

## ***What is a Biblical Elder?***

Selected Scriptures - NCBC, January 31, 2016

**Main Point: God calls the church to recognize the mature servant-leaders He appoints to shepherd the flock together.**

- A biblical elder is “recognized” (1 Tim. 5:22)
- A biblical elder is spiritually “mature” (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Tit. 1:5-9)
- A biblical elder is a “servant-leader” (Matt. 20:25-28; 1 Thess. 2:7-8)
- A biblical elder is “appointed by God” (Acts 20:17-38, esp. v. 28)
- A biblical elder is “to shepherd the flock” (1 Pet. 5:1-3)
  - Teaching (1 Tim. 3:2, 5:17; 2 Tim. 4:1-5; Tit. 1:9; Heb. 13:7)
  - Prayer (Acts 6:2-4; Jas. 5:14-15)
  - Leading & Equipping (Eph. 4:11-16; 1 Thess. 5:12-13; Heb. 13:17)
- A biblical elder serves alongside other elders “together” (Acts 14:23; Tit. 1:5)

**Application: Pray for our elders and encourage them.**

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### **Opening Announcements:**

Annual Meeting this morning – starting promptly at 9:30a

Prayers for Gene (Augie) Shrader in the loss of his sister, Dorothy Clason yesterday (1/30).

<<All the Way My Savior Leads Me>>



Jesus is the chief Shepherd of the church. And when the Lord is our Shepherd, we lack nothing.

I would invite you now to prepare for the public reading of God's Word from **1 Peter 5:1-5**. If you do not have a Bible with you today, our ushers are coming now to give you a Bible. Please catch their attention as they pass by and it would be our joy to give you a Bible to use this morning. You are welcome to take this Bible home as our gift to you, or just simply return it after our service by placing it on the table in the back of the room.

Today we conclude our January series on key Discipleship themes by answering the question, “**What is a Biblical Elder?**”

Next week we begin a brand new preaching series from the book of **Titus** entitled, “**Adorning the Doctrine of God.**” I am so excited about preaching this short book,

and invite you to begin reading through Titus in preparation for our upcoming study together.

Today's message is going to reference many different Scriptures, but I've selected **1 Peter 5:1-5** for our Scripture reading today. **1 Peter 5:1-5**. You can find this text on page **1016** of the Bibles we've handed out. Please stand with me now in honor of God's Word as I read the English Standard translation of **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: <sup>2</sup> shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; <sup>3</sup> not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. <sup>4</sup> And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. <sup>5</sup> Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."*

**These are the words of our chief Shepherd. You may be seated.**

**Let's Pray.**

Our message this morning on Biblical Eldership reminds me of an experience that Jody and I had recently on a special date. We went out to eat at a Brazilian Steakhouse. I had never been to a Brazilian steakhouse before...and frankly, if I knew what I was getting into, I do

not think I would have eaten for an entire day prior to going. Here's how it worked. Kitchen staff would come by your table with one of 15 different meats on a rotisserie skewer – sirloin, filet, ribeye, lamb, ribs, salmon, chicken, pork, sausage, and swordfish – all steaming hot and mouthwatering to the senses.

In front of us we had a plate, and a small colored token – black on one side, and orange on the other. When you wanted more meat – you simply turned the token over to show the orange side – and the flow of meat would continue at your table until you surrendered and flipped the token over.

Needless to say, it was quite the experience. I became full way too quickly. But I had to turn my token over – it wasn't worth force feeding on such delicacies.

