



Biblical Eldership

Christian Leadership



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This is an online series of lectures on Biblical Eldership by John Piper, Founder and teacher of the organization, Desiring God. He holds a DTheol from the University of Munich, BDiv, from Fuller Seminary and a BA from Wheaton College.

Chapter 1 – Principles of Local Church Governance

The purpose of the local church is to function as the body of Christ to advance God's kingdom in the world by displaying God's glory, God's wisdom and the authority and power of Christ. All New Testament churches had elders. We can apply scriptural principles and practical considerations to train, choose and establish a framework for the ministry of elders so they can encourage and lead individuals and the church as whole to live out their faith in the community.

A. Introduction

This is the TBI seminar on Biblical Eldership. It is part of the larger fulfillment on a course called Issues in Spiritual Leadership. Tract one is for a lay people who want a certificate saying that they have taken the course. We really encourage our people at Bethlehem Institute to especially do this if they are moving toward eldership someday or in a decade or so. Then there is a tract two for the few people taking this for seminary credit.

In Acts 20 we see that Paul assembles the elders from Miletus or from Ephesus at Miletus and gives one of his moving final sermons of his. He says in verse 28 to pay attention to yourselves and to all the flock in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers to care for the church of God which he obtained with the blood of his own son or with his own blood. So the church belongs to God; he obtained the church at the price of his own blood and therefore the role of the elders to take heed to all the flock is made in order to have extraordinary significance because of how precious the church is to God.

I want to first point you to some different texts, the first being Alexander Straut's *Biblical Eldership* and then Hezekiah Harvey's *The Church*, a 19th century Baptist person who also wrote a book on *The Pastor*. Another book is the *Reformed Pastor* by Richard Baxter. You can't get much more discouraging than that book because it is so good; the stakes are so high and the pattern he sets is just so awesome in the story of his own life. He is one of those Spurgeon like people and so when you read them, you feel like quitting. *The Ruling Elder* by Samuel Miller who has a Presbyterian

background of the 19th century and then the first book I read after I came to Bethlehem on the *Christian Ministry* by Charles Bridges. I thought it was great and I still think it is great. Then, there is *The Elder's Handbook* by Lester Dekoster and Gerard Berghoef of the Christian Reformed Church of America.

Well, I grew up as a Southern Baptist in Greenville, South Carolina and never heard of elders. Had I heard about them, I am sure I would have thought they were Presbyterian. I went to seminary and skipped all the polity courses because I thought that I was going to be a teacher which I was for about six years. These things can be learned on the job just as effectively as in seminary. There you need to do exegesis, theology and church history which you will not do otherwise. You have to know eldership because your church has to be run. You will figure out a way to lead the church, you as the pastor. I came here in 1980 and inherited a system of government which was deacon governed. There was a council of deacons, twenty-four of them altogether. Every year there was a ballot with two choices for every office. So, we needed about two hundred people on this ballot but the church only had about three hundred people. This is what happens if you are locked into a rigid structured constitution with many boards, committees and offices. It is a dreadful mistake. One of the mistakes, you will have losers everything you have an election and if the church doesn't have the size to warrant that many candidates, it is a prescription for carnal leadership. There are churches being governed by fleshly people with no spiritual life all over the country because of constitutions that mandate certain levels of leadership. It becomes a popularity contest. I told them that they were doing duties that belonged to elders, 1st Timothy 7:1-3. So, so the years they began to fill a little uneasy with this. They realized that there should be a clear understanding of responsibilities that belongs to whom and to where the authority is invested. Later, I preached a series of sermons on Acts 20 on eldership.

The deacons undertook about four years of study and work on this. Eventually elders were installed in the church. I think now we have a very biblical structure of what a church should have, but whether we carry it through and implement all of it is something we need to pay attention to. There are no standing committees in this church anymore. There is only one council of elders; it has a flexible size now with eighteen people serving. All of the ordained pastors serve on the council of elders by definition. Whenever you are doing church government, it will always be a balancing out of what is clear in the Bible and what is seemingly the work of wisdom, given the culture and the kind of church you have. So, the Lord has treated me with tenderness over the eighteen years I've been here. There has always been a collegiality and commodity that is simply amazing. I think this is partly

owing to the Lord's tenderness toward me in knowing what I can and cannot cope with and the prayers for this church along with a hundred and twenty-six year history to the faithfulness of the word of God. And I think there are other practical means that the Lord has used to preserve this kind of unity. We don't have a body of deacons as they are needed for various things; they can be chosen when needed and we don't have any standing committees. The elders create whatever bodies that seems to be helpful. They have created children's committees and mission's committees along with building committees and others. So, the elders govern the church by created and abolishing these committees. They have the flexibility to respond to ministry. Committees themselves create the idea that ministry is serving on a board or committee. This is not ministry. Those boards are to free people who want to do ministry. Ministry is not board work, ministry is in people's homes, at the hospitals and on the streets; ministry is where needs are.

B. The Importance and preciousness and purpose of the church of Jesus Christ in the world.

You can't talk about Biblical eldership without laying the foundation of the church. What is the church? Why church and what is the goal of the church? I want to highlight some of the names of the church and the ways in which the New Testament sees the church.

1. The Bride of Christ - We start off with the Bride of Christ where in Ephesians 5:25 it says for husbands to love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such things, that she might be holy and without blemish. So one picture that elders should have in their minds that they are serving the bride of Christ; I am laboring to remove spots and wrinkles; I am laboring to enhance this glory; this splendor. And every time it seems to be low and nitty gritty, you pause and pray that the Lord reminds us that this body of people I'm serving is more important than the U.S. Navy or Pentagon or the Senate or the House of Representatives. This is the Bride of Christ. It is the body of Christ universal and the body of Christ local.

2. The Body of Christ – Colossians 1:18-24: He is the head of the body, which is the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he himself might have first place in everything. So the body of Christ is the church universal and it is the church local as well.

3. The Body of Christ (Local) – 1st Corinthians 12:21-27. In 1st Corinthians 12, the eye cannot say to the hand, I have not need of you nor again can the head say to the feet, I have no need of you. On the contrary, all the parts of the body are indispensable. Now you are the body of Christ.

What is remarkable here in 1st Corinthians is that the head is not Christ here. The image is different; the head cannot say to the feet, I have no need of you. This is part of the analogy; he is thinking of the body differently than it was thought of when he wrote Colossians. He is thinking of the local church as the local expression of that universal body. He is thinking of every member as part of that body relating properly so that none can say that I don't need you. The church is the body of Christ which is probably why Paul was spoken to by Christ on the Damascus Road with the words, 'why do you persecute me?' When you put my people jail, you persecute me.

4. The Household and Dwelling of God – Ephesians 2:19-22. So then you are no long strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in which the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit. This house and this temple are being built; the people of God are being built into a dwelling of God. There is a way in which God inhabits the church that is different from the way he inhabits a soul and in the way he inhabits nature. His omnipresence is focused and active in a different way in the church than anywhere else. That is why the expectations for the gathered church in worship and business can be so different. When you are assembled, my Spirit is with you; so, a dwelling of God is what the elders serve.

5. The Pillar and Support of the Truth – 1st Timothy 3:15: I'm writing this to you so that you may know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God. This could be written as a banner over this meeting tonight. I teach hopefully biblically so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God which is the church of the Living God, the pillar and support of the truth. That is an amazing calling. There is no other institution in society with this mission; it isn't the university; it is not Christian colleges and seminaries. It is the church which is the pillar and support of the truth. That means if we do our job well, the truth stands and if we do our job poorly, it can crumble; generations will suffer if we don't fulfill that mission. This is the universal church coming in local expressions. If you say universal church and leave it unspecified in the air, it has no concrete place where anything happens. You have saints in heaven, born and scattered all over the world with various peoples. It is when it comes concrete in local expressions, it becomes a functional reality. But I wouldn't want to make a hard and fast distinction here. This is a high calling especially relevant for elders; why? We are going to see that elders are charged and they are the only people who are charged in the New Testament Church with teaching or in Titus 1:9 being those

who correct with right doctrine. They are the guardians of right doctrine. The elders are called to teach; nobody else is called to do that in the church except the elders.

6. To Display His Glory – 1st Peter 2:9: So what is the goal of the church? Because if you say what is the goal of the eldership? It would be something that the church should become. 1st Peter 2:9 says that you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellences of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. This is the goal; so that you may proclaim the excellences of him who has called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Elder should do their work so as to enable that to happen. I said that the only people charged to be guardians of true doctrine are the elders. There are others for sure who are responsible in all of their teachings, like the older women in relation to the younger women to get it right. So, do the elders have a unique role in equipping people like this? Everybody then in the church who is small group leader, Sunday school teacher, and adult Sunday school class leader is responsible to help uphold of the truth in being part of that effort. When we do our work right, this will happen; the church is going to shine and declare and proclaim the excellences of the one who called the people out of darkness.

7. To Display the Manifold Wisdom of God to the Spiritual Power of Heaven – Ephesians 3:6-10: The gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the Gospel. To me, the very least of all the saints, this grace was given to preach to the gentiles the immeasurable wealth of Christ and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages have been hidden in God who created all things; so that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places. This is one of the most breath taking statements about why the church exists that I know of. Whether it is demons, rulers and authorities, principalities and powers or whether it is angels or both, it is big. The church that God has designed and has guided, equipping and supplying in the world so that as angels look on and as the devil looks on, the manifold wisdom of God will be seen and praised and known or at least recognized. I remember first arriving here; I preached a sermon called cosmic church. In those days, we were carrying an advertisement in the newspapers where I listed it as the ‘Cosmic Church.’ I really got scolded for that because it sounded so New Age. That was during the front end of the New Age movement back in the early 80s. But I explained this text was what I was talking about.

