USING EXPOSITORY PREACHING FOR DISCOVERING,

DEVELOPING, AND DEPLOYING ELDERS

AT BELIEVERS' BAPTIST CHURCH

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A Project

Presented to

the Faculty of

The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Ministry

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by

Jason Eugene Rolen

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**APPROVAL SHEET**

USING EXPOSITORY PREACHING FOR DISCOVERING,

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To Jesus Christ,

my life,

to Stacy M. Rolen,

my love,

and

to Believers' Baptist Church,

my joy and crown

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PREFACE

       I could not have completed this project without the encouragement and support of many others.  First, I want to thank my wife, Stacy, who patiently and graciously supported and encouraged me through the years of my studies. She gave of herself completely that I might at last finish this obligation.  Mere words are not sufficient for the debt of gratitude I owe her.  She is my true companion in the Lord.  I am humbled to be called her husband.

       Second, I want to thank the membership of Believers' Baptist Church.  I thank my God always when I think of them because I have derived much joy and comfort from them. I have often been refreshed and inspired by their sacrifice of love, grace, and forbearance.

       Third, I want to express my sincere gratitude to Roberta Jackson for her suggestions, thoughts, and proofreading, to Perry and Debbie Hitt for providing me a literal "upper chamber" from which to work, and to Brooks Harman, who on a number of occasions blessed me financially during the years of this project.  I could not have completed the task without these people in my life.

       Finally, I want to thank my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, without Whom I could do nothing.  Without Him I would surely fail.  I thank Him for His grace.  May I boast only in knowing Him.

<div align="right">Jason E. Rolen</div>

Emory, Texas

December 2014

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

**Purpose**

The purpose of this project was to use expository preaching to discover, develop,
and deploy elders at Believers' Baptist Church, Emory, Texas.

**Goals**

Five goals were used to aid in evaluation, viability and effectiveness of this
project. It is the thesis of this project that true biblical polity is a plural-elder
congregationalism. The first goal aimed to create interest, acceptance, and knowledge of
biblical eldership. Congregational surveys helped to measure the knowledge of the church
members about biblical eldership.

The second goal of the project was to inform the congregation of the value and
necessity for a trained and competent biblical leadership. This awareness included an
agreement *with* and commitment *to* biblical eldership. One of the primary reasons for
struggling churches within the Southern Baptist Convention is because of poor biblical
polity. There is serious misunderstanding, much confusion, and even unfounded fear
concerning biblical eldership. The New Testament clearly teaches several types of leaders,
including *elders* or *overseers* (two titles that are used interchangeably) and deacons in the
local church. Though the Bible does not provide an exhaustive template for the role or
functions of an elder in the church, the Scriptures are very specific about the character of

those who serve as leaders.  Biblical leadership based on the character traits taught in the Scripture is becoming increasingly important in a postmodern age.

The third goal was accomplished as an initial group of prospective elder candidates (and wives) felt a desire and willingness to go through a short-term evaluation study.  Each candidate understood that he was under no obligation to accept this role (elder) once the evaluation study was completed.  Nor did completion absolutely assure that the candidate would be an elder.  Each candidate was invited to the evaluation study based upon a sense of calling, biblical qualifications, and personal desire.  This goal included evaluating, comparing, and coordinating the best study points and chapters of *Biblical Eldership: Twelve Lessons for Mentoring Men for Eldership* by Alexander Strauch[1] and *Elders and Leaders Field Guide: Governing Boards Learning Together in Community* by Rowland Forman, based on the book *Elders and Leaders: God's Plan for Leading the Church* by Gene Getz. [2]  At the conclusion of the evaluation study, some of the participating men were asked to become elders and to continue in the eldership process by committing to a more specific and detailed semester training.

The fourth goal of the project is beyond the time parameters of the project, but is necessarily included in the writing of the project to guard against the impression that elders could be discovered, developed, and deployed in a short period of time.  The goal will have several men (and wives) formerly invited, who having previously completed the short-term evaluation study, to commit to a thirteen-week training semester.  At the conclusion of the

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[1]Alexander Strauch, *Biblical Eldership:  An Urgent Call to Restore Biblical Church Leadership* (Littleton, CO: Lewis and Roth, 1995).

[2]Rowland Forman, *Elders and Leaders Field Guide: Governing Boards Learning Together in Community* (Dallas: Center for Church Based Training, 2003).  Gene Getz, *Elders and Leaders: God's Plan for Leading the Church* (Chicago:  Moody, 2003).

training semester, each man will be presented to the congregation in a special recognition and ordination service. Each man will testify to his call and desire to serve the church as an elder. The congregation will be informed that no "votes" would be cast, but rather they will be given opportunity to voice any possible concerns through the guidelines of the church constitution and by-laws.

As a final goal, the project endeavored to improve both my pastoral leadership and mentoring skills. I especially increased my knowledge of and ability to articulate the doctrine of biblical eldership. Further, I continued growing in my commitment to and ability in expository preaching.

**Context**

Believers' Baptist Church is located in Emory, Texas, the county seat of Rains County. Rains County, with a total area of 258.8 square miles, is the fourth smallest county in the state. It was created in December 1870 from parts of four other counties. The county and the county seat are named after the founding father, Emory Rains. Dairy and beef cattle are the main industries. The Texas legislature designated Rains County as "Eagle Capital of Texas" in 1995 in order to preserve the bald eagles that nest around the local lakes. Rains County is bordered by Lake Tawakoni, known for catfish fishing, and Lake Fork, known for bass fishing. These lakes, along with annual festivals, draw thousands of visitors and outdoor enthusiasts each year.[3]

Rains County was forged with persistence, heroism, and the deprivations of the comforts of life. A large majority of the first settlers were descendants of settlers from

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[3]Elaine Bay, *Images of America: Rains County* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia, 2011).

Tennessee, Kentucky, and Mexico. These early residents of Rains County had a strong sense of justice and individual liberty and with great struggle, finally created from the chaos and wilderness, a place to build homes and raise families. Through the years the county has experienced small to moderate growth.[4]

The 2010 county population is listed as 13,694. This represents an increase of 5,593 or 69 percent since 1990. The population of the county is expected to increase by 10.9 percent or 1,498 between 2010 and 2015. Rural families account for 78.3 percent of the households of the county. Overall, the faith involvement level and preference for historic Christian religious affiliations is very high. Based upon worship, music, and architectural style preferences in the county, the overall church style preference can be described as both traditional and contemporary.[5]

The history of Believers' Baptist Church is brief. In March 1998, a small group of believers began meeting at the home of Jim and Tiny Jones – just outside of Emory, Texas. Several men rotated preaching/teaching responsibilities as the group prayed about the future. On April 29, 1998, the group voted to form a church and to call Bryan Hutchinson to be the first pastor. The first treasurer was named, and Tiny Jones became the church's volunteer Worship Leader.

Hutchinson was a busy bi-vocational pastor, but these were exciting days for the young congregation, and many were added to the church. On Sunday, June 14, 1998, the church held a worship service in a local community center (Heritage Center) on Highway

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[4]W. O. Hebisen, *Early Days in Texas and Rains County* (Dallas: Rains County Historical Society, 1917).

[5]Percept Group, *Demographic Information* (Costa Mesa, CA: Percept, 2010), 1-6.

276 in Emory.  The church was to hold worship services there until December of 2003.

Just one week later the church was accepted as a mission of Highland Terrace Baptist

Church in Greenville, Texas, and as a mission church of the Baptist General Convention of

Texas.  This status allowed Believers' Baptist to begin receiving financial and other needed

support from a sponsoring church and state convention.

In the summer of 1999, the growing church voted to purchase ten acres on

Highway 19 in Emory, just one mile north of the Rains County Courthouse.  This purchase

was a major step of faith for the congregation and tangibly ensured the desired longevity of

the church.  The purchase of the property also gave the church credibility with the

community.

On February 13, 2000, the church accepted the resignation of Bryan Hutchinson

as pastor, and one month later the church voted to break the relationship with the Baptist

General Convention of Texas and applied to align uniquely with the more conservative

Southern Baptists of Texas Convention. In early April, Calvin Beach was called by the

church as the interim pastor and had a short but effective and much appreciated ministry.

In July 2000, the church voted to call me as its first full-time pastor. My first

sermon to the church was preached (July 23) under a tent on the ten acres.  In August, the

church was accepted as a mission of the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention.  This

designation allowed the church to receive a monthly financial support of $600.  The church

received the state convention support until August of 2003.

In February 2001, the church entered into a capital fundraising campaign to raise

the money for paying off the property note and for constructing its first building. The "A

Faith Step Forward" campaign allowed members to pledge a stewardship of finances over a

three-year period.  In August 2001, the church hired Siebenlist Architects in Tyler, Texas, to draw the plans for the new building to be constructed on the ten acres.  A few months later the church hired Ken Brown of K.W. Construction, Emory, as the Construction Manager.

By God's faithfulness and provision to his people, in November of 2002, the land debt was paid off, and a note-burning ceremony was held on the property on Sunday, December 1, 2002.  The ten-year note was paid off in three and a half years.  All plans for construction were finalized.

In March 2003, the church celebrated its fifth-year anniversary with a groundbreaking ceremony for the construction of the church's first building.  The new building would include worship space with a seating capacity of 200-250, nursery and preschool area, and office space. The approximate cost for the construction was given at $400,000. The last worship service of the church at the Heritage Center was November 30, 2003.

The first worship service in the new building was held December 7, 2003.  A community-wide Praise and Thanksgiving worship service was held on Sunday, December 14, 2003. A community-wide open house and dedication service were held on Sunday, January 25, 2004.

On October 3, 2004, the church began a new capital fundraising campaign for an additional facility.  The "Building Today and Tomorrow" campaign ended on October 16, 2005.  Over thirty thousand dollars was received during the campaign and became the foundation for the church to start planning for the construction of a new educational and fellowship building.

Though still in "mission status" and not yet formally constituted as a church, but anticipating a plural-elder congregationalism form of church government, the church installed Pat Parker and Bill Faughtenberry as the first lay-elders and Al Shipp as the first deacon on October 24, 2004. These men were placed in their roles after a brief study and discussion time within the congregation, but without the guidance of the mother church. The men were appointed in these offices based on qualifications and having been previously ordained in other churches. In retrospect, the church moved too rapidly and unadvisedly in a desire to get formal leadership in place in anticipation of moving out of "mission status." Though the elder-led, deacon-served government was accepted by the congregation, the decision and actions of the church at that time should have been given adequate time and careful consideration before actuated.

In November 2004, the church voted to purchase an additional 8.631 acres adjacent to the original ten acres. This additional property would allow the church more than enough property for future growth. The young church now was in its first building and possessing over eighteen acres.

In July 2005, the mother church (Highland Terrace) ceased financial support of the church. This prompted the church to be formally released from "mission status." The church was, and continues to be, affiliated with Hunt Baptist Association, the Southern Baptists of Texas, and the Southern Baptist Convention.

Mike German was ordained to the deacon ministry of the church on April 23, 2006, and in May 2006, the church acquired a white wood-frame 30 x 60 structure and had it moved onto the property next to the original facility. Though needing to be remodeled, the building became the anticipated educational and fellowship building and was given to

the church from a nearby sister church. This building would allow for much needed space for the growing church.

In February of 2007, the church agreed with Cleveland Seals of S & S Professional Drafting Services in Sulphur Springs, Texas, to draft a construction plan for the remodeling of the new addition. The plans were completed by the end of March, and the preparation for remodeling began. God had continued to multiply the designated monies in the "Building Today and Tomorrow" fund, and $50,000 was made immediately available for construction.

On February 18, 2007, the church voted to accept the proposed Constitution and By-Laws for the church as written, proposed, and presented by the Council of Elders. The vote was unanimous. The officers were confirmed and elected by the church at that time.

In early April 2007, the church agreed with Ken Brown of K.W. Construction, Emory, to become the Project Manager for the remodeling of the additional building. It was also determined at that time to add classroom space to the building. Volunteer builders from Highland Terrace Baptist Church, Greenville, Texas, agreed to frame the new classroom addition. The dirt work for the new construction began on April 23, 2007. Though in the early stages of remodeling, on May 29, 2007 the church held its first church-wide fellowship in the building.

In June of 2007, Pat Parker, Chairman of the Council of Elders, resigned and moved to Ponder, Texas. The chairman position of the Council of Elders was left vacant at that time. Later that year, for personal reasons, Bill Faughtenberry resigned as the sole remaining lay-elder.

On Sunday, April 6, 2008, the church held a special Dedication Service for the completed fellowship hall and classroom addition. On May 18, 2008, the church held a ten-year anniversary service under the theme "From There To Here." The day was celebrated with memories, pictures, and testimonies of God's faithfulness.

Since 2008 the church has continued to experience slow but steady growth. The average weekly attendance is currently 130. In 2010-11 the church baptized 16 and had 21 other additions. In 2012-13 the church baptized 8 and had 18 other additions. Since 2009 the church has sent 8 high school and college students on mission trips to China, Japan, Jordan, and Israel. Other than the Hunt Baptist Association, the Southern Baptists of Texas, and the Southern Baptist Convention, the church is currently financially committed to Heart Cry Missionary Society in Virginia, which is primarily involved with indigenous missions in South America and Raffa Clinic, a women's crisis pregnancy resource center in Greenville, Texas. In addition, Believers' is also currently financially sponsoring two other ministries: For the Silent, a ministry of hope to teens silenced by sex trafficking and exploitation, and Our Father's Heart, a nurturing and care ministry for foster children. Further, the intentional outreach ministry of BBC is "Thinking Outside the Building." This program is an externally focused service and helps minister to the county benevolence ministry, the local school district (only one in the county), the volunteer fire department, the youth sports association, local law enforcement, and other community and county groups and organizations.

My leadership style is pastoral. I desire to be lovingly biblical in my interaction with the congregation, elders, and community. I believe that the mission of the true church is found in the Great Commission (Matt 28:18-20). I also believe that the church is best

able to accomplish this mission by having called, committed, competent and commissioned elders in the vanguard.

**Project Rationale**

Unashamedly, much of the rationale for the project was for the benefit of Believers' Baptist Church.  Since 2007 the church had no active elders other than the current pastor. Though a plural-elder congregationalism was the form of government specified in the church constitution, various obstacles and issues created a long-standing reality that was not consistent with the constitution, and was certainly not healthy for the congregation or the pastor.  Continual numerical growth had placed the congregation in need of elders who would provide necessary pastoral care, teaching, discipline, accountability, guidance, and prayer.  However, it was also recognized that many people in the congregation did not understand or had no familiarity with the advantages and function of elders in the local church.

In order for Believers' Baptist to function as a biblical congregation it was necessary that the people understood biblical eldership.  Though the New Testament allows variety and flexibility in the duties of church leadership, it is very clear that the New Testament pattern was plural-elder congregationalism.  This project allowed the local congregation of Believers' Baptist to be taught this pattern.

Further, rationale for the project was found in the words of the Apostle Paul in 1 Timothy 3:1, "The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task."  What follows is based on the continuing belief that the New Testament model and practice was a plurality of elders in each and any local congregation, that the model is valid and necessary today, and that the model should not fall into

disrepute for fear or lack of understanding, or because of faulty application of beliefs. The aim was therefore to look closely at the Scriptural reality, principles and practices of plural eldership, and in the context of Believers' Baptist Church, to create a plan for putting elders in place for leading that congregation.

The project was based on the conviction that the spiritual state (unity problems, doctrinal errors, and destructive corporate witness) of many congregations can be traced to, at best ineffective, and at worst unbiblical deficiencies and understanding in local church government, in a phrase, to widespread abuse and default in the practice of eldership. Many churches apparently feel that lack of understanding and implementing plural leadership is not significant to gaining and enjoying God's blessing. Though God is certainly more concerned with the heart than the form, the form can be conducive to faith and obedience, which necessarily attract and receive God's blessing.

It was also my hope and prayer that the thoughts written and suggestions made might be of use as a model or resource to those who would be considering plural eldership in their own congregations or who would like to re-evaluate their current understanding of elders. I also anticipate that the project would stimulate further discussion within Southern Baptist leaders and churches concerning plural eldership. However, because of my very limited experience, I would in no sense consider my thoughts and suggestions as definitive.

## Research Methodology

The first goal of the project was to increase congregational knowledge of biblical eldership. To evaluate the goal, those eighteen and older of the congregation completed a survey to measure their understanding, attitude, and perceptions about biblical eldership. An expository sermon series was preached for eight weeks on biblical eldership. At the

conclusion of the sermon series the same survey was given again. The results of the surveys were analyzed and compared to measure any change in understanding, attitude, and perceptions of the congregation.

The achievement of the second goal was to garner the acceptance and understanding of the congregation for the necessity for biblical eldership for the church, and to create a motivation and desire (1 Tim 3:1) within some men to be involved in an evaluation study group. This was accomplished through the expository sermon series that defined the office of elder, the qualifications of an elder, the role or functions of an elder, the urgent need for elders in the church, and the role and function differences between elders and deacons. During the eight-week sermon series the congregation was strongly encouraged and challenged to pray and fast for those men who voluntarily became the study group.

A separate focus group ranging in age, amount of time as a member, education, and perceived spiritual commitment was created and used to evaluate my preaching in the areas of content, presentation, oratory, personal appearance, and habits during my preaching. The group was pre-selected and trained in expository listening. The group evaluated each sermon and provided helpful feedback in regard to my expository preaching.

The third goal of the project was to create the opportunity and invitation for some men to be involved in the aforementioned study group. The result was that several men committed to the four-week evaluation study. The study gave clarification in the knowledge of, qualifications for, calling to, and necessary personal desire for eldership in the church. The participation of the wives of the men was required. Congregational prayer

and fasting were emphasized during the weeks of the study group. The curriculum for the study was based upon an evaluation, comparison, and coordination of *Biblical Eldership: Twelve Lessons for Mentoring Men for Eldership* by Alexander Strauch, and *Elders and Leaders Field Guide* (vol. 1) by Rowland Forman.  The *Elders and Leaders Field Guide* is the companion study guide of *Elders and Leaders: God's Plan for Leading the Church* by Gene Getz. The men in the study were under no obligation to pursue eldership further, nor did their participation in the study guarantee invitation into a longer, more intense training semester.

The result of the project will be to have a number of men who would commit to become elders to the congregation.  This outcome could not be accomplished until after the thirteen-week training semester was completed.  The congregation will be informed of those who are participating in the training and encouraged to pray for them.  The training will include opportunity for practical hands-on ministry to the church.  At the conclusion of the training semester the men will be presented to the church and will testify to their calling, desire, and training to serve the church as an elder. The church will have an opportunity to voice any concerns with the potential elders per the church constitution and by-laws.

**Definitions**

In order to accomplish the project it was first necessary to define ecclesiastical office.  In Cornelis Van Dam's book, *The Elder: Today's Ministry Rooted in All Scripture*, an ecclesiastical office is defined as "a task given by God for a specific, continuous, and

institutional service to his [God's] church with a view to its edification."[6]

This definition affirms the right and privilege to an ecclesiastical office does not reside conclusively in gifts, but rather in God's calling. God, in his wisdom and pleasure, calls certain persons to serve him in a special office. This call is not to be taken lightly or carelessly, but in humility, faith, and desire. Because the elder receives his office from God, he represents God himself in the execution of his ministry. Given the heavy weight of this responsibility and privilege, the elder must do his duties prayerfully and in dependence on the Word and Spirit (Acts 14:23; 1 Thess 5:12-13; 1 Tim 5:17-20; Heb 13:17; Jas 5:13-17).

Inserting definitions for the project must include defining the project specifically in the context of masculinity. In other words, it is the conviction of the project that elders will be of the male sex. This conviction should not be understood as having derived from personal authority, exclusive privilege or superior personality, but rather on the authority of Scripture. Nor should this be understood as in any sense suggesting that the roles and functions of women within the local church are not significant.

In addition, it was necessary to the project to give a definition of expository preaching. In his book *Expository Preaching: Plans and Methods,* F. B. Meyer defines expository preaching as

> The consecutive treatment of some book or extended portion of Scripture on which the preacher has concentrated head and heart, brain and brawn, over which he has thought and wept and prayed, until it has yielded up its inner secret, and the spirit of it has passed into his spirit.[7]

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[6]Cornelis Van Dam, *The Elder: Today's Ministry Rooted in All of Scripture* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2009), 4.

[7] F. B. Meyer, *Expository Preaching: Plans and Methods* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1916), 29.

Preaching the texts used in the project was done with expository clarity and accuracy. The necessary preparation was done under the guidance and in dependence on the Holy Spirit. The intent of each sermon was to make much of application and relevancy to the church concerning the subject of the project.

**Conclusion**

The final determinations rest outside the project boundaries. However, the following chapters discuss the project's research, process, and possibilities. The project was evaluated on the congregational understanding and acceptance of eldership, congregational participation in prayer and fasting, and the forming of a study group. The study group allowed an opportunity for the participants to understand and confirm calling, evaluate personal desire, and to include wives in the discussion and consideration. Following the study group, those who accept the invitation will participate in a thirteen-week training semester with an emphasis on practical pastoral ministry to be experienced and witnessed by the church. Following this training, men will be presented to the church as elders to the congregation.

It is my desire that the project will be used to benefit and bless both Believers' Baptist Church and other congregations. It is also my desire that the project will create thought and discussion on biblical leadership. It is my greatest desire that God be pleased and glorified in and through this project.

CHAPTER 2

BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES
ON ELDERSHIP

**Why Biblical Polity Is Important and Necessary**

For many people, the issue of polity is an irrelevant issue for the church.

Careful investigation and study on the issue has too often been forsaken in favor of

organizing the church around what is popular or pragmatic.  Even the well-known New

Testament scholar G. E. Ladd in his work *A Theology of the New Testament,* wrote, "It

appears likely that there was no normative pattern of church government in the apostolic

age, and the organizational structure of the church is no essential element in the theology

of the church."[1]  But in fact, it is a vital and critical issue for the church that cannot be

neglected.  John L. Dagg, noted Baptist theologian of another day, considered church

polity an issue worth diligent consideration.  He noted that just because church polity

may not be the *most* important issue for the church does not mean that it is *unimportant.*

He stated that the Scripture teaches on the subject, therefore, the issue of polity must be

explored.[2]

In a culture of biblical illiteracy and theological ignorance it is not surprising

that there is an easy willingness to minimize church polity.  There is also in our culture a

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[1]G. E. Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 534.

[2]Mark Dever, ed., *Polity: Biblical Arguments on How to Conduct Church Life* (Washington, DC:  Center for Church Reform, 2001), v.

growing rejection of tradition.  The combination of these realities creates a great deal of

unnecessary confusion and debate over the issue.  Whether ignoring it or confused by it,

the evidence is clear, an urgent sense of value and clarity must be given to church polity.

