



The Sanctuary Fellowship

Eldership Process

Eldership Process

Phase 1:

- a. Invitation to eldership from a vocational elder.
- b. Interview with at least one vocational elder.
- c. Review all Eldership Process documents.
- d. Read Strauch's "Biblical Eldership" summary.

Phase 2: Application process. Forms & instructions are on the website and also provided within this document in following sections.

1. Personal Info

- a. Contact information
- b. Photo (preferably with family)
- c. Resume
- d. Reference #1 – Supervisor
- e. Reference #2 – Peer
- f. Reference #3 – Disciple (or subordinate)

2. Essays and Questionnaires

- a. Applicant Essay – Personal history essay including specific elder calling.
- b. Wife's essay – Personal history essay of applicant's wife
- c. Child Essay – Essay for children over 13 years old
- d. Family Finance survey
- e. Pastoral Questionnaire
- f. Theological Exam
- g. Confidential Personal Questionnaire/Background Check Forms – Must be submitted before Final Interview

Phase 3:

- 1. Final Interview** by Supervisor Elder and any other applicable leadership.
- 2. Elder candidate is presented** as elder to be installed.
- 4-week window for body to bring any concerns
- 3. Elder Team approve** elder candidate
- 4. Formal Installation and Ordination**

Seventeen Characteristics of an Elder Above Reproach

(Titus 1:6-9; 1 Timothy 3:1-7; 1 Peter 5:1-3; Acts 20:17-37)

Elder is another term for *pastor, Bishop, overseer or shepherd*. Elders are men above reproach or blameless. These are not sinless men—sinless men do not exist. The elders who would lead the churches had to be men without any outward character flaw. It is a person who others in the church have no obvious reason to accuse him of sin. He would have internal evidence against himself because he knows his inclinations toward evil and sin. His lifestyle would need to be exemplary.

All Christians should strive for these general characteristics, not just the elders.

This list is a description of a person living above reproach which all of us should strive. The normal attendee of a church would not be denied entrance into the church if one lacked these character qualities. However, an elder must demonstrate ALL of these qualities to serve in the office as an elder. Every believer should strive to live above reproach.

This is the highest office in the church and the other pastoral epistle states this as a role exclusively for males (1 Tim. 2:11-15).

Above Reproach (Titus 1:6, 7; 1 Tim 3:2)

This is the overarching, summarizing characteristic. You will find a similar (but not identical) list in First Timothy. Being above reproach is the first requirement in both lists and Titus repeats it. The other items on the list explain what above reproach means. If we peruse the two lists, as well as First Peter, we find 17 qualities of an elder who is above reproach.

1. Husband devoted to wife (Titus 1:6; 1 Tim 3:2) one-woman man.

This is a major qualification in light of the marriage picturing Christ and the church (Eph. 5:22 ff.). The pastors in the church lead by example. They exhibit Christ's love for His church—His bride by their love, devotedness and exclusive faithfulness to their wife. This does not disqualify a single man from being an elder...Jesus was single and Paul was single but it is the exception. Here is the rule: do not look and do not touch unless she is your wife—then look and touch often!

2. Children in submission (Titus 1:6; 1 Tim 3:4-5) not perfect.

Equally important is the pastor leading his family. 1 Timothy 3:5 explains that **if a man does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church**. The first flock for a pastor is his own family as Pastor Dad. If this flock is not in order, the larger flock will suffer. Paul instructs **fathers not to provoke [their] children to anger, but [to] bring them up in the discipline and admonition of the Lord** (Eph. 6:4).

3. Faithful Steward (Titus 1:7)

Here the term used is overseer (Greek episkopos). It is not another office, but a functional title of the elder. It is what he does. He is a steward, a manager of God's resources and Jesus' flock. He takes responsibility, but not ownership.

4. Humble - not arrogant (Titus 1:7)

A pastor must constantly demonstrate the gospel by admitting wrong and assuming responsibility and restoring relationships. Arrogance is only being concerned with oneself.

5. Gentle - not quick-tempered (Titus 1:7; 1 Tim 3:3)

No man will be of any use in the kingdom that is quick-tempered and lashes out at others. The difference between how Jesus demonstrated anger is that He was angry at the abuse of others and the dishonoring of God. We get angry at how it affects us.

6. Moderate - not a drunkard (Titus 1:7; 1 Tim 3:3)

This is not just overindulgence in alcohol but is idiomatic for any behavior that fuels addictive responses.

7. Peaceful - not violent (Titus 1:7; 1 Tim 3:3)

A pastor is prone to inflict violence through his words. He is to be a peacemaker.

8. Financial Integrity - not greedy for gain (Titus 1:7; 1 Tim 3:3; 1 Peter 5:3)

A pastor is to be upright in his financial dealings and not accused of pursuing money over the kingdom of God.

9. Hospitable (Titus 1:8; 1 Tim 3:2)

A pastor's home is to be open for others to enjoy. This is a difficult qualification as a pastor's life is stressful enough not to have his home as his one refuge

10. Lover of Good (Titus 1:8)

A pastor genuinely loves what is good. He does not just think he should love it.

11. Self-controlled (Titus 1:8; 1 Tim 3:2)

Self-control is a characterization of every area of a pastor's life. He is disciplined in his diet, time, mouth, exercise, relationships, sex, and money. He is consistently training in righteousness to be able to run the race set before him.

12. Upright (Titus 1:8)

He is upright in his relationships and in how he treats others.

13. Holy (Titus 1:8)

The opposite is *unholy* and that is not helpful when counseling others –Unholy Reverend. It is a life devoted wholeheartedly to Jesus, externally and internally.

14. Able to teach (Titus 1:9; 1 Tim 3:2)

All of the other qualifications are character qualities. This is the only ability-based requirement. He is to be able to teach sound doctrine, not just be able to communicate in an excellent manner. His teaching can be to one or two, to twenty, to a hundred or to a thousand. Most of the churches in Crete were house churches. The elders were to defend the faith once delivered to the saints against the numerous false teachers that arose.

15. Spiritually Mature (1 Tim 3:6)

Positions of authority without spiritual maturity lead to the trap of pride. When pride grows in a man sin abounds. 1 Timothy 3:6 says, **“He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. A pastor must first be a convert.”**

16. Respectable (1 Tim 3:7)

1 Timothy 3:7 says that **an elder must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.** That does not mean that all will like him or even appreciate him. It means that there is no criminal, moral or ethical offense against him.

17. Example to the Flock (1 Peter 5:3)

We need models in our life to emulate. Elders are examples of Biblical character such as sexuality, time management, marriage, parenting, worship, relationships and many others. A pastor should be someone your sons could pattern their life after and the kind of man your daughter should marry.

The characterizations of an elder could be divided as follows:

1. Relation to God

- A man — masculine leader, not a female
- Above reproach — without any character defect
- Able to teach — effective Bible communicator
- Not a new convert — mature Christian

2. Relation to Family

- Husband of one wife — one-woman man, sexually pure
- Has obedient children — successful father
- Manages family well — provides for, leads, organizes, loves

3. Relation to Self

- Temperate — mentally and emotionally stable
- Self-controlled — disciplined life of sound decision-making
- Not given to drunkenness — without addictions
- Not a lover of money — financially content and upright

4. Relation to Others

- Respectable — worth following and imitating
- Hospitable — welcomes strangers, especially non-Christians for evangelism
- Not violent — even-tempered
- Gentle — kind, gracious, loving
- Not contentious — peaceable, not quarrelsome/divisive
- Good reputation with outsiders — respected by non-Christians
- Exemplary lifestyle

Lifestyle of an Elder

The elders in a church set the precedent for what faithful pastoral leadership is in that church. Therefore, elders must not only have character, which qualifies him to lead God's people, but also the competency to accomplish the duties Jesus his Senior Pastor has assigned him. The duties of the elders are many according to Scripture. Elders, deacons, and members share the load.

- Prayer and Scripture study (Acts 6:4)
- Ruling/leading the church (1 Timothy 5:17)
- Managing the church (1 Timothy 3:4–5)
- Caring for people in the church (1 Peter 5:2–5)
- Giving account to God for the church (Hebrews 13:17)
- Living exemplary lives (Hebrews 13:7)
- Rightly using the authority God has given them (Acts 20:28)
- Teaching the Bible correctly (Ephesians 4:11; 1 Timothy 3:2)
- Preaching (1 Timothy 5:17)
- Praying for the sick (James 5:13–15)
- Teaching sound doctrine and refuting false teachings (Titus 1:9)
- Working hard (1 Thessalonians 5:12)
- Rightly using money and power (1 Peter 5:1–3)
- Protecting the church from false teachers (Acts 20:17–31)
- Disciplining unrepentant Christians (Matthew 18:15–17)

Elder Protocol

It is crucial to clarify from the outset of the eldership application process the roles, responsibilities, expectations, rules of engagement and disciplinary procedures for eldership at The Sanctuary Fellowship. It is important to remind ourselves of what is already established and understood amongst the church body as a whole.

Scripture definition of an Elder:

“Elders are the male leaders of the church who are also called pastors, bishops, and overseers (Acts 20:28; Eph. 4:11; 1 Peter 5:2). The elders are men chosen for their ministry according to clear biblical requirements (1 Tim. 2:11–3:1–7; Titus 1:5–9). The elders are always spoken of in plurality because God intends for more than one man to lead and rule over the church as a safeguard for both the church and the man. The elders’ duties include ruling (1 Tim. 5:17) managing (1 Tim. 3:4–5), tending (1 Peter 5:2–5), giving account (Heb. 13:17), living exemplary lives (Heb. 13:7), using authority (Acts 20:28), teaching (Eph. 4:11; 1 Tim. 3:2), preaching (1 Tim. 5:17), doctrinal instruction (Titus 1:9), and discipline (Matt. 18:15–17).”

The Elders of The Sanctuary Fellowship commit:

- “to lovingly caring for you and seeking your growth in Christ (Heb. 13:17; 1 Thes. 5:12).”
- “to provide teaching and counsel from the Scriptures (Gal. 6:6; 1 Tim. 5:17–18).”
- “that this teaching will span the whole counsel of God’s Word (Acts 20:27–28).”
- “to helping you in times of need (Acts 2:42–47, 4:32–35; James 2:14–17).”
- “that your elders and deacons will meet the criteria assigned to them in the Scriptures (1 Tim. 3:1–13; 5:17–22; Titus 1:5–9; 1 Pt. 5:1–4).”

Biblical Church Government Roles

A. Jesus and the Elders:

1. Jesus is the head of the church in every capacity

- **Colossians 1:15-20** - He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.
- **1 Peter 5:4** - And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.

2. Jesus is the pattern and example for the elders to follow

- **1 Corinthians 11:1** - Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.
- **Philippians 2:1-11** - So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

3. Jesus entrusts the elders of the church with the preaching of the Gospel

- **1 Thessalonians 2:1-8** - For you yourselves know, brothers, that our coming to you was not in vain. But though we had already suffered and been shamefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we had boldness in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in the midst of much conflict. For our appeal does not spring from error or impurity or any attempt to deceive, but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not to please man, but to please God who tests our hearts. For we never came with words of flattery, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed—God is witness. Nor did we seek glory from people, whether from you or from others, though we could have made demands as apostles of Christ. But we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children. So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us.
- **1 Corinthians 1:17** - For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.

4. The Bible is Jesus' perfect words to the church and is in authority over the church

- “Unless I am convinced by the testimony from Scripture or by evident reason...I am held fast by the Scriptures adduced by me, and my conscience is held captive by God's Word, and I neither can nor will revoke anything, seeing it is not safe or right to act against conscience. God help me. Amen.” (Martin Luther Diet of Worms, April 18, 1521)

- **Jude 1:3** - Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.

B. Elders and The Church:

1. The elders are to govern the church in an orderly way.

- **1 Corinthians 14:40** - But all things should be done decently and in order.

2. The elders are the highest human authority in the church

- **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.
- **1 Peter 5:1-2** - 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;
- **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.

3. The elders are to lead by example

- **Colossians 1:24-25** - Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church, of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known
- **1 Timothy 4:11-16** - Command and teach these things. Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity. Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching. Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you. Practice these things, devote yourself to them, so that all may see your progress. Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers.
- **1 Peter 5:1-11** - 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; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you. Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen.

- **2 Timothy 1:3-14** - I thank God whom I serve, as did my ancestors, with a clear conscience, as I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day. As I remember your tears, I long to see you, that I may be filled with joy. I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you as well. For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands, for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control. Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God, who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, and which now has been manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel, for which I was appointed a preacher and apostle and teacher, which is why I suffer as I do. But I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard until that Day what has been entrusted to me. Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you.

4. The elders are to develop other leaders and disciples of Jesus

- **2 Timothy 2:1-2** - You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus, and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.
- **Ephesians 4:11-16** - And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, 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 that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by

every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, 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.

