

**The Role,
Responsibilities,
and
Recognition
of Elders**

Steve Fernandez

have given verbal assent until the waiver can be signed). Normally, meetings will be called by the chairman, or by a written request signed by one third of the elders. All matters before the elders will be determined by the prayerful agreement of the elders present. (Exception: In matters of the salary or the discipline of an elder or the members of his immediate family, the elder in question must abstain). A simple majority of the elders of the church shall constitute a quorum.

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criticized by a congregational member must always be defended and supported by the elder (s) who received the criticism.

PRINCIPLE #3: Inter-elder accountability must be maintained and exercised. All elders should be openly accountable to any other elder for any apparent time/effort/ministry problems or questions.

Note: See note in Principle #1.

PRINCIPLE # 4: There should be constant communication between elders. They should seek to develop relationships on a non-business level. Things such as having a meal together should be made a priority.

Meetings of the Elders

The elders shall meet each December for the purpose of selecting officers from among the elders for the coming year (as required by state law). These officers will include a chairman and a secretary/treasurer. The office of chairman and secretary/treasurer shall not be held by the same person. The separation of duties between these offices shall be determined among the elders. Notice of regular and special meetings shall be given to each elder at least five (5) days in advance, so that all may arrange to attend. When an emergency meeting is required, the previous stipulation (of five days notice) may be deemed to have been fulfilled when all the elders (including those not present at the emergency meeting) have signed a waiver to this effect (or

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Principles for Maintaining Elder Board and Church Unity

The following are principles for engendering and enhancing mutual trust, confidence, accountability and support among elders. It is essential that elders be diligent in practicing those principles which will make the unity, love, and respect among the elders such a reality that it is caught by the congregation and those beyond. The following principles are shared as essential elements of that desired unity:

PRINCIPLE #1: Whenever it is necessary to deal with any apparent staff and/or lay elder problem, a person should not generalize and impugn the whole or portion of the staff of lay elders, but be specific in their criticism and approach. This specific approach should always be done in the spirit of Galatians 6:1.

Note: A recommended retort to all critics of elders or staff: *Have you spoken to them about this yet? If not, why not?*

PRINCIPLE # 2: Any and all congregational criticism of an elder should be met and answered with support and confidence for that elder or staff member with a promise to investigate further into the complaint if it appears valid. Some kind of answer should always be given, but if the criticism or complaint is not valid, the carrier of said complaint should be so told and admonished in an appropriate manner.

Note: Any elder board decision which is

Equality and Diversity Among Elders

Two things should be kept distinct and clear in mind to help the effective functioning of elders as a leadership team.

Decisional Equality

First is what is referred to as decisional equality. This refers to the fact that the standing and authority of each elder is equal in the decision making process. The vote of each man is of equal weight and must be considered before the board proceeds.

Functional Diversity

Distinct from decisional equality is functional diversity. This recognizes the presence of the differing gifts and abilities of each elder. The arrangement of their ministries and roles in the church and their function on the board reflect their individual gifts. The elders recognize these differing roles and demonstrate it by their mutual submission one to another. It is important that their relations and functions be seen in this light. For example, although the pastor/teacher elder has the same standing and authority as the rest of the elders, he is recognized by them and the rest of the congregation as being the primary God-ordained instrument of vision and direction for the church. The other functions of elders are also recognized accordingly.

CHAPTER ONE

The Priority of Elders in the Local Church

- **The Church is at the Heart of God's Program**
- **The Church Belongs to God and Christ**
- **The Church's Leadership Standards and Structures are Clearly Specified in Scripture**
- **The Church's Leadership Will Determine the Church's Effectiveness in the World**

The Priority of Elders in the Local Church

There are four realities, which point to the critical importance of a proper leadership structure in a local church.

The Church is at the Heart of God's Program

The first reality is the central place of the local church in God's program. The only visible institution established by the Lord Jesus Christ and the apostles was the local church. "It is the pillar and support of the truth" (I Timothy 3:15). While this does not mean that other Christian institutions are without divine approval, it does mean that Christ's foremost concern is for the church. Therefore, the selection and structure of its leadership is of vital importance to Him.

The Church Belongs to God and Christ

The second reality is that the church belongs to Christ. "It is the church of God which He purchased with His own blood" (Acts 20:28). The very purpose and nature of the church is to display Christ. It is His showcase of Himself to the world (Ephesians 2:22; 3:10; I Peter 2:9). It can be rightly assumed that He would specify clearly the blueprint of the right form and structure of its leadership.

tabling an issue for further seeking of the Lord.

The Handling of Dissent

In the case of a sole dissenting vote or a small minority dissent, the following procedure is followed.

- As mentioned above, unhurried and unharried freedom is given to respond.
- Time is given to the majority group of elders to consider that Christ is directing the sole dissenting or minority dissenting elder(s).
- The dissenting elder(s) is given until the next scheduled meeting (unless a shorter period of time, not less than two weeks, be deemed necessary by all other elders) to present the reason for his dissent. The reasons should be stated in writing and given to the elders at the next meeting.
- The elder(s) dissent is not to be based solely on intuition or feeling, but objective reasons and facts clearly stated and defended.
- If the remaining elders judge the reasons are not based on sufficient objective reasons, but simply feeling and intuition, the dissenting elder must be willing to identify himself with the decision of the majority.
- All board decisions are to be presented to the congregation with the unanimous agreement of the elders.

continue to display the qualifications required in I Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:6-9. When an elder ceases to meet those qualifications, he shall be asked by the elders to step aside for a time so that he may get his life in order in that area. Such a request from the other elders shall be made only when they are in unanimous agreement. *Thirdly*, an elder may desire to be relieved from office either temporarily or permanently if he feels unable to serve for any reason. The process of his possible reinstatement at a later time will be determined by the elders in relation to the attendant circumstances.

