**JANUARY BIBLE STUDY – 2023**

***Biblical Eldership: The Role of Eldership***

**Part 1: Defining Eldership**

1. Summary Position
   * We are Jesus ruled, elder led and congregationally accountable.
   * Two offices: elder and deacon:
     1. Deacons serve through member care and addressing the physical needs of church.
     2. Elders lead by shepherding the congregation as well as watching over the doctrine and practice of church.

* Elders are multiple, male, mature, and include both ministerial staff and laity who devote themselves to the ministry of the Word and prayer.

1. Congregationalism in the New Testament

“All animals are equal, but some are more equal than others” (George Orwell, *Animal Farm*).

* + Church authority demonstrated in church discipline (Matt 18:15–17; 1 Cor 5:4–5; 2 Cor 2:6).
  + Solution to problem with widows presented to church to solve (Acts 6:2–5).
  + Church responsible to ensure gospel being preached is biblical (Gal 1:6–9)
  + Congregationalism is not a pure democracy; church affirms the leadership offered by the elders.
  + Church leaders are described as a gift to the church to lead them to full maturity in Christ (Eph 4:11–16; Heb 13:17).

**FROM OUR FAITHBIDGE BYLAWS:**

The following matters shall be brought before the church in conference for affirmation:

1. The budget; (the annual overall operating expenditures of the church);
2. The purchase or sale of real property;
3. The assumption of any loan or encumbrance;
4. Amendments to the Constitution, Bylaws, or Articles of Incorporation;
5. The plan of merger, consolidation, or dissolution and any amendments thereafter; any matter related to disassociation of the church from the Southern Baptist Convention, the Florida Baptist Convention, or First Coast Churches (formerly Jacksonville Baptist Association); any merger or consolidation with any other Baptist convention, fellowship, or association;
6. The recommendation to call, appoint, or terminate a Senior Pastor or Elder Board Member;
7. Terminating membership as a result of church discipline;
8. Any transfer of authority, even temporarily, to another church or entity.
9. The Pattern of Church Leadership in the New Testament Church
   * In Acts 20:17–38, Elders (*presbuterous*, v. 17) and overseers (*episkopous*, v. 28) are used interchangeably; do work of “pastoring” or “shepherding God’s flock.”
   * 1 Timothy 3:1-13 distinguishes the office of elder from deacon; same character requirements, but elder/overseer/pastor must also be able to teach.
   * Acts 6:1-4 clarifies distinction between roles; therefore, deacons serve through meeting physical needs and caring for the body in way that brings unity under the Word and supports the leadership of the elders. Without deacons, elders will not be free to lead church through word and prayer.
   * Local churches were led by a plurality of elders. What about the Moses model of the Old Testament where a singular leader led God’s people?
10. Plurality of Elders Leading Local Churches in the New Testament
    * Elders found in churches of Judea and surrounding area (Acts 11:30; Acts 15; James 5:14, 15).
    * Paul commissioned elders to be established in new church plants (Titus 1:5) and they are found leading Pauline churches in Derbe, Lystra, Iconium and Antioch (Acts 14:23), Ephesus (Acts 20:17; 1 Timothy 3:1-7; 5:17-25), Philippi (Phil 1:1) and Crete (Titus 1:5).
    * Peter describes elders leading churches in Northwest Asia Minor in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bythnia (1 Pet 1:1; 5:1).
    * Strong suggestion that elders existed in churches of Thessalonica (1 Thess 5:12) and Rome (Heb 13:17).
11. Instructions about Elders Given to Churches

* James instructs those who are sick to call for elders of the church (James 5:14).
* Paul instructs the Ephesian church to financially support elders who labor at “teaching and preaching” (1 Tim 5:17–18).
* Paul instructs churches about protecting elders from false accusation, discipling elders who sin, and restoring fallen elders (1 Tim 5:19–22).
* Paul instructs the church as to the proper qualifications for eldership (1 Tim 3:1–7; Titus 1:5-9).
* Paul affirms that those who desire to do the work of an elder desire a noble work (1 Tim 3:1).
* Peter instructs the young men to submit to the elders (1 Peter 5:5).
* The writer of Hebrews instructs his readers to obey and submit to the elders (Heb 13:17).
* Paul teaches that elders are the household stewards, leaders, instructors, and teachers of the local church (Titus 1:7, 9; 1 Thess 5:12).
* Paul instructs the church to acknowledge, love and live at peace with its elders (1 Thess 5:12–13).

