

# We are Baptist

## Two Offices

**1 Peter 5:1-4** *The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.*

### Qualifications for Overseers

**1 Timothy 3:1-7** *This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work. A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach; Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous; One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; (For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?) Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover he must have a good report of them which are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.*

### Introduction

As Baptists, we recognize two distinct offices that were given by God to the church. These are spiritual offices that require spiritual men to fill them. These offices are that of the pastor and the deacon. They were given to the church to help the church to function the way God designed it.

## I. Pastor versus Plurality of Elder rule

At the end of this lesson is an article that was written by Matthew Morales for my Apologetics class. I encourage you to read it as he did a great job explaining the different church governments. I will provide a brief explanation here.

- A. The word “pastor” is **synonymous** with the words “bishop” and “elder” used in the New Testament.

**1 Peter 5:1** *The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an **elder**, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed:*

**1 Timothy 3:1** *This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a **bishop**, he desireth a good work.*

- B. Three church governments:

1. **Episcopal** – Catholic

*The Episcopalian model, or the Catholic model, is ruled by an archbishop or bishop from outside of the local church. In this model, the priesthood that makes decisions for the church does not exist within the context of the local church. The Episcopalian structure is based off a hierarchy of priests with varying authority over jurisdictions of churches. Since the Catholic church has an Episcopalian structure, one could clearly see the parallels of papal authority with Episcopalian leadership. (Matthew Morales)*

2. **Presbytery** – Protestant

*The Presbyterian model utilizes a leadership of multiple elders. A group or board of elders share equal governing power that make the decisions for the local church. Not only are Presbyterian churches run by a local group of elders, but they are also managed through regional presbyteries and the general session from outside the local church. In this system, the "general assembly" is a group of elders that are in charge of a large region or nation. Within the general assembly, there are several presbyteries (more groups of elders) who rule over churches in smaller regions. Then in the context of each local church, the board of elders who "rule" that church are comprised of elders sharing equal governing authority, including the preaching or head pastor. Interestingly, this model was a reaction to the Catholic Model during the Reformation. Therefore, this model did not originate from*

*biblical authority but rather as a rebuttal to a different system.*  
(Matthew Morales)

### 3. **Congregational** – Baptist

*The Congregational model of church government insists on each local church being free from outsider ruling. In the congregational model, all governing authority rests with the local congregation, and although not always the case, a single pastor is considered the leader of the congregation.*

*Historically, Baptists have always been proponents of the Congregational model, and Baptists have typically followed a single elder or pastor leadership structure. Biblically, the Congregational model is demonstrated clearly throughout the New Testament accounts. (Matthew Morales)*

- a. The church chooses the pastor.
- b. The church also has the power to remove the pastor under the guidelines set forth in the Constitution and By-Laws
- c. This form of church government keeps error from spreading to a group of churches if for some reason a church fails to stay biblical.

C. By accepting the **local church** view, we must accept single-elder rule over a plurality of elder rules.

- As I stated earlier in our studies the importance of local church versus universal church would affect how a church functions and what you believe. Not only does it better fit the Bible context, but it is also consistent with the theology of local church.

D. Evidences of **single-pastor rule** in the Scriptures:

1. James was the pastor in Jerusalem.

***Acts 12:17** But he, beckoning unto them with the hand to hold their peace, declared unto them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, Go shew these things unto James, and to the brethren. And he departed, and went into another place.*

2. Paul ordained elders for every church. The context shows that there was an main elder over each church.

**Acts 14:23** *And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed.*

3. In Revelations 2-3 the seven church letters were written to the pastors of those churches.

**Revelation 2:1** *Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write; These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks;*

## II. A Pastor's Role in the church

- A. He is the primary overseer of the church and is tasked with **leading** the church.

**1 Peter 5:1-4** *The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.*

1. Overseer – to have the care of the church
  - a. Guard the flock from dangers
  - b. Care for the flock when hurt
  - c. Make sure the flock is fed
2. This clearly signifies that he is the primary leader.

- B. He is to make sure the congregation is **spiritually fed**.

1. The Pastor therefore is the main preacher in the congregation. He does not have to do all the preaching, but he is tasked with making sure the church receives proper spiritual food.
2. Preaching becomes the main task of the Pastor.

3. The Pastor is not actually the one who takes care of all the physical needs of the church, but he is there to take care of the spiritual needs.

C. How the Pastor is to lead:

1. **Not by force**

- The Pastor is not to be a dictator or tyrant, but a leader! He is not to use force to compel people to follow. Obedience is a choice and is not obedience if it is forced.