5. Elders are to protect the church against false teachers

- **1 Timothy 1:3-11** - As I urged you when I was going to Macedonia, remain at Ephesus so that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine, nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies, which promote speculations rather than the stewardship from God that is by faith. The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. Certain persons, by swerving from these, have wandered away into vain discussion, desiring to be teachers of the law, without understanding either what they are saying or the things about which they make confident assertions. Now we know that the law is good, if one uses it lawfully, understanding this, that the law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who strike their fathers and mothers, for murderers, the sexually immoral, men who practice homosexuality, enslavers, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine, in accordance with the gospel of the glory of the blessed God with which I have been entrusted.

6. Elders are worthy of respect unless under discipline for sin

- **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.
- **1 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.
- **1 Timothy 5:17-18** - Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain," and, "The laborer deserves his wages."

C. Qualifications of an Elder

Elders must meet the qualifications for the office as listed in Scripture

- **1 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, 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.
- **2 Timothy 2:14-17** - Remind them of these things, and charge them before God not to quarrel about words, which does no good, but only ruins the hearers. Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth. But avoid irreverent babble, for it will lead people into more and more ungodliness, and their talk will spread like gangrene.
- **Titus 1:5-16** - 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— 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. 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, but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined. 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. For there are many who are insubordinate, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision party. They must be silenced, since they are upsetting whole families by teaching for shameful gain what they ought not to teach. One of the Cretans, a prophet of their own, said, "Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons." This testimony is true. Therefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith, not devoting themselves to Jewish myths and the commands of people who turn away from the truth. To the pure, all things are pure, but to the defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure; but both their minds and their consciences are defiled. They profess to know God, but they deny him by their works. They are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good work.

D. Elders and the Law

The elders are a legal court with legal obligations and liabilities

- **Romans 13:1-7** - Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer. Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience. For the same reason you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing. Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed.

Mutual Submission within the Eldership

At The Sanctuary Fellowship, we expect all elders to operate from a trustworthy posture under the umbrella of the The Sanctuary Fellowship Elders' position in submission to Jesus, regarding doctrine, philosophy, polity/government, personal character practices, submission to authority, leadership integrity, and trust and confidence.

We mutually submit to one another (Eph. 5:21). A breach occurs if an elder operates *outside* the established Sanctuary Fellowship Elders' beliefs and values either verbally or practically. An elder can hold to slightly differing beliefs but must align under the eldership principally to avoid dysfunction, divisiveness and a rebellious church. Trust is a major factor, even if divisiveness is not provable. If an elder dishonors the eldership principles, immediate repentance and realignment is expected. If not, that elder will disrupt the mission, vision and effectiveness of Jesus through The Sanctuary Fellowship and must be relieved of his eldership immediately.

Seven areas where mutual submission is expected:

1. **Doctrinally**, each elder is expected to uphold in practice, teaching, counseling, and modeling the doctrinal statement established by the elders. Any disagreement is to be discussed in an appropriate manner with other elders seeking to understand Scriptural positions. However, the position espoused outside of the elder discussions is to be consistent with the approved doctrinal statement. If an elder is not able to uphold and defend the doctrines of the church, he should resign or be removed from office.
2. **Philosophically**, an elder is to support the ministries of the church. Any practice of the church is open for discussion with a supervisory elder overseeing a particular ministry but it is incongruous to criticize ministries, practices or policies established by The Sanctuary Fellowship eldership. An elder that openly criticizes philosophies, particularly with non-elders, is divisive. The congregation assumes that each elder speaks in harmony with the other elders.
3. The **polity of the church** is its operational and governance structure, including the authoritative structures as outlined in the Bylaws and supportive documents defining roles, responsibilities, protocol and hierarchical authority. If a question arises about the polity, Bylaws or procedural structures of the church, an elder is to take the issue to the lead pastor or to one of the executive elders. Every elder is to support and operate within this established structure. At no time is it acceptable to criticize the authoritative systems outside of the eldership.
4. The **lifestyles** of the elders are to be consistent with Scripture and mutually submissive to the other elders. An elder is to be above reproach in his attitude, actions, thoughts and words. He is to live as a model to the members of the church with regard to his family, marriage, finances, work ethic, self-control and appropriate dealings with others.
5. An elder must **respect the leadership** of all of the elders and particularly of the lead pastor and other elders who act in a supervisory role (Heb. 13:7). Elders

model submission and godly leadership principles to others in the church and on the eldership team. If an elder repeatedly operates outside of his God-given authorities, he is to repent immediately.

- a. An elder can disagree with the direction of the church, ministry, department or campus and can respectfully ask questions of other elders.
 - 1) Discuss the issues in a mature manner to gain understanding of the concern at hand.
 - 2) Discuss it in a respectful way.
 - 3) An elder can offer alternatives in a way that is not antagonistic, arrogant or filled with threats. To disagree is acceptable; to be divisive is not acceptable.
 - 4) Limit your discussion to those who are directly a part of the problem or a part of the solution. Discussion of elder matters with those outside of the eldership is not wise. These will lead to misunderstandings and further problems.
 - b. An elder must be willing to submit wholly to the decision once it is made—even if contrary to one’s personal view. To submit wholly means refraining from being divisive or contentious about it.
 - c. An elder must understand that we are mutually submissive with regard to the role and character of a church leader but we have functional positions of authority as well as firsts among equals. Submitting to authority is respecting the chain of spiritual authority to those who are “equal” in eldership, but are established as firsts among equals. This will be especially relevant with multiple departments, campuses and specialized ministries.
 - d. An elder who continually ignores respect for authority, for established chains of command, or one who is defiantly antagonistic about a personal belief, is contrary to the heart of Jesus. The result will be discipline from a supervisor in a patient, but firm manner.
 - e. Jesus in Gethsemane cried out to the Father, asked for the cup to pass, but ultimately committed himself to the Father’s will. In this, he did not sin, even though he expressed strong feelings, was transparent about the agonizing effects of it, and even suggested an alternative (letting the cup pass). He was not acting disrespectfully or without submission. God trusted Jesus ultimately to line up in submission to the Father’s will. The Father did not respond to the Son in a displeased way or cast shame on Jesus for experiencing the impact of the Father’s purpose for him. Jesus’ submission was demonstrated in that he was able to move forward fully aware of the excruciating pain he was about to endure because of it. He conquered those feelings by doing what he was called to do.
6. **Leadership integrity** must be a premium for eldership. In whatever area of responsibility he has been entrusted, he is to develop and lead others toward achieving the mission and vision of the church. He must demonstrate reliability, sacrifice, dependability, competence and honesty. Elders must lead with respect for others, for the church and with responsibility for all his actions. A leader is the role model for those he leads. A good indication of a leader with integrity is the character of those under his charge.
7. **Trust and Confidence** among the elders is imperative. Trust is fragile and can be lost instantly or a long-earned trust may be eroded and then suddenly lost.

Elders must trust one another implicitly. If trust and confidence either up the chain of command or down the chain has been completely lost then the best course of action is either repentance or removal from eldership. Systems, structures and leadership should not be forced to work around individuals who are prone to betraying this trust. Elders are entrusted with lives, with resources, with information and with the mission of Jesus. Misusing information or sharing information wrongly is a breach of trust and that elder will encounter discipline.

Elder Disciplinary Procedures at The Sanctuary Fellowship

Questions vs. Accusations – The Bereans Acts 17

There is a difference between asking questions to investigate a perceived problem and questioning a person's character. The first is responsibly overseeing the body while the latter is accusatory and is not consistent with Scripture or contributing to the health of the Elders.

According to Romans 3:23, "all men have sinned"...and this includes the elders. However, the elders are held to a standard that says we must be above reproach, that our lives are conducted in such a way that there are no obvious or hidden areas of sin. It does not mean we are perfect. An elder, like every Christian, must be on a continual path of sanctification and spiritual maturity. We all will sin and the following principles are intended to give instruction on how that sin should be dealt with personally and corporately as an elder body. We see in scripture that there is a different level of discipline for different sins.

1. Personal sin must be dealt with personally

- o **Matthew 18:15-20** - "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. Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them."

2. Formal charges & witnesses are required to investigate elder sin

- o **James 3:1** - Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly.
- o **1 Timothy 5:19-21** - Do not admit a charge against an elder except on the evidence of two or three witnesses. As for those who persist in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all, so that the rest may stand in fear. In

the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of the elect angels I charge you to keep these rules without prejudging, doing nothing from partiality.

Termination Decision Principles and Questions

The senior leadership of The Sanctuary Fellowship will continually be forced to make difficult eldership decisions. We have both a Biblical and legal requirement to act wisely, prudently and in the best interest of the whole church.

1. Is there blatant and obvious disqualifying sin according to the scriptures?
 - o If yes than the sin must be confronted, employment termination should be immediate and eldership or deaconship removal needs to be initiated.
2. Is it in the best interest of the church (not the individual) and the forward progress of the Gospel to terminate this employee?
 - o What is in the best interest of an individual cannot take priority over what is in the best interest of the church as a whole. We must have the courage to make hard decisions for the Gospel that are not popular to those affected by the decisions.
 - o Godly, strong, decisive and compassionate leadership of the church needs to take precedent over personal feelings when there is a clear termination action to be taken.
 - o Stewardship of Jesus' resources cannot be taken lightly.
3. Is it causing more damage to the organization to keep this person around than it would to terminate them immediately?
 - o Systems, structures and leadership should not be forced to work around individuals that are negatively affecting the organization.
 - o If trust and confidence either up the chain or down the chain has been completely lost then the best course of action is to terminate.
 - o Politics cannot override conviction when it comes to making inevitable termination decisions. This is not about positioning for an agenda or vote to be approved but the right thing must be done expediently for the health of the church.
4. Is this person causing an unhealthy amount of distraction and detraction from the church leadership's time and attention towards the mission and vision?
 - o Termination does not mean an absence of care for an elder and his family but it is not right for an employee to detract the leader's time and attention from the mission and vision because of ongoing performance, character, sin or insubordination issues.
 - o There is room as an elder, to respectfully ask questions and disagree with an openhanded decision provided disrespect, unfounded accusations, or insubordination is not present. However, where patience, grace and love has been continually extended, and in turn rejected, a termination must be considered. It is a sin of leadership to tolerate sin, disrespect and insubordination and set a precedent to allow such behavior to continue in the future.
5. Is there Biblical precedent to seek personal (not employment) reconciliation or should all contact be cut off to best protect the church?

- o Sin can and should be dealt with regardless of employment status. Realizing that a person being terminated will always feel wronged and still needs Jesus and Godly counsel, the leadership should accept humble repentance and seek personal reconciliation. If the terminated employee is hard-hearted, stiff necked, divisive and unrepentant than the leadership must protect the rest of the church. Much of this is dependant on the personal response of the one being terminated.

Biblical Eldership – Condensed Version by Strauch

BIBLICAL ELDERSHIP
by **Alexander Strauch**

**Restoring the Eldership
to Its Rightful Place
in the Church**

(Revised - Booklet)

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THE PROBLEM

While attending a sacred music concert, I received an insightful lesson in ecclesiology. As I walked into the main foyer of the church where the concert was being held, I immediately noticed the photographs and names of the senior pastor and his staff arranged in a pyramid within a glass encasement. The senior pastor's photograph was at the top, his three associate pastor's photographs were below, and the rest of the church staff's photographs completed the base of the pyramid. As I walked further into the building and down a side hall, I saw another glass encasement that contained the photographs and names of the church elders. I immediately thought, *What a superb illustration of how the church elders have been pushed aside to a scarcely visible position in the church!* This is quite different from the New Testament model of eldership.

My first encounter with church elders occurred when I was a young teenager preparing for confirmation. During confirmation classes, I told the minister about my conversion to Christ, which had taken place the previous summer at a Bible camp. He was so intrigued by my youthful, exuberant testimony of Christ that he asked me to share my story with the church elders. So I met with the elders and told them about my new relationship with Jesus Christ. They sat speechless, looking totally puzzled. I was saddened by their response because I realized that they didn't understand what I was saying. That experience left me with little confidence in the elders or the church.

My next encounter with church elders, however, was altogether different. While attending college away from home, I was invited to a church that taught and practiced authentic biblical eldership. The elders of this church took seriously the New Testament commands for elders to be biblically qualified and to actively pastor the flock of God. They provided strong leadership, loving pastoral care and discipline, sound Bible teaching, and humble, sacrificial examples of Christian living. As a result, they were highly esteemed by the church. The inspiring example of these men first awakened in me a positive interest in the subject of church eldership.

Later, while attending seminary, my growing interest in eldership was vigorously challenged. During a class on church polity, which stubbornly resisted any notion of an elder-led church, I asked the professor, "But what do you do with all the scriptural texts on elders?"

He quickly responded, "Numbers of texts on elders mean nothing!"

I thought, but didn't have the nerve to express it publicly, *Well, what does mean something? Your nonexistent texts on clerics?* This and other similar experiences served only to stir my increasing conviction that eldership was a biblically sound doctrine that most churches either ignored or misinterpreted.

Several years later, I was preparing a series of sermons on the doctrine of the Church. When I came to the subject of eldership, I was shocked to discover that there was no full-length book on the subject. There were small booklets, journal articles, and chapters within books, but no thorough treatment of the subject from an expository viewpoint. This lack of exposition was hardly believable, especially when I considered the elders' primary role as leaders in the first churches and the number of scriptural texts devoted to elders. It finally ignited my desire to write on the subject of eldership.