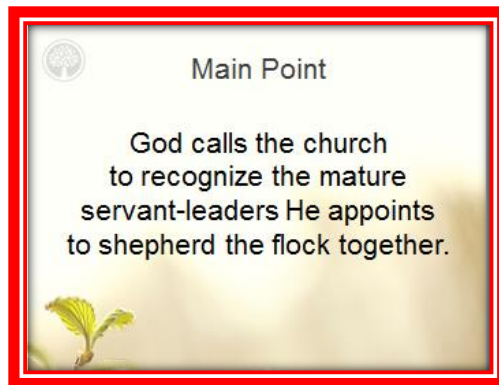
So this morning, as we come to God's Word to answer the question, "What is a Biblical Elder?" I'm asking you to keep the orange side up for a bit. Don't be overwhelmed by the onslaught of the Scriptures this morning – it's a meaty meal I know but sit back and take in as much as you can.

I do hope you're hungry for the nutritious meat of God's Word – but I also want you to know that this message is just a topical overview. This morning I depart a bit from my usual practice of going through a single Scripture passage line by line. Instead today we want to lay a systematic foundation for our understanding of spiritual leadership in God's church. We will have many opportunities over the next year of sermons together to

revisit portions of this message as we preach through Titus, Ezra-Nehemiah, and the Upper Room discourse together.

So are you hungry this morning? Are you ready to learn how God's Word answers the question, "What is a Biblical Elder?"

This morning we learn that:



**God calls the church to recognize the mature servant-leaders He appoints to shepherd the flock together.**

Every part of this sentence is important – so we'll unpack it as we go along. God calls the church to recognize the mature servant-leaders He appoints to shepherd the flock together.

Notice by the way that we're answering the question, "What is a *Biblical* Elder?" this morning. This is because every part of our thinking on spiritual leadership must

come from God's Word. Many churches are weak today because they have adopted the traditions of the world in regards to leadership. But God's Word has much to say about God's design for leadership in His church. We err when we embrace the worldly values, definitions, and methods of leadership. The church is not a business. God's church is not a military, club, or government. God's church is a family, and His Word sufficiently reveals God's good design for the leadership of His family.

So this morning we *open our Bibles* to answer questions about Spiritual Leadership. For God's Word is fully sufficient to teach us all we need to know about how God has designed for his family to be shepherded for His glory and our eternal joy.

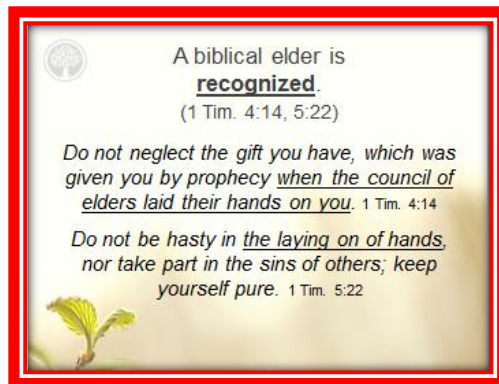
First then, we learn that:



A biblical elder is "recognized" (1 Tim. 5:22)

Biblical eldering is not a private ministry. The office of an elder is a publicly recognized office.

In the New Testament, the existing church leadership formally recognized each new elder through a ceremony that included the public laying on of hands.



In **1 Timothy 4:14** Paul encourages the young Ephesian pastor to “*not neglect the gift he has, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you.*”

He’s not talking about a time when the elders arrested him and made him do something against his will... Paul is referring to the public commissioning of Timothy to his pastoral ministry. He was formally ordained and commissioned – just as we are doing today for our three active elders. **By the elders laying their hands on Timothy and praying over him, they were symbolically communicating spiritual authority to him for the purposes of his ministry.**

So the public recognition of an elder was significant – it communicated real spiritual authority to the man in that

office – and that’s why in chapter 5:22, Paul wanted to make sure that Timothy was “*not hasty in the laying on of hands...*” for a sense of prayerful caution and testing is appropriate before recognizing someone as a biblical shepherd in God’s earthly family.

Next then, it is important for us to understand that:



A biblical elder is spiritually “mature” (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Tit. 1:5-9)

**1 Timothy 3:1-7** and **Titus 1:5-9** both list a number of necessary character qualities for a biblical elder. Many church problems would be avoided today if churches were more careful to consider these biblical qualities in their consideration of their spiritual leaders.

