, elders are essentially on par with the senior pastor (who is merely the “teaching elder”). This “board run” system can be found in many Presbyterian or Reformed churches. It’s also common amidst many traditional Evangelical denominations.

One of the common critiques is that, as you increase church decision makers, you also increase politics and stalemates while slowing decision making. But the biggest critique, which gave birth to the next model was that, board run churches tend to be run by power-families and oligarchies. And if you don't fit into one of these power-families, then you will always have a limited voice. Naturally, this created a desire for greater representation in church governance, leading to Congregationalism.

The Congregationalist Model (*a.k.a., the Church Vote Model*) The key words for this model are *democracy* and *autonomy*. Each church is essentially independent and self-governing. Congregationalism emerged as a reaction against Episcopalian-styled systems where out-of-touch bishops could dictate local policies as if they were imperialist dictators. Thus, *congregationalism* primarily means that a church is “locally self-governed.” Thus, in one sense, any independent or non-denominational church could technically be considered *congregationalist* (including the Apostolic Pastor Model mentioned below). However, many congregational churches have some form of a democracy or republic at work in their national denominational structures (if they belong to one).

However, most congregationalist churches are distinguished by the following: (A). They have a lot more church-wide voting processes and (B). They have a longer and more intense membership process. I.e., Their voting procedures demand higher membership requirements.

Obviously, there’s a lot of diversity within Congregationalist churches. Various boards and sub-committees often control various aspects of the church. And a common example of congregationalism can be found in the Baptists or Evangelical Covenant Church.

But, the central idea behind this model is that, the highest authority essentially rests in the congregation. Ideally, it argues that full accountability demands full democracy. Yet, others would argue, this approach to accountability is also its greatest weakness.

Similar to board-run churches, congregationalist churches are often critiqued for having increased politics and thus, stalemates. If a pastor takes a controversial stance on say, Calvinism or the End Times, the entire church can easily get embroiled and distracted with a church vote.

Naturally, the responsibility of a church vote requires a more robust number of membership requirements. After all, you can't haphazardly entrust key theological votes to just anyone. They must be educated.

Thus, congregationalist churches often have long membership processes, where applicants must be interviewed. Some people find these processes to be rather elitist and alienating towards seekers.

They also need to spend huge amounts of time educating and debating voting issues – which may or may not be healthy. For example, when a church needs to vote on eldership, it generally results in an annual debate on women or gender-diversity in leadership.

Now, for some churches, this might even be a necessary discussion. But for other churches, where 90% of the membership aren't even reading their Bibles, this is a toxic distraction. Instead of learning how to read their Bibles, they're embroiled in a hyper-political debate on women in ministry when they don't even have the theological foundations to have the conversation in the first place.

In the United States, as churches have become larger and less biblically educated, many critics of this model feel like these procedures do more harm than good. Setting aside the politics and polarization that results from church votes, the membership requirements can also alienate seekers and undermine evangelism efforts.

For example, what happens when a person applies to congregationalist church and they are voted down because they don't subscribe to a Pre-tribulation Rapture (or some other secondary doctrine)? So the husband is rejected yet the wife is not? Or what happens when that same husband shows up at a church vote. We he be turned away? What if he's a big giver?

Thus, a lot of people feel like, these types of problems could be holistically avoided by simply removing a lot of these "unnecessary votes." Hence, the fourth and final model:

The Apostolic Pastor Model (*a.k.a., the Benevolent Dictator Model*) This model is a church ruled by a singular elder. Much like a CEO can control a small business, these Apostolic models are essentially benevolent dictatorships – which sounds bad to some; but, after decades of denominational splits, many independent churches in the 1970's and 80's felt that traditional church governments were too political to stay relevant.

Particularly in Episcopalian models, people felt that pastors were mere hirelings and that denominations failed to respect the need for a clear central leader. I.e., in Episcopalian models, people felt like traditions were more sacred than people. Thus, independent churches began embracing more agile leadership structures that could guarantee that evangelism could trump church-traditions (or unnecessary church votes). And to do this, they embraced models that were more familiar to entrepreneurial leadership than traditional churches.

But throughout history, the advocates of this Apostolic model argued: "*This idea isn't new.*" Indeed, this model of church goes all the way back to the Apostle Paul. Every church movement in scripture and church history had a unique individual whom God anointed to lead His people. From the Judges of the Old Testament, to Paul, to John Wesley: Each of these people had large amounts of "divine apostolic authority" to resolve disputes over budgets and statements of faith.

But who holds these pastors accountable? Advocates of this model would respond: "*The accountability is divine!*" I.e., God will severely judge the leader who misleads his sheep or misrepresents God (Heb. 13:17; James 3:1). This is not to say that these models have "no human systems of accountability." Indeed, many of them still have trustee boards (in order to comply with basic government requirements). But rather, apostolic churches tend to argue that "human systems of accountability" are ultimately secondary to the accountability of God.

Naturally, this results in less control for the average church member – which is comforting (if your wounded by church politics; or, if your church is filled with thousands of seekers who are "barely saved.") And this is disconcerting if you're accustomed to higher amounts of control.

But the accountability mechanism is simple: People pray for God to judge the leader decisively, and/or they vote with their feet and their social media. Conversely, the leader, with great fear and trembling, must lead the people knowing that God's judgement is absolute. After all, "those who teach will be judged more strictly" (James 3:1). And they will certainly "give an account to God" (Heb.13:17).

What's the Next big Evolution?

For a season, it seemed like this Apostolic church model was over-taking over the world. Gender and sexuality votes were splitting Presbyterian and Congregationalist churches across the U.S. Even worse, Denominations with big assets and clear hierarchies (bishops) became lucrative targets for sex-abuse lawsuits. Yet Apostolic church scandals have definitely slowed the momentum of this model.

As prosperity churches (which were predominantly Apostolic) started to implode throughout the 90's and 2000's, Christians began asking the question: "*Who holds the pastor accountable in this model? Who approves the pastor's salary? What happens when nepotism kills fruitfulness? Is there a way to take the best parts of each of these models and merge it into one model?*"

And ultimately, *that's* where this book is going. Can we maximize the strengths of these four classic models while simultaneously minimizing their weaknesses? I believe the answer is a resounding yes.

But, to appreciate the wisdom of this new model, it's critical we understand five principles – five "building blocks" – which have a huge impact on church decision making. And as we explore many of these principles of group psychology, consider how it might be impacting your current church.

Chapter Two: **Building Blocks #1 and #2** **The Subjectivity/Size Principle & the Qualification Effect**

Do the right amounts of people with the right qualifications have the authority to make the right decisions?

People behave differently in groups. As a youth pastor, I noticed that a lot of teenagers would suddenly act super obnoxious the moment they got around certain friends. But the problem wasn't necessarily *the person*, rather, the *environment* around the person. And over time I became aware of how *environments* can affect *behaviors*. The same proves true when it comes to church boards.

So, in the coming chapters, I want to hit five powerful building blocks that can have a huge impact on your leadership teams. Indeed, the ideas in this chapter will not only sharpen your organizational leadership skill but it will make you smarter discipler and parent as well!

The first two building blocks might seem like basic group psychology. Yet, it's amazing how many leaders fail to implement these principles when it comes to their bylaws. So allow me to set up the first building block using a hypothetical scenario.

The Restaurant Illustration

Imagine you were in charge of taking a room full of thirty random people out to dinner. Collectively, you must come to a consensus about where to go. And you are responsible for taking a vote on the decision. You are told: "Let the people decide."

Like in any group of people, you are going to have dominant personalities. You'll probably have a few vegetarians, a few health food nuts, (and those irritating people who are allergic to just about everything.) And you'll also probably have those people who only like exotic local restaurants (you know... those restaurants that only serve moose-cheese and vegetarian liver sausage).

So here is a situation that is intrinsically political. After all, you empowered everyone by giving them the right to share their opinions and vote. And as you'd imagine, the dominant leaders will rise up to persuade. Everywhere you look, lines and allegiances are being drawn in the sand. The "food-allergy people" will take their stand. The "deep-fried liver-lovers" arise as well. Of course, there will also be the quiet people who never get consulted. And then you have those stubborn people who always say: "*You didn't listen to me – otherwise you'd agree.*" And, like in any political process, there will definitely be losers.

You see, political processes can definitely create discernment and wisdom; but, when a decision is time-sensitive or highly subjective (meaning, the decision is based on opinions & preferences), these same processes can create unnecessary dysfunction, polarization, and disenfranchisement.

So imagine a different approach: What if, in this restaurant scenario, there was a clearly defined leader who had complete authority to make the decision by herself without a vote:

“Hey everyone... I know that we all have a lot of opinions about restaurants; but, the goal here is to enjoy each other’s company – not have the ideal eating experience; so, we’re all gonna compromise and all go to this one place.”

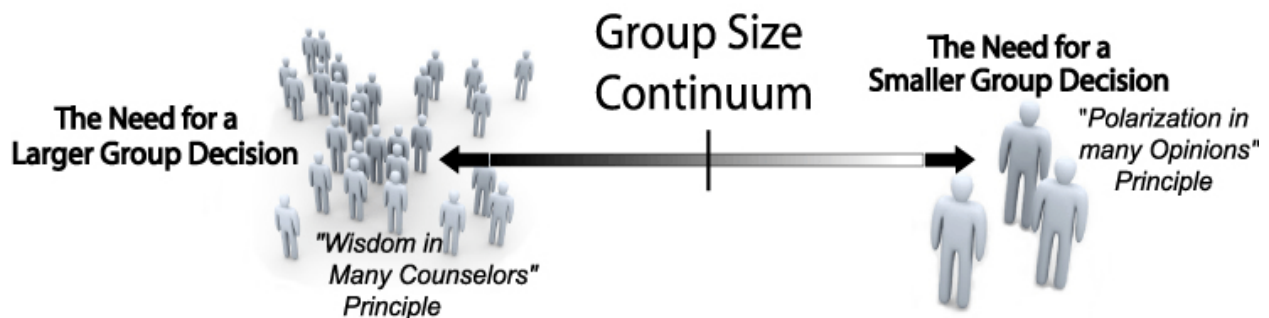
Chances are, if the decision-making authority was clear like this, (and that leader was emotionally intelligent), most people would have simply fallen in line. There wouldn’t have been a process to ruffle anyone’s feathers.