I don't believe any doctrine of Holy Scripture should be neglected or defined out of existence. Yet this is precisely what many churches have done to the biblical doctrine of eldership. Even among churches that claim to practice eldership, elders have been reduced to being temporary, lay, church board members, which is quite contrary to the New Testament model of pastoral eldership. Although such churches may have an eldership, it is not a biblical eldership.

Literally tens of thousands of churches worldwide practice some form of eldership because they believe it to be a biblical teaching. Unfortunately, because the advocates of eldership have been so terribly delinquent in adequately articulating this doctrine, a great deal of confusion and unbiblical thinking surrounds the topic among most elder-led churches. There are persistent, crippling misconceptions about eldership that hinder churches from practicing authentic biblical eldership. This subject is too important to the local church to be bogged down in confusion and error.

To help remedy this appalling confusion over eldership, I wrote *Biblical Eldership: An Urgent Call to Restore Biblical Church Leadership*. This book was aimed primarily at churches that practice eldership but may misconstrue its true biblical Christian character and mandate. This booklet briefly summarizes *Biblical Eldership*. Hopefully it will whet your appetite to read the entire book, but more important, it will motivate you to study further the biblical teaching on eldership. Precious truths, no doubt, still await discovery.

BIBLICAL ELDERSHIP DEFINED

Despite what all the New Testament communicates, the doctrine of biblical eldership has been sorely misunderstood. Even churches that claim to be governed by a plurality of elders have redefined eldership so that its original purpose and noble standing have, in practice, been eclipsed by the ordained pastor and his staff. To clarify biblical eldership in light of contemporary church practices, I present the following five, distinguishing features of a New Testament, Christian eldership: pastoral leadership, shared leadership, male leadership, qualified leadership, and servant leadership.

Pastoral Leadership

When most Christians hear about church elders, they think of an official church board, lay officials, influential people within the local church, or advisers to the pastor. They think of elders as being policymakers, financial officers, fund-raisers, or administrators. I call these types of elders "board elders." People don't expect "board elders" to teach the Word or be involved pastorally in people's lives. Victor A. Constien, a Lutheran official and author of *The Caring Elder*, illustrated this popular view of the elders' role when he wrote, "Members of a congregation's board of elders are not assistant pastors. They *assist* their pastor. . . elders help facilitate and strengthen the working relationship of the church staff."

Such a view, however, not only lacks scriptural support but flatly contradicts New Testament Scriptures. A person doesn't need to read Greek or be professionally trained in theology to understand that the contemporary, church-board concept of eldership is irreconcilably at odds with the New Testament definition of eldership. According to the New Testament, elders lead the church, teach and preach the Word, protect the church from false teachers, exhort and admonish the saints in sound doctrine, visit the sick and pray, and judge doctrinal issues. In biblical terminology, elders shepherd, oversee, lead, and care for the local church.

Therefore, when Paul and Peter directly exhort the elders to do their duty, they both employ shepherding imagery. *It should be observed that these two giant apostles assign the task of shepherding the local church to no other group or single person but the elders.* Paul reminds the Asian elders that God the Holy Spirit placed them in the flock as overseers for the purpose of shepherding the church of God (Acts 20:28). Peter exhorts the elders to be all that shepherds should be to the flock (1 Peter 5:2). We, then, must also view apostolic, Christianized elders to be primarily pastors of a flock, not corporate executives, CEOs, or advisers to a pastor.

If we want to understand Christian elders and their work, we must understand the biblical imagery of shepherding. As keepers of sheep, biblical elders are to protect, feed, and lead the flock and to help meet the flock's many practical needs. Using these four, broad, pastoral categories, let us briefly consider the examples, exhortations, and teachings of the New Testament regarding shepherd elders.

Protecting the Flock: A major part of the New Testament elders' work is to protect the local church from false teachers. As Paul was leaving Asia Minor, he summons the elders of the church in Ephesus for a farewell exhortation. The essence of Paul's charge is this: *guard the flock--wolves are coming*:

And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church . . . "*Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be on the alert.*" (Acts 20:17,28-31a; italics added).

According to Paul's required qualifications for eldership, a prospective elder must have enough knowledge of the Bible to be able to refute false teachers:

For this reason I left you in Crete, that you might set in order what remains, and appoint elders in every city as I directed you, namely, if any man be above reproach . . . holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, *that he may be able . . . to refute those who contradict* [sound doctrine] (Titus 1:5,6a,9; italics added).

The Jerusalem elders, for example, met with the apostles to judge doctrinal error: "And the apostles and the elders came together to look into this [doctrinal] matter" (Acts 15:6). Like the apostles, the Jerusalem elders had to know the Word so that they could protect the flock from false teachers.

Feeding the Flock: Unlike modern, church-board elders, all New Testament elders were required to be "able to teach" (1 Tim. 3:2). Listing elder qualifications in his letter to Titus, Paul states, "[The elder must hold] fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, that he may be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict" (Titus 1:9). In an extremely significant passage on elders, Paul writes about some elders who labor at preaching and teaching and thus deserve financial support from the local church:

Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially *those who work hard at preaching and teaching*. For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing," and "The laborer is worthy of his wages" (1 Tim. 5:17,18; italics added).

Paul reminds the Ephesian elders that he has taught them and the church the full plan and purpose of God: "For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God" (Acts 20:27). Now it was time for the elders to do the same. Since elders are commanded to shepherd the flock of God (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:2), part of their shepherding task is to see that the flock is fed God's Word.

Leading the Flock: In biblical language, to shepherd a nation or any group of people means to lead or govern (2 Sam. 5:2; Ps. 78:71, 72). According to Acts 20 and 1 Peter 5, elders are to shepherd the church of God. So, to shepherd a local church means, among other things, to lead the church. To the church in Ephesus, Paul writes, "Let the elders who rule [lead, direct, manage] well be considered worthy of double honor" (1 Tim. 5:17a). Elders, then, are to lead, direct, govern, manage, and otherwise care for the flock of God.

In Titus 1:7, Paul insists that a prospective elder be morally and spiritually above reproach because he will be "God's steward." A steward is a "household manager," someone with official responsibility over the master's servants, property, and even finances. Elders are stewards of God's household, the local church.

Elders are also called "overseers," which signifies that they supervise and manage the church. Peter uses the verb form of *overseer* when he exhorts the elders: "Therefore, I exhort the elders among you . . . shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight" (1 Peter 5:1a,2a). In this instance, Peter combines the concepts of shepherding and overseeing when he exhorts the elders to do their duty. Hence we can speak of the elders' overall function as being the pastoral oversight of the local church.

Helping to Meet the Flock's Many Practical Needs: In addition to the familiar, broad categories of protecting, feeding, and leading the flock, elders are also to bear responsibility for meeting the practical, diverse needs of the flock. For example, James instructs sick members of the flock to call for the elders of the church: "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" (James. 5:14). Paul exhorts the Ephesian elders to care for the weak and needy of the flock: "In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner *you must help the weak* and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive' " (Acts 20:35; italics added).

As shepherds of the flock, the elders must be available to meet the sheep's needs. This responsibility includes: visiting the sick and comforting the bereaved; strengthening the weak; praying for *all* the sheep; visiting new members; providing counsel for couples who are engaged, married, and/or divorcing; and managing the many, day-to-day details related to the inner life of the congregation.

Hard Work and Sacrifice: When the church eldership is viewed as a status or board position in the church, there will be plenty of volunteers. When it is viewed as a demanding, pastoral work, few people will rush to volunteer. One reason there are so few shepherd elders or good church elderships is that, generally speaking, men are spiritually lazy. That is a major reason why most churches never establish a biblical eldership. Men are more than willing to let someone else fulfill their spiritual responsibilities, whether it be their wives, the clergy, or church professionals.

Biblical eldership, however, can't exist in an atmosphere of nominal Christianity. There can be no biblical eldership in a church where there is no biblical Christianity. If a biblical eldership is to function effectively, it requires men who are firmly committed to living out our Lord's principles of discipleship. Biblical eldership is dependent on men who seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness (Matt. 6:33), men who have presented themselves as living and holy sacrifices to God and view themselves as slaves of the Lord Jesus Christ (Rom. 12:1,2), men who love Jesus Christ above all else, men who willingly sacrifice self for the sake of others, men who seek to love as Christ loved, men who are self-disciplined and self-sacrificing, and men who have taken up the cross and are willing to suffer for Christ.

Some people say, "You can't expect laymen to rear their families, work all day, and shepherd a local church." That statement is simply not true. Many people rear families, work, and give substantial hours of time to community service, clubs, athletic activities, and/or religious institutions. The cults have built up large lay movements that survive primarily because of the volunteer time and efforts of their members. We Bible--believing Christians are becoming a lazy, soft, pay-for-it-to-be-done group of Christians. It is positively amazing how much people can accomplish when they are motivated to work toward a goal they love. I've seen people build and

remodel houses in their spare time, for example. I've also seen men discipline themselves to gain a phenomenal knowledge of the Scriptures.

The real problem, then, lies not in men's limited time and energy but in false ideas about work, Christian living, life's priorities, and--especially--Christian ministry. To the Ephesian elders, Paul says, "You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my own needs and to the men who were with me. In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive' " (Acts 20:34, 35). How do working men shepherd the church and still maintain a godly family life and employment? They do it by self-sacrifice, self-discipline, faith, perseverance, hard work, and the power of the Holy Spirit. R. Paul Stevens, author and instructor at Regent College in Vancouver, British Columbia, sets us on the right track when he writes:

And for tentmakers to survive three full-time jobs (work, family and ministry), they must also adopt a sacrificial lifestyle. Tentmakers must live a pruned life and literally find leisure and rest in the rhythm of serving Christ (Matt. 11:28). They must be willing to forego a measure of career achievement and private leisure for the privilege of gaining the prize (Phil. 3:14). Many would like to be tentmakers if they could be wealthy and live a leisurely and cultured lifestyle. But the truth is that a significant ministry in the church and the community can only come by sacrifice.

Shared Leadership

Shared leadership should not be a new concept to a Bible-reading Christian. Shared leadership is rooted in the Old Testament institution of the elders of Israel and in Jesus' founding of the apostolate. It is a highly significant but often overlooked fact that our Lord did not appoint one man to lead His church. He personally appointed and trained twelve men. *Jesus Christ gave the church plurality of leadership.* The Twelve comprised the first leadership council of the church and, in the most exemplary way, jointly led and taught the first Christian community. The Twelve provide a marvelous example of unity, humble brotherly love, and shared leadership structure.

Shared leadership is also evidenced by the Seven who were appointed to relieve the Twelve of the responsibility of dispensing funds to the church's widows (Acts 6:3-6). The Seven were the prototype of later deacons. There is no indication that one of the Seven was the chief and the others were his assistants. As a body of servants, they worked on behalf of the church in Jerusalem. Based on all the evidence we have, the deacons--like the elders--formed a collective leadership council.

The New Testament reveals that the pastoral oversight of many of the first churches was committed to a plurality of elders. This was true of the earliest, Jewish-Christian churches in Jerusalem, Judea, and neighboring countries as well as many of the first Gentile churches. Interestingly enough, Protestants don't challenge the plurality of deacons in an effort to create a singular deacon, yet many challenge the plurality of elders. It is odd that most Christians have no problem accepting a plurality of deacons but are almost irrationally frightened by a plurality of elders that is far more evident in the New Testament. Despite such fears, a plurality of leadership through a council of elders needs to be preserved just as much as a plurality of deacons.

I am convinced that the underlying reason many Christians fear the plurality of elders is that they don't really understand the New Testament concept of plural elders or its rich benefits to the local church. New Testament eldership is not, as many think, a high-status, church-board position that is open to any and all who desire membership. On the contrary, an eldership patterned after the New Testament model requires qualified elder candidates to meet specific moral and spiritual qualifications before they serve (1 Tim. 3:1-7). The qualifications of such elder candidates must be

publicly examined by the church (1 Tim. 3:10). The elders selected must be publicly installed into office (1 Tim. 5:22; Acts 14:23). They must be motivated and empowered by the Holy Spirit to do their work (Acts 20:28). Finally, they must be acknowledged, loved, and honored by the entire congregation. This honor given by the congregation includes the provision of financial support to elders who are uniquely gifted at preaching and teaching, which allows some elders to serve the church full or part time (1 Tim. 5:17,18). Thus a team of qualified, dedicated, Spirit-placed elders is not a passive, ineffective committee; it is an effective form of leadership structure that greatly benefits the church family.

A Council of Equals: Leadership by a council of elders is a form of government found in nearly every society of the ancient Near East. It was the fundamental, governmental structure of the nation of Israel throughout its Old Testament history (Ex. 3:16; Ezra 10:8). For Israel--a tribal, patriarchal society--the eldership was as basic as the family unit. So when the New Testament records that Paul, a Jew who was thoroughly immersed in the Old Testament and Jewish culture, appointed elders for his newly founded churches (Acts 14:23), it means that he established a council of elders in each local church.