8. To Show the Authority and Power of Christ – Matthew 16:18: I say to you that you are Peter and upon this rock I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. I will

build my church; so when the church flourishes, it is the work of Christ that is flourishing through whatever leadership structures that are in place. With regards to Peter here and the rock; Peter represents the apostles and Ephesians 2:20 says that the church is built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets. So, in as much as Peter is the spokesman for the apostolic authority and that authority is spoken through the apostles and codified in the New Testament, we are on that rock of apostolic authority. I don't think the rock here refers to Jesus. I think it is a play on the word, Petrous. I think Peter here stands for the apostles. I don't find in the New Testament a warrant either for the monarchical bishop-ship though there may be Episcopal people among us would differ with this or the ongoing papal authority of the Catholic Church.

I will build my Church, it says; so what is church? Where does it come from and what does it refer to besides the general statements that we have seen? We have an Anglo-Saxon word *Circe* which in turn comes from the Greek *Kuriakon* which means belonging to the Lord. One could think of church as an Anglo-Saxon word based on this Greek word, the Lord's as the people or the building belonging to the Lord. In the English New Testament, the word church translates in Greek as *Ekklesia* which never refers to a building but always to an assembly or a congregation or the called out ones. Therefore the church is the people who belong to the Lord Jesus. The called out ones would be one way to say this. One even wonders whether you should have the English word church. Is it a helpful word; this is a battle that none of us should spend any time fighting. The uses of this can include the universal church of all believers like in Ephesians 1:22 where it reads: and he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all. So here, the word is used for the entire assembly of believers everywhere. Then it is used for all the believers in an area; for example, Acts 9:31 where it reads, so the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied. This was the church, not just churches, but the church. Then in Acts 8:1 it is used for all the believers in the city where it says on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.

Note that all New Testament churches; they had Elders in all the churches that Paul founded as seen in Acts 14:23. There were elders in the churches at Jerusalem (Acts 15:2) and in Ephesus (Acts 20:17) and in Crete (Titus 1:5) and throughout the dispersion of the Roman Empire (James 1:1; 5:14). There were elders in all the churches in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia (1st Peter 1:1; 5:1)

We have Aquila and Priscilla in 1st Corinthians 16:19, they greet you in the Lord with the church that is in their house. When you read church in the New Testament, note the context to see whether if there is a local expression or district expression, area wide or citywide or is it referring to it universally? The people of the Lord, the *Ekklesia*, the called out ones, the assembly all was considered at these different levels. I would be hard put to say that is an official expression at each of those levels. Watchman Nee says that every city should have a body of Christ and you could make a case for this in the New Testament where there was a body of Christ in Corinth and in Ephesus and in Thessalonica. To man date this possibly, perhaps there should be some Minneapolis expression like that, but I couldn't get dogmatic about this. I think on some of the ecclesiastical governing issues, I don't want to be dogmatic in any way. Some of the things I am going to be defending as far as structures are concerned aren't as iron-clad as perhaps other doctrines are. Of course there are different structures: the Episcopal structure, the Baptist structure, the Presbyterianism structure. There are about two hundred different names for church in the New Testament. We produced a document in the late 1980s in which we tried to come up principles of that would guide out study as we thought through Biblical church governance. There are eleven of these principles of biblical local church governance which provide a backdrop in which we look closer in terms of the eldership.

C. Eleven Biblical Principles of Local Church Governance

1. Principle One

a. Matthew 16:18: The local church is governed by Christ. In Matthew 16:18 it says that I will build my church. This governance as well as other text that mention his leadership over the church was mediated through the authority of the apostles and their close associates. Today, Christ still rules through the words of his apostles as they are preserved for us in the inspired writings of the New Testament. Therefore, every effort will be made to make sure the structure and procedures and spirit of church governance are close as possible to New Testament guidelines with a constant eye to promoting the glory of God and the advancement of faith. Christ is the head of the local church alongside millions of other local expressions; he rules over this church not by some esoteric magical secretive words spoken to elders, but through his apostles who now are all dead. We don't have apostles here; I have good friends who lead denominations who do have apostles though they define

them differently than this. However, we don't have that office here. The apostles are the books of the New Testament; the New Testament is the written expression of the Word of Christ and charter of the church and the rule over the church. The elders then are responsible to be apt to teach and to correct people with good doctrine by knowing this book and effectively applying it to their people so that Christ mediates his authority and his power and his teaching and his love through his Word and the apostles teaching of that Word and the elders understanding of it preached and taught through that. Now, of course, Christ is the leader and governor of the church.

b. Ephesians 2:19-20: We are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord (Ephesians 2:19-20). There are disagreements as to what 'and prophets' refer to; whether there is another office called prophets or whether they were just charismatic prophets here and there or whether this means apostles and prophets meaning apostles who are prophets. I am inclined to think that is what it means. The apostles and their authority is the foundation of the church.

c. 1st Corinthians 2:12-13: I mentioned inspired writings and 1st Corinthians 2:12 reads, 'now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God.' And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual.' So there is one kind of claim in Paul's writings for his own inspiration that he doesn't teach words taught by human wisdom. We could add 2nd Peter 3 where Peter says there are some things in Paul that are hard to understand and men twist them to their own destruction as they do the other Scriptures. So Peter is already aligning Paul's writings with Scripture. So Paul's writings being inspired are among the apostle's writings that govern the church.

d. 1st Corinthians 7:17: Here are some texts that show the kind of authoritative function that the apostles had in the church which they still have through the writings of the New Testament. In 1st Corinthians 7:17, he says to let each person lead the life that the Lord has assigned to him, and to which God has called him. This is my rule in all the churches. This is the way I order the life of the church. So Paul claims amazing authority. None of us should talk this way but the apostles can talk this way.

e. 1st Corinthians 14:37-38: If anyone thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that the things I am writing to you are a command of the Lord. But if anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized. Paul had a confirmation of being an authoritative spokesman as

an apostle which he was, to write in a way that was virtually the Lord's commandment. And anyone who didn't recognize this, he said that they weren't to be recognized.

f. 2nd Thessalonians 3:14: If anyone does not obey what we say in this letter, take note of that person, and have nothing to do with them, that they may be shamed. These three texts where the apostle Paul says that he stands as an emissary of the risen Christ called out by him and taught not in words of human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit and therefore what I say holds sway in the church as the governing word. Now, we don't have Paul around to talk like that anymore; we only have what he wrote and therefore faithful elders will do their best to mediate that through being apt to teach to their congregations. And thankfully the congregations have Bibles of their own at home where they can get it from the apostles as well.

g. 1st Corinthians 10:31: I said that at the end of that principle that we had an eye to the glory of God in all of this and I base that on 1st Corinthians 10:31 whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God, just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, that they may be saved. Whatever you do, including your eldership and your church governance and all your constitutional design, do all to the glory of God. Our mission statement here at Bethlehem says that we exist to create a passion for the supremacy of God in all things for the joy of all people. So, if you ask why we are doing this seminar; I am doing it to spread passion for the supremacy of God in all things for the joy of all people. I think if we get the eldership right and if we get governance right, if we get the Spirit right and the Word right, then God's glory and God's supremacy will be wonderful and passionately honored more than if we don't get it right. The joy of faith is the goal also.

h. Philippians 1:25: Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith, so that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus, because of my coming to you again. Here is what Paul's life task was. It was for their progress and joy in the faith. Paul wrote what he wrote, said what he said, structured the churches the way he structured them; appointed elders in every church for the joy of our faith. The elders exist for the joy of the church. They should never forget that. If there is an unhappy church, something is wrong with the elders. If the church isn't pumping joy out of the elders, something is wrong and therefore needs to be adjusted because that is the goal of the apostolic ministry. This is principle number one; Christ governs his church through the apostles whose writings are now in the New Testament. These writings are to be taught by faithful elders.

2. Principle Two

The ministry of the church is primarily the work of the members in an activity of worship toward God, nurture toward each other and witness toward the world. Internal structures for church governance are not the main ministry of the church, but the necessary equipping and mobilizing of the saints for the work of the ministry. Oh, that every one of our churches would get this mindset; the ministry mindset that every saint is called to minister. And the pastors and elders exist to inspire, strengthen and encourage them and there also has to be a war time mentality. You need to have a good field hospital if you are going to do battle; otherwise the moral problems of the frontline troops are going to be very bad. It is a multi-layered vision of mobilizing ministry. Pastors and elders also need to think in terms of mobilizing people to reach out to the loss in the neighborhoods, the country and nations. We see in Ephesians 4:11 that Christ gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, the Spirit to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, and until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. So you have this group and you have the equipping of the saints who is everybody; this is not a select group. This is for the work of ministry; the Greek word is *diakonia* which involves attendance to charitable aid in the official service; technically in the official service of the body of stewards. This is for the building up of the body of Christ and when that happens, it becomes effective in the world. I am going to argue that pastors, elders and overseers and bishops are all synonymous in the New Testament. They must be able to teach; this is their main task, governing and teaching.

3. Principle Three

Governance structures should be lean and efficient for the purpose of mobilizing and equipping, not aiming to include as many people as possible in office holding; but to free and fit as many people as possible for ministry. Remember the history of these points: these were written before we had our new constitution. These were written as I was trying to work with twenty-four deacons as to how to rethink governance at Bethlehem. So we develop these principles, not as conclusions but as guidelines for how to get to where we are and how to correct it if we don't have it right. We started by saying, 'it seems to us that if this is true, then it would be true.' The elders now can do two successive three year terms. They can be off a year and then come back on. Those who are leaving and coming on are moving out for the purpose of learning, and those who are called

and gifted needs to be brought back on quickly. We don't need the mindset of just passing things around; we need to use people who are called to a ministry. There are people who are good at their jobs within ministry; yet we don't want to institutionalize a person for a role insomuch that can't change and can do other things. You need to have solidity and long-term influence. There is an ethos that must be understood. Suppose a person who is loved by everyone and serves as a deacon for so many decades and becomes somewhat senile. Even though a precious person, he is saying things that doesn't add up; that are off the wall. We would end of hurting such a person if we didn't have a way to transfer him out of a particular ministry. We usually do things in the face as such but really there needs to be gentle ways to avoid hurt. This is why we have an easy way of every six years to not bring somebody back on. It is easier to not bring somebody back on than it is to let someone go in the middle of their life.

