

REDISCOVERING CHURCH LEADERSHIP

A BIBLICAL & HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

2016



FROM PASTOR JEREMY FREEMAN

CHURCH FAMILY, I would love to share a few things directly from my heart. It is my prayer that you will truly take the time to read, not only these first couple of pages, but every page that is in this booklet about the vision God has given me as I seek to lead our church. Every word has been carefully selected and seeks to convey a desire to be explicitly Biblical in all that we do at First Baptist Church of Newcastle (FBCN).

As you read this introductory letter, there are two lenses through which I want you to look. The first lens is what I call, *A Personal Path*. This lens will allow you to see a little of my own journey and understand where I am coming from personally. The second lens is what I call, *A Pastoral Plea*. This lens will allow you to see my heart and get a glimpse of where I am seeking to lead FBCN.

A PERSONAL PATH

When I became the pastor of FBCN, I had, and continue to have, one desire: to preach and follow God's Word verse by verse. If there is anything we have done together these past years, it is to establish that the Word of God trumps our desires, preferences, traditions, plans, and ideas. We have built upon the solid foundation laid by previous pastors, and are cultivating a culture where God's Word is what guides our every action and decision. This booklet was born and put together first and foremost with that in mind.

My journey though, as a pastor, has looked nothing like I could have ever imagined. I wish I could say that when I came to FBCN, I knew exactly what I was doing. That is not the case. While I had some ideas of what I wanted to accomplish, I was, and remain, desperate for God's guidance in my life. So much of what has happened in my time as your pastor, is a direct result of the goodness and grace of God. Our church has grown in nearly every way, and for that, I am immensely grateful.

With the growth, has come many blessings, but also many burdens and challenges. Even though I have been on church staffs in other churches and thought I knew what the pastorate was all about, I can honestly say that it is much more difficult than I ever imagined. I do not think most church members, and even some staff members at times, have any idea the weight and responsibility that pastors bear. As you can imagine, in a church our size, the burden of trying to

minister to and shepherd so many people is truly overwhelming. This has led me to look into the Scripture and see what God has said about leading and shepherding His people.

For the past several years, I have been on a personal journey of discovery. It turns out that God has said much about how He wants His church to be organized and shepherded. He gave the church a plan, but the problem is, most churches have not embraced it. As I have looked at our church, along with studying the Scripture, the Lord has revealed to me that FBCN needs to understand and embrace the Biblical model for church leadership that God has given us in His Word. Therefore, my desire is to lead our church to rediscover God's plan for church leadership. This is a journey I have been on personally, and one I am inviting you to join.

A PASTORAL PLEA

As I began deeply studying the issue of church leadership and government, God put a desire in my heart to have other men come alongside me to study together. In November of 2014, I prayerfully selected a diverse group of men, both of age and church background, for the purpose of simply studying the issue of church leadership side by side. I was not sure where the journey would take us, but wanted to start down the path and follow God's lead.

For 18 months, a small group of men met monthly and often bi-monthly to pray, study, read, and discuss. The booklet you hold in your hands is the result of our study. It is a condensed collection of data that has literally been compiled from countless hours of study and discussion. It has been a true labor of love. What I hope you see in this booklet is the Biblical and historical support for God's design for the church. From cover to cover of the Bible, God's design has always been to have a plurality of pastors (which the Bible calls "elders") whom He would call out to lead His people. My plea for FBCN is to see church leadership from this perspective and to follow God's design.

Baptists love to pride themselves on being a "people of the Book". If that is the case, then all we should care about is what the Bible teaches. A Christian's and church's desire should be to align themselves as closely to God's truth as possible. That should be our only aim. As you read this booklet, you will see that Baptists were more aligned with God's design for church leadership at one point in time, but have drifted since then. Church family, it is time we rediscover God's design for the organization of His church. God has spoken and we must obey. As we do that, we will see that a plurality of pastors is Biblical, Baptist, and ultimately best. God never intended for the church to be led by one man, but rather, for multiple called men of God, to lead and serve His church. When the church functions with this type of structure, God will be glorified and the church will be edified.

I am asking you to join me on this journey. Let us unite together and seek to do things as God has revealed in His Word. When we align ourselves with His Word, not only will the church benefit, but those leading it will, as well. It is with great excitement and eager expectation that I present these things to you. I am looking forward to what God will do and how He will bless us as we rediscover His purpose for church leadership. Are you ready? I hope so. Let's dive in!

Because He Lives,



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BIBLICAL OVERVIEW OF ELDERS

The following pages contain a comprehensive overview related to what the Bible teaches regarding spiritual oversight and leadership. This work represents a summary of collective thinking from the pastor and a 20-person group that have been praying together, studying, researching, and discussing the topic since November 2014. If you have further questions, you may contact one of the members of the study group at large or this sub-group whose members include: Jeremiah Broyles, Cody Caywood, Chuck Page, Paul Rohde, and Dave Watson.

ELDERS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

From the beginning, God has established all things with order and provided a method of leadership to ensure the proper management of His work. This section is designed to give an encapsulated overview of the authority, qualifications, and model for church government that gives us guidelines for establishing a plurality of elder leadership in the church as given by God through His inspired Word. In order to more practically lead and fulfill the mission of the church, God has given us a pattern of elders or overseers in Scripture. 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9 are two New Testament passages that lay out the qualifications of an elder/overseer, but first, let us continue with an Old Testament example that demonstrates how men with similar duties and qualifications were appointed to govern the Israelite congregation.