By definition, the elder structure of government is a collective leadership in which each elder shares equally the position, authority, and responsibility of the office. There are different names for this type of leadership structure. More formally it is called collective, corporate, or collegiate leadership. In contemporary terms, it is referred to as multiple church leadership, plurality, shared leadership, or team leadership. I use these terms synonymously throughout this booklet. The opposite of collective leadership is unitary leadership, monarchical rule, or one-man leadership.

First Among a Council of Equals: Leaders Among Leaders: An extremely important but terribly misunderstood aspect of biblical eldership is the principle of "first among equals" (1 Tim. 5:17). Failure to understand this principle has caused some elderships to be tragically ineffective in their pastoral care and leadership. Although elders are to act jointly as a council and share equal authority and responsibility for the leadership of the church, all elders are not equal in their giftedness, biblical knowledge, leadership ability, experience, or dedication. Therefore, those among the elders who are particularly gifted leaders and/or teachers will naturally stand out among the other elders as leaders and teachers within the leadership body. This is what the Romans called *primus inter pares*, which means "first among equals," or *primi inter pares*, which means "first ones among equals."

The principle of "first among equals" is observed first in our Lord's dealings with the twelve apostles. Jesus chose and empowered all of them to preach and heal, but He singled out three for special attention--Peter, James, and John ("first ones among equals"). Among the three, as well as among the Twelve, Peter stood out as the most prominent ("first among equals").

As the natural leader, the chief speaker, and the man of action, Peter challenged, energized, strengthened, and ignited the group. Without Peter, the group would have been less effective. When surrounded by eleven other apostles who were his equals, Peter became stronger, more balanced, and was protected from his impetuous nature and his fears. In spite of his outstanding leadership and speaking abilities, *Peter possessed no legal or official rank or title above the other eleven. They were not his subordinates. They were not his staff or team of assistants. He wasn't the apostles' "senior pastor."* He was simply first among his equals, by our Lord's approval.

The "first-among-equals" leadership relationship can also be observed among the Seven who, as we've seen, were chosen to relieve the apostles of certain responsibilities (Acts 6). Philip and Stephen stand out as prominent figures among the five other brothers (Acts 6:8-7:60; 8:5-40; 21:8). Yet, as far as the account records, the two held no special title or status above the others.

The concept of "first among equals" is further evidenced by the relationship of Paul and Barnabas during their first missionary journey. They were both apostles, yet Paul was "first among equals" because he was "the chief speaker" and dynamic leader (Acts 13:13; 14:12). Although clearly the more gifted of the two apostles, Paul held no formal ranking over Barnabas; they labored as partners in the work of the gospel. A similar relationship seems to have existed between Paul and Silas, who was also an apostle (1 Thess. 2:6).

Finally, the "first-among-equals" concept is evidenced by the way in which congregations are to honor their elders. Concerning elders within the church in Ephesus, Paul writes, "Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, 'You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing,' and 'The laborer is worthy of his wages' " (1 Tim. 5:17,18). All elders must be able to teach the Word, but not all of them desire to work fully at preaching and teaching. The local church should properly care for those who are specially gifted in teaching and spend the time to do so. Let us be clear about the fact that it is the spiritual giftedness of the elders that causes the church to grow and prosper spiritually, not just the eldership form of government per se.

This doesn't mean, however, that elders who are first among their equals do all the thinking and decision making for the group, or that they become the "pastors" while the others are "merely elders." To call one elder "pastor" and the rest "elders," or one elder "the clergyman" and the rest "lay elders," is to act without biblical precedence. To do so will not result in a biblical eldership. It will, at least in practice, *create a separate, superior office over the eldership, just as was done during the early second century when the division between "the overseer" and "elders" occurred.*

The advantage of the principle of "first among equals" is that *it allows for functional, gift-based diversity within the eldership team without creating an official, superior office over fellow elders.* Just as the leading apostles, such as Peter and John, bore no special title or formal distinctions from the other apostles, elders who receive double honor form no official class or receive no special title. The elders, then, who labor in the Word and exercise good leadership are, in the words of Scripture, "leading men among the brethren" (Acts 15:22).

Male Leadership

There is much about biblical eldership that offends churchgoing people today: the concept of elders who provide pastoral care, a plurality of pastors, and the idea of so-called "lay" or nonclerical pastor elders. Yet nothing is more objectionable in the minds of many contemporary people than the biblical concept of an all-male eldership. A biblical eldership, however, must be an all-male eldership.

For the Bible-believing Christian, the primary example of male leadership is found in the person of Jesus Christ. The most obvious point is that Christ came into the world as the Son of God, not the daughter of God. His maleness was not an arbitrary matter. It was a theological necessity, absolutely essential to His person and work.

During His earthly ministry, Jesus trained and appointed twelve men whom He called "apostles" (Luke 6:13). Jesus' choice of an all-male apostolate affirmed the creation order as presented in Genesis 2:18-25. Luke informs us that before choosing the Twelve Jesus spent the entire night in prayer with His Father (Luke 6:12). As the perfect Son, in complete obedience and submission to His Father's will, Jesus chose twelve males to be His apostles. These men were God the Father's choice. Jesus' choice of male apostles was based on divine principles and guidance, not local custom or traditions.

As we've seen, the Twelve followed the example of their Lord and Master by appointing seven men, not seven men and women, when they needed to establish an official body of servants to

care for the church's widows and funds (Acts 6:1-6). Thirty years after Christ's ascension into heaven, Peter wrote to the churches of northwestern Asia Minor and exhorted his Christian sisters to submit to their husbands in the same way the "holy women" of the Old Testament age did (1 Peter 3:5). He also exhorted husbands to care for their wives and reminded them that their wives were fellow heirs "of the grace of life" (1 Peter 3:7). Thus Peter continued to follow His Lord's example and taught both role distinctions and male-female equality.

The biblical pattern of male leadership continued throughout the New Testament era. Regarding the marriage relationship, Paul could not have stated more pointedly the divine order of the husband-wife relationship. In complete agreement with Peter's instruction on the wife's marital submission, Paul teaches that the husband is empowered and commanded to lead in the marriage relationship and that the wife is instructed to submit "as to the Lord." The following texts speak for themselves:

- "Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord" (Eph. 5:22).
- "But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything" (Eph. 5:24).
- "For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church" (Eph. 5:23).
- "Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord" (Col. 3:18).
- "But as for you, speak the things which are fitting for sound doctrine . . . that they [older women] may encourage the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be sensible, pure, workers at home, kind, being subject to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be dishonored" (Titus 2:1,4,5).

Just as Paul teaches male headship in the family, he teaches male headship in the local church (1 Tim. 2:8-3:7). Because the family is the basic social unit and the man is the established family authority, we should expect that men would become the elders of the larger church family. Consider Paul's instructions in 1 Timothy 2:12: "But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man." In the same way that every individual family is governed by certain standards of conduct, so the local church family is governed by certain principles of conduct and social arrangement. The letter of 1 Timothy specifically addresses the issue of proper order and behavior of men, women, and elders in the local church family. To his representative in Ephesus, Paul writes, "I am writing these things to you, hoping to come to you before long; but in case I am delayed, *I write so that you may 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*" (1 Tim. 3:14, 15; italics added).

A major aspect of the church's social arrangement concerns the behavior of women in the congregation. In the church in Ephesus, as a result of false teaching that may have challenged the validity of traditional gender roles, Christian women were acting contrary to acceptable Christian behavior. In order to counter improper female conduct in the church, Paul restates Christian principles of women's conduct: "Let a woman quietly receive instruction with entire submissiveness. But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet. For it was Adam who was first created, and then Eve. And it was not Adam who was deceived, but the woman being quite deceived, fell into transgression" (1 Tim. 2:11-14).

First Timothy 2:11-14 should settle the question of women elders. Paul prohibits women from doing two things: (1) teaching the men of the church; and (2) exercising authority over the men.

Note that immediately following his instruction in 1 Timothy 2:11-15, that prohibits women from teaching and leading men, Paul describes the qualifications for those who oversee the local church (1 Tim. 3:1-7). Significantly, the qualifications assume a male subject. Thus the overseer

is to be "the husband of one wife" and "one who manages his own household well" (1 Tim. 3:2b,4a). Paul gives no suggestion of women elders in this passage.

Qualified Leadership

In a letter to a young presbyter named Nepotian, dated A. D. 394, Jerome (A.D. 345-419) rebukes the churches of his day for their hypocrisy in showing more concern for the appearance of their church buildings than the careful selection of their church leaders: "Many build churches nowadays; their walls and pillars of glowing marble, their ceilings glittering with gold, their altars studded with jewels. Yet to the choice of Christ's ministers no heed is paid."

Multitudes of churches today repeat similar error. Many of them seem oblivious to the biblical requirements for their spiritual leaders as well as to the need for each congregation to properly examine all candidates for leadership qualities in light of biblical standards (1 Tim. 3:10). The most common mistake made by churches that are eager to implement biblical eldership is to appoint biblically unqualified men. Because there is always a need for more shepherds, it is tempting to allow unqualified, unprepared men to assume leadership in the church. This is, however, a time-proven formula for failure. A biblical eldership requires biblically qualified elders.

The overriding concern of the New Testament in relation to church leadership is to ensure that the right kind of men will serve as elders and deacons. The offices of God's church are not honorary positions bestowed on individuals who have attended church faithfully or who are senior in years. Nor are these offices to be viewed as church-board positions to be filled with good friends, rich donors, or charismatic personalities. Nor are they positions that only graduate seminary students can fill. The church offices--both eldership and deaconship--are open to all men who meet the apostolic, biblical requirements. The New Testament unequivocally emphasizes this. Consider these points:

- To the troubled church in Ephesus, Paul insists that a properly constituted, biblical Christian church (1 Tim. 3:14,15) must have qualified, approved elders:

It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do. *An overseer, then, must be* above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not addicted to wine or pugnacious, but gentle, uncontentious, free from the love of money. *He must be* one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity (but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?); and not a new convert, lest he become conceited and fall into the condemnation incurred by the devil. And *he must have* a good reputation with those outside the church, so that he may not fall into reproach and the snare of the devil (1 Tim. 3:1-7; italics added).

- Paul, as we've seen, also insists that prospective elders and deacons be publicly examined in light of the stated list of qualifications. He writes, "And let these [deacons] also [like the elders] first be tested [examined]; then let them serve as deacons if they are beyond reproach" (1 Tim 3:10; cf. 5:24, 25).
- When directing Titus in how to organize churches on the island of Crete, Paul reminds him to appoint only morally and spiritually qualified men to be elders. By stating elder qualifications in a letter, Paul establishes a public list that will guide the local church in its choice of elders and empower it to hold its elders accountable:

For this reason I left you in Crete, that you might set in order what remains, and appoint elders in every city *as I directed you, namely, if any man be above reproach, the husband of one wife, having children who believe, not accused of dissipation or rebellion. For the overseer must be above reproach as God's steward, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not addicted to wine, not pugnacious, not fond of sordid gain, but hospitable, loving what is good, sensible, just, devout, self-controlled, holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, that he may be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict* (Titus 1:5-9; italics added).

- When writing to churches scattered throughout northwestern Asia Minor, Peter speaks of the kind of men who should be elders. He exhorts the elders to shepherd the flock "not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock" (1 Peter 5:2, 3).

It is highly noteworthy that the New Testament provides more instruction concerning the qualifications for eldership than on any other aspect of eldership. Such qualifications are not required of all teachers or evangelists. One person may be gifted as an evangelist and be used of God in that capacity, yet be unqualified to be an elder. An individual may be an evangelist immediately after conversion, but Scripture says that a new convert cannot be an elder (1 Tim. 3:6).

When we speak of the elders' qualifications, most people think that these qualifications are different than those of the clergy. The New Testament, however, has no separate standards for professional clergy and lay elders. The reason is simple. There aren't three separate offices--pastor, elders, and deacons--in the New Testament-style local church. There are only two offices--elders and deacons. From the New Testament perspective, any man in the congregation who desires to shepherd the Lord's people and meets God's requirements for the office can be a pastor elder.

The scriptural qualifications can be divided into three broad categories relating to moral and spiritual character, abilities, and Spirit-given motivation.

Moral and Spiritual Character: Most of the biblical qualifications relate to each candidate's moral and spiritual qualities. The first, overarching qualification is that of being "above reproach." The meaning of "above reproach" is defined by the character qualities that follow the term. In both of Paul's lists of elder qualifications, the first, specific, character virtue itemized is "the husband of one wife." This means that each elder must be above reproach in his marital and sexual life.

The other character qualities stress the elder's integrity, self-control, and spiritual maturity. Since elders govern the church body, each one must be self-controlled in the use of money, alcohol, and the exercise of his pastoral authority. Since each elder is to be a model of Christian living, he must be spiritually devout, righteous, a lover of good, hospitable, and morally above reproach before the non-Christian community. In pastoral work, relationship skills are preeminent. Thus a shepherd elder must be gentle, stable, sound-minded, and uncontentious. An angry, hotheaded man hurts people. So, an elder must not have a dictatorial spirit or be quick-tempered, pugnacious, or self-willed. Finally, an elder must not be a new Christian. He must be a spiritually mature, humble, time-proven disciple of Jesus Christ.

