

Eldership

1) Introduction:

The bible is clear that Jesus loves the church and also leads the church¹. Jesus is the great shepherd who rules the church and he is the Apostle who was sent to birth the church². Jesus is the bridegroom and the church is his bride³. He is also our great High Priest in heaven interceding for the church right now⁴. He is the foundation that the apostles and prophets lay in the church⁵ and he is the head of the church and we are his body⁶.

Jesus gives gifts and authority to elders to lead His church⁷. Their primary responsibility is therefore to glorify Jesus, serve Jesus, imitate Jesus, obey Jesus, fulfil Jesus' mission and teach their churches to do the same.

We believe there are many potential elders in Mosaic and it is our responsibility to bring them through into this sort of leadership. If we are going to continue to grow, reach the city and play our part in the great commission, there must be more leaders who have a passion for Jesus and his purposes.

Bill Hybels famously said: *"the local church is the hope of the world and its future lies in the hands of its leaders"*⁸. Bottom line, in order for Mosaic and many other churches to fulfil their God-given potential, we must be intentional about training and appointing elders.

This paper aims to clarify what sort of leaders Jesus expects to have at the church's helm. The bible seems to suggest that serving under Jesus are Ephesian 4 ministries (apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers), Elders, Deacons (who we refer to as leaders) and church members or saints.

This table⁹ presents what we consider to be the simple leadership layout of the New Testament church. It is not meant to be hierachical but rather a clarification of the various roles within church life.

¹ Matt 16:18; Eph 1:9, 22-23; 4:15; 5:23

² 1 Peter 5:4; Heb 3:1

³ Matt 9:15

⁴ Rom 8:34

⁵ Eph 2:20

⁶ Col 1:18

⁷ Eph 4:7

⁸ Bill Hybels 'Courageous Leadership' p27

⁹ PJ Smythe 'The World needs more Leaders'

<p style="text-align: center;">Jesus the Head</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Jesus</p> <p>The head of the Body (Col 1v18)</p> <p>The Chief Foundation (Eph 2v20-22; Pet 2v4f)</p> <p>The Great Apostle (Heb 3v1)</p> <p>The Great Prophet (Mt 13v57; Mt 21v11)</p> <p>The Great Evangelist (Lk 19v10)</p> <p>The Great Pastor (Jn 10v11)</p> <p>The Great Teacher (Mt 23v10)</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">The Ephesians 4 Ministry Gifts</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Apostles & Prophets</p> <p>These were originally the pre-ascension Apostles with their unique calling and commissioning by Christ. They had the role of being the literal pillars of the early church (Mk 3v14; Acts 1v2; Acts2v42; Acts 6v6). Thereafter came other 'post-ascension' apostles mentioned in scripture such as Paul and Barnabas (Acts 14v14), Andronicus and Junias (Rms 16v7), Timothy and Titus and surely others not specifically mentioned in scripture (2 Cor 11v5). From biblical times until the return of Christ we enjoy the ongoing ministry of 'modern-day' apostles and prophets (Eph4v11-13). These gifts will operate in their own local churches and will certainly spill out to serve the wider body.</p> <hr/> <p style="text-align: center;">Evangelists, Pastors, Teachers</p> <p>These three gifts, along with apostles and prophets, make up the five-fold team of gifts most clearly mentioned in Eph 4. These five gifts are essential building gifts that must be operating for the church to be all that God intends it to be. These gifts will operate in their local church, and may also spill out to serve the wider body.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">The Local Church Ministry Gifts</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Elders, Deacons, Saints</p> <p>Paul seemed to think in terms of elders, deacons and saints (Phil 1v1).</p> <p>Saints: 'Saints' is a generic phrase for 'the royal priesthood of all believers' (1 Pet 2v9) or 'the body' (1 Cor 12). Within the body are all manner of other leadership gifts and a multitude of other spiritual gifts (see 1 Cor 12, Rom 12).</p> <p>Some will emerge as elders and deacons.</p> <p>Deacons: These are those who have so proven themselves in a general situation of leadership that they are set apart for weightier leadership responsibility (see Acts 6, 1 Tim 3, and the later chapter on deacons).</p> <p>Elders: These are the men who lead the local churches (see Acts 14v23, Acts 20v28, 1 Tim 3, Titus 2, 1 Pet 5).</p>