If you don't have something like this, it becomes difficult to deal with people, especially those serving in the church without hurting them. We cannot do business like this; We cannot do business that hurts people. People also need a rest; this helps with getting a new perspective of the church looking from the outside. Know that there is nothing biblical about these two three year terms; you can set it up in way you want to. What does a smaller church do? Well, you need multiple elders in every church, not just one. The smaller church will need to think through something that works. I don't have a prescription for the smaller church; you shouldn't necessarily take what we have as being the way to do it. There are some biblical core values here, but the idea of three years plus three years and then one year off is not biblical. This came about through prayer, fasting, study and discussion and human wisdom. What was considered in this decision was our own history and situation. You could do it a very different way than what we do. We place no terms limits for vocational elders. Those of us who are ordained do not have to take a year off. This is one of the perks or burdens of being ordained, however, we do have to be reaffirmed. Fifteen percent of the people in the church could call my job into question every three years; you see, we ask for an eighty-five percent reaffirmation vote. That doesn't mean that an eighty-four percent would unseat an elder. That only means we would have to see why there may be a problem. We could over-ride any of those decisions. We want our people to be excited about their leaders.

4. Principle Four

Christ is the head of the church and in regards to spiritually all his disciples are on a level ground before him, each person has direct access to him and a responsibility to intercede for the

good of all as a community of priests of whom are men, women, and old, young; all believers are priests. Sometimes this will be played off against elders or leaders.

First, we have Ephesians 4:15: Speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love. So, we are all to grow up into Christ, all the members. Then in Matthew 23:8-11, a Baptist text, do not be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all brothers. When I came to this church, I don't know why it is with churches today, but churches like to have doctors for pastors. This is why we have the Doctor of Ministry degree. Well, when I came to this church, they repainted the sign out front: Dr John Piper. I made them redo it immediately, taking the Doctor off of it and put pastor on it. Not because I get in everybody's face who call me Doctor Piper. Do not be called rabbi; for one is your teacher and you are all brothers. Do not call anyone on earth your father, for one is your father. This is a warning not to overdo leadership and miss the priesthood of the believer. This is a balancing text that describes leadership. Do not be called leaders, for you have one instructor, the Christ. The great among you shall be your servant. Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted. Like in the Sermon on the Mount, don't do your alms to be seen by men; don't fast to be seen by men; don't pray to be seen by men. That doesn't mean not to do these things; it means your motive shouldn't be even when you do these things in public; your aim should not be to get recognized for them. This is a warning to the council of elders and to pastors and all of us. We should make sure that we don't try and put ourselves into any saint category. So, this text is a warning to all of us to be aware of wanting to be stroked as leaders; rather we are to be servants; we are to lower ourselves to work in the nursery, teach a Sunday school class and do the things that the saints do.

Now in 1st Timothy 2:5, for there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony that is given at the proper time. For this I was appointed a preacher and an apostle (I am telling the truth, I am not lying.), a teacher of the gentiles in faith and truth. We are not the mediators. One of the reasons there is such an outcry whether women can be elders or not is because for many it looks as if you are excluding woman from significant ministry. I am trying to develop the mindset that says just the opposite, namely to say that these poor men have to meet hour after hour trying to figure out parking problems and church discipline problems and the women are out there saving souls and healing the sick. This is because a woman is a priest to God, filled with the Holy Spirit with

immediately access to almighty God. And when she puts her hand on a sick person and prays for that person, God almighty can heal and that is ministry and why would she ever want to sit on a council of elders when she could be doing that. I just want you to understand that Holy Spirit supernatural changing ministry is not just for a few; it is for everybody. We need to mobilize everybody for the work of ministry sharing Christ with those who don't know him. Revelation 1:6 is explicit in regards to the idea of priesthood. Christ has made us a kingdom, priests for his God and Father, be glory and power forever and ever! Amen.

D. Revision Questions

1. List some of the suggested readings that are given for this Unit.

- Biblical Eldership by Alexanders Straut
- The Church by Hezekiah Harvey
- The Reformed Pastor by Richard Baxter
- The Ruling Elder by Samuel Miller
- Christian Ministry by Charles Bridges
- The Elder's Handbook by Lester Dekoster and Gerard Berghoef

2. List the points given for the importance and purpose of the church of Jesus Christ in the World today as to what the church is.

- The Bride of Christ
- The Body of Christ, both Globally and Locally
- The Household and Dwelling of God
- The Pillar and Support of the Truth
- To Display His Glory
- To Display the Manifold Wisdom of God to the Spiritual Power of Heaven
- To Show the Authority and Power of Christ

3. What are the given four biblical principles of local church governance?

- Principle One – It is governed by Christ and we are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus being the cornerstone. The elders exist for the joy of the church.
- Principle Two - The ministry of the church is primarily work of the members in the activity of worship toward God, nurture toward each other and witness toward the world.
- Principle Three - Governance structures should be lean and efficient for the purpose of mobilizing and equipping, not aiming to include as many people as possible in office holding; but to free and fit as many people as possible for ministry.
- Principle Four - Christ is the head of the church and spiritually all his disciples are on a level ground before him, each person has direct access to him and a responsibility to intercede for the good of all as a community of priests of whom are men, women, and old, young; all believers are priests.

4. List the references given showing the importance and purpose of the church.

- Ephesians 5:25-29
- Colossians 1:18-24
- 1st Corinthians 12:21-27
- Ephesians 2:19-22
- 1st Timothy 3:15
- 1st Peter 2:9
- Ephesians 3:6-10
- Matthew 16:18
- Acts 14:23

Chapter 2 – Principles of Local Church Governance (Pt 2)

God has ordained the existence of officers in the church, some of whom are charged under Christ with the leadership of the church. The leaders of the church should be people who are spiritually mature and exemplary, gifted for the ministry given to them, have a sense of divine urging, and are in harmony with the duly established leadership of the church.

5. Principle Five

These are principles on how you guide and structure church government. Not inconsistent with this equality with the priesthood of the believer and not having a father, a rabbi, a leader; because you have one rabbi and one father and one leader. Not inconsistent with that equality, God has nevertheless ordained the existence of officers in the church some of whom are charged under Christ with the leadership of the church. So, we must not go the Plymouth Brethren way; I know there are all different kinds of Brethren, but what I know if them, there are no appointed preaching elders or clergy. There is an eldership and on a Sunday morning, the congregation looks to them for exhortation. True, in reality the Holy Spirit works within any group of people. But what I was saying when I said Brethren, I was referring to the idea that all believers are priests and therefore there is nobody over them. Therefore there shouldn't be any officers and anyone in authority in the church, but the texts which I refer to will point the other direction.

In 1st Timothy 5:17, it says to let the elders who rule well to be considered worthy of double honor especially those who labor in preaching and teaching. I would find that to be a biblical impulse pushing a group to say that there are some who rule or govern or oversee and some of those who work hard at the Word and teaching. So clearly some of those do exercise their governing office as teachers, but not all; and not all in that same group have the same role in teaching, though they all will be apt to teach, but not all labor as hard in preaching and teaching. I find my job description right here at Bethlehem; that is who I am. I am doing this seminar because that is my job. I preach on Sunday morning because that is my job; that is who I am. I am one of these guys and I have one vote along with seventeen others. I'm not the chairman of that group. A better name for me other than senior pastor would probably be preaching elder or something like that. I am assigned to do various things, to bring back reports, etc. However, I do probably exert more influence in the church than anybody as I talk to more people than anybody else. Influence, if you take it to mean that which sways a person's views. Prayer may be doing more than my teaching ever thought. So, I would say that I exert more influence in the church as for as teaching goes. I suppose my influence is greater in that respect.

We see in 1st Thessalonians 5:12, 'we ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves.' This tells us that there are leaders in the church and Paul means it to be that way. Another text in this regard is Hebrews 13:7 where it says to remember

your leaders, those who spoke to you the Word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith. So leaders again and later in verse 17, it says to continue to follow and be submissive to your leaders, since they are watching over your souls as those who will have to give a word of explanation. By doing this, you will let them carry out their duties joyfully, and not with grief, for that would be harmful for you. So, clearly, there are leaders in the church, according to this text; not just everybody having the same office or rule. Lastly in Acts 20:28, pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. So here is a group of people who have been made overseers to shepherd the church of God which he purchased with his own blood. So these are shepherds and the sheep. We are sheep before being shepherds and to me that is vastly more important than to be a shepherd. Can you think of a text in Luke that says something like, be glad that you are a sheep before being glad that you are a shepherd? That is chapter 10 talking about the seventy returning; they are so exciting because God worked in their lives. Jesus said that he saw Satan fall like lightening in their ministry; and yet he says, don't rejoice in this that the demons are subject to you; in other words that you have a powerful ministry. But rejoice in this, along with all the other saints, your name is written in heaven. I tell you, to be the sheep of God, to be one of his lambs is ten thousand times more precious than to be a pastor. That is my ticket to heaven, not pastoring. To have been a chosen lamb, rescued from the thicket and the wolves is my joy.

6. Principle Six

Under Christ and his word, the decisive count of appeal in the local church in deciding matters of disagreement is the gathered church assembly. This implies first, is the fact that the leaders are not to lead by coercion but by persuasion and free consent. (1st Peter 5:1-3) The second point: in the fact that elders may be censured; elders are not God. There is a way to correct elders and to rebuke elders and remove elders. Third: Mathew 18:15-20 and 1st Corinthians 5:4-5 depict the gathered church assembly as the decisive count of appeal in matter of discipline. Those are my three pointers toward congregational church government. And here, pointers are not proofs; frankly I don't want to die on this hill. I am going to live on this hill instead of dying on it. I would die on the hill of foreknowledge of God. I will not die on a hill where a body of elders can't excommunicate somebody. Know that we don't excommunicate by the eldership, but instead by the body. We admit to the action of the body and we evict or dismiss either happily or unhappily through the action of the body. Of the three arguments I have here, the last one seems to be the most compelling.

