

## **CHOOSING OUR LEADERS (2):** The Nuts and Bolts of Biblical Eldership

### **I. WELCOME / PRAYER / REVIEW**

A. The Necessity of Church Government

B. The Kinds of Church Government

C. NT Teaching on Church Govt.

1. God Has Ordained that Elders Should Lead the Churches

2. Elder, Overseer, and Pastor (Shepherds) are three different words for the same office

3. There are only two offices in the local church: Elders and Deacons. The deacons assist the elders and serve the people, but have no authority to govern the church

4. There should be a Team (or Board) of co-equal Elders leading each church

5. The Board of Elders has three basic responsibilities, and authority from God to execute them: a) Minister the Word of God, with a special emphasis on equipping the saints for the work of service; b) oversee the flock of God, with a view to its safety, nurture, and healing; c) govern the affairs of the church; i.e., use its God-given authority with a view to maintaining sound doctrine, ethical living, and the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, all with the result that the church consistently enjoys the presence and power of God in her midst.

D. Moral of the Story: The NT places great responsibility upon the Elders, and invests great authority in them. Therefore, the members of the church—the people who choose their elders—need to know what elders actually do, and if they are qualified to do it! Today we will focus on the first of these: The Nuts and Bolts of Biblical Eldership (i.e., What the Board of Elders Actually Does).

Note: Much of this material appears in the constitution that I have drawn up for IBC (Immanuel Baptist Church).

### **II. THE ELDERS AND THE THREE LEGGED STOOL: A SIMPLE PICTURE OF THE LOCAL CHURCH**

A. The NT gives us a simple, three-fold picture of the composition of a local church:

A local church, gathered and fully organized according to the mind of Christ, consists of officers and members. The officers appointed by Christ are overseers or elders, and deacons. They are to be chosen and set apart by the church called and gathered in this way, for the distinctive purpose of administering ordinances and for carrying out any other power or duty Christ entrusts them with or calls them to. This pattern is to be continued to the end of the age.<sup>15</sup>—LBC 1689

## B. The Three Legs of the Stool

- #1 The Elders: They are responsible to create and/or oversee all the ministries of the church: E.g., 1) The selection of new elders; 2) the formation and operation of the Board of Deacons; 3) the ministry of the Word in preaching and teaching; 4) church discipline, 5) the vetting and induction of new members, 6) the formation and/or operation of various church committees, ministries, meetings, and activities; 7) the financial, legal, and clerical affairs of the church; 8) the appointment, compensation, and dismissal of vocational pastors and other employees; 9) the care and comfort of individual members and their families; and, 10) any other necessary ministries in the church

MP: The Buck Stops with the Elders!

MP: But they CAN'T—and are not MEANT—to do it all! So, under Christ, they DELEGATE authority:

- #2 The Deacons: They serve by administering benevolence (Acts 6, 1 Tim. 3:8f)
- #3 The Members: They are called and spiritually gifted ministers of God's grace, leading or participating in the various ministries of the church.

<sup>11</sup> And He Himself gave some *as* apostles, some *as* prophets, some *as* evangelists, and some *as* pastors and teachers, <sup>12</sup> for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, for the building up of the body of Christ, <sup>13</sup> until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. – Eph. 4

## III. THE COMPOSITION OF THE ELDER BOARD

A. Basic Definition: *The Board of Elders is a team of qualified men, differing in spiritual gifts, but equal in decision-making authority*

- **Plurality/Team of Qualified Men**

<sup>23</sup> And when they had appointed *elders* in every church with prayer and fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed. – Acts 14:23

- **Differing in spiritual gifts:**

<sup>17</sup> Let the elders who well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and teaching. – 1 Tim. 5:1

<sup>6</sup> Having then gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, *let us exercise them*: if prophecy, according to the proportion of *our* faith; <sup>7</sup> if service, in *our* service; he who teaches, in *his* teaching; <sup>8</sup> he who exhorts, in *his* exhortation; he who gives, with sincerity<sup>3</sup>; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness. – Rom. 12:6

- **Equal in Decision-Making Authority:**

1. Acts 6: Now in those days, when the disciples were growing in number, there arose a complaint on the part of the Hellenists against the Hebrews, because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. 2 So the twelve called the entire community of the disciples together, and they said, "It is not

right for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables” . . . And when the apostles had prayed, they laid *their* hands on them.

2. Acts 15: <sup>24</sup> Since *we* have heard that certain men—to whom *we* gave no such instruction—have gone out from among us<sup>12</sup> and troubled you with *their* words, unsettling your souls, <sup>25</sup> it seemed good *to us*, *having reached complete agreement on this matter*, to send chosen brothers<sup>13</sup> to you, along with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, <sup>26</sup> men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

- Note: The elder’s spiritual gifts and corresponding job descriptions may be used to identify their role on the Board and in the church: E.g., Pastor of Teaching and Preaching, Pastor of Counseling, Pastor of Church Administration, Evangelism and Missions, Visitation, etc. (Note: The people can exercise leadership in some of these areas too)

## B. The Elder Board May Have One or More *Vocational* Pastors

1. Defined: A vocational pastor/elder is someone who is employed by the church, whether full or part time.

In the same way, the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel. – 1 Cor. 9:14

<sup>4</sup>No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life, so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier. <sup>5</sup>Also if anyone competes as an athlete, he does not win the prize unless he competes according to the rules. <sup>6</sup>The hard-working farmer ought to be the first to receive his share of the crops. <sup>7</sup>Consider what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything. – 1 Tim. 2:4f

2. Note: Vocational Pastors should normally arise from within the church, but may be sought without, if necessary; like all elders, they are selected by the existing Board of Elders after close consultation with the congregation.