1. Instructions Given Directly to Elders

* To pray and anoint the sick with oil (James 5:14).
* To oversee the local church (1 Pet 5:1–2).
* Warning against being too authoritative (1 Pet 5:3).
* Promises elders that when Jesus returns, they will receive “the unfading crown of glory” (1 Pet 5:4).
* They are to be clothed with humility (1 Pet 5:5).
* Reminded that the Holy Spirit placed them in the church as overseers to pastor the church of God (Acts 20:31).
* To work hard, help the needy and be generous like Jesus (Acts 20:35).
* Live at peace with the congregation (1 Thess 5:13).

1. Eldership Best Harmonizes with the True Nature of the Church as a Family

* Believers in a local church are a “the brotherhood” (1 Pet 2:17; 5:9).
* Early Christians met in homes (Rom 16:5; 1 Cor 16:19; Col 4:15; Phlm 2).
* They shared material possessions (Acts 2:44–45; 4:32; 11:29; Rom 12:13, 20; 15:26; 1 Cor 16:1; 2 Cor 8; Gal 2:10; 6:10; Heb 13:16; James 2:15–16; 1 John 3:17).
* They ate together (Acts 2:46; 20:11; 1 Cor 11:20; Jude 12).
* They greeted one another with a holy kiss (Rom 16:16; 1 Cor 16:20; 2 Cor 13:12; 1 Thess 5:26; 1 Pet 5:14).
* They showed hospitality (Acts 16:15; 21:8,16; Rom 12:13; 1 Tim 3:2; 5:10; Heb 13:2; 1 Pet 4:9; 3 John 5–8)
* They cared for widows (Acts 6:1-16; 9:39; 1 Tim 5:1–16)
* They disciplined their members when appropriate (1 Cor 5-6; 2 Cor 2:1–11; 2 Thess 3:6–15; 1 Tim 5:19–20).

1. The Church Is a Humble, Servant Community under Christ’s Headship

* Elder system of government enhances the humble, servant character of the church family.
* New Testament consistently provides a picture of shared leadership as a means to maintain love, humility, and servanthood within the church.
* To function effectively, the Elder Body must show mutual regard, submit themselves to one another, patiently wait on one another, genuinely consider one another’s interests and perspective, and defer to one another.
* The Elder Body serves as a microcosm of the church as a whole and a living example of loving relationships and servanthood for the whole body.
* Biblical eldership promotes and guards the preeminent position of Christ over the local church.

1. The Pattern of Baptist Congregations
   * Our churches aren’t the same and neither is our history.
   * London Confession of 1644 affirmed plural leadership of local churches as well as the 1925 Baptist Faith and Message.
   * First SBC President, W.B. Johnson, taught plural eldership.
   * Pastors and church leaders often referred to as “elders.”
   * Minutes from various church and associational meeting evidence that plural eldership was the norm for many Baptist congregations.
   * Fell into disuse under influence of key leaders, cultural individualism, and rise of industrialization and corporate organizational structures.

**Part 2: Purpose of Elders – Equipping the Saints for Ministry**

“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” (Eph 4:11–14)