In Exodus 18, Moses sat to judge the people of Israel and give them the advice of God. People gathered around Moses from sun up to sun down. Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, gave Moses wise counsel and told him that he could never continue to do this because he would wear himself out. Early in Scripture we see that a position of spiritual leadership over a large group of people is a daunting task that cannot be performed alone. Jethro continued his wise counsel and advised Moses to teach all of the people the statutes and laws they were to obey and the work they must do. In Exodus 18:21-22, Jethro gives a list of qualifications for these men to be placed in positions of leadership.

The first qualification is that the men must fear God. Unlike the secular world, he must be a man that is not pushing for personal motives, but rather a man who has stepped aside in this life and surrendered his direction to the Lord's will. A godly leader must lead others by prayer, thoughtful study, and meditation of God's Word. This is the command that God gave Joshua in Joshua 1:7-8. The first command to Joshua regarding leadership of the congregation was to personally know the law God gave to Moses and to walk in it. Second, the Book of the Law was NEVER supposed to depart from his lips. He was to continually talk about God's law and His promises to the Israelites. In Ezra 7:10 we see a description of the same formula: "For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the Law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach statutes and ordinances in Israel." If a man wants to lead a congregation, he must first be surrendered to God and must

be diligently following Christ.

The second qualification is that the men should be men of truth. It must be the practice of an elder to uphold the truth even if the truth causes discomfort. An elder must fight to keep it... *no matter the cost*.

The last qualification is that the men must hate covetousness. An elder should be content with what God has given him and not allow his heart to be swept away following after possessions of this world. An overseer of a congregation must be a man who has cut ties to this world and has clung to the foot of the cross, forsaking all that he once held dear and exchanged it for the blood of Christ.

The elders of the Old Testament were the spiritual representatives of the congregation, and they carried the burden of the sin of the congregation before the Lord. Also, we see in Deuteronomy 27:1 that the elders stood with Moses before the people and they urged the people to keep all the commandments that Moses commanded. The elders taught the people and instructed them in the way of righteousness. We also see in Deuteronomy that the elders used God's Word and wisdom to judge the people. When David sinned against God and ordered a census, it was the elders who went out with David, put sackcloth on, fell on their faces, and prayed that God would stop His angel from destroying the people (1 Chronicles 21:16).

ELDERS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

The word "elder" (presbuteros) in the New Testament is used in several ways. It is used five times to refer to someone who is older (Luke 15:25; 1 Timothy 5:1-2; 1 Peter 5:5; Romans 9:12). It is used thirty-three times in the Gospels and Acts to refer to elders of the Jews who were part of the group (the chief priest, elders and scribes) that opposed Jesus and the Apostles. According to the [Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible](#), "In New Testament times, each Jewish community had its council of elders. The most important of these, of course, was the council of seventy-one, the Sanhedrin, of Jerusalem, which served as a 'supreme court' for all Jewry." It is used about sixteen times to refer to elders of churches, their appointment, their qualifications, and responsibilities. The first references to church elders concerns the church in Jerusalem (Acts 11:30; Acts 15:2, 4, 6, 22, 23; Acts 16:4; Acts 21:18). Although little information is given concerning how they became elders, the context reveals they were leaders of the church in Jerusalem with the Apostles. In the New Testament community, elders functioned as representatives of the church. Christian elders in Jerusalem, for example, received relief gifts from Barnabas and Saul on behalf of believers in Antioch (Acts 11:30). Afterward, when Paul and Barnabas circled back to the churches they had established during their first missionary journey, they "appointed elders for them in every church" (Acts 14:23). This became Paul's custom wherever a church was established (e.g. Ephesus, Acts 20:17). He also instructed Titus to appoint elders in each town on the island of Crete. Multiple elders were set apart in each of the infant churches of Asia Minor so that they might be nurtured and protected, clearly establishing the pattern of plural eldership. Later, Paul writes to Timothy and Titus concerning elders, which gives us more information about their qualifications and responsibilities.

The words "bishop" (1 Timothy 3:2) and "overseer" (Acts 20:28) are translations of the same Greek word (episkopos). The epistles use "overseer" or "bishop" interchangeably with the term "elder"

(presbuteros). Also, it seems the Apostle Paul used the terms "elder" and "bishop" to refer to the same person when writing to Titus (Titus 1:5-7). In a similar way, he refers to the elders of Ephesus (Act 20:17) as being overseers of the church by the Holy Spirit (Acts 20:28). Paul's casual shift from "elder" to "overseer" shows that he understands the two terms as referring to the same office: "elder" suggesting one's character and "overseer" suggesting one's task. Although the term "pastor" (poimen) was translated only once in its noun form, the title joins those of "elder" and "overseer" in deepening the calling of this church office (Eph. 4:11). *Poimen* literally means "shepherd" and is translated throughout the Gospels and in two of the Epistles (e.g. Matt. 9:36, 25:32, 26:31; John 10:2, 11-12, 16; Heb. 13:20; 1 Peter 2:25). Most of these Scriptures refer to Christ as the Shepherd of His flock. This is helpful because the type of leadership elders are to provide must mirror that of Jesus Christ, whom Peter described as the "Shepherd and Guardian of your souls" (1 Peter 2:25). Thus, like Christ, an "elder" is to watch over the spiritual lives of those under his charge, seeking to protect them from the perils of false teaching and deceit of sin, so that the church might live as salt and light to the glory of Christ. While "elder" appears to be the dominant term for the church office dealing with the spiritual needs of the local church, "overseer" and "pastor" are used synonymously with "elder" to reflect the same office. Think of it like this: "elder" reflects the spiritual maturity of the office; "overseer" reflects the leadership and direction for the church; "pastor/shepherd" reflects feeding, nurturing, and protecting the flock. Therefore, in the New Testament and the local church today, elders, both in calling and in function, prove to be essential to the church's leadership and ongoing stability.