Yet, because you gave everyone the power to argue for their opinion, you’ve created a totally different game – a game that some people will lose. Likewise is true in churches.

There are certain decisions where opinions are truly important. Listening to people’s opinions can create both discernment and ownership to the vision being proposed. But there are other times when opinions do nothing more than polarize people.

Of course, I realize that this restaurant decision was rather minor; after all, we’re only talking about a silly restaurant. But imagine if this decision was about something much more important – something “spiritual” or permanent (such as a decision over a worship service in a plateaued church). Imagine people quoting scriptures to defend their logic. You see this very same political process can suddenly become a deep spiritualized wedge that splits a church.

Therefore, using this illustration, we see that there is a continuum to heed: On one extreme, there is the “*wisdom in many counselors*” principle (Prov. 11:14). The more important a decision, the more important it is to create buy-in by valuing and entertaining opinions. On the other extreme, we have the “*Polarization in Many Opinions*” Principle. The more subjective or complex a decision is, the more important it is to simply have a decisive leader (or very small group of specialized leaders whom the people trust).



So, why is all this philosophy important? Because, if your bylaws do not carefully limit the quantity of decision makers on specific issues, your church unity will eventually be at stake.

We’ve all heard the stories of that one church that split over the rain gutters – and we say to ourselves: “*that will never happen to us!*” Yet we fail to see how our church governments feed the systemic problem. Once again, “*Bad forms of church government can cause good people to behave badly.*” Your bylaws might be wise in including more people in a vote for a new senior pastor; but, what if everyone has to vote on the expensive rain gutters? If you throw in the wrong

personalities after the church morale has been in decline *anything* can be a lightning rod. Let's face it: our churches are full of spiritually immature people.

The Million Dollar Question

Thus, the ultimate question we need to ask our bylaws is this: ***Do the right amounts of people with the right qualifications have the authority to make the right decisions?***

For example, I had a friend who pastored a church where, almost every volunteer leader required a vote. The church voted in a worship leader who turned out to be extremely disorganized. People began quitting the worship team and the church in droves. But in order to "fire" the leader there needed to be another church vote. And, as you would imagine, this worship leader had a good number of people who liked him no matter what he did.

At first, the issue was so hotly contested that if this non-paid leader was fired, it would certainly split the church. So, numerous leaders stood up and gave impassioned speeches about how ridiculous the issue was and made a motion to simply "do nothing". (I.e., indecision seemed better than a church split.) Of course, when all was said and done, these speeches were meaningless. After all, my pastor friend confessed, the church was a ship with a slow leak. Indecision was merely a slower way to split the church. And this church constitution essentially turned a hard decision into a completely impossible one.

You see, many decisions are subjective, meaning, everyone's approach will be "subject" to their opinions, preferences, and prejudices. Other decisions are increasingly *objective*, meaning, they won't change from person to person. Two plus two equals four. And four is the objective answer. But, sometimes, the correct answer in a complex church decision isn't as easy to discern. So, when large amounts of people are empowered to make harder and more subjective decisions, the only thing we're really doing is dramatically increasing the odds of a church split.

Budgeting decisions can be the same as staff decisions: they are amazingly complex and subjective. Everyone would like to spend church money over a different "pet-ministry-idea". Thus, if the wrong number of people are being empowered to make a budgeting decision, it's very easy to create a mess. This brings us to the "Subjectivity/Size Principle": So a good form of church government will discern "the right number of people" behind every decision in the church.

Subjectivity/Size Principle: *If a larger number of people are being empowered to make a subjective decision, the odds of polarization and perceived disenfranchisement increases.*

The Right Number, Wrong Qualifications

Similar problems occur when the right number of people with the *wrong* qualifications are making a decision.

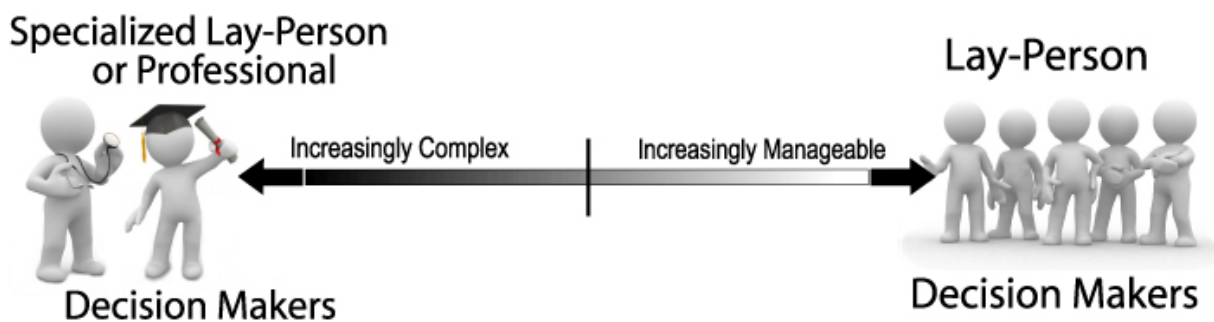
For example, imagine if the church were more like a professional football team. Let's say there is a particular wide-receiver who simply isn't getting the job done. Who should make the

call about cutting this guy? Should it be a council of fans – perhaps season ticket holders? Are they qualified? I suppose they could look at some game stats to help themselves a bit. But, what if the problem goes beyond the game stats. What if this problematic wide-receiver is quarreling with teammates in the locker room? What if the individual simply isn't working as hard as his team-mates at practice? What if the wide-receiver simply isn't as good as he should be (in terms of natural gifting?) Who is most qualified to make this decision? Well, in pro-football, this decision is usually entrusted to a professional coach.

A professional coach is usually someone who has been trained in the subtle art of football techniques and team dynamics. Most NFL coaches were once great players. They often have invaluable first hand experience both on and off the field. Generally speaking, a coach is in a much better position to assess this person both at practice and in the locker room. In other words, it makes no logical sense for difficult decisions like these to be made by non-paid season-ticket holders. So then, why do so many church systems empower lay leaders to make similar complex decisions?

Churches are not what they used to be. Only a few decades ago, more than 90% of America's churches were under 200 people. Church government systems were primarily designed for these smaller types of churches. But now, budgeting, staffing, and church systems in general are a great deal more complex than they used to be. They often require a lot of inside knowledge and skills that the average person would simply not know. So we need to begin assessing whether or not the qualified people are making the right decisions. We cannot be satisfied using unsophisticated pee-wee football structures in a higher stakes world of professional football.

Imagine if the state government allowed your eight year old to decide whether or not they wanted to go to school – or required your thirteen year old to cast a public vote on your family budget? Such an arrangement would be ludicrous because eight year olds do not fully understand a huge number of things. You'd have to explain the need for life-insurance, health insurance, or why your retirement plan is important next to a new video game system.



You see, when decisions are entrusted to under-qualified individuals, we not only lose discernment but we also lose a huge amount of time trying to educate decision makers. And this lost time is often the difference between a ministry that thrives verses a ministry that flounders. Many church governments require consensus on almost all decisions in order to discern the will of God. Yet, the statistical cost to such thinking can have a devastating effect upon the fruitfulness of an organization.

Of course, every congregation *intends* to fulfill the Great Commission. Yet studies like the Natural Church Development method have long shown that many ministry structures fail miserably. And Remember: God doesn't judge us based on our intentions (Mt. 25:14-30). So, this

The Qualification Effect: *When highly complex or specialized decisions are entrusted to under-qualified decision makers, the odds of losing both discernment, time, fruitfulness, and overall ministry-focus increases.*

brings us to our second critical principle, the *Qualification Effect*.

Now, it's important to note with this principle that we are not advocating for some elite professional clergy that can unilaterally assert their wisdom upon the "ignorant laity". On the contrary, good leadership will *always* include people in on the decision making process. Good leaders allow input from their team-mates. Even more, a good decision should be able to withstand a good amount of scrutiny. And there is much to gain by affirming God's will through consensus (see Acts 15 as an example⁴). Rather, the *Qualification Effect* simply addresses the fact that there are many liabilities of *legally empowering* the final decision to "under-qualified decision-makers" on specialized decisions.

For example, many churches are now "outsourcing" serious disciplinary procedures to objective "overseers / spiritual advisors" (a respected board of pastors outside of your local fellowship). Whenever a senior pastor is being accused or investigated, churches have a sad and atrocious history of either being too soft or too harsh – posturing their churches for a split.

Thus, by appointing a "crisis board" of independent and objective professionals, churches remove a huge number of caustic political elements from a potentially explosive situation. In other words, by picking qualified people who do not stand to gain or lose anything, we not only gain discernment, but we also empower locals to keep their focus where it should be: on the ministry and mission of Christ – instead of politics.

Or, as another example of how churches are heeding the Qualification Effect, many churches are now separating their "financial boards" from their "elder boards". As churches become larger, it becomes rather unmanageable for a singular board of lay people to be in charge of everything.

As an illustration of this, I had a pastor friend whose church was undergoing a rather large amount of growth. Because of their momentum, it seemed like they had a never-ending number of financial decisions to be made. Their church got to a point where the elder board was bottle-necking everything in the church. Even more, the decisions were becoming increasingly complex. The elders themselves began wondering if they were even qualified to make the decisions in front of them. None of them were all that business savvy in the first place. Many of

⁴ In Acts 15, the disciples needed to make a decision about which commands Gentiles should be following from the Law of Moses. We cannot discern an exact authority structure from this text; but, regardless of whether James had "the final say" or not, there was still a good amount of conversation and consensus.

them just wanted to be “spiritual leaders.” But, over time, they began to feel like “wannabe general contractors” and rookie tax accountants.

Finally, my pastor friend went to them with a recommendation. He said, *“Team, we have some dynamic business people in our church who are accustomed to making these types of decisions all day long. How would all of you feel if we put together a dream team of Godly entrepreneurs, general contractors, accountants, lawyers and bankers – and then turned all of these ‘trustee’ responsibilities over to them so that you can devote yourselves to shepherding.”*

At first, several of them were reluctant to give up their financial responsibilities. In fact, a couple of them decided that they would be better suited for this fiduciary/facility dream team than they would be as elders. But, a short time later, they decided to make this separation an official part of their bylaws.