There are at least four positive reasons for this urgency and for giving it a

proper place in the church.  First, a correct polity regulates *who* can be a leader in the

church.  A biblical structure will put leaders in place who are biblically qualified rather

than according to social status, professional accomplishment, popularity, or some other

man-made measurement.  Second, a biblical form of church government directly affects

the process of selecting those qualified for leadership.  Third, a biblical polity determines

what a leader does in the church.  Fourth, a biblical structure will affect what the

congregation thinks and does in regard to the work of the church.[3]

The failure to recognize the value of biblical polity and the confusion

surrounding it has created some very serious negative present day ramifications for the

church.  First, there is a very obvious and critical leadership void in the church.  Second,

without qualified leaders the church has developed an unbiblical toleration and

acceptance of worldliness and a real pattern of compromise with sin.  Third, the absence

of biblical order and accountability has opened a Pandora's box of false teachers and

teachings in the church.  Fourth, the Great Commission priority of the church has become

an after-thought in the wake of internal strife, confusion, and self-centeredness.[4]

All of these reasons, both positive and negative, give the church pause to take

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[3]Benjamin Merkle, *Why Elders? A Biblical and Practical Guide for Church Members* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2009), 11.

[4]Alexander Strauch, *Biblical Eldership:  An Urgent Call to Restore Biblical Church Leadership* (Littleton, CO: Lewis and Roth, 1995), 101-2.

seriously the importance and urgency of a definitive biblical polity.  Each of these should

be impetus enough for the church to take a fresh look at leaders and leadership.  These

reasons, however, should also lead the church to ask if there is enough Scriptural

evidence and foundation for insisting on one form of church government.  Is this form

viable and relevant in the twenty-first century?  How does it interact with the biblical

priorities of the church?  Does the form dictate the same practice and function for every

local church?  Should we conclude that the form of church polity is really not that crucial

and that each church may simply do as it pleases?  These are important questions.  Only

with a serious look at the biblical evidence can answers be found.  The premise of this

project posits one form of church government found in the New Testament that is

necessary for the church today.  The aim of this project is to make a reasonable

demonstration that the form of church government taught in the New Testament is a

plural-elder congregationalism.

## Plural-Elder Congregationalism as the Biblical Model

Though some would understand that the New Testament is mostly silent or

certainly ambiguous regarding any definite church polity, a survey and analysis of the

Scripture reveals a definite pattern and discernable evidence for plural-elder

congregationalism in the New Testament churches.[5]  This chapter will present this form

of church government as necessary and sufficient for the church.  First, the evidence of

elders in the New Testament churches will be presented, which necessarily includes the

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[5]For an example of an alternative position, see Danny Akin, "The Single Elder Church: The Bible's Witness to a Congregational/Single-Elder-Led Polity," in *Perspectives on Church Government: Five Views of Church Polity*, ed. Chad Owen Brand and R. Stanton Norman (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2004), 25-86; Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament,* 534.

qualifications and duties of elders.  Second, the evidence of congregational authority, involvement, and unity with elders will be considered.  Third, the chapter will conclude with a summary of plural-elder congregationalism.

Any discussion of ecclesiastical government must begin with Jesus Christ, the Head of the Church.  Edmund Clowney says it well:

> Our understanding of the government of Christ's church must begin with the Lord himself and his kingdom authority.  He is the Head of the Church; his rule is unique and incomparable.  A second principle derives from the first.  The Church shows the organic life of Christ's body: it lives as an organism, not just an organization.  The third principle is no less essential.  The Church is not like the kingdoms of this world, for it is organized for service, not dominion.  All government in the church is stewardship: i.e. its leaders are servant-managers, who use their authority only to advance the interests of those they represent and serve.[6]

The Lordship of Christ confirmed: a biblical theology for concluding a plural-elder congregationalism must first begin with clear evidence that elders existed in the New Testament churches.  It is within the framework of the New Testament that we discover not only the existence of elders, but also the qualifications for elders, some examples of what elders are to do, and how elders and congregations function together.  The New Testament is the final authority for the argument and conclusion of the project.

### The Evidence for Elders in the New Testament

The evidence for elders in the New Testament may not be as clear as some prefer, but it certainly is not as ambiguous as others propose.  The evidence necessarily begins with a study of the book of Acts.  Though there is some danger in building a doctrinal argument from the book of Acts, there is enough consistency between biblical text and historical understanding to construct an argument for the existence of plural

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[6]Edmund Clowney, *The Church* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1995), 202.

elders in the New Testament churches.  Undoubtedly, the most outstanding evidence for

elders in the New Testament is the list of qualifications found in 1 Timothy.  This list will

be carefully considered in the argument.  The duties of an elder are not specifically listed

in the New Testament as the qualifications are, therefore the duties must be extrapolated

from the various texts in the different letters.  Though the duties are not as definitive,

there are enough implicit texts to inform our understanding of duties for elders even for

today.

**The Church in Jerusalem**

The New Testament does certainly record the existence of elders in a number of

the churches (Acts 14:21-23, 20:17-38; Phil 1:1; Titus 1:5).  Beginning in Acts 11:30,

elders are mentioned for the first time with no explanation of origin, purpose, or duties

given.  The reference is to the leaders of the church in Jerusalem (Judea).  These elders

are mentioned again in Acts 15:1-35 and 21:17-25.  Yet notably, this first reference to

local church leaders names them as *elders*.  The author (Luke) undoubtedly had no need

to explain the term to his readers.  Steven Ger puts forth a plausible, though not

definitive, answer for the lack of any explanation.  "During the decade of the AD 40's,

the leadership of the Jerusalem church was gradually being transferred from Peter and the

other apostles to a council of elders."[7]  This "transfer" would have been prior to the

events of Acts 11:27-29, and approximately twelve years after Pentecost.

This process would have been a natural one.  James Kirkland concurs with Ger.

"The apostles had been given authority under Christ to be overseers of his church.  But

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[7]Steven Ger, *Acts: Witnesses to the World,* Twenty-First Century Biblical Commentary Series (Chattanooga, TN: AMG, 2004), 171.

these apostles were not destined to live forever.  Consequently, they passed on, and

entrusted the ministry of teaching and rule, called "oversight" to elders."[8]  There are no

details given as to who these Jerusalem elders were, or how they qualified, or how they

were selected or appointed.  Likely, a reasonable answer as to how they may have been

selected can be seen in the choosing of the seven Grecian Jews in Acts 6:1-6.  In this case

there is evidence of both human and divine elements in the process of selection.  No

doubt it became a pattern for the selection of elders in other places and on other occasions

(Acts 14:23).[9]  Of the thousands who became believers, men like Barnabas, Philip, and

Stephen would have been readily recognized as qualified to be elders for the

congregations.  The fact remains that there were elders in the Jerusalem church.  Perhaps,

Cornelis Van Dam, in his book *The Elder,* adds more insight when he writes, "Nothing is

said about how the elders in Jerusalem came to their office, but not too much should be

made of it since it would have been perfectly normal for a Jewish congregation to model

itself after the synagogue and to have elders from the outset."[10]

Interestingly, Van Dam gives further evidence for the existence of elders in the

Jerusalem church when he writes,

> The very first Christian congregation, the one in Jerusalem, apparently not only had
> elders but also apostles in their council (Acts 15:4).  Indeed, it even appears that the
> apostles, in establishing normal church government in the various new churches,
> considered themselves to be elders.  Thus, Peter, although identifying himself as an
> apostle (1 Pet 1:1), nevertheless spoke of himself as a fellow elder when addressing

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[8]James Kirkland, *Elders, Deacons, and Saints, Oh My!* (Bloomington, IN: CrossBooks, 2011), 45.

[9]Gene Getz, *Elders and Leaders: God's Plan for Leading the Church* (Chicago: Moody, 2003), 55.

[10]Cornelis Van Dam, *The Elder:  Today's Ministry Rooted in All of Scripture* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2009), 100.

the elders (1 Pet 5:1). The apostle John also called himself an elder when writing his first and second letters (2 John 1, 3 John 1).[11]

Again, regardless of the precise manner in which the office of elder came into the Jerusalem church, the evidence shows that elders existed there. Van Dam's possibility is certainly plausible when it is remembered that the office obviously had the approval and acceptance *of* and *through* the apostles themselves. By the authority that Christ had given them, they in turn established the office in the church.

**Old Testament Origins
of New Testament Elders**

That the Christian church would model itself after the Jewish synagogue, as Van Dam argues, should not be surprising considering the tremendous influence of Judaism on it. Therefore, any understanding of elders in the New Testament must begin with a brief survey of elders in the Old Testament. The survey will prove helpful for background and collaborative evidence supporting the New Testament elder.

The adoption of church elders in Jerusalem indicates that early church government was likely adapted from similar structures and traditions within Judaism. The familiarity of these structures and traditions to the apostles and the early believers, who were primarily Jews, would have influenced and informed the decisions and actions of the early church regarding elders.

Throughout the history of the nation of Israel, the existence of elders and their significance is clearly evident. During the formative years of the nation, the patriarch, Jacob, represented the foundation of elder leadership that would eventually characterize

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[11]Ibid., 41.

the nation. At the time of the exodus from Egypt, elders were already established as the leaders of the people (Exod 3:16-18).

It was the elders of the people that Moses called together to inform the nation as to how they should prepare to meet God when he offered to covenant with them (Exod 19:7-8). Later, it was a group of seventy elders that were invited to ratify the covenant for the people (Exod 24:1). When Moses faced a crisis of leadership during the exodus, God gave him seventy elders to assist him (Num 11:16-17). The special role of elders is also seen in the days of Joshua (Josh 7:6, 8:10, 23:2, 24:1).

As the people were scattered across the land in their various tribes, elders played an important role within each tribe (Judg 11:4-11; Ruth 4:1-12; 1 Sam 8, 11:3; 2 Sam 3:17, 5:1-3). Elders were the chiefs, the tribal leaders, the overseers, and the judges of specific families and communities. They would form a governing body that represented the people and exercised authority in community disputes, decisions, and most importantly in teaching the Law as it pertained to the life of individuals or to the whole community (Deut 21:18-21, 27:1, 31:9-13).[12]

Even during the united monarchy, elders were actively involved in the life of the nation (2 Sam 19:11-14; 1 Chr 15:25; 1 Kgs 12:6). However, during this time, there is an obvious decrease in their status. For example, during the reign of Solomon, there is almost nothing recorded about elders. It is perceivable that by the time of Solomon, the people would have been more inclined to look to the king rather than the elders for leadership. However, elders as leaders in the society during the years of the divided kingdom would not have altogether disappeared (2 Kgs 23:1).

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[12]Kirkland, *Elders, Deacons, and Saints, Oh My!*, 46.

With the defeat of Judah, the fall of Jerusalem, and the subsequent exile to Babylon, elders once again rose in status with the people. During the exile, in the absence of a king, elders began to rise to previous recognition as *the* authoritative leaders of the people. By the time of the return of the nation from exile, elders were once again accepted as the prominent leaders in the life of the nation (Ezra 6:7-8, 14, 10:8).

At the time of Christ and the apostles, the synagogue had become an established and normal institution in Jewish society. The synagogues were important because they were places for learning the Law of Moses. The elders were responsible for the activities, discipline, and traditions of the synagogues and of the influence of the Mosaic Law on the people.[13]

When the first Christian congregations were established by Jewish believers, these were considered, not surprisingly, to be new synagogues. Van Dam writes, "In what appears to be the oldest Christian document, the letter of James, the Christian assembly is referred to as a "synagogue" (συναγογθε; Jas 2:2). Although, James also refers to the church (εκκλεσια; Jas 5:14), the fact that he uses the word "synagogue" is notable, given the Jewish connotations it carried."[14] The use of the word is more evidence of the continuity between the Old and New Testament elder. It is also interesting to note that in the Septuagint, the word זָקֵן (elder) is translated πρεσβυτερος, (elder). In turn, the same word is written as "elder" throughout the New Testament.[15]

Thus the existence of elders in the New Testament without argument has roots

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[13]Strauch, *Biblical Eldership,* 121-23.

[14]Van Dam, *The Elder*, 11.

[15] Kirkland*, Elders, Deacons, and Saints, Oh My!,* 45.

in the Old Testament. As James Kirkland writes, "The council of Christian elders first mentioned in Acts 11:30 as receiving gifts for the Jerusalem poor appears on the scene as naturally as did the council of elders to whom Moses was sent long before (Exod 3:16)."[16] It is clear that at the founding of the New Testament church, Christ brought together a spiritual community based on a structure that was already familiar and established.

**Elders in Each Church**

The death of Stephen (Acts 7:1-60) and the resultant persecution of the church in Jerusalem (Acts 8:1) scattered the early believers through Judea and Samaria. Some of them went as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch (Acts 11:19). As these persecuted believers searched for safe refuge, they "went about preaching the word" (Acts 8:4).[17] That is, they spread the good news and in doing so, we read, "And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number who believed turned to the Lord" (Acts 11:21). The implicit witness of the New Testament is that these new believers formed congregations meeting in designated locations in the various cities. And we may also deduce, even though there had been notable exceptions (Acts 10, 11:19-21), the new believers would have been decidedly Jewish (Acts 2; 13:14, 44-43). Thus again, the continuity of Jewish traditions and systems would likely have been used in forming the new congregations.[18] However, Gentile believers, being familiar with local government and leaders who

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[16] Ibid, 47.

[17] Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are taken from the English Standard Version.

[18] Strauch, *Biblical Eldership,* 121-23.

resembled Jewish elders, would have had no trouble accepting elders as leaders in the churches.

Elders are next mentioned in Acts 14:21-23. This comes at the conclusion of the first missionary journey (Acts 13:1-4). Paul and Barnabas determined to retrace their steps back through the cities where they had originally preached (Acts 14:21). They did this that they might strengthen, encourage, and exhort the new converts (Acts 14:22), both Jew and Gentile (Acts 13:44-49). While they were in each city they "appointed elders for them in every church" (Acts 14:23).

This text is the first appearance of Christian elders in the churches outside of Jerusalem. There might be some questions as to how men would have been appointed as elders so quickly. After all, it had been only a matter of months between the first and second visits of the apostles. Gene Getz suggests: "since there were a number of committed Jews and devout Gentiles in these cities, these men who responded to the Gospel would have grown quickly in their faith. And when Paul and Barnabas returned to these churches, we can be sure they looked for these men."[19] Perhaps Curtis Vaughn is correct in saying: "In the months that separated the first and second visits there was time for the persons having the gift of leadership to become known."[20] Beyond these two suggestions, no doubt, the selection of these men was Holy Spirit driven.

Regardless, the text provides clear historical testimony to the apostles' method of organizing the churches. Although this is the only time that it is recorded that the apostles appointed elders (in Acts) in specific churches, the text can be understood to be a

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[19]Getz, *Elders and Leaders,* 70.

[20]Curtis Vaughn, *Acts: A Study Guide Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974), 95.

summary statement of the normal pattern for organizing the churches. Later, when Paul wrote these same churches in Galatia (AD 48-49),[21] he gave instruction concerning financial support of those who had been appointed as elders (Gal 6:6).

Further evidence for the existence of elders in the New Testament can be found in Paul's directives to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:17-38. These verses are the most descriptive and comprehensive in the book of Acts for the proof of elders in the early churches. The passage is crucial in providing insight and understanding into the expected leadership of elders in the New Testament church.

In AD 57-58, Paul was determined to go to Jerusalem, and this in spite of the warnings he would receive along the way as to the rejection he would encounter (Acts 21:4, 10-11). He was anxious to arrive in Jerusalem to celebrate Pentecost (Acts 20:16), but he had a very important message for the Ephesian elders and felt compelled to deliver it to them. Therefore, rather than going directly to Ephesus and incurring further delay in his travel, he called for the Ephesian elders to join him at Miletus, a coastal city approximately forty miles south of Ephesus.[22]

In the only recorded sample of Paul directly teaching elders, he refers to these men using three different terms. All three terms are used synonymously in the text. The first term πρεσβθτεροι, translated "elders" (Acts 20:17), denotes maturity. The second term that Paul uses is επισψοποι, translated "bishops" or better "overseer." The term implies the nature of their function, that of "oversight" over an area or a designated sphere of responsibility. Finally, these men had the responsibility to ποιμεν, "shepherd"

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[21]New Testament dates are approximate and often disputed. All dates in this document are according to Robert H. Gundry, *A Survey of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 222-23.

[22]Ger, *Acts,* 264.

the church (Acts 20:28).  The word is the verb form implying the pastoral nature of the

responsibility.  When the word appears as a noun (1 Pet 5:4), it implies pastoral care. [23]

It is best to understand *all three terms* as describing the *same person*.  The word

for elder is sometimes translated presbyter, overseer as bishop, and shepherd as pastor.

The terms are interchangeable for the same person.  Perhaps these translations raise the

question: if they were the same office, why are three names used for it?[24]  The answer to

the question is found in the meaning of the words themselves.  Πρεσβθτερος describes

these men as chronologically older and respected as wise and experienced.  Επισκοπης,

on the other hand, describes their function, that of overseeing the church.  Finally, they

are described by their care or shepherding (ποιμαινο) of the church.[25]

Further evidence for elders in the churches is found in Paul's letters.  As the

history of the early church continued unfolding, letters were written to the various

churches.  These letters provide both specific and general evidence for elders in the

churches.  For example, when Paul writes to the church at Philippi (AD 61), he

specifically greets the "overseers and the deacons" (Phil 1:1).  Most of the letters are not

as explicit as the letter to the Philippians.  Many of them use words or phrases that would

only imply a reference to elders.  In the first letter to the Corinthians, he gently urges the

believers to "be subject to every fellow *worker and laborer*" (1 Cor 16:15-16), and in his

first letter to the church at Thessalonica (AD 51), he exhorts each believer "to respect

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[23]John MacArthur, *Acts, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 1985), 209.

[24]Kirkland, *Elders, Deacons, and Saints, Oh My!,* 45.

[25]Derek W. H. Thomas, *Acts,* Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2011), 576.

*those who labor among you* and *are over you* in the Lord and *admonish you*" (1 Thess 5:12).[26]

The most definitive evidence for the existence of elders in the New Testament churches is found in the Pastoral Epistles (1 and 2 Timothy, Titus). These letters were penned approximately thirty years after Pentecost, and in them we see irrefutable evidence of the office of elder. The letters are unique in the collection of inspired letters from Paul in that they stand along with the letter to Philemon as having been written to individual co-workers rather than churches. To these co-workers, Paul gives details as to their work in the churches.

First Timothy was written (AD 63-65) to encourage and enable Timothy to deal with the false teachers who were in the church at Ephesus (1:3) and to explain how believers were to conduct themselves as God's household (3:15). The letter contains more direct and detailed teaching on eldership than any other New Testament letter. Included in Paul's instruction to Timothy is a listing of qualifications that Timothy was to use in appointing both elders and deacons in the church (3:1-13), financial instructions concerning elders (5:17-18), and discipline instructions for a habitually sinning elder (5:19-22).

Titus was written (AD 63-65) to instruct Titus in appointing elders in the churches on the island of Crete (Titus 1:5) and includes another listing of qualifications for elders (1:5-9). This list is very similar to the list found in 1 Timothy 3:1-7. The inclusion of the list in Titus gives evidence that the qualifications for an elder were likely recognized and accepted in all the churches.

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[26]Merkle, *Why Elders?,* 29.

Second Timothy was written (AD 66-67) as a request for Timothy to come to Paul, as he was at that time a prisoner in Rome (1:4, 4:9, 21).  The exhortation concerning elders in 2 Timothy is veiled in Paul's words for Timothy "to entrust to faithful men" the doctrine and practice which Paul had taught him, and in turn, these faithful men would "be able to teach others also" (2 Tim 2:1-2).  Interestingly, none of the Pastoral letters gives a list of specific responsibilities of the elder, though certainly some duties can be ascertained from them.  Perhaps this is evidence for variety and flexibility as to how elders are to perform their duties in each church.[27]

Additional evidence for elders in the New Testament churches appears in the letters of James, 1 Peter, and Hebrews.  Robert Gundry proposes that James was written in AD 45-47.[28]  Therefore, it is concluded that the letter is the oldest of the New Testament letters.  If this proposition is accepted as true, then it is significant that the oldest of New Testament writings of the church refers to local church leaders as elders (5:13-20).  Gene Getz writes, "When James wrote this letter to believers scattered throughout the Gentile world, there were churches in those areas led by elders."[29] Nowhere are we told how or when, or even by whom, these elders were appointed, but the proof that elders existed in these churches is abundantly clear.  Interestingly, in James we find the first major responsibility of an elder, which will be considered later in the chapter.

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[27]Getz, *Elders and Leaders,* 63.

[28]Gundry, *A Survey of the New Testament,* 324-25.

[29]Getz, *Elders and Leaders*, 63.

Gundry also posits that Peter's first letter was written in AD 63.[30]  Peter

addressed elders who were in churches "scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia,

Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia" (1:1).  In an obvious act of humility, Peter, though

certainly an apostle, called himself a "fellow elder" (5:1).  As a "fellow elder" Peter gives

several directives as to how the elder should conduct himself in the church (5:1-4).

It is also in these verses that the terms "pastor," "elder," and "bishop" are used

interchangeably.  The emphasis of each word is different, calling attention to the subtle

nuances of the office, but all three words describe the same person.  Of this text Paige

Patterson writes,

> Here, all three words "elder," "bishop" (overseer), and "pastor" (shepherd) occur in
> the same text, all referring to the same office.  Peter addresses himself to the elders
> (πρεσβθτεροσ), identifying himself as a "fellow elder" (σθμπρεσβθτεροσ).  He
> requests that these elders "shepherd" (ποιμινο) the flock of God among them,
> "taking oversight" (επισκοποθντεσ) of those flocks.  Two of the three terms are
> verbs, but as such point to the function of the corresponding nouns.  Therefore, at
> least functionally, all three ideas, two of which describe the work of the elder, are
> present."[31]

Finally, though there is no clear consensus of the identity of the author of the

letter to the Hebrews (AD 64-65), in his final exhortations to his readers, he reminds

them to "obey your *leaders* and submit to *them*; for they are keeping watch over your

souls, as those who will have to give an account.  Let them do this with joy and not with

groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you" (13:17).  No one knows with

certainty why the author used the generic "leaders*"* rather than "elders," but Gene Getz

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[30]Gundry, *A Survey of the New Testament,* 329.

[31]Paige Patterson, "A Single-Elder Congregationalist's Response," in *Who Runs the Church? 4 Views on Church Government,* ed. Paul E. Engle and Steven B. Cowan (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 142.

offers this explanation: "The author used the present participle of the Greek verb

ηγεομαι—which was used to describe a variety of leadership positions in the Roman

world—a prince, a governor, a military commander, as well as a leader of a religious

group.  It's very apparent, however, that in this letter he was referring to those who had

significant authority in the church both universally and locally."[32]

**A Plurality of Elders in Each Church**

Having presented the New Testament evidence for elders existing in the church,

it now becomes important to consider if the New Testament presents evidence for a

plurality of elders in *each* church.  Is this really the case?  The question can be answered

only from the New Testament itself.

In spite of the common ecclesiastical governments found in churches today, it is

overwhelmingly clear that the New Testament consistently demonstrates that a plurality

of elders existed in the churches.[33]  These elders existed in the churches without

dismissing the significance, authority, or autonomy of a specific congregation.  Both Old

Testament heritage and the dynamics that existed in the early church made plural elders

in each church the norm.

Further, the word "elder" almost always appears in the plural form in the New

Testament, affirming that the office was designed for a plurality of men.  A singular use

of the word occurs in a few instances, as when the apostle John calls himself "the elder"

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[32]Getz, *Elders and Leaders*, 178.

[33]Samuel Waldron, "Plural-Elder Congregationalism," in *Who Runs the Church? 4 Views on Church Government* (Grand Rapids:  Zondervan, 2004), 79.