How many elders should be utilized in a church? Elders were appointed in plurality many times in the New Testament, and this model seems to be the standard. No biblical passage suggests that any church, no matter how small, had only one elder. The consistent New Testament pattern is a plurality of elders "in every church" (Acts 14:23) and "in every city" (Titus 1:5). Although there is no numbering system or a formula to follow, Paul is said to make elders in every church. A plural elder leadership makes the most sense, even looking back to the advice of Jethro in Exodus 18. The plurality of elders within a church body would divide the burdens of ministry over multiple peers, allowing for better pastoral availability, while reducing burnout and frustration. This becomes more important as a congregation grows and problems are compounded. Also, the plurality of leaders provides leadership with accountability from peers, and allows them to have pastors to whom they may go to when in need of godly counsel. God says it best in Proverbs 27:17, "As iron sharpens iron, so a man sharpens the countenance of his friend."

What authority is given to elders? Ultimately, all authority belongs to Christ Jesus (Matthew 28:18) and it has been delegated to those He has sent (Matthew 28:19-20). This authority was originally given to the apostles, and the apostles appointed the elders in every church. We see later that elders were given the authority to appoint other elders (Titus 1:5), based on the character of the men they see in the church and the work of God in their lives. We do not see diversity of forms of government in the New Testament church, but a unified and consistent pattern in which every church had elders governing it and keeping watch over it (Acts 20:28; Heb. 13:17; 1 Peter 5:2-3)

How should elders use this authority within the church? Elders have several roles within the church in which they are to use their spiritual authority. The first is to teach people about the

riches of God through sound doctrine (Matt 28:20; 1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:9). Second, they are to have spiritual rule over the people (1 Timothy 5:17; 1 Timothy 4:6, 12-16). Third, they are to rebuke false doctrine and sin within the church (2 Timothy 4:2; Titus 1:9-13, 2:15). Fourth, elders are to minister and pray for the congregation (James 5:14). Last, elders are to protect, feed, and tend the congregation (John 21:15-17; 1 Peter 5:2-3). If a congregation has a group of godly spiritual leaders who perform these duties, that church will be best positioned for spiritual growth, accountability, and effective ministry.

Elders have great responsibility within the church, and no one seeking to be an elder should take the position lightly. If a man is called by God, and this call on his life is evident before the brethren, then the position of elder is a good work and is noble.

BIBLICAL REFERENCES ON ELDERSHIP

ACTS 11:30 And they did so, sending it to the elders by the hand of Barnabas and Saul.

ACTS 14:23 And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

ACTS 15:1-2, 6, 22-23a But some men came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved." ²And after Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them, Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and the elders about this question... ⁶The apostles and the elders were gathered together to consider this matter... ²²Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men from among them and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They sent Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas, leading men among the brothers, ²³with the following letter...

ACTS 20:17-35 Now from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the church to come to him. ¹⁸And when they came to him, he said to them: "You yourselves know how I lived among you the whole time from the first day that I set foot in Asia, ¹⁹servicing the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials that happened to me through the plots of the Jews; ²⁰how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public

and from house to house, ²¹testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. ²²And now, behold, I am going to Jerusalem, constrained by the Spirit, not knowing what will happen to me there, ²³except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me. ²⁴But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God. ²⁵And now, behold, I know that none of you among whom I have gone about proclaiming the kingdom will see my face again. ²⁶Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all, ²⁷for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God. ²⁸Pay 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. ²⁹I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; ³⁰and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. ³¹Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears. ³²And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified. ³³I coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel. ³⁴You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my necessities and to those who were with me. ³⁵In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"

ACTS 21:17-19 When we had come to Jerusalem, the brothers received us gladly. ¹⁸On the following day Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present. ¹⁹After greeting them, he related one by one the things that God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry.

EPHESIANS 4:11-12 And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, ¹²to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ...

PHILIPPIANS 1:1 Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons:

1 THESSALONIANS 5:12-13 We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, ¹³and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work...

1 TIMOTHY 3:1-7 The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. ²Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, ³not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. ⁴He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, ⁵for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church? ⁶He must not be a recent convert, or he

may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. ⁷Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.

1 TIMOTHY 4:14 Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you.

1 TIMOTHY 5:17-25 Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching. ¹⁸For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain," and, "The laborer deserves his wages." ¹⁹Do not admit a charge against an elder except on the evidence of two or three witnesses. ²⁰As for those who persist in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all, so that the rest may stand in fear. ²¹In 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. ²²Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands, nor take part in the sins of others; keep yourself pure. ²³(No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments.) ²⁴The sins of some people are conspicuous, going before them to judgment, but the sins of others appear later. ²⁵So also good works are conspicuous, and even those that are not cannot remain hidden.

TITUS 1:5-9 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 – ⁶if anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife, and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination. ⁷For 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, ⁸but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined. ⁹He 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.

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.

JAMES 5:14-15 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. ¹⁵And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.

1 PETER 5:1-5 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: ²shepherd 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; ³not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. ⁴And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive

the unfading crown of glory. ⁵Likewise, 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."

3 JOHN 9-10 I have written something to the church, but Diotrephes, who likes to put himself first, does not acknowledge our authority. ¹⁰So if I come, I will bring up what he is doing, talking wicked nonsense against us. And not content with that, he refuses to welcome the brothers, and also stops those who want to and puts them out of the church.

All scriptures taken from ESV

BIBLICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF AN ELDER

The characteristics or qualifications are seen from the standpoint of a man's fundamental relationships – to God, His Word, the elder himself, family, others including the outside world, and things. These verses will help match elder characteristics (taken from NASB and ESV) with related references.