The net result was sensational: The productivity of both teams completely exploded. *“It felt like we hired a dozen more staff members”* my friend commented. Both teams could finally get their focus – becoming great at one thing, rather than being mediocre in all things. The financial strategizing and church business-planning skyrocketed. The discretionary income of the church quickly doubled – not because of more tithers but because of more efficiency. Rather than wasting time debating complex financial & staffing decisions (which only a few of them were good at doing anyway), the “dream team” of business savvy trustees were able to quickly employ their endless business acumen to the tasks at hand.

Even more, the elders began feeling more like ministers again. They were free to spend their time launching ministries and helping small group leaders pastor their people. Not surprisingly, church volunteerism soared to an all-time high. The elders/deacons were free to spend more time praying, counseling, and relieving the full-time staff of their pastoral burdens (as in Acts 6:1-7). And quite predictably the church experienced unprecedented fruitfulness.

Once again, by talking about “qualified” individuals making the right decisions, we’re not saying: *“take all authority away from laity and give it to full time pastors.”* Rather, it’s like a football team: the ball is safer when you have specially trained running backs. Indeed, by stratifying like this you’re actually empowering people *more* because you’re actually employing a true team dynamic.

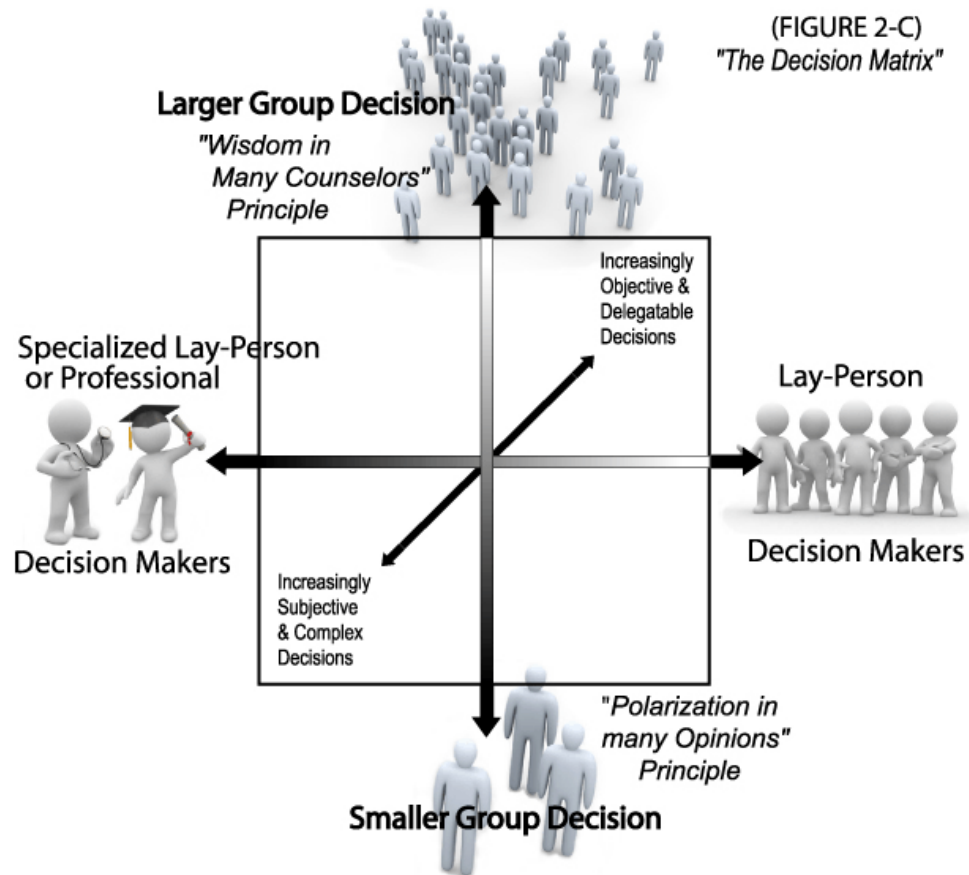
Some government systems falsely claim to empower people by making everyone a “head” of the local church body. But *“are all apostles”* and *“administrators”* (1Cor.12:28-29)? The answer is no.

So, with this principle, we are merely acknowledging that, as churches grow bigger, we need to see that church governments get more specialized, focused, and team oriented – more like the “body of Christ” that the Apostle Paul advocated. Even more, accountability, safeguarding and credibility increases as we allow our teams to become more focused.

“As churches grow bigger, we need to see that church governments get more specialized, focused, and team oriented – more like the ‘body of Christ.’”

The Decision Matrix

So once again, the most profound question we could ask about our governance systems is this: *How do we get the right amounts of people with the right qualifications the authority to make the right decisions?* The Matrix below illustrates our first two concepts: “*Subjectivity requires Smaller*” and “*Complexity requires Qualification*” on a singular chart. I.e., basic wisdom tells us: If a decision is very complex or subjective, it is wise to empower smaller groups of more specialized people (*note the Decision Matrix below – Figure 2-C*).



What if we were to take every church decision and categorize it based on this wisdom? In other words: which decisions are better for large groups vs. smaller groups? Which decisions are more complex and subjective (thus, better suited for smaller and more specialized decision makers)? Lastly, which decisions are so big that a multi-layered *process of decisions* needs to be defined – like the selection of a new pastor. (For example, we could have the previous pastor nominate a singular candidate and then have the elders and trustees vote on this candidate – creating a two-level decision process).

When we stratify church decisions around this matrix, we are accomplishing several dramatic things:

- (1). We are seriously reducing the likelihood of unnecessary polarization and church split.
- (2). We are enabling people to focus on ministry *more than* politics & corporate management.

(3). We are creating a system that does a better job at placing gifted people in strategic places.

(4). We are increasing our organization's ability to quickly bring about positive change.

And lastly, *all of this is done without sacrificing accountability and discernment.*

Ironically, accountability *actually increases* because these teams are increasingly specialized and are in charge of less things. Therefore,

(5). We are increasing the quality of the safeguard through specialization.

Unfortunately, most church governments are narrow-mindedly based on a singular quadrant of this matrix. All of the classical church governments may heed the wisdom on *one side* of these continuums; yet, simultaneously they tend to ignore the wisdom found on the opposite side.

Usually, when I point out these facts to my “classical-government” friends, they refute, “*I hear what you're saying, but it doesn't necessarily need to be that way.*” After all, they argue, “*we adhere to a classical form of government and we aren't experiencing any of those problems.*” Yet my response is always the same: Not yet.

For example: very few churches experience the flaws of their church governance until the founding pastor is gone or has a major scandal. But the moment there is a leadership vacuum where a weaker leader follows a stronger one, the flaw of their bylaws will suddenly be exposed. And yes, there are always exceptions to the rule. But, as we will find in the following chapters, these exceptions are very hard to sustain over time.

So, with building blocks one and two established, let's move onto our second set of building blocks: *The Divine Chemistry Principle* and the *High Stakes Rule*.

Chapter Three:

Building Blocks #3 and #4 The Divine Chemistry Principle & the High Stakes Rule

“Do your leadership teams have adequate chemistry and role definition?”

A good church government will provide safety and empowerment for God’s people. But, not all governments and safeguards are created equal. The reason is because there are certain sociological principles which govern how humans make decisions; and, many leaders ignore the principles of group psychology.

If your bylaws overly-empower large numbers of people to make highly subjective decisions, then the odds of polarization and perceived disenfranchisement will increase (known as the Subjectivity/Size Principle). If you *legally empower* too many decision makers to make “overly preferential decisions,” all you’re really doing is increasing your risk of a church split and a wounded disenfranchised person.

Also, when highly complex or specialized decisions are entrusted to under-qualified decision makers, the odds of losing both discernment, time, fruitfulness, accountability, and overall ministry-focus increases (also known as *The Qualification Effect*).

In the business world, if we lost all of these advantages, we would certainly be a non-competitive company. The same is true in the church. When we embrace decision making systems that ignore these principles, we are building a government that ineffectively stewards God’s people – and ultimately steals glory from God.

What About the Exceptions to the Rule?

Certainly there are healthy church governments within every classical model. The main problem is not whether *it’s possible* to have a healthy classical system; rather, can these systems healthily sustain themselves over the long-haul? Can your system statistically survive stress and transition – and continue to grow? You might be a lucky exception to the rule; but, most systems do not.

For example, even though classical systems are troublesome when making certain types of decisions, they manage to “survive” these weaknesses by using humility, finesse, and good leadership. And yes, it’s great when these things save the day. But it’s presumptive to hope that good leadership will always make up for a flawed decision making system. It’s like hoping that your dynamic prayer life will

“It’s presumptive to hope that good leadership will always make up for a flawed decision making system.”

compensate for the fact that you never wear your seat-belt. It's just not a smart way to live.

For example, it's interesting to note that *very few churches experience the weaknesses within their church government while the founding pastor is still intact*. Most churches begin plateauing and declining around their 15th - 18th year⁵...usually about the time the founding pastor has resigned.

But why is this? What do founding pastors have that other pastors do not? Allow me to introduce the concept of *divine chemistry*.

Chemistry and Calling

Imagine if a young engaged couple came to you for marital advice. After speaking with them a while, the soon-to-be-wife says: "*Actually, I can't stand my fiancé. Honestly, I think he's rather repulsive – his face, his body, his ideas... he just strikes me as gross. Every time he talks I find myself getting irritated. But, boy, do I love his house! It's gorgeous! And I love the stability of his salary. And...I suppose I enjoy his Aunt Martha too.*"

Now, hopefully if you're a smart person, you will tell her that getting married is probably a bad idea! Obviously, this couple is missing an important ingredient. There's no heart-match. There's no clear compatibility. Or, let's say it this way: *There's no divine chemistry*. If she's totally repulsed by her husband-to-be, such a marriage is certainly not likely to produce a whole lot of healthy kids. Yet, ironically, we allow this same situation to occur in churches across America.

Many people in aging churches attend churches, not because they like the senior pastor, but because they like the "house" or the "people related to the house". Often times, they came to the church when there was a different senior pastor. The new leaders are merely step-dads that long-time attendees never fully attached to. Thus, the people's relationship with their leader is a *co-dependency* or a *co-habitation* as opposed to a *calling*.

