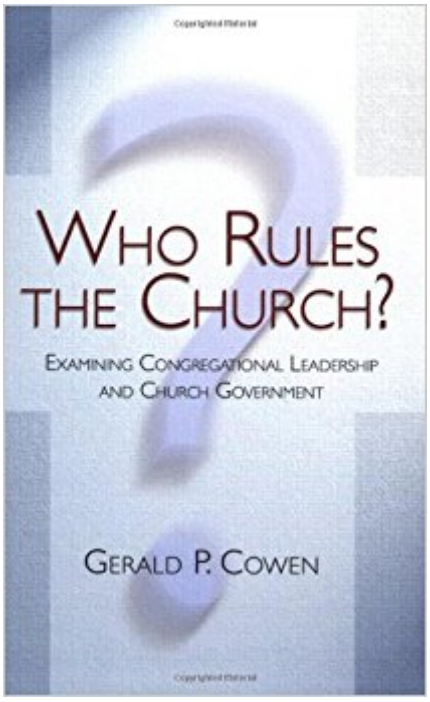
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Who Rules The Church?: Examining Congregational Leadership And Church Government



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Synopsis

In this book author Gerald Cowen will offer critical definitions about what the work of a pastor or elder isÃ¢â ¬â •what is his job description and what are the limits of his authority. Who Rules the Church? will make the case that the New Testament model for congregational government is the Pastoral Leadership-Congregational rule. In other words, authority is given by the Lord to the congregation itself, but the pastor is God-called to that congregation not only to serve and take care of the congregation but to be the leader.

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Customer Reviews

Jerry Vines' foreword of this book builds our anticipation of a "thorough study of the whole pastor-elder issue," one that is "thoroughly researched and well done" and utilizes "extensive knowledge of and skill in the Greek language." Unfortunately, the book that follows this foreword doesn't quite measure up to the anticipation.Cowen does do a fairly solid, if unremarkable, job at explaining the Greek words used for church leaders. What you'll find here is essentially indistinguishable from what you'll find in a myriad of books and articles on elders, and doesn't go into the detail that many other authors do. Sadly, after spending most of his first chapter describing these words and how they're related, and presenting a faithful explanation of the NT role of elders/overseers/pastors, in the last two paragraphs of this chapter he undoes most of this good by interjecting a sole leader or pastor of each congregation (in distinction to the pastors/elders).He bases this assertion on an incredibly brief and unsupported reference to James being the primary

leader of the conference in Acts 15, which is disputed even by some who share his view of church polity, and which wouldn't establish his view of a sole pastoral leader for each congregation anyway. But the author somehow takes this one questionable example and extrapolates a biblical model(!) of each house congregation having only one leader. He then defends this view by referring to the angels or messengers to the churches in Revelation 2-3, a passage of which, he admits, there are many varying opinions, and of which "a firm conclusion cannot be reached." To establish such a normative model of church government requires much more than these two perfunctory (and contested) examples. After this end of the first chapter, he drops all discussion of pastor-elders working in plurality or as a team. The rest of the book focuses on "the pastor."He devotes his second chapter to a defense of the traditional view that the pastor must receive a special calling from God for pastoral ministry. He seems to base this almost entirely on the special calling of OT prophets and NT apostles, but never discusses the fact that a special, direct calling and commissioning is part of the very thing that distinguishes OT prophets and NT apostles from other servants of God (such as pastor-elders). He tries valiantly to establish this special calling as a model for pastor-elders but is unconvincing.In chapter 3, he takes exception to Marvin Mayer's observation that Timothy and Titus were "not elder-overseers but apostolic legates." His attempts to counter this don't make much sense to me, but even if they are all accurate they still don't lead to the conclusion that these men were pastors. His reasoning is surprisingly faulty. Ironically, he uses 1 Timothy 5:17 and James 5:14 in exploring the role of the pastor-elder, but doesn't acknowledge the plural nature of pastoral ministry as described in each.Potential readers should be aware that this book is written from a congregational perspective. I admit that I am puzzled by the author's model of 'Pastoral Leadership-Congregational Rule.' (Shouldn't the church be ruled by Christ?) Regardless, people from similar church traditions might have benefited from this book. But because of the faulty exegesis and reasoning throughout most of this book, leading to erroneous conclusions, I would advise looking elsewhere.

Gerald Cowen's book "Who Rules the Church? Examining Congregational Leadership and Church Government" is 152 pages long and is divided into an introduction, 6 chapters, and 2 appendices. Its main focus is on digging into the New Testament records to discover what they have to say about leadership in the local church. The basic conclusion is that pastors/shepherds, presbyters/elders, and bishops/overseers are just different terms for the same person(s) in a local church according to the New Testament, which is different than the common institutional church practice of creating a hierarchy based on these different terms.There are several strengths to the

work. First, it is written by a professor of New Testament and ancient Greek, giving credibility and depth to his analysis of the biblical text. Second, it is written in a popular level style, which makes it accessible to a non-specialist, yet it does not avoid getting into the meaning of the original Greek words. Third, it relies on the Bible itself, rather than institutional church traditions, to come to conclusions about the shape of leadership in the early church. Fourth, it deals with all the relevant texts on the definition, call, role, qualifications, and authority of pastors/shepherds, presbyters/elders, bishops/overseers, as well as touching on the relationship of the pastor/elder/overseer and the deacon.There are several weaknesses. The two appendices deal with ecclesiology of the Free Churches of the Reformation and the Baptists, which seems out of place and unnecessary in a book on New Testament analysis. I got the book because I wanted to know what the Bible teaches, not what the Reformed and Baptist churches teach! Also, I wish there was a discussion on the role, calling, and authority of translocal apostles in the New Testament. None was offered unfortunately.Overall, this is a solid and enjoyable biblical analysis of the nature of local leadership in the New Testament. It has helped shape my own thinking and practice in catalyzing a network of house churches, and I have referenced it in my own writings.RAD ZDERO, author of LETTERS TO THE HOUSE CHURCH MOVEMENT and THE GLOBAL HOUSE CHURCH MOVEMENT

This was a poor attempt at addressing the subject. It was not well organized and the thought process was rather convoluted.I would not recommend this book.

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