Abilities: Within the lists of elder qualifications, three requirements address the elder's abilities to perform the task. He must be able to manage his family household well, provide a model of Christian living for others to follow, and be able to teach and defend the faith.

Able to manage his family household well: An elder must be able to manage his family household well. The Scripture states, "He must be one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity (but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?)" (1 Tim. 3:4, 5). The Puritans referred to the family household as the "little church." This perspective is in keeping with the scriptural reasoning that if a man cannot shepherd his family, he can't shepherd the extended family of the church. Managing the local church is more like managing a family than managing a business or state. A man may be a successful businessman, a capable public official, a brilliant office manager, or a top military leader but be a terrible church elder or father. Thus a man's ability to oversee his family household well is a prerequisite for overseeing God's household.

Able to provide a model for others to follow: An elder must be an example of Christian living that others will want to follow. Peter reminds the Asian elders "to be examples to the flock" (1 Peter 5:3b). If a man is not a godly model for others to follow, he cannot be an elder even if he is a good teacher and manager. The greatest way to inspire and influence people for God is through personal example. Character and deeds, not official position or title, is what really influences people for eternity. Today men and women crave authentic examples of true Christianity in action. Who can better provide the week-by-week, long-term examples of family life, business life, and church life than a local-church elder? That is why it is so important that an elder, as a living imitator of Christ, shepherd God's flock in God's way.

Able to teach and defend the faith: An elder must be able to teach and defend the faith. It doesn't matter how successful a man is in his business, how eloquently he speaks, or how intelligent he is. If he isn't firmly committed to historic, apostolic doctrine and able to instruct people in biblical doctrine, he does not qualify to be a biblical elder (1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:9).

The New Testament requires that a pastor elder "[hold] fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching" (Titus 1:9a). This means that an elder must firmly adhere to orthodox, historic, biblical teaching. "Elders must not," one commentator says, "be chosen from among those who have been toying with new doctrines." Since the local church is "the pillar and support of the truth" (1 Tim. 3: 15b), its leaders must be rock-solid pillars of biblical doctrine or the house will crumble. Since the local church is also a small flock traveling over treacherous terrain that is infested with "savage wolves," only those shepherds who know the way and see the wolves can lead the flock safely to its destination. An elder, then, must be characterized by doctrinal integrity.

It is essential for an elder to be firmly committed to apostolic, biblical doctrine so "that he may be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict" (Titus 1:9b). This requires that a prospective elder must have applied himself for some years to the reading and study of Scripture, that he can reason intelligently and logically discuss biblical issues, that he has formulated doctrinal beliefs, and that he has the verbal ability and willingness to teach other people. There should be no confusion, then, about what a New Testament elder is called to do. He is to teach and exhort the congregation in sound doctrine and to defend the truth from false teachers. This is the big difference between board elders and pastor elders. New Testament elders are both guardians and teachers of sound, biblical doctrine.

Spirit-given Motivation for the Task: An obvious but not insignificant qualification is the elder's personal desire to love and care for God's people. Paul and the first Christians applaud such willingness and created this popular Christian saying: "If any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do" (1 Tim. 3:1). Peter, too, insists that an elder must shepherd the flock willingly and voluntarily (1 Peter 5:2). He knew from years of personal experience that someone who views spiritual care as an unwanted obligation cannot fulfill the shepherding task. An elder who serves grudgingly or under constraint is incapable of genuinely caring for people. He will be an unhappy, impatient, guilty, fearful, and ineffective shepherd.

Shepherding God's people through this sin-weary world is far too difficult a task--fraught with too many problems, dangers, and demands--to be entrusted to someone who lacks the will and desire to do the work effectively.

A true desire to lead the family of God is always a Spirit-generated desire. Paul reminds the Ephesian elders that the Holy Spirit--not the church or the apostles--placed them as overseers in the church to shepherd the flock of God (Acts 20:28). The Spirit called them to shepherd the church and moved them to care for the flock. The Spirit planted the pastoral desire in their hearts. He gave them the compulsion and strength to do the work and also the wisdom and appropriate gifts to care for the flock. The elders were His wise choice to complete the task. In the church of God, it is not man's will that matters; it is God's will and arrangement that matter. So, the only men who qualify for eldership are those whom the Holy Spirit gives the motivation and gifts for the task.

A biblical eldership, then, is a biblically qualified team of shepherd leaders. A plurality of unqualified elders provides no significant benefit to the local church. I agree fully with the counsel of Jon Zens, who writes, "Better have no elders than the wrong ones." The local church must in all earnestness insist on biblically qualified elders, even if such men take years to develop.

Servant Leadership

Just as Christianity influenced the Roman Empire, the Greco-Roman world also affected the course of Christianity. Citing pagan influences on early Christianity, Kenneth Scott Latourette--renowned church historian and professor of Christian missions--states that the Roman concepts of power and rule corrupted the organization and life of the early churches. He observes that "the Church was being interpenetrated by ideals which were quite contrary to the Gospel, especially the conception and use of power which were in stark contrast to the kind exhibited in the life and teaching of Jesus and in the cross and the resurrection." This, Latourette goes on to say, proved to be "the menace which was most nearly disastrous" to Christianity.

I believe it is more accurate to say that the conceptual and structural changes that occurred within the church during the early centuries of Christianity proved to be disastrous. Christianity, the humblest of all faiths, degenerated into the most power-hungry and hierarchical religion on earth. After Emperor Constantine elevated Christianity to legal religious status in A.D. 312, the once-persecuted Christians fiercely persecuted all their opposition. An unscriptural clerical and priestly caste arose that was consumed by the quest for power, position, and authority. Even Roman emperors had a guiding hand in the development of Christian churches. The pristine character of the New Testament church community was lost.

When we read the Gospels, however, we see that the principles of brotherly community, love, humility, and servanthood are at the very heart of Christ's teaching. Unfortunately, like many of the early Christians, we have been slow to understand these great virtues and especially slow to apply them to church structure and leadership style.

New Testament, Christ-like elders are to be servant leaders, not rulers or dictators. God doesn't want His people to be used by petty, self-serving tyrants. Elders are to choose a life of service on behalf of others. Like the servant Christ, they are to sacrifice their time and energy for the good of others. Only elders who are loving, humble servants can genuinely manifest the incomparable life of Jesus Christ to their congregations and a watching world.

A group of elders, however, can become a self-serving, autocratic leadership body. Thus Peter, using the same terminology as Jesus, warns the Asian elders against abusive, lordly leadership: ". . . nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock" (1 Peter 5:3). Peter also charges the elders, as well as everyone else in the congregation,

to clothe themselves in humility just as Jesus clothed Himself in humility: "All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble" (1 Peter 5:5b). With similar concern, Paul reminds the Ephesian elders of his example of humility. In Acts 20:19, he describes his manner of "serving the Lord with all humility" and implies that they, too, must serve the Lord in the same manner. Because of pride's lurking temptation, a new Christian should not be an elder: "And not a new convert, lest he become conceited and fall into the condemnation incurred by the devil" (1 Tim. 3:6).

In addition to shepherding others with a servant spirit, the elders must humbly and lovingly relate to one another. They must be able to patiently build consensus, compromise, persuade, listen, handle disagreement, forgive, receive rebuke and correction, confess sin, and appreciate the wisdom and perspective of others--even those with whom they disagree. They must be able to submit to one another, speak kindly and gently to one another, be patient with their fellow colleagues, defer to one another, and speak their minds openly in truth and love. Stronger and more gifted elders must not use their giftedness, as talented people sometimes do, to force their own way by threatening to leave the church and take their followers with them. Such selfishness creates ugly, carnal power struggles that endanger the unity and peace of the entire congregation.

The humble-servant character of the eldership doesn't imply, however, an absence of authority. The New Testament terms that describe the elders' position and work--"God's stewards," "overseers," "shepherd," "leading"--imply authority as well as responsibility. Peter could not have warned the Asian elders against "lording it over those allotted to your charge" (1 Peter 5:3) if they had no authority. As shepherds of the church, elders have been given the authority to lead and protect the local church (Acts 20:28-31). The key issue is the attitude in which elders exercise that authority.

Following the biblical model, elders must not wield the authority given to them in a heavy-handed way. They must not use manipulative tactics, play power games, or be arrogant and aloof. They must never think that they are unanswerable to their fellow brethren or to God. Elders must not be authoritarian, which is incompatible with humble servanthood. When we consider Paul's example and that of our Lord's, we must agree that biblical elders do not dictate; they direct. True elders do not command the consciences of their brethren but appeal to their brethren to faithfully follow God's Word. Out of love, true elders suffer and bear the brunt of difficult people and problems so that the lambs are not bruised. The elders bear the misunderstandings and sins of other people so that the assembly may live in peace. They lose sleep so that others may rest. They make great personal sacrifices of time and energy for the welfare of others. They see themselves as men under authority. They depend on God for wisdom and help, not on their own power and cleverness. They face the false teachers' fierce attacks. They guard the community's liberty and freedom in Christ so that the saints are encouraged to develop their gifts, to mature, and to serve one another.

In summary, using Paul's great love chapter, we can say that a servant elder "is patient . . . kind . . . not jealous; . . . [a servant elder] does not brag . . . [a servant elder] is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly . . . does not seek [his] . . . own . . . [a servant elder] is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; [a servant elder] bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things" (1 Cor. 13:4-7).

BIBLICAL EVIDENCE FOR PASTORAL LEADERSHIP BY THE PLURALITY OF ELDERS

Christians who profess the Bible to be God's infallible, all-sufficient Word agree that they must establish their church practices and doctrines on the teachings of the Bible. Many contemporary scholars say, however, that the New Testament is ambiguous or silent regarding the topic of church government and conclude that no one can insist upon a biblical model of church government (by elders or anyone else) for all churches because the Bible doesn't. George Eldon Ladd, author of *A Theology of the New Testament* and former professor at Fuller Theological Seminary, expresses this view most concisely: "It appears likely that there was no normative pattern of church government in the apostolic age, and that the organizational structure of the church is no essential element in the theology of the church." Although this is a widely held view among scholars today, it must be challenged because it simply does not fit biblical evidence.

In its major features, local church leadership (or government) by the plurality of elders is plainly and amply set forth by the New Testament writers. J. Alec Motyer, former principal of Trinity College in Bristol, England, captures the true spirit of the New Testament when he writes, ". . . it is not as much as hinted in the New Testament that the church would ever need--or indeed should ever want or tolerate--any other local leadership than that of the eldership group."

Not only does the New Testament record the existence of elders in numerous churches, it also gives instruction about elders and to elders. In fact, the New Testament offers more instruction regarding elders than it does regarding such important church subjects such as the Lord's Supper, the Lord's Day, baptism, and spiritual gifts. When you consider the New Testament's characteristic avoidance of detailed regulation and church procedures (when it is compared to the Old Testament), the attention given to elders is amazing. "This is why," writes Jon Zens, editor of the journal *Searching Together*, "we need to seriously consider the doctrine of eldership; it jumps out at us from the pages of the New Testament, yet it has fallen into disrepute and is not being practiced as a whole in local churches."

A Consistent, New Testament Pattern

To hear some scholars speak, you would think that the Bible doesn't say one word about church elders or church government. But that is not true. The New Testament records evidence of pastoral oversight by a council of elders in nearly all the first churches. These local churches were spread over a wide geographical and culturally diverse area--from Jerusalem to Rome.

Examples of Eldership: Consider, as recorded in the New Testament, the consistent pattern of plural leadership by elders that existed among the first Christian churches.

- Elders are found in the churches of Judea and the surrounding area (Acts 11:30; James 5:14, 15).

- Elders governed the church in Jerusalem (Acts 15, 21).

- Among the Pauline churches, leadership by the plurality of elders was established in the churches in Derbe, Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch (Acts 14:20-23); in the church in Ephesus (Acts 20:17; 1 Tim. 3:1-7; 5:17-25); in the church in Philippi (Phil. 1:1); and in the churches on the island of Crete (Titus 1:5).

- According to the well-traveled letter of 1 Peter, elders existed in churches throughout northwestern Asia Minor: Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia (1 Peter 1:1; 5:1).
- There are strong indications that elders existed in churches in Thessalonica (1 Thess. 5:12) and Rome (Heb. 13:17).

Instruction About Elders: Not only does the New Testament provide examples of elder-led churches, it includes explicit instructions to churches about how to care for, protect, discipline, select, restore, and call the elders. The apostles intended these instructions to be obeyed, and they should be regarded as normative teaching for all Christian churches at all times.