You can usually see this difference in a church within a few Sundays of being there. The pastor isn't a spiritual parent; they're a hireling. The church is no longer led by visionary-leadership – capable of taking healthy risks; rather, it's driven by a complex web of traditions programs and power-families. And if anyone messes with that web, conflict quickly ensues. And given enough time (and stress), this "crack in chemistry," this lack of calling, almost always develops into a full-fledged church-split. Or, less dramatically, churches like these often perform a slow-fade into death.

For this reason, I always tell church-attendees: Make certain you are called to the central leader *more than* the organization.⁶ If there's a change in senior leadership, every church member needs to ask themselves the question: "*Am I called to the new leader?*" If not, you need to seriously consider whether or not God is truly calling you to that church.

⁵ Win Arn, *The Pastor's Manual for Effective Ministry* (Monrovia, Calif.: Church Growth, 1988), p.41

⁶ By being called to the "central leader", I mean, the person who your bylaws gives the ultimate "say" on an issue; thus, in Episcopalian churches, this is the bishop. In presbyterian churches, this is the board.

To some people, this idea is *obvious*. To other people, it sounds radical. For many of us: Our church traditions were inherited. We don't *question them*. We *commit* to them. But I want to challenge this dysfunctional approach to church. It's much like marrying someone exclusively for their kids or house. That type of marriage isn't likely to produce a whole 'lot of kids. (Hopefully, I don't need to explain why). But it suffices to say that *chemistry* results in *babies*.

Likewise: very few churches manage to grow when their core group isn't experiencing a total chemistry with a strong central leader. Put more emphatically, if you want to bear fruit spiritually, you better be in sync! And here's how to know if you're not.

"Man, Movement, Machine, Monument"

Most churches go through an organizational life-cycle that looks like this: "*Man, Movement, Machine, Monument*". Growing organizations have strong central leaders. Growing corporate churches are almost always dependent upon a central leader. But over time, as this leader passes on and weaker leaders take their place, people's sense of calling and allegiance begins to shift. The authority of the visionary leader (the Man) and the authority of his visionary leadership team (the Movement) is supplanted by *the Machine* (i.e., a churches' doctrines, programs, or established systems). Leadership and creativity are no longer the driving force of that church. People attach their calling to what currently "is" their driving force: *the Machine* (i.e., *the church services, assets, programs*). Or they attach their callings to what "was" (i.e., the *Monument: the traditions, the history*) – *not realizing the type of unity that sparked all of these things*. To put it simply: When people are called to "churches" and not senior pastors, it's a sign that the growth cycle of that church is soon ending.

How do you know where *your church* is at in this cycle? Well, the simplest way to know is by listening to how people talk: Do they primarily talk about the lead pastor's impact? (Man); Do they talk about specific staff (Movement)? Do they talk about their favorite program in the church (Machinery)? Or the great moments in the churches' past (Monuments)? Certainly, a healthy church will have all four elements. But, over time, unhealthy churches will tend to only talk about the latter "M's." Indeed, preserving the machinery and monuments become an obsession.

Thus, it's critical we understand that, just like a healthy marriage, *divine chemistry* is an essential health component.⁷ And the good news is this, we can keep our organizations youthful when we constantly reinvigorate *divine chemistry*. *But how?*

"Are you called to the pastor, more than the people, platform or paycheck?"

⁷ In fact, in the classic corporate treatise Good to Great, researcher Jim Collins found an alarming fact about transitions in senior leadership. The vast majority of organizations that thrived after a change in senior leader did so by raising up an inside leader (presumably who already had chemistry and credibility amidst the pre-existing leaders). Disturbingly, only one out of eleven organizations continued to grow after bringing in an *outside* leader! (p.32) Although I don't know for certain, I believe this has something to do with the internal chemistry of an organization. Internal chemistry with a senior leader is essential. And once the internal chemistry is gone, conflict and turn-over are inevitably going to increase.

Back before social media, when I took over a church in a smaller city, I had a lot of people who were exclusively called to the programs of the church but not to me. I knew that these small fractures in our church unity were going to grow with time. So, one Sunday, I took a radical approach. (And I don't necessarily recommend this)! But, I said:

“Check out other churches in this city to see if you're called elsewhere.”

Of course, I didn't want to encourage consumeristic church-hopping. Yet, I wanted to make certain that the people who attended my church are truly called. Much like Gideon's Army (Judges chapter 7), a unity of spirit will create greater impact than numbers. And sure enough, we lost a few families to the church down the road... mostly families who weren't giving or serving anyway. But we also had a lot of semi-connected families check out other churches. And when doing so, they realized: *“Wow, I really love how our pastor does things.”* I.e., They suddenly realized all that they were taking for granted. And they came back to our church more committed than ever. But it was a “calling” this time.

But here's a second reason why *divine chemistry* is so important. Most of us would never marry a person who we didn't want to spend time with, right? And, thus, as a pastor, I would never hire any pastoral staff member I wouldn't want to hang out with on my day off. I see our staff more like a family than a corporation.

There have been many times when I've been tempted to find hired-guns who are great at what they do. But, if I don't have chemistry with them, no matter how talented they are, it will eventually hurt me or my organization in some way. Who cares if this person is helping me to grow my church if we can't stand to be with each other!

You see divine chemistry makes heart-felt communication easier. It pulls you through those awkward spats and disagreements. Thus, even amidst difficulty, you feel *called* to be together. And thus, even when you don't see eye-to-eye, you still have the desire to walk hand in hand. I.e., You press-on through the stressful moments to find that deeper understanding. And most importantly, divine chemistry creates a unity that moves God to bless our churches (Psm 133; Mt. 18:19)!

When the staff love each other, the lay-leaders will feel it. When the lay-leaders love each other, the attendees will know it. People will flock to your church wanting to be adopted. After all, you're more than just a church service led by ministry professionals: You're a family that loves each other (Jn 13:35). And it's exciting. It's refreshing. It trickles into every crack of the church. And ultimately, *it's contagious*.

“I would never hire any person I wouldn't want to hang out with on my day off.”

It's a lot like a good marriage full of attraction: it will likely “produce a good number of kids”. And, likewise, when sinners are getting saved due to this contagious unity, the atmosphere of such a church is electrifying. But this is not so in a church where everyone is called to programs, people, and traditions more than central leadership.

You see, divine chemistry is God's way of telling us where to fellowship. But if we ignore this leading because of some idolatrous commitment to a church tradition, paycheck or

program, we will experience the pain of a slow church death. And that, my friends, will not only hurt you but it will hurt your church leaders as well.

Many pastors manage their finances with no margin. Thus, they start to treat church members like “giving units” instead of sons and daughters. Indeed, they become parasitic to the church. And then church members feel disloyal and frustrated. And rather than following “divine flow” as a sign from God, they instead choose to nit-pick each other to death... or simply ignore each other.

To put it another way: Churches are like lakes. Every lake has a certain degree of inflow and outflow. Lakes that have no outflow are like the Dead sea – they grow stagnant. And no matter how many resources flow in, they will never feel fresh again. In the same way Christians need the freedom to listen to God.

Now certainly this can be taken to an unhealthy degree. Many churches have a large back-door simply because they struggle with unhealthy systems or attitudes. Other times, people leave a church, not because the Holy Spirit called them to, but because they’re running from their character and calling. I.e., It’s easier to run than reconcile.

So, it’s important to understand that, by divine chemistry, I’m not referring to any of these dysfunctions. I’m simply trying to describe a divine unity that can fall upon us when we rethink how we’re “called to a church.”

And this is where church bylaws come back into the conversation: Many bylaws tend to “protect the machinery and monuments” more than the divine chemistry.

So, allow me to get specific: Does your church have *divine chemistry* or are you an odd mix of co-dependant individuals. Or, to apply this to our constitutions: *Do your bylaws allow your senior leader the legal capacity to build their teams based on divine chemistry?*

For example, many churches don’t allow the senior pastor to choose their staff or rotate their boards. Yet a failure to rotate board-members often results in a host of dysfunctions.

A study on church satisfaction found that, a person has a “98% chance of being “very satisfied” if they have a high quantity of intimate Christian friends in that church.⁸ Many other studies have linked job satisfaction to workplace chemistry.

Without the ability to design the environment, senior leaders end up being co-dependant professionals with no chemistry. And you may get a highly skilled team. But, what good is this if they all hate each other and have different agendas for the church? How will the church ever recruit other talented staff members into that type of environment? How will that team demonstrate contagious life-giving community if they’re all the product of a carnally arranged marriage?

Quite often, we fail to remember that growing churches are first of all families – not religious organizations. So, if pastors do not have the ability to pick their staffs or veto their board selections, it’s like setting up a random “marriage lottery” and expecting those marriages to produce healthy kids.

At my first senior pastorate, I had a couple elders who simply didn’t trust me. Most of them had been in the church for quite a while. Over time it became clear to me that many of

⁸ Friendship: Creating a Culture of Connectivity in Your Church © 2005 Group Publishing, Inc.

them had been wounded by past leaders. One of them was naturally a bit hesitant about me being the new senior pastor. And understandably so: I was incredibly young. (Keep in mind: all of our trustee/elders had life-long appointments to their positions.) Yet, despite our total and complete differences I decided to make the best of it.

Inevitably tough calls needed to be made and disagreements ended up surfacing. Before long the situation became insufferable. Almost every meeting ended with an awkward public stalemate between us. Even basic church decisions ended with this one trustee (& his friends) giving me bizarre challenges and accusations.

I tried to extend friendship in hopes that trust could be built; but, to no avail, none of these leaders were truly interested in getting to know me – nor were they interested in getting off of the board. One of them even admitted: *“I’m called to this church but I’m not called to you. And I’m gonna do whatever it takes to protect this church even if it means protecting this church from its senior pastor.”*

Not surprisingly the church didn’t grow much at all. All of us hated coming to board meetings. Like the Apostle Paul said of the Corinthians: *“Your meetings do more harm than good”* (1 Cor. 11:17).

In the end, one of us needed to leave – and I was the first to step out. We resigned our position there. Of course, at our next church, we made certain that divine chemistry existed; and, not surprisingly, our new church has experienced explosive growth at almost every turn.

Leadership has been a delight. Board meetings are downright fun. The joy oozes out into the congregation. And when non-Christians see the internal chemistry of our church, they line up to be adopted. It’s much like Jesus promised: *“Love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples...”* (Jn 13:35).