AS TO GOD AND HIS WORD

- a. Not a recent convert 1 Timothy 3:6
- b. Devout/Holy Titus 1:8
- c. Holds firm to the trustworthy word Titus 1:9
- d. Able to give instruction and refute 1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:9

AS TO HIMSELF

- a. Aspires to the office of overseer 1 Timothy 3:1
- b. Not under compulsion 1 Peter 5:2
- c. Prudent/Self-controlled, rather than self-indulgent 1 Timothy 3:2
- d. Not quick-tempered, in control of his feelings Titus 1:7
- e. Not sexually immoral Titus 1:6 (implied)

AS TO HIS FAMILY

- a. Husband of one wife, not distracted by other women 1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:6
- b. Manages his own household well 1 Timothy 3:4
- c. His wife loves, respects, and follows his leadership Colossians 3:18; 1 Timothy 3:5 (implied)
- d. His children are believers, submissive and not rebellious* 1 Timothy 3:4-5; Titus 1:6

AS TO OTHERS

- a. Hospitable 1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:8
- b. Apt/Able to teach 1 Timothy 3:2
- c. Gentle with people 1 Timothy 3:3
- d. Not arrogant/self-willed Titus 1:7
- e. Attentive to the needs of God's flock Acts 20:28
- f. Loves what is good, "a lover of good" Titus 1:8
- g. Not pugnacious/violent Titus 1:7; 1 Timothy 3:3
- h. Not physically or verbally abusive 1 Timothy 3:4 (implied)
- i. Not domineering or lording his position over others 1 Peter 5:3
- j. Uncontentious, not quarrelsome 1 Timothy 3:3
- k. Respectable 1 Timothy 3:2
- l. Good reputation with those on the outside 1 Timothy 3:7

AS TO THINGS

- a. Free from the love of money 1 Timothy 3:3, 6:10
- b. Above reproach, blameless 1 Timothy 3:2; Psalm 15:2
- c. Not involved in dishonest business practices Titus 1:7
- d. Not greedy or seeking personal gain Titus 1:7; 1 Peter 5:2
- e. Not addicted to wine or any other substance Romans 14:13-21

**While it is ideal that all elder's children be believers, the goal is for elder's children to be faithfully taught the Gospel in hopes of them responding. If an elder is living an upright life and being faithful to teach his children the Gospel, he cannot be held responsible for their rejection. If an elder's child becomes rebellious and disruptive to the church, that is an issue that must be addressed.*

ELDERS IN BAPTIST HISTORY

The following pages contain a comprehensive overview related to what Baptist history teaches regarding spiritual oversight and leadership. This work represents a summary of collective thinking from the pastor and a 20-person group that have been praying together, studying, researching, and discussing the topic since November 2014. If you have further questions, you may contact one of the members of the study group at large or this sub-group whose members include: Jeremy Carter, Bryan Haskins, Doug King, Nathan Presley, and O.W. Thomasson.

The purpose of this section is to briefly trace elders throughout Baptist life, specifically Baptist life in America. One of the greatest ways to understand Baptist history is to look at the Baptist Confessions of Faith that have been developed and edited throughout the course of church history. This section will highlight five Baptist Confessions that have had great influence upon where we are today as a Southern Baptist church, and what they have to say about church government, specifically what they say about pastors/elders/bishops. As you will see, the terminology in all five of these documents is very similar. They all state that the offices within the church are bishops or elders and deacons, with the exception of one. The New Hampshire Baptist Confession replaces elders with pastors.

LONDON BAPTIST CONFESSION OF FAITH (1689)

*A particular church, gathered and completely organized according to the mind of Christ, consists of officers and members; and the officers appointed by Christ to be chosen and set apart by the church, so called and gathered, for the peculiar administration of ordinances, and execution of power or duty, which he entrusts them with, or calls them to, to be continued to the end of the world, are **bishops** or **elders**, and **deacons**.*

The way appointed by Christ for the calling of any person, fitted and gifted by the Holy Spirit, unto the office of bishop or elder in a church, is, that he be chosen thereunto by the common suffrage of the church itself; and solemnly set apart by fasting and prayer, with imposition of hands of the eldership of the church, if there be any before constituted therein; and of a deacon that he be chosen by the like suffrage, and set apart by prayer, and the like imposition of hands.

PHILADELPHIA CONFESSION (1742)

*A particular church, gathered and completely organized according to the mind of Christ, consists of officers and members; and the officers appointed by Christ to be chosen and set apart by the church, so called and gathered, for the peculiar administration of ordinances, and execution of power or duty, which He entrusts them with, or calls them to, to be continued to the end of the world, are **bishops** or **elders**, and **deacons**.*

The way appointed by Christ for the calling of any person, fitted and gifted by the Holy Spirit, unto the office of bishop, or elder, in a church is, that he be chosen thereunto by the common suffrage of the church itself; and solemnly set apart by fasting and prayer, with imposition of hands of the

eldership of the church, if there be any before constituted therein: and of a deacon that he be chosen by the like suffrage, and set apart by prayer, and the like imposition of hands.