2. **Not for riches**

- The Pastor is not for hire to the highest bidder. He is to go and serve where the Lord sends him, and for the good of the church.
- Not with covetousness. He is not to covet riches.
- The church should take care of their minister as stated in 1 Timothy.

**1 Timothy 5:17-18** *Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine. For the scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. And, The labourer is worthy of his reward.*

- The Pastor does not seek riches or gain, but the will of the Lord to lead the people. At the same time, the people work hard to take extra care of the pastor and family, double honor, so that covetousness has little room to enter. It is a great balance that the Lord set up to protect and bless His church. The Pastor invests in the people, and the people invest in the Pastor.

3. **By Example**

- The Pastor is to be an example to the church of how a Christian ought to live!

### III. Pastors Requirements

**1 Timothy 3:1-7** *This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work. A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach; Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous; One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; (For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?) Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover he must have a good report of them which are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.*

- A. The Pastor must have a good **testimony** in the community and church!
  - 1. Good character! He is to be humble and godly.
  - 2. Good interaction with people! Not someone who is brawler or angry man, but someone who can work with people.
  
- B. The Pastor must have a **family life** that fits Scripture and is an example to the church.
  - 1. This requirement means that he is leading his family properly.
  - 2. How can he lead the church if he cannot lead his own family?
  - 3. He is to be married to one woman.
    - a) This means he is not to be divorced – Matthew 19 is clear that God allows divorce, but never intended for man to divorce. So why would He allow His pastors to be divorced?
    - b) Only because divorce is so accepted today is why some are accepting Pastors who have been divorced. One will not find this model the history of Priests in the O.T. or the early church.
    - c) A divorced pastor has not ruled his house well.
    - d) Just because God forgives everything does not mean that there are no earthly consequences.  
  
Ex. – someone can be forgiven of murder, but still will be put in jail. If they killed a loved one of mine, I would need to forgive them, but would still expect them to spend the rest of their life in jail.

Ex. – someone can be forgiven of child molestation, but they will still not be allowed to live close to a school or work with children.

C. The Pastor must have **experience**.

1. Age does matter.

- Although no specific age is given for a Pastor, it just makes sense that he has life experience according to the requirements. He would be married, had time to have kids, not a novice, etc.

2. Just being a good preacher is not good enough.

- One may be able to preach and still not be a good pastor. There is a difference between a preacher and a pastor. A good preacher should be an evangelist! They play a key role in the church, but they are not the pastor.
- In the Jewish culture you were not considered a man until the age of 30. In our culture I think a church needs to make sure that their pastor is not a novice lest Satan is able to influence him and lead him away.

D. The Pastor must be a **man**.

1. Notice the statement “husband of one wife”.

2. God has also made it clear in Scripture that women are not to be Pastors.

- The problem we have today is pragmatism is ruling our lives instead of the Scriptures. We are allowing our culture to change our doctrines and this is why we are Baptists – we go by the Word of God, not the whims of mankind!

**1 Timothy 2:11-12** *Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence.*

**1 Corinthians 14:33-35** *For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints. Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law. And if they will learn any thing, let them*

*ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church.*

#### **IV. Conclusions**

- A. We hold to the congregational church government which has a single pastor as the leader of the church.
- B. We believe the Pastor's role is to preach and oversee the church.
- C. We believe the Pastor should fit the qualifications laid out in Scripture.
- D. We believe that women are excluded from being Pastors.



# Who's in Charge?

## The Problems with Board Run Churches

**By Matthew Morales**

I remember the first (and only) time I ever tried skinny jeans. In my early childhood, cargo pants were all the rage, because the baggier the better. But later in my teen years, skinny jeans were taking over. At first, we as a culture laughed at these weirdos walking around in jean leggings, but soon, it became the thing to do. I remember walking through a JCPennys by the jeans section. No longer could you easily find a pair of Arizona cargo jeans with ease, because the front racks were loaded with every color and texture of skinny jeans. I remember wondering, "Would I look good in skinny jeans?" I was alone and lonely, so I figured it was worth a shot. I grabbed a weathered pair of black skinny jeans and went to the changing room. It was there where I realized an important and universal truth: Skinny jeans might seem like an intriguing idea until you try them on.

I look at the subject of board run churches, or technically titled plural elder rule, in the same way as I do skinny jeans. Both are trending, appear to be used by successful people, and might even seem appealing for various reasons. However, it is the author's belief that much like skinny jeans, trying it on for size exposes several concerning flaws as a model of church government.