Manner of Decision Making

Consensus

The elder's basis of decision making is consensus; consensus being understood as harmony and unified agreement in decision making. Each elder is of equal standing with each vote of equal weight in the decision making process. The elders seek consensus in order that:

- Premature and precipitous decisions are avoided.
- Dependence on the Lord is demonstrated in prayer and patiently waiting on the Lord.
- Each elder has been given unhurried and unharried freedom to decide.
- Much time and discussion without pressure is granted, and there will be no hesitancy in

The Church's Leadership Standards and Structures are Clearly Specified in Scripture

The third reality is that the New Testament verifies the critical importance of leadership in the local church. As would be expected, in light of the sufficiency of Scripture (II Timothy 3:16-17), there is detailed information given of the church's organization and structure with emphasis on its leadership base. These matters are presented in the imperative mood (I Timothy 3:15; I Corinthians 14:37). They are not matters to be discussed, but principles and priorities to be implemented in the local church to help assure its success.

The Church's Leadership Will Determine the Church's Effectiveness in the World

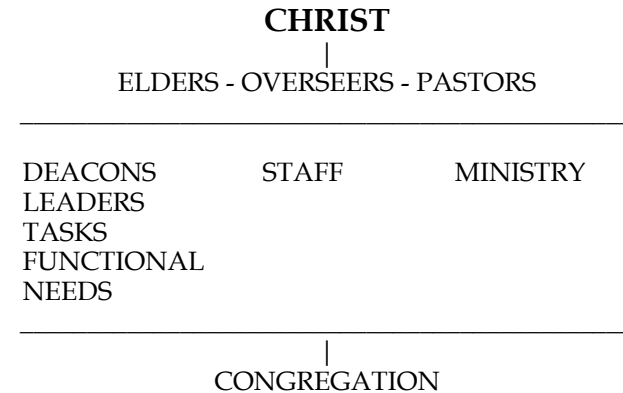
The fourth and final reality is that the local church cannot grow beyond the quality and maturity of its leadership. The fact is that every church growing in a Christ-exalting way is characterized by godly spiritual leaders. There are two principles or axioms that cannot be ignored in regard to the church.

- People, generally speaking, only go where their leadership goes or allows them to go (Luke 6:40).
- Leaders can only take their people as far as they themselves are able or willing to go. The critical importance of leadership is self-evident.

From the above we see the importance of biblically qualified leaders. It is imperative that every effort be made to pattern the church's leadership after the New Testament norm. Only then can Christ's purpose and plan for His church be fulfilled in the world. The biblical evidences indicate that the leadership function of the local church lies with divinely appointed men referred to as elders (Acts 20:17; Titus 1:5). They are Christ's undershepherds. They are His provision for the care and nurture of His flock. In this manual the role, responsibilities and recognition of elders will be considered with a view to ensure that Christ's desire for His church be fulfilled.

This chart will help in understanding the leadership structure at Community Bible Church.

STRUCTURE OF COMMUNITY BIBLE CHURCH



Term and the Termination of Office

The Elders Serve an Indefinite Term of Office

Termination of an elder's office may occur for three reasons. *First*, his office may be terminated when general church discipline is brought according to biblical principles. However, no accusation is to be taken seriously unless there are two or three witnesses (I Timothy 5:19). If, however, an elder is confronted in keeping with the principles of Matthew 18:15-18 and he "continues" in sin, he is to be rebuked by the other elders before the whole assembly so that others may fear (I Timothy 5:20). *Secondly*, an elder's office may also be terminated for failure to

recommendation will be tabled. When a consensus cannot be reached, the congregation will seek God's will further. Matters will continue as before until a consensus decision can be reached under the direction of Christ.

The Relationship of Deacons

The relationship of deacons is understood as follows: Deacons are godly men who aid the elders in serving the flock. They relieve elders of duties and tasks that would take them away from the ministry of prayer and the Word (Acts 6:1-4). They do not share the oversight of the congregation with the elders, but have authority delegated to them by the elders to oversee specific tasks and functions in the church. Deacons are spiritually qualified men. They, too, must meet the minimum character qualifications specified in I Timothy 3:8-13. They must also have godly reputations, be filled with the Spirit and be filled with wisdom (Acts 6:3). They are men of high character with their families in order, who are already actively serving and helping in the church.

CHAPTER TWO

The Presence of Elders in the Church

- **The Presence of Elders in the Church**
- **The Pattern of a Plurality of Elders**
- **The Teaching Pastor and the Division of Labor Among Elders**

The Presence of Elders in the Church

The first thing to be considered is the reality of the presence of elders in the New Testament church. The Scriptures are full of references to their function and leadership role. Moreover, it is the plurality of elders that is set forth as the pattern and standard to be implemented in each local church.

The Presence of Elders in the Church

Right from the beginning, the leadership of the church was in the hands of elders. When the church at Antioch sent its offering for famine relief to the church at Jerusalem, it sent it to the elders (Acts 11:29). When Paul was on his way to Jerusalem at the end of his third missionary journey he addressed the elders of the church at Ephesus (Acts 20:17). At Jerusalem, Paul met with James and all the elders (Acts 21:18). When the church met at Jerusalem to settle the issue over circumcision, it was the apostles and elders who acted and authorized the decision on the matter (Acts 15:6, 22). It is elders who are identified as those who have the rule of the church (I Timothy 5:17). Timothy himself was publicly commissioned for ministry by the authorization of a council of elders (I Timothy 4:14). Furthermore, Paul authorized the appointment of elders in the churches as one of his first apostolic acts (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5). In his instructions to Titus, he indicated that a

pastoral staff, (3) the annual budget, and (4) the recognition of church officers. In such cases the matter will be presented at a congregational meeting. After discussion and questions, a period of two to three weeks will be given for input, feedback and the expressions of reservations and questions.

The elders will not proceed unless a unified consensus of the church is clearly evident. A minimum of eighty percent of the church membership will be considered a clear consensus to move forward with unity.

The Purpose of Congregational Meetings

The purpose of congregational meetings is understood in the light of the congregation's relation to the elders. Their purpose can be seen from two perspectives.