NEW HAMPSHIRE BAPTIST CONFESSION (1853)

*We believe that a visible Church of Christ is a congregation of baptized believers (1), associated by covenant in the faith and fellowship of the gospel (2); observing the ordinances of Christ (3); governed by his laws (4), and exercising the gifts, rights, and privileges invested in them by his Word (5); that its only scriptural officers are **Bishops**, or **Pastors**, and **Deacons** (6), whose qualifications, claims, and duties are defined in the Epistles to Timothy and Titus.*

THE ABSTRACT OF PRINCIPLES (1858)

*The Lord Jesus is the Head of the Church, which is composed of all his true disciples, and in Him is invested supremely all power for its government. According to his commandment, Christians are to associate themselves into particular societies or churches; and to each of these churches he hath given needful authority for administering that order, discipline and worship which he hath appointed. The regular officers of a Church are **Bishops**, or **Elders**, and **Deacons**.*

BAPTIST FAITH & MESSAGE (1925)

*A church of Christ is a congregation of baptized believers, associated by covenant in the faith and fellowship of the gospel; observing the ordinances of Christ, governed by his laws, and exercising the gifts, rights and privileges invested in them by his word, and seeking to extend the gospel to the ends of the earth. Its Scriptural officers are **bishops** or **elders** and **deacons**.*

BAPTIST FAITH & MESSAGE (1963)

A New Testament church of the Lord Jesus Christ is a local body of baptized believers who are associated by covenant in the faith and fellowship of the gospel, observing the two ordinances of Christ, committed to His teachings, exercising the gifts, rights, and privileges invested in them by His Word, and seeking to extend the gospel to the ends of the earth.

*This church is an autonomous body, operating through democratic processes under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. In such a congregation members are equally responsible. Its Scriptural officers are **pastors** and **deacons**.*

The New Testament speaks also of the church as the body of Christ which includes all of the redeemed of all the ages.

BAPTIST FAITH & MESSAGE (2000)

*A New Testament church of the Lord Jesus Christ is an autonomous local congregation of baptized believers, associated by covenant in the faith and fellowship of the gospel; observing the two ordinances of Christ, governed by His laws, exercising the gifts, rights, and privileges invested in them by His Word, and seeking to extend the gospel to the ends of the earth. Each congregation operates under the Lordship of Christ through democratic processes. In such a congregation each member is responsible and accountable to Christ as Lord. Its scriptural officers are **pastors** and **deacons**. While both men and women are gifted for service in the church, the office of pastor is limited to men as qualified by Scripture.*

The New Testament speaks also of the church as the Body of Christ which includes all of the redeemed of all the ages, believers from every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation.

Since the 1925 Baptist Faith & Message there have been two revisions: one in 1963 and one in 2000 (both are referenced above). These confessions of faith were the foundational documents of the current Baptist Faith & Message that was adopted by the Southern Baptist Convention in 2000. There are several things this section desires to point out concerning these confessions and the history of elders in the life of Baptist churches.

1. It can clearly be seen that through four centuries of Baptist History biblical eldership has been affirmed. The first president of the Southern Baptist Convention, W. B. Johnson wrote in his book, The Gospel Developed through the Government and Order of the Churches of Jesus Christ (1846), that "each [New Testament] church had a plurality of elders".¹ W.B. Johnson went on to say that in a plurality of pastoral leadership, each elder brings a different set of gifts and abilities so that the whole body profits by this sharing together in ministry. While Johnson recognized that a plurality of elders was not always possible (due to the limited number of available pastors in some areas), he did contend that it was most Biblical and beneficial to employ it when at all possible.
2. It should be noted that there was a change in terminology in the Baptist Faith & Message in the 1963 revision. The terms bishops and elders were removed and the term pastors was introduced. This was a change from all the previous confessions. The only exception to that was the New Hampshire Baptist Confession, which used the terms bishops and pastors (instead of bishops and elders). This brings up the question, "Why would the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) make such a change"? All one needs to do is go to the SBC annuals and find the meeting minutes from the 1963 annual meeting to find the answer to that question. In the annual meeting, the committee states that in instances where it has substituted words, it was done so for clarity. "At times it (the revised 1963 BFM) has reproduced sections of that Statement (the 1925 BFM) without change. In other instances it has substituted words for clarity or added sentences for emphasis."² What was in need of clarifying? The terms bishops or elders. In the 1925 statement they used both terms. The terms bishops or elders was referring to one office, not two. The terms were interchangeable. The clarity the 1963 statement sought to achieve was to be concise and show that there are only two offices in the church. That of pastor, elder, or bishop which was consolidated into one term "pastors". And then the office of deacon. In the New Testament, the terms translated as "pastor," "elder," and "bishop" are but three ways of referring to the same office of leadership. The apostle Paul equates elders with overseers/bishops in Titus 1:5 and 7 by using the term overseer/ bishop (episkopos) interchangeably with the term elder (presbuteros). In 1 Peter 5:1-2, the apostle Peter commands the elders (presbuteros) to pastor/shepherd (poimaina) and to exercise oversight (episkopea). The book of Acts records the apostle Paul as he refers to the elders (presbuteros) as overseers (episkopos) and as he commands them to pastor/shepherd (poimaina) the flock of God.³
3. Another point of interest in the 1963 BFM is the introduction of the phrase "democratic process" into the language of how the church is to operate.

¹ <https://timmybrister.com/2007/04/an-open-letter-to-morris-chapman-on-biblical-eldership/>

² <http://www.dennyburk.com/southern-baptists-and-elders/>

4. It should also be noted that nowhere in any of the confessions is it stated that the office of pastor is singular. In fact, it's actually always plural. Even the changed terminology in the 1963 revision of the BFM the term "pastors" is plural, just as the term deacons is plural. It is interesting to note that in almost all Southern Baptist churches today, the practice is to have a plurality of deacons, yet many have a single pastor.

The last 200 years have witnessed the demise in elder plurality among Baptists. This brings us to the question, "Why then, do many Southern Baptist churches not have a plurality of elders?" It is difficult to pinpoint an exact reason why. There were many factors and events that took place inside the church and in the culture that had an impact upon Southern Baptist life. This section will provide several possible reasons.