*What gifts did Jesus give to the church?*

* Apostles – In a technical sense, *Apostles* refers to the Twelve who witnessed Christ’s resurrection and, along with prophets (Eph 2:20; 3:5), served as the foundation for the church. Defined in this sense, we no longer have apostles. In a general sense, it can refer to a “sent one” who serve as Jesus’ emissaries or messengers (Acts 14:14; 2 Cor 8:23).
* Prophets – Throughout the Bible, *prophets* proclaimed God’s Word to his people (by forth-telling more than future-telling) as seen through the Old Testament period and the early church (Acts 11:27–28; 13:1; 15:32; 21:9; 1 Cor 14:32). Defined this way, as with apostles, we no longer have biblical prophets. More generally, a prophet can refer to anyone applying God’s Word to God’s people.
* Evangelists – Referring to those people particularly gifted in sharing the gospel, this term only occurs here and in two other places (Acts 21:8; 2 Tim 4:5).
* Shepherds and Teachers – The word translated *shepherds* is the same word often translated as “pastors,” which is used interchangeably throughout the New Testament with “elders” and “overseers.” Paul closely relates this role with teachers due to the overlap in function. While not all teachers are pastors, all pastors must be able to teach (1 Tim 3:2).

*How do elders “equip the saints for the work of ministry?”*

* Oversight – Elders lead the church toward attaining “the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” by caring for the flock, watching over the flock, and ultimately bearing responsible for its protection and wellbeing. This concept is reinforced in the qualification to “manage his own household well” (1 Tim 3:4), which implies an intimate involvement with the people. Oversight of the church involves shepherding the congregation as well as watching over its practice.
  + Shepherding the congregation includes:
    - Affirming and clarifying vision and direction.
    - Considering ways to make the disciple-making efforts of the church more effective.
    - Providing strategic oversight for the church to include finances, facilities, staffing and strategic initiatives.
    - Submitting to the lordship of Jesus in all things
  + Watching over practice includes:
    - Ensuring alignment between orthodoxy and orthopraxy.
    - Overseeing staff initiatives to build on the churches vision for disciple-making.
* Personal Holiness – In passages dealing with the qualifications for elders (1 Tim 3; Titus 1; 1 Pet 5), the various qualifications related to character emphasize the need for personal holiness in the life of the elder. Elders must model the type of character God desires for all believers (Heb 13:7). It also distinguishes true shepherds from false ones (Jer 23:1–4; Ezek 34:1–6; Jn 10:1–5). Those men who do not hold to the character traits listed by Paul might use their position to abuse and take advantage of the church, behavior that is stringently rebuked throughout Scripture, and would tear down the body of Christ rather than build it up.
* Teaching – Elders “feed” the flock of God through ministry of the Word, providing nourishment through the truths and promises of Scripture and protecting them from “every wind of doctrine,” “human cunning,” or “craftiness in deceitful schemes” (Eph 4:14). Aside from direct preaching and teaching, this task also includes watching over the doctrinal integrity of the church,
  + Watching over doctrine includes:
    - Wrestling with contemporary issues and helping the church define her understanding of biblical teaching on the subject.
    - Monitoring teaching being done within the church to ensure both curricula and teachers present beliefs that align with those held by the church via the Elder Body.

**Part 3: Biblical Principle – The Spiritually Qualified Should Lead**

*What is an elder not:*

* 1. An older male
  2. A successful businessman
  3. An involved church member
  4. A ‘good ol’ boy’
  5. A politician

Christ-like character described in 1 Tim 3:1–7 and Titus 1:6–9. Paul is in essence saying, “But make sure each man is a certain kind of man” (cf. 1 Tim. 3:1).

*Qualifications for Eldership*

Above Reproach

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

Manages His Own Household Well

Not a Recent Convert

Well Thought of by Outsiders

Not Arrogant

Gentle

Lover of Good

Upright

Holy

Disciplined

*Qualification Quadrants*

**Core Theology :**

Authority/Sufficiency of Scripture

Substitutionary Atonement

Divinity and Exclusivity of Christ

**Doctrinal Distinctives:**

Believer’s Baptism

Congregationalism

**Love for the Congregation:**

Actively Involved

Disciples Others

**Cultural distinctives:**

Gender Roles

Biblical Sexuality

**Part 4: Plurality of Elders – Power in Numbers**

The New Testament terms for pastor, overseer, or elder are never used to talk about a single person leading or governing the church alone. A plurality of elders strengthens and serves the church by:

* Embodying and expressing the New Testament principle of interdependence and the diversity of gifts in the body of Christ (Rom 12:4–6; 1 Cor 12).
* Acknowledging human limitations by recognizing no one man can possess all the gifts, wisdom, and abilities needed to lead the church (1 Cor 12:21).
* Creating a leadership structure where the leaders must model the unity to which God calls the whole church (John 17:23; Rom 15:5; Eph 4:3, 13; Col 3:14).
* Providing a community of care, support, and accountability that guards the calling, life, and doctrine of church leaders (1 Tim 4:14; Titus 1:6–9; James 5:16).
* Contradicting the “Great Man” theory of leadership and replacing it with “an abundance of counselors” who collaborate, lead, and guide the church together (Prov 11:14; 24:6).