And to this day, I believe that all of those elders were good people. Chances are, God had a different church for them as well. The Lord knows, those leaders were probably suffering as much as I was. But from that experience I learned a powerful lesson. I need to listen to the Lord in prayer as he speaks to me through divine chemistry. No board position or job opportunity is worth disobeying God’s “still small voice” in the form of divine chemistry. Hence our next building block:

The Divine Chemistry Principle: *When bylaws do not encourage ‘divine chemistry’ to take place, communication, trust, friendship, and fruitfulness will ultimately decrease.*

Church governments need to encourage board rotation. If a pastor can’t pick his staff, it’s much like having a Republican president with a Democratic cabinet – nothing is going to get done. So why would we create bylaws which obligate this scenario? Generally, we do it under the pretense of “accountability.” Yet, we fail to see the liabilities that this creates.

But, can we create divine chemistry even if our bylaws are bad? Maybe. But it’s not easy.

As you're about to find out, the further a church goes away from its founding pastor, the harder this becomes without the right bylaws.

For example, above, we established that founding pastors are usually people with great influence. Church plants generally grow much faster than churches over fifteen years old.⁹ The

“When non-Christians see the internal chemistry of our church, they line up to be adopted.”

reason is likely because: *People come to a church plant based on chemistry with the senior pastor rather than tradition.*¹⁰

Rarely do lay-members (in a younger church) carry more influence than the founding pastor. Thus, when conflicts occur, there is usually a central leader with enough clout to recreate the unity – even when someone is trying to destroy it. In other words, leadership and finesse compensates for the weaknesses in the system. (Much like “dads” usually carry

more influence than “step-dads”.)

And this brings us to another important point: It's great that leadership can save the day – despite the weaknesses of a particular governance system. But we've got to design smarter systems than this. Inevitably, there will be a group of leaders who are not “up to the challenge”. So bylaws and constitutions need to be able to guide a church under non-ideal circumstances. They anticipate a time further down the road when church members are divided over programs (machinery) and staff (movement).

In other words, sometimes, “step-dads exist.” Sometimes “kids wield more power than the parents.” Sometimes senior pastors come in from the outside (step-dads). Sometimes, church members have more clout than the senior decision-maker does. So, a good constitution is one that guides a church family under duress.

For example, it's great that your church leadership teams have good role definition *now*. A strong long-term pastor of a congregationalist church may experience a good amount of freedom *now*. But, what about when the stakes are raised? What about a weaker pastor who follows him? In the NFL, even hall of fame head-coaches and quarterbacks get intense scrutiny when the pressure is cranked up. If roles aren't *legally* defined, and decisions aren't legally stratified, a church is at a much greater risk of plateauing, splitting, or even worse: a death.

For example, year ago, we had a bunch of our men's small groups join a Christian basketball league. In smaller games, Christians were usually very generous to one another about fouls and scoring mistakes. For the most part, the *need to win* didn't eclipse the *need to value each other*. But, when the tournament came around, and the stakes were raised, it was amazing how carnal a group a Christian men could get! Last season alone I watched Christian men from various churches whip chairs across the court. I've seen Christian men fight. And especially when the league play-offs begin, the values of Christ become strangely non-existent.

⁹ “Churches Die with Dignity,” *Christianity Today*, January 14, 1991, p.69.

¹⁰ C. Wayne Zunkel, *Growing the Small Church* (Elgin, Ill.: David C. Cook, 1982), p.48

You see, when the stakes are raised, when the players are less known to each other, everything changes – even though they are all still Christians. And, unfortunately, the same is often true for church boards and staff when making high pressure church decisions.

Or imagine an NFL play-off game with no referees: It would be downright dangerous to even attend such a match. The likelihood of mob violence would dramatically increase. We all hope to see good sportsmanship on behalf of both the players and the fans. Yet, to be wise, we need to have a very elaborate set of “official game rules.”

Lets face it, there will always be “close calls” (a.k.a., subjective decisions). We need to know: *What exactly constitutes a catch?* Thus, NFL rules are amazingly specific – even to describing body parts: *“one elbow in bounds equals two feet in bounds provided the ball was secured before the elbow hits.”*

In the same way, a good set of church bylaws will delineate all of these subjective circumstances. So, another important principle that our constitution must heed is the “High Stakes Rule.”

The High Stakes Rule: *If your bylaws aren't specific enough about rules and role definition, they will fail in carrying you through times of duress.*

Of course, we will all hope for the best behavior in our church! We will hope for a spirit of cooperation and humility. We will all attempt to listen to one another. And no one wants their authority to be undermined. No one wants to be micro-managed. But, without a system to define this, we are taking risks that are both foolish and unnecessary. A healthy constitution needs to allow divine chemistry to occur. And, just as important, it must be specific enough to create clear direction under great periods of stress.

But where does this leave us on our quest for a healthy government? We've explored four critical building blocks. But, we've saved the best one for last. If you do not understand the principle of Corporate Subservience, your church may well be on its way to spiritual death. Very few of these principles will affect your churches life-expectancy as much as building block number five. So let's dive in.

Chapter Four:

Building Block #5

The Principle of Corporate Subservience

Have the tools of your church (the staff, the building, or the programs) become the end in themselves?

Before we build a life-giving church polity, there is one final sociological principle that we need to learn.

Many years ago, I learned a brilliant concept about church health called *Corporate Subservience*.¹¹ When people refer to *a church*, there are two different concepts that people have in mind: The “Church” could refer to the “*Corporation*” (a.k.a, the building, the organization, the staff, the programs, the assets, etc.). However, there is also the “*Spiritual Body*” which is essentially the true spiritual church (a.k.a., the people, the fellowship of the saints, the living breathing network of Christians who mentor and serve one another.)

Now, the entire purpose for the *corporation* is to serve the *spiritual body*. For example, the ultimate purpose for a program or a building is to help people. Just because we own a building with stained glass windows doesn’t mean we actually have a church. Likewise, without *people*, programs are just meaningless structures. Pastoral staff are the same. The only reason why full-time staff exist is for the purpose of “*equipping the saints*” (Eph 4:11). Thus, the corporation (staff, the facilities, programs, etc.) are *merely tools* to help the *true church* to remain relationally healthy.

“Corporate subservience is definitely an answer to the question: ‘Why do persecuted churches grow so fast.’”

However, what often times happens is that the “corporation” hijacks the spiritual body. I.e., The tool become the end in itself. Church members exist *more* to perpetuate the existence of a program or building, than the building exists to perpetuate a transformational community. And, from this concept we discern the *Principle of Corporate Subservience*:

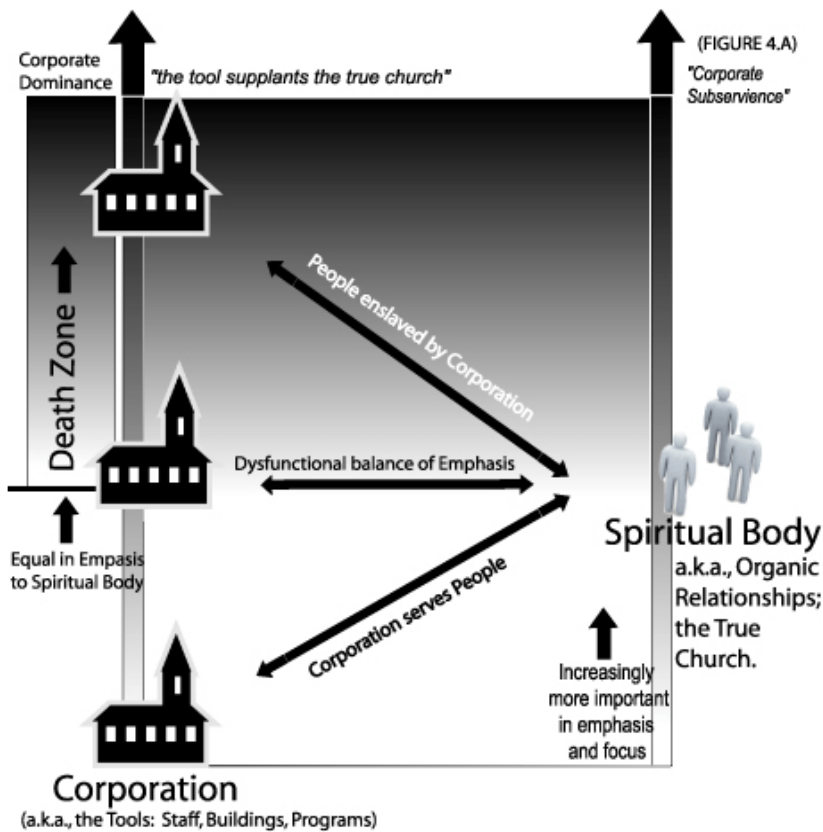
The Principle of Corporate Subservience: *The moment the corporation becomes equal to (or greater than) the spiritual body in terms of focus or energy, that is the moment the church begins to die.* (See figure 4-A below)

For example, many churches attempt to build facilities or hire staff they cannot yet

¹¹ This concept came out of an early edition of a book called: *The Life-Giving Church* by Ted Haggard. Unfortunately, the idea was removed from subsequent editions and is now out of print – yet the concept is nonetheless a profoundly relevant message to churches.

afford. As a result, their mortgage payments become a stranglehold on their church income. Thus, they spend all of their time doing continuous capitol campaigns or endless “offering sermons” trying to squeeze every last dollar out of God’s people.

For example, I had a highly successful pastor friend wisely teach me: “*Never stand behind the pulpit needing an offering.*” And the reason is simple: when pastors stand behind the pulpit needing an offering, their motives are no longer “servant focused.” Because they failed to



budget with margin, their choices have caused them to become addicted to increasing numbers of givers. As a result, church cultures become increasingly stingy about releasing people to other churches or to the mission field because they need givers to pay the mortgage.¹² And, when people begin to feel like faceless “giving units,” it is only a matter of time before the church’s attendance will begin to drop.

In other words, *what began as a tool became a goal or end unto itself*. Bad financial decisions, in terms of staffing and facilities, regularly create a “life-sucking” atmosphere – where the corporation *dominates* the spiritual body, *rather than serves it*. Of course, when a corporation effectively serves its people, I call it *Corporate Subservience*. This

principle applies to many other corporate tools as well.