This subject of elder rule piqued my interest during my senior year of Bible college, but I was introduced to the idea much earlier. I remember a pastor discussing with me some of the potential benefits of a board of elders, then I began to realize how popular it is in mainstream Christianity. I also noticed that it was a topic that did not seem to be well documented or discussed well by either side. While in an Apologetics class at Bible college, I chose to write a paper and make my verbal defense on this subject for two reasons. First, I did not know much about the subject, and secondly, no one else did, which would make for a much easier Q and A from my fellow students later.

If you are wondering "What is the big deal?", I would invite you to look up any number famous churches in America and observe their Leadership Structure. You will frequently see titles of different pastors, staff, but also elders. While this structure is not prevalent for Independent Baptists, it has become increasingly utilized by reformed, non-denominational, and even Baptist churches. As we have seen popular trends in Christianity creep into the constructs of many independent Baptist churches, this issue has the potential to uproot the structure of many solid churches. We should then be cautious and informed about this

issue so we can properly understand and apply the doctrine of the autonomous, local church.

We will begin by defining our terms so we can attempt to know what we are talking about. We will then survey the three main models of church government to understand how we got to this issue. Through understanding the history of elder boards, we will be able to confront the common arguments used by proponents of elder rule. Finally, we will conclude with some important reminders for why this discussion matters.

Before we can address elder rule, we must start by determining what a biblical elder is. Biblically, an elder is synonymous with the office of a bishop or pastor as described in 1 Timothy 3. The three terms describe the elder as someone who leads, oversees, shepherds, and feeds the congregation. Ultimately, they are all terms for the same office, that describe different functions of the office. A multitude of passages in Scripture that describe the roles of elders gives clear proof that the office of an elder is the same as the office of a bishop or pastor. (1 Peter 5:2-4; Acts 20:17-28; 1 Timothy 3:1-2; 1 Timothy 5:17; Titus 1:5-7; Philippians 1:1)

Understanding that the biblical elder is the same as the biblical pastor, we are ready to cover the three main types of church government. First, the Episcopalian model, or the Catholic model, is ruled by an archbishop or bishop from outside of the local church. In this model, the priesthood that makes decisions for the church does not exist within the context of the local church. The Episcopalian structure is based off a hierarchy of priests with varying authority over jurisdictions of churches. Since the Catholic church has an Episcopalian structure, one could clearly see the parallels of papal authority with Episcopalian leadership.

Secondly, the Presbyterian model utilizes a leadership of multiple elders. A group or board of elders share equal governing power that make the decisions for the local church. Not only are Presbyterian churches run by a local group of elders, but they are also managed through regional presbyteries and the general session from outside the local church. In this system, the "general assembly" is a group of elders that are in charge of a large region or nation. Within the general assembly, there are several presbyteries (more groups of elders) who rule over churches in smaller regions. Then in the context of each local church, the board of elders who "rule" that church is comprised of elders sharing equal governing authority, including the preaching or head pastor. Interestingly, this model was a reaction to the Catholic Model during the Reformation. Therefore, this model did not originate from biblical authority but rather as a rebuttal to a different system.

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<sup>1</sup> Thiessen, Henry. *Lectures in Systematic Theology*. Wm. B Eerdmans. Grand Rapids, MI. 2000. E-book.

While this model may seem complicated, we can see clearly that the Presbyterian model is the home front for elder rule, or more specifically, Plural Elder Rule. Plural Elder rule is a church government method of multiple elders sharing equal governing authority among themselves within the local church. The church does not have a singular leader with more governing power, rather the authority is split evenly with those on the board. While modern Christianity has not borrowed all of the elements of the Presbyterian model, plural elder rule has made its way to many local churches.

Lastly, we as Independent Baptists would recognize the Congregational model. The Congregational model of church government insists on each local church being free from outsider ruling. In the congregational model, all governing authority rests with the local congregation, and although not always the case, a single pastor is considered the leader of the congregation. Historically, Baptists have always been proponents of the Congregational model, and Baptists have typically followed a single elder or pastor leadership structure. Biblically, the Congregational model is demonstrated clearly throughout the New Testament accounts describing the actions of local churches.<sup>2</sup> (Acts 6:3-5; 1 Corinthians 5:5; Matthew 19:15-18; 2 Thessalonians 3:6; Acts 13-14)