Therefore, I exhort the elders among you; shepherd the flock of God among you, not as lording it over those allotted to you, but proving to be examples to the flock. There is a Spirit that points toward the church which has to be excited this leadership and therefore there needs to be a certain kind of interaction that might open to the door to congregational life which is through congregational approval. 1st Timothy 5:19-20 says that we are not to admit a charge against an elder except on the evidence of two or three witnesses. Those who continue in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all, so that the rest may stand in fear. Now, he is talking to Timothy here. Timothy is an apostolic delegate or a legate or representative in Ephesus. This is where you Episcopalians would say, you have a pointer toward the monarchical bishop; you have Timothy who is to discipline elders in churches over a city. They would say that you have a bishop. Well, it is possible; I don't want to wage war on these issues, for there are far more important issues to think about. You have to decide what you see here and begin to structure your church accordingly. If you are a layperson, you have to think through what kind of group you are going to align if it is going to be the Biblical group. But, I don't think we should assume that Timothy is an ongoing office that should be duplicated in every distinct. Rather this points toward some kind of discipline for elders. It says to rebuke in the presence of all; is this all the people or all the elders so that the rest will stand in fear. So, there has to be a structure in place, whatever it is so that elders who are in error can be corrected and if necessary removed. 3rd John 1:10 is another possible way to dealing with elders who are living in sin.

Matthew 18:15-20 says that if your brother sins against you go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a gentile and a tax collector. It seems that the disciplinary dimension of excommunication which will happen here in the next step. Remove him from the roles and treat him as though he was not a Christian anymore. There are many churches that interpret this to mean, the church as represented by the ruling council. Frankly, I would love to give it that meaning; I would love to do all our disciplinary work at Bethlehem. It would be better and certainly quicker, but there is an issue of sensitivity and also of being sued. You have to handle these things with such care today; how are you going to get the congregation to act with someone who is in adultery or whatever. If I felt free to give the word church here the meaning expressed through it duly appointed officers. That would simplify my life a lot. And I would respect you if you made that choice. When these words were spoken, Jesus was addressing his disciples; did they constitute a

church and if not, who was he talking to? In his own time, I would guess ecclesia would be the loss of his own. How was this to be obeyed before Pentecost or before the constitution of local churches? I don't have any problem with this being considered the constitutional church. As Jesus and John the Baptist were baptizing, a new people of God were being called out. John looked at the people of God, Israel and knew that they were apostate. I am going to assemble a new people of God and I am going to do that with a new sign, not circumcision but instead through baptism.

So, he starts baptizing and the Jews don't like it. They say that they didn't need this sign. But he said that this is the new messianic people and then Jesus comes along and continues that. At least we could say, this is the church in the making. So what would the implication of that be? And another question; what would constitute a church in that setting? Another point; this ecclesia here in Matthew 18:17 is the church of the New Covenant; the church post Pentecost. But there was an ecclesia in the Old Testament; however, we have something very particular in our minds about the New Testament church with its officers and its gift of the Holy Spirit. That we are baptized into one body by the Spirit; we have all of that in our head when we say church. Whereas the word ecclesia, this has a broader meaning than that. So it has an expression here; God had a people for himself called ecclesia at every stage ever since Adam at least. But as far as the full blown meaning of church, that comes after Pentecost. In regards to sin in the Old Testament; there are different sins and they would be treated all differently by priests through sacrifices in the Old Testament. There was stoning and then other problems caused people to be put outside the camp and there was the idea of being unclean for a certain number of days. This is rather complex and thank God with the turn in redemptive history and the coming of Christ, most of those things have gone by the wayside.

For 1st Corinthians 5:4-5, in the name of our Lord Jesus when you are assembled, the church and I with you in Spirit with the power of the Lord Jesus, you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord. It is not just the elders who do this; it is when the church is assembled that they do this act of discipline. For those two texts and probable others, I would argue the point, namely the point that the decisive court of appeal in the local church in deciding matters of disagreement is the gathered church assembly. I also think this has implications in regards to the selection of leadership as well.

7. Principle Seven

The local congregation therefore should call and dismiss its own leaders. This is implied in the preceding principle; if it isn't then I don't know where to get it. The local congregation should

call and dismiss its leaders. Now, in the Episcopal form of church government and also the Presbyterian Church form of government, generally there is a kind of hybrid thing that goes on. As I have said, can a local presbytery who ordains in the Presbyterian Church; the presbytery ordains, not the local church; the senate but I don't think they can unilaterally say, now you go to that church and church you accept him. There is an interaction with the local church that the church does some calling there as well. I don't know how it is with the Episcopal Church where perhaps the Bishop is the key ordaining officer and then appoints a rector or pastor to a local body. I would guess that local body would also have a say with that. You get the impression that church government really a mingling of Biblical principle with practical, cultural and historical local dynamics and not absolutize our own little systems. It is just not that clear; that is why there are these different kinds. Titus appointed elders in all the churches in Crete. So, here you have a person functioning like a bishop who is appointing elders. Then you have Acts 6 where the deacons are chosen from among themselves. Somehow that had to be orchestrated where the people chose among themselves to do a particular ministry.

8. Principle Eight

The leaders of the church should be people who are spiritually mature and exemplarily gifted for the ministry given to them and having a sense of divine urging and being in harmony with the duly established leadership of the church. This is a mouthful and every one of these phrases count. We wrote this before we chose any elders or even decided to do elders here at Bethlehem. I just started the list in 1st Timothy 3:1-13: the saying is trustworthy: if anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, and able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. You can go to a person and ask if they have ever considered serving the church as an elder. Ask if they have ever had any aspiration or desire or dream to that service and if that isn't there, don't coerce anyone to be on the council. God should plant that within a person's heart. So, there are fifteen qualifications in these verses of Timothy. We have in Titus 1:5 the same qualifications for being an elder. For this reason, I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained in order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you. If anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife, and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled,

upright, holy, and disciplined. Here we have eighteen different qualifications being listed. In Romans 12:6-8 gives us the idea of being gifted again. Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them; if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.

In Acts 29:28, it says to pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. We have to figure out a way in our churches to see how this will happen. How does the Holy Spirit do this? I have been talking up until this time of how we set these things in place, but here it says that God is doing it. We have eighteen men in Bethlehem who are elders; so can we say this in Bethlehem. Can we say that the Holy Spirit made them overseers? We should be able to give an account for how we submitted ourselves in this process trying to design a discerning process that was the Holy Spirit's way of getting whom he wanted onto this council. This involves huge amounts of prayer and fasting; also to follow the Bible involves following the Holy Spirit. There needs to be with every elder a sense of Holy Spirit compulsion and urging toward a sense that someday this will be right for me and I believe if this is true, they will discern this. All of the mutual prayerful considered, discerning with prayer and fasting, the Holy Spirit will have put in place his elders. If you are in a church that isn't as spiritual as you would like, teach on text like this and plead with the people that we have structures and prayer meetings and disciplines in the church that we will lay ourselves open to the leading of the Holy Spirit. Philippians 2:2 is a unity text that says to complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Remain in the one love and in one mind and intend on one purpose. That is why I said that leaders should be in harmony with the duly established leadership of the church. There is a rise of empire building here; if you have a vision of God or doctrine, of life of mission what is strong and powerful that you believe is Biblically, you want to preach it, you want to cultivate it and build it; you run the risk of manipulation to get it! If it is of God, you don't have to do that. If it is of God, you never have to do the political thing. You don't have to plan and humanly calculate to make sure things are known to the right people; instead trust in God for him to do his will.

On the other hand, I think it is folly to say that we need lots of different theologies or lots of different philosophies of ministry; that results is chaos. Churches become wounded and hurt, year after year because there is no deep profound united leadership that is saying, here is the vision and so let's do it. There is a balance. I wanted to build the vision together with the elders in prayer and

study as a group and thus this vision is housed in a body of leaders. There is a lot of theological and ministerial harmony along with a lot of unity at the center of this church and I will work hard to see that it stays this way. I hope I don't work politically to see that it stays that way. I will work hard, I will preach hard, I will teach hard and pour my life out for those elders to help them see how to serve God. They will then choose what the next elder slate is to be to put before the people. We don't have a nominating committee for they usually just don't work. The leaders of the church should be the people who test the next leaders of the church. They don't have the last say. They are the spiritually gifted testers; they are a sieve through which you put every candidate for leadership because they are the ones who have been entrusted with the spiritual leadership. But then, once they have tested, talked and prayed and met with them and say yes or no; they put them before the people for you to approve or disapprove in regards to the last say.

There are three of these verses: one to Timothy and one to Titus and then Acts 14:23 where Paul appointed elders in every city. I will restate my answer; those are either apostles getting the church started or the apostolic representatives, especially with Timothy and Titus. Today, there aren't any apostles, so we don't do it that way any longer. These texts that point toward congregational life and governance; selections are affirmed by the body, the congregation. In regards to appointing, we call it recommending; we recommend to the body and then they affirm and you could use the word appoint. Clearly, we are exercising a lot of authority at that point in deciding who will be put before the people. But those people will have the last say so if this body of elders; these eighteen people start to slip into some heresy or some immorality and or sin; everybody in the church will know this. In our constitution, they can unseat us all. In our constitution, the congregation can almost do anything. We don't expect any losers; we don't put people forward who might not be fit for the position. The eldership needs to be absolutely certain as they have considered everyone's background. Nothing is hidden; this family is functioning and there is no financial misappropriation whatsoever. There is no deep seeded anger anywhere; the congregation will know about these things. We have done the hard work and everything is hanging on our approval ultimately in regards to whether they are fit to serve or not.

Chapter 3 – Elders in the Local Church

Spiritual qualifications are more important than business qualifications. Terms of service should balance the need to

have the most qualified leaders and the concern of burnout and stagnation. In the New Testament, other terms translated into English that also refer to the office of elder are bishop, overseer and pastor.

