

BIBLICAL ELDERSHIP

A Summary, December 2024

Introduction

The church is built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone (*Eph. 2:20*). Once this foundation was completed, and since the apostles have passed from the scene, the church must be governed by the precepts of Scripture alone. This means it will be under the administration of the officers of the local church — the Elders and Deacons. They are the ones who have the responsibility for the spiritual care of the flock. After much study and prayer, Henderson Hills approved leadership by an Elder Council on August 4, 1996. The first Elders were ordained and installed in 1997.

What Exactly Is an Elder?

The Bible describes Elders as overseers, or stewards, pastors of the church. When the Bible mentions Elders, it is always plural. A plurality of Elders ensures that authority is shared, checked, and balanced. A plurality also ensures the contribution of different voices, abilities, and spiritual giftings.

What Do Elders Do?

Elders lead, feed, care for, and protect the church. Elders lead by casting vision, clarifying our mission, identifying values, and providing oversight. Elders feed the church by affirming our beliefs, teaching doctrine, and fostering spiritual growth. Elders care through prayer, counsel, and encouragement. Elders protect the church by defending doctrine, overseeing instruction, and exercising discipline when necessary.

What Are the Qualifications?

Qualifications for Elders are listed in *1 Timothy 3:1-7*, as well as *Titus 1:5-9* and *1 Peter 5:1-3*. Elders are not to be new converts, lovers of money or fond of sordid gain, not addicted to alcohol, contentious or quick-tempered, and not self-willed or lording it over others. Instead, Elders are to be devout men who are above reproach, husbands of one wife, who manage their households well and who have children who believe.

Elders are to be gentle, hospitable, prudent, sensible, and self-controlled. They are to be respectable men, who have a good reputation, who are lovers of what is good, and who are an example to all. Elders are to hold fast to the faithful Word and be able to teach or exhort and refute those who contradict it. Finally, they are not to serve under compulsion but voluntarily and with eagerness.

It is clear that these are to be men of character and integrity, examples of the Christian life, men of sound doctrine, who love and know God's Word, and who can teach it rightly to others.

Eldership is a calling of God, not for those who seek power, prestige, or some other “payment.” These men have obeyed God’s call and serve humbly and sacrificially. The Bible tells us that those aspiring to be Elders should be examined before being installed, and there is an extensive mentoring process for candidates.

What Is the Mentoring Process?

Candidates endure several interviews, as well as a rigorous study of biblical Eldership. Their beliefs are challenged with 80 doctrinal questions, followed by an intense examination.

The candidates are then mentored by three Elders over a period of nine months. They also join Elder Council meetings to see how they interact with church challenges, as well as with the other Elders. Our overall goal is to affirm God’s call on their lives and to examine their qualifications.

Finally, these men are introduced to church members, who also examine their qualifications and affirm God’s calling. The entire process takes two years or more. After the mentoring phases are complete, the Elder candidates are affirmed by a church vote and publicly ordained.

Elder Principles and Practices

1. Elders have been called, qualified, and equipped by God for the work of His church.
2. Elders are accountable to God, to each other, and to the congregation for their words and actions.
3. The Elders are the Pastors of the church and are equal in position, responsibility, leadership, and voice.
4. These Pastors, or Shepherds, are to lead, feed, care for, and protect the sheep.
5. Since Christ is the Chief Shepherd, and the Elders are His under-shepherds, they will pastor His church in a way that reflects His character, with humility, sacrificial love, and servitude.
6. Elder equality requires collaborative leadership in determining ministry direction and fulfillment.
7. The need for biblical decisions outweighs any requirement of expediency.
8. In every decision, the Elders strive for consensus as to the will of God for His church.
9. While the Elders may not agree on every issue, they support the decisions of the Council.
10. Elders commit to preserving the bonds of friendship, unity, respect, and trust between them.

Soul Care

The Bible says that Elders are to watch over the souls of the flock and will have to give an account to God for the way they have watched over them (*Heb. 13:17*). We are grateful for the men whom God has called to this position and pray for their protection, wisdom, and unity.