First, sometime in the late 1800's and early 1900's Southern Baptist churches began to move away from a plurality of elders. One of the reasons was westward expansion. As people moved out west and churches began to be planted and built, there was a lack of understanding of church government, as well as a lack of leadership (elders/pastors/bishops). These groups of elders were not leaving the east and heading west. It was one elder who would leave with his family to head out west. He would establish a church and become the pastor, then teach, preach, and lead the church. Before long there were other communities established that did not have a pastor. And so the invention of the circuit riding preacher occurred. Now, not only was there a single pastor per church, there might be a single pastor for two or three churches.

Second, was the rise of landmarkism. If you're not familiar with what landmarkism is, it might be helpful to do some research on it. But, landmarkism gave five points that make a New Testament church. One of them was democratic rule with no elder rule.

Third, was the rise of the Campbelites. That's what Baptists called them early on. We now call them the Church of Christ. The Church of Christ used the word "elder" almost exclusively. Baptists, in an effort to separate themselves from the Campbelite movement, threw out the term elder and chose the word pastor, even though it's only used one time in the New Testament as a noun.⁴

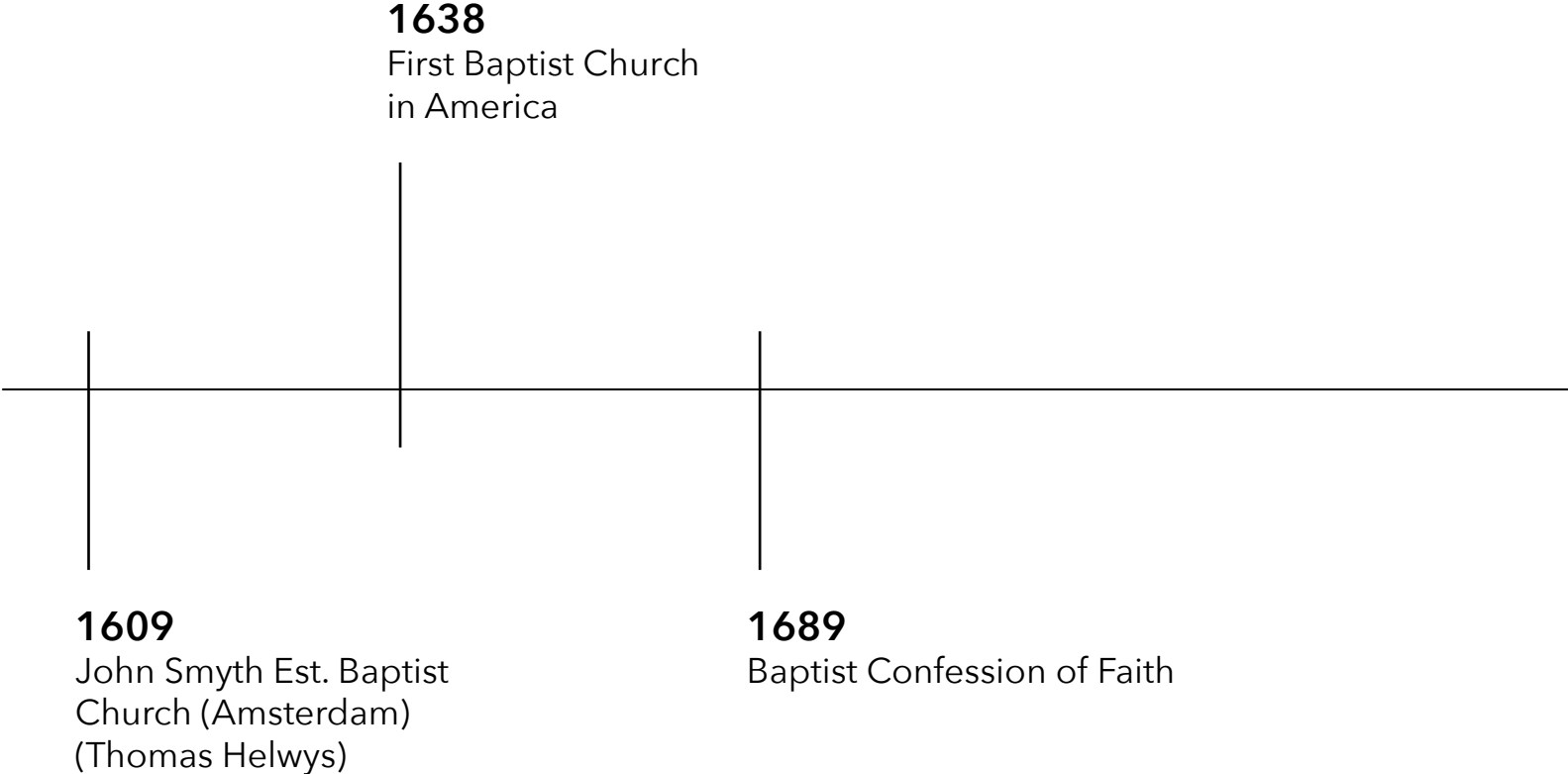
Fourth, in more recent years, churches have a tendency to emulate corporate structures that mirror many successful companies. In light of this, many pastors resemble corporate CEOs, rather than the New Testament office of humble shepherd. Many modern churches reflect a single, CEO type pastor, with a board of directors (often deacons), instead of having a God-appointed council of elders (servant leaders) and a supporting team of deacons (leading servants).