A. Principles 9-11

9. Principle Nine

These principles were all articulated back in the mid to late eighties as guide lines on how Bethlehem Church would rethink its structure on governance in order to move toward a flexible and lean ministerial oriented biblical structure. First, let me say that spiritual qualifications should never be sacrificed to technical expertise. For example, deacons or trustees or what we call financial and property administrators can be men or women. While we don't install women as elders at this church, we do believe it is biblical to have deacons or trustees or financial and property administrators as to include women. They should have hearts for God, even more importantly than abilities for finance. This applies to everyone. I stress this because as I contemplated our change in government, I saw in the early days of Bethlehem Church that our deacons were very Godly people. They put a premium on Christ likeness and biblical people in the way they thought and saturated their meetings in prayer and walking in the power of the Holy Spirit. I wanted to preserve that very much. Whereas in many churches it is thought of that the deacons and elders do the spiritual work! Then you have to have business people to know how to do budgets and finance, etc. This is a horrible bifurcation; how do you handle your money! For example, to send out tent makers who spend all their time on making tents isn't a good investment in regards to resources. One such missionary said that money is where most people are spiritually destroyed. Jesus talked more about money than about the second coming and also about marriage. He was unbelievably concerned with how we handle our possessions; because possessions kill and destroy. You have read or heard that it is hard for a rich man to get into the kingdom of heaven. So, to put money into the hands of your least spiritual people is deadly in a local church. However you are led in this matter, your standards of spiritual depth and biblical awareness and passionate commitment to radical Jesus like living, should be the kind of people handling your money. That is principle number nine; don't sacrifice spiritual qualifications for business expertise. Better to have bumbler, spiritual bumbler than carnal experts. God covers for a lot of bumbling with people who love him with all their hearts. Many experts who are not spiritual can get us into big trouble.

10. Principle Ten

The selection process should provide for the necessary assessment of possible leaders by a group able to discern the qualifications mentioned in principle eight and that the process provides for a final approval of the congregation of all the officers. We have that in place in this church; we didn't have it then and didn't know quite what it would look like. I wanted to make sure that we avoided what was happening in the early days of Bethlehem Church, even though God was blessing us and keeping us from going off the deep end. The problem is, if you have a nominating committee and that committee is elected by the congregation; they are usually chosen from those you know. That nominating committee may not have studied for years the list of qualifications and may not understand any of them. For example, dignified may mean to them, a person who wears a three piece suit. You just can't have popular people or people who know people, but instead you have to have a group who knows the Bible and who can take the time and effort to interview candidates in order to understand their lives and their families, etc. Very few people have the guts to ask questions in the interview process. Now, our elders do this and I hope and trust that they do it carefully when they interview candidates. We have a list of questions that guide people in this process. We have a list of the qualifications and how to get at those.

Anybody within the congregation or on the council can give us a name for a possible elder. As a council, we pray over those names and in conversation we decide which of those stand out. We start sharing names and at that moment anybody in the council can comment in regards to any information on that person. From there, we would ask if they would be open to a conversation about this. Then, two elders would go and meet with that person and I believe that this is the key moment in any assessment. We get volunteers asking who knows this person the best. They will bring a report back and share their thoughts; we can stop it right there or go to the next step which would invite the person in to be interviewed by the council. After that, the council then makes a decision together. I like to discuss these things instead of just rushing into making a decision. However, we don't have any rule to say that we have to come to a consensus over anything. We put a little biography of the candidate in our church mailing list explaining what we are doing and who the person is. This gives people an opportunity to say something. Now, should all the details, especially those that aren't uplifting, be shared around to everybody? There are situations where such information probably should not be shared; there can be legal issues or it could involve a broken pledge of some kind. We have never had a case where the church didn't go along with a council recommendation. One such pastor said that if you ever get a no vote from the church, then

the leaders haven't done their job. So, you don't put motions on the floor of people that haven't been discussed properly. A lot of careful homework must first be done.

The congregation must have a sense of trust for the council, knowing that they work hard to come to a recommendation. I know that if people don't like the elders or don't like me, they will call that a rubber stamp. You can find negative terminology to describe positive things. Like, in this church, the congregation just rubber stamps the elders. This is a negative way to describe what might be a very positive thing. There is probably such a thing as a rubber stamp meaning a mindless thoughtless concession to people. But there can be a sense of trusting your leaders so it becomes a joy to agree with what they do. A question: if we have women deacons, how do we distinguish in the list of qualifications what is what. There are manhood and womanhood issues that I will go through in-depth later on. There is a place where it includes women and thus translated women or wives. If it is wives, why isn't it there for the elder's wives? In verse 11, they are the wives of the deacons; aren't the wives of the elders more significant to be spiritually fit? The word in Greek is women, so, I conclude that it includes women for deacons. This is added precisely to answer your question. The men who are chosen should be the husband of one wife; the accent falls on one wife. Rather, if women are going to be deacons, they should have these qualifications. That is a contextual answer but my principal answer, the thing that distinguishes an elder from a deacon; in the list of qualifications and their duties, elders are to be apt to teach, verse 2. Elders also are to govern (5:17). Deacons do not have to teach; they are not oriented mainly around the gift and authority of teaching, but rather serving in other ways. Deacons are neither seen as governors and general overseers of the congregation. In 1st Timothy 2:12, when Paul says to the church, I do not allow a woman to teach or have authority over men. These two things are the two things that distinguish an elder from a deacon. This means, in principle, a deacon who doesn't function as a teacher or an authoritative figure could be a woman. When I say this, I know that there are women who are very gifted in teaching. I don't think that 1st Timothy 2:12 means that women can't teach at all, because you have the text saying let the older women teach the younger women. I think the teaching of children and youth and women is wide open to them and therefore, they should be qualified spiritually to do that.

So what about singles and elders? There again, it would come down to a one woman man. This is a literal translation with the emphasis on one; if you got one, it had better be one. This is my interpretation; the accent is on being a one woman man. Therefore, I would have a hard time saying that Paul couldn't be an elder in a local church.

11. Principle Eleven

Terms of active service should not be dictated by the desire to include as many different people as possible in leadership, but by the careful balance between the need on the one hand, to have the most qualified leaders and on the other hand, to guard against burn out and stagnation. The most qualified leaders might need to keep serving because there might not be as many as you would like to have. Yet, you have to guard against burn out and over work; you need to constantly cultivate from the wider group of available candidates depth and giftedness. So, these are my eleven principles of local church government.

B. Historical Traditions for the Use of Elders and Deacons

There is a little green book called Baptist confessions that comes out of the earliest days of Baptist history, 1609; there are two offices in the church: elders and deacons; in following these confessions of faith which began to drop out in the early 1900s. Eon Murray and his book, the biography of Johnston Edwards have some interesting explanations as to why that was. A short confession of faith, twenty articles by John Smith in article 16, the ministers of the church are not only bishops, a New Testament translation of this *episcopos* to whom the power is given for dispensing both the Word and the sacraments and also the deacons. So, the earliest Baptist confession that I know about, talks in terms of Bishops or overseers and deacons as the two offices. In 1611, a Declaration of Faith of the English people remaining in Amsterdam says that the officers of every church of the congregation are either elders, who especially feed the flock concerning their souls or deacons, men or women, who by their office relieve the necessities of the poor. In Germany, the Lutherans and Catholics both have huge ministries, all involved with the government. This is because of the idea of state churches; these are called diaconal ministries. These include men and women who run hospitals and do social work, etc. In 1614, one such proposition says that Christ has sat in his outward church two sorts of ministers, namely, some who are called pastors and teachers, or elders who administer in Word and sacraments and others who are called deacons, men and women whose ministry is to serve tables and wash the saints feet. In the London Confession of 1644 in article 36, being thus joined, every church has power given to them from Christ for their better well-being to choose from themselves persons into the office of pastors, teachers, elders, deacons, but pastors and teachers are omitted in later additions.

These pastors, deacons and elders were considered the same person. Deacons are those who are qualified according to the Word; those who Christ has appointed, etc. The Second London Confession in 1688 in article 26, paragraph 8, says that a particular church gathered and completely organized according to the mind of Christ consists of officers and members, and the officers appointed by Christ to be chosen and set apart by the church, so called and gathered for the peculiar administration and execution of power or duty which he entrusts them with or called them to be continued to the end of the world are bishops or elders and deacons; those two offices. Article 33 of the Baptist Bible Union of America 1923 reads that we believe that the church of Christ is the congregation of baptized believers and that its offices or ordination are pastors, elders and deacons. It isn't clear whether they are the same here. Now from 1963, the Statement of Faith from the Southern Baptist Convention says that the church is an autonomous body operating through a democratic process under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. In such congregations, members are equally responsible and its Scriptural officers are Pastors and deacons. This is what most of us inherit when we go to a Baptist church. If you talk about an elder, they would say that isn't Baptist. From the year 1925, elders went by the wayside for the Baptist; the word was gone. It is easy to understand that the body of believers who grow up in a church, you have deacons and a pastor; but not elders. But you hear from across town, all the PCA and PCUSA churches and the Reform churches have elders. This is historically naïve and confessions of faith don't prove that it is biblical. I just want you to know that wise and Godly leaders have concluded in Baptist traditions that the two offices of the church are elders and deacons.

When most people who teach like I am doing on Sunday morning or what a popular Sunday School Class teacher does. For us, we bring in alongside the text of 1st Timothy 3:2 and Titus 1:9 which says that he must hold firm to the sure word as taught so that he may be able to give instructions in sound doctrine and also to confute those who contradict that sound doctrine. Elders have to be able to do that. But I don't think they have to be able to do it in public. To be a charismatic up-front figure who is a dynamic leader and a communicator. That is not necessarily what the apostles are looking for, but instead they are looking for people who can recognize the sure Word as being taught; that is, as the apostles have taught it. They can get in the apostolic mind, reading their Bible carefully and understanding what it means. They can articulate it plainly, maybe in a one on one setting or councilor setting, etc. They can spot false teaching and go to the Bible and find answers against this false teaching and present their answers. So there is a difference between apt to teach meaning competent in the Word and able to correct false doctrine at different levels.

Every elder should have that gift otherwise he's not going to be a contributing member to this council having the kind of Biblical insight that he should have. There are those pastors who can't do this, thus they shouldn't be pastors, yet we shouldn't judge them on some kind of style issue.