- James instructs those who are sick to call for the elders of the church (James 5:14).
- Paul instructs the Ephesian church to financially support elders who labor "at preaching and teaching" (1 Tim. 5:17, 18).
- Paul instructs the local church about protecting elders from false accusation, disciplining elders who sin, and restoring fallen elders (1 Tim. 5:19-22).
- Paul instructs the church regarding the proper qualifications for eldership (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9).
- To the church in Ephesus, Paul states that anyone who desires to be an elder desires a "fine work" (1 Tim. 3:1).
- Paul instructs the church to examine the qualifications of prospective elders (1 Tim. 3:10; 5:24, 25).
- Peter instructs the young men of the church to submit to church elders (1 Peter 5:5).
- Paul teaches that elders are the household stewards, leaders, instructors, and teachers of the local church (Titus 1:7, 9; 1 Thess. 5:12;).

Instruction and Exhortation to Elders: Besides giving instruction to churches about elders, Paul, Peter, and James give these instructions directly to elders:

- James tells elders to pray for the sick and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord (James 5:14).
- Peter directly charges elders to willingly pastor and oversee the local congregation (1 Peter 5:1, 2).
- Peter warns elders not to be too domineering (1 Peter 5:3).
- Peter promises elders that when the Lord Jesus returns they will receive "the unfading crown of glory" (1 Peter 5:4).
- Peter exhorts elders to be clothed in humility (1 Peter 5:5).
- Paul reminds the Ephesians elders that the Holy Spirit placed them in the church to be overseers and pastor the church of God (Acts 20:28).
- Paul exhorts elders to guard the church from false teachers (Acts 20:28) and to be alert to the constant threat of false doctrine (Acts 20:31).
- Paul reminds elders to work hard, help the needy, and be generous like the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 20:35).

Promotes the True Nature of the New Testament-Style Local Church

The local church's structure of government makes a profound statement about the nature of the local church and its philosophy of ministry. The local church is not an undefined mass of people; it is a particular group of people that has a unique character, mission, and purpose. I am convinced that the elder structure of government best harmonizes with and promotes the true nature of the local church as revealed in the New Testament. We will consider four ways in which the elder structure of government complements the nature and theology of the local church.

The Church Is a Close-knit Family of Brothers and Sisters: Of the different New Testament terms used to describe the nature of the church--the body, the bride, the temple, the flock--the one most frequently used is the family, particularly the fraternal aspect of the family-

-brothers and sisters. Robert Banks, a prominent leader in the worldwide, home-church movement, makes this observation in his book, *Paul's Idea of Community*:

Although in recent years Paul's metaphors for community have been subjected to quite intense study, especially his description of it as a "body," his application to it of "household" or "family" terminology has all too often been overlooked or only mentioned in passing.

Banks further comments on the frequency and significance of these familial expressions:

So numerous are these, and so frequently do they appear, that the comparison of the Christian community with a "family" must be regarded as the most significant metaphorical usage of all.... More than any of the other images utilized by Paul, it reveals the essence of his thinking about community.

The local Christian church, then, is to be a close-knit family of brothers and sisters. Brotherliness also provided a key guiding principle for the management of relationships between Christians (Rom. 14:15,21; 1 Cor. 6:8; 8:11-13; 2 Thess. 3:14,15; Philem. 15,16; James 4:11). Jesus insisted that His followers were true brothers and sisters and that none among them should act like the rabbis of His day who elevated themselves above their fellow countrymen:

"But they do all their deeds to be noticed by men; for they broaden their phylacteries, and lengthen the tassels of their garments. And they love the place of honor at banquets, and the chief seats in the synagogues, and respectful greetings in the market places, and being called by men, Rabbi. *But do not be called Rabbi; for One is your Teacher, and you are all brothers*" (Matt. 23:5-8; italics added).

In complete obedience to Christ's teaching on humility and brotherhood, the first Christians resisted special titles, sacred clothing, chief seats, and lordly terminology to highlight their community leaders. They also chose an appropriate leadership structure for their local congregations--leadership by a council of elders. The first Christians found within their biblical heritage a structure of government that was compatible with their new, spiritual family and their theological beliefs. Israel was a great family, composed of many individual families. The nation found leadership by a plurality of elders to be a suitable form of self-government that provided fair representation to its members. The same is true of the local Christian church. The elder structure of government suits an extended family organization like the local church. It allows any brother in the community who desires it and qualifies for it to share fully in the leadership of the community.

The Church Is a Humble-Servant Community: I am convinced that one reason the apostles chose the elder system of government was because it enhanced the loving, humble-servant character of the Christian family. The New Testament offers a consistent example of shared leadership as the ideal structure of leadership in a congregation where love, humility, and servanthood are paramount. When it functions properly, shared leadership requires a greater exercise of humble servanthood than does unitary leadership. In order for an eldership to operate effectively, the elders must show mutual regard for one another, submit themselves one to another, patiently wait upon one another, genuinely consider one another's interests and perspectives, and defer to one another. Eldership, then, enhances brotherly love, humility, mutuality, patience, and loving interdependence--qualities that are to mark the servant church.

Furthermore, shared leadership is often more trying than unitary leadership. It exposes our impatience with one another, our stubborn pride, our bullheadedness, our selfish immaturity, our domineering disposition, our lack of love and understanding of one another, and our prayerlessness. It also shows how underdeveloped and immature we really are in humility,

brotherly love, and the true servant spirit. Like the saints at Corinth, we are quick to develop our knowledge and public gifts but slow to mature in love and humility.

I believe that churches today desperately need a revival of love, humility, and the servant spirit. Such a revival must begin with our leaders, and biblical eldership provides the structure through which leaders learn to work together in mutual love and humility. Since the eldership represents a microcosm of the entire church, it provides a living model of loving relationships and servanthood for the entire body. Thus, leadership by a plurality of elders ideally suits the humble-servant church.

The Church Is Under Christ's Headship: Most important, biblical eldership guards and promotes the preeminence and position of Christ over the local church. Jesus left His disciples with the precious promise that "where two or three have gathered together in My name, there I am in their midst" (Matt. 18:20). Because the apostles knew that Jesus Christ, by the Holy Spirit, was uniquely present with them as Ruler, Head, Lord, Pastor, Master, Overseer, High Priest, and King, they chose a form of government that reflected this distinctive, fundamental, Christian truth. This truth was not a theoretical idea to the early Christians--it was reality. The first churches were truly Christ centered and Christ dependent. Christ alone provided all they needed in order to be in full fellowship with God and one another. Christ's person and work was so infinitely great, final, and complete that nothing--even in appearance--could diminish the centrality of His presence among and sufficiency for His people.

So, during the first century no Christian would have dared to take the position or title of sole ruler, overseer, or pastor of the church. We Christians today, however, are so accustomed to speaking of "the pastor" that we do not stop to realize that the New Testament does not. This fact is profoundly significant, and we must not permit our customary practice to shield our minds from this important truth. There is only one flock and one Pastor (John 10:16), one body and one Head (Col. 1:18), one holy priesthood and one great High Priest (Heb. 4:14ff), one brotherhood and one Elder Brother (Rom. 8:29), one building and one Cornerstone (1 Peter 2:5ff.), one Mediator, and one Lord. Jesus Christ is the "Senior Pastor," and all others are His undershepherds (1 Peter 5:4).

To symbolize the reality of Christ's leadership and presence over the local church and its leaders, one church places an empty chair at the table next to the chairman during all elders' meetings. This is a visual reminder to the elders of Christ's presence and lordship, of their position as His undershepherds, and of their dependence on Him through prayer and the Word.

Promotes the Protection and Sanctification of Spiritual Leaders

We come now to two, extremely significant reasons for and benefits of pastoral leadership by a council of qualified elders. First, the shared leadership structure of eldership provides necessary accountability protection from the particular sins that plague spiritual leaders. In turn, this protects the spiritual character of the local church and the testimony of the Lord's name. Second, the eldership structure provides peer relationships to help balance elders' weaknesses and correct their character, an essential component in the sanctification process of spiritual leaders.

Leadership Accountability: English historian Lord Acton said, "Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely." Because of our biblical beliefs in the dreadful realities of sin, the curse, Satan, and human depravity, we should understand well why people in positions of power are easily corrupted. In fact, the better we understand the exceeding sinfulness and deceitfulness of sin, the stronger our commitment to accountability will be. The collective leadership of a biblical eldership provides a formal structure for genuine accountability.

Shared, brotherly leadership provides needed restraint concerning such sins as pride, greed, and "playing god." Earl D. Radmacher, chancellor of a Baptist seminary in America, writes, "Human leaders, even Christian ones, are sinners and they only accomplish God's will imperfectly. Multiple leaders, therefore, will serve as a 'check and balance' on each other and serve as a safeguard against the very human tendency to play God over other people."

It was never our Lord's will for one individual to control the local church. The concept of the pastor as the lonely, trained professional--the sacred person presiding over the church who can never really become a part of the congregation--is utterly unscriptural. Not only is this concept unscriptural, it is psychologically and spiritually unhealthy. Radmacher goes on to contrast the deficiencies of a church leadership that is placed primarily in the hands of one pastor to the wholesomeness of leadership when it is shared by multiple pastors:

Laymen . . . are indifferent because they are so busy. They have no time to bother with church matters. Church administration is left, therefore, largely in the hands of the pastor. This is bad for him, and it is bad also for the church. It makes it easier for the minister to build up in himself a dictatorial disposition and to nourish in his heart the love of autocratic power.

It is my conviction that God has provided a hedge against these powerful temptations by the concept of multiple elders. The check and balance that is provided by men of equal authority is most wholesome and helps to bring about the desired attitude expressed by Peter to the plurality of elders: ". . . shepherd the flock of God among you, not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock (1 Peter 5:2,3)."

In addition to providing close accountability, genuine partnership, and peer relationships--the very things most imperial pastors shrink from at all costs--shared leadership provides the local church shepherd with accountability for his work. Church leaders (like all of us) can be lazy, forgetful, fearful, or too busy to fulfill their responsibilities. Thus they need colleagues in ministry to whom they are answerable for their work. Coaches know that athletes who train together push one another to greater achievement. When someone else is running alongside him or her, a runner will push a little harder and go a little faster. The same is true in the Lord's work. That is one reason why the Lord sent out His disciples in twos.

Peer Relationships: One of the deep joys of my life has been to share the pastoral leadership of a church with a team of dedicated pastor elders. As partners in the work of shepherding God's precious, blood-bought people, we have sharpened, balanced, comforted, protected, and strengthened one another through nearly every conceivable life situation. I do not hesitate to say that the relationship with my fellow elders has been the most important tool God has used, outside of my marriage relationship, for the spiritual development of my Christian character, leadership abilities, and teaching ministry. The eldership has played a major role in the sanctification process of my Christian life.

Shared leadership can provide a church leader with critically needed recognition of his faults and deficiencies and can help to offset them.. We all have blind spots, eccentricities, and deficiencies. We all have what C. S. Lewis called "a fatal flaw." We can see these fatal flaws so clearly in others but not in ourselves. These fatal flaws or blind spots distort our judgment. They deceive us. They can even destroy us. This is particularly true of multitalented, charismatic leaders. Blind to their flaws and extreme views, some talented leaders have destroyed themselves because they had no peers who could confront and balance them and, in fact, wanted none.

When a single leader is atop a pyramidal structure of organization, the important balancing of one another's weaknesses and strengths normally does not occur. Note the strong language Robert Greenleaf, author of the book *Servant Leadership*, uses to convey his observations:

To be a lone chief atop a pyramid is *abnormal and corrupting*. None of us are perfect by ourselves, and all of us need the help and correcting influence of close colleagues. When someone is moved atop a pyramid, that person no longer has colleagues, only subordinates. Even the frankest and bravest of subordinates do not talk with their boss in the same way that they talk with colleagues who are equals, and normal communication patterns become warped.

I believe that traditional, single-church pastors would improve their character and ministry if they had genuine peers to whom they were regularly accountable and with whom they worked jointly.

An Apostolic Directive

Since Paul established the elder structure of government among Gentile churches (Acts 14:23) and, most likely, the Twelve established it among Jewish churches (Acts 15:6; James 5:14), the New Testament writers assumed eldership to be a fixed, apostolic institution. In Titus 1:5, Paul tells Titus and the churches that a church is not properly ordered until qualified elders (plural) have been appointed. So he orders Titus to install elders: "Appoint elders in every city as I directed you" (Titus 1:5b). By doing this, Paul is going against customary cultural practices because both the Jewish synagogue and Greco-Roman society commonly practiced one-man oversight. Thus Paul's choice of the elder structure of government is intentional. He is not simply accommodating himself to current social norms. His instruction to Titus establishes an apostolic directive that should be followed by Christians today.

Many scholars contend, however, that only the instructions about elders, not the elder structure, are universally binding on churches. They say that Paul's instructions regarding the qualifications of an elder are binding but that the structure is not. By making this distinction, they can eliminate the eldership structure from the church and apply the biblical instructions to their self-appointed institutions--the clerical structure or the singular pastorate. But this is an erroneous distinction. How, for example, would a critically important passage such as 1 Timothy 5:17, 18 apply to the singular pastorate? This instruction makes sense only in the context of a plurality of elders.