First, is the negative: The purpose of meetings is not to initiate and pursue discussion of new plans or direction for the church. Such suggestions should be submitted to the elders for future consideration. Second, is the positive: The purpose of the meeting is to help ascertain congregational consensus or affirmation concerning the proposals and plans presented by the elders. The elders submit proposals already discussed in detail and agreed upon by them. The elders will, therefore, support them as that which they believe is in the best interest of the church. The input and insight of the congregation will be considered both at the meeting and over the two- to three-week period before a decision is made. Concerns must be given in person, not by an anonymous note. If the response of the congregation is not one of a consensus, the

The Functioning of Elders as a Governing Board

Elder Rule and the Relationship of the Congregation and Deacons

The Relation of the Congregation to Elders

First, elder rule recognizes that the shepherds are to lead the sheep, not the sheep leading the shepherds. The congregation, therefore, is to submit to elders (Hebrews 13:17). When godly elders minister diligently, effectively and consistently they deserve the congregation's love, respect and obedience (I Thessalonians 5:12; I Timothy 5:17). The congregation will not fight them, but follow them in unity and harmony.

The Role of the Congregation in the Decisions of the Elders

Secondly, in elder rule, the necessity of the unified support and following of the congregation is recognized. The elder's role is to discern Christ's direction for His flock. His sheep hear his voice and follow him (John 10). If the elders are truly following Christ's direction, it will be affirmed by the unified support of the congregation. Therefore, in the major decisions affecting the entire church, the consensus of the congregation is sought.

The areas of major decisions specifically are; (1) the purchase of property and real estate or sale of building or land, (2) the hiring of full time

church is not yet fully in order until a team of godly qualified elders are overseeing its care. Paul's words are, "set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city as I directed you" (Titus 1:5). The Greek word for "set in order" means "to bring to a natural and normal condition," and the word for "remains" refers to "something lacking." The normal, natural condition of a local church includes the presence of a team of godly elders in leadership. Until that is the case, it is still incomplete, lacking what it ought to be. The presence of elders in the New Testament church as its divinely authorized governing body seems abundantly clear.

The Pattern of a Plurality of Elders

It is to be noted that the above references to elders are always in the plural. The pattern is a body of men governing a church, not a single man. Paul's instruction for the appointment of elders in the churches is for a plurality (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5). The Jerusalem church had a plurality (Acts 11:30). James indicates multiple elders when referring to the request for prayer in the life of an assembly (James 5:14). In addition we are commanded to obey and esteem those (plural) who have the leadership over us (I Thessalonians 5:12-13).

When single leaders are referred to, it relates to their qualifications or to their discipline for sin. This is understood by the fact that leaders are selected and disciplined separately, not as a body (I Timothy 3:1; 5:19). The pattern and norm for leadership in the New Testament church clearly is a group of godly qualified men, recognized for

their maturity, ministry and love for God's people, who are given oversight of the church.

The Teaching Pastor and the Division of Labor Among the Elders

There is one other matter relating to the plurality of elders in the church. It concerns the presence of a teaching pastor and a division of labor on the elder team. The primary verse is I Timothy 5:17. It states, "Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching."

A number of conclusions can be drawn from the passage. First, all elders rule and govern the church regardless of their functions, duties and ministry responsibilities. All govern and share the oversight of the church. Secondly, all elders are involved in personal ministry with people and the handling of the word. The verse cannot be used to substantiate the concept that some elders only rule. The other New Testament references to the responsibilities of elders make this clear (Acts 20:28; I Peter 5:1-3). This verse only indicates that some elders are not involved in teaching extensively to the point of working hard at it. Thirdly, elders have differing responsibilities and functions. Depending on giftedness, the primary function and labor of each elder will vary. Some will be involved more in administration, some in counseling, others in caring, others in teaching, etc. All shepherd, all teach, but not with the same degree of involvement.

Therefore, it appears to be biblically

CHAPTER SEVEN

The Functioning of Elders as a Governing Board

- **Elder Rule and the Relationship of the Congregation and Deacons**
- **Term and the Termination of Office**
- **Manner of Decision Making**
- **Equality and Diversity Among Elders**
- **Principles for Maintaining Elder Board and Church Unity**
- **Meetings of the Elders**

warranted that because of giftedness, one man (or men) may become publicly identified as the teaching pastor(s), not because he alone teaches, but because he is the most extensively and publicly involved in that area.

Along with the teaching pastor's more extensive public ministry of the word come public influence and regard. This reality seems to be evidenced by the prominence of James in the church at Jerusalem. This understanding of I Timothy 5:17 is described by one commentator thus,

On the whole, therefore, we seem warranted to draw from the passage the following conclusion: That while it furnishes no ground for maintaining that any formal distinctions were made between one member and another of the presbyterial body as to ruling and teaching, the function of government was originally the more prominent element in their collective calling. However, the gift of ministering publicly in the exhibition of gospel truth...necessarily distinguishes, according to the degree in which it was possessed and exercised, one presbyter from another, so that the respect and honor due to all for their offices' sake, more especially gathered around those who, besides being faithful in governing, also proved successful in instructing and edifying the members of the flock. (Patrick Fairborn, *Pastoral Epistles*, 26).

In conclusion it can be said that the New Testament envisions a plurality of elders sharing oversight of the church. Within this body is a recognized diversity of function and responsibility based on giftedness. Further, more often than not, this may involve one man distinguishing himself in the public ministry of

the Word to a greater degree. Accompanying this is a correspondingly greater influence and regard in the eyes of the congregation. The other elders recognize this in the spirit of mutual submission (Ephesians 5:21). This, on the other hand, does not give a greater official authority to the teaching pastor in the decisions of the elder board as a whole. He recognizes this also, as the spirit of mutual submission reigns supreme in all. God's pattern then, is a godly, diversely gifted group of men overseeing the direction and care of the spiritual well being of Christ's church.

and invests a man with authority to serve as an elder.