In short, you could summarize these qualities as having a character that is “beyond reproach.” In many ways, both of these lists outline what spiritual maturity looks like. So every believer who desires to grow in Christ-likeness should be growing in all of these evidences of God’s

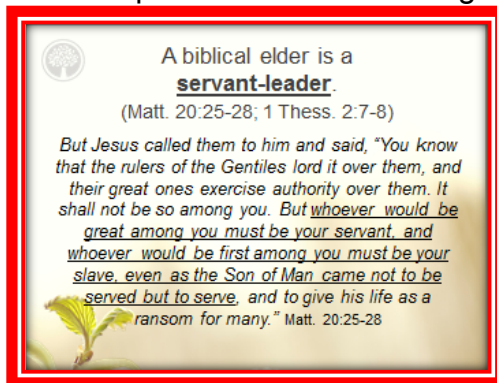
indwelling Spirit. But certainly, biblical elders are to be examples of spiritual maturity.

So a biblical elder is publicly recognized by the church as a man of tested spiritual maturity. But it's also important to note that:



A biblical elder is a "servant-leader" (Matt. 20:25-28; 1 Thess. 2:7-8)

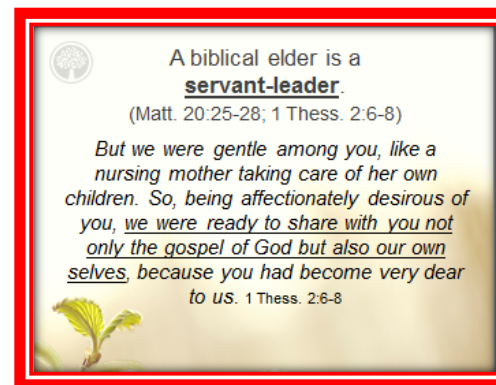
This is so different from the worldly traditions of leadership. Note Jesus' teachings in **Matthew 20:25-28**,



*But Jesus called them to him and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. <sup>26</sup> It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, <sup>27</sup> and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, <sup>28</sup> even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."*

The text we read from **1 Peter 5** at the beginning of our worship service taught that elders are to shepherd the flock of God... *not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.* (v.3)

Certainly Paul's spiritual leadership modeled this well, for in **1 Thessalonians 2:6-8**,



...he speaks of how he and the other apostles were *ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us.*

Can I say it this way? A biblical elder understands that leading occurs through love. The aim of biblical leadership is always love (1 Tim 1:5). And yet love is sacrificial, and personally costly. So a biblical elder is a servant-leader. Not using the flock for personal gain, but personally sacrificing his own time, talents, and treasures for the mutual building up of the body. This is how a Spirit-filled character demonstrates itself in a leadership office within God's family.

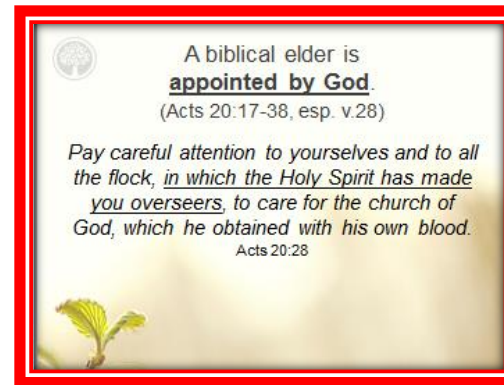
And this matter of God's Spirit is so important to this discussion, for we must be clear this morning that:



A biblical elder is "appointed by God" (Acts 20:17-38, esp. v. 28)

Be careful to note this. A biblical elder is recognized by the church, but appointed by God.

