

Governing Boards Are Important to Church Leadership

Surprisingly my book entitled *Leading Leaders* is my current best seller. The reason I'm surprised is that it addresses church governing boards. I wrote it thinking that the typical church board should find it helpful as so many seem to be struggling with what they're doing and what they think they should be doing. A majority feel that boards are vital to the life of the church, but so many seem to be accomplishing so little of real worth. Apparently, the book has touched a strong felt need of many churches sprinkled all across North America.

I'm All for Church Boards

Since I've written a book on church boards, you'll not be surprised that I'm all for them. However, my view biblically and theologically is different from many of my peers. For example, I don't believe that Scripture teaches that each church must have an elder board made up largely of lay persons in the congregation. Several passages seem to teach this view (Acts 14:23; 15:2; 20:17; 1 Tim. 5:17; and James 5:14). Each talks about the elders (plural) in every church (singular). However, what is missing is an understanding of the local church in the first century. They consisted of city churches and house churches. The passages above describe the city church. However, other passages address house churches (Acts 2:46; 5:12, 42; 8:3; 20:20, 1 Cor. 16:19). It would appear that all the house churches in a particular city were an important part of and made up the larger city church. Thus, I would argue that the elders most likely were the pastors of the house churches. When Acts 20:17 or the other passages describe a plurality of elders in a church, it's probably referring to a gathering of the house church elders for a particular reason (see *Leading Leaders* for more on this).

Is He Really for Church Boards?

At this point you're probably thinking, *he's just kidding himself as well as us-he's just contradicted himself-he doesn't believe in a plurality of board leadership.* While I don't believe that Scripture teaches or argues for a plurality of lay elders in every church, I'm not opposed to the idea. I believe that board leadership is wise in that seeking the counsel of others is a wise thing to do (Proverbs 11:14; 15:22; 20:18; and 24:6). Whatever you want to call them elders, deacons or some other name is up to the church. If I were to pastor another church some day, I would prefer working with a leadership board. However, I do have a problem with those who argue that the plurality of elders is the biblical approach and then toss stones at those who disagree with them. (There seems to be a lot of "stone tossing" going on in the evangelical camp over various issues, and I believe this is most unfortunate as well as questionable biblically-at least the manner in which people are smearing other believers who differ with them.)

What Has Begun to Bother Me to No End

In my consulting practice, a number of pastors will contact me who want me to come and help them in their churches to plan and think strategically much as in the early churches. After discovering their situation, we agree that they do need help, especially in addressing their growth issues. However, when some go back to discuss this with their boards, the boards freeze up. It's as if they sound a retreat, move back across the church drawbridge into their fortresses, pull up the drawbridge, and think, *we don't need any help, if we just keep doing what we've been doing surely things will get better*. Most of us have learned by now that this is hardly the solution, and someone has said that this is the definition of insanity. Regardless, the pastors become discouraged over their board's passiveness and eventually move on to another church.

What Governing Boards Need to Do

We in North America live in what has proved to be a difficult time for churches. While the number of unchurched people is growing, far too many churches aren't surviving. We do need governing boards in our churches no matter their size, but we need strong boards that aren't timid and fearful of moving beyond their fortresses with a vision of making a difference in their communities. This calls for proactive, visionary people of faith. They need to take Paul seriously when he says in Ephesians 3:20, "Now unto him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly more than we ask or think. . . ." The implication is that some churches (likely Ephesus) weren't thinking nor asking big enough. When this is the case, Paul says our God is too small. We must learn to trust him to make a significant difference in our communities for Christ. My research indicates that churches that are having a significant impact for Christ have these kinds of boards. My prayer is "May their tribe increase!"

An Announcement

The Malphurs Group will again be offering onsite leadership development and consultant training in the fall. Those who have been trained say this is leadership at its finest and is a must for all pastors. We will meet for five sessions that will take place once a month on Fridays from noon to 6:00 p.m. and Saturday mornings from 8:00 a.m. to noon. This will happen at a hotel near the D/FW Airport. Those who attend may receive seminary credit toward a masters or doctor of ministries degree. If you would like to know more, contact the Malphurs Group ASAP as we begin the first weekend in August (Aubrey@malphursgroup.com).

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