For example, my friend attended a church with an older style sanctuary. It was located

¹² I’ve found that budgeting on 75% of the previous year’s budget is a wise amount of cushion. It enables me three huge privileges that other pastors don’t have. Every program I’ve ever killed (or staff member I’ve ever fired) usually cost me around 4-5 families – the one offended family and the four “sympathizer families.” Thus, whenever I’m making major changes, there’s always a cost associated with it. But, because I have financial margin, (1). I can make healthy decisions rather than political decisions. (2). A financial cushion keeps my staff and I safe from down-sizing. Nothing kills your church morale and momentum quicker than having to fire people or freeze ministry spending. (3). A cushion enables me to release church members to plant churches and do missions more. If I’m idolatrously addicted to people’s income, I won’t be happy about sending them out to fulfill their calling. They are slaves, not sons. Yet, the Bible teaches that there’s more blessing in giving than receiving. So, when I’m stingy with releasing people, I also cut myself and my church off from the blessings of God. I.e., Financial margin is a lot like the Sabbath. When we honor God with it, God bestows us with abounding supernatural capacity (2 Cor. 9:8; Mt. 6:33).

near a college campus and many younger people were coming to the church hoping for a contemporary worship format. But projection screens needed to be installed; and, such an installation didn't fit well into the older design of the sanctuary. Even more, the presence of drums required some acoustic treatments; yet, the architecture was very sacred to many older people. And there weren't any other places in the building where a contemporary service could be held.

After a lengthy debate, the church voted the idea of contemporary worship down for a few years. Not surprisingly, the church ended up with a huge exodus. Only one person under fifty-five remained in the church! The church is almost completely dead today – all because of some tiny architectural problems. Once again, the tool had become the end in itself. The corporate asset became more important than the true church. The church culture did not maintain corporate subservience; and hence, the church began to die.

As one last example, church programs are a massive tool to enhance discipleship. But, as we all know, it's much more exciting to *start* a program than it is to *kill* a program. Many leaders find it easier to arm-twist people into maintaining a dying program than it is to simply put the program to death.

Thus pulpit arm-twisting becomes a typical mode of operation within corporate dominated cultures. The program is no longer an enhancement and outgrowth of the community; rather, it's the master of it. And the moment a building, an asset, or a program becomes more important than the fruitfulness of the true church, is the moment that church has begun to die. Thus, it is the job of leadership to guarantee that the "living stones" of Christ's church are always more important than the life-less stones of an aging corporation.

I've spent many years working with pastors in persecuted countries. My western Christian friends have always asked me: "*Why is it that churches in persecuted or third world countries seem to grow so fast.*" Of course, I don't want to over-simplify things; yet, corporate subservience is definitely easier to maintain in persecuted countries.

For example, it's literally illegal for many of these churches to organize a *corporation*; thus, their focus is much more organically directed on home fellowships and old-fashioned mentoring. Or many of these same churches simply don't have enough money to build an encumbering organization. Hence, they live in an environment where corporate subservience naturally occurs.

Today, we live in an era where there is a strong "anti-mega-church movement". People are always telling me: "*Mega-churches are too corporate, too impersonal, & too obsessed with huge buildings.*" Of course I empathize with these sentiments. Yet almost every argument I've ever heard against mega-churches is really just a cry for corporate subservience. In other words,

"Every argument I've ever heard against mega-churches is really just a cry for corporate subservience."

the debate has been incorrectly centered around "church size". But, the real reason why a church feels "corporate" and impersonal is because of this deeper problem that looms beneath the surface. And ironically, corporate subservience can sabotage churches of all sizes – even home churches. So, statistically speaking, church size has nothing to do with anything.

No one in their right mind would say: "*Medium size*

brick houses make for healthier families.” The size of the house has nothing to do with the quality of the family – despite the bad experiences you may have had growing up in a certain size house. Similarly, no one in their right mind would say: “*Smaller churches have more faith;*” because, faith is a *value*, not a *church size*. And either your church values “faith” or it doesn’t. So let’s get beyond the ignorant myths and start asking the question: *How do we employ the values of corporate subservience?*

Why Corporate Subservience is So Tricky

On the surface, *corporate subservience* would seem to be a simple concept to enforce. I could spew out dozens of adages like: “*Don’t hire more staff than you need... don’t get too far into debt... don’t continue programs that require more energy than they are worth. And focus on organic small groups & mentoring.*” However, we already know these things! The real problem is *how*. *How do we avoid these scenarios?* Quite simply: If we have the wrong forms of church government, it’s nearly impossible to actually “*subdue*” the corporation. Here’s why:

Healthy *corporate subservience* requires constant pruning and change. Change is hard – even when it’s positive. Then, toss in a lot of opinions (*Subjectivity Size Principle*) who are under-qualified about how to prune a morale-based organization.¹³ And suddenly, killing a program can feel impossible. In other words, corporate subservience also requires *controversial* change. Everyone is going to have a different opinion on “*how to downsize.*” And some would prefer to simply live in denial.

For example, we know that “*a few staff members may need to be laid off; but, which ones?*” We know that “*a few programs need to be cleared off the schedule; but, which ones?*” Sometimes even *fruitful programs* and delightful staff members need to be pruned to create organizational health. And this is where your church government becomes critical.

When a church has too many legally empowered decision-makers, these types of subjective decisions become impossible. Every time corporate subservience is attempted, the church will likely split or embrace denial to keep the peace.

To compound the issue, as churches grow, so do their assets. As assets grow, so do the number of people seeking to control the assets. As this number increases, the likelihood that an organization will take risks (necessary for corporate subservience) generally decreases. The net result is slow organizational death.

Like we mentioned above, some churches manage to overcome these weaknesses through humility, finesse, and good central leadership. And once again, it’s great when these things save the day. It’s just that, after the founding pastor, the odds of a

“the average church goes into an almost irreversible plateau after its first twenty years.”

¹³ "Moral based" means: Any organization that primarily depends on volunteers to serve as employees. In a typical job, a boss can use money (a paycheck) as leverage: "If you don't do what I say, you won't get paid." But when your employees all work for free, how do you motivate them to show up and do an excellent job? You need to be better at casting vision and creating a life-giving atmosphere. I.e., It must be a "high morale" environment or people will quit. Why would people waste their free time serving a leader who doesn't appreciate them?

church having central leaders capable of accomplishing this becomes increasingly slim.

In many ways, Corporate Subservience is all about curbing the toxic consumerism of "power-families" and staff. And what makes it so difficult is that, toxic consumerism often looks like "protecting our values and traditions." I.e., it's completely natural to want to preserve our favorite tradition, program or staff member. But, how do we know when it becomes toxic? Even when people see it, it's hard to deal with it.

The Expectation Exercise

A pastor friend of mine asked a group of church members a simple question: "*What do you expect from me as your senior pastor?*" Each of them anonymously wrote their basic criteria on a little sheet of paper and handed it to a young lady who quietly compiled their answers onto a marker board.

Most of these little sheets of paper only had room for one to three demands: And most people wrote basic things like: "*I expect my pastor to 'rightfully divide the word of God' in the pulpit.*" Or, "*I expect my senior pastor to make sure we are shepherded well.*"

Most people in the room thought: "*I don't expect much from my senior pastor. I only demand one to three things at most.*" However, the person at the marker board kept running out of space. Pretty soon, she needed *another marker board* and then *another marker board*. And soon enough, there was a list of around 300 criteria that the room of people expected from their senior pastor.

What they failed to understand was that: They might only expect *one or two things*; but, when you multiple one or two things times the number of church attendees, the job description quickly becomes an impossible task – which was the whole point of the exercise!

My pastor friend wanted them to realize that corporate expectations tend to escalate quite quickly. And though our individual expectations might be simple, they multiply into toxic idealism.

So how do we stop this? The strange answer is this: We need bylaws that give non-founding pastors more freedom to make hard decisions – which ironically means: "less accountability."

Less is More

Once again, as churches age, they naturally become more risk-averse. Church boards generally become more powerful with time. Protecting the assets (and status quo) becomes a natural priority over reaching the lost. Even worse, as churches age, decision making becomes more diffuse.

Every time there's a transition in lead pastor, a few new power families step up to fill the gap (until the new lead pastor establishes themselves). And with each subsequent lead pastor, the church is slowly taken over by benevolent power-families and power-ministries.

For example, during leadership transitions, churches tend to "prop up their morale" by *over-celebrating* a few ministries and a few leaders (which is a great short-term strategy when you're going through the financial and attendance dips that often accompany transitions in lead

pastor). But ironically, these morale boosters become sacred cows for the next lead pastor.

Indeed, many non-founding pastors win their jobs by promising to maintain these programs and staff – rather than pledging to maintain corporate subservience – which often means trimming these power-families and programs! And then we wonder why less than 1% of churches grow after their founding pastor retires? Quite simply, we've created a bureaucratic juggernaut that is almost politically impossible to solve.

The reason I talk about this is because, we all hear stories of moral failures in the lead pastorate and we think: "*Wow, we probably should have been holding our lead pastors more accountable.*" And as I've consulted with church boards, their overwhelming fear is: "*How do we make sure we are holding our pastors accountable?*" Yet, ironically, I always remind them: You should be ten times more worried about "death by bureaucratic board."

Think about it: Church deaths due to moral failures in the lead pastorate always steal more headlines compared to church deaths by bureaucratic boards. The former is scandalous. But the latter *everywhere!* It's so common that we almost see it as inevitable. Indeed, most churches are going into a death spiral the moment their founding pastor retires yet they don't even realize it!¹⁴

Thus, the great irony is this: Non-founding pastors need to be "*less accountable.*" They need bylaws that give them slightly greater authority to make hard decisions. I.e., they need a slight *imbalance of power* that goes in their favor so that they can carve back the quickly expanding corporation.

To put it simply: An over-expanding corporation has killed far more churches than moral failures ever have or ever will.

"So, are you suggesting that churches embrace the Apostolic CEO model (a.k.a., the Benevolent dictator model)?"

Absolutely not.

As you'll see with the Hybrid model, we can actually take the best of *each* classical model while minimizing their weaknesses. And by heeding the wisdom of these five building blocks we can create a system that creates safeguards without stalemates!

¹⁴ Research shows, the income and attendance of most churches peaks with the founding pastor and never return. The only exceptions are generally when, a non-founding pastor reconsolidates power enough to ruthlessly cut down sacred cow programs – a process that usually takes over a decade. Unfortunately, it's extremely rare for non-founding pastors to stay at their church for longer than ten years – which condemns the church to another 10 year plateau and deepens the death spiral.