When Paul met with the Ephesian elders for his final farewell in Acts 20, he charged the elders in verse 28:



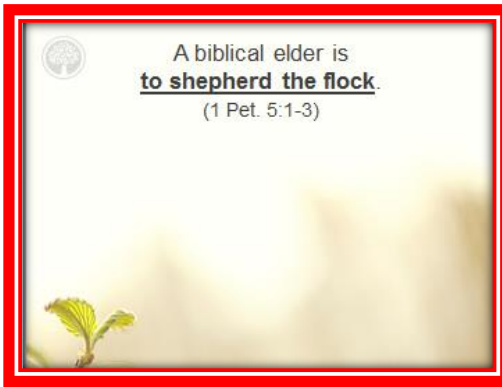
*Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.*

Did you catch that? Who makes a biblical elder? God's Spirit produces biblical elders. God's Spirit works in the hearts of men to bring them to spiritual maturity and servant-leadership in His church. It's the church's responsibility to recognize those in their midst whom God has called, gifted, and appointed for this ministry.

This means then that a church's bylaws and organizational practices must be aimed at recognizing and spiritually affirming those men that God has appointed for shepherding and pastoring – for as long as God has called them to serve. The church doesn't make elders – only God's Spirit appoints pastors and elders in His church.

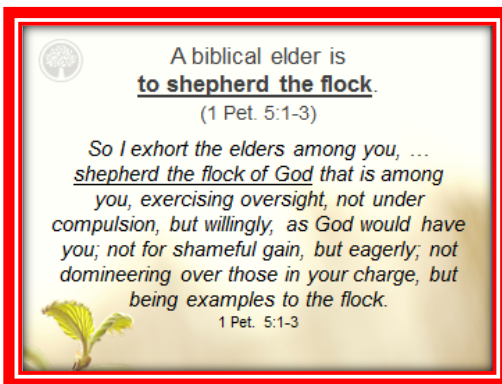
So the church is called by God to recognize the men His Spirit has equipped and appointed for this ministry. All because:





A biblical elder is “to shepherd the flock” (1 Pet. 5:1-3)

The apostle Peter lays it out most clearly in chapter 5 of his first letter to the exiles,



*So I exhort the elders among you, ... shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; <sup>3</sup> not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.*

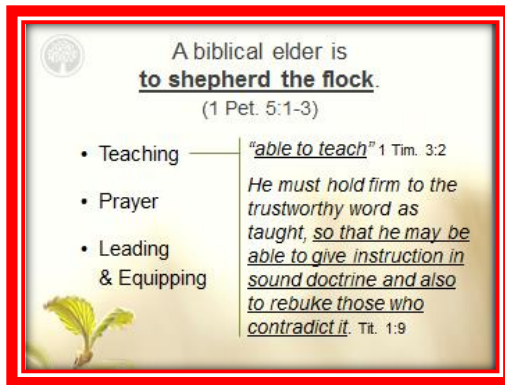
It's instructive that the Bible uses this metaphor of a “Shepherd” over 12 times to refer to human leaders who care for God’s people. Biblical elders are shepherds. They are not primarily visionaries. They are not primarily decision-makers. They are not the who’s who of the community. Biblical elders are shepherds. And they are responsible to shepherd the flock. To feed, protect, and care for the flock of God – as a faithful shepherd.

I realize this challenges some of our traditional thinking on this subject. But think carefully with me for a moment. Biblically, the words “elder,” “pastor,” and “overseer” all refer to the same office. So an elder is the same as a pastor is the same as a bishop or overseer in the Scriptures.

Biblically there is no concept of recognizing a man as an elder in a church who would never be considered as a pastor. And yet our modern structures of church governance can at times create an artificial distinction between the biblical responsibilities of a pastor and elder – distinctions that simply do not exist in the biblical text.

So if a biblical elder is a shepherd, what are their primary responsibilities?