So, with our understanding of the three main types of church governments, one can clearly see that there is a blatant connection between plural elder rule (boards of elders) and the Presbyterian model. Also, there is a connection single elder rule and the Congregational Model. So why is a method from the Presbyterian model permeating Baptist circles? The reason that many Baptist churches are being influenced by the Presbyterian model is because popular Protestant and Reformed pastors are joining the Baptist ranks while bringing their Protestant and Reformed methods with them. Just like non-denominational and Southern Baptist churches are often being pastored by Protestant preachers, churches are being deeply affected by the core beliefs of Protestant beliefs. Popular pastors such as John Piper, Matt Chandler, David Platt, Mark Dever, and Kyle Idleman are examples of Protestant preachers that have brought elder rule to their churches.<sup>3</sup> As with Reformed Theology, the Protestants will continue to propitiate their beliefs clothed with intellectually sounding arguments. Clearly, we must be aware of the oncoming attack on our congregational structure. While the acceptance of elder rule will not include the involvement of a general assembly or other outside governing groups, the implications of the local church will drastically change.

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<sup>2</sup> Parton, Curt. "Review: Who Runs the Church?: Four Views on Church Government." <http://exploringthefaith.com/2012/01/20/review-who-runs-the-church/> January 20, 2012. Web.

<sup>3</sup> Information about elder rule found in each pastor's church website. John Piper: [hopeingod.org](http://hopeingod.org) Matt Chandler: [thevillagechurch.net](http://thevillagechurch.net) David Platt: [brookhills.org](http://brookhills.org) Mark Dever: [capitolhillbaptist.org](http://capitolhillbaptist.org) Kyle Idleman: [southeastchristian.org](http://southeastchristian.org)

It is important that we understand the scriptural and logical arguments that those who support elder rule will use to promote their ideas. Scripturally, proponents of elder rule will point to the New Testament pattern of multiple elders being ordained and ruling within biblical local churches. (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5; James 5:14; 1 Timothy 5:17; 1 Peter 5:1)

At first glance, this pattern can appear troubling to opponents of elder rule. While we must recognize that there is a pattern of multiple elders ruling in New Testament churches, an understanding of what these churches were like will lead to a more comprehensive reason for this pattern. The New Testament does not require a plurality of elders, but their usage was a result of the incredibly large congregation sizes of the early New Testament churches. These churches would have surpassed many modern standards for mega churches. In fact, many believe that the church of Ephesus would have reached a numerical attendance of 250,000 people.<sup>4</sup> Some scholars believe that the church of Jerusalem had a membership of over fifty thousand a year after Pentecost.<sup>5</sup> A.H. Strong, perhaps the most quoted opponent of elder rule, says it most clearly:

In certain of the New Testament churches there appears to have been a plurality of elders. There is not however, any evidence that the number of elders was uniform, or that the plurality which frequently existed was due to any other cause than the size of the churches for which these elders cared. The New Testament example, while it permits the multiplication of assistant pastors according to need, does not require a plural eldership in every case.<sup>6</sup>

Because of this New Testament pattern, there is a biblical case for the possibility of multiple elders in a church for a specific situation, Wayne Grudem includes this "crucial distinction: the governing authority of the office of an elder is possessed only by the professional pastor of the church."<sup>7</sup> In our circles, you could notice that several larger churches that have hired multiple pastors to serve various functions, such as Associate Pastor or even Youth Pastor. However, the decision-making process or governing authority is not shared equally with the staff and the Senior Pastor. The Senior Pastor holds the governing authority, although other pastors may exist on staff. While the concept of a plurality of elders has biblical precedent, the idea of plural elder rule is foreign to Scripture. Never do we have an example of a board of elders that has equal governing power. Instead, it is an invention of Protestants since the Reformation. Another helpful passage to demonstrate the idea of single elder rule is found in the example of the church in Jerusalem. James was the pastor of a large church in Jerusalem, and his leadership and governing authority is evident in the Scriptural accounts of his decision making. (Acts 12:7; 21:18; Galatians 2:12) Also, Scripture

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<sup>4</sup>Mounce, Robert H. *The Book of Revelation*, NIC. Grand Rapids: Edermans, 1977. Pg. 85

<sup>5</sup> Huckabee, Davis W. *Studies on Church Truth: Volume One*. Salem, OH. 2002. Pg 115

<sup>6</sup> Strong, A.H. *Systematic Theology*. Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI. 1994. Pg. 928