C. Other Name for Elders in the New Testament

My aim here is to argue that the four terms in the New Testament: Bishop, Overseer, Elder and Pastor; these terms are all the same person. The English term 'bishop' means overseer and is sometimes used to translate the Greek word *episkopos* which means one who over sees. Not that the words are identical in meaning but that they refer to the same person or office from different angles.

1. Bishop/Overseer

There is no different Greek word in the New Testament for Bishop and Overseer. *Episkopos* is the word behind both of those translations. The English term bishop means overseer and is sometimes used to translate the Greek word *Episkopos*, the one who oversees. There are at least four reasons to consider this term bishop or overseer as equivalent to elder in the New Testament. We can compare Titus 1:5 and Titus 1:7. Titus 1:5 reads, 'this is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you. Titus 1:7 reads, 'for an overseer, as God's steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain. So, he left Titus in Crete to establish elders. The switch from elder to overseer is not a switch in meaning, but a different of looking at the same person. There is no indication that a new group is being addressed but rather the group is called elders and then the group is called overseas. This is both the task of the person and their maturity explained.

The second reason we compare Acts 20:17 and Acts 20:28. Acts 20:17 reads 'now from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the church to come to him.' Acts 20:28 reads, 'pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.' Here we read that the Holy Spirit has made the Elders overseers to shepherd. You have mature elders and they are overseeing and shepherding or pastoring the church of God. This is argument number two why bishops or overseers and elders are the same person.

The third reason compares 1st Timothy 3:1 and 1st Timothy 5:17. 1st Timothy 3:1 reads, 'the saying is trustworthy: if anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task.' 1st Timothy

5:17 reads, ‘let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching.’ So 1st Timothy 3:1 translates as bishop or overseer and then describes the qualifications for those. When he gets to 5:17, he says the elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor and here it mentioned those who preach and teach. Unlike the deacon, the overseer must be able to teach and in verse 5, he is said to be one whose management of his own household fits him to care for God’s church. These two functions are ascribed to elders in the fifth chapter of this book. In 1st Timothy 5:17, you have teaching and governing; those who rule well. So, it’s likely in Paul’s mind, that the bishops and overseers in 1st Timothy 3:1-7 are the same as the elders in 5:17.

The fourth reason compares Philippians 1:1 to 1st Timothy 3:1. Philippians reads, ‘Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons.’ Then 1st Timothy 3:1 reads ‘the saying is trustworthy: if anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task.’ In the ESV, this is shown as overseer whereas in the ISV, it is shown as elder. In Philippians is shows overseer which is from *episkopos* and deacon from the Greek word, *diakonos*. There are overseers and there are deacons; he wrote to the church and wanted the special attention of those two groups. This is a remarkable confirmation that the two lists in 1st Timothy 3 of the elders and deacons are paralleling these two. These, then, seem to be the two offices of church just as in 1st Timothy 3:1-13, the qualifications only for these two are given. But Paul appointed elders in all the churches and so it’s likely that the elders of the church at Philippi were the bishops and overseers referred to in Philippians 1. In Acts 14:23, it reads, ‘and when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed.’ So Paul appointed elders in all the churches, then when he writes to the church in Philippi, he writes to the bishops and deacons. In 1st 3:1-13, those two groups are treated as elders as well as bishops and deacons. Those are my arguments on why I would take the term bishop/overseer as the same person as elders, speaking of the office from two different angles; one the functional angle of overseeing and the other the maturity angle.

2. Pastor

So now we will consider the term, pastor. This term occurs in the New Testament only once in reference to a person, but the term shepherd occurs more than once. In reference to an office in a church or a person in the church, it occurs only in Ephesians 4:11 it says and it is he who gifted some to be apostles, others to be prophets, others to be evangelists, and still others to be pastors

and teachers. This is from the ISV, but the ESV says that he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and the teachers to equip the saints for the work of the ministry, for building up the body of Christ. There is something that corresponds to shepherd, namely to shepherd or to feed which is closely related to the noun, pastor. This helps us to understand the role of pastor and how it is related to the role of elder and bishop. Now the first reason I present, to argue the point that pastor and elders should be considered the same person as shown above. Ephesians 4:11 treats pastors and teachers as one group and thus suggest that the chief role of the pastor is feeding the flock through teaching, a role clearly assigned to bishops. In 1st Timothy 3:2, an elder must be apt to teach and to elders in Titus 1:9: he will be able to both exhort in sound doctrine and confute those who contradict. This suggests that the pastor is another name for elder and overseer. This is argument one.

The second argument or reason comes from Acts 20:28 where it says to pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his blood. So the elders of Ephesus are encouraged in their pastoral efforts, their shepherding, thus showing that Paul saw the elders as shepherds or pastors. So, clearly, elders, overseers and bishops are to shepherd, that is to be pastors. The English word, pastor, means shepherd and it comes from the Greek word, *poimen*.

For reason number three, in 1st Peter 5:1-2 it reads, ‘so I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you.’ So, the elders are told to tend the flock of God. Peter saw the elders essentially as pastors or shepherd. Paul considered himself an elder.

D. Conclusion and Summary of this Information on Overseers and Pastors

The New Testament only refers to the office of pastor one time; it is a functional description of the role of elder, stressing the care and feeding of the church as God’s flock just as an overseer or bishop is a functional description of the role of elder stressing the governing or oversight of the church. We may conclude therefore that pastor and elder and bishop overseer refer in the New Testament to the same office or person. This office stands alongside deacon in Philippians 1:1 and 1st Timothy 3:1-13 in such a way as to show that the two abiding offices instituted by the New Testament are Elder and Deacon.

This means that John Piper, for example, is an elder and a part of a council or college or comradery of elders. So the elders are the pastors as a whole. They are all pastors and elders and overseers within the council. John has an assignment from this church to do certain things as an elder; he is not the pastor. This is why my title, senior pastor, represents one of the pastors having one vote on the council. I don't legally or officially make choices that these other men have to follow. We make choices, so this group governs the church. I know what this communicates to the average church. But when most people think pastor, they think preacher on Sunday morning and then there is a board that are deacons and they run the church. They are the governing board by and large in most churches. In some of those churches, the pastor isn't a part of that board. He may sit ex-officio on all boards; there are all kinds of variations of this. Pastors, elders and deacons are always a plurality in the New Testament and they are together, not one of them is the overseer, governor or guide of this church. And then there are these helpers and assistants who carry out the financial and practical aspects; these are called deacons. A question: is the noun, teacher, in a text like Acts 13:1 implies another synonym of the same office. In view of Ephesian 4:11, he appointed some pastors/teachers. So what is the Biblical support or warrant for saying that there should be such a thing, for example, as a vocational pastor or elder if they all have the same task? There are expects from many different vocations in this room; as why hire someone like me full time when we are all really supposed to be doing the same thing. The easiest biblical answer comes from 1st Timothy 5:17 where it says that the elder is worthy of double honor, who rules well, especially those who labor in the word, *logos* in Greek, 'and' *kai* in Greek and doctrine or *didaskalia* also in Greek.

Some among the elders rise to the service of being called by God and affirmed by the church as devoting their whole life to this, whereas others are tent-maker type elders; you might say. That is my understanding why some do it full time because it becomes a full time job the larger the church gets. But I think that at any time, anyone of these lay elders, as we call them, could stop working and become full time at the church if the church called them to do that. They wouldn't have to go back to seminary either. They would prove to the council and congregation over the years that there is a competency, a gift, a special thing that they are good at. I think we should probably structure the elders so that elders do grow up into that. That is one reason why we have a TBI, The Bethlehem Institute. We just want to teach and disciple and lead in such a way that at Bethlehem, there is this constant rising of general tide of Biblical understanding so that God can just touch different ones around the church, bringing them up into effective ministry in different ways. Who knows when that might become full time? At any given time, God may burn into a person's heart to do full time work

for the Lord such as evangelism, counseling, visitation or pastoring. If a person is a teacher, does it mean that he is an overseer or elder? No, we must distinguish between office and gifts. For example, there are a lot of gifted Sunday school teachers. There has to be a lot of other things in place as well. When we hire staff, vocational staff, are we intentional about bringing them on as elders? Sometimes and at other times, no we aren't. We automatically treat ordained pastors as elders because otherwise, there would be a contradiction in regards to their service. However, we hired Sally Michael along with her husband to be minister for parents and children discipleship. She has the gift of teaching, but this doesn't automatically make her an elder.

E. All the New Testament Churches had Elders

There were elders in the church at Jerusalem as shown in Acts 15:2, 'and after Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them, Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and the elders about this question.' So the apostles had made sure that not only according to Acts, deacons had been appointed but elders had also come into existence. It doesn't tell us how but they did. So, you got elders, people functioning like deacons who manage the feeding of the widows and you have elders to help solve this theological dispute. Secondly, there were elders in all the churches that Paul founded as shown in Acts 14:23: 'and when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed.' So, on Paul's return from the first missionary journey, he appointed elders in all the churches. An interesting sideline, how would you appoint elders in a church that developed out of paganism? There were elders in Ephesus, Acts 20:17 which we have read before that says now from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the church to come to him. Remarkably, there was no great to-do about observing that there were elders there. It is assumed! Paul just assumed that there were elders in all the churches. There were elders in all the churches of Crete as shown in Titus 1:5 which we are already read, 'this is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you.' So, it didn't matter what culture it was in, whether Ephesus, Crete, Roman, Antioch or Jerusalem.