(2 John 1; 3 John 1), when Peter refers to himself as a "fellow elder" (1 Pet 5:1), or when

instruction is given about an accusation against a specific elder (1 Tim 5:19).[34]

The New Testament bears limited evidence of a single elder church. On the

other hand, many churches had a plurality of elders.[35] The church in Jerusalem had a

plurality of elders (Acts 11:30; 15:2, 4, 22-23; 16:4; 21:18). The church in Antioch in

Syria had a plurality of elders (Acts 13:1). Paul and Barnabas appointed *elders* in Lystra,

Iconium, and Pisidain Antioch (Acts 14:23). In Ephesus a plurality of elders were called

to meet Paul (Acts 20:17). He exhorted them to "keep watch over *yourselves* and all the

flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you *overseers*" (Acts 20:28a). Later Paul

instructed Timothy about elders in this same church (1 Tim 3:1-7; 5:17-20). Paul wrote

Titus to appoint *elders* in every city on the island of Crete (Titus 1:5). Peter wrote to the

persecuted *elders* of the *churches* "scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia,

Asia, and Bithynia" (1 Pet 1:1). The recipients of Hebrews were to "obey your *leaders*

and submit to their authority" (Heb 13:17). Gene Getz informs our understanding:

> To understand how plurality in leadership worked in the New Testament culture, we
> must avoid superimposing our contemporary, Western forms on first-century
> churches. In contrast to the multitude of "local churches" we have in a given
> population center, every mention of multiple leaders in the New Testament is made
> in reference to a *single church in a single city or town.*[36]

How the body of elders actually functioned is uncertain. The New Testament

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[34]John MacArthur, *1 Peter, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 1996), 264. Note the way Paul and Peter used the plural concept when referring to a single elder in 1 Tim 3:1-2; 5:19-20; Titus 1:5-7; 1 Pet 5:1.

[35]For an argument for single-elder church polity, see Daniel L. Akin, "The Single-Elder Led Church: The Bible's Witness to a Congregational/Single-Elder-Led Polity," in *Perspectives on Church Government: Five Views of Church Polity*, ed. Chad Owen Brand and R. Stanton Norman (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2004), 25-86.

[36]Getz, *Elders and Leaders,* 211.

does not give any details.  Getz suggests that the lack of details would be by "divine design."[37]  He further explains, "God wants believers in various cultural settings to be able to create a multiple leadership plan that will function effectively regardless of whether we live in the first century of the church or the twenty-first."[38]

Pastor and author John MacArthur posits several practical reasons for a plurality of elders in the early church that are valid for today as well.  First, a plurality of elders helped to protect the church from error.  No one man should teach independent of the accountability of other teachers.  Second, a plurality of elders would enrich the spiritual life of the church because God does not give all the spiritual gifts to one man.  Finally, a plurality of elders avoids discontinuity in the church.  When circumstances change the dominant leader (pastor), without several other functioning elders, there is likely a major and damaging disruption of ministry for that church.  These reasons are confirmed in Scripture (1 Cor 12: 4-11, 14:26-33) and carry the weight of safeguarding the church.[39]

The norm of the New Testament is conclusively a plurality of elders in each church.  The evidence for this confirms the apostolic intention and means for the church.  God's wisdom in this is apparent in the benefits that are afforded to his church.

### Qualifications and Explicit Duties for Elders

Having examined evidence for the existence of elders in the early churches, both by Old Testament precedent and apostolic acts, one must consider the qualifications and duties for elders that are affirmed in the New Testament.  Generally, Scripture

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[37]Ibid.

[38]Ibid.

[39]MacArthur, *1 Peter*, 264.

teaches that elders are the household stewards, shepherds, leaders, instructors, and teachers of the people of God (Ezek 34:1-10; 1 Thess 5:12; Titus 1:7; Heb 13:7, 17). Scripture also clearly gives a large amount of specific information *about* elders and a significant amount of specific instruction *to* elders (Acts 20:18-35; 1 Tim 3:1-7, 5:17-20; Titus 1:5-9; Jas 5:13-16; 1 Pet 5:1-5). This information and instruction clarifies the qualifications and duties for the overseer in the local church.

Before considering the qualifications and duties, one should note that the New Testament gives greater emphasis to the qualifications than to the duties. This emphasis is due in part because the qualifications interpret the duties without having to be specific and in part because the duties are spoken of in generalities that they might be flexible and applicable in any culture and at any time according to the need of each local church. In short, the duties are less emphasized than the character of the man who serves actuating the duties.[40]

James introduces the first major responsibility for elders described in the Scripture. The letter was written to believers scattered throughout the known world (Jas 1:1b). These believers were predominantly Jewish (Acts 2:5-11) and congregated with elders as their leaders. James's directive to these believers was to "call for the elders of the church" if "anyone among them was sick" (Jas 5:14). In turn, the instructions specifically given to the overseer was to "pray over him" and "anointing him with oil" (Jas 5:14). Though it is uncertain as to whether James has in mind a symbolic ceremony or the physical healing properties and benefits of olive oil (Isa 1:6; Mark 6:12-14), it is certain that the intent is the welfare of the believers. Through this process of prayer and

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[40]Getz, *Elders and Leaders,* 30.

anointing, the sick believer would experience the love and support from spiritually

mature men in the church who could in some degree meet their needs.[41]

        The apostle Paul's meeting with the Ephesian elders in AD 58 reveals a clarified

development of the role of elders in the church (Acts 20:17-35).  This meeting was a very

emotional and impassioned appeal from Paul to these elders as to their role and duties

toward the church.  He never expected to see these men again before his death.  Paul's

instruction was simple: they were responsible for the pastoral oversight of the church in

Ephesus.  Specifically, the elders were to guard diligently their own lives against

besetting sins.  Also, they were to "be on guard for all the flock, among which the Holy

Spirit has made you *overseers*, to *shepherd* the church of God" (v. 28).  The words used

by Paul connect the familiar Old Testament imagery of the shepherd-flock relationship to

the duties of the overseer.  Alexander Strauch writes of this image,

> The sheep-shepherd image beautifully illustrates the church's need for leadership
> and protection.  An essential part of this metaphor is the inseparable relationship
> between the sheep and the shepherd.  Because sheep are defenseless, an unguarded
> flock is in danger.  So there must always be shepherds to keep watch over the
> flock.[42]

By using the shepherding metaphor, Paul emphasizes the elder's spiritual relationship

with the believers in the church.  Each individual was significant and was to be cared for

with sincere love, gentleness, and grace.  This care is especially seen in two areas.  First,

they were to guard the flock from false teachers and teaching.  Second, they were to

instruct pro-actively the flock with the truth of God's Word.  John MacArthur aptly

affirms this reality:

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[41]Kurt A. Richardson, *James,* The New American Commentary, vol. 23 (Nashville:  Broadman & Holman, 1997), 233.

[42]Strauch, *Biblical Eldership,* 146.

The shepherd's main task is not to tell people only what they want to hear (2 Tim. 4:3-4), but to edify and strengthen them with the deep truths of solid spiritual food that produces discernment, conviction, consistency, power, and effective testimony to the saving work of Christ. No matter what New Testament terminology identifies the shepherd and his task, underneath it all is the primacy of this biblical truth. He is to feed the sheep.[43]

Paul wanted these elders to understand their duties. He was urgent and forceful, using vivid and familiar imagery to communicate his important message. He spoke with clarity and conviction so that there would be no doubt as to what was expected of the elders in Ephesus.

With the writing of the first letter to Timothy in AD 63, it had become necessary in the growth of the church to have a common criterion for any man who "aspires to the office of overseer" (1 Tim 3:1) and for an accepted and recognized instruction related to the accountability of the office (1 Tim 4:13-14, 5:17-18, 5:19-20). When 1 Timothy was written, it had been at least thirty years since the church had been born in Jerusalem.[44]

Though one cannot be absolutely certain that the list in 1 Timothy was common enough to be accepted in all the churches, because of the similar list in Titus (1:5-9), the churches likely had an affirmed and common agreement for elder qualifications.[45] Perhaps the qualifications were agreed upon in much the same way that the council in Jerusalem agreed not to trouble the Gentiles who had turned to God with Jewish expectations (Acts 15:1-33). As stated, the best evidence for this common agreement is in the similar words and phrases seen in the list of qualifications found in Titus (1:5-9)

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[43]MacArthur, *1 Peter*, 264.

[44]Gundry, *A Survey of the New Testament*, 222-23.

[45]Getz, *Elders and Leaders,* 201.

and Timothy (3:1-7).  Even without a common or accepted written list before the writing

of 1 Timothy, there is no reason to doubt that the list would have become the pattern for

the churches after the writing of the letter.  However, differences in the two lists suggest

that the acceptable qualifications were flexible according to the need of the specific

church.

The presence of a very definite list of qualifications (1 Tim 3:1-7) and specific

instructions related to accountability (1 Tim 5:18-22) testifies to some very important

realities that are necessary to understand the office at that time.  First, the list implies that

qualified men were recognized and set apart in some formal way for the office (elder and

deacon) by the church (Acts 6:6, 13:3; 1 Tim 4:14, 5:22).[46]  Second, in light of the

command that deacons "also be tested first" (1 Tim 3:10), context indicates that this

would have certainly applied to the office of overseer as well.  They must be tested in the

church before receiving office.[47]  Third, according to 1 Timothy 5:17-18, elders were to

be compensated by the church for their work.[48]  Fourth, the elders were subject to

discipline by other elders (1 Tim 5:19-21).  Fifth, there is the warning that the elders and

the church should not too quickly put a man in the position of overseer (5:22).[49]

Paul opened his discussion of qualifications and duties for the office with a brief

commendation of the man who would desire the office (3:1).  These words form a

commendation and should not be understood as a command that Timothy begin a new

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[46]Benjamin L. Merkle, *Forty Questions about Elders and Deacons* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2008), 210.

[47]Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 202.

[48]John Kitchen, *The Pastoral Epistles for Pastors* (The Woodlands, TX: Kress, 2009), 225-31.

[49]Strauch, *Biblical Eldership,* 217-18.

office in the church.  Paul was simply affirming the desire of any man who aspired to the

office and affirming the sanctity of the office itself.  The wording he used is best

translated: "It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is

a fine work he desires" (NASB).  The trustworthy statement, which is to be accepted as

true, relates to the office of overseer as being a fine or necessary work for the church.

The desire is commendable because of the inherent difficulty and demands of the office.

Neither in that day, nor in this, should the office be entered into lightly.  The work

requires time, energy, and effort, which will impinge on the personal life of the man.

For that day, the reasons for careful consideration would have been more than the

exertion of energy and effort or the difficulties and demands.  First, there was the sure

and constant possibility of personal persecution as a leader of a persecuted group.

Second, the churches were poor.  There was little money to pay to elders.  Third, a

leadership position in the church was not a position of social prestige.[50]

Further, the word "aspire" is from ορεγο, a word that can also be translated as

"longing" (1 Tim 6:10) or "desire" (Heb 11:16).  It carries the idea of "reaching out after"

or "to grasp something."  The term speaks of a compelling internal motive that is actuated

in the life of the man.  This motive would come first from a definite and clear leading of

the Holy Spirit (Acts 20:28; Eph 4:11; Heb 5:4), second, from a genuine and sincere love

and commitment for the work, and then finally, from recognition and affirmation of

spiritual giftedness.  The language used by Paul makes no room for love of earthly honor,

campaigning, seeking fame, or greed, but rather a godly ambition that seeks only the

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[50]John MacArthur, *1 Timothy, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 1995), 95.

glory of God.[51]  Neil Summerton explains, "The New Testament is unequivocal that effective ministry [for eldership] is derived, in the power of the Holy Spirit [from call], from character, and from spiritual gift and not from any other source."[52] Paul's commendation is appropriate.  It sets the office in the proper perspective for any man who would qualify.  It is a serious work and should not be entered into carelessly or hastily.  It is a "fine work" or noble task that benefits the church, and since it is a good work, good and godly men ought to strive to become elders in the church.[53]

It is important to note that the office is obviously for men only.  The text indicates that Paul has in mind that the calling and desire would be *to* and *from* men.  He uses the words "any man" (1 Tim 3:1).  The indefinite pronoun *tis* (any) should be understood as masculine and agrees with the masculine form of the adjectives used in verses 2-6.  MacArthur writes: "Also, a woman could hardly be a "one-woman man" (v. 2), nor did women in that day head households (vv. 5-6)."[54]  This teaching clearly corresponds with Paul's teaching in 1 Timothy 2:11-15 that women are not to be leaders in the church.  This certainly does not suggest that women are not important to and in the churches, but only that their role in the church does not include the office of pastor.

The qualifications (1 Tim 3:2-7) are more than suggestions or hopes for leadership, but are the expected norm for leaders and carry the primary idea of holy living but also the idea of moral and spiritual example before the church.  These are the

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[51]Ibid.,  96.

[52]Neil Summerton, *A Noble Task* (Devon, Australia: Paternoster Press, 1987), 21.

[53]Philip Graham Ryken, *1 Timothy,* Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2007), 109.

[54]MacArthur, *1 Timothy*, 95.

measurable characteristics that qualify a man for the office.  These are nonnegotiable for the man who would be an elder.

The first qualification is best understood as an umbrella or overarching reality in which the other qualifications find their meaning and completion.  The elder is to be above reproach (ανεπιλημπτου; 1 Tim 3:2; αυεγλητος; Titus 1:6; 7) meaning "not able to be held."  There is to be no accusation or significant pattern of sin that can be charged against the man.  The overseer is a man who is free from deliberate (private or public) sins that bring definite charges against him.  He must be beyond the criticism that comes from foolish, careless, and frivolous conduct, speech, and attitude.  He must clearly and consistently demonstrate the highest standard of holiness and virtue.  Certainly, this does not imply that he is sinless, for none would qualify, but rather emphasizes the serious spiritual nature of the office.

The pastor must be above reproach because he is a primary model for the congregation to follow.  His sin has greater potential for bringing reproach from the world on the church.  His sin also has the greatest potential for causing other believers to stumble.  The nature of his position assumes the greater knowledge and therefore accountability.[55]

As noted above, the list of qualifications found in Titus (1:5-9), and the parallel of the list in 1Timothy, includes this umbrella qualification.  In fact, Paul considered it of such importance and necessity that he repeats it twice in the Titus list (1:6; 7).  Significantly, the same qualification is also expected of deacons (1 Tim 3:10).  However, in the Titus list, Paul adds an additional thought.  He writes: "For an overseer, as God's

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[55]Ibid., 103.

steward, must be above reproach" (1:7). Paul uses a familiar characteristic of the Roman

society in which he and his readers lived. The steward was one who managed a

household on behalf of an owner. In most cases the steward was a slave or a former

slave. They usually were given great authority because of their responsibilities. Paul

connects the familiar reality in society with the truth that the elder was a steward in God's

household, the church (1 Tim 3:15).[56] The church, as God's household and belonging to

him, is to be cared for by elders, who, on his behalf, oversee the spiritual lives of his

children. In doing this, elders are to be demonstrably beyond any reproach.

Having established the all-embracing qualification, the remaining list delineates

the concrete and observable qualifications that flesh-out what it means to be above

reproach. These define what it is to live above any negative charge or accusation. They

are the assurance and authority for placing qualified men in church leadership.

The second qualification has been grossly misunderstood and misapplied

throughout the history of the church. The text is written "the husband of one wife" ($\mu\iota\alpha\varsigma$

$\gamma\upsilon\omega\alpha\iota\kappa o\varsigma \,\alpha\upsilon\eta\rho$; 1 Tim 3:2; Titus 1:6) and actually refers to *moral character* rather than

*marital status*. Regardless of this, the text has been interpreted and applied in various

ways as pertaining to marital status.

Regarding the qualification as marital status rather than moral character, it is

and has been understood as a prohibition against polygamy.[57] However, this would not

have been an issue in Ephesus in that day. Monogamy was the generally accepted norm

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[56]John MacArthur, *Titus, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 1996), 35.

[57]For an argument that the qualification refers to polygamy, see Jay Adams, *Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan,1980), 80-83.

in both Greco-Roman and Jewish culture. History reveals Roman thought of the day as having little regard for marriage, having permitted easy divorce, and as readily accepting and promoting sex outside of marriage. Therefore it made polygamy unnecessary.[58]

Neither does the qualification require that the overseer be married, especially in the light of Paul's strong affirmation on the believer remaining single (1 Cor 7:32-35). It has also been understood that the qualification is applicable to a man who has remarried after the death of his wife. The remarriage would disqualify him from the office. This too is faulty or incorrect interpretation and application. There is no prohibition of remarriage after the death of a spouse in the Scripture (1 Cor 7:39; 1 Tim 5:14).[59]

Perhaps the most common misunderstanding is that the qualification excludes a divorced man from being an elder. Once again, to accept and hold this interpretation would miss Paul's meaning. In the first place, Scripture does not forbid all divorce or remarriage after divorce (Matt 5:31-32; 19:9; 1 Cor 7:12-15). In the second place, the qualification is certainly emphasizing moral behavior toward women, not marital status. Thirdly, if a man was divorced prior to conversion it should not be held against him so as to disqualify him in spiritual leadership (Col 2:13). If Paul had desired to use divorce as a disqualification he could have clearly used the word for divorce (απολυο).[60]

Rather, it is obvious that Paul is referring to a man who must be committed in his heart, mind, and life to the woman who is his current wife. He is to be sexually pure in body and mind and live in complete fidelity in regard to his one woman. This man

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[58]Philip H. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus,* The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 250-51.

[59]MacArthur, *Titus*, 35-37.

[60]Ibid., 35-37.

would be above reproach in interacting with *all* women. There would not even be a hint of reproach that could be charged to the man in regard to sexual purity.[61]

It should be understood that this understanding of the text is not an argument for low standards for elders. The facts are that a divorced man may be disqualified because of a tainted reputation. John Kitchen writes: "One can foresee at least some cases in which it would not be in the best interest of the church, the Gospel ministry, nor the man and his family to have him in the office of elder."[62]

There are certainly those who would argue against the interpretation presented here, most notably J. Carl Laney. In his book *The Divorce Myth,* Laney is certainly against any interpretation that would allow for a divorced and remarried person to stand qualified for the office. Further, he believes that to broaden the qualification diminishes the value of the qualification and refutes the requirement of an elder managing his household well.[63]

It should be noted that *if* the elder is married, his wife is to be a believer. The command "Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers" (2 Cor 6:14a) has sure application for marriage and applies to all believers, but more especially to elders. Paul also comments about having "a right to take along a believing wife, even as the rest of the apostles, and brothers of the Lord, and Cephas" (1 Cor 9:5), in so doing, he makes it clear that a "believing wife" is the only kind of wife that an elder is to have.[64]

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[61]John R. W. Stott, *The Message of 1 Timothy & Titus: Guard the Truth,* The Bible Speaks Today Series (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity, 1996), 94.

[62]Kitchen, *The Pastor Epistles for Pastors*, 491.

[63]J. Carl Laney, *The Divorce Myth* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1981), 94-99.

[64]MacArthur, *Titus,* 32.

The next three qualifications in Paul's list are similar in meaning. Each word or phrase used by the apostle adds color or definition and brings into sharp focus the character expectations for the elder. This is so that there may be no question as to what kind of man qualifies for the office. The different nuances of the words and phrases actually serve to define the man.

The overseer is qualified for the office because he is above reproach in regard to sober-mindedness (υηφαλιου; 1 Tim 3:2; Titus 1:8). He is a man who is self-disciplined and thoughtful in life and living. He possesses disciplined strength and control in regard to all excesses. He is to be balanced in his thinking, responses, priorities, values, attitudes, and all of life. No charges could be brought against him as one who was excessive in any area of life. He is also to be self-controlled (σωφρουα; 1 Tim 3:2; Titus 1:8). He is to live a purposeful and diligent life. He is balanced and trustworthy in all of his judgments, decisions, or discernment. Further, the elder is to be respectable (κοσμιου; 1 Tim 3:2). His life is to be marked as quiet and orderly, serving as a good role model. He is not to be in any way careless, haphazard, or frivolous in his actions, but rather is stable, sensible, and thoughtful. The overseer is to have a discernable dignity and sensibility about his life. He must not have a reputation of chaos, disorder, and folly. In summary, his well-disciplined mind and body define a well-ordered lifestyle.[65]

The fifth qualification, to be hospitable (φιλοζευου; 1 Tim 3:2; Titus 1:8), is a commonly stressed Christian virtue in the New Testament (Rom 12:13; Heb 13:2; 1 Pet 4:9). The elder is to demonstrate unselfishness and generosity to all, but especially to

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[65]Ibid., 36.

strangers.  He is to willingly share of his life and home with others without being a

respecter of persons, and as having no regard for anything being returned to him in like

kind or favor.  The pastor is to be approachable and available to those who have needs.

To be inhospitable is to be a poor example of Christian love and care for others.[66]

In this list of qualifications, two duties for the pastor are mentioned.  First, the

overseer is to be able to teach (διδακτικου; 1 Tim 3:2; Titus 1:9).  This is the only duty

related to his giftedness.  The qualifications primarily stress what the elder is to *be*, but

this gives insight as to what he is to *do* in the church.  That it is placed here in the middle

of the list of character qualities likely indicates that the elder's ability to teach proceeds

from his moral character.  He is able to teach with credibility because he has and exhibits

true biblical character.  Teaching (and preaching, 2 Tim 4:2) is the primary responsibility

of elders (1 Tim 4:6-7, 11, 13, 16; 5:17; 2 Tim 2:15, 24: Titus 2:1) and was a task passed

to them from the apostles (Matt 28:18-20; Acts 2:41-42, 11:23, 14:21-23).  It was for this

purpose that elders were given to the church (Eph 4:11-14).  This responsibility sets the

overseer apart from the deacon (1 Tim 3:8-13) and is absolutely vital to the spiritual

health and life of each local church.  To teach the Word of God to the people of God is

the greatest of privileges and the most sacred of all duties for the elder.  There is no

greater priority of ministry for the elder.[67]

Since there is no greater duty for the pastor, it is incumbent upon him to

understand the necessary attitudes and actions for fulfilling the duty.  Strauch stresses that

teaching entails three basic elements: "a knowledge of Scripture, the readiness to teach,

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[66]Stott, *The Message of 1 Timothy & Titus*, 95.

[67]MacArthur, *1 Timothy,* 108-9.

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and the ability to communicate."[68]  MacArthur lists five criteria for the elder as teacher:
"he must have the gift of teaching, a deep understanding of doctrine, humility, diligence
in study, and courage empowered by conviction."[69]

In the parallel list of elder qualifications in Titus, Paul gives additional clarity
on the meaning of "able to teach."  He writes: "He must hold firm to the trustworthy
word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to
rebuke those who contradict it" (1:9).  The elder is to teach sound doctrine and to refute
false doctrine (2 Tim 2:23-26).

The foundation for effective teaching and preaching by the elder is his own
understanding of and obedience to the Word of God (2 Tim 3:16-17).  He must be deeply
committed and unswervingly loyal to Scripture (Titus 1:9).  His pastoral leadership is
built on this and not on his giftedness, education, ability, or charisma.  The elder
understands that God is most glorified and the saints are most edified by the accurate and
clear exposition of Scripture and that teaching and preaching is the primary means by
which God has chosen to build up the church and save the lost (Eph. 4:11-15; 1 Cor.
1:18-21).