In conclusion, the historical evidence suggests that Baptists moved away from the New Testament model of church leadership for more practical rather than Biblical reasons. The single pastor (elder) model was clearly not the design, nor model in the New Testament, or even in early Baptist history, and getting back to God's design for church leadership will do nothing but benefit the Body of Christ. If a plurality of deacons is needed in the church, then surely a plurality of pastors is needed that much more.

³ <http://www.dennyburk.com/southern-baptists-and-elders/>

⁴ <http://media.hhbc.com/pdfs/elderhistory.pdf>

HISTORICAL TIMELINE OF ELDERS IN THE BAPTIST CHURCH



1845
Southern Baptist
Convention Created

1963
Baptist Faith & Message:
Scriptural Officers, Pastors
and Deacons

1925
Baptist Faith & Message:
Scriptural Officers are
Bishops or Elders, and
Deacons

2000
Baptist Faith & Message:
Scriptural Officers, Pastors
and Deacons

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQs)

The following pages contain questions that might be anticipated as First Baptist Church of Newcastle prayerfully considers a change in church governance. The responses represent a summary of collective thinking from the pastor and a 20-person group that have been praying together, studying, researching, and discussing the topic since November 2014. The responses will often merely touch on and make reference to a subject that may be addressed in more detail in one of the other sections of this document. If you have further questions, you may contact one of the members of the study group at large or this sub-group whose members include: Tom Honeycutt, Dustin Manis, Larry McMains, Dennis Sanders, Eric Sosebee, and Ben Stewart.

1. Why do we need this? What is wrong with how we are doing things now?

We need this for Biblical reasons. We are directing our steps towards obedience and in an effort to seize the great opportunities the Lord has opened up for FBCN. True followers of Christ should align their lives with Biblical teaching as soon as they understand it. This change is in an effort to build our church according to the pattern that God has given us in Scripture. This is not our idea or a new idea; this is God's idea for church governance (see *Biblical Overview and Baptist History Sections*).

We need this for practical reasons. Our church has grown significantly over the last several years. As wonderful as that is, we have an increasing number of people to shepherd, love, and minister to. God has entrusted all of us with only a finite number of hours in a day. The most important and fundamental role of the pastor is the ministry of the Word and prayer (Acts 6:4). Pastor Jeremy needs help and has asked for it. Elders will join our pastor in the work of shepherding, and will equip the saints for the work of ministry, which is their duty (Ephesians 4:11-12).

We have studied how Pastor Jeremy spends his time. If we do not make some changes to balance his responsibilities, the burdens on our pastor could negatively impact his ministry and the church. This change will relieve and help our pastor, as well as help the church as a whole, function in a more Biblical, balanced, and beneficial manner.

2. Why now and why did previous leadership not institute this in the past, if it is so Biblical?

At a time when the deacons functioned more as a governing body, previous pastors attempted to diversify authority, but the church was not ready. Over time, our deacon body has moved closer to the servant leader model presented in the New Testament and our

church has grown numerically and spiritually, resulting in new challenges and opportunities. Furthermore, a degenerating culture is more aggressively seeking to impose its standards of morality on the church and its families. One person cannot bear the entire responsibility of deciding and stating what we will stand for or against. This is why the New Testament clearly teaches that this is to be a shared responsibility among called men of God to shepherd the church.

Our local church has historically been blessed by God for its faithful adherence to teaching and obeying His Word. In these challenging times, His church needs to double its efforts to seek His will by following His Word. The multiple-elder model of church leadership and pastoral ministry is clearly taught in His Word (see *Biblical Overview* section).

3. Does the Southern Baptist Convention take a stance on church governance? Why would we do something that isn't "Baptist"? If this is such a great idea, why aren't more churches/all churches doing it?

The Southern Baptist Convention is silent on church governance, but that is to be expected from a denomination that holds local church autonomy in high regard. While the Baptist Faith and Message 2000 does address the subject generally (see *Baptist History* section), it leaves the door open for each local congregation to structure themselves according to their understanding of Scripture.

The guide of the local congregation is always the Word of God (see *the Biblical Overview Section*). Eldership is actually found commonly in Baptist congregations historically (see *Baptist History Section*).

The question of why other churches may or may not be functioning this way focuses more on relative, pragmatic, and more modern traditional concerns, rather than looking to the Bible and church history to ask why we are not functioning in this way. The most Biblical way is not always the cleanest or easiest way. Furthermore, we must interpret the text of Scripture and apply it to our context rather than allowing other churches to do that for us.

4. Would we pursue an elder-led model or an elder-ruled model?

We will have elders (pastors) who are servant leaders of the church. This is often referred to as "Elder-led Congregationalism." Our elders will not "rule" dictatorially over anyone. The congregation will affirm them, and each elder will serve in "pastoral" roles. They will provide leadership, direction, teaching, and example as they work equally alongside Pastor Jeremy helping shepherd the flock.

Major matters (e.g. calling a pastor, approving the budget) will still be put in the hands of the whole church by means of a vote. On these matters, the elders will present a recommendation to the congregation.

Our elders may exercise spiritual oversight over the body, but ultimately are servants of the Lord and His Church. Our elders will be men who love the congregation and will work hard to serve the church.

5. Is this change a concentration of power or authority? Shouldn't Christians be able to rule themselves?

Rather than a concentration of power or authority, this governance is an opportunity to distribute the weight and burden of caring for the souls in our congregation (Hebrews 13:17) and responsibility within the life of our church. The aim of following Biblical eldership is to properly care for the flock and oversee the spiritual health of the church, not to control it. If anything, this change will reduce and balance the power and authority our pastor currently has, and distribute it equally to a group of men, including Pastor Jeremy, who are called by God to shepherd the souls of our congregation.