The vast amount of biblical teaching on the responsibilities of eldering could be summarized as:

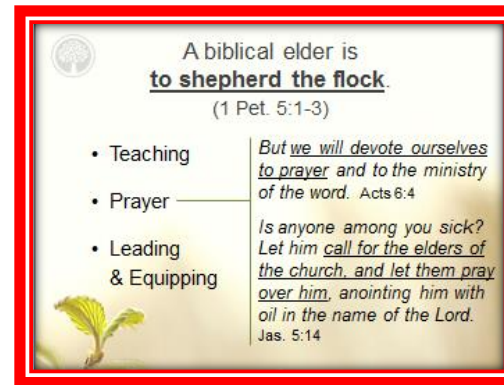


Teaching, Prayer, and Leading or Equipping the flock.

First, **Teaching** (1 Tim. 3:2, 5:17; 2 Tim. 4:1-5; Tit. 1:9; Heb. 13:7). A biblical elder is appointed by God's Spirit to teach the flock.

Deacons are called to serve alongside as ministry-leaders so that elders who are spiritually gifted to teach can feed the flock with sound doctrine, and also confront and correct any false teaching within the body.

Elders shepherd the flock by focusing on teaching and prayer. You see this distinction between elders and deacons modeled well in **Acts 6**.

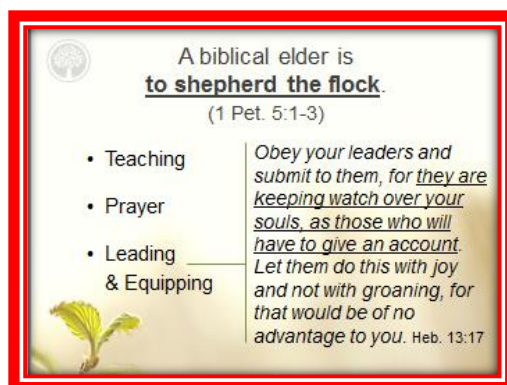


In verse 4, the elders who were still apostles ordained deacons to help lead significant ministries so that they could stay *devoted to prayer and to the ministry of the word*.

And James 5:14 highlights how biblical elders fulfill their God-given ministry by praying over the weak and sick in the congregation. The blessings of modern medicine do not diminish this important shepherding priority of biblical elders.

And finally, shepherding the flock requires





Leading & Equipping (Eph. 4:11-16; 1 Thess. 5:12-13; Heb. 13:17). Biblical elders are responsible to keep watch over every soul in the flock – *exercising oversight* as 1 Peter 5 says. Always working to equip every saint for the work of the ministry that God has gifted them for – so that the entire body is building itself up in love.<sup>1</sup>

There's so much more we could say about all of this, but remember – today is just an overview.

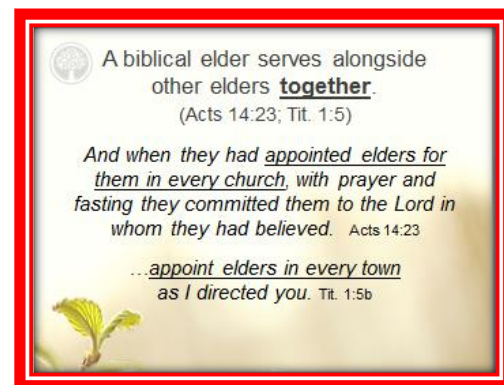
Finally then, it's important to note that:

<sup>1</sup> Eph 4:11-16



A biblical elder serves alongside other elders “together” (Acts 14:23; Tit. 1:5)

Beginning with the early church, God's design is for a plurality of biblical elders working together to shepherd the flock.

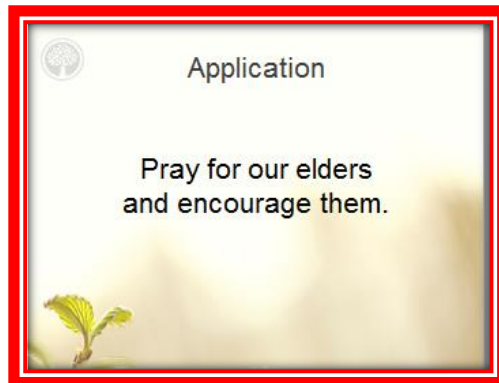


In Acts 14 – we see every church recognized multiple elders among their assemblies. Paul encouraged Titus to appoint a plurality of elders in every town – for there

was only one Christian church in each town in those days.