<sup>7</sup> Grudem, Wayne. *Systematic Theology*. Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI. 1994. Pg. 928

gives small hints towards single elder rule throughout the New Testament. In the letters to the seven churches in Revelation, each letter was addressed to the "angel of the church." The best interpretation of this phrase would be that John was referring to the single ruling elder of the church.<sup>8</sup>

However, the issue is deeper than looking for a biblical precedent. The agenda of the proponents of elder rule is what drives their obsession with their model of church polity. Supporters of plural elder rule believe that by sharing the responsibilities of governing a church, the pastor is given a system of checks and balances that keeps themselves accountable to others. Of course, these seems like a well-meaning and logical protection for the church from scandals or power-hungry pastors. Although it may seem reasonable and attractive after experiencing increasing embarrassment due to immorality, implementing an unbiblical structure of church government is not the answer for a lack of pastoral accountability. Organizations do not thrive without clear authority, and a two or more headed leadership frequently leads to self-destruction. Also, pastoral accountability can be achieved without restructuring the local church. Those who follow the congregational model will be able to biblically address and remove an unqualified pastor. As much as the Protestants would like to think they are the solution, the Bible already gives guidance on how to deal with such matters. Consider the testimony of Dave Miller, who happens to be a hesitant supporter of plural elder rule:

I have seen a lot of elder-led and elder-ruled churches that have been real messes. I have seen the chair of the elders set himself in opposition to the pastor and the church was rocked by the conflict. I have seen elders who tried to squash anyone who would disagree or dissent with their decisions and treat people with different ideas as spiritual lepers. Many of the most serious church splits and messed up churches I have seen have been elder ruled churches.<sup>9</sup>

Whether a church's government is structured with single or plural elder rule, the spiritual condition of the church will ultimately determine the cooperation of the church. Blaming the structure of the church for a lack of godliness is a cheap and inadequate excuse for the heart of the problem. Therefore, it would be better to stick with the proven structure and history of our Baptist heritage and Congregational model instead of pursuing a new format that claims to fix our spiritual problems.

In this study, we have covered the main types of church governments and discovered the correlation between plural elder rule and the Presbyterian model. We have attempted to provide an accurate reflection of the arguments used by

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<sup>8</sup> Strong, A.H. *Systematic Theology*. Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1907. Pgs. 915-916

<sup>9</sup> Miller, Dave. "Why I am Apathetic about Elders in Baptist Churches."

<http://sbcvoices.com/why-i-am-apatetic-about-elders-in-baptist-churches/> August 24, 2011. Web.

proponents of elder rule and demonstrated Biblical reasons that they fail. But finally, we must reaffirm an important principle that should be referred to when considering new trends, ideas, or doctrines. Consider this rule of thumb from Dr. John Waterloo:

Stick to the historical position until you have sufficient evidence to alter that position. Understand to not do so is to say that all the godly men before you were wrong. This is a bold statement to make and most likely you and I are wrong rather than our Baptist fathers. Be careful abandoning a Baptist position just because you do not understand it yet.<sup>10</sup>

One of the reasons that this subject is not well documented is because the governing structure of the local church is not a doctrine explicitly taught in Scripture. Of course, we do have biblical reasons for our stance, but the issue of plural elder rule versus single elder rule will not be found in a specific verse of the Bible. And apart from this issue, we may find that there are some difficult verses and passages that depart from a Baptist position. We may discover that a certain idea we hold to have not as much Scriptural backing as others. However, do not be threatened. If you do not see evident truth that demands that you should depart from your Baptist position, why would you leave it? In many of the contemporary controversies facing Independent Baptists, we should approach them with humility instead of arrogance. Hopefully, you too can trust that the historical congregational structure has been Biblical and blessed for our Baptist fathers and that it will continue to be Biblical and blessed for us.

### **Summary:**

- We should be aware of the issue of single elder versus plural elder rule because leadership structure changes will lead to dramatic implications for the local church.
- Plural Elder Rule clearly has historical connection to the Presbyterian Model and not our historical Congregational Model.
- While early Biblical churches had multiple elders, there is no evidence that they shared equal governing authority.
- Multiple elders were never required or uniform in Scripture and most likely existed due to the large congregation sizes in the early churches.
- Changing the local church structure will not solve the spiritual issues that the Presbyterian model attempts to fix.
- Leadership suffers without clear authority.
- Baptists should stick to the historical position instead of pursuing trends without sufficient evidence.

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<sup>10</sup> Waterloo, John. *Apologetics: Defending the Faith Course Notes*. Heartland Baptist Bible College, OKC, OK. 2015. Pg. 23