While Christians are somewhat responsible for themselves, the Scriptures are clear that godliness is not a goal to be achieved in isolation, and the Scriptures clearly point us to be people under authority – an authority that has been established by God. Authority is a good gift from God to us. We come to know God better in exercising and submitting to authority.

6. Would we still have committees? Are elders just another committee? What is the difference?

Yes, we will continue to have committees, but they will no longer be called committees, but rather, ministry teams. In a large growing church such as ours, the church staff, even with a group of elders, cannot oversee every detail of church life and effectively teach, feed, and protect the church. Ministry teams will all have oversight, but will also allow the pastors and staff to focus on their calling, and members to grow, mature, and use their God-given spiritual gifts and talents to serve one another. There will only be two standing ministry teams (Personnel and Finance). At least one elder will be assigned to these teams. There will be many other ministry teams that serve on and off throughout the year (e.g. Funerals; Fellowship; Transportation).

The elders will not be just another committee. Elders will hold the highest level of leadership in our church, and will be accountable to God for the care, teaching, feeding, discipline, and protection of His church.

Elders are our spiritual leaders. They will lead us according to the vision God gives them for our church. Ministry teams are for making recommendations in their specific areas of expertise and are essential in assisting the elders in carrying out that vision.

7. Do I lose my voting privileges as a member of the church? Will there still be an open flow of information?

No, the church membership will still vote on major recommendations concerning the church as a whole. Instead of coming from the pastor or church staff through committees, major recommendations will be prayed over and discussed by the elders who are called by the Holy Spirit and ordained by the church.

Yes, business (Member) meetings will be continued, though their frequency may be reduced. Weekly church staff meetings will continue and committees (ministry teams) will continue to meet as well.

8. I love my pastor and things as they are. Would I lose access to him? What will Pastor Jeremy's role be in this new structure?

Our pastor is already spread too thin. We would not want his physical and spiritual health to suffer if we fail to follow the Biblical model allowing other called individuals to come alongside and help shoulder the burden of leadership and pastoral ministry. To love our pastor means we care for and assist him. There is always a temptation to put our personal convenience and desires ahead of the Kingdom, but that is not a proper perspective or order of priorities for the church.

With shared responsibility comes more availability for the ministry to which God has called and prepared our pastor. Our pastor will continue to be as available as his time and energy will allow, but there will also be a growing number of called individuals who will join him, and be used to effectively minister to the church. The entire church family will benefit when the church follows the Biblical pattern of shared leadership.

Pastor Jeremy will continue to do the majority of the preaching at FBCN, and will serve as a leader among equals with the other elders. He will devote his time to preaching, praying, shepherding, and equipping.

9. What about our current church staff? Do we not already have pastors, and if so, why do we need elders?

According to our current church By-Laws, we technically only have one pastor. All other staff members are either classified as ministerial staff, or support staff. However, because we do have other called male ministers, we often refer to them as pastors (e.g. Executive Pastor, Worship Pastor, Student Pastor). In our By-Laws though, they are referred to as ministers.

Under the multiple-elder model, not all called male ministers will be pastors, and just because someone is currently a male minister on staff, does not mean he is automatically qualified as an elder. The only staff member who will immediately be considered an elder will be Pastor Jeremy. There will be a formal process for nominating, selecting, and approving other elders (*see question 10*).

It is the study group's conviction, that the utilization of a plurality of elders is both Biblical and Baptist, as well as, ultimately best for everyone in the congregation. Without elders, there is confusion and absence of recognized spiritual leadership. A collective group of men called by God will be a tremendous blessing to the life and health of the church.

10. Would the elders be paid? How many do we need? What is the process for elder selection?

Some of the elders will be full-time church staff members, but a majority of the elders will be non-paid, lay members of the church. While the New Testament always speaks of a plurality of elders, it never specifies how many elders a local congregation must have. Multiple factors (e.g. availability of called men, evaluation of church and ministry needs) must be considered when determining the number of elders. The goal will always be to have more lay elders than paid elders.

Pastor Jeremy will teach extensively on the subject of church governance. Church members will also have ample opportunity to ask questions and gain clarity through multiple question and answer sessions that will be made available. The transition process will be laid out in detail by Pastor Jeremy and voted on by the church. The plan will involve forming an elder selection team (which will be voted on by the church) to begin looking for an initial small group of men (in addition to Pastor Jeremy), who feel called by God to serve as elders at FBCN. Once these men are identified, there will be a lengthy process of interview and evaluation. Upon review, the elder selection team will present these men to the church for a vote, in hope of installing them shortly after that time.

11. What is the primary difference between a deacon and an elder?

Elders have many of the same qualifications as deacons but have additional requirements as well. Teaching is not a qualification for serving as a deacon, but the ability to teach the Word of God is a requirement for the office of elder. Elders are responsible for the soul care of the local congregation. Collectively, the elders shepherd the church and provide spiritual vision and direction for the church. The major functions of the deacon body are to serve, by taking care of needs that arise in the congregation, and nurture church unity. A simple way to describe the difference is to label elders as servant leaders, and deacons as leading servants.

12. What happens if we switch to an elder-led model and then Pastor Jeremy leaves?

A plurality of leaders actually enables the continuation of the church's spiritual and numerical growth as it diversifies the dependence on a single individual. Should the lead pastor leave, the remaining elders can share the burden of teaching, preaching, and developing the vision given by the Holy Spirit. One of the incredible benefits of a plurality of elders is that the ministry to the people can actually continue uninterrupted, even while the church seeks a new lead pastor.

For additional questions, please email elders@fbcnewcastle.com.

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