Our goal in this paper is to discuss the role of the elder, the qualifications for eldership and the process of appointing elders. We will also present our position on women in leadership. The hope is for this work to encourage many more elders to be raised up to love Jesus, serve his church and take the gospel to the nations of the world and to see this sort of strong, Christ-like leadership esteemed by the church.

2) What is an elder?

There seems to be only one form of church government described in the New Testament – eldership. Elders are the men in the church chosen by God to lead the local church. Their ministry is shaped and influenced by apostolic ministry. They are no more special or loved than the rest of the church but God does have a specific role for them.

The New Testament uses three different titles to describe the position of elder. While the words are used interchangeably, they each refer to a different aspect of the same position.

i) Elder (Presbuteros)

This title can be found throughout the New Testament. It refers to those men who were appointed by the apostolic missionaries who had brought them the gospel. Their task was to continue preaching the gospel, strengthen the disciples and encourage them as they faced difficulties once the apostolic teams had left¹⁰.

ii) Overseer or bishop (Episkopos)

This word carries a sense of responsibility for leading and managing the church.

iii) Pastor (Poimen)

A pastor had the honor of caring for Christians and reaching out to non Christians. The word encourages the protecting, governing, guiding, nurturing and caring for the church. They acted like shepherds to the flock¹¹ and followed the example of the Great Shepherd – Christ. In Spanish the term ‘pastor’ literally means shepherd. If my daughter tells her Spanish friend that I am a pastor then they would literally be imagining me with a crook, a dog and a flock of woolly animals.

3) How common were Elders in the New Testament church?

It seems that all New Testament Churches had Elders. This table shows us that there is a clear biblical warrant for eldership in the local church.

¹⁰ Acts 14:21-23

¹¹ Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:2

Location of Eldership	Biblical reference
Elders in All the Churches that Paul Founded	Acts 14:23 When they had appointed <i>elders</i> for them in <i>every church</i> , having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.
Elders in the Church at Jerusalem	Acts 15:2 And when Paul and Barnabas had great dissension and debate with them, the brethren determined that Paul and Barnabas and some others of them should go up to <i>Jerusalem</i> to the apostles and <i>elders</i> concerning this issue.
Elders in Ephesus	Acts 20:17 From Miletus he sent to <i>Ephesus</i> and called to him the <i>elders</i> of the church.
Elders in All the Churches of Crete	Titus 1:5 For this reason I left you in <i>Crete</i> , that you would set in order what remains and appoint <i>elders in every city</i> as I directed you.
Elders in All the Churches of the Dispersion of the Roman Empire	James 1:1; 5:14 James, a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad: Greetings. . . . Is anyone among you sick? Then he must call for the <i>elders</i> of the church and they are to pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.
Elders in All the Churches in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia	1 Peter 1:1; 5:1 Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who are chosen. . . . Therefore, I exhort the <i>elders</i> among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, shepherd the flock of God.