The Congregation is Informed of the Candidates for Eldership

The sixth step is the public announcement of the candidates for eldership. The congregation's role here is critical. The members alone can evaluate finally if they will follow the prospective elder. The sheep will know the true shepherd's voice (John 10:14). Each prospective elder is presented to the flock, and the flock is asked to join prayerfully in consideration of this appointment and express their support or reservations. Over a period of several weeks, they are given opportunity to show cause as to why any of these prospective elders should not be set apart to eldership. Any reservations should be communicated in writing or in person, not by means of an anonymous note.

Confirmation is Given By Congregational Consensus

The seventh step is the consensus of the congregation. If the response of the congregation is positive with a consensus approaching total agreement, the elders will consider it a confirmation from the Holy Spirit and proceed to ordination. If a consensus of 80-90% is not evident, the candidate will be removed from consideration.

The Public Ordination is Granted to Serve the Flock

The last step is to follow the biblical pattern of ordination where the approved elder is set aside for ministry by the laying on of hands (I Timothy 5:22; Acts 6:6; 13:3). This is an act of identification and blessing. This public act confirms the appointment

CHAPTER THREE

The Perspectives of an Elder

- **An Elder's Perspective of Christ**
- **An Elder's Perspective of the Church**
- **An Elder's Perspective of Himself**

The Perspectives of an Elder

The next thing to be considered is the perspective of an elder. An elder's perspectives are critical. They are foundational to his leadership role, and must be biblical if an elder is to lead the church to become what Christ wants it to be. There are three areas to be considered.

An Elder's Perspective of Christ

The first area is an elder's perspective of Christ.

Christ is the head of the Church: Christ rules the Church. (Ephesians 1:22-23)

An elder is to see that, biblically speaking, the church is not a democracy, or an oligarchy (the rule of few), but a theocracy. The church is ruled by Christ. He is its head. He is its chief shepherd and its great shepherd (Hebrews 13:20; I Peter 5:4). As such, He leads the sheep; the sheep do not lead the shepherd. Therefore, the heart attitude of an elder must be to earnestly seek the mind of Christ in every detail of the church's life. Christ's mind is revealed through His Word where He gives specifics as to the purpose, pattern and priorities of the church (Ephesians 4:11-12; I Timothy 3:15). His mind is also revealed in dependent prayer and in a waiting on Christ to reveal His direction through individual elders and members of the congregation as well (Acts 13:1-2).

office. After much discussion, prayer and consideration, and only after coming to unanimous agreement among themselves, the elders will extend the invitation and proceed toward the goal of public recognition (I Timothy 5:22).

The Prospective Elder Will Be Interviewed, Examined and Trained

The fifth step is an interview and examination of the candidate in four key areas. *First*, the personal interview is made with the candidate and his wife. This is to answer any questions they have and to give them a clear picture of the responsibilities and duties that go with eldership. It is also done in consideration of the fact that an elder's wife will be called upon to make special sacrifices that many wives are not able or willing to make. The support and encouragement of the wife are absolutely essential. *Second*, a written doctrinal examination is given to the elder. An elder must be able to wholeheartedly support the doctrinal statement of the church. A clear unified voice must be heard from the elders in all areas. *Third*, the prospective elder is given a copy of the church's elder's manual and a book that represents the church's philosophy of the church. He is required to meet for a number of weeks to go over the manual and discuss the book. *Fourth*, there is a meeting in which elders, deacons and other recognized ministry leaders will meet with an opportunity for questions. The prospective elder is asked to respond to any and all questions regarding his doctrinal position, his philosophy of ministry and his qualifications to serve as an elder.

oversee the flock. As such, they play the central and leading role in the process of raising up new elders.

The Congregation is Taught the Responsibilities of Elders and Its Role in the Process

Secondly, the congregation is taught what constitutes qualified leaders. The presence of godly character (I Timothy 3:1-7), the work of shepherding and the flock's confidence in each man must be clearly perceived. The members of the congregation are also taught their responsibility and role in the selection process. Ultimately, it is they who give consensus and confirmation of whom the Holy Spirit has raised up as elders.

The Process is Saturated With Prayer

Thirdly, there must be active involvement in prayer. Since a God-given confirmation of whom the Holy Spirit has raised up is essential, the entire process must be done in a context of prayer. The congregation is to be informed of their need to pray these men out. This is to help preserve a spirit of unity in the body. In addition, special days of church-wide prayer should be called to pray forth elders. This stresses the critical importance of the selection. The elders themselves must commit to prayer, recognizing the decision to the welfare of the flock.

The Elders Invite Qualified Nominees to Serve the Flock as Overseers

Fourth, the elders will extend an invitation to men to serve the flock with them as fellow overseers. The invitation will be given to those whom they judge have met the specific qualifications for the

Christ is the architect and builder of the Church.

An elder is also to see that Christ is the builder and architect of the church. Jesus said, "I will build my church and the gates of hell will not overcome it." He has designed His church to operate and grow based on specific principles and priorities (Ephesians 4:11-12; Matthew 28:18-20; I Corinthians 12:15-18; I Timothy 3:1-7). Elders are to see themselves as Christ's main instruments to ensure that the way He wants to build His church is carried out. Their concern is (since Christ alone has the wisdom to know how it is to operate and be built) to see that His mandates are carried out in the life of the Church.

An Elder's Perspective of the Church

The second area concerns an elder's perspective of the church.

He understands the significance of the fact that the church is a living organism. (Ephesians 1:22-23; 4:16).

An elder is to recognize that the church is a living organism with a shared life. It is a body under the direction of a head. As in any organism, certain things produce health and facilitate growth. Elders do not see themselves as managers operating on the same principles as in a secular organization. While it is, by necessity, an organization, it is first and foremost an organism, and this will affect an elder's concept of his role and what is needed in the oversight of the church. There is more than management and

organizational principles involved in leading God's church.

He understands that the Church grows as a living organism. (Ephesians 4:15-16).

An elder also is to understand that just in the same way that a body grows, so does the church. Every part is important and must be working properly. An elder sees his role as overseeing that the church is functioning in such a way that an environment is created and sustained where each individual gift can function (I Corinthians 12:15-21). This is critical in the church, for Paul said there should be the "proper working of each individual part" (Ephesians 4:16). They are responsible to see that elements are present to ensure that Christ can display His life through each individual member in the best way possible.