## C. As a rule, the Board of Elders will have a leader, a first among equals:

- Peter on Pentecost (Acts 2)
- James in Jerusalem

<sup>17</sup> And when we arrived in Jerusalem, the brothers received us with joy. <sup>18</sup> On the following day, Paul went with us to *see* James; and all the elders were present. – Acts 21:15f

- Possibly, this will be someone with the gift of leadership (and the vision that often goes with it): Rom. 12:8 “ . . . he who leads, with diligence.”
- Possibly, the elders will agree to rotate in and out of the Team Leader position, to avoid the exaltation of one man, and to impress upon the members that Christ alone is our one true Leader/Pastor/Overseer (Heb. 13:20)

#### D. The Elders and the People Must be Diligent to Maintain the Spirit of Service and Brotherhood among the Elders

- No hierarchy in the Elder Board (e.g., Senior, Associate, Assistant Pastor, etc.)
- No titles that would elevate the Elders above the people:

Peter, John, Paul . . . never took titles or used them when addressing or speaking of other leaders. They just used their names.

<sup>8</sup> But as for you, do not be called Rabbi; for One is your Teacher, and you all are brothers.<sup>9</sup> Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven.<sup>10</sup> And do not be called leaders; for One is your Leader, *even* the Christ.<sup>11</sup> Rather, he who is greatest among you must be your servant.<sup>12</sup> And whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted. – Mt. 23:8f

<sup>25</sup> But Jesus called them to *Himself* and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and that *their* great men wield authority over them.<sup>26</sup> But among you, it shall not be so. Rather, whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant;<sup>27</sup> and whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave—<sup>28</sup> even as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.” – Mt. 20:25f

<sup>5</sup> Therefore I exhort the *elders* among you, I who am *your* fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory *yet* to be revealed:<sup>2</sup> *Shepherd* the flock of God among you, serving as *overseers*, not under compulsion, but willingly, according to God; not out of greed for material gain, but eagerly;<sup>3</sup> **not as lording it over those allotted to your care, but becoming examples to the flock;**<sup>4</sup> and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that never fades away. – 1 Peter 5:1f

### IV. DECISIONS OF THE BOARD OF ELDERS

#### A. The Supreme Goal: The will and leading of the Lord, the Head of the Church

<sup>18</sup> And Jesus drew near and spoke to them, saying, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me.<sup>19</sup> Go, therefore, *and* make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,<sup>20</sup> teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you all the days *that remain, even* until the end of the age!” – Mt. 28:18f

<sup>9</sup> . . . having made known to us the mystery of His will according to His good pleasure, *a mystery* that He *has now* set forth in Him<sup>10</sup> for the purpose of an administration<sup>5</sup> of the fullness of the times: namely, the heading up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things upon the earth. – Eph. 1

<sup>22</sup> And He placed all things in subjection beneath His feet, and gave Him, as head over all, to the church,<sup>23</sup> which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all. – Eph. 2:22-23

#### B. The Means by Which the Elders (and the Church) Reach this Goal

- Prayer (and Fasting)

<sup>2</sup> And while they were fasting and worshiping the Lord, the Holy Spirit said, “Now separate Barnabas and Saul to Me<sup>2</sup> for the work to which I have called them.”<sup>3</sup> And when they had fasted, prayed, and laid *their* hands upon them, they sent *them* off. – Acts 13:2f

- Consultation and Consensus among the Elders

<sup>25</sup> it seemed good to us, having reached complete agreement on this matter, to send chosen brothers<sup>13</sup> to you, along with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, <sup>26</sup> men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. – Acts 15

<sup>10</sup> Now I plead with you, brothers, through the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and *that* there be no schisms among you, but *that* you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. – 1 Cor. 1:10

Note: If necessary, consultation with leaders outside the church, whether in our denomination or community (Acts 15)

- Consultation with the congregation / Open Door Policy (Acts 6, 15)

Note: There is no record in the NT of any church voting; only of leaders deciding after consultation with the people (Reading: Eric Burd)

## **V. SAFEGUARD AGAINST ABUSES BY TYRANNICAL ELDERS**

A. Bad Shepherds Happen (Ezekiel 34, 3 John)

B. Safeguards Against (written into proposed IBC Constitution)

- Careful vetting of prospective elders, both by existing elders and the people
- A congregational vote on prospective elders, with existing elders *required* to secure 2/3 congregational approval before they receive a candidate onto the Board
- Annual congregational re-affirmation of Elders, with the same 2/3 rule applying
- A commitment to biblical church discipline of all members, including elders. This could include the right of a committee of (7) people to petition the Board for the removal of any elder
- A commitment to securing a *team* of Elders as soon as possible, lest any one man should hold too much power in the church
- A commitment among the elders to seek unanimity in their decisions
- A commitment among the elders to function as spiritual fathers within the congregation, and so to consult regularly with the members of the church family, listening carefully to their ideas, wishes, and concerns.

- A constitutionally required recognition that the physical and financial holdings of the church belong to the corporation, and that the disposition thereof is subject exclusively to the people through their votes to approve the annual budget, special expenditures, and the purchase or sale of property.
- 10) In the unlikely event of a stalemate between the Board of Elders and the congregation, a constitutional requirement that the elders bring the matter to trusted peace-makers outside the church for final mediation, arbitration, and reconciliation.

## **VI. CONCLUSION**

- Next Week: Qualifications and Selection of Elders