**Part 5: Proposed Bylaws Revisions – Article III, Church Leadership**

**SECTION 1. SENIOR PASTOR**

3.1(1) The Senior Pastor shall be recognized as the spiritual leader of the church and President of the Corporation, and as such, he must meet the biblical standards found in 1 Timothy 3:1–7 and adhere to the Articles of Faith of the church. He shall serve as the primary preacher and senior Bible teacher by virtue of his calling, bearing responsibility for all worship and other public services of the church. The Senior Pastor shall also direct the work of the church staff in cooperation with the Elder Board.

3.1(2) The Senior Pastor shall be elected for an indefinite period of time and may be removed by resignation or by dismissal. He may elect to terminate his position with the church by a notice of at least four (4) weeks, or the church may terminate his position in conference with at least a 75% majority vote. Any action taken by the church to terminate will be effective immediately.

3.1(3) Any two church members with reason to believe that the Senior Pastor should be censured or dismissed should express such concern to the Elder Board and, if necessary, to the congregation. Any such action shall be done in accordance with Scripture, particularly the instructions given in Matthew 18:15–17 and 1 Timothy 5:17–21.

3.1(4) In the event of a vacancy in the position of Senior Pastor, the Elder Board is responsible for recommending a permanent Senior Pastor for the church. The church shall have an opportunity to hear the recommended candidate on a specific weekend at all weekend worship services. Election shall require an affirmative vote by written ballot of at least 75% of the members voting to constitute a call. Should the recommended candidate fail to receive a 75% majority vote, then the Elder Board shall seek out another candidate to recommend for Senior Pastor.

**SECTION 2. ELDER BOARD**

3.2(1) The Elder Board, under the leadership of the Senior Pastor, is responsible for leading the church in all matters of direction, doctrine, and discipline. This team is responsible to oversee and evaluate the direction of all ministries and stewardship of the church. They may, along with the Senior Pastor, hire or remove church staff as necessary, establish ministry teams to assist them in any of their duties, and delegate authority to qualified individuals or teams as they deem fit.

3.2(2) The Elder Board shall consist of the Senior Pastor plus a combination of congregational and staff elders; however, the board shall not exceed seven (7) nor have fewer than three (3) in total. All men serving on the Elder Board must meet the biblical standards found in 1 Timothy 3:1–7 and adhere to the Articles of Faith of the church.

3.2(3) The Elder Board shall also appoint a Chairman from among the Congregational Elders. He shall work with the Senior Pastor in managing the affairs of the Elder Board.

3.2(4) The initial Elder Board shall be selected by the Senior Pastor and appointed by the church in conference. This action shall be taken within one calendar year of this provision being adopted by the church.

3.2(5) In the absence of a Senior Pastor, the Elder Board shall ensure that someone preaches every week at all services. They shall also ensure that the church’s mission and ministries are kept intact and functioning, and that the attendance and finances are properly promoted while the church is without a Senior Pastor.

3.2(6) Members of the Elder Board may be removed by resignation or by dismissal. He may elect to terminate his position with the church by a notice of at least four (4) weeks, or the church may terminate his position in conference with at least a 75% majority vote. Any action taken by the church to terminate will be effective immediately.

3.2(7) Any two church members with reason to believe that a member of the Elder Board should be censured or dismissed should express such concern to the Senior Pastor and/or Elder Board Chairman and, if necessary, to the congregation. Any such action shall be done in accordance with Scripture, particularly the instructions given in Matthew 18:15–17 and 1 Timothy 5:17–21.