He understands that the Church's oversight is given by Christ to qualified men called Elders.

In addition, it is understood by elders that they are the overseers of the church ultimately appointed by the Holy Spirit Himself (Acts 20:28). They alone are said to have the rule and charge of oversight (I Timothy 5:17). They are referred to interchangeably by the use of three terms.

- **ELDERS:** First, they are called elders. This is the most common term. It refers to the spiritual maturity of the man and also indicates the respect and honor in which he is to be held (Acts 20:17; I Timothy 5:17; Titus 1:5).

character. The Scripture gives a crystal clear portrait so that the men the Holy Spirit has chosen can be identified. Their character begins to be marked by the qualities described in I Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:6-9.

The Evidence of Ministry Skills, Wisdom and Fruit

The second area where a man will emerge is in the area of ministry involvement. Evidence will be shown of skill in ministry, both in the handling of the Word of God and in the handling of people. His effectiveness and fruitfulness in the work of shepherding will be obvious to the congregation.

The Desire and Heart of the Man to Lead

Lastly is the matter of desire and spiritual drive. Paul says an elder must be a man who aspires to the office (I Timothy 3:1). The Holy Spirit will put a holy ambition within to oversee the flock. This ambition is out of a concern for God's name and the spiritual well-being for the flock, not self-exaltation.

The Church's Role in the Making of Elders

The second phase in recognizing elders involves the process of public confirmation and ordination. It is in reality an acknowledgment of the work that the Holy Spirit has already accomplished. This official or public phase includes the following:

The Elders Recognize the Need for Leadership

The first step in the process is the elders recognize the need for leadership and present that need to the church. Elders have the responsibility to

The Recognition of Elders in the Church

When the biblical evidence is considered, it is clear that elders are made by God and not by man (Acts 20:28). However, this does not exclude man from the process of the public recognition and calling of elders. Two distinct aspects are to be seen when considering the raising up and appointment of elders in a local church. Each aspect will be considered in some detail.

The Holy Spirit's Role in the Making of Elders

The first aspect concerns the Holy Spirit's role in the making of elders. This is primary and fundamental. It recognizes the fact that the Holy Spirit Himself raises up elders to oversee His flock. Paul said, "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers" (Acts 20:28). The task then is not to create elders, or ultimately to elect them. It is to discern those whom the Holy Spirit has raised up within the congregation to lead the flock. He accomplishes His work by developing men and causing their emergence to be noticed in the context of the local assembly. This development will be noted in three areas.

The Development and Manifestation of Christ-like Character

The first is the development of Christ-like

- **OVERSEERS:** Secondly, they are referred to as overseers. This indicates his responsibility of oversight and accountability for the flock. It refers to his caring watch over God's people (I Timothy 3:1; Philippians 1:1).
- **SHEPHERDS/PASTORS:** Lastly, they are called shepherds or pastors. This indicates his heart attitude as well as his activity of tending to the varied, individual needs of the flock. It indicates his willingness to lay down his life in self-service (Ephesians 4:11).

Note: In Acts 20:17, 28; Titus 1:5-7; and I Peter 5:1-3, it can be seen that these three terms are used interchangeably of the same man. It can also be seen in Philippians 1:1 where reference is made to the church leaders as overseers without mention of elders, indicating that an interchangeable reference was understood.

An Elder's Perspective of Himself

Third is an elder's perspective of himself. An elder is to recognize that his role is not so much an official position as it is a ministry. He is to be known by his work and character, not by his election to a position.

An Elder is to see himself as a Slave.

- He is a bond slave (*doulos*): Romans 1:1; I Timothy 2:24; Mark 10:44; Galatians 1:10. In relation to God, an elder is to see himself as one who is in loving and willing bondage to Jesus Christ. He is devoted to Christ to the

point of disregard for his own interests. Therefore, his ultimate concern is for Christ's name and interest, not his own.

- He is a galley slave (*huperetes*): I Corinthians 4:1; Acts 13:5. He also is to see himself like a galley slave (an under-rower on a ship). Thus, he is constantly viewing others as more important than himself. He views himself as one who is to labor hard as a subordinate, seeking to accomplish the requests of His superior. As such a subordinate, he realizes he is lowly and expendable (I Corinthians 4:1).

An Elder is to see himself as a Servant (*diakonos*).

In relation to others, he sees his assignment as one of a servant and minister. He is one whose activity is to hasten after and pursue the needs of others. Similarly to Jesus his Lord, his attitude is not of one that demands to be served, but one that he gives himself away as he serves (Matthew 20:28). It is manifested in his willingness to sacrifice and to be inconvenienced.

An Elder is to see himself as a Steward (Titus 1:7).

An elder is also to see himself as a steward, that is, a manager or a caretaker of another's property. An elder must recognize that he is being held accountable for every facet of Christ's church (Hebrews 13:17). His management and care involves more than the spiritual and social needs of the flock. He must also see that the

CHAPTER SIX

The Recognition of Elders in the Church

- **The Holy Spirit's Role in the Making of Elders**
- **The Church's Role in the Making of Elders**

knowledge and understanding of the doctrines of Scripture. Then it involves a personal conviction of the significance and truth of the Scripture. This enables the person to deal clearly and effectively with error.

Evaluation: Do you possess a reasonably good grasp of major Bible doctrines, enough to refute a heretic?

corporate possessions and property that God has provided through members of the flock is managed rightly, fairly and profitably.

An Elder is to see himself as a Shepherd.