The second duty mentioned in the list also proceeds from moral character.  The
elder must manage his own household well (του ιδιου οικου καλως προισταμευου; 1Tim
3:4).  He is to do this with dignity (3:4).  His children are to be submissive (3:4).  Paul
adds the reason for managing his family: "for if someone does not know how to manage
his own household, how will he care for God's church" (3:5).  This correlates with what

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[68]Strauch, *Biblical Eldership,* 195.

[69]MacArthur, *1 Timothy,* 108-9.

Paul wrote to Titus: "his children are believers (faithful) and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination" (Titus 1:6). This duty does not demand or require that an elder be married and have children. Rather Paul was referring to the fact that *if* a man is married and has children, and *if* the children are still living in his house, their behavior must not threaten to bring reproach upon their father or the church he serves.

As noted above, Paul's expectation is that an overseer would have a believing wife. The elder was to "manage" his marriage and children well. He is to be a good husband and father. "Manage" means to have "authority over." The same word is translated "rule" in 1 Timothy 5:17. The implication is that the pastor is to spiritually preside over his family. The godly submission of the wife (Eph 5:22-24) and children (Eph 6:1-3) is not to be ruthlessly forced and coldly demanded, but rather to be rightfully expected in the context of unconditional love, fairness, sympathy, and mercy (Eph 5:25-33; 6:4). He must have a reputation of providing, leading, and protecting his family, and of being a good steward of everything connected with the home (finances, possessions).[70]

First Timothy 3:4 and Titus 1:6 indicate that a primary measurement for a man to qualify as an elder is that man's management of his own household. The word for "children" (1 Tim 3:4; Titus 1:6) specifies no gender or age. The word the ESV translated "to believe" is πιστοσ. It is a verbal adjective that passively means "trustworthy", actively it means "to believe." In this case it can be rendered either way. Therefore, it could be understood that the elder *must* have children who are believers. [71]

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[70]MacArthur, *1 Timothy,* 116.

[71]MacArthur, *Titus,* 30-31.

However, it seems likely that Paul intended that an elder have *faithful* children (Titus 1:6), that is to say, children who are obedient and respectful to parents and to all those in authority. The children of the elder would be known for their faithfulness to parental supervision and nurture. This understanding best affirms Paul's instructions to Timothy (1 Tim 3:4).

John MacArthur understands the application of 1 Timothy 3:4 to the elder whose children were too young to understand faith in Christ, but as children grow older and can understand the gospel, the expectation of Titus 1:6 (believing children) comes to bear upon the elder. The implication is that if the elder cannot bring his own children to salvation, he will not have the confidence of the church to lead others to salvation. The demonstration of his children being brought to salvation sets the pattern for the expectation in the church and also sets the model for other households in the church.[72]

However, does a man control the salvation of his children? Is a man disqualified from an elder role for the sinful behavior of any of his children who live outside his own home? Certainly it is the duty of the elder to lead his family spiritually, however, he cannot bring his own children to salvation (John 1:12-13). Neither can a man control the actions of his grown children who have their own households.

At first glance, there seems to be a legitimate argument that if the children of an elder are unbelievers living in prodigality and rebellion they will bring reproach on the life and ministry of the elder. Many understand Paul's statements to reflect this idea. However, once again, is a man responsible for the household of his children or his own?

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[72]Ibid.

Do the sins of the grown children disqualify the elder? If so, what sins? Are some sins more apt to disqualify than others?

Gene Getz uses a cultural explanation to advocate that a man should not be disqualified from being an elder because of the actions of his children. In his book *Elders and Leaders: God's Plan for Leading The Church,* he uses the localized extended family of the New Testament world as the situation in which Titus 1:6 would apply. He argues that modern Western culture, namely loose family structures and mobile lifestyles, do not necessarily affect the reputation of the overseer.[73]

Perhaps each man should be considered on an individual case basis. Certainly historical and cultural context should be considered in our understanding of the issue. For all the obvious questions concerning the issue, what is definitive is that the elder's faith and obedience radically affect his marriage and parenting.

Returning now to the remaining qualifications for an elder (1 Tim 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9), Paul writes that the elder must not be a drunkard (μη πάροινον; 1 Tim 3:3; Titus 1:7). Although the New Testament world used wine as the commonest of all drinks, it was used very abstemiously. Someone given to habitual drunkenness would certainly not be above reproach. The overseer should not be overindulgent or preoccupied with wine, and in a more advanced and modern culture it should refer to any mind-altering substance. Certainly any man in that day who was being considered for the role of pastor would have been familiar with the Old Testament warnings against too much wine (Prov 20:1; 23:29-35; 31:4-5). These warnings are of course valid for today. It is also reasonable that the elder would consider Paul's teachings of the "strong" to the "weak" in

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[73]Getz, *Elders and Leaders,* 170-71.

all things, especially to alcohol.  Timothy, an elder, certainly may have been committed

to abstinence (1 Tim 5:23).  Intentionally avoiding strong drink is likely the expected

pattern that no reproach would be brought upon Christ or his church by a drunken elder.

However, one cannot be dogmatic that Paul requires total abstinence in the elder.[74]

The elder is not to be violent, but gentle (επεικη; 1 Tim 3:3; μη αυθαδη; Titus

1:7).  A violent man is a fighter.  He is a bad-tempered, out-of-control individual.  He is

prone to resolving problems and differences with the tongue or the hand.  It suggests a

possible pattern of physical abuse or abusive reactions.  Rather, the pastor is to be kind or

gracious.  This gentleness is in marked contrast to being violent.  To be gentle implies an

element of yieldingness.  He is to overlook wrongs done to him.  He is to be forgiving in

all circumstances.  The elder is not to use physical vengeance when wronged, but rather

to live peaceably with all people, especially with enemies (Rom 12:9-21).[75]

In similar fashion, the overseer is not to be quarrelsome (αμαχου; 1 Tim 3:3; μη

οργιλου; Titus 1:7).  Physical violence is certainly unnecessary and unbecoming for an

overseer.  He is a peaceable man and does not divide or disrupt fellowship and unity with

his quick temper or argumentative spirit (2 Tim 2:14-16; 23-26).  It should be noted that

words often strike harder than fists.[76]

Paul demanded that the elder not be a lover of money (αθιλαργυρου; 1 Tim 3:3;

μη αισχροκερδη; Titus 1:7).  A lover of money would be one who is materialistic or

greedy.  The overseer is not to be a mercenary using God's people for personal gain and

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[74]Thomas Lea and Hayne Griffin, Jr, *1, 2 Timothy and Titus*, The New American Commentary, vol. 34 (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 283-84.

[75]Stott, *The Message of 1 Timothy & Titus*, 96.

[76]Lea and Griffin, *1, 2 Timothy and Titus*, 283-84.

profit. This was a great condemnation on the Pharisees (Luke 16:14; Mark 12:40). Paul explained that the love of money is the root of all types of evil in which the elder could find himself (1 Tim 6:10). Elders, then, cannot be preoccupied with money. They should be content with God's provision (1 Tim 6:7-9; Heb 13:5). They must set the example for other believers in this. Paul was the model of contentment to the Ephesian elders and church (Acts 20:33; 1 Cor 9:1-16; 2 Cor 11:9) and so expected all elders to follow his example.[77]

Paul admonishes Timothy that an elder must not be a recent convert (μη νεοφυτον; 1 Tim 3:6). This seems to be a concern for the spiritual maturity of the one being appointed as an elder. Simply, new converts are not spiritually mature enough to be placed in positions of leadership. They are in danger of becoming proud because of their position and thus fall into the sin and condemnation of the devil.

Paul obviously considered this issue such a serious danger that he warned Timothy a second time. He wrote, "Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands" (5:22). This implies a certain formality that had become acceptable in the churches and was used for identification *with* and affirmation *of* a man who had been set apart for leadership (4:14; 2 Tim 1:6; Acts 13:3). To "lay hands upon" someone is to acknowledge and agree to the suitability of the one being considered for the office. Likely the practice derives from Israelite tradition. For example: Moses laid hands on Joshua as a final act before his death (Deut 34:9). It is also possible that the act had roots in the Old Testament

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[77]Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 198.

practice of laying hands upon a sacrificial animal to identify with it (Exod 29:10, 15, 19; Lev 4:15).[78]

To suggest that this act is ordination as it is practiced today is possibly an anachronism. There is no definite explanation of purpose for the laying on of hands given in any New Testament text, but it seems evident that the ceremony did affirm the work of the Holy Spirit in the man who is recognized as gifted and called to the work of spiritual leadership (1 Tim 4:14; 2 Tim 1:6). It is uncertain as to the exact form the ceremony would have had. Whatever the purpose and details for the laying on of hands in the early church, the warning given by Paul in this text is informed by the seriousness of the office and the spiritual danger both to Timothy (1 Tim 5:22) and to the man himself.[79]

The final qualification of the text takes us full circle and reveals a common New Testament theme. All believers are to have a good reputation with those outside the church (1 Cor 10:32; Phil 2:5; Col 4:5; 1 Thess 4:12). This is most expected of the man who would lead the church. His godly reputation is to be verified by those outside the church. He must be recognized as having unquestionable character. He may face opposition for his theology, but he must never face the accusation of reckless living, immorality, impurity, lack of hospitality, drunkenness, violence, a quick-temper, rebellious children, or financial impropriety with those outside the church. This was the case with the apostles who were often persecuted but never brought up on moral charges. They were often opposed for their teaching (Acts 4:1-3; 5:12-17; 2 Tim 4:14), but their

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[78]Lea and Griffin., *1, 2 Timothy,* 142-44.

[79]Ibid., 139.

lives were irreproachable. The elder should give no opportunity for any accusation of evil to be brought against him by those outside the church. The life of the pastor must be an example of the beauty of the gospel.[80]

As in the previous warning (1 Tim 3:6), so also the warning here is that the elder beware of the devil.  When an overseer is appointed too quickly he may fall into the same condemnation as the devil because of pride.  Likewise, when an elder has a bad reputation, he may fall into a snare of the devil.  Philip Ryken suggests that the ominous note that ends the list of qualifications (3:6, 7) leads to the obvious conclusion that Satan is set on discrediting the church by using sinning elders.  Indeed, the entire church of Jesus Christ is brought into disrepute by the scandalous sin of the leaders.[81]

Though the qualification lists of Timothy and Titus are similar, there are some differences that ought to be noted and presented as further criteria for appointing elders. The differences are best understood in the unique context for Timothy in Ephesus versus the specific challenges faced by Titus in Crete.  As seen in Paul's pattern of addressing specific issues in his letters to the various churches, it is not surprising that the list of qualifications in Timothy would address certain issues in the church at Ephesus, while the list in Titus would confront the particular needs faced by Titus.[82]

The first specific difference in the lists is that the elder should not be arrogant or self-willed (μη αυθαδη; Titus 1:7).  The pastor should not be absorbed in self-interest,

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[80]R. Kent Hughes and Bryan Chappell, *1 & 2 Timothy and Titus: To Guard the Deposit,* The Preaching the Word Series (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2000), 81.

[81]Philip Graham Ryken, *1 Timothy,* The Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2007), 120.

[82]Getz, *Elders and Leaders,* 157-58.

self-fulfillment, and self-glory (Matt 20:25-28). He should not force his own opinion or

will with total disregard for the interests and concerns of others. He should not be over-

bearing, but rather flexible, sensitive, and gentle in the use of his authority and

leadership.[83]

In the Timothy list the pastor is not to be quarrelsome, but in Titus, Paul writes

that the elder is not to be quick-tempered (μη οπγιλογ; Titus 1:7). The idea is to have

control over your own emotions. It prohibits an impulsive or divisive reaction that will

lead to further complications. An elder cannot be irascible. He cannot be easily

provoked.[84]

An elder must also be a lover of good (φιλαγαθου; Titus 1:8). He is to love

whatever is good in others. He is a lover of good things and good actions. He is to

delight in good in whatever form he finds it.[85]

Paul requires that an overseer be upright (δικαιου; Titus 1:8). The pastor is to

be just in his dealings. He is to be honest and equitable in relationships. He is trusted

and known to be uncompromising in his integrity. All of his obligations and

responsibilities are characterized by fairness.[86]

The elder is to be known as being a devout man (οσιου; Titus 1:8). The

direction and purpose of his life is that he is separated to the service of God. His life is in

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[83]MacArthur, *Titus*, 36.

[84]Lea and Griffin, *1, 2 Timothy and Titus,* 283.

[85]John MacArthur, *Pastoral Ministry: How to Shepherd Biblically* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 79.

[86]Ibid., 79.

obvious conformity to God's Word. His priorities are marked by unswerving dedication to the Word of God.[87]

Finally, the overseer is to be disciplined (εγκρατη; Titus 1:8). Outwardly he is to be self-controlled in his actions, attitudes, and habits (1 Tim 3:2). Inwardly, he is to have power over his body and mind. He has mastery over the impulses and urges of the flesh. The control that he has is not generated by self-will or self-desire, but rather that he has put himself under the control of the Holy Spirit.[88]

**Tested First**

Having listed the spiritual qualifications for elders (1 Tim 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9), it is necessary to consider the reference related to testing each elder before and during his time of active service. Beginning in 1 Timothy 3:8, Paul lists the character qualifications necessary for deacons. The lists for elders and deacons (3:8-13) are essentially identical. The significance for this lies in the fact that there is no drop-off in spiritual quality or maturity from elders to deacons. In the middle of the deacon's list, Paul interjects an essential qualification that adds significance for any man being considered for the office of elder or deacon. He writes, "And let them *also* be tested first; let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless" (3:10). The word "also" refers back to the overseers of verses 1-7. In other words, though Paul writes that the deacons are to be tested (in the context of the church and by existing elders), he bases it on the assumption that elders would be examined in the same way.[89] Thus, it can be concluded that any

[87]Strauch, *Biblical Eldership,* 235.

[88]Kitchen, *The Pastoral Epistles for Pastors,* 497.

[89]Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 202-3.

man being considered for the office of overseer must be tested in light of the

qualifications.  The testing is not optional and should be done prior to gaining the office.

However, the statement implies that the testing is not just a one-time test or probationary

period, but even more, it is a deliberate and continuous examining of the man throughout

the time of his service.[90]

## Implied Duties for Elders

As previously considered, other than praying for the sick (Jas 5:13-18), teaching

and preaching (1 Tim 3:2; 5:17; Titus 1:9), and managing his household (1 Tim 3:4-5;

Titus 1:6-7), the duties of the elder are not explicit in the Scriptures.  However, there is

enough information given in the New Testament that a list of specific duties can be

extrapolated.  This is not to suggest that elders are tied to rules and details about how the

duties are to be carried out.  The context of each local church should determine the

specifics concerning time, extent, circumstances, and conditions for the duties to function

in the congregation.  Obviously, the details of function are always regulated and

supervised by the biblical parameters.

### Shepherd, Manage, and Steward

Just as the New Testament consistently uses the titles *elder, overseer,* and

*pastor* interchangeably, so too, it uses three words to describe the overarching function of

elders.  The elders are to *shepherd* (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet 5:1-4), to *manage* (1 Tim 3:4-5;

5:17; 1 Thess 5:12), and to *steward* (Titus 1:7; 1 Cor 4:1-2) the church.  An

understanding of each word informs the elder of the nature of the work.  To shepherd the

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[90]MacArthur, *1 Timothy,* 129.

church is the idea of providing and protecting, especially in regard to doctrine. To manage the church is to take care of the church by strenuous labor and serving leadership.[91] To steward the church is to lead the church as the household of God (Eph 2:19; 1 Tim 3:15; 1 Pet 4:17).[92] The elder is to steward the church through regular and expected responsibilities and decisions, always under the reality of certain accountability (1 Pet 5:2) to the Master (Matt 24:45-47; Luke 12:42-44). Therefore, elders are to give strong, Word-produced, Spirit-led leadership to the church. They are to be consistent in self-sacrificing love and concern. They are to be bold, uncompromising teachers of God's Word.[93]

Leading the church by shepherding, managing, and stewardship requires humble, servant leadership--so that all the elder does is always in love and service. This is reflected in Peter's words: "not under compulsion, but willingly, not for shameful gain, but eagerly, not domineering over those in your charge" (1 Pet 5:2-3). To do all things in service and love implies that the elder does not demand respect, is sacrificial, and has a servant attitude. Jesus was the perfect model of servant leadership (Phil 2:5-11; Mark 10:45; John 13:1-20) and taught that selfless service should be the pattern for those of his kingdom, especially those in leadership (Mark 9:33-35; 10:42-44; Luke 22:25-27). Paul, imitating Jesus, set the example for all elders to follow (Acts 20:18-21; 1 Cor 3:6-7; 2

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[91]D. Michael Martin, *1, 2 Thessalonians*, The New American Commentary, vol. 33 (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 171-73.

[92]MacArthur, *Titus*, 34-35.

[93]David R. Helm, *1 & 2 Peter and Jude*, Preaching the Word Series (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 157.

Cor 4:5; 2 Thess 2:3-12), and every elder must conduct himself first and foremost as a servant in all that he does.[94]

**Train Oneself for Godliness**

Before considering the other duties or functions of the elder that have not previously been discussed (teaching, caring for the sick, managing family), it is important to underscore the New Testament teaching emphasizing the responsibility of spiritual growth in the elder's personal life. Paul, on the significant occasion of speaking to the Ephesian elders at Miletus, said, "Pay attention to yourselves" (Acts 20:28). This admonition implies what is expected of every true believer: perseverance and intentional effort in spiritual growth and maturity. If perseverance and intentionality are true of the people it is most certainly true of *the leaders* of the people. Paul said as much to Timothy, an elder himself: "train yourself for godliness" (1 Tim 4:7).[95] There is no place in the life of the elder for spiritual laziness. The word "train" implies grueling effort, sweaty exertion, and consistent energy. No one grows spiritually by being lazy, apathetic, or busy. Neglect of spiritual discipline, what *to do* as well as what *not to do*, hinders all personal spiritual progress. Author Thabiti Anyabwile warns, "Ministry takes practice. It takes much concentration, meditation, action, and evaluation. And good

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[94]Benjamin L. Merkle, *Why Elders? A Biblical and Practical Guide for Church Members* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2009), 45.

[95]See also 1 Tim 4:8; 15-16; 6:11-14; 2 Tim 2:22.

practice takes strong devotion."[96]  Indeed, as Anyabwile points out, spiritual growth for the elder requires a "good and godly focus on the correct things."[97]

**Pray for the Believers**

As already stated, an important duty of elders is prayer.  This duty is stated explicitly in James 5:13-18, but it is also seen in Acts 6:1-6.  The text is a picture for us.  The church was led by the apostles at that time, and it is evident that one of the major points of the text is that these men were, as leaders of the church, to devote themselves to prayer (6:4).  Though there is no explicit instruction as to how the elders were to fulfill this duty.  The examples of Acts 2:42; 4:31 and 12:5 provide some clarity.  In commenting on Acts 6:1-6, Benjamin Merkle writes,  "It is clear that prayer is a primary calling of the elders.  James states, 'is anyone among you sick?  Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him' (Jas 5:14).  But certainly the prayer of elders should not be limited to those who are sick."[98]  Indeed, the clear teaching of the New Testament is the urgency, priority, and power of prayer (Matt 9:38; Rom 12:12; Eph 6:10-20; Phil 4:8-9; Col 4:2), and as the example of Paul teaches (Eph 3:14-21; Phil 1:4; Col 1:3; 9-14; 1 Thess 1:2), prayer for those in his spiritual care is one of the more important responsibilities of the overseer.

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[96]Thabiti M. Anyabwile, *Finding Faithful Elders and Deacons* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway,  2012), 146.

[97]Ibid.

[98]Merkle, *Why Elders?,* 48.

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**Protect True Doctrine**

As noted above, teaching and preaching is the primary duty for the pastor. It must be understood that this includes maintaining doctrinal purity in the church. The first reference of elder involvement in a doctrinal issue is recorded in Acts 15. Paul and Barnabas were sent by the church in Antioch to relate to James, the apostles, and the elders "what great signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles" (15:12) and to argue that circumcision was not necessary for the Gentile believers. By doing this, they preserved the gospel of grace alone, through faith alone, by Christ alone. This event becomes a pattern for all elders responsible for maintaining day-to-day and week-to-week doctrinal purity in the church (Acts 20:29-30; 1 Tim 1:3-4; 6:3-5; 2 Tim 2:14-19; 22-26; 4:1-5; Titus 1:9; 1:10-14). Teaching and preaching would certainly be *proactive* in fulfilling this duty (2 Tim 4:2), but there would also be a certain amount of necessary *reactive* responses in fulfilling this duty (Titus 3:9-10).[99]

**Model a Godly Life**

It is clear from Paul's writings that believers are instructed to imitate their leaders (Acts 20:18-21; 1 Cor 4:16; 11:1; Gal 4:12; 1 Thess 1:6; 2 Thess 3:9; 2 Tim 3:10-11). Likewise, elders are commanded to be good examples to the believers (1 Pet 5:3; 1 Tim 4:12; 15). What is implied in the character qualifications (1 Tim 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9) is made explicit by the commands. Elders are to set the example for the believers in five particular areas: speech, conduct, love, faith, and purity (1 Tim 4:12). The overseer is to model an exemplary life that evidences spiritual consistency and progress. The elder

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[99]Getz, *Elders and Leaders,* 196.

must be aware that the eyes of the congregation and the world are upon him.  The world

will develop an understanding of God, Scripture, and the church by the example of the

elder, and the church will develop a reverence for God and respect for Scripture as they

watch their elders live imitation-worthy lives.[100]

**Discipline Unruly Believers**

The New Testament clearly teaches that believers are to admonish, encourage,

exhort, and discipline one another (Matt 18:15-17; 1 Cor 5:1-5; Col 3:16; Heb 3:12-13;

10:24-25).  It is the unique and authoritative responsibility of elders to administer a

certain amount of discipline over the lives of which they have charge.  The authority for

the discipline does not originate with or proceed from the elders.  They rule by the

authority of the Lord Jesus (Matt 28:18-20) and through Scripture (2 Tim 3:16).  To be

sure, they are not to lord over the congregation (Luke 22:25-26; 1 Pet 5:3). They have no

dictatorial rights.  However, they are to have authority over the spiritual lives of one

another and of the congregation.

First they are to discipline one another (1 Tim 5:19-20).  These verses indicate

that elders are to hold one another accountable in a reasonable and verifiable way.  Using

the Old Testament pattern of multiple witnesses to substantiate a crime (Deut 17:6;

19:15), an elder accused of sinning must have more than one witness bring a charge

against him.  The sense of the text indicates a charge is brought from either another elder,

a church member, or possibly even someone outside of the church.  The charge against

the elder is best understood as a habitual pattern of deliberate sin, and not merely the

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[100]Anyabwile, *Finding Faithful Elders and Deacons,* 140.

sin(s) that occurs in life and living. The regulation provided in the text is a safeguard

against false or frivolous accusations that could ruin an elder's reputation and ministry.