Chapter Five:

The Hybrid Solution

What if we took the strengths of every classical government and minimized their weaknesses?

Over the last several chapters, we've been studying five building blocks that can have a huge impact on our churches. But how can we integrate these principles into a singular model? The good news is that, churches have been doing this with a model called the Classical Hybrid.

The reason why I call it the Classical Hybrid is because it merges elements of all four of the classical forms of government. In theory it takes many of the strengths of each classical government while minimizing their weaknesses.

To accomplish this, the Hybrid balances power by creating three separate boards – which sounds cumbersome at first. But the result is the opposite of cumbersome. And here's how it works.

Imagine if you took the biblical concepts of Elders Overseers and Deacons, and then, split them into four groups: (A). The Lead Pastor; (B). The Trustee/Directors (Financial board); (C). The Staff Elders (pastoral board); (D). The Overseers/Spiritual Advisors (the crisis and mentoring board). If we set aside the Lead Pastor, we have three remaining boards. So, before we unpack how they function, allow me to summarize their basic roles.

THE THREE BOARDS OF THE HYBRID SYSTEM

(1). THE TRUSTEES are responsible for the financial well-being of the church. They monitor accounting and business practices. They must vote on any mortgages, contracts, or major financial decisions. They assure fiscal responsibility (both to the church and the I.R.S.) They help develop the budget, manage the assets, & aid in facility acquisition and management. I.e., their role is primarily placed on the “business” of the corporate church. And their distinct focus enables them to aid in the business planning of the organization (being freed from the typical responsibilities of an elder.) Like many larger churches, the role of trustee is separated from elder to enable expedience and focus.

Generally, this board consists of business executives, C.P.A.s, general contractors, and other “corporate savvy” individuals. They are nominated by the senior pastor and approved by the Staff Elders.

(2). THE STAFF ELDERS are responsible for shepherding the people. Their distinct focus frees them from the endless lists of corporate responsibilities. As an extension of the senior pastor, they are free to serve the people through prayer and shepherding. In some hybrid

churches, executive pastoral staff are automatically considered elders. They assist in administering the sacraments. They decide and manage the statement of faith (if necessary). They help manage the church in times of duress (for example, they would aid in mediating or settling a dispute in the church). They manage licensing and ordaining (if necessary). And in highly political cases of conflict (such as a serious and viable accusation against the senior pastor), the elders have the authority to call in the third board, which is the board of registered Overseers.

(3). THE OVERSEERS / SPIRITUAL ADVISORS are a board of successful lead pastors who govern churches outside of your church. This board is generally comprised of mentors of the senior pastor who pastor churches that are generally equal or larger than the church they're overseeing. This gives them greater credibility if they are called upon.

In the case of alleged misconduct, they investigate and, if necessary, decide the disciplinary course of action for the Lead Pastor. The key words which define this board are: *professional*, and *objective*.

For example, when accusations against the Lead Pastor are made, local church boards tend to lose both their objectivity and discernment. Theoretically, the objective nature of the overseers can seriously reduce the risk of dirty politics and mixed motives which often embroil a local crisis or a leadership vacuum. The sheep should never have to discipline their shepherd. Thus, overseers alone have the ability to remove, discipline, or exonerate a senior pastor.

History has shown us that when local elder boards have either the authority or desire to discipline the senior pastor, the ruling will usually be highly politicized. I.e., it will either be too harsh or too soft. Statistically these types of "internal discipline boards" can often result in a church split. Thus, in times of conflict, it helps to have an *outside board* which can theoretically carry a greater level of credibility (as they are pastors who are well-respected due to their own churches' success.) Also, because they aren't "locally entrenched" in the issue being discussed, they offer a greater level of objectivity than local boards (who are usually plagued with alliances and other conflicts of interest.)

Even more, the overseers are *ministry professionals* who are better attuned to satisfying the corporate management needs of a church. I.e., You want a surgeon to do your surgery – not some lay-person who read a few books on surgery. For example, such overseers can be invaluable when key staff members are suspended for investigation or are being removed. Often played by denominational leaders or apostolic mentors, their resourcefulness during times of duress can be indispensable (such as finding supply preachers, and/or guiding the public relations process).

However, this system also prevents these overseers from becoming micro-managing “bishops” as they are only called upon when authorized by the Elders under specific conditions. Hybrid bylaws extend differing degrees of authority to overseers based on the nature of the crisis.

WHY THREE BOARDS?

Churches are a lot like football teams. When little kids play football on the playground, they get to play every position: *offense* and *defense*. But, a professional sports team forces their players to get increasingly specialized. And this specialization dramatically increases quality. They create squads who are dedicated to a singular skill: *offense, defense, special teams, (not to mention a multi-tiered coaching staff)*. Nobody gets to do everything. Ironically, only a small few get to even touch the ball. And even fewer get to call plays on the field.

Indeed, the ball is not safer when all eleven players attempt to hold it at the same time (the *presbyterian model*). I.e., You need blockers who are O.K. with the fact that they never get to touch the ball or call a play. But this does not mean that those who touch the football aren't accountable.

You also don't want a system where the season ticket holder can over-ride both the coach and the quarterback on any given play (the *Congregationalist model*). And then, there are the two extremes: A model where the clueless outside owner can meddle with the coach and quarterback (the *Episcopalian model*). And the opposite extreme: a coach & quarterback who can make endless terrible decisions with no accountability (the *Apostolic pastor model*). At some point, we would do well to acknowledge, *all* of these roles matter. And all of these roles need to have checks and balances.

So, here's how the Hybrid model attempts to balance these groups: The Lead Pastor is the visionary. They get to make the final call on the subjective topics that tend to split churches the most. There is no church board on earth that will always agree about: "*What's the perfect budget... perfect worship set... the perfect next staff hire.*" So, when bylaws force votes on highly subjective topics like these, it rarely increases safety or discernment.

Ironically, these debates (and subsequent votes) can often make the church *less* safe as they often polarize, divide, or at the very least, distract the church leaders from their overall mission.

Once again, healthy lead pastors will always seek out the advice of their teams on budgets, worship sets, and staff hires. But bylaw protocols should be designed for "worst-case-scenarios." They aren't intended to prescribe an *idealistic* leadership process but rather, they create clear road-maps for messy ones!

The Hybrid is designed to work like a football team who's down by 7 points with only a few minutes to go. In moments like these, you don't want your team fighting on the field because they don't like the play calling. Indeed, in critical survival moments, it's almost always better to stay united around a mediocre play that's called than it is for players to fight on the field and just do what they want.

In a similar way, most churches die during crises or transitions in Lead Pastor. And they splinter over budget debates, staff controversies and worship wars. Thus, the Hybrid is designed to reshape the decision making process on highly subjective and specialized decisions.

So to recap, the Hybrid has 3 separate boards; yet, *four* key entities: (A). The Lead Pastor; (B). The Trustee/Directors (Financial board); (C). The Staff Elders (pastoral board); (D). The Overseers/Spiritual Advisors (the crisis and mentoring board). But, where do the building blocks fit in?

INTEGRATING THE BUILDING BLOCKS

Remember, the million dollar question is: *Do the right amounts of people with the right qualifications have the authority to make the right decisions?* If too many people are being legally empowered to make a highly subjective decision, the odds of polarization and perceived disenfranchisement increases (a.k.a., the Subjectivity Size Principle). And, when highly complex or specialized decisions are entrusted to under-qualified decision makers, the odds of losing both discernment, time, fruitfulness, accountability, and overall ministry-focus increases (a.k.a., The Qualification Effect).

So the power behind the three board system is this: Specialization and Role Definition. Again, it's much like a football team. When your quarterback, your running backs, and your offensive line are all in sync with one another, there is protection; there is progress; and ultimately, there is victory. But this is not so when you have eleven quarterbacks and no offensive line. Not everyone can hold the ball at the same time. And not everyone should call the plays. At some point players will need to allow role definition and trust to take root.

But many church governments refuse to allow this. They falsely assume that “just because you can't over-ride the play-calling that the play-calling is unsafe.” Or, “just because you aren't carrying the ball, this means the ball isn't safe”. But this simply isn't true. Indeed, the ball is actually safer when it's in the hands of a skilled player. Running backs are specially trained on how to hold the ball while 300 pound men are violently trying to rake it out of their hands. Quarterbacks are specially trained to identify defensive formations and exploit them on the line of scrimmage. Coaches are specially trained to call statistically effective plays based on game information. So we would have to be out of our minds to create a governance system that can consistently undermine this structure with votes and parliamentary procedures.

“Just because you aren't carrying the ball, doesn't mean the ball isn't safe! ...Indeed, the ball is actually safer when it's in the hands of a skilled player.”

My congregationalist friend once told me: “*Well, we allow role definition to occur!*” But, I contested, how well would that role definition continue when the stakes are high and a highly subjective decision is being made. Believe me: When the stakes are raised, everyone will seize every last ounce of authority given them according to the bylaws. Role definition and specialization will generally go right out the window (*See the “High Stakes Rule” of Chapter 3*).

For example, Congregationalism may allow someone to be called “the coach” or “the quarterback” (senior pastor); but, the bylaws ultimately give “the season ticket holder” the vote (the congregation).

So, what's going to happen when the game is on the line, and 2/3rds of the season ticket holders say, pass the ball – yet you know better than anyone that you should run it (after all, it's your job to know these things – you've spent your whole life studying for this moment). So, who's really in control in this situation? The “Quarterback” is nothing more than a meaningless title, because, according to the bylaws, everyone's technically a quarterback.

Presbyterianism works in a similar way. But, to stick with our football metaphor, instead of empowering season ticket holders, it would limit the power to key players (a.k.a., the *elders*).

The game is on the line and the influential wide receiver/elder feels he isn't getting the ball enough. So, the bylaws give him the ability to politic. In fact he feels that *he* would be a better quarterback on that particular play. And lucky for him: he's got more influence than both the coach and the quarterback. Is this really a safe authority structure in times of crisis? Not at all.

You see, anyone can say that they allow "role definition" and "specialization" to occur within their church. But, until you give that group or person the ultimate legal "say-so," your role definition is merely a temporary phenomenon for when the stakes aren't high.