4) The Role of Elders

According to the New Testament, elders are responsible for the primary leadership and oversight of a church. The function and role of an elder is well summarised by Alexander Strauch¹² in his book 'Biblical Eldership': "*Elders lead the church¹³, teach and preach the Word¹⁴, protect the church from false teachers¹⁵, exhort and admonish the saints in sound doctrine¹⁶, visit the sick and pray¹⁷, and judge doctrinal issues¹⁸. In biblical terminology, elders shepherd, oversee, lead, and care for the local church.*"

These responsibilities could be summarised using these four headings: Display; Direction; Doctrine; Discipline.

i) Display

The elder's life is on display to the church and community. We should be able to look at their lives as a good example of someone who is devoted to

¹² Alexander Strauch 'Biblical Eldership'

¹³ 1 Tim 5:17; Titus 1:7; 1 Peter 5:1-2

¹⁴ 1 Timothy 3:2; 2 Timothy 4:2; Titus 1:9

¹⁵ Acts 20:17, 28-31

¹⁶ 1 Timothy 4:13; 2 Timothy 3:13-17; Titus 1:9

¹⁷ James 5:14; Acts 20:35

¹⁸ Acts 15:16

Jesus (1 Tim 4:12; Titus 2:7). Paul was able to say *“Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ”* (1 Cor 11:1) and so we should be able to observe how an elder handles his money, his children, his temper, his relationships and his devotional life and use it as an example to the church.

It is not easy being an elder. The apostle Paul tells a young pastor called Timothy that to be an elder means you can pull the load of an ox, fight like a warrior, live a life of discipline to compete with an athlete and work tirelessly like a farmer who is up before the sun, doing his job every day.¹⁹

Alongside this, elders are called to embody the vision of the church. Their lives are to be shaped by the priorities and values expected among church members. If the elders are not modelling a lifestyle of mission and discipleship then the church will lack these qualities too.

Practically elders need to be accountable to one another and support and encourage one another. Paul encourages Timothy to not only watch his doctrine closely but also his life²⁰. Elders need to fight for each other, value friendship, be unified in prayer and bring out the best in each other.

ii) Direction

This involves decision making, strategy, administration and delegating the details of church life. People need to be loved and cared for but also directed towards the vision God has given the church²¹. This sort of leadership needs to be marked by servanthood and not by control and manipulation²².

Likewise, there needs to be a response from the congregation to follow this lead. Mainly this will involve imitating the lifestyle that the elders embody²³ but also includes joyful submission to servant leadership. It is worth quoting Hebrews 13:17 in full: *“Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you.”*

This verse describes the ‘win-win’ situation of elders building released to build missional churches which is good for the congregation and people following this example, which in turn brings joy to the eldership.

iii) Doctrine

Elders were referred to as pastor-teachers and being able to teach²⁴ though it does not specify the quality of this teaching! However Paul also seems to

¹⁹ Driscoll ‘A book you will actually read on Church Leadership’ p. 16

²⁰ 1 Tim 4:16

²¹ 1 Tim 5:17; 1 Peter 5:2

²² 1 Peter 5:3

²³ Heb 13:7

²⁴ 1 Tim 3:2

expect there to be elders who devote themselves especially to the preaching and teaching of the bible and get paid to do so²⁵.

Elders serve the church by protecting it from heresies and wrong teaching²⁶. This means they need to know scripture in order to refute unbiblical arguments and also be agreed on the main doctrines of the church.

We would also suggest there needs to be ongoing biblical training for elders that is either self-generated or provided by Newfrontiers or an education body.

iv) Discipline

Elders need to be released to train, admonish, encourage, correct and sometimes remove someone from the church community²⁷. Whilst Matthew 18:15-20 makes clear that the whole church is involved with this, the elders bear the main weight of these decisions. The idea of church discipline is to bring wayward people back to repentance, restore their relationships with God and bring reconciliation with those involved.

This is one of the most difficult areas of eldership but nevertheless they are charged with the responsibility to protect the church community and help people pursue Christ. It is beyond the remit of this paper to develop this issue. However, a helpful attempt at dealing with church discipline can be found in Chapter 46 of Grudem's 'Systematic Theology'.

5) How many Elders should we have?