However, the text should not to be used as a loophole in which elders are not accountable

for all sins, as if they were only accountable for sins that were verified by witnesses.[101]

As John Kitchen writes: "there are some sins which by their very nature are unlikely to be

exposed and judged appropriately by this strict limitation."[102] Thus, as Kitchen seems to

indicate, other forms of evidence, though not confirmed by witnesses, may be necessary

and legitimate for proper discipline to occur. To the point, the elders need great wisdom,

discernment, and humble prayer when considering any charge against another elder, and

all elders are strictly accountable to one another.

When an elder is found guilty and is unrepentant, though previously confronted

by the other elders in private (Matt 18:15-16), he is to be rebuked in public before the

church (Matt 18:17; 1 Cor 5:4; 3 John 9-10). As is the purpose of any discipline, this

public rebuke is for the good of the one receiving the discipline-- the spiritual restoration

of the sinning brother, but also, as indicated, "that the rest may stand in fear" (5:20; Deut

19:20) of God and the consequences of unrepentant sin.[103]

Second, the elders are to discipline the members of the congregation. They are

to *admonish* and *command* the believers to right conduct (1 Cor 4:14-15, 5:4-5; Phil 4:2-

3; 1 Thess 5:12-13; 2 Thess 3:6; 14; 1 Tim 4:11; 5:7; 6:17). Elders are to be alert to

destructive and divisive behavior in the church (3 John 9-10; Titus 3:10-11) and to

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[101]John Kitchen, *The Pastoral Epistles for Pastors* (The Woodlands, TX: Kress Christian, 2009), 231.

[102]Ibid.

[103]Ibid., 233.

discipline accordingly.  The steps given by Jesus in Matthew 18:15-17 would become necessary in a case of willful unrepentant sin which had become common knowledge to the church.  All church discipline should be carried out in the spirit of Galatians 6:1-5. Gene Getz indicates that though Paul does not mention elders specifically in Galatians 6:1-5; they certainly must have been uppermost in Paul's mind when he referred to those "who are spiritual."[104]

**Oversee Financial Matters**

The first reference of elders in the New Testament is in the context of financial responsibility.  The church at Antioch had collected an offering to be given for famine relief to the believers in Judea.  The church then sent the gift by Paul and Barnabas to the *elders* of the Jerusalem church (Acts 11:30).  Though there are no details recorded as to how the elders distributed the money, it seems apparent that the elders were the ones who were responsible for the distribution.  This is also implied in the duty of the overseer to steward the church (Titus 1:7; Luke 12:42).  Likely, the elders delegated the details to other faithful men (Acts 6:1-6).  It appears certain that other leaders (deacons) or groups in the church do not control the finances of the church.  They administer them for the elders.

Gene Getz has suggested that the elders' responsibility over financial matters implies oversight in monitoring the remuneration among themselves (1Tim 5:17-18).[105] The congregation is responsible for the finances being placed for availability to the elders

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[104]Getz, *Elders and Leaders,* 197.

[105]Ibid., 198.

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who in turn distribute the funds among themselves accordingly.  Perhaps other members

of the congregation were included in the final determination as a means of accountability.

<p style="text-align:center"><strong>Elders and Congregation in Concert</strong></p>

**Models of Government**

In American Christianity it is popular and prevalent to conduct the ministry:

day-to-day business, finances, and plans of the church solely as a democracy; that is, as a

right to vote the will of the church.  However, it is clear from the New Testament that the

church is actually a unique blend of governing types.  First, it is a monarchy because of

Christ the King (Col 1:18).  Second, it is an aristocracy as seen in plural-elder rule.

Third, it is a democracy because of the power of the church to determine and act on the

basis of the Scripture what the will of the King is.  By careful consideration of Scripture

it becomes clear that the congregation and the elders are to cooperate, support, and serve

one another.[106]

**The Authority of Elders in the Church**

It is evident by the duties of elders that they do have spiritual authority.  This

authority is not inherent but rather given to them by God (Matt 28:18-20; Acts 20:28;

Eph 4:11-12).  Neither is this authority absolute.  The authority they exercise is measured

by the biblical warning of Hebrews 13:17.  Of this warning, Phil Newton writes: "This

accounting faces all the spiritual leaders in the church, who must remember that when our

day is done, we will give an account for the discharge of our delegated responsibilities in

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[106]Waldron, *Who Runs the Church? 4 Views on Church Government*, 202.

the church."[107]  Their authority is also balanced by command (1Pet 5:3), apostolic

example (1 Thess 2:1-12), and the involvement and influence of the congregation.

**The Role of the Church**

Plural-elder leadership does not undermine the role of the congregation in the

life of the church.  The New Testament teaches that the regenerate membership of the

church have a foundational and critical role to play in several issues and decisions of

church life, which include: discipline, membership, selection of leaders, sending of

missionaries, and maintaining biblical doctrine (Matt 18:15-20; 2 Cor 2:6-8; Acts 6:1-6;

13:1-3; 15:22).  It also teaches that the primary dynamics of church membership in

relationship to elders are respect (1 Thess 5:12-13), obedience, and submission (Heb

13:17).  In addition, the church is to provide financial compensation to their elders (Gal

6:6; 1 Tim 5:17-18).

Additional support for the significance of congregational cooperation and

involvement with elders is found in the biblical teaching on spiritual gifts (1 Cor 12-14).

It is also seen in the expected ministry of the Word to one another (Col 3:16; Gal 6:1-5;

Eph 4:25; Heb 10:24-25).  Finally, it is evidenced in the priesthood of all believers (1 Pet

2:5-10).

**Church Discipline**

The teaching of Jesus on the issue of church discipline is undeniably to be

decided and actuated by the congregation (Matt 18:15-20).  The church (εκκλεσια) is

mentioned twice in these verses and anticipates the New Testament church born at

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[107]Phil Newton, *Elders in Congregational Life* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2005), 85.

Pentecost (Acts 2).  The original hearers were the disciples gathered in that house at

Capernaum, but the principle of the text is by extension timeless and applies to the whole

church at any time.[108]  The text is straightforward, with the prescribed pattern to be

followed being rooted in Deuteronomy 17:6 and 19:15.  The understanding of the text is

clear: the church is called upon to make the final determination as to how the

congregation is to relate to one of their unrepentant fellow members.  Each member of

the church is to abide by the decision of the whole.[109]  Mark Dever confirms the church's

verdict when he writes: "Notice here to whom one appeals.  Notice what court is the final

judicatory.  It is the church, that is, the whole local congregation whose action must be

the final court of appeal."[110]

Following this example, Dever also appeals to 1 Corinthians 5 as an example of

church discipline.  In the text, Paul exhorts the whole congregation (not just the elders) to

act.  Paul is not the one to make the determination in the matter, neither are the elders,

rather the whole church is.  They were all implicated in the sin of the one, and they must

all discipline him to repentance and reconciliation.[111]

So then, in matters of church discipline, the church as a whole is responsible in

the execution of the biblical pattern (Matt 18:15-20) and accountable to one another to

live and act consistently in Christlikeness.  Certainly, the elders of the congregation

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[108]John MacArthur, *The Masters Plan for the Church* (Chicago:  Moody, 1991), 236.

[109]James Leo Garrett, *The Congregation-Led Church* in *Perspectives on Church Government: Five Views of Church Polity,* ed. Chad Owen Brand and R. Stanton Norman (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2004), 159-62.

[110]Mark Dever, *A Display of God's Glory: Basics of Church Structure* (Washington, DC: Center for Church Reform, 2001), 33-34.

[111]Ibid., 35.

would be involved in the discipline process and no doubt prominent in leading the congregation through the process. Perhaps this is what Paul had in mind in Galatians 6:1. Obviously, congregation and overseers would act in harmonious concert together to uphold the witness and purity of the church.

**Church Membership**

The biblical texts that teach congregationalism imply an identifiable church membership (Matt 18:15-20; 1 Cor 5; 6; 11: 17-34; 2 Cor 2:6-8; Gal. 6:6; 1 Tim 5:3-16; Heb 13:17; Jas 5:13-14). In fact, the appeals and exhortations made to the churches could not be acted upon if the congregation did not recognize one another as fellow members in accountability and fellowship with one another in the same church.[112] For example, in 1 Corinthians 5, Paul appeals to the congregation (not the elders) to act in corrective discipline on an unrepentant member. No doubt, the elders and congregation acted together to carry out the discipline, but again, it is to the congregation that Paul makes his appeal. They could not have acted upon the member if they had not all been identified as members together, with the unrepentant one as being in membership with them.[113]

In another example, 2 Corinthians 2:6-8, it is apparent that another (possibly the same one referred to in 1 Cor 5) case of church discipline has previously been applied. Again, the congregation had acted together to use discipline and it seemed to have worked. In the wake of having won the errant member back, Paul writes to the church

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[112]Phil A. Newton, *Elders in Congregational Life: Rediscovering the Biblical model for Church Leadership* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2005), 57.

[113]Garrett, *The Congregation-Led Church,* 157-208.

(not the elders) urging the man's re-admission into the fellowship of the church. But the

great apostle can do no more than exhort because the matter of membership lies with the

church. The church, as a whole, is decisive and determinative in membership.[114]

In a final example, Paul writes instructions to Timothy concerning the need of

the church in Ephesus to enroll true widows into the care of the church (1 Tim 5:3-16).

The instructions imply an identifiable roster of widows for which the church is exhorted

to provide. Timothy and the church membership are to work together to make sure that

true widows are identified, enrolled, and cared for.[115]

## Selecting Leaders

Just as evident as the responsibility of the church to enact church discipline and

recognize membership is the congregation's role in selecting leaders (Acts 6:1-6). In this

case, the apostles assumed the leadership in making the proposal to solve the dilemma,

but it is obvious that they left final approval, of both the plan and the selection of the

seven, which included discernment of the character of the men, to congregational

decision. The text seems to indicate that the congregation brought the chosen men to the

apostles for their commissioning or appointment to the task.[116]

As further evidence of the congregational choosing of leaders, the Didache,

though not carrying the weight of Scripture, is helpful in informing our understanding.

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[114]Ibid.

[115] Stott, *The Message of 1 Timothy & Titus,* 132-35. For additional discussion on the community life of the church, see Robert J. Banks, *Paul's Idea of Community: The Early House Churches in Their Cultural Setting* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994).

[116]John Polhill, *Acts,* The New American Commentary, vol. 26 (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 181.

The Didache is considered a beneficial historic manual on church order and practice. Though dating the Didache is uncertain, most would date it at the first half of the second century. Regardless, it is considered significant and authoritative for understanding early church order and practice.

In section XV, instructions are given to the congregation for the election of the leadership in the church: "Elect for yourselves bishops and deacons worthy of the Lord, men that are gentle and not covetous, true men and approved; for they minister to you the ministry of the prophets and teachers. Therefore, despise them not; for these are they that are honored of you with the prophets and teachers."[117]

The short statement indicates four realities. First, two offices were in view (bishops and deacons); this is in keeping with New Testament teaching (Phil 1:1). Second, it was the responsibility of the congregation to discern the character of the men to be chosen (Acts 6:3). Third, it was the obligation of the congregation to choose the leaders (Acts 6:3). Fourth, each congregation was responsible to honor their leaders.[118]

Paul and Barnabas possibly followed the pattern of Acts 6:1-6 in appointing elders in the churches at Lystra, Iconium, and Pisidian Antioch (Acts 14:23); though one cannot be dogmatic in this. It is always dangerous to build doctrine on the historical context and circumstances of the book of Acts. However, if the pattern of Acts 6:1-6 is followed in the church today, it would certainly not be in opposition to the rest of Scripture.

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[117]Daniel L. Akin, "The Single-Elder-Led Church: The Bible's Witness to a Congregational/Single-Elder-Led Polity," in *Perspectives on Church Government,* ed. Chad Owen Brand and R. Stanton Norman (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2004), 39.

[118]Ibid.

In contrast, Old Testament precedent (Exod 18:21) and New Testament command (Titus 1:5) seem to give credence to elders appointing other elders for the church. This can certainly be concluded from Acts 14:23 and Titus 1:5. It is possible that the young age of the congregations considered in these texts created the need for the apostles and their special helpers to appoint elders.[119] Again, absolute certainty cannot be determined. What is clearly evident from the text of Acts 6 is that apostles and congregation work together in harmony, agreement, and mutual affirmation to place spiritual leaders in the congregation.

What is also implied from the New Testament is the congregation's involvement in the testing of leaders. Paul commanded Timothy that deacons ought to be "tested first" (1 Tim 3:10). As noted above, this command would also apply to potential elders. Though it is not specific as to the details of the testing, most assuredly the congregation would be active and involved in the testing. Certainly, the testing includes ministry to the congregation that can be identified as the exercising of various spiritual gifts and spiritual leadership. By this evidence, the congregation can affirm the man to the office in consideration. What is important to our understanding is the cooperation and harmony of the elders (1 Tim 4:14; 2 Tim 1:6) and the church.[120]

**Sending Missionaries**

The church has the same commission (Matt 28:18-20) that Jesus had (Luke 19:10). Therefore, it is the priority of the church to send out those who would clearly,

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[119]William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles,* Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 46 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2000), 386.

[120]Brian Croft, *Test, Train, Affirm and Send Into Ministry: Rediscovering the Church's Responsibility in the External Call* (Leominster, Australia: Day One Publications, 2010), 62.

boldly, and faithfully preach the gospel (John 4:35-38). The early church was obedient to send out from their own number those who would carry the gospel where it had not been preached (Acts 13:1-3). Though it is evident that the Holy Spirit sent Paul and Barnabas (Acts 13:1; 4), it is less evident who the text refers to as "they were worshiping and fasting" when the Holy Spirit revealed his plans. Were the leaders only "worshiping and fasting" or was the whole congregation? Clearly, faith and obedience of the church and leaders are emphasized. Perhaps it is best to understand the passage as *the church and the leaders together* affirming the two that are called out by the Spirit and sending them from their midst.[121]

The ideal of congregational involvement in sending some from their own for ministry is also seen in the case of the church at Antioch approving and appointing some men to go to the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:1-4), and in return, the Jerusalem church choosing men to send back to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas (Acts 15:22). The church at Corinth also approved and sent those who went to Jerusalem with the financial gift from the church (1 Cor 16:3-4). Certainly, the testing, affirming, and sending of missionaries and special representatives (2 Cor 9:19) from the churches is another solid evidence for plural-elder congregationalism.

**Doctrine and Practice**

There is no question as to the responsibility of the elders in teaching and maintaining true doctrine and practice in the church (Acts 20:28-32; 1 Thess 5:12-13; 1 Tim 3:2; 2 Tim 2:1-2; 4:1-5; Titus 1:9; 1 Pet 5:2). However, it is also true that the

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[121]Merkle, *Why Elders?*, 35-40.

apostolic doctrine, given from God, is given to the *churches*. This is seen in the letters written to the churches as opposed to being written to the elders, leaders, a council or synod only. It is also seen in the content of the letters themselves. The churches are responsible, for example, to discern true from false gospels (Gal 1:8-9), discern true and false teachers (Phil 3:1-2-3), and "to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3). [122]

It is obvious from the Scripture; elders and church members are to work together to protect biblical doctrine. Elders, deacons, and saints are to cooperate in mutual humility, sacrifice, and love (Phil 2:5-11) to participate together in building the church (Matt 16:18; Eph 4:4-16). Once again, the evidence for plural-elder congregationalism is affirmed.[123]

**Respect, Regard, Obedience, and Submission**

There are two significant texts that teach the dutiful response of the church members to their spiritual leaders. Both of the texts highlight the necessity of church membership to recognize and give preference to their leaders. First Thessalonians 5:12-13 describes the elders' responsibilities toward the church. They are to labor, lead, and admonish. These responsibilities have previously been addressed, but the text also teaches how the church members are to respond to their leaders. The congregation is first to, "respect" their leaders. The members are to recognize and deeply admire those who lead them. Second, the members are to "esteem" their leaders. This complements their

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[122]Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 294.

[123]Ibid.

respect. They are to esteem their elders very highly. The respect and regard owed the elders is not to be given by compulsion or duty, but rather "in love." Conversely, the expected respect and regard are not based on social status, personality, or popularity, but rather on the character, love, and labor of the leader.[124]

In Hebrews 13:17, church members are instructed, first, to "obey" their spiritual leaders. They are to conform themselves to the leadership and teaching of their elders. Second, they are to "submit" to their leaders. They are to give themselves to the accountability and authority of the elders. The writer gives the reason for their obedience and submission: "they (elders) are keeping watch over" their "souls." By the congregation's willing obedience and submission, the elders have joy in actuating their responsibilities. The text also reminds the elders that their leadership will be accountable to God, therefore it must be done with due diligence (1 Pet 5:1-5).[125]

**Financial Responsibility**

Finally, along with the aforementioned respect, regard, obedience, and submission, the New Testament teaches the financial responsibility that the congregation has toward elders. This responsibility is an Old Testament reality seen in Leviticus and in Deuteronomy 25:4. The truth is also taught in several New Testament texts (1 Cor 9:1-18; Gal 6:6) but certainly most clearly in 1 Timothy 5:17.

The elders who are ruling well are to be "considered worthy of double honor". This can be understood as something that is determined outside of the elders themselves;

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[124]John S. Hammett and Benjamin L. Merkle, *Those Who Must Give an Account: A Study of Church Membership and Church Discipline* (Nashville: B & H, 2012), 35- 36.

[125]Ibid., 34.

that is by the congregation.  It can also be understood as that which the church is to give

both consistently and continuously.[126]   The meaning of "double honor" is typically

understood as both respect and financial compensation.  The context and the text itself

inform this conclusion.  First, in 5:1-16, Paul instructs that widows should be enrolled to

receive "honor" from the church (5:3).  It is clear that "honor" refers to financial support

(5:4; 8; 17).  Second, Paul quotes Deuteronomy 25:4 in the text to confirm that financial

support is in view.[127]

Some conclude that this verse teaches two classes of elders; however, it is best

to understand that Paul is making a distinction between elders who are faithful and elders

who are surpassing the others by their laborious, strenuous effort in preaching and

teaching.  All elders are expected to teach and rule over the congregation, but some will

preach and teach more than others.[128]

Perhaps the distinction is best applied in the difference between the elder who

has as his vocation the greater opportunity and accountability to work hard at preaching

and teaching, as opposed to those whose vocation would be something other than the

church.  However, this should not be understood as the creation of a separate office.  That

would not be the teaching of Scripture.  There are two offices: elder and deacon.

Therefore, it can be understood that the plurality of elders would have one (possibly

more) who would receive their living from the church, while others would not.  This does

not mean that the church-supported elder would have more authority in the church than

[126]Kitchen, *The Pastoral Epistles for Pastors,* 227.

[127]Merkle, *Why Elders?,* 83.

[128]MacArthur, *1 Timothy,* 220.

the non-supported elders.  There are several reasons for this position: First, it would do harm to the unity of the elders.  Second, all elders must meet the same qualifications. Third, all elders share the same duties.[129]

However, one would be mistaken to disregard the evident distinction in the text. Obviously, the text does not teach that *all* elders *must* be paid.  Certainly, Paul himself is the example of one who received his living from outside the church (Acts 18:1-4; 1 Cor 9:1-18).  Though he had the right to be financially supported by the churches, he chose not to seek it.  Perhaps the distinction can also be understood not only vocationally, but also according to giftedness and experience in preaching and teaching.  Again, though some would be more gifted in preaching and teaching does not confer more or less authority, but rather more recognition and influence in the church.  This pattern can be seen in the twelve disciples: Peter, James, and John received greater recognition than the others.  Even among these, Peter was more prominent (not superior) than the other two. Yet, all the disciples became apostles (excluding Judas) and had equal authority and significant place in preaching the gospel.  This pattern can also be seen in the relationship between Paul and Barnabas (Acts 6:8; 13:13; 14:12).[130]

If an elder is compensated by the church, he must certainly "work hard at preaching and teaching."  His is not a superior role but rather a greater responsibility and influence.  The other elders, with equal authority, would give accountability to his preaching and teaching.  Greater responsibility does not infer a different or higher office,

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[129]Ibid.

[130]Merkle, *Why Elders?,* 54-55.

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dominance, or godliness.  Rather the wisdom of God is seen in requiring a plurality of elders for each church.

The church (regenerate members) has a sure and significant role in the important decisions and critical issues of church life and ministry.  There seems to be purposeful ambiguity in the application of elder, deacon, and congregational cooperation.  Undoubtedly, this is to allow flexibility within each congregation in the working of the details in cooperation between leaders and members.  It is best to understand that each church would be somewhat distinct and different in the working out of the principles.

## Conclusion

It has been the aim of this chapter to argue for plural-elder congregationalism as the definite biblical form and pattern for church polity regardless of culture or time.  This has been accomplished by: presenting the biblical evidence for a plurality of elders in the New Testament churches, examining the qualifications and duties of elders, and considering the necessary cooperation between elders and congregation.  The evidence has been primarily drawn from the New Testament.  Many other resources were consulted as noted.

The prayer for this chapter is to reveal the wisdom of God in establishing plural-elder congregationalism as the form of polity for the church.  Though it is evident that other forms of church government are used today, these do not appear to have the same Scriptural evidence as plural-elder congregationalism.  May this discussion lead us to humble, sincere, and diligent interpretation, application, and examination of Scripture, to the glory of God through Jesus Christ our Lord!

CHAPTER 3

A CONSIDERATION OF TWO MODERN
RESOURCES FOR TRAINING ELDERS

**The Priority of Leadership Development**

In the church today, there is a great outcry against the increasing drought of

professional and volunteer leaders and leadership. Thus, much of contemporary

Christian writing includes a plethora of books on leaders and leadership.[1] This reality

bodes well for the church. Many of these books provide helpful models and curriculum

for leadership development. Wise and discerning church leaders have gladly accepted

and affirmed these plans and leadership training has become a growing priority in the

church.

This priority is not focused on vocational ministers and staff only, but also on

developing committed and competent leaders from the membership of the church. There

are several reasons why developing leaders from the congregation is beneficial to the

church. First, proper and adequate pastoral leadership can be expanded. Second,

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[1] A representative list includes Leith Anderson, *Leadership That Works* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1999); Brian Croft, *Test, Train, Affirm and Send into Ministry: Rediscovering the Local Church's Responsibility in the External Call* (Leominster: Day One Publications, 2010); Howard G. Henricks and William H. Hendricks, *As Iron Sharpens Iron* (Chicago: Moody, 1995); Aubrey Malphurs, *Being Leaders: The Nature of Authentic Christian Leadership* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003); John C. Maxwell, *Developing the Leader within You* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998).

intentionality on the Great Commission can increase. Third, trained leaders are necessary

for the credibility and stability of the doctrines of the church.[2]

Aubrey Malphurs and Will Mancini define leadership development as "the

intentional process of helping established and emerging leaders at every level of ministry

to assess and develop their Christian character and to acquire, reinforce, and refine their

ministry knowledge and skills."[3] Based on this definition and the reasons cited above, it

becomes clear that leadership development should be implemented in every local church.

Leadership development as a priority must, by necessity, include emerging and called

elders.

## The Resources Used to Create a Curriculum

At the forefront of modern elder training facilitators are Alexander Strauch and

Gene A. Getz. Strauch's book, *Biblical Eldership: An Urgent Call to Restore Biblical*

*Church Leadership*[4] has greatly influenced the training of established and emerging

elders worldwide. No other book written for the purpose of training elders has pressed

upon the church with such clarity and power. Strauch's knowledge and passion for

biblical leadership has made him the foremost proponent of biblical eldership.