Thus, to create *true* role definition, you may need to delegate the privilege of authority on certain things or else those toxically collaborative systems will melt under the heat.

So how do these board play out?

But what is the exact accountability within this system? First of all, each board can have its own internal accountability. For example, in our church bylaws: Trustees can be countered by other trustees – elders by other elders and overseers by other overseers. Allow me to give a few examples:

Trustees cannot be approved without being nominated by the lead pastor and confirmed by the elders. If a trustee (or spouse) becomes weird, they can be removed by the lead pastor – but only one of them every six months (to prevent the lead pastor from swapping the board with "yes-men" if someone dared to disagree with them).

Elders can only be nominated by the Lead Pastor; but, they must be confirmed by the Trustees.

The lead pastor can only be voted in by the congregation; and, they can only be removed if, the elders or trustees call the overseers and the overseers deem it wise to do so. So, there are plenty of checks and balances if things get sticky.

The Power to Execute Corporate Subservience

But there is one other brilliant benefit to structuring your church like this. As we mentioned before, maintaining *corporate subservience* is close to impossible without the right form of government.

By way of quick recap: there are two entities within a church. There is the "Corporation" (a.k.a., the staff, the building, the assets, the programs, etc). And then there is the "Spiritual Body" (a.k.a., the actual network of people).

When the Corporate tools become equal in emphasis or importance to the spiritual body, the church begins to die. I.e., The tools kill the church by becoming the end in themselves. The building no longer enhances the organic discipleship of the spiritual body. Instead, the people of the spiritual body are mere giving units who service the debt on the building. (I.e., the tool enslaves the master). But this begs the question, how does a church government contribute to this?

As I mentioned in previous chapters, as churches age, church boards tend to become increasingly powerful and decision making tends to become toxically collaborative. As a result, subsequent lead pastors tend to have an impossible time trying to trim back predatory programs

and expenses. Thus, these bylaws are designed to extend the life-expectancy of a church by creating a "*healthy imbalance*" that is slightly biased towards the lead pastor. In other words, the Lead Pastor has a higher amount of discretion on highly subjective issues.

Earlier we mentioned that corporate subservience requires highly subjective, complex and controversial decisions. Everyone will have a different opinion on *how* to budget, *who* to cut and *how to prioritize* or down-size. For example, we know that "*a few staff members may need to be laid off;*" but, which ones? We know that "*a few programs need to be cleared off the schedule;*" but, which ones? Sometimes even fruitful programs and delightful staff members need to be pruned to create organizational health. Once again, the Subjectivity/Size Principle and the Qualification Effect teach us that ill sized groups of unspecialized decision makers will only decrease a churches ability to create corporate subservience. So what should we do?

We separate the corporation from the spiritual body (like two branches of government) and we assign each of the branches their own board. The trustee look over the corporation by helping the lead pastor do business planning, staff management, I.R.S. compliance, etc. The other branch (the staff elders) focus exclusively on the spiritual body (mentoring and shepherding).

And, the most critical concept is this (which we borrow from the fourth model, the Singular Elder/Pastor Model): **Only allow one person the advantage of controlling limited aspects of both the Corporation and the Spiritual body.** I.e., Both branches of church government come to a head in the merged role: "Senior Pastor / President." This person is the *Lead Pastor* (aka., the head of the *elders* and consequently, the *spiritual body*); but, this same person is also the *President* (or the head of the trustees and the corporation). But why is this so important?

When we separate the *Presidency* from the *Senior pastorate* we have effectively created a dangerous "*balance of power.*" Again, remember, a balance of power between a corporation and a spiritual body is actually a *bad thing*. It means that the "*church building*" is equally as important as the actual "*church community*" – which is certainly not how God sees things! We would be foolish to protect the "tools" of the church equal to the church itself.¹⁵ Also remember, church boards, traditions and power families grow with time. I.e., church power naturally becomes imbalanced with time. Thus, we need to design a system that counteracts this ever growing bureaucracy.

Unfortunately, many churches do separate the "President" (aka., Chairman of the board) role from the "Senior Pastor." This balance of power is done under the guise of creating accountability and discernment; but, in reality, it adds neither. Suddenly you have a Lead pastor with no real authority over the church tools. And you have a President with no ability to actually implement the tools for true ministry. In essence, this split plays out like a "Co-pastorate."

Now, are there churches who have done this well? Of course! But stalemates and splits dramatically increase in these types of churches. Ultimately, the subjective nature of corporate subservience is much more functionally executed when you marry these roles into a singular "Lead Pastor/President".

¹⁵ Again, if this doesn't make sense, re-read Chapter Four on Corporate Subservience. After all, splitting the senior pastorate and the presidency will likely limit the life-expectancy of your churches' "growth" season.

And remember, in this Hybrid system, the Senior Pastor/President role is limited too. For Example, the *Trustees* (representing the corporate branch) will hold the lead pastor / president accountable for all of the major financial decisions of the church (like debt, contracts, business practices, etc). The President can't just go out and buy a fleet of luxury cars for himself with church money – nor can he go get a loan for the church all by himself. He's got to submit those decisions to the trustees. But the trustees can't micro-manage the money either. (And this is where this system becomes brilliant).

The trustees are *not* primarily asking the question: “*How should this be used to serve the spiritual body*” as much as they are thinking “*Are we operating this church based on sound financial principles?*” In other words, they are *safe-guarding* without *stalemating*. They are advising without micro-managing. And yes, the difference between these roles can get blurry at times. So, think of the trustees like a crew of fire-fighters.

The trustees efficiently hook the hose to hydrant and the senior pastor aims it. I.e., They don't need to sit and debate “where to aim the water” (a.k.a., “what program is the priority?” or “Which low level staff should we hire or fire?”) Instead, much like a firefighting team, team-mates become *specialists* so that time isn't lost stalemating over subjective issues. And the senior pastor doesn't need to waste endless energy educating either the trustees or the masses about why he “aimed the hose the way he did.” Nor does he worry about a split over his endlessly complex decisions.

“It would be ridiculous to watch ten fire-fighters fight over the tip of a fire-hose while lives are at stake.”

And it's *not* that no one can question each other. The whole point of the trustee board is to ask questions and scrutinize corporate decision making. Whenever a team of people are unable to listen to one another, there will always be a break-down in functionality and discernment. But it also would be ridiculous to watch ten fire-fighters fight over the tip of a fire-hose while lives are at stake.

At some point, if the organization really wants to save lives, all teams need to accept the fact that their roles must become defined.

So, the corporate decision making is highly specified: All loans, all leases, and all property purchases must be done by a trustee vote (i.e., the big issues need votes). The trustees set the senior pastor's salary. Also, the trustees have discretion of up to 35% of the income for the purpose of managing the facilities.

But budgeting can become a highly subjective and controversial process. I mean, everyone will have a different “favorite ministry.” Even more, everyone will have a different opinion about what each staff member is worth. (And most church splits happen over budgeting decisions). So, the remaining 65% of the upcoming budget becomes the discretion of the Senior Pastor.

Of course, the trustees still help him budget his portion. The advice still flows in his direction; but, the ultimate decision rests with him. This freedom affords him the easiest ability to create corporate subservience. (As he has the ability to starve unproductive staff and programming with his 65%).

But what if the lead pastor decided to do something immoral with his share of the budget.

Then, the trustees would make their case to the elders. And if the elders agreed, they would call in the Overseers. And if the overseers felt the Senior Pastor was out of line, they would rule in favor of the Trustees. You see... there are still plenty of accountability mechanisms, even though roles are very defined.

In the same way, the Elders will hold the senior pastor / president accountable for shepherding the people (and vice versa). Elders have significant relational influence (as they were elected by the people). Naturally, they are ideal for helping to steer the people by performing a long list of significant pastoral responsibilities. But they do not think about financial assets. They aren't worried about church leases. Their job is not to decide: "*How should the corporation be used for the spiritual body?*" Nor do they want to.

First of all, if the trustee board is filled with brilliant business folks, C.P.A.'s and savvy contractors, why would want to steal corporate decisions from them? If my wife is on the operating table, it would be in my best interests to leave the doctor be! Yes, it's fine to ask questions and get second opinions; but, if my motive is merely to seize control, I'd be a fool.

Secondly, how do I truly give myself to the job of shepherding and mentoring people if I'm constantly distracted with lease discussions and payscale debates. Especially if your church is in a building project, there will hardly be any shepherding going on. The focus of the team will be completely hijacked by corporate conversations. And quite often, the stresses of church discipline, conflict mediation and small group mentoring will cause you to do a miserable job at holding the senior pastor accountable for good financial management. I mean, how will you have time to double check the church books and oversee an internal audit when you're trying to be a shepherd.

"If my wife is on the operating table, it would be in my best interests to leave the doctor be!"

Once again, when roles are defined, focus and specialization increase. With increased specialization comes an increase of trust and effectiveness. Before long, your trustees, elders, pastors and overseers will operate like an unstoppable well-oiled football team. Sunday after Sunday you will march the church into victory. And when sinners are transformed (because the government is functioning well) people will rejoice!

Rarely do people harass their leaders when things are going well. The joy of watching spiritual transformation is far too exciting to get caught up nit-picking about church decision making. And *that* should be the dream of every church system: *to keep God's people completely focused on the Great Commission.*

Tying it all Together

Ultimately, there are many other subtle advantages to a Hybrid system. So, I encourage you to talk to pastors who've been a part of one for a while.

But, this is the real goal behind this entire essay is simple: Church government should operate so efficiently, that church soap-operas are few and far between.

Chances are, you're going to have a few no matter what you do. So you don't need a flawed system adding to this problem. Even more, apart from providing safety and stability, we simply want to steward God's people in a formation that leads God's people into victory. But few churches have been capable of consistently passing that momentum on for longer than twenty years. Certainly, church longevity requires a lot more than just a good church government. But make no mistake, rarely will this happen without one.

We want to reach people with the love of Christ. Christ likened us to doctors who reach sick people. The church is meant to be an emergency room for lost people. When we are giving spiritual CPR to a dying person, we simply do not have time to be sitting around debating about the decorations on the E.R. walls. And that is what a good church government will prevent. Desperate people have different priorities. Christ is seeking lost souls. And *that* is what's at stake when we employ a mediocre governance system.

Peter R. Haas – 2020