Lastly, an elder is to see himself as a shepherd. As such, he is to be involved personally in the lives of the sheep. Shepherding has two facets specified by Jesus (John 21:15-18). Together they constitute the main responsibility of an elder. First, he is responsible to feed the sheep with the Word of God (John 21:15, 17). Jesus stressed this duty. He mentions that the lambs (new Christians) are to be fed (John 21:15). Then, He states it again, this time in reference to His sheep in general, or the whole flock (John 21:17). Second, as a shepherd, an elder is responsible for all the spiritual needs of the flock. Jesus said, "Shepherd My sheep" (John 21:17). Shepherding, while including teaching and preaching, is more inclusive. It involves protection, admonition, exhortation, consolation and restoration (Ezekiel 34:2-8). All is to be done by involvement and intimacy on an individual, personal level (John 10:14). The dual mention of feeding the flock the Word of God shows the central place of preaching and teaching in the shepherding ministry of an elder. Nothing is to distract from this primary responsibility. That the apostles took this seriously is evident by their example in Acts 6:2-7. Paul also stresses it in his admonition to Timothy in II Timothy 4:1-2.

This Chart Shows the Emphasis Jesus Made in the Responsibility of an Elder as a Shepherd

John 21:15-17

Verse 15	FEED: (<i>Bosko</i>) Involves sound expository teaching preaching	LAMBS: Jesus' first concern is new believers
Verse 16	SHEPHERD: (<i>Poimen</i>) Involves encouraging protecting, etc.	MY SHEEP: Endearing term refers to all
Verse 17	FEED: (<i>Bosko</i>) Mentions teaching again showing the place of central teaching and preaching: (cf. II Timothy 4)	SHEEP: Again, this refers to all His flock.

Not a New Convert (*Neophutos*):

A new convert is someone “newly planted.” He is a person who has not accumulated enough Christian experience, both in victory and defeat, to remain sound-minded. A novice is marked by the fact that he thinks too highly of himself (the word conceited means to “wrap in midst”). He often loses perspective and is either filled with pride or a critical, judgmental spirit in relation to others.

Evaluation: Are you aware of your need for continual growth and experience, or are you not teachable by others who have more experience or insight?

Able to Teach (*Didakitos*):

Able to teach is the capacity to communicate the Word of God. It involves not only the mechanics of communicating orderly and clearly, but also the manner in which it is communicated. Truth is not to be conveyed in a proud, know-it-all spirit. Paul associates it with not being quarrelsome, but being patient and gentle, even with those who oppose the truth (II Timothy 2:24-26).

Evaluation: Are you reasonably able to communicate the word of God in an edifying, clear and living manner?

Hold Fast the Faithful Word (*Antichomenon Tou Pistou Logou*):

First, holding fast the Word involves a sound

Good Home Manager (*Kalos Priostamenon*):

To manage involves the idea of preside, govern or superintend. It is watchfulness over the condition of the home in all areas—spiritual, financial, social, etc. A good manager does not domineer (John 13:14-17). He delegates responsibilities and involves the whole family, especially the wife, in the decision-making process. If he has children, he disciplines and instructs them with dignity, not humiliating them or causing them to be embittered.

Evaluation: Do you manage your household affairs in a commendable way, or is there chaos and disorder in your home?

Children Under Control (*Tekna Hupotage*):

Children who are under control are children who have a respect for authority and demonstrate it through a basically obedient attitude. If they are older, they are not accused of rebellion and dissipation (Titus 1:6). That is, they are not unrestrained and insubordinate.

Evaluation: Do your children show a respect for authority, not only yours, but others as well?

His Ministry Life

The final area of qualifications has to do with a man's ministry to the body of Christ and his handling of the Word.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Responsibilities of an Elder

- **The General Responsibilities**
- **The Specific Responsibilities**
- **The Exercise of Their Responsibilities**

The Responsibilities of an Elder

The functions and responsibilities of an elder are clearly delineated in the New Testament. These responsibilities are to be given the highest priority. The very well-being of the flock is at stake (Acts 6:2-4; I Timothy 4: 13-16). Therefore, nothing is to distract from their pursuit.

The General Responsibilities

The first responsibilities are general in nature. They are the first fundamental tasks that God has placed in the elder's hands. They entail the primary objectives of New Testament leadership.

Equip the Saints for Ministry

An elder as a shepherd (pastor) is primarily responsible to "equip the saints for the work of the ministry for the building up of the body of Christ" (Ephesians 4:12). To equip is to "get something ready for action, or outfitting it to handle tasks assigned" (Matthew 4:21). Biblically, the ministry belongs to every believer. Christianity is not a spectator sport, but a battle where every believer is a soldier with a task to fulfill. The duty of shepherding, for which every elder is responsible, is to see that the flock is prepared for individual ministry.

- Equipping to personal maturity

Equipping involves, first of all, bringing

Good Reputation in the World (*Martutian Kalon*):

Good comes from the word which means "pleasing, beautiful, commendable, admirable." It was that which had harmonious completeness, balance and proportion. A good testimony is a life that, first of all, is balanced, not extreme or eccentric. Secondly, it is a life where nothing unethical or questionable is done in the eyes of the world.

Evaluation: Are there associates or acquaintances that would question your reputation for any reason?

His Family Life

The fourth qualification is in the area of the man's family life. This is perhaps the most critical of all.

Husband of One Wife (*Mias Gunaikos Andra*):

Literally it says, a one-woman man. The stress is on the quality of the man's relationship with his wife. He is loyal to her. He is not flirtatious. He is happily married and satisfied (content) with his wife.

Evaluation: Is your marriage stable and growing? Are you content with your wife and are you careful not to relate to other women in a way that could be misinterpreted?

His Social Life

The third area of qualifications has to do with a man's use of his possessions and his reputation in the world.

Hospitable (*Philozenos*):

The Greek word for hospitable means "love of strangers." A hospitable person is someone who uses his home to reach out to people in need of love and encouragement. It is an attitude that ministers, sometimes in inconvenience, without complaint as it extends warmth to people through home and resources (Luke 14: 12-14).

Evaluation: Do you tend to extend yourself and your home only to your friends, or do you receive new people as well, and that without complaint?

Free From the Love of Money (*Aphilargurous*):

The person free from the love of money is basically content with what he has. He has a biblically balanced perspective of money and material things. He does not allow the making of money to distract him from his ministry nor his walk with God. He knows that true values are eternal, not the temporal things of this life (II Corinthians 4:18).