Getz has written more than sixty books, including; *Elders and Leaders: God's*

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[2]Aubrey Malphurs and Will Mancini, *Building Leaders: Blueprints for Developing Leadership at Every Level of Your Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 19-20.

[3]Ibid., 23.

[4]Alexander Strauch, *Biblical Eldership: An Urgent Call to Restore Biblical Church Leadership* (Littleton, CO: Lewis & Roth, 1995).

*Plan for Leading the Church,*[5] and has been a pastor and professor in Dallas, Texas since 1972. He is the Chairman Emeritus for The Center for Church Based Training, a discipleship training and leadership development ministry. He has extensive and respected knowledge for developing church leaders worldwide, most notably elders.

The goal of this chapter is to evaluate, compare, and coordinate some of the best points and ideas from the aforementioned books and to create a curriculum unique and applicable for training potential elders at Believers' Baptist Church. I used the study guides: *Biblical Eldership: Twelve Lessons for Mentoring Men for Eldership* by Strauch,[6] and *Elders and Leaders Field Guide* (vol. 1)[7] by Rowland Forman, the Director of Curriculum Development for The Center for Church Based Training to form the content of the chapter and the basis for the four week evaluation study for the potential elders at BBC. The evaluation study is the beginning point for the more extensive training that is not included in the parameters of this project. The details for this more extensive training are included in the next chapter.

## The Evaluation Study

The evaluation study was a brief four-week group study for potential elders and their wives (if married). This study fulfilled the requirements of the project, but it did not fulfill the necessity of a more comprehensive training for the prospective elders. The

[5]Gene A. Getz, *Elders and Leaders: God's Plan for Leading the Church* (Chicago: Moody, 2003).

[6]Alexander Strauch, *Study Guide to Biblical Eldership: Twelve Lessons for Mentoring Men for Eldership* (Littleton, Co: Lewis & Roth, 1996).

[7]Rowland Forman, *Elders and Leaders Field Guide vol. 1* (Dallas: Center for Church Based Training, 2003).

greater training began at the conclusion of the evaluation study and continued for twelve months.  At the end of the training the men will be affirmed as elders at BBC.

## The Participants for the Evaluation Study

Candidates were invited to the evaluation study based upon a sense of calling, biblical qualifications, and personal desire.  The candidates were neither new converts (1 Tim. 3:7) nor considered hastily (1 Tim. 5:22) and had meet the qualifications for elders as found in 1 Timothy 3:1-7.  In addition, each man was already actively involved in the church, either in teaching or in other less formal leadership roles.  The men had also proven to be knowledgeable in the Scriptures, in basic Bible doctrines, and were in agreement with the basic doctrinal positions of the church.  Finally, each man had expressed a degree of desire for becoming an elder.  At the conclusion of the study some men were asked to continue to pursue eldership in the church.  The completion of the class did not assure that a candidate was asked to be an elder.  The wives of each candidate were invited and strongly encouraged to participate in the evaluation study.

## The Reasons for the Evaluation Study

The importance of the evaluation study for the potential candidates was first seen in the necessary assurance that the men chosen were biblically qualified and Spirit-led to become an elder.  A second reason for the study was to create a forum for informing candidates of the commitment, joy, hardships, and privilege of serving as an elder in the church.  The third reason for the evaluation study was found in the primary way that leaders are trained.  A 2002 leadership survey, conducted by John Maxwell, revealed that most current leaders are influenced to become leaders by someone who is

an established or accomplished leader.  This was true of 85 percent of those responding to

the survey.  Five percent had become leaders as a result of a crisis and ten percent were

leaders because of natural gifting.[8]

The result of the survey belies the importance of training potential elders by

established elders.  Further, Maxwell, in his book *Developing Leaders Around You,* states

that the training or equipping of others is the highest calling of leadership.[9]  The

evaluation study created the opportunity for an established elder to influence several

potential elders in a formal training experience.

Not surprisingly, Strauch indicates that many current elders and deacons readily

confess that they are unprepared and untrained for their work.[10]  Maxwell offers some

suggestions for the failure to train other leaders.  First, many current leaders fail to realize

the importance of training.  Second, many current elders have too many responsibilities

and obligations to give themselves to the training of others.  Finally, many leaders feel

too insecure to give influence and opportunity to others.[11]

A fourth reason for the importance of the evaluation study is found in the nature

of biblical equipping or training.  This is seen primarily in the life and ministry of Christ.

The manner in which Jesus used to prepare his disciples is the biblical model for training

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[8]John C. Maxwell, *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 133.

[9]John C. Maxwell, *Developing the Leaders around You* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 111.

[10]Strauch, *Twelve Lessons*, 9-11.

[11]Maxwell, *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership,* 136.

other elders in the church.[12]  Both from his words and his actions we can see that he

attached supreme importance to that part of his earthly mission.  Though the evaluation

study itself falls woefully short of the model, it is the beginning point for a more

extensive training in which the potential elders will participate outside of the assigned

project.

A final reason for the evaluation study is found in the words of the apostle Paul

in 2 Timothy 2:2.  Paul had taught and trained others, and he expected that those he

trained would do the same.  He expected Timothy to depart from Ephesus having

equipped faithful men who would continue the developing of other future leaders.  The

pattern expected by Paul is to be followed today.[13]

## A Brief Review of *Biblical Eldership*

*Biblical Eldership: Twelve Lessons for Mentoring Men for Eldership* is

designed to be used by the prospective elder under the mentorship of an established elder.

It can also be used as a group study, but is best used as a one-on-one study guide.  There

is also a companion volume, *The Mentor's Guide to Biblical Eldership* that is available to

assist the established elder.[14]  This resource provides the mentoring elder with answers to

the questions in *Twelve Lessons for Mentoring Men for Eldership.*

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[12]The classic work for this model is A. B. Bruce, *The Training of the Twelve: Timeless Principles for Leadership Development* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1988).

[13]Oswald J. Sanders, *Dynamic Spiritual Leadership* (Grand Rapids: Discovery House, 1999), 210-220.

[14]Alexander Strauch, *The Mentors Guide to Biblical Eldership* (Littleton, Co:  Lewis & Roth, 1996).

In *Biblical Eldership: Twelve Lessons for Mentoring Men for Eldership,* Strauch gives a profound portrait of what eldership should be. The portrait is informed by his many years serving as an elder. The lessons reveal the personal experience and investment that he has with the subject. Each lesson is specialized to the ministry of the elder.

The book begins with an Old Testament overview of the duties and deficiencies of ancient Israel's elders, and uses Job as a model of an Old Testament elder. This first lesson thoroughly examines many Old Testament texts that are a necessary foundation for understanding the New Testament elder. The remaining eleven lessons are built upon the Old Testament background presented in the first lesson.[15]

Lessons 2 through 12 focus on the qualifications and work of the New Testament elder. Each lesson is biblically based and gives practical insight to the ministry of the elder. The author suggests that each lesson will take three to five hours to complete and also recommends an hour and a half of review and discussion with others. The expected length for completion of the study is six months to a year. At the conclusion of each lesson, there are a number of recommended resources that are listed for additional study and reading.[16]

In lesson 2 the learner is challenged to evaluate his knowledge of and ability to defend basic bible doctrines. The third lesson reinforces the call of the elder to the ministry of eldership by using Acts 20:28. Lesson 4 deals with the elder's responsibility to guard the congregation from false teachers and teaching. In the fifth lesson the learner

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[15]Strauch, *Twelve Lessons*, 3.

is to consider the humility and grace necessary to lead, admonish, and exhort the congregation. The sixth lesson examines the plurality of elders and the necessity for unity and love among the elders. Lesson 7 is a close look at the qualifications for elders. The relationship between the congregation and the elder is addressed in lesson 8. The elder/congregation relationship is addressed again in the ninth lesson as each local church is admonished to biblically appoint men into eldership. The lesson teaches that the inclusion and the involvement of the established elders in the appointment process is required. The final three chapters (10 through 12) give practical application for the learner in the areas of time management, care for the poor and sick, and the spiritual responsibility that an elder has toward the congregation.[17]

## A Brief Evaluation of *Biblical Eldership*

*Biblical Eldership: Twelve Lessons for Mentoring Men for Eldership* is a biblically rich and a practical guide for training elders in the church. The book has multiple strengths, not the least of which is simplicity. The Biblical texts are presented with clarity and conviction. The practical application is clearly drawn from the biblical texts. The result is a pleasing combination of knowledge and practice that leaves the learner satisfied with the comprehensiveness of the study guide. A second strength is the homiletical value of the resource.

Strauch's book *Biblical Eldership: An Urgent Call to Restore Biblical Church*

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[16]Ibid., 11-12.

[17]Ibid., 4-6.

*Leadership* is used as a commentary for *Twelve Lessons*.  *Biblical Eldership* is largely doctrinal and expository and lacks practical application.  *Twelve Lessons* keeps the doctrinal emphasis but completes what is lacking in application.  One of the more interesting and challenging thoughts for application is found in a summary of the work of the elder:

> Out of love, true elders suffer and bear the brunt of difficult people and problems so that the lambs are not bruised.  They bear the misunderstanding and sins of others so that the assembly may live in peace.  They lose sleep so that others may rest.  They make personal sacrifices of time and energy for the welfare of others.  They see themselves as men under authority.  They depend on God for wisdom and help, not their own power and cleverness.  They face the false teachers' fierce attacks.  They guard the community's liberty and freedom in Christ so that the saints are encouraged to develop their gifts, to mature, and to serve one another.[18]

This thought-provoking quote is one of many that move the elder from biblical knowledge to real ministry.  These types of admonitions make the study guide a solid reference tool for the reality of ministry for the elder.

For the purposes of this project *Biblical Eldership* and *Twelve Lessons* had value as the foundational source for the created curriculum needed for the evaluation study and subsequent training.  The hermeneutical work done by Strauch is thorough enough that other resources, though referenced, were not necessary.  Any potential or experienced elder would benefit from a serious study of this resource.

## A Brief Review of *Elders and Leaders*

The book *Elders and Leaders: God's Plan for Leading the Church* (Getz) and *Elders and Leaders Field Guide* (vol. 1) (Forman) are companion resources.  The project

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[18]Ibid., Lesson 10, 7.

utilized *Elders and Leaders Field Guide* as the comparison piece to *Biblical Eldership:*

*Twelve Lessons for Mentoring Men for Eldership* (Strauch). *Field Guide* (vol. 1) is very

pragmatic in its approach to training. The twelve lessons included in the resource are

built upon an informal survey of the twelve most common issues that elders typically

face.[19]

        The first lesson emphasizes learning in community. Forman writes,

> Authentic community is living together in unity. It is like a family in harmony.
> And it is good and pleasant. Church leaders must settle for nothing less than
> genuine community. When church leaders emphasize the priority of community
> and consistently model it, their example will shape leaders-in-training and the
> whole congregation.[20]

Forman believes that true community among elders provides the motivation and

inspiration for training and effective elder ministry. This lesson forms the context and

foundation for the remaining eleven lessons.[21]

        Lessons 2 through 12 contains topics that are relevant to the elder. Each topic is

introduced with a question. Some of the questions are "What does the Bible say about

Elders?" "How can elders stay in tune with God?" "How should elders pray with and for

their people?" "How should elders manage their family and God's family?" "How can

elders resolve church disputes?"[22]

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[19]Forman, *Elders and Leaders Field Guide*, 1.

[20]Ibid., 6.

[21]Ibid., 7-8.

[22]Ibid., 3.

Each lesson takes the learner through six steps.  Steps 1 through 4 are completed individually and discussed in the final two steps.  Step 1 is a brief consideration of the topic or issue.  The issue is seen from the context of church and leadership.  Each issue is set up as a case study using real or imagined churches and leaders.  Step 2 is a study of the Scriptures.  The learner is directed to relevant texts that guide and inform understanding and application specific to the issue.  In the third step the learner will read assigned chapters from the book *Elders and Leaders: God's Plan for Leading the Church* by Getz.  The designated chapters from the book coordinate with the lesson topic.  This step also recommends additional resources that are significant to the issue.  Each learner is given an opportunity to record a three-fold response to the issue, the Scripture study, and the reading in the fourth step.  The response includes reflection and application on knowledge, character, and ministry.   The last two steps (5 and 6) are to be completed in a group setting.  Interactive discussion is encouraged in step five.  The discussion allows for exchange of knowledge and for questions and answers from the previous steps.  Specific outcomes for the individual and/or the church are formulated in the final step.[23]

### A Brief Evaluation of Elders and Leaders

Much like *Twelve Lessons for Mentoring Men, Elders and Leaders Field Guide* (vol. 1) is pragmatic in theme.  Rowland Forman makes a convincing and credible case for application in each lesson.  This is the strength of the book.  It is a needs-based curriculum and has less of a homiletical and hermeneutical flavor than *Twelve Lessons*

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[23]Ibid., 2.

*for Mentoring Men* (Stauch). *Field Guide* is clearly the go-to resource when urgency is needed for a particular crisis or situation.

*Field Guide* uses the six steps as explained above for presenting each lesson. The six steps are well thought out and designed as a comprehensive format for grasping the presented issue. Forman continually emphasizes discovering and understanding each issue by using examples, illustrations, and explanation. The use of *Elders and Leaders: God's Plan for Leading the Church* (Getz) adds clarity and additional thought to each issue.

## Creating Specific Lessons

Since the Evaluation Study of the potential elders is of short duration for the guidelines of the project, four important lessons were built upon coordinating the aforementioned resources. An outline of each lesson is included in Appendix 4. Each lesson had as its foundation a biblical text. The lessons were designed to give the potential elder assurance and understanding of his call to eldership and inform his desire to serve as an elder. The lessons were also designed so that the wives (if married) would also understand the reality of eldership, and be affirmed in her own heart as to her husband's call and desire. Because of the nature of the Evaluation Study, the training venue chosen was the classroom. This allowed for the most information to be given in the short time available. It also created a nonthreatening and familiar setting for the men and their wives. However, each lesson was conducive to interaction. Each lesson required one hour to complete.

**Synopsis of the Lessons**

The first lesson emphasizes three main themes: (1) An affirmation of the Spirit-led call to eldership. Since the men involved in the study already met the qualifications, this discussion is more of an affirmation of each man and his response to the call and desire to serve as an elder (1 Tim 3:1).[24] (2) A discussion of the nature of the call. Using Matthew 20:25-28, John 13:1-5, and 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13, the lesson discusses how the elder is to serve with service, sacrifice, and selflessness. (3) A discussion of the spiritual maturity required for the call (1 Tim 3:2-7). This lesson includes material and readings from Strauch (*Biblical Eldership*) pages 67-83, 85-98 and Getz (*Elders and Leaders*, 93-100, 155-162).

In the second lesson, the emphasis primarily fell on the elder's devotion to the people or congregation. This necessarily includes the explicit duties of praying for the sick (Jas 5:13-18), teaching and preaching (1 Tim 3:2; 5:17; Titus 1:9), and managing his own household (1 Tim 3:4-5; Titus 1:6), but also includes the implicit duties of disciplined and regular pursuit of the spiritual disciplines (1 Tim 4:7), praying for believers, protecting true doctrine, being a godly example, leading in the discipline of unruly and unrepentant believers, and overseeing financial matters.[25] This lesson includes material and readings from Strauch (*Biblical Eldership*, 9-31) and Getz (*Elders and Leaders*, 61-64, 261-71).

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[24]For a discussion of 1 Tim 3:1, see J. Oswald Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), and Dave Harvey, *Rescuing Ambition* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010).

[25]For a discussion of all these duties see chap. 2 of this paper.

The third lesson includes a discussion on marriage and family issues. Using Ephesians 5:22-33, 1 Peter 3:1-7, 1 Timothy 3:4-5, and Titus 1:6 as focal texts, the lesson considers the biblical teaching on the marriage and parenting of each elder. All the men in the class were married with children. This lesson includes material and readings from Getz (*Elders and Leaders*, 163-71) and Forman (*Field Guide,* vol. 1).

The final lesson of the Evaluation Study consists of discussions on elders working together (1 Tim 5:17-25) and the congregation's response and responsibility to elder leadership (1 Thess 5:12-13, Heb 13:17). This lesson also includes an invitation for the prospective elder(s) to continue the process of becoming an elder in the church. All the men in the Evaluation Study were asked to remain as prospective elders. The congregation was made aware of the decision of the men. They (congregation) were exhorted to pray, encourage, and watch these men as they continued the eldership process. This lesson includes material and readings from Strauch (*Biblical Eldership,* 31-50) and Getz (*Elders and Leaders*, 218-26, 252-59), and Forman (*Field Guide,* vol. 1).

The outline of each lesson (Appendix 4) includes additional resources that could be used by the presenting elder or the prospective elders for further reading and study. The project bibliography also includes a number of helpful resources that can be used to supplement or compliment the presented lesson outlines. A word of caution is in order. When presenting each of the lessons of the Evaluation Study the presenter must guard against being too lax or too frivolous because of the familiarity and relationships that he has with the men involved. Each lesson is designed and intended to raise a high expectation for character, commitment and competency.

CHAPTER 4

ELEMENTS OF THE PROJECT

The project consisted of an eight-week sermon series on biblical eldership.  In addition, the project included a pre-sermon series survey and a post-sermon series survey, a preaching focus group, and a four-session training for potential elders.  These elements were based on the projects goals: (1) create congregational interest, acceptance, and knowledge of biblical eldership; (2) emphasize the value and necessity of a trained and competent elder leadership for the congregation; (3) to raise up from the congregation an initial group of prospective elder candidates; (4) to immediately evaluate each prospective elder through a short-term study and to continue a long-term training of confirmed elders; (5) personal growth and improvement in pastoral leadership, mentoring skills, and expository preaching.  The elements of the project aided in accomplishing each goal.

**Scheduling of the Elements**

The sermon series began in March and continued through the end of May 2014. Two weeks of that period were allotted for Resurrection and Mother's Day sermons, resulting in an eight-week series during a three-month period.  A timeline for the project elements were as follows:

1.  March 2      Began recruiting for sermon evaluation focus group and administered pre-sermon series survey

2.   March 9      Conducted sermon evaluation focus group training and administered pre-sermon series survey (second time)

3.   March 16     Began sermon series

4.   May 18       Completed sermon series

5.   May 25       Administered post-sermon series survey

6.   June 22      Began elder evaluation study

7.   July 20      Concluded elder evaluation study

The total duration of the project was fifteen weeks.  The timeline for the project was temporarily interrupted by an unexpected church-planned and provided trip to Israel.

## The Sermon Evaluation Focus Group

The focus group consisted of ten individuals from various age groups and life stages.  Since improving my expository preaching ability was an important goal of the project I encouraged the full and unbiased involvement of each person in the group.  Each member of the group was a long-time believer.  Each one was a regular Sunday morning attender and each one had many years experience listening to preaching.  There were six males and four females in the group.  One member of the group was over 70.  Four of the members of the group were ages 60-69.  Four of the members of the group were ages 50-59, and one was in the age range of 20-30.

I met with the group on Sunday March 9, 2014.  The meeting was designed to encourage careful and informed listening and to be mindful of pulpit mannerisms that would be helpful or distracting to the hearers.  The meeting also informed the participants as to how the text related to the points in the sermon, how to hear and anticipate the

transitions in the sermon, and how to record their thoughts as they listened.  I also

acquainted the members with the survey.

### The Pre-Sermon Series Survey

The survey was composed of three personal information questions, fourteen

questions set up on a 5-point-Likert scale, and a brief essay question (Appendix 1).  The

survey was administered to the congregation.  Participation was voluntary.  The design of

the survey was to measure individual attitudes, knowledge, and perceptions of biblical

eldership.

The personal information questions were designed to create a demographic of

those participating in the survey.  The fourteen questions were the heart of the survey and

measured the biblical understanding of the congregation regarding eldership.  The

purpose of the essay question was to accumulate the combined previous experience

(negative or positive) with eldership of all participants.

The pre-sermon series was administered on the first two Sundays in March

2014.  Only those eighteen years of age and older were given the survey.  The survey

fostered a general anticipation for the sermon series, and raised an expectation for clarity

and understanding biblical eldership.

### Synopsis of Sermons Preached

The theme of the sermon series, A Noble Task: Elders in the Local Church was

derived from 1 Timothy 3:1: "The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of

overseer, he desires a noble task."  The sermons were intended to inform the

congregation of the urgency and necessity for a plurality of elders at Believers' Baptist

Church, and to confirm the biblical precedent for elders in the local church.  The outline of each sermon is presented in Appendix 3.

**Sermon 1**

The first sermon underscored two reasons for urgently meeting the need for a biblical church polity.  First, there is an urgent need to be biblical.  The point retraced the relevant New Testament texts that demonstrate a pattern for plural eldership in the early church.  Second, there is an urgent need to fulfill the Great Commission (Matt 28:18-20).  The Bible defines specific roles within the church in order to fulfill the Great Commission.  The Bible also defines the organization of the church in order to fulfill the Great Commission.  The application of the sermon was found in the commitment of each hearer to study and to pray about personal submission to the veracity of Scripture and to agree with the urgent need for elders in the church.

**Sermon 2**

The second sermon clarified and confirmed the New Testament evidence for a plurality of elders in the local church.  Using three points, the sermon emphasized the role of the elder in the Old Testament, the continuity the Old and New Testament office of elder, and the clear pattern of elders in the early church as seen in the book of Acts.  The application of the sermon was found in accepting the early church pattern of plural eldership as currently valid for the church.

**Sermon 3**

The third sermon was the first of two sermons presenting and defining the biblical qualifications for an elder in the church.  The sermon accentuated the biblical

priority of character verses function.  The first point presented the evidence for a

definitive list of qualifications and specific instructions for elders as found in 1 Timothy.

The second point emphasized spiritual aspiration and personal desire as the context for

the elder qualifications (1 Tim 3:1).  The final point stressed the first and overarching

qualification for the elder as being above reproach (1 Tim 3:2).  The application for the

sermon was found in the biblical expectation of being above reproach as applicable to

every believer.

**Sermon 4**

The fourth sermon was the second of two sermons on the biblical qualifications

for an elder.  The sermon defined and applied each moral and spiritual qualification listed

in 1 Timothy 3:1-7.  The sermon also presented the two elder duties or functions that are

presented from the same list.  The application for the sermon was seen in the universal

relevance of the qualifications for each believer.

**Sermon 5**

The fifth sermon presented the duties of the elder.  There were three points

presented.  The first point magnified the primary duties of preaching and teaching.  The

second point pointed to the duties of administration and oversight.  The final point

emphasized the duties of shepherding or pastoring.  The application for the sermon was

seen in the understanding and acceptance of the duties of the elder as the traditional

pastoral duties.

**Sermon 6**

Sermon 6 delineated significant ways that elders and the congregation work in concert with one another. The sermon pressed on the necessary unity and accountability for elders and congregation. A definitive list of the ways and means of cooperation was presented. The sermon encouraged the hearers to pray and work for understanding and unity at whatever role or level he or she would have in the congregation.

**Sermon 7**

The seventh sermon taught the hearers the biblical responses that all church members should have toward the elders of their church. In the first two points, the congregation was exhorted to remember and respect their elders (Heb 13:7-9, 1 Thess 5:12-13), and to submit to their elders (Heb 13:17). The final point encouraged the congregation in the personal and spiritual benefit they should receive from their elders (Heb 13:17). The sermon portrayed the relationship between elders and congregation as much like the biblical relationship between husband and wife (Eph 5:22-33). The application to the listener is made in the specific points of the sermon.