Elders in all the churches of the dispersion or the Roman Empire; James 1:1 refers to this point: 'James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes in the dispersion: Greetings.' This letter was written to either all the Christians or just Jewish Christians. There is a question as to whether it is gentile Christians and/or Jewish Christians. In James 5:14, it says, 'is

anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.’ Many churches don’t consider or do what this verse says. We try to piggy back on services when elders are here already in praying for the sick. We will do this after church on Sunday. We anoint a person with oil by rubbing oil on the forehead of a person before praying or at the same time of praying. One time I poured the whole bottle on a dying person! In 1st Peter 5:1, it reads, ‘so I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly.’ There is no question as to whether there are elders among them; it is an assumed point. So, according to James, Peter, and Paul from Jerusalem to Rome and everywhere in between, every church has elders. We see that church structure is very clear and precise in the New Testament. An observation mentioned that there were elders in the Old Testament; this was shown in number mentioning seventy elders, for example. There were groups of elders that helped Moses; so the concept of elders is not a creation of the early church. Interestingly, apart from cultural differences; you might expect it to be in Jerusalem with a Jewish church, but all the churches throughout the Roman Empire took on eldership. I don’t think you have to call them that, but why not, since the New Testament does?

A question: what do we say to distinguish between the office of eldership and old men, as the word can mean both. I suspect that in Paul’s mind, there is a maturity factor that shouldn’t be overlooked. They should be older people, but the question becomes, what does that mean and what if you are in a young church? I just read also in numbers or perhaps Leviticus that the priesthood serves from age thirty to fifty where after he must retire and become one who teaches and equips the others. So, if you wanted an age for an elder to start, age thirty might be something to go with. Another point, in America we have institutionalized adolescence lasting until about twenty-two years of age. But in their culture, at thirteen years of age, you entered into manhood; you began to work as an apprentice with the father to learn a trade and then get married earlier in life. In 1st Timothy, it looks like the words, elders and deacons, don’t represent just an age meaning. So, I would want to be careful saying that it had to be an old person. Anybody who is an elder is an older person; this just doesn’t work in 1st Timothy 3. Question: in a missionary context, polygamy is a perhaps a norm and yet the elder has to be a man having one wife. In a pre-literate culture, not being able to read; how can they teach? Do you then put in place temporary missionary structures, perhaps not ideal to bring them along and compromise the principle on polygamy? I don’t think I want to speak the last

word on that; I would not stand in judgement on missionaries at this point who go either way on this issue. It seems like God did this in the Old Testament. Does Paul refer as to the one woman man to polygamy or divorce and remarriage? I don't think this refers to both. We are going to talk about qualifications in the next lecture.

Chapter 4 – Biblical Qualifications for Elders

The issue of whether elders should be men or women or both is covered in the book, Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, edited by Wayne Grudem and John Piper (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1991). We will not take it up in detail here. The position of Bethlehem Baptist Church, expressed in our constitution, is that elders will be spiritual men who aim not to lord it over anyone, but to be servants of the people of God for their up-building in the joy of faith. The main text relating to this issue is 1st Timothy 2:11-13.

A. Function of Elders – To Govern

These units are on the elders governing and teaching with the last being on the qualifications for elders. These points will easily fill up the time, plus I want you to feel free to ask questions along the way. I do not presume to have answers to all the questions you will ask. While we have worked hard to create a structure at Bethlehem Church, the implementation of the shepherding ministry is greatest structural frustration of my life in this church. How to shepherd faithfully the twelve hundred members and then the hundreds who aren't members, when the small group system that you create, partnering with elders to oversee those people of which half don't go to. So how do you provide crises care and know the spiritual where-about so that they are not into sin or drifting away when they don't participate in the structure that you have provided at a volunteer level in a small group system. We just don't have good answers to that yet. I don't think you can be satisfied as shepherds who will give an account some day of the souls in your charge by just saying that people don't come! There needs to be some kind of way where you get at people; you pursue people according to James 5. If they are sheep that are drifting away, perhaps about to leave their wife or husband or commit some kind of financial inappropriate behavior at work; or perhaps they are not reading their Bibles anymore. They hardly go to church. Elders are responsible to figure that out and pursue those people. I know that there will always be people like that; always, in every church. This is clear from Jesus' teaching of the weeds, etc.

There will never be a perfect church; if you get too rigorous and say, we are going to have a church where every member is accountable and fulfills their responsibility for attendance and tithing, etc. You will either go crazy or you will have a very tiny legalistic church. In our culture, you can't make people do all the things they ought to do. I think this was the same with the New Testament Church also. For discipline is for the fragrant community known act; how many small group meetings can you miss before you are disciplined? How many Sunday mornings or Wednesday evenings can you miss? I don't know how you would draw lines like that without going beyond the New Testament. So, I just say that I don't have answers to all these questions about how to implement the care ministry or the shepherding ministry. But I can only say that we tried hard. After eighteen years, I can only say that we try, we think about it and try to put staff and structures in place. We try to organize what I think has been implicit already as we talk about the function of elders in the New Testament, namely governing and teaching. I will try to show why those are the two ways and what governing or oversight involves. The responsibilities of elders are summed under these two headings: governing and teaching. We will take these one at a time and see the text that point in those directions.

1st Timothy 5:17 says to let the elders who rule well, they should be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching. This means to literally stand before; this is used for leadership, guidance and authority several times in the New Testament. Those who govern or rule, stand before. Let the elders who govern well; this doesn't mean to have efficient and slick meetings; it means, are the people cared for successfully? Are they mobilized and taught successfully? Are they giving richly? Are they living upright and Godly lives? Have you put structures in place that help them do that? Let them be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching. So, governing here comes from this word. So, within the elders, the Presbyterian Church has often distinguished between teaching elders and ruling elders. And I believe they have always said that the ruling elders still have to be able to teach, because all elders have to be able to teach. This is according to 1st Timothy 3:2 and they have to be able to correct doctrine. But some do it especially; that is a specialty. In 1st Timothy 3:4-5, it says that he must manage his own household well, and all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church? He must manage; the Greek word is *proistemi* which really means to stand before, to preside over or to practice. We will talk more about this later when we talk about qualifications. We have all been through pain and difficulty with our family, especially children. I have shared it with others and

cried together because according to this verse, my wife and children could destroy my ministry. I don't say this to my family because it would be too difficult for them to carry such a burden.

The point here is simply, the reason for looking at a man's family is to see if he can govern. Can you manage your household; do you know how to lead a wife and children to the Lord in devotions. If you can't lead devotions at home, you can't be an elder in this church. We do remind each other and ask how it is going at home sometimes. If you can't gather a few children and wife together and lead them in pray and sing a song and pray together, how can you lead a congregation? Governing or overseeing or managing would be another word for it here. So, the duty of elders is to oversee or shepherd the flock as it says in Acts 20:28, 'pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.' We don't have a right to lord it over someone but instead we are to shepherd which is caring for those under you. Caring includes protecting, looking after, and providing food for people. In 1st Peter 5:1-2, so I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elders and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you.' In 1st Thessalonian's 5:12, it says that we ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves.' There is no reference to elders in this verse, but it does refer to leaders that are over you.

The last text on governing is Hebrews 13:17; '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.' So the leaders of the church have a governing, overseeing, leading and managing role. This is not just to be done by the congregation as a whole. If you have a small house church, then it may be that the distinctions are different. In such a situation, you have to have someone to manage and solve problems that come up. I believe that in a healthy church, the saints love to be led well. They want to be led with prayer, with the Word and with a humble service. They don't want bunglers making stupid decisions or passive elders and pastors who never dream any dreams of missions, leading people to Christ, training people and ministering outside the church building. This makes a church very sick and sad, and a much greater danger to have visionary leaders who are trumpeting a vision and effectively recruiting the troops to follow. If we are in a local church and you are plugged in with a group of men to whom you look at those to whom you submit to; what if you leave? At what point does that

leadership and governing cease? It is probably ambiguous to a certain extent, but if you plug into the local church where you are and that you are at a point of shifting your leaning on leadership. As long as a person is a member here, we should feel the responsibility but we should not abuse membership by stopping people coming from or leaving to go to another church. Of course, there is a transition period wherever you move to, such as another church, city, or state. You should still feel part of the previous eldership or church until you are settled. For ourselves, when we went to Germany for three years, we never joined a church there. The church we had been a member of in the states, one elder kept up with me almost monthly through letters; he was hoping that I would come back some day and let them do whatever ordination that was ask of them. This resulted in me being ordained in that church four years later. When we had first left that church to go to Germany, they prayed for us and God answered their prayers for us in creditable ways.

But, ideally I should have joined a church in Munich. There were language and culture problems and other things, so I just left my membership back at the church. So, I would say, let's try to teach our people that if they change churches, they should change membership as quick as possible. If you are forced to change churches on a regular basis, then join the local church during that time. Membership doesn't have to be years and years, it can be a short thing. It means that I am here, I want to be responsible for you and I want you to care for me and love me while I am here. I want to be part of this body and I'm here as long as I'm in this situation. So what if someone is running from church authority? Do the elders have a responsibility to keep up with such a person? Yes, they do still have a responsibility. You leave the ninety-nine and you go after the one. This is what the shepherd does and that is what we are not good at. I would like to see a new staff member here at the church whose main job would be something like pastoral care where we would know the spiritual whereabouts of everybody that is on this membership list. This would be a huge job, but otherwise we are just playing games with membership. There are so many people like this; so, we need a structure for this and we need structure for discipline or to encourage people to change their membership. We, as elders are so busy and we have so many things going on; we push these things to the back over and over again. This is to our own discredit, not following through in regards to the spiritual whereabouts of our members.

B. Function of Elders – To Teach

This is not just formal teaching in classrooms and the pulpit, but Word use in counseling and small group settings. The use of the Bible in powerful, effective, convicting and winsome ways;

Ephesians 4:11, and he gave some to be apostles, and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. So, the elder has the responsibility of teaching. We should constantly use the Word of God to equip saints to do ministry. We need to think about mobilization all the time. 1st Timothy 3:2, therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, and able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. We have seen that the overseer and elder is the same office; this qualification is not included in the list of qualifications for deacons. We have read 1st Timothy 5:17 that tell us to let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching. It is not that all don't have to be able to teach; they do, but some labor or devote more time and energy to it, perhaps earning their living by it. Titus 1:9 reads: 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. This may not mean an upfront charismatic gift in communications. There is a firm hold; so when you are interviewing these men, you try to discern whether he has a firm hold on the sure Word as being taught. Can you get his head into the head of the apostles and does he have a firm hold on it? Or does it sound like that he doesn't know what he believes. Is he fragile as if another strong charismatic voice comes along; he would just accept a new teaching. He is not going to make an elder if he lacks firmness. The giving of instruction may also be private. He is also to confute those who contradict sound doctrine.