The point is this: An elder does not possess spiritual authority as an individual, but is a member of a group of elders who together serve the church. The authority has been given to a group of mature servant-leaders whom God has supernaturally appointed to shepherd the flock of God together.

This then is what it means to be a biblical elder. It is a high and serious calling. It is an exhausting yet rewarding ministry. And that's why this morning I encourage you to keep:



### **Praying for our elders and encouraging them.**

This year our elder team wants to grow deeper in our understanding and practice of biblical eldership. Remember, it was just 6 years ago that New Castle Bible Church changed our bylaws to enable us to move towards a more biblical model of eldering. So while we

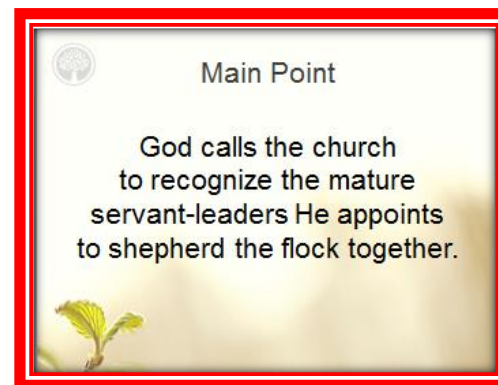
are so thankful for the faithful men that God has given our church in this role...we acknowledge that we are still learning with all of this.

We need your prayers. We value your spiritual encouragement and partnership in disciple-making so much. Frankly – you all are a true joy to serve! I can't imagine a more joyful ministry to be called to than biblical eldering. The rewards are enormous.

So pray for our elder team. Pray for our deacons as they begin to more significantly come alongside our elders this year to free our elders up for our shepherding priorities. And keep asking God what part He would have you to serve in His body for the mutual edification of all!

Well – you survived the jet tour of biblical eldership this morning. Do you still have your orange token showing?

Today we've learned that:



God calls the church to recognize the mature servant-leaders He appoints to shepherd the flock together.

And so now, that's what we are delighted to do now.



Since our last formal elder commissioning service, God has added 4 men to our elder team. Scott Krause, Kyle Krall, Chad Leman, and myself.

Through the process of calling me to serve as your new pastor, we held a commissioning and installation service for me last fall.

But we have not yet formally laid hands on **Scott, Kyle, and Chad** in keeping with 1 Timothy 4:17 & 5:22. So today we have this privilege to formally commission our brothers to this God-appointed ministry of eldering.

**If these men would come forward with their wives and take a seat here in front of the pulpit. Also I would invite the rest of the pastors and elders and**

**their wives to come forward to prepare to lay hands on them as we pray.**

In your worship folder there is an insert that briefly introduces these three men to you. They have all already been faithfully serving as part of our elder team for some time. You have already voted on all of these men, and affirmed them into this ministry.

However today we want to publicly lay hands on these men – and together commission them to the ministry of Biblical Eldering according to God's divine appointment.

Church – this is a fine hour for New Castle Bible Church. God has been very kind to us to appoint such faithful and humble men of spiritual maturity and servant-heartedness to help shepherd our hearts together towards greater worship of Jesus Christ. Please join with our elders and their wives now as we lay hands on these dear men – we would invite all of the members of this church to participate in this with us by reaching out your hands towards these men – right from where you are seated, and joining us in this commissioning prayer.

Elders - Let's pray for these men and the ministry that God has entrusted to them by His Spirit.

**Amen.**

Closing Song – <<Thank You>>

**Benediction**

*The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God  
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.*

*2 Corinthians 13:14*

Reminder that the **Annual Meeting** will be starting promptly at **9:30am** in the Family Center. All are invited to join us!