Scripture doesn't give an optimum number but there is an expectation for there to be more than one. Wayne Grudem²⁸ agrees: *"First, no passage suggests that any other church, no matter how small, had only one elder. The consistent New Testament pattern is a plurality of elders "in every church"²⁹ and "in every city"³⁰. Second, we do not see a 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 it³¹."*

Even though this is not a biblical word, we must think of the elders as a *team*. It should be the eldership team leading and guiding the church. This also means each elder can be given specific responsibilities that match their passion and gifting.

²⁵ 1 Tim 5:17

²⁶ Titus 1:9

²⁷ 1 Thess 5:12

²⁸ Wayne Grudem 'Systematic Theology'

²⁹ Acts 14:23

³⁰ Titus 1:5

³¹ Acts 20:28; Heb 13:17; 1 Peter 5:2-3

It also suggests that Mosaic needs to continue to develop new elders as the church grows and as existing elders are sent out church planting.

6) What are the Qualifications for Eldership?

Since we value discipleship and love Jesus, our hope is that all of us desire to become more Christ-like and learn how to love one another more deeply. The list of qualifications mentioned below should serve as a target for all of us to aim for. However, it does give a helpful, biblical idea of who is ready for directing the affairs of the local church.

The leaders of the church should be people who are spiritually mature and exemplary³², gifted for the ministry given to them³³, have a sense of divine urging³⁴ and are in harmony with the duly established leadership of the church³⁵.

1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9 provide the main expectations for eldership in the church. Clearly they are not intended to be exhaustive lists. We can tell that from the fact that they are not the same.

Here are the qualifications from 1 Tim 3:1-7 in more detail:

1 Here is a trustworthy saying: If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task. 2 Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, 3 not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. 4 He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect. 5 (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?) 6 He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil. 7 He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap.

Above reproach.

A catch-all term for being beyond criticism in all areas inside and outside the church. This does not mean perfect (or who could qualify?) but someone who will not need to be publicly rebuked for anything. 1 Tim 5:19 shows us why: elders get the benefit of the doubt, because an unending amount of accusations, rumours and investigations would damage the church.

Paul gives an umbrella term, called 'above reproach', which means that there should be no glaringly obvious areas of sin in their lives. This also means that

³² 1 Timothy 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9

³³ Romans 12:6-8

³⁴ Acts 20:28

³⁵ Philippians 2:2

if an elder wants to do something that is evil but not on the above list, he can't do that either.

The husband of one wife.

Whilst this isn't a huge problem in Leeds, Ephesus two millennia ago had many more polygamists. According to John Stott's³⁶ commentary on 1 Timothy the issue is the sanctity of marriage. Literally, the term means an elder should be a '*one woman man*'.

This verse doesn't prohibit singles from eldership either because the focus is on the quality of a married persons relationship. The idea is if you can't be loyal and trustworthy in your marriage, you are not going to be trustworthy in other areas of your life.

Temperate, self-controlled, respectable.

These three qualities overlap.

'*Temperate*' does not mean boring, but vigilant, emotionally stable, not given to huge swings of anger, fear, and the like.

'*Self-control*' is a fruit of the Spirit and refers to someone who is discreet, sober and sensible. This means there are no areas of addiction or uncontrollable urges in the elder's life.

'*Respectable*' comes from the Greek word 'kosmios' and is used in Titus when slaves are urged to '*adorn (kosmeo) the doctrine of God our Saviour in every respect.*'³⁷ Our English word 'cosmetics' comes from this word. In essence, Paul is asking for elders' lives to be the 'cosmetics of the gospel' – to make the gospel attractive by the way they live their lives.

Hospitable.

Hospitality is a very high value in Scripture and a very low one in Britain. Overseers are to be people who continually have others in their houses, both church members (fellowship) and unbelievers (outreach through hospitality). Additionally, elders are to be hospitable inside and outside their home in their attitude to their material possessions and the way they serve people.

Able to teach.

This need not mean that the person is very good in front of a group, since not all elders devote all their time to formal teaching or preaching³⁸. Rather, as Titus 1:9 says, '*He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.*' In other words, he must know Biblical doctrine well and be able to explain it to people. He must be astute enough theologically that he can spot serious error and show a person why it is wrong and harmful.

Not a drunkard.

³⁶ John Stott 'Commentary of 1 Timothy' Bible Speaks Today series

³⁷ Titus 2:10

³⁸ 1 Timothy 5:17

Paul is saying spiritual leaders shouldn't be addicted to alcohol or over-indulge or over drink. Elders must not abuse their freedom to cause others to sin.

Not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome.

Some people are aggressive, have violent tempers and can have huge emotional swings that 'bruise' people physically and verbally. Elders cannot be like this, because '*God has called you to peace*³⁹'.

Not a lover of money.

Elders need to model generosity, financial responsibility and counter-cultural simplicity. Paul knows that elders need to avoid the enslaving tendencies found when material possessions become the goal of life. He should not be anxious about his financial future. He should not be so money-orientated that ministry decisions revolve around this issue. Elders should lead the way in adventures of faith with their money.

He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect.

John Piper explains "*the home is the proving ground for ministry. He (the elder) should have submissive children. This does not mean perfect but it does mean well disciplined, so that they do not blatantly and regularly disregard the instructions of their parents. The children should revere their father. He should be a loving and responsible spiritual leader in the home. His wife should be respected and tenderly loved. Their relationship should be openly admirable.*"⁴⁰

He must not be a recent convert.

Paul's explanation here is that new believers can often get tempted with the responsibility that comes with eldership. This attack comes in the form of pride and conceit.

He must also have a good reputation with outsiders.

If the elder falls below the world's standards for leadership then there is no place for them in church governmental leadership. The local community needs to respect the elder as they often see past the authority structures present in church. Work colleagues, neighbours, family and friends should make good referees for the elder.

Clearly, elders are disciples of Jesus, servants of Jesus and lovers of Jesus. Another implication is that existing elders need to work hard at discipling young men so that they are being prepared for leadership and eldership.

³⁹ 1 Cor 7:15.

⁴⁰ John Piper 'Biblical Eldership' Sec 7

7. The Process of Eldership

According to Tim 3:1 and Titus 1:7, a local church should have overseers. These overseers are the ones who 'rule' the local church which means they lead, manage and direct.

Therefore the selection process is very important. Even though there aren't any examples of elders appointing elders in the New Testament, perpetuation of the eldership team is implied within the shepherding and stewarding functions of an overseer. This means any good eldership will be praying and looking for new elders. There seem to be four elements of testing to the process towards appointing elders.

i) Individual/Couple testing. When someone is recommended by the eldership or leadership team they themselves must be convinced (by God, not by others) to undertake the responsibility. Elders are not called by committees and leadership teams but by God himself. Paul tells elders that *"the Holy Spirit has made you overseers."*⁴¹

Elders will be challenged, confronted and questioned from time to time. At that point, elders must know that God has called them. The bible says *"if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do."*⁴² Does the individual desire or have a willing heart⁴³ to become an elder? If so, this will be evident in the way they sacrifice, love and serve the church. Alexander Strauch suggests: *"the stronger a man's desire for eldership, the stronger will be his leadership and love for people and the Word"*⁴⁴.

If the potential elder is married, then part of the responsibility of managing his family well means that his wife has got to be convinced too. For example, it would be very difficult to appoint an elder when the wife doesn't agree in male only eldership.

ii) Private testing. 1 Timothy 5:22-25 suggests that in order to avoid appointing the wrong men, leadership needs to make an assessment of their character and deeds over time. It has to be tested and worked out in a team context.

Bill Hybels⁴⁵ looks for 3 qualities in his Elders:

- 1) Character: a disciple of Jesus;
- 2) Competence: track record of high achievement;
- 3) Chemistry: a relational fit with the other Elders.

This last element is very important. Does the prospective elder get on with the other elders? Does he find people difficult or are they insecure around

⁴¹ Acts 20:28

⁴² 1 Tim 3:1b

⁴³ 1 Peter 5:2

⁴⁴ Alexander Strauch 'Biblical Eldership' p281

⁴⁵ Bill Hybels 'Courageous Leadership' p81

leaders? We have decided that our eldership team will be highly relational and accountable as this reflects our biblical values as a church. Therefore, the team dynamics are crucial to guaranteeing the eldership team will strengthen each other.

Mark Driscoll suggests an extremely rigorous testing of each elder candidate. This includes *“examining his family, financial giving to the church, performance at work, relationship with people outside the church, service in the church, spiritual gifts, ministry passions, attitude towards authority, work ethic, leadership gifts, humility and anything else related to his conversion, calling, character, courage and competency!”*⁴⁶.

Whereas Mark Dever⁴⁷ utilizes a helpful quadrant to help evaluate potential elders.

(1) Central Christian Concerns	(2) Distinctive Theological Concerns
(4) Love for the Congregation	(3) Distinctive Cultural Concerns

When evaluating men who have the character and ability to serve as elders, the first matter should be **(1) Central Christian Concerns**, for example, faithful testimony as a Christian, ability to articulate the gospel, stable walk with Christ, consistent Christian character and strong family life. The notable characteristics listed above in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 apply.

If the man demonstrates faithfulness in this area, then **(2) Distinctive Theological Concerns** must be considered⁴⁸. This aims particularly at the candidate’s position towards the church doctrinal statement as well as his grasp of the faith. Such might be evidenced by his ability to articulate biblically the church’s position on baptism or worship or evangelism or church government.

Having shown understanding and ability to dialogue theologically, the next quadrant evaluates the **(3) Distinctive Cultural Concerns** that are presently affecting the church or Christian community, the role of women in the church,

⁴⁶ Mark Driscoll ‘a book you’ll actually read on leadership’ p17

⁴⁷ Mark Dever quoted in Phil Newton ‘Elders in Congregational Life’

⁴⁸ Acts 20:28-31

for example or issues of modernity affecting the church, and effects of the church-growth movement on the church⁴⁹.

The final quadrant assures that the eldership candidate has applied his understanding of the gospel and theological issues to his life in regard to **(4) Love for the Congregation**⁵⁰. Is there evidence that he genuinely loves the body of Christ and desires to serve and minister to the church?

iii) Public testing.

The prospective elder should also be proving himself by leading, teaching and bearing responsibility in the church. Paul instructs the church in Thessalonica to acknowledge and recognise those who serve in the church: *“Now we ask you, brothers, to respect those who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you.”*⁵¹ One way to do this is by recommending him and encouraging him towards eldership.

Practically this means we will first take our eldership appointments to our leaders (deacons) and then if there is general agreement (not necessarily 100%), we will let the church community know about the prospective elders. After a season of discussion, prayer and fasting, elders can be appointed.

iv) External testing.

This is where apostolic teams can serve local churches. If we believe that apostles appoint elders (by the laying on of hands)⁵², it is vital for apostles and their delegates to relationally connect with potential elders. They can then provide an unbiased assessment of the candidate. Authority from outside can sometimes be clear about issues that those involved cannot see.

8) How Eldership works with Ephesian 4 ministries

Scripture teaches us that churches are built on a foundation laid by apostles and prophets⁵³. This foundation is Jesus, for he is described as the chief cornerstone⁵⁴. When Jesus is the centre of church life then local churches will be:

- Gospel focussed;
- Devoted to God through worship, prayer and the Word;
- Hungry for God’s presence;
- Passionate about God’s kingdom;
- Committed to the great commission;
- Embracing an eternal perspective.

⁴⁹ Titus 1:9

⁵⁰ 1 Peter 5:2-3

⁵¹ 1 Thess 5:12

⁵² 1 Tim 5:22

⁵³ Eph 2:19-20

⁵