A few weeks ago, a young man walked to the front and said that he was converted in Korea about five years ago. He said that he went to a church that now seems to have been a cult. The Church of Christ, the church that he mentioned uses baptism for justification and thinks that only Christians that belong to their church are Christians. He wanted someone to help him because he wasn't sure. Our elders should be able to help him. Not all elders need to be able to do public preaching. So, the function of Elders may be summed up in two headings: teaching and governing. They are the doctrinal guardians of the flock and the overseers of the life of the church, responsible to God for feeding and care and ministry of the people. But the elder has his own family and work that he is a part of and he needs to apportion part of his time to study and to ministry and to everything else.

C. Biblical Qualifications for Elders – 1st Timothy 3:1-7

‘The saying is trustworthy: if anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, and able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God’s church? He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.’

1. Aspiration: We see here that aspiration is significant. So to obtain the role of elder is to aspire to it. Nobody should be an elder who doesn’t want to be an elder. 1st Peter 5 says to let him do his job eagerly. If you can’t do it eagerly, you should take a break. That might be an over statement as everybody has seasons of discouragement and I wouldn’t want anyone, even myself to resign every time I got discouraged. If you get to the point of hating everything you do; you need to do something else; take a break from it. We also have irreproachability as a qualification. On the way of people becoming elders, our church listed out what each of these words meant. There are fifteen of these words in this passage and seventeen from Titus as an overlap.

2. Irreproachability: The Greek word is *anepilimpton* and it is used in a few other places in the New Testament. For example, it is used in 5:7 where the widows are to be without reproach by putting their hope in God and not living according to the world. In chapter 6:14 it says that Timothy should keep the commandment irreproachably until Jesus comes. So the word seems to mean living in a way that gives no cause for others to think badly of the church, our faith or the Lord. This doesn’t tell us anything that would actually bring reproach on the church but coming at the head of a list, it puts a tremendous emphasis on a person’s reputation. The focus seems to be, not a person’s relationship with the Lord but how others see him. It, therefore, seems right from the beginning that the public nature of the office is in view with its peculiar demands. So, I’m arguing, a person who is consistently behaving in ways that bring reproach from outside upon the Gospel or the church or Christ; we need to see whether they should be an elder or not. We know that Jesus had enemies and note: who doesn’t have enemies if he or she is being a righteous person. Paul says that if you desire to live a Godly life, you will be persecuted. When people persecute Christians, they say nasty things about them. They reproach them, so being above reproach can’t mean never having an unbelieving person speak an evil word against you. If you want to be Godly, people will speak against you. So, you have to be discerning as to whether or not certain stumbling blocks a person has, are warranted

or unwarranted. All of the qualifications can easily be misapplied which shows us that these lists are by no means exhaustive and they are not in themselves without ambiguity. Do you know the meanings of these qualifications in Timothy and in Titus? There is not a word about prayer! There is nothing about not stealing, killing, lying. So above reproach is not causing unnecessary criticisms from outside to arise.

3. One woman's Husband: This is a very controversial one which we have already touched on. We have the Greek words *Mias* which means one and then *gunaikas andras*. It isn't likely that Paul meant that the elders had to be married, but if they are married, they should be married to one woman. There are other words for marriage that he could have used. The word order would have put husband in the prominent place if that was his intention. Moreover, Paul wasn't married and he thought singleness was an excellent way to have more freedom for ministry (1st Corinthians 7:32). So, that would have been odd if you couldn't be elders because you weren't married. In verse 4, Paul gets to the issue of how a man manages his household. So, the point is probably not a man's competence as a husband but instead one of notoriety: what is this person's reputation in regards to whether he has had one wife or not. So, it appears that the public standard will be high. Does this mean that the elder may not be a polygamist or may not remarry after the death of his first spouse or may not be remarried after a divorce? What is the meaning of this; so this is very controversial? For those who are divorced there may be feelings of condemnation because of this. I think this means that a person can't be an elder if he is divorced. The main argument against polygamy is the use of the parallel phrase, one woman man, in 1st Timothy 5:9 in reference to widows whom the church was to enroll in a well fair service order; she must be one man's wife. These are the same words but reversed to apply to a woman. Polyandry, a woman having several husbands, this simply was not a practice. This probably meant that the woman had not been divorced and remarried; since that she wasn't a polyanderith. So, since the phrase in relation to women cannot refer to polyandry, it doesn't likely refer to polygamy for the men. This is my main argument against polygamy being addressed here. Now, by implication, I think polygamy is wrong. This is from the teachings of Jesus and from Genesis 2:24 and elsewhere. So, I don't think this is what Paul is addressing here.

I haven't defended that she shouldn't have remarried after divorce while her husband was still living. Where do I get this? The phrase in 5:9 surely didn't mean that the widow was excluded from the order if she had remarried when her first husband died. In 5:14 the younger widows were encouraged to remarry and its unlikely having said this that Paul would exclude them later from the widow's order because they had followed his advice. So, he says to young women who lose their

husbands to remarry for it is good for you. Then later as they are older and lose their husbands, the church needs to take care of them. So, I don't think one man woman means either polyandry or remarrying after the death of a husband. The only answer that is left is divorce and remarriage. This is my basic argument. There is a word for divorce, for Jesus used it and why didn't he use that here? Why this phrase, one woman man? In thinking aloud, the phrase probably is as broad as it is to cover a broad range. It is general enough to say, there are different ways that you can become a two woman man. You can become a two woman man by polygamy, by inappropriate remarriages and by having secret affairs and not have a divorce. So, there is a fundamental issue of the kind of man that should be there in regards to how you relate to a woman. The answer: he had better relate to a woman biblically and one woman. So, I don't know what else it might mean.

Is he saying that a woman who divorces her husband and then repents and then later meets a Godly man and married him. What happens when he dies and she becomes a widow and then she applies to this group? Paul says that she shouldn't belong to it, but that doesn't mean that she can't be fed or she can't be looked after and cared for. But there seems to be some kind of organization, like a nunnery or convent. So, I apply this to a past issue in an elder's life. When it comes to the issue of what his marriage track record is, there is something about this. This is my bottom line interpretation here and I admit to varying interpretations here. I think that the marriage issue is the one thing when it comes to the public representation to the world and the church, abides. He wants elders who embody in their marriage track record the ideal as much as possible. Here is a life example: a pastor is abandoned by his wife and she remarries. Is the pastor disqualified from ministry? I think I would say, not necessarily, if he doesn't remarry. There are other issues like irreproachability and the ideal and managing of the household. So whatever church is going to call him or keep him must be profoundly satisfied that he didn't fall short of anything in trying to keep that marriage. It wasn't due to a failure of being able to manage his household well. This is all a very scary and sad thing that a woman who forsakes the faith can hold a man hostage and ruin his ministry like that. I tremble at that. But yet, certain things happen to us and often it is a matter of changing ministries; God doesn't give up on us. What about other things in our lives? What about the drug culture, crime, and even murder? Does this change our chances to serve God? I suggest that your marriage state only changes things like being an elder or a pastor, etc. Anyone who grew up in an unbelieving situation and has come to the Lord is different.

So what about Hosea; he continued to be a prophet? I wouldn't want to build on those prophetic symbolic activities of the Minor Prophets. In summary, I will admit that the idea or phrase

of this husband of one wife is not crystal clear! But also be aware that as a leader if you have a view that nobody agrees with, you either have to leave the church because you simply will not have any followers or you will have to live with some compromises. I will compromise on this one, simply because it isn't clear. I have my own narrow belief while others believe differently.

4. Temperate: This word is used two other times in the New Testament, both in 3:11 and in Titus 2:2 in regards to older men. It is odd that it is used here even though in verse 3 it says that the elders must not be addicted to wine. Perhaps here, the point is more general; that his temperance extends over other things besides wine or perhaps the repetition comes because in verse 3 there begins a list of things that the elder is not supposed to be. So Paul felt that he should include the problem of wine in the positive list as well as the negative list. I think temperate is broader here than just wine. This is a person who is not given to excessive things that would be harmful to him. What about coffee, sugar, over eating etc.?

5. Sensible, Prudent and Reasonable: The Greek word for this is *sophrona*. This is related to being of a sound mind and having good judgement which implies seeing things as they really are; knowing yourself well and understanding people and how they respond. It is being in touch with reality with no great gaps between what you see in yourself and what others do. This is an idea of self-knowledge with a sober and wise and reasonable assessment of circumstances in people. This is something that you can't begin to quantify. This is why you have to have mature people in the interview process that we have here at Bethlehem Church for recruiting elders.

6. Dignified, Respectable and Honorable: The Greek word for this is *kosminos*. The idea seems to be one of not offending against propriety. A person who comports himself in situations so as not to step on toes unnecessarily; every culture has certain expectations that are dignified and honorable must take thought about. They shouldn't ignore what we call norms in society.

7. Hospitable: The Greek word is *philoxenon*, love of strangers, a literal translation. People that are given to being kind to new-comers and make them feel at home. This is a person whose home is open to ministry, a person who doesn't shrink back from having guests. There should be some sense with elders on a Sunday morning of not running away from people, but instead they are running toward people.

D. Doctrinal Proficiency

The remaining qualifications include the following: skilled in teaching, not addicted to wine, not pugnacious or belligerent, gentle, peaceable, lover of money; must be a leader of a well-ordered

household, a mature believer and not a New Convert. He must have a good reputation with outsiders and blamelessness with honest and orderly children, not arrogant, quick-tempered, not a drunkard, not violent, not greedy for gain, a lover of goodness, a master of himself, just, devout, holy and self-controlled. For doctrinal proficiency, first is his firm hold on the truth and nature of the Word he holds. There must be a positive role of teaching and also of confuting doctrinal error.