**Sermon 8**

The final sermon of the series compared and contrasted the office of elder with the office of deacon. The main idea of the sermon presented the significance of the office of deacon in the church. The qualifications for the deacon as listed in 1 Timothy 3:8-13 were given priority. The cooperation of elders and deacons serving the congregation and one another was the application for the sermon.

## The Post-Sermon Series Survey

The post-sermon series survey was administered on May 25, 2014. The survey duplicated the pre-sermon survey. The purpose for using the same survey was to accurately evaluate the effectiveness of the sermon series in achieving the project goals by comparing the pre and post-survey results.

## The Evaluation Study

The four-session evaluation study was designed as a group and self-evaluation for the men who had a Spirit-led aspiration to become an elder in Believers' Baptist Church. Their aspiration was confirmed and informed by their outward desire or pursuit of the opportunity. Four men from the congregation presented themselves as prospective elders. Participation in the evaluation study did not assure the man that he would become an elder. The aim of the evaluation study was to inform the men of the calling, devotion, and nature of biblical eldership. The men ranged in age from 60 to 70. Each man was currently active in ministry in the church. All the men were married with grown children. Each of the men had a proven record of being above reproach in all areas of life and living. Every man also had a good reputation with those outside the church. At the conclusion of the evaluation study all the men determined and desired to continue the necessary training to become elders in Believers' Baptist Church

These are not perfect men. They are qualified men according to Scripture. These are men who love the Lord Jesus and the church, and desire to serve the church. Each of the men has an obvious weakness, but each has many obvious strengths. These men are currently a benefit to the church, and in their Spirit-led aspiration as elders, will continue to be a blessing to the church.

**Synopsis of Evaluation Study**

The previous chapter gives a detailed description of the lessons that were used in the Evaluation Study.  The outline for each lesson is found in appendix 4.  In addition to these specific lessons, an overview of the church history and distinctive beliefs and doctrine was given.  At the conclusion of the Evaluation Study, all four men determined to continue in the pursuit of becoming an elder of the church.

**Additional Elder Training**

The additional elder training that lies outside of the parameters of this project will be a continuation of the intent of the Evaluation Study.  The training will primarily utilize Alexander Strauch's book *Biblical Eldership: An Urgent Call to Restore Biblical Church Leadership* and the companion *Biblical Eldership:  Twelve Lessons for Mentoring Men for Eldership* by the same author.  The training will combine classroom, congregational question and answer sessions, and hands-on ministry projects.  The duration of the training is expected to be 12 months.

Each prospective elder will be trained in pastoral leadership skills and opportunities including, but not limited to: preaching, teaching, modeling, leading, discipline, observing the ordinances, and counseling.  The responsibilities of the elders for Believers' Baptist Church will include examining prospective members, overseeing the process of church discipline, examining prospective candidates for office, overseeing and cooperating with the work of the deacons and appointed church agencies and committees, administering the ordinances, equipping members for the work of ministry, correcting error, establishing relevant policies, protecting doctrine, overseeing the

ministries of the church, promoting evangelism, and mobilizing the church for world

missions.

CHAPTER 5

EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT

**Analysis of Data**

The data from the pre- and post-sermon series surveys was analyzed, and the responses of the sermon series evaluation forms of the focus group were evaluated. There were thirty-one respondents from the church body and ten from the focus group. The pre-survey and post-survey data was entered into a Chi-Square calculator. The Chi-Square allows discreet responses, such as "agree" or "disagree" to be mathematically calculated so that the actual value is compared to the expected value. By comparing the difference in the expected and actual values I was able to measure the increase/decrease of agreement, and understanding or change in the responses on the surveys before and after the sermon series. The statistical difference in the actual value and the expected value of each question of the pre and post sermon series surveys are found in appendix 5.

I also examined the responses of each survey question to determine the percentage of people who responded in each possible answer choice or category. For example, if 16 out of 31 chose "strongly agree" on a specific question, then 52 percent of the people selected that category. By consideration of the percentages I was able to determine the percentage difference between the pre-survey and post-survey on any survey question. The actual response for each survey question is found in appendix 6.

The Chi-square calculations allowed me to measure two of the project goals: create interest, acceptance, and knowledge of biblical eldership and inform the congregation of the value and necessity for a trained and competent biblical leadership. The results from the Chi-square calculations indicate that both can be considered accomplished.  For example, in question 3, "The New Testament recognizes two distinctive church government offices," there was an increase between the pre- and post-survey answers that indicates a stronger agreement in answer to the question after the sermon series was preached (see table A3 in appendix 5).

The increase in agreement in question three and in most of the other questions, suggests that the sermon series made a difference in the people's thoughts on biblical eldership.  Another example is question 7, "The biblical titles of elder/bishop/pastor are interchangeable," increased from 19 percent strong agreement to 58 percent strong agreement (see table A21 in appendix 6).

However, a few of the responses were puzzling.  For example, question 9, "The New Testament teaches that only men can serve as elders," had a 74 percent strong agreement in the pre-survey and a 71 percent strong agreement in the post-survey (see table A23 in appendix 6).  Though only a slight drop, it nonetheless elicits some consternation!  The Scripture could not be any more clear concerning the issue of male elders only (1 Tim 2:12, 3:2), but the calculations revealed not only a slight decrease in strong agreement, but also the opposite: no increase at all in strong agreement to the question!  Could the question have been misunderstood or misread?  It is possible that the margin of error in the survey would account for the difference.

The post-survey responses to question 10, "The New Testament teaches that the titles elders/deacons in interchangeable," revealed a gratifying increase in strong disagreement responses (see table A10 in appendix 5). The question was intended to note the biblical difference between the offices of elder and deacon. Table A24 in appendix 6 reveals a total increase of 13 percent disagreement to the question. I was encouraged that the results revealed that the sermon series provided better understanding for this important truth.

## Synopsis of Elder Evaluation Study

The four-part elder evaluation study was an important component of the project. The significance was found in the sincere personal evaluation of each man's motives and desire for the office. The four lessons were designed to re-create the impact of each sermon in a less formal setting, thus allowing for personal thought, questions, and discussion. The four lesson outlines are found in appendix 4.

My desire for the interaction and participation of the men in the sessions was all that I had hoped and intended. The discussion was open, honest, and sober. The questions asked by the men were important and relevant to the call, qualifications, and expected responsibilities that each man would encounter. There was a mixture of humility and anticipation from the men. Each man was transparent in his commitment to follow his call and desire to serve as an elder.

I included the wives in the four sessions. This allowed the wives to hear their husband's understanding of his call and the congregational expectations that come to each wife because she is an elder's wife. It also allowed for them to sense the seriousness

of eldership and the necessary sacrifices for shepherding a congregation.  The wives participated in the discussion with enthusiasm and humility.

The end of the Evaluation Study affirmed the four men in their desire to continue the necessary training for biblical eldership elder.  Each man is actively involved in some ministry of the church.  All four men are currently committed to a weekly reading of *Biblical Eldership* by Alexander Strauch, and to a discussion of the church's Constitution, By-Laws, Theological Values, and Doctrinal Emphases.  There are currently two Elder Q&A Discussions scheduled for the congregation to be able to dialogue and understand the call, testimony, growth, and theology of each man.

### Evaluation of Sermon Series Focus Group

One of the goals of the project was to continuing growing in my commitment to expository preaching.  I asked for volunteers from the congregation to become a Focus Group for the purpose of evaluating each sermon used in the project (see Sermon Outlines in appendix 3).  My desire was to have the group critique my ability to communicate each text with clarity and conviction.  I especially wanted to be evaluated on my ability to articulate the main idea, the outline, and the application of each sermon.

The group was composed of 6 men and 4 women.  These ranged in age from 32 to 72. Each participant is a strong, growing believer.  Two of the participants are founding members of the church, but the remaining eight are members of the church for five years or less.  The Sermon Evaluation Form can be seen in appendix 2.

In many ways, the feedback of the group was encouraging.  First, I never received less than a 4 on a 5 point scale on any element of any sermon.  Second, most of

the listeners were able to demonstrate understanding of the sermon. Finally, there were many varied and thoughtful responses of application.

However, I believe that many of the participants lacked the critical judgment needed for true and beneficial evaluation. Perhaps the instrument I used was insufficient for giving me the kind of feedback necessary for personal improvement? In retrospect, it is obvious that some of the questions in the survey were not pertinent to my style of preaching.

Nevertheless, it was very clear from the returned forms that most of the participants took their volunteer role very seriously, and sincerely tried to be as helpful as they could. The comments were well thought out. It was also evident that each element of the sermon was carefully considered, and that there was continuity between the preached sermon and what was heard and understood.

The forms revealed that the evaluators were able to grasp the main idea of the sermons most of the time. This is best seen from their own comments on their evaluation form. Further, most listeners responded that that the main idea was relevant to the congregational need or to a personal application.

As previously stated, the evaluators were diligent in recording their understanding of each sermon outline. Most of the listeners were able make a distinction between the main idea and the points of the sermon. It was rewarding to see that the written outlines of the participants were consistent with the presented outline of the sermon.

Finally, it was obvious from the participant comments that application for each sermon was also carefully considered. Most of the application comments followed the

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main idea.  For example, "As a church member, work with leadership to make sure the church is following God's purpose" or "The qualifications for an elder are more emphasized than duties."  But a few of the application comments were more personal in nature.  For example, "To become a more humble person; less prideful" or "My role as part of the congregation is as important as the elders' role in the working of the church." These comments reveal some personal thought and meditation about the text and its interpretation.

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**Evaluation of Goals**

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The first goal of the project was to create interest, acceptance, and knowledge of biblical eldership.  The data noted above and seen in both appendices 5 and 6 reflect definite changes in the congregation's perceptions and understanding of biblical eldership.  This is most clearly seen in the survey response to questions 4 (table A4 in appendix 5) and 5 (table A5 in appendix 5).

However, statistically, this cannot be affirmed with certainty.  A larger involvement of the congregation is needed to get an accurate reading.  Regardless, the surveys that were returned at least give some indication of the reality.

The second goal was to inform the congregation of the value and necessity for a trained and competent biblical leadership, and is perceived accomplished in the data of appendices 5 and 6.  I also believe that this goal cannot be considered completely accomplished from interpreting the data alone.  There is an element of this goal that is measured in the congregation's current acceptance and agreement regarding a plural-elder polity.  The fulfillment of the goal will further be seen in the congregational

involvement with the actual training of the elders, and in anticipation of the church for the expected ordination of the prospective elders.

The third goal, to have an uncertain number of men respond to the Spirit's leading to become elders for the church, was fulfilled in the willingness of four men who presented themselves as prospective elders. These men responded in obedience to the Word and the Spirit from the project's sermon series. Though each of the men have yet to be ordained as an elder, each one has agreed to participate in the existing elder training with a future view toward eldership.

The fourth goal of the project, which is not actually an element of the project's written presentation (see chapter 4), but is presented as an integral element of the project's success and completion, is seen in the on-going training of the prospective elders. This goal is included in the project to guard against the impression that elders could be discovered, developed, and deployed in a short period of time. The time for the completion of the project will take approximately one year and end with the ordination of several men as elders for the church.

The final goal of the project was to improve my pastoral leadership, mentoring skills, and expository preaching. The evaluation of the goal can be measured from the above comments about the Sermon Series Focus Group, but also in the transition of the church from a single-elder polity to a plural-elder polity. Though this has been the desire and even an attempt of the church prior to this project, it has been ten years since the church has legitimately pursued this polity. Many people and changes have taken place in the church during the ten years, so that the transition was somewhat suspect and

uncertain at the beginning of the project. By God's grace there is understanding and unity in the church for a plural-elder polity.

**Evaluation of the Process**

There are several changes in the process of the project that I believe would have informed the conclusion of the project. First, I would strive for better communication and explanation of the absolute importance of the pre-and post-sermon series surveys. Though I feel that I adequately explained the details and value of the project, I missed the opportunity to gain a true picture of the perceptions and attitudes of the congregation about biblical eldership by my lack of informative communication. In spite of this failure, the church is accepting the plural-elder polity without dissension or regret.

Secondly, I would change the sermon evaluation forms to illicit more comments from the listeners. The forms, as used, were helpful to a degree, but could have been of greater help if I had expected essay-type answers rather than requiring multiple-choice answers. I would also train the participants in expository listening prior to the sermon series.

Third, I would make adjustments to the Likert scale of the pre and post sermon series surveys. The six multiple-choice answers were confusing and frustrating for those who responded. I feel that the multiple answers did not provide enough clarity and created soft answers. I also would have put more thought into the questions, trying to anticipate the answers, therefore creating greater transparency in the responses. I also would consider using a four-point Likert scale, especially if the number of respondents was consistent with what was received.

## Theological Reflection

The project solidified my personal commitment to plural-elder polity for the local church. Study, meditation, and interpretation of various texts and contexts that indicate a plurality of elders in the early church both deepened and broadened my convictions. But I also gained an appreciation for the personal convictions of others in their understanding of biblical church polity. It was informative to read the various arguments against a plural-elder rule, but in the end, I am convinced that plural-elder lead polity is best for any church.

The actual implementation of the project did less for my commitment to expository preaching than the required seminars. Though it certainly was beneficial for me to preach through the appropriate texts of the project, it was especially challenging to preach the texts as I define and am learning expository preaching. The texts necessary to the project are scattered in various New Testament books and can even be repetitive. This repetition no doubt indicates something very significant to us about elders and their work! But several times I felt that the outlines I used were forced on a text, and I would not have used an outline at all I had not set up the project expecting feedback from the focus group.

My personal understanding of expository preaching is to allow the people to feel the impact of the text by preaching the text: to help people hear what God is saying through the text. To force an outline on the text was cumbersome. Yet, the work of wrestling with the text and an outline clarified my thoughts and convictions and the value of expository preaching. Though I am still learning and striving to be a faithful

expositor, the project has both encouraged and equipped me to become a better communicator of the Bible.

## Personal Reflection

Pursuing a Doctor of Ministry degree has challenged me in several ways. First, it has been a personal challenge to prioritize my time. I have had to balance my family, church, community, and school responsibilities. I have had to learn to delegate. I have had to evaluate how I use my time. It has taken far more time to complete the degree than I intended. This likely speaks to my failure in time management! It seems that the tyranny of the urgent defeated the reality of the important far more than it should! However, I have learned, and am still learning, valuable lessons in self-discipline and personal use of time.

My pursuit has impressed upon me the discipline of continued growth. Prior to my enrollment and acceptance in the doctoral program I had grown stagnant in my professional growth. The requirements of the degree have pushed me and caused me to recognize anew the value of reading theology, preaching, and culture. It is so easy to for me to feel that I have arrived based on my years of experience! But the seminars and the work on the project have informed my reality and refreshed by commitment to continual professional growth. I believe that I have gained from the pursuit of the degree knowledge and tools for continued and fruitful ministry.

Finally, the project has awakened in me an understanding of how dependent I am on the gifts, abilities, and time of others. There are many people who have contributed to the process of earning this degree. I appreciate each person who has been with me through this journey. They have made it easier to complete what I started. I am

humbled by God's wisdom and providence in my life as he sovereignly controls each day, opportunity, and privilege. I am thankful and blessed to have people in my life who inspire, motivate, and encourage me in my spiritual journey.

## Conclusion

This is the conclusion of the project to fulfill the requirements for the degree, but in real time the project does not end. The project is just the beginning for a different paradigm of ministry for me personally and for Believers' Baptist Church. My great prayer and desire is for this project to be the foundation for many fruitful years of spiritual growth for the congregation and myself. It has been a privilege to interact with the professors and the members of my cohort as I worked on this degree, and my hope is that someone else may benefit from the research and conclusions of the project.

APPENDIX 1

CHURCH POLITY SURVEY

**Agreement to Participate**

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to measure the level of understanding and knowledge that you have about biblical eldership.  This research is being conducted by Jason Rolen for the purpose of collecting data for doctoral project research.  In this research, you will answer questions before a sermon series and you will answer the same questions at the conclusion of the sermon series. Any information you provide will be held *strictly confidential,* and at no time will your name be reported or your name identified with your responses. *Participation in this survey is totally voluntary.*  By your completion of this survey you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this research.

Personal Information:

Age: _____

Gender: _____

Number of years as a member of Believers' Baptist Church: _____

If applicable, please give a brief statement of your personal experience in an elder-led church prior to membership at Believers' Baptist Church:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

**Directions:** Answer the statements according to the following scale: SD = strongly disagree, D = disagree, DS = disagree somewhat, AS = agree somewhat, A = agree, SA = strongly agree; please circle the appropriate answer.

1- It is important for a local church to have a form of government.
    SD  D    DS  AS  A    SA

2- The New Testament does not teach a specific form of church government.
    SD  D    DS  AS  A    SA

3- The New Testament recognizes two distinctive church government offices.
    SD  D    DS  AS  A    SA

4- The New Testament teaches that every local church should be served by elders.
    SD  D    DS  AS  A    SA

5- The New Testament teaches that a church should have more than one elder.
    SD  D    DS  AS  A    SA

6- The New Testament does not teach the necessary qualifications for an elder.
    SD  D    DS  AS  A    SA

7- The biblical titles elder/bishop/pastor are interchangeable.
    SD  D    DS  AS  A    SA

8- The New Testament teaches that elders are to rule over the church.
    SD  D    DS  AS  A    SA

9- The New Testament teaches that only men can serve as elders.
    SD  D    DS  AS  A    SA

10- The New Testament teaches that the titles elder/deacon are interchangeable.
    SD  D    DS  AS  A    SA

11- The New Testament teaches multiple duties for a deacon.
    SD  D    DS  AS  A    SA

12- The New Testament puts more emphasis on the character of a man than on duties.
    SD  D    DS  AS  A    SA

13- I believe that the most important duty of an elder is teaching/preaching.
    SD  D    DS  AS  A    SA

14- The New Testament teaches that a divorce disqualifies a man from any church office.
    SD  D    DS  AS  A    SA

Are you able to briefly explain what you perceive to *be* a biblical form of church government?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

APPENDIX 2

SERMON EVALUATION FORM


Preacher: _____          Evaluator: _____
Date: _____ Sermon Title: _____
Text: _____

CONTENT OF THE SERMON


**Introduction** _____
Was the introduction interesting and contemporary?          1       2       3       4       5
Did it give you a reason to listen?                         1       2       3       4       5


**Main Idea** _____
Was one main idea presented clearly?                        1       2       3       4       5
Was the main idea relevant?                                 1       2       3       4       5


**The Body of the Sermon** _____
Was a clear outline of the text presented?                  1       2       3       4       5
Can you briefly re-state the points of the outline?




Did illustrations used enhance/clarify points?              1       2       3       4       5
Were the transitions between points clear and smooth?       1       2       3       4       5


**Application** _____
Was the application clear and specific?                     1       2       3       4       5
Do you know specifically how you can apply the sermon to your life?

APPENDIX 3

SERMON OUTLINES

Series:  A Noble Task: Elders in the Local Church

Title: The Urgent Need for Elders in the Church

Text: 1 Timothy 3:1-7; Matthew 28:18-20

I. Introduction

II.  The Church has an urgent need to be biblical.
    A.  The office of elder is recognized in the New Testament churches (Acts 11:30; 14:21-23; 15:1-4; 20:17, 28; Phil 1:1; Titus 1:5; 1 Pet 5:1-5, Jas 5:13-20).
    B.  The office of deacon of deacon is recognized in the New Testament churches (1 Tim 3:8-13; Phil 1:1; Acts 6:1-6).

III.  The Church has an urgent need to fulfill the Great Commission (Matt 28:18-20).
    A.  The Bible defines roles and structure for the church (Eph 4:7-11).
    B.  The Bible defines the purpose of organization in the church (Eph 4:12-16).

IV.  Conclusion

Series: A Noble Task: Elders in the Local Church

Title: The Evidence of the New Testament Elder

Text:  Exodus 3:16-18, 19:7-8; Acts 14:23

I.  Introduction

II.  The NT elder cannot be properly understood apart from the Old Testament (Exod 3:16-18, 19:7-8, 24:1, Num 11:16-17).
    A.  The OT pictures people as sheep in need of a shepherd (Ezek. 34:1-1-10).
    B.  The OT pictures elders as shepherding the people by example and exhortation to live God's will as expressed in God's Word (Deut. 31:9-12).

III.  There is continuity between the OT and NT office of elder (Acts 14:23).
    A.  The NT elder is to shepherd the people (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:1-4).
    B.  The NT elder is to shepherd the people by example and exhortation to live God's will as expressed in God's Word (1 Tim. 4:11-16).

IV.  The NT clarifies and defines the office of elder (1 Tim. 3:1-7).
    A.  The office of elder is recognized in the NT churches (Acts 11:30).
    B.  The office of elder is necessary in the NT churches (Acts 14:23).

V.  Conclusion

Series: A Noble Task: Elders in the Local Church

Title: The Qualifications for the Elder (Part 1)

Text: 1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9

I.  Introduction

II. Qualifications for elders were expected and accepted in the New Testament (1 Tim 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9).
    A.  Definitive evidence for a list of qualifications (1 Tim 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9)
    B.  Definitive evidence for specific instructions for elders (1Tim 5:17-22)

III. A biblical desire is the context for the qualifications (1 Tim 3:1)
    A.  Outward aspiration
    B.  Inner desire

IV. The first and overarching qualification for an elder (1 Tim 3:2)
    A.  The elder's most important requirement is not measured by popular or secular standards.
    B.  The elder's most important requirement is moral and spiritual.

  V.  Conclusion

Series: A Noble Task: Eldership in the Local Church

Title: The Qualifications for the Elder (Part 2)

Text: 1 Timothy 3:2-7; Titus 1:5-9

I.  Introduction

II.  Moral and Spiritual Character
  A.  Above reproach
  B.  Husband of one wife
  C.  Sober-minded
  D.  Self-controlled
  E.  Respectable
  F.  Hospitable
  G.  Not a drunkard
  H.  Not violent
  I.  Not quarrelsome
  J.  Free from the love of money
  K.  Not a new convert
  L.  A good reputation with those outside the church

III.  Duties or Abilities
  A.  Able to teach
  B.  Manage household well

IV.  Conclusion

Series:   A Noble Task: Eldership in the Local Church

Title:  The Duties of the Elder

Text: Acts 20:17-38

I.  Introduction

II.  The elder has duties in preaching and teaching (1 Tim 4:13, 5:17; 2 Tim 2:15, 4:12).
    A.  Elders are to preach what is profitable to spiritual birth (Acts 20:20-21).
    B.  Elders are to teach what is profitable for spiritual growth (Acts 20:20-21).

III.  The elder has duties in administration and oversight (1 Tim 4:7-11, 15-16;
    2 Tim 2:3-7, Heb 13:17, Heb 13:17, Jas 5:13-15, 1 Pet 5:1-4).
    A.  Elders are to pay attention to personal spiritual health and progress (Acts
        20:28).
    B.  Elders are to pay attention to the spiritual health and progress of the people
        (Acts 20:28).

IV.  The elder has duties in shepherding and pastoring (1 Tim 1:3-7, 4:1-3, 5:1-8;
    2 Tim 2:14-19, 3:1-9; Jas 5:13-15).
    A.  Elders are to protect the flock from false teachers and doctrines (Acts 20:29-30)
    B.  Elders are to protect themselves from false doctrines (Acts 20:29-30).

V.  Conclusion

Series: A Noble Task: Elders in the Local Church

Title: Elders and Congregation Working Together

Text: Selected Scripture

I. Introduction

II. An understanding of elders and congregation working together begins with an understanding of church membership (Matt 18:15-20; Acts 6:1-6; 1 Cor 11:17-34, 15:1-3; Gal 6:6; 1 Tim 5:3-16; Jas 5:13-16)
    A. Membership in a local church is implied in the New Testament
    B. Membership in a local church is important to the believer

III. An understanding of elders and congregation working together is predicated on an understanding of biblical authority (1 Thess 5:12-13; Heb 13:17)
    A. Elders have spiritual authority over the congregation
    B. Elders have spiritual accountability to God

IV. An understanding of elders and congregation working together is evidenced in many ways (1 Cor 12-14; Col 3:16; Gal 6:1-5; 1 Pet 2:5-10; Acts 6:1-6; Acts 13:1-3; Gal 1:8-9)
    A. In the biblical teaching on spiritual gifts (1 Cor 12-14)
    B. In the expected ministry of the Word to one another (Col 3:16; Gal 6:1-5)
    C. In the priesthood of all believers (1 Pet 2:5-10)
    D. In the necessity of church discipline (Matt 18:15-20)
    E. In the selecting and testing of leaders (Acts 6:1-6)
    F. In sending missionaries (Acts 13:1-3)
    G. In discerning doctrine and practice (Gal 1:8-9)

V. Conclusion

Series: A Noble Task: Elders in the Local Church

Title: The Congregational Response to Elders

Text:  1 Thessalonians 5:12-13; Hebrews 13:7-9, 17

I.  Introduction

II.  The congregation is to gladly remember and respect their spiritual leaders (Heb 13:7-9; 1 Thess 5:12-13).
    A.  Remember and respect your leaders because they teach you the Word of God.
    B.  Remember and respect your leaders because they are examples to follow.

II.  The congregation is to submit to their spiritual leaders (Hebrews 13:17).
    A.  Submit to your leaders because they represent God to you.
    B.  Submit to your leaders because they are accountable to God for you.

IV.  The congregation is to benefit from their spiritual leaders (Heb 13:17).
    A.  You will receive joy from your leaders.
    B.  You will receive spiritual growth from your leaders.

V.  Conclusion

Series:  A Noble Task: Elders in the Local Church

Title: Elders and Deacons Working Together

Text: Acts 6:1-6; 1 Timothy 3:8-13

I.  Introduction

II. The background of the New Testament Deacon (Acts 6:1-6)
      A.  Acts 6:1-6 is a possible model for identifying the office of deacon
      B.  Philippians 1:1 is a clear reference for identifying the office of deacon

III.  The qualifications of the New Testament deacon (1 Tim 3:8-13)
      A.  There are striking similarities of the qualifications for elders and deacons
      B.  The main difference between an elder and a deacon is a difference in gifts and calling, not character

IV.  The role of a deacon (1 Tim 3:8-13; Acts 6:1-6)
      A.  The deacon has a servant ministry to the congregation
      B.  The deacon has a supportive role to the elders

V.  Conclusion

APPENDIX 4

EVALUATION STUDY LESSONS

Lesson 1

Series:  A Noble Task: Elders in the Local Church

Title:  The Calling of the Elder

Text:  1 Timothy 3:1

I.  Introduction

II.  A Nobel Calling
    A.  1 Timothy 3:1
    B.  Ephesians 4:11-12

III.  A Servant Calling
    A.  Matthew 20:20-28
    B.  3 John 9

IV.  A Character Calling
    A.  1 Timothy 3:2-7
    B.  Titus 1:5-9

V.  Conclusion

Additional Reading:

Harvey, Dave. *Am I Called?* Wheaton: Crossway, 2012.

Tripp, Paul David. *Dangerous Calling* Wheaton: Crossway, 2012.

Lesson 2- Evaluation Study

Series:  A Noble Task: Elders in the Local Church

Title:  The Devotion of the Elder

Text:  1 Timothy 3:5:1-2

I.  Introduction

II.  An Elder is Devoted to His God
      A.  1 Timothy 4:7
      B.  2 Timothy 2:15-16
      C.  2 Peter 1:3-11

III.  An Elder is Devoted to His People
      A.  Romans 12:9-21
      B.  1 Thessalonians 2:7-12
      C.  1 Timothy 5:1-2

IV.  An Elder is Devoted to His Duties
      A.  1 Timothy 3:2
      B.  1 Timothy 3:4-5
      C.  James 5:13-18

 V.  Conclusion

Additional Reading:

Anderson, Lynn. *They Smell Like Sheep* West Monroe, LA: Howard Publishing. 1997.

Shelly, Marshall. *Well-Intentioned Dragons* Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1985.

Strauch, Alexander, and Robert L. Peterson. *Agape Leadership* Littleton, CO: Lewis & Roth, 1991.

Lesson 3: Evaluation Study

Series: A Noble Task: Elders in the Local Church

Title:  The Family of the Elder

Text:  1 Timothy 3:2, 4-5

I.  Introduction

II.  The Elder and His Wife
     A.  Ephesians 5:22-33
     B.  1 Peter 3:7

III.  The Wife of An Elder
     A.  1 Timothy 3:11
     B.  1 Peter 3:1-6

IV.  The Elder and His Children
     A.  1 Timothy 3:4-5
     B.  Titus 1:6

V.  Conclusion

Additional Reading:

Adams, Jay. *The Christian Living in the Home* Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1972.

Thomas, Gary. *Sacred Marriage* Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000.

Lesson 4-Evaluation Study

Series:  A Noble Task: Elders in the Local Church

Title:  The Relationships of the Elder

Text:  1 Timothy 3:1

I.  Introduction

II.  Elders Working Together
      A.  1 Timothy 5:17-25
      B.  2 Timothy 2:1-7

III.  Elders Working with the Congregation
      A.  1 Thessalonians 5:12-13
      B.  Hebrews 13:17

IV.  Conclusion


Additional Reading:

Malphurs, Aubrey. *Being Leaders* Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003.

Sande, Ken. *The Peace Maker* Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004.

APPENDIX 5

AVERAGES FOR THE CHURCH BODY

Table A1. Average responses to question 1

| Question 1 | |
|---|---|
| It is important for a local church to have a form of government. | |
| Pre-Survey Average | 5.45 |
| Post-Survey Average | 5.74 |
| | |
| 1 = Strongly Disagree  2 = Disagree  3 = Somewhat Disagree  4 = Somewhat Agree  5 = Agree  6 = Strongly Agree | |

Table A2. Average responses to question 2

| Question 2 | |
|---|---|
| The New Testament does not teach a specific form of church government. | |
| Pre-Survey Average | 2.10 |
| Post-Survey Average | 1.61 |
| | |
| 1 = Strongly Disagree  2 = Disagree  3 = Somewhat Disagree  4 = Somewhat Agree  5 = Agree  6 = Strongly Agree | |

Table A3. Average responses to question 3

| Question 3 | |
|---|---|
| The New Testament recognizes two distinctive church government offices. | |
| Pre-Survey Average | 4.45 |
| Post-Survey Average | 5.23 |
| | |
| 1 = Strongly Disagree  2 = Disagree  3 = Somewhat Disagree  4 = Somewhat Agree  5 = Agree  6 = Strongly Agree | |

Table A4. Average responses to question 4

| Question 4 | |
|---|---|
| The New Testament teaches that every local church should be served by elders. | |
| Pre-Survey Average | 5.29 |
| Post-Survey Average | 5.42 |
| | |
| 1 = Strongly Disagree  2 = Disagree  3 = Somewhat Disagree 4 = Somewhat Agree  5 = Agree  6 = Strongly Agree | |

Table A5. Average responses to question 5

| Question 5 | |
|---|---|
| The New Testament teaches that a church should have more than one elder. | |
| Pre-Survey Average | 5.00 |
| Post-Survey Average | 5.55 |
| | |
| 1 = Strongly Disagree  2 = Disagree  3 = Somewhat Disagree 4 = Somewhat Agree  5 = Agree  6 = Strongly Agree | |

Table A6. Average responses to question 6

| Question 6 | |
|---|---|
| The New Testament does not teach the necessary qualifications for an elder. | |
| Pre-Survey Average | 1.29 |
| Post-Survey Average | 1.48 |
| | |
| 1 = Strongly Disagree  2 = Disagree  3 = Somewhat Disagree 4 = Somewhat Agree  5 = Agree  6 = Strongly Agree | |

Table A7. Average responses to question 7

| Question 7 | |
|---|---|
| The biblical titles of elder/bishop/pastor are interchangeable. | |
| Pre-Survey Average | 3.52 |
| Post-Survey Average | 5.32 |
| | |
| 1 = Strongly Disagree  2 = Disagree  3 = Somewhat Disagree 4 = Somewhat Agree  5 = Agree  6 = Strongly Agree | |

Table A8. Average responses to question 8

| Question 8 | |
|---|---|
| The New Testament teaches that elders are to rule over the church. | |
| Pre-Survey Average | 2.58 |
| Post-Survey Average | 3.45 |
| | |
| 1 = Strongly Disagree  2 = Disagree  3 = Somewhat Disagree<br>4 = Somewhat Agree  5 = Agree  6 = Strongly Agree | |

Table A9. Average responses to question 9

| Question 9 | |
|---|---|
| The New Testament teaches that only men can serve as elders. | |
| Pre-Survey Average | 5.74 |
| Post-Survey Average | 5.71 |
| | |
| 1 = Strongly Disagree  2 = Disagree  3 = Somewhat Disagree<br>4 = Somewhat Agree  5 = Agree  6 = Strongly Agree | |

Table A10. Average responses to question 10

| Question 10 | |
|---|---|
| The New Testament teaches that the titles elder/deacon are interchangeable. | |
| Pre-Survey Average | 2.16 |
| Post-Survey Average | 1.97 |
| | |
| 1 = Strongly Disagree  2 = Disagree  3 = Somewhat Disagree<br>4 = Somewhat Agree  5 = Agree  6 = Strongly Agree | |

Table A11. Average responses to question 11

| Question 11 | |
|---|---|
| The New Testament teaches multiple duties for a deacon. | |
| Pre-Survey Average | 4.48 |
| Post-Survey Average | 4.39 |
| | |
| 1 = Strongly Disagree  2 = Disagree  3 = Somewhat Disagree<br>4 = Somewhat Agree  5 = Agree  6 = Strongly Agree | |

Table A12. Average responses to question 12

| Question 12 | |
|---|---|
| The New Testament puts more emphasis on the character of a man than on duties. | |
| Pre-Survey Average | 5.13 |
| Post-Survey Average | 5.45 |
| | |
| 1 = Strongly Disagree  2 = Disagree  3 = Somewhat Disagree<br>4 = Somewhat Agree  5 = Agree  6 = Strongly Agree | |

Table A13. Average responses to question 13

| Question 13 | |
|---|---|
| I believe that the most important duty of an elder is teaching/preaching. | |
| Pre-Survey Average | 4.23 |
| Post-Survey Average | 4.84 |
| | |
| 1 = Strongly Disagree  2 = Disagree  3 = Somewhat Disagree<br>4 = Somewhat Agree  5 = Agree  6 = Strongly Agree | |

Table A14. Average responses to question 14

| Question 14 | |
|---|---|
| The New Testament teaches that a divorce disqualifies a man from any church office. | |
| Pre-Survey Average | 2.42 |
| Post-Survey Average | 2.06 |
| | |
| 1 = Strongly Disagree  2 = Disagree  3 = Somewhat Disagree<br>4 = Somewhat Agree  5 = Agree  6 = Strongly Agree | |

# APPENDIX 6

# CHURCH BODY RESULTS

Table A15.  Actual responses to question 1

| Question 1.  It is important for a local church to have a form of government. | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Pre-Survey | | Post-Survey | |
| Possible Responses | Respondents | Percent | Respondents | Percent |
| Strongly Disagree | 0 | 0% | 0 | 0% |
| Disagree | 0 | 0% | 0 | 0% |
| Somewhat Disagree | 0 | 0% | 0 | 0% |
| Somewhat Agree | 2 | 6% | 0 | 0% |
| Agree | 13 | 42% | 8 | 26% |
| Strongly Agree | 16 | 52% | 23 | 74% |
| | | | | |
| Conclusion:  There was a 22% increase in strong agreement. | | | | |

Table A16.  Actual responses to question 2

| Question 2.  The New Testament does not teach a specific form of church government. | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Pre-Survey | | Post-Survey | |
| Possible Responses | Respondents | Percent | Respondents | Percent |
| Strongly Disagree | 11 | 36% | 15 | 48% |
| Disagree | 12 | 39% | 13 | 42% |
| Somewhat Disagree | 4 | 13% | 3 | 10% |
| Somewhat Agree | 2 | 6% | 0 | 0% |
| Agree | 2 | 6% | 0 | 0% |
| Strongly Agree | 0 | 0% | 0 | 0% |
| | | | | |
| Conclusion:  There was a 12% increase in strong agreement. | | | | |

Table A17.  Actual responses to question 3

| Question 3.  The New Testament recognizes two distinctive church government offices. | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Pre-Survey | | Post-Survey | |
| Possible Responses | Respondents | Percent | Respondents | Percent |
| Strongly Disagree | 0 | 0% | 0 | 0% |
| Disagree | 2 | 6% | 1 | 3% |
| Somewhat Disagree | 0 | 0% | 0 | 0% |
| Somewhat Agree | 3 | 10% | 0 | 0% |
| Agree | 16 | 52% | 14 | 45% |
| Strongly Agree | 7 | 23% | 15 | 48% |
| | | | | |
| Conclusion:  There was 25% increase in strong agreement. | | | | |

Table A18.  Actual responses to question 4

| Question 4.  The New Testament teaches that every local church should be served by elders. | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Pre-Survey | | Post-Survey | |
| Possible Responses | Respondents | Percent | Respondents | Percent |
| Strongly Disagree | 0 | 0% | 0 | 0% |
| Disagree | 0 | 0% | 1 | 3% |
| Somewhat Disagree | 1 | 3% | 0 | 0% |
| Somewhat Agree | 3 | 10% | 2 | 7% |
| Agree | 13 | 42% | 10 | 32% |
| Strongly Agree | 14 | 45% | 18 | 58% |
| | | | | |
| Conclusion:  There was a 13% increase in strong agreement. | | | | |

Table A19.  Actual responses to question 5

| Question 5.  The New Testament teaches that a church should have more than one elder. | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Pre-Survey | | Post-Survey | |
| Possible Responses | Respondents | Percent | Respondents | Percent |
| Strongly Disagree | 2 | 6% | 0 | 0% |
| Disagree | 0 | 0% | 1 | 3% |
| Somewhat Disagree | 0 | 0% | 0 | 0% |
| Somewhat Agree | 4 | 13% | 0 | 0% |
| Agree | 13 | 42% | 10 | 32% |
| Strongly Agree | 12 | 39% | 20 | 65% |
| | | | | |
| Conclusion:  There was a 26% increase in strong agreement. | | | | |

Table A20.  Actual responses to question 6

| Question 6.  The New Testament does not teach the necessary qualifications for an elder. | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Pre-Survey | | Post-Survey | |
| Possible Responses | Respondents | Percent | Respondents | Percent |
| Strongly Disagree | 18 | 58% | 22 | 71% |
| Disagree | 9 | 29% | 6 | 19% |
| Somewhat Disagree | 3 | 10% | 2 | 7% |
| Somewhat Agree | 0 | 0% | 0 | 0% |
| Agree | 1 | 3% | 0 | 0% |
| Strongly Agree | 0 | 0% | 1 | 3% |
| | | | | |
| Conclusion:  There was a 13% increase in strong disagreement. | | | | |

Table A21.  Actual responses to question 7

| Question 7.  The biblical titles elder/bishop/pastor are interchangeable. | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Pre-Survey | | Post-Survey | |
| Possible Responses | Respondents | Percent | Respondents | Percent |
| Strongly Disagree | 5 | 16% | 0 | 0% |
| Disagree | 7 | 23% | 0 | 0% |
| Somewhat Disagree | 1 | 3% | 1 | 3% |
| Somewhat Agree | 4 | 13% | 1 | 3% |
| Agree | 7 | 23% | 10 | 32% |
| Strongly Agree | 6 | 19% | 18 | 58% |
| | | | | |
| Conclusion:  There was a 39% increase in strong agreement. | | | | |

Table A22.  Actual responses to question 8

| Question 8.  The New Testament teaches that elders are to rule over the church. | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Pre-Survey | | Post-Survey | |
| Possible Responses | Respondents | Percent | Respondents | Percent |
| Strongly Disagree | 8 | 26% | 7 | 23% |
| Disagree | 8 | 26% | 5 | 16% |
| Somewhat Disagree | 3 | 10% | 6 | 19% |
| Somewhat Agree | 5 | 16% | 0 | 0% |
| Agree | 3 | 10% | 6 | 19% |
| Strongly Agree | 2 | 6% | 7 | 23% |
| | | | | |
| Conclusion:  There was a 13% increase in the overall disagreement.  The respondents understood that elders are to serve not rule. | | | | |

Table A23.  Actual responses to question 9

| Question 9.  The New Testament teaches that only men can serve as elders. | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Pre-Survey | | Post-Survey | |
| Possible Responses | Respondents | Percent | Respondents | Percent |
| Strongly Disagree | 0 | 0% | 0 | 0% |
| Disagree | 0 | 0% | 0 | 0% |
| Somewhat Disagree | 0 | 0% | 0 | 0% |
| Somewhat Agree | 0 | 0% | 0 | 0% |
| Agree | 8 | 26% | 9 | 29% |
| Strongly Agree | 23 | 74% | 22 | 71% |
| | | | | |
| Conclusion:  There was 3% decrease in strong agreement. | | | | |

Table A24.  Actual responses to question 10

| Question 10.  The New Testament teaches that the titles elder/deacon are interchangeable. | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Pre-Survey | | Post-Survey | |
| Possible Responses | Respondents | Percent | Respondents | Percent |
| Strongly Disagree | 9 | 29% | 11 | 36% |
| Disagree | 13 | 42% | 15 | 48% |
| Somewhat Disagree | 3 | 10% | 3 | 10% |
| Somewhat Agree | 2 | 6% | 0 | 0% |
| Agree | 3 | 10% | 1 | 3% |
| Strongly Agree | 0 | 0% | 1 | 3% |
| | | | | |
| Conclusion:  There was 7% increase in strong agreement. | | | | |

Table A25. Actual responses to question 11

| Question 11. The New Testament teaches multiple duties for a deacon. | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Pre-Survey | | Post-Survey | |
| Possible Responses | Respondents | Percent | Respondents | Percent |
| Strongly Disagree | 1 | 3% | 1 | 3% |
| Disagree | 2 | 6% | 4 | 13% |
| Somewhat Disagree | 1 | 3% | 1 | 3% |
| Somewhat Agree | 6 | 19% | 2 | 6% |
| Agree | 13 | 42% | 16 | 52% |
| Strongly Agree | 7 | 23% | 6 | 19% |
| | | | | |
| Conclusion: There was a 4% decrease in strong agreement. The respondents understood that the New Testament does not teach explicit duties for deacons. | | | | |

Table A26. Actual responses to question 12

| Question 12. The New Testament puts more emphasis on the character of a man than on duties. | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Pre-Survey | | Post-Survey | |
| Possible Responses | Respondents | Percent | Respondents | Percent |
| Strongly Disagree | 0 | 0% | 0 | 0% |
| Disagree | 1 | 3% | 0 | 0% |
| Somewhat Disagree | 1 | 3% | 0 | 0% |
| Somewhat Agree | 2 | 6% | 1 | 3% |
| Agree | 16 | 52% | 15 | 48.5% |
| Strongly Agree | 11 | 36% | 15 | 48.5% |
| | | | | |
| Conclusion: There was a 12.5% increase in strong agreement. | | | | |

Table A27.  Actual responses to question 13

| Question 13.  I believe that the most important duty of an elder is teaching/preaching. | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Pre-Survey | | Post-Survey | |
| Possible Responses | Respondents | Percent | Respondents | Percent |
| Strongly Disagree | 2 | 6% | 0 | 0% |
| Disagree | 3 | 10% | 2 | 6% |
| Somewhat Disagree | 3 | 10% | 0 | 0% |
| Somewhat Agree | 7 | 23% | 3 | 10% |
| Agree | 10 | 32% | 10 | 32% |
| Strongly Agree | 6 | 19% | 14 | 45% |
| | | | | |
| Conclusion:  There was a 26% increase in strong agreement. | | | | |

Table A28.  Actual responses to question 14

| Question 14.  The New Testament teaches that a divorce disqualifies a man from any church office. | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Pre-Survey | | Post-Survey | |
| Possible Responses | Respondents | Percent | Respondents | Percent |
| Strongly Disagree | 10 | 32% | 8 | 26% |
| Disagree | 6 | 19% | 15 | 48% |
| Somewhat Disagree | 7 | 23% | 3 | 10% |
| Somewhat Agree | 4 | 13% | 3 | 10% |
| Agree | 2 | 6% | 1 | 3% |
| Strongly Agree | 1 | 3% | 0 | 0% |
| | | | | |
| Conclusion:  There was 6% increase in strong disagreement.  The respondents understood that a divorce does not necessarily disqualify a man from serving as an elder. | | | | |

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ABSTRACT

USING EXPOSITORY PREACHING FOR DISCOVERING,
DEVELOPING, AND DEPLOYING ELDERS
AT BELIEVERS' BAPTIST CHURCH

Jason Eugene Rolen, D.Min
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2014
Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Brian Vickers

The purpose of this project was to use expository preaching to discover,

develop, and deploy elders at Believers' Baptist Church, Emory, Texas.  Chapter 1

describes the context, goals, and rationale for the project, and includes an argument for

the need of elders in Believers' Baptist Church.  The chapter also defines biblical

eldership and expository preaching.

Chapter 2 looks closely at the biblical texts that establish elders as present and

plural in the New Testament church and as the pattern for the contemporary church.

Chapter 2 also examines the biblical qualifications and duties for elders.  The chapter

concludes with biblical arguments for the elders and the congregation working in concert

to accomplish the Great Commission.

Chapter 3 is an evaluation, a comparison, and a coordinating of two

contemporary and significant curriculums on biblical eldership.  Specifically, the chapter

examines *Biblical Eldership: Twelve Lessons for Mentoring Men for Eldership* by

Alexander Strauch and *Elders and Leaders: God's Plan for Leading the Church by*

*Rowland Forman* based on the book *Elders and Leaders: God's Plan for Leading the Church* by Gene Getz.

Chapter 4 is a model for training elders. The model can be used as a plan for training current elders or for establishing elders in a congregation. The model was used at Believers' Baptist Church, but is flexible enough to be adapted to any congregation.

The project concludes with an assessment of the congregation's understanding of biblical eldership and a consideration of the congregational involvement in the project. An examination and conclusion of the response and involvement of the men considered and called to eldership is included in the final chapter. A final evaluation on the strengths and weaknesses of the project are included.

VITA

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