Evaluation: Would those closest to you say you are basically content with what you have, or does money easily sidetrack you from spiritual priorities?

believers to maturity in their character and walk with Christ. They are to grow in their comprehension of Christ, their communion with Christ and their character likeness to Christ (Ephesians 4:13-15).

- Equipping for ministry involvement

Equipping also involves bringing believers to faithful and fruitful involvement in ministry that builds up the body of Christ (Ephesians 4:12, 16). God has placed the ministry in the hands of the people. The responsibility of elders is to see that it becomes a reality in the church. Without mutual ministry on every level, the church will not grow qualitatively or quantitatively as Christ desires it to (Ephesians 4:16).

Be an Example to the Flock

An elder is also to be an example to the flock. The greatest equipping, discipling tool is modeling. Jesus appointed twelve that they may be with Him (Mark 3:14). The vital role of modeling a godly life marked by the right priorities, principles and practices cannot be overemphasized. God has placed this vital role primarily in the hands of elders (I Timothy 4:12). Paul continually pointed to it in his life (II Timothy 3:10; I Thessalonians 1:6), as did Jesus (John 13:13-15). Elders are to be involved in discipling and reproducing godly, Christ-like believers. The primary method is to exemplify Christ-likeness themselves.

MANDATORY AREAS OF MODELING

1. Obedience to Scripture regardless of what it involves
2. Faithfulness in ministry without complaint
3. Faith in the face of adversity
4. Sacrificial spirit, liberality in sharing of possessions and belongings
5. Regular and sacrificial giving to the assembly
6. Faithful and punctual in service and attendance
7. Hospitality and open home to newcomers and the family of God
8. Growing marriage and godly family
9. Victory in overcoming sin and the display of the fruit of the spirit
10. Maintaining of unity by a reconciling attitude

Evaluation: Do you have a tendency to act based on what God says is right, or are your decisions or actions easily influenced by pressure from men?

Devout (*Hosios*):

The meaning of devout is “undefiled by sin or uncontaminated.” A devout person is one whose attitude does not condone or accept evil. He abstains even from the appearance of evil (I Thessalonians 5:22). On the positive side, he has an attitude that respects and holds in high regard the things valued by Scripture.

Evaluation: Do you abstain from sin in your activity, but in your attitude you convey that you would partake if you could? Is your devotion to the Lord such that in activity and in attitude you do not condone sin?

Self-Control (*Egkrates*):

Self-control is “having power over, or mastering, curbing, restraining oneself.” It is a strength of character given by the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22) that enables a person to master his impulses and drives and channel them to the right use. Its foremost evidence is in the control of the tongue (James 3:2).

Evaluation: Would you say your general conscious effort is to allow the Holy Spirit to control your speech, impulses and drives?

interests first or the interests of others?

Not Quick Tempered (*Orgilos*):

A person who is quick tempered is someone who is prone to anger. It is an anger (*orge*) which, in reference to God, is an abiding internal attitude of displeasure or vengeance. With man, it is someone who quickly holds a grudge or harbors embittered ill feelings.

Evaluation: Do you deal with feelings in a biblical way, or do you quickly hold grudges and harbor ill feelings?

Loving What is Good (*Philagathos*):

This is a quality, which not only appreciates goodness in others, but finds pleasure and enjoyment in doing good to others as well. A good person uses his time, efforts, possessions, influence, etc. for the benefit and blessing of others (Romans 12:20; Matthew 7:9-11).

Evaluation: Do you have a tendency to use your resources to bring benefit and blessing to others? Are you a sharing person, or do you keep too tight a fist on your resources?

Just (*Dikaious*):

A just person is someone who seeks to be right and fair. He can be counted on to do the right thing. He will not be partial, or show favoritism, nor will he violate his principles under pressure.

The Specific Responsibilities

Next are the specific responsibilities of elders. These entail the care and oversight of the flock.

He is to rule the church (*Proisteme*). I Timothy 5:17; I Thessalonians 5:12

Elders are to rule the church. However, their rule is to be that of shepherds. The basis of their rule is not the power of punishment or position, but rather the respect of Christ-like character. The word “rule” means “to set or place before, to be over, and to preside.” It was used in the Greek world of a man appointed to regulate a new colony or acquisition. Elders are responsible for presiding over the affairs of the church. Their responsibility is that of a manager. As such, they are to plan, direct, delegate and evaluate the ministries and business of the church.

He is to guide/lead the church (*Hegeomai*). Hebrews 13:7, 17, 24

An elder is not only to rule the flock, but he is to lead it. Leading is closely related to ruling. The word means “to go before; to have authority; leading as respects influence; controlling in counsel” (Acts 15:22). In the noun form, it was the common term for a governor. It indicates an elder’s prerogative in taking the initiative in the church. Among other things, this would entail setting spiritual objectives, operational objectives, implementing the practice of Scripture in all areas (including discipline), and taking the lead in the recognition and appointment of ministry leaders and church officers.

He is to guard and protect the flock (*Prosecho, Gregoreo*). Acts 20:28-31

A further responsibility of elders is to guard and protect the flock. They are to be careful to prevent the inroads of false doctrine (Titus 1:9-13), and are to watch for those who cause divisions (Acts 20:28-31). Elders are to constantly be on the alert for the dangers of false teachers and to contend for the unity of the body. Their pursuit of this is to know no limits (John 10:12).

He is to watch/admonish (*Agrupneo, Nouthesis*).

Lastly, it is the elder's responsibility to watch for and admonish the flock. They are described as those who "keep watch over your souls" (Hebrews 13:17), and "those who give you instruction [admonish]" (I Thessalonians 5:14). "To watch" (*agrupneo*) comes from the word that means "to be sleepless or keep awake and thus to exercise constraint, or to have vigilance over something" (Luke 21:36). Elders are never to be listless in their care of the flock. They are to take note of the influences on each individual sheep that could prove detrimental to his or her spiritual well-being. They also are "to give instruction." The idea is not public teaching, but personal admonition (*nouthesis*). They are to lovingly confront individuals to bring about needed correction and restoration.