I conclude, therefore, that the instructions given to elders and about elders, as well as the eldership structure itself, are to be regarded as apostolic directives (Titus 1:5) that are normative for churches today. Ladd is quite wrong when he claims that "there was no normative pattern of church government in the apostolic age, and that the organizational structure of the church is no essential element in the theology of the church."

We would do well to heed Alfred Kuen's sober warning against doubting the full sufficiency of Scripture in order to direct the practices of our churches today. Kuen, a Bible teacher at the Emmaus Bible Institute in Switzerland, writes:

Has not the history of twenty centuries of Christianity proved that the plan of the primitive church is the only one which is suitable for all times and places, is most flexible in its adaptation to the most diverse conditions, is the best able to resist and stand against persecutions, and offers the maximum of possibilities for the full development of the spiritual life?

Each time that man has believed himself to be more intelligent than God, that he has painstakingly developed a religious system "better adapted to the psychology of man," more conformable to the spirit of our times, instead of simply following

the neotestamentary model, his attempt has been short-lived because of failure due to some unforeseen difficulty.

All heresies and deviations in the church spring from the abandonment of the Scripture and of the model for the church which they present.

In short, as Alfred Kuen concludes, "the churches established by the apostles remain the valid models for churches of all times and places."

To be sure, the incorporation of pastoral eldership into the local church is not the cure-all for every problem. Eldership creates its own problems, and these must be understood and continually addressed. However, when properly implemented, biblical eldership allows the church to be what God designed it to be, fosters the spiritual development of the leading men within the church family, and honors the teaching of God's precious Word.

Confidential Personal Information Release Agreement

I hereby certify that all information submitted in connection with my Confidential Personal Questionnaire/Background Check is true and correct. I agree that The Sanctuary Fellowship may verify any of the information submitted in support of my application, and I understand that I am under a continuing obligation to advise The Sanctuary Fellowship of any changes which may occur after the Confidential Questionnaire submission. I further certify that if I am accepted as an elder of The Sanctuary Fellowship, I will abide by the rules and regulations as determined by the church leadership. I understand and agree that the omission, misrepresentation, or concealment of any significant fact in any statement may be considered sufficient reason for my removal from the eldership process.

Signature of Candidate

Date

Signature of Spouse

Date

**Consent for Release of Information:
Eldership Process Personal Documents**

I, _____ hereby authorize The Sanctuary Fellowship personnel to disclose to the elders information from testing procedures, questionnaires, and the interview process. The purpose of discussion among the elders is solely to evaluate your suitability as a potential elder of The Sanctuary Fellowship. Your information will be treated with sensitivity and confidentiality.

Signed this _____ day of _____, 20____

Signature of Applicant _____

Signature of Spouse _____

**Consent for Release of Information:
Background Check**

I, _____ hereby authorize The Sanctuary Fellowship personnel to conduct background checks, both criminal and financial. Additionally, I give permission for the resulting information to be disclosed to the elders of The Sanctuary Fellowship.

Applicant Name:

_____ Last First Middle

Applicant Social Security # _____ / ____ / _____ **Date of Birth** ____ / ____ / _____

Applicant Address:

_____ Street

_____ City County State Zip

Applicant Drivers License # _____ State

Spouse Name:

_____ Last First Middle

Spouse Social Security # _____ / ____ / _____ **Date of Birth** ____ / ____ / _____

Spouse Drivers License # _____ State

Questionnaire on Biblical Eldership¹

Purpose and objective: To identify and assess if biblical eldership is grasped with a mind like Christ from the potential candidate (1 Corinthians 1:10; Philippians 2:1-3). As The Sanctuary Fellowship grows, being faithful gatekeepers and developers of good leadership is vital to our future mission with Jesus. Making sure we are of one mind on ecclesiology is key to our sustained growth.

Instructions: Based on your reading of Alexander Strauch's condensed "Biblical Eldership" and your own personal convictions, please answer the following in *your own words*:

1. Do you have any habitual or grievous sin that would disqualify you from eldership?

2. What does accountability look like for you?

3. Define Biblical Eldership.

4. What passages from the Bible support a plurality of elders? (not looking for qualifications, but passages that support putting elders over the church)

5. In your own words, what does it mean to be qualified for eldership?

6. Explain how you meet these qualifications for eldership.

7. Explain, from your understanding, what first among equals or leaders among leaders means?

8. What does protecting, leading and feeding the flock mean to you? How are these lived out in the church?

9. Explain these three areas of biblical eldership:
 - a. moral and spiritual character
 - b. abilities

c. spirit-given motivation

10. What is the difference between an elder and a lay Christian?

11. Why does The Sanctuary Fellowship have male elders? What is the significance of male eldership in our culture?

12. If one man is an elder, what is the role of this man's wife?

Pastoral Questionnaire

General Theology:

- 1) Who have been your primary theological teachers, or influences? In other words (apart from the Bible), what authors, theologians (either living or dead), movements, denominations, or schools of thought have most influenced your theology?
- 2) Outside of the Bible, what is the most theologically intensive book you have read cover-to-cover?
- 3) What is the gospel? (i.e. theologically speaking, not how you would explain the gospel message to a non-Christian)
- 4) Please give your view of the scriptures.
- 5) Briefly describe your philosophy of ministry and evangelism.
- 6) What is our role in saving the lost, and what is God's role?
- 7) In your own words, how do you understand the doctrine of predestination and what view do you personally hold on this doctrine? (e.g. God's sovereignty vs. man's responsibility, free will, who are the elect, etc.)
- 8) How has Adam's sin affected our nature and our ability to choose in regard to good and evil?
- 9) What is the church? Scripturally support the role of the church as different from other organizations.
- 10) Briefly describe your view of local church government, including the offices, who can/should hold them, and who has final authority for decision making?
- 11) What is your eschatological position?

Pastoral Theology:

- 1) How would you respond to a couple at your church that just miscarried 9 weeks into pregnancy? What scriptures would you take them to?
- 2) Some college kid comes into your office wanting to know who God is and has a vague idea of this thing called the "Trinity." Please explain how you would pastorally go about talking to this confused person about God and the Trinity.
- 3) You are counseling a couple, which claims to be Christian, that are fornicating and believe they are "married in their hearts". They would like to become members of your church. Describe how would you handle this couple, including how you would address the issue of being "married in their hearts"?
- 4) Another couple that you have been counseling, who is married, eventually are saved by the gospel during your time together (this happens). Explain to them what it means to become a Christian and how they are now justified in Christ.
- 5) A group of people is talking and invites you to answer a question they have been trying to figure out. The question they are trying to answer is what role does prayer have in the Christian life if you preach the sovereignty of God? What would be your answer for them?
- 6) After church one day a crying woman that truly has a broken heart from being convicted of her sin approaches you. She simply asks you to tell her the gospel so that she may believe like others in your church. How would you explain the gospel to her?

Family Finance Survey

1. In your marriage who is responsible for your family finances? Describe what roles you and your wife handle, either shared or individually.
2. Has this been an area of friction and tension in your marriage, and how have you worked this out?
3. Have you ever struggled with credit card debt (or other kinds of debt)?
4. What has been your experience with personal finances, balancing accounts, budgeting, forecasting, tracking receipts and expenses, bank and tax records etc? Has this been, or is this now, an area of difficulty or struggle for you? What area of growth do you believe God would have you address in this arena?
5. Do you have a buffer of liquid money in savings in case of emergency?
6. If you have an area of debt in your life that concerns you, do you have a plan to pay it down?

Confidential Personal Questionnaire

We are aware that the following questions are personal and very sensitive. Jesus is in the business of redeeming sinners and changing lives, so we do not expect anyone's past to be perfectly "clean." Rather, our concern is with unresolved issues from the past. These issues are sensitive precisely because, unless properly dealt with, they have the power to undermine and destroy you even as you seek to become an elder. Therefore, we ask these questions both for your protection and ours as a church, but especially for those among you whom you intend to minister.

Your answers on this form will only be read by the elders of The Sanctuary Fellowship. It will be kept in a confidential and locked file. You will be consulted in the event there is need for further clarification. We would request a response from the candidate and his wife on all relevant questions. We appreciate your honesty. If you need additional space in order to adequately respond, please use a separate sheet of paper.

Names

Candidate _____

Spouse _____

1. Please list your significant financial obligations, including all types of debt: Mortgages, major bills, insurance, pledges and any other items for which you must make provisions.

| Name of Obligation Meeting it | Amount | Annual Payment | Plan for |
|--------------------------------------|---------------|-----------------------|-----------------|
|--------------------------------------|---------------|-----------------------|-----------------|

This Section to be Filled Out By Candidate and Spouse:

1. Do you and/or your wife have any health concerns which could create a financial burden in the context of being an elder at The Sanctuary Fellowship?
2. Do you have any special concerns for your children's needs (i.e. health, education, physical needs, emotional, etc.)? If yes, please explain:

3. Have you ever been charged or convicted of a felony? If yes, indicate dates and please explain:
4. Do you or have you used illegal or narcotic drugs (including abuse of prescription medications)? If yes, indicate what type, how recently and in what quantity:
5. Have you or your spouse ever been involved in any Eastern Religions or occult activities(i.e. tarot cards, Ouija boards, witchcraft, Wicca, new age, etc.)? If yes, please explain.
6. Sexual history: Have you ever been sexually involved with a minor, while you yourself were legally considered an adult? If yes, when?
7. To what extent have you been involved with pornography, including cable channels, soft-core porn (e.g. HBO, Cinemax, etc.)?
8. Have you or your spouse ever been unfaithful to one another in your sexual relationship (emotionally or physically)? If yes, please explain:
9. Have you ever had same-sex desires and/or had a same-sex experience? If yes, please explain:
10. Are you now or have you been under a physician's care for mental or emotional treatment? If yes, please explain:
11. Have you or your spouse ever participated in a 12-Step Program or another type of recovery program for addiction or codependency issues? If yes, please explain:
12. If any of these areas are unresolved at this time are you open to get help with resolution?

Any Additional Comments:

Contact Info and References

Contact Information

Please ensure all information is up-to-date on the application site and make any corrections as necessary.

References 1-3 (Supervisor, Peer, Disciple)

You are required to supply us with three references for your application. One should be from a supervisor (authority), another from a peer, and another from a disciple (under your authority).

Reference Form

To: _____
(name of person completing this reference)

Instructions: The named person below has entered into The Sanctuary Fellowship elder process. The Bible requires certain characteristics and skills to fulfill the role of elder in the church (1 Tim 3; Titus 1). Your honest appraisal, including any negative or weak areas of which you are aware, will help us guide him forward in the elder process.

When completed, email this document directly to The Sanctuary Fellowship with the subject containing the applicants name and "reference form" (e.g. **Joe Smith – Reference Form**). elderprocess@thesanctuaryfellowship.com

Thank you for your time in helping us accurately assess the applicant.
-The Sanctuary Eldership Team

Reference for : _____
(Applicant's name)

Reference type: _____
(Your relationship- Supervisor, Peer or Disciple)

Date:

Reference's Contact Information:

Name:
Phone:
Email:

1. What is your relationship with the applicant?
2. How has the applicant demonstrated a personal relationship with Jesus?
3. Describe the applicant's ability to lead.
4. What areas do you feel will be difficult for the applicant in being an elder?

5. How would you describe the applicant's theological understanding?

6. Where have you seen the gospel evident in this applicant's life?

7. How effective is the applicant in communicating the truths of the Bible?

8. Does the applicant's marriage seem able to withstand outside difficulties and stress?

9. Describe any areas that would be helpful for an assessment team in understanding the applicant's ability to be an elder (i.e. character, strengths, weaknesses, areas of growth...).

Pastor/Leader Recommendation of Elder Candidate

Elder Candidate:

Date:

Current Sanctuary Fellowship elder:

_____ has submitted himself to the office of an elder at The Sanctuary Fellowship. I have observed his life as he has served in our ministries and he appears to be above reproach in the observable areas of his life.

I have asked him about his calling to be an elder and he feels assured that God has called him to serve as an elder at The Sanctuary Fellowship.

Any other notes you might have about the elder candidate here

Your Name

Eldership Theological Examination

This test may be taken over a period of (7) seven days. The purpose of this test is not to grade on a curve but to show competencies in biblical knowledge as well as theological terms and concepts. It will help evaluate strengths and deficiencies so that you may be trained up with a solid foundation.