The Exercise of Their Responsibilities

The responsibilities of elders stated above will now be delineated as they find their practical

equitable, suitable, fair." It is probably best described as "reasonableness." It is a quality of a person who knows when to be flexible and yield even when he is in the right. It is a willingness to listen and yield out of a sense of fairness when personal rights could still be demanded. (James 3:17; Acts 24:4; I Peter 2:18).

Evaluation: Would you say you are, generally speaking, willing to listen with a yielding and fair approach in your dealings with people?

Uncontentious (*Amachon*):

The verb means "to fight, used of armed combatants, or those who engaged in hand to hand struggle." He is a contentious person who has an argumentative, quarrelsome attitude. He insists on getting the last word in to prove his own supposed superiority (Titus 3:9; II Timothy 2:24).

Evaluation: Do you tend to be an argumentative, quarrelsome person if things do not go your way?

Not Self-Willed (*Authade*):

The word is a compound consisting of "self" and "please." It is a person who is a self-pleaser, interested in advancing his own interests. He insists on having his own way. He has trouble being supportive unless he is in complete agreement. He does not convey a team spirit or a sense of loyalty.

Evaluation: Do you insist on and seek your own

decorated tombstones and well trimmed lamps (I Timothy 2:10; Matthew 12:44; 23:29; 25:7). Home, dress, business, etc. are in order and give good appearance and representation to others.

Evaluation: Is your life well ordered and arranged, or is there a disarray, procrastination and neglect in the day in-day out business of life?

Not Addicted to Wine (*Parionos*):

To be “not addicted to wine” refers to a quality of character which is not dependent on or dominated by any external influence. There is no bondage or dependence on anything but Christ. Today the issue may extend to drugs, tobacco, food, etc.

Evaluation: Do you find yourself dependent on drugs, alcohol, cigarettes or anything else, or do you turn to Christ in time of weakness?

Not Pugnacious (*Plektēs*):

A pugnacious person is one who is a “bruiser ready for a blow.” He is someone who suddenly, sometimes at the slightest provocation, flies off the handle and strikes out at someone. It is an easily irritated and upset person with a short fuse.

Evaluation: Do you have a tendency to lash out at others either verbally or physically?

Gentle (*Epiekē*):

The gentle person is one who is “seemly,

outworking in the oversight of the church. The oversight and responsibilities of elders can be categorized in five areas.

The Purpose and General Direction of the Church

First, the elders have the responsibility to oversee, guard and preserve the general purpose, direction and development of the church body according to the Word of God. To accomplish this they have responsibility for the teaching of the Scripture and training by word and by example.

The Policies of the Church

Next, they have the responsibilities of being and causing others to be good stewards of God’s resources, both of money and of time. This entails the following further responsibilities:

- Approving the annual budget and safeguarding the collection and distribution of funds through appropriate financial policies and controls.
- Establishing and causing to be developed and maintained the appropriate committees and policies to enhance stewardship and organization in the church.

The Personnel of the Church

Elders also have the responsibility to oversee the personnel and leadership development of the church. This includes the following:

- Approving and appointment of all officers and major ministry leaders. This includes elders, deacons and other key ministry positions.
- Approving the selection and hiring of the pastor/teacher and other pastoral staff.

The Purity of the Church

Elders are also responsible for preserving the purity of the church. They maintain and cause to be maintained church discipline according to the principles and purpose of the Word of God.

The Personal Oversight of Specific Ministries in the Church

It is also the responsibility of each elder to personally oversee one area of ministry in the church. He is to have direct involvement and oversight of that area and is responsible to do the following:

- Shepherd and teach ministry leaders in that area so that they may, in turn, shepherd and teach others.
- Enforce and cause to be enforced approved policies and procedures.
- Recommend to the board of elders appropriate ministry leaders, policy and/or procedural changes to enhance that area of ministry.
- Mediate interpersonal relationship problems.

His Personal Life

Temperate (*Naphalion*):

The word basically means “sober, not intoxicated.” In the spiritual and ethical realm, it is spiritual alertness and watchfulness (I Peter 5:8, I Thessalonians 5:6-8). It is a sensitivity to staying on the track spiritually, not allowing anything that would distract spiritual progress.

Evaluation: Are you easily sidetracked from spiritual progress and ministry? Are you careful to not allow anything in your life to distract you from spiritual growth and effectiveness?

Prudent (*Sophronos*):

It is translated “bring to their senses” in the KJV in Titus 2:4. The word conveys the idea of thinking logically and seeing things as they really are. It is objectivity, not allowing oneself to be excessively self-absorbed. It is the ability to be sensible and objective. (Mark 5:15; II Corinthians 5:13)

Evaluation: Do you have a levelheaded, objective outlook on life and problems, or are you subject to excessive moodiness and a tendency to overreact?

Respectable (*Kosmion*):

To be respectable is to be orderly and well arranged in every facet of life. It is a word used of a woman’s dress, a well-ordered house,

The Qualifications of an Elder

Elders are men raised up by the Holy Spirit. Only God can qualify a man for the ministry of oversight of His flock. The primary indicator that the Holy Spirit has prepared a man is in his character. The New Testament puts far more emphasis on what a man is than what he does. The qualifications of an elder are listed in I Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:6-9. There are twenty specific marks that are to be consistently demonstrated before a man is to be considered for the position of elder. Because of their critical importance, each one will be dealt with specifically and an evaluation will be given.

His General Testimony and Maturity

The first qualification is general in nature and encompasses the man's overall character.

Above Reproach (*anepilamptos*):

The word is a compound that means "to be apprehended; that which cannot be laid hold of; or not open to censure." It does not mean to be perfect or without sin. To be above reproach is to have no aspect of character where he can characteristically be faulted.

Evaluation: Is there anything about you for which someone could bring accusation and support it?

- Represent that area of ministry needs before the elder board.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Qualifications of an Elder

- **General Testimony and Maturity**
- **Personal Life**
- **Social Life**
- **Family Life**
- **Ministry Life**