SECTION 1

Biblical Knowledge

Old Testament Survey (You may use your Bible only)

1. Who wrote the first five books of the Bible and why?
2. Who did God create in His image?
3. What was the first sin?
4. What did God do for Adam and Eve after they had committed their sin?
5. What was the covenant sign that God made with Noah after He came out of the ark?
6. What was the covenant sign with Abraham in Genesis 17?
7. Read Genesis 50:19. What does this verse tell us about sin and about suffering? (Especially God's involvement in working with the two)
8. Who was the first High Priest Appointed?
9. What was the provision God made for the hungry Israelites in the wilderness?
10. Before the last plague was wrought on Egypt, what "everlasting ordinance" did God instruct Moses to do?
11. What were the three sections of the tabernacle?
12. Which of the following did not belong in the tabernacle?
 - a. the ark
 - b. the alter of incense
 - c. the gold lamp stand
 - d. the golden scepter
 - e. the bronze laver
13. The ark of the covenant held:
 - a. the ten commandments
 - b. Aaron's rod
 - c. the manna
 - d. all of the above
14. On the day of atonement, who was affected by the sacrifice?:
 - a. the Israelites alone
 - b. the whole world
 - c. all the people who were in the camp
 - d. all the people outside the camp
15. Who is the appointed successor of Moses?
16. Did Moses ever get into the promised land of Canaan?
17. Read Deut. 7:6. What do you think this means?
18. What covenant did Joshua renew with the Israelites and why?
19. Name four judges from the book of Judges.
20. Read Judges 9:23. How does this change your perception of God--or does it?
21. Why is the book of Ruth important?
22. Why is Ruth herself important?
23. What does the name Ichabod mean, and why is he important?
24. Who was the first king of Israel?
25. What king was deemed "a man after God's own heart?"
26. What sin did this king commit? why? and at who's expense?

27. Who was this king's prophet?
28. Who was struck dead because he touched the ark of the covenant?
29. Who succeeded David as king?
30. Read 1 Kings 8:53. What does this mean?
31. What great prophet is introduced in 1 Kings 17?
32. What happened with this prophet on Mount Carmel?
33. How did this prophet die?
34. Who was his successor?
35. Read 1 Kings 22:19-23. How does this affect your view of God?
36. Name three kings who did great reforms in the book of 2 Kings:
37. What king was the king of prayer?
38. Why did God exile Judah and when?
39. 1 Chronicles records for us--what?
40. What did Solomon ask for as a gift from God?
41. Who built the 1st temple?
42. What is Religious Syncretism?
43. What kingdoms did God use to exile the Israelites: circle all that apply:
 - a. Babylon
 - b. Persia
 - c. Egypt
 - d. Chaldea
 - e. Judah
 - f. Rome
44. During what young king's reign was the book of the law found.
45. What godly scribe has a book of the Bible named after him?
46. King _____ was moved by God to have the temple rebuilt.
47. Who was king Artaxerxes? and why was he important?
48. In the book of Ezra, what sin is dealt with in the last two chapters, and why is it a great sin?
49. Who was appointed to rebuild the wall of Jerusalem?
50. Why is the book of Esther important?
51. What is the feast of Purim?
52. Who was Job's adversary?
53. What were the names of Job's comforters?
54. What sufferings did Job endure and why?
55. Read Job 13:15. How does this verse help people deal with trials?
56. Read Job 21:30. What does it mean?
57. Read Job 42:2. What does this say about the will of God?
58. Give two examples (Scriptural ref.) of lamenting Psalms:
59. What is an imprecatory psalm?
60. What are three examples of prophetic Psalms concerning the Messiah?
61. Read Psalm 10:4. What is this saying?
62. Read Psalm 51:5. What is being expressed here?
63. Read Psalm 65:4. What is being expressed here?
64. What is your favorite Psalm and why?
65. What five books of the Bible are considered "Hebrew Poetry?"
66. Proverbs personifies something as very important. What?
67. What is the beginning of wisdom?
68. Read Proverbs 9:9. What is being expressed here?
69. What do the Psalms tell us concerning using instruments in worship?
70. Quote your favorite Proverb:
71. What is the theme of the book of Ecclesiastes?
72. What is the best description of the Song of Songs:
 - a. a love song between a husband and a wife
 - b. love between Christ and the church
 - c. love between a king and his subjects

- d. love between God and creation
 - e. love between a horse and his master
73. Which prophet saw the Lord "high and lofty" and "seated on the throne?"
 74. Read Isaiah 66:2. What is being expressed here?
 75. Read Jeremiah 1:5. What is being expressed here?
 76. Read Jer. 9:23-24. What is being expressed here?
 77. Where was Jeremiah when he prophesied?
 78. Name three symbols, or object lessons, used by God for Jeremiah's understanding a certain judgment or blessing.
 79. Read Jeremiah 13:3 and 17:9. What is being expressed here?
 80. What chapter is the prophecy of the Branch of Righteousness found in Jeremiah?
 81. Read Jeremiah 31:15. What is the NT prophecy which is fulfilled from this verse?
 82. In Jeremiah chapter _____, the New Covenant is spoken of.
 83. Why is Lamentations important?
 84. Where do we find this verse? "Through the LORD's mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; Great is your faithfulness."
 85. What is going on in Ezekiel chapter 1?
 86. Read Ezekiel 34:1-16. What is being expressed here?
 87. What is the message behind the valley of dry bones?
 88. The last 8 chapters of Ezekiel deal with what?
 89. What king captured the Israelites during the time of Daniel?
 90. What five kingdoms did Daniel prophesy about?
 91. Which is the greatest kingdom of the 5?
 92. Who was Nebuchadnezzar's son and why is he important?
 93. Who is seen in Daniel's vision of chapter 7?
 94. What prophet was instructed to marry a harlot?
 95. Read Hosea 6:6. What is being expressed here?
 96. What "army" does Joel prophesy about?
 97. What well known prophecy is contained in Joel 2?
 98. Read Amos 3:2. What is being expressed here?
 100. What, to who, and why did Obadiah prophecy?
 101. How long was Jonah in the belly of the great fish?
 102. Many people think Jonah was just a fairy tale. Read 2 Kings 14:25. Why does this help us?
 103. Who did Jonah prophesy against?
 104. How does the book of Jonah end? Why?
 105. What is contained in Micah 5?
 106. Who did Nahum prophecy against?
 107. In what OT book is the quote, "The just shall live by faith?"
 108. Zephaniah prophesied about many countries. Which country was he most concerned about?
 109. Who had a vision of the High Priest being ridiculed by Satan?
 110. In what OT book is this quote: "Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit says the Lord?"
 111. Malachi chapter 3 prophesies about John the Baptist. T or F.
 112. Where are people robbing God in the book of Malachi?

New Testament Questions

1. What was Jesus' hometown?
2. Why did John Baptize Jesus?
3. Where did Jesus get his human nature?
4. Who forced Jesus to go into the wilderness to be tempted?
5. What book and chapters do we find the Sermon on the Mount?

6. How many beatitudes are there?
7. What Gentiles did Jesus become amazed at, because he had more faith than Israel?
8. What two groups viciously opposed Jesus?
9. Read Matthew 21:22. Is this true, why or why not?
10. Read Matthew 10:34. What is being expressed here?
11. Read Matthew 13:11-15. How does this affect the universality of the Gospel?
12. What two figures appeared with Jesus during the transfiguration?
13. What is the importance of Matthew 16 and 18 when applying it to the church?
14. Read Matthew 19:17. Is Jesus not Good? What is being expressed here?
15. Read Matthew 22:13-14. What is being expressed here?
16. Are there greater punishments in hell for greater sin? Or is one sin just as bad as another?
17. Did Judas want to betray Christ? Why or why not?
18. Use a verse from Matthew's gospel which proves the Trinity.
19. What is the purpose of a parable?
20. Jesus cast out demons (Mark 5), can we? Why or why not?
21. Use the Gospel of Mark and prove the doctrine of eternal punishment.
22. Read mark 10:26-27. What is being expressed here?
23. Of the sayings of the cross, what which impacts you the most and why?
24. Who did Luke write his Gospel to?
25. Who was John the Baptist's mother?
26. In Matthew 5 we have a sermon on a mountain, in Luke 6 it is on the plain. Is this a problem with the reliability of the Bible?
27. What is the meaning of the parable of the good Samaritan?
 - a. ...of the Mustard seed?
 - b. ...of the Lost Son?
 - c. ...of the persistent widow?
 - d. ...of the Pharisee and the tax collector?
 - e. ...of the parable of the Minas?
 - f. ...of the wicked vine dressers?
28. What two men tried Jesus?
29. Read Luke 24:45. What is being expressed here?
30. What is an ascension?"
31. What was Jesus' first miracle?
32. Read John 3:3. What is being expressed here?
33. Read John 5:21. What is being expressed here?
34. Read John 6:44, 6:65. How does this relate to the unsaved?
35. Read John 10:11-15. What is being expressed here?
36. Read John 15:16. What is being expressed here?
37. Who is the Comforter?
38. Who is the second Comforter?
39. What does the second Comforter do for us according to Jesus?
40. What is the formal prayer Jesus prayed in John 17?
41. Read John 17:9. What is being expressed here?
42. During the crucifixion, name 3 things which were fulfilled from the OT.
43. Why did John write his Gospel?
44. What is the overall picture in Acts?
45. What 2 disciples stand out prominently in the book of Acts?
46. At Pentecost the 120 disciples spoke in what language?
47. What does it mean to "break bread?"
48. Read Acts 4:27-28. What is being expressed here?
49. Who is chosen to serve in Acts 6?
50. According to Acts 6, what is the biblical role of elders or ministers in the church?
51. What is a martyr?
52. Paul was a mentor to what young Pastor (s)?
53. Paul was a

- a. Tarsian
 - b. Roman
 - c. apostle
 - d. Jew
 - e. all of the above
 - f. just b, c, d.
54. Jude and 2 Peter have some identical content. T or F?
55. Who wrote the book of Jude?
56. What 2 epistles did the brothers of Jesus write?
57. What lost letter of Paul is mentioned in Colossians?
58. Here are a few discrepancies in the bible. (??) One verse says one things, and another seems to contradict. Read them and explain why they are not contradictions.
- a. Matthew 20:20 and Mark 10:35
 - b. Matthew 26:34 and mark 14:30
 - c. James 1:13 and Genesis 22:1
 - d. Proverbs 26:4 and Proverbs 26:5

SECTION 2

Theological Knowledge

Briefly outline your understanding of the following:

1. Soteriology
2. Inerrancy
3. Trinity
4. Providence
5. Imago Dei
6. Eschatology
7. Theology proper
8. Ecclesiology
9. Pneumatology
10. Infallibility
11. Omniscience
12. Covenant
13. Exegesis
14. Eisogesis
15. General Revelation
16. Special Revelation
17. Sovereignty
18. Decree of God
19. Free will
20. Limited Free will
21. Miracles
22. Angels
23. Demons
24. Satan
25. Exorcisms
26. Doctrines of Grace
27. Imputation of Sin
28. The Fall
29. Propitiation
30. Impeccability
31. Virgin Birth
32. Penal Substitution

33. Redemption
34. Baptism in the Holy Spirit
35. Holy Spirit
36. Common grace
37. Election
38. Predestination
39. Reprobation
40. Foreknowledge of God
41. Effectual Calling
42. External Calling
43. Body of Christ
44. Keys of the Kingdom
45. Apostle
46. Elder
47. Disciple
48. Deacon
49. Pastor
50. Lord's Supper
51. Millennium
52. Final Judgment
53. New heavens and new earth

Essays and Questionnaires Documents

The following documents include the applicant's, wife's and child's essays, as well as the family finance survey, pastoral questionnaire, theological exam, confidential questionnaire and background check form. These must all be submitted on the applicant website per the instructions given there. These must be completed prior to the compilation interview.

Applicant Essay: Testimony & Calling to Eldership

Testimony

1. Share very briefly your family of origin and as you proceed, please include the important events that have shaped your life.

2. Describe how you met Jesus including what your life was like prior, the key factors that led you to Jesus, and how your life changed after meeting Jesus.

3. Describe your spiritual disciplines and how you walk, hear, and learn from God.

4. Describe some specifics as to what Jesus has been doing in your life in the past year, and what is currently happening for you in terms of spiritual growth today.

5. What have been your five most influential books (outside of the Bible) and describe why?

6. Please describe briefly how you and your wife met, what your courtship was like, and how long you dated before marriage.

7. Provide a candid narrative of your marital history.

Calling

8. Please describe specifically how you experience your calling to serve as a Sanctuary Fellowship elder and the role you believe Jesus is leading you to fill.

9. Is your spouse persuaded of a call for you becoming an elder at The Sanctuary Fellowship? Explain.

Wife's Essay

1. Please describe the important events that have shaped your life.
2. Share how you met Jesus including what your life was like prior, the key factors that led you to Jesus, and how your life changed after meeting Jesus (begin very briefly with your family of origin).
3. Provide a candid narrative of your marital history.
4. Please describe how your husband has led you spiritually and contributed to your growth in your history together.
5. Describe how your husband has functioned as head of the home, and how he has taken responsibility to teach, train, and pastor your children.
6. Please tell us what you believe your husband's primary spiritual gifts are, and why you believe your husband would be a good elder at The Sanctuary Fellowship.
7. Describe a time when the demands of work and/or ministry put strain on your marriage or family life and how you as couple dealt with it.

Child's Essay

for children over 13 years old

Child's Name and Age:

1. How and when did you meet Jesus?
2. What is your relationship with your dad like?
3. How has your dad led you to know and love Jesus?
4. How has your dad taught you the Bible?

▪ Acknowledgment of Materials Read

I, _____, an applicant for eldership at The Sanctuary Fellowship, Richmond, TX, hereby declare, on behalf of the elders, that I have read, understood and am in agreement with the entirety of the content of this document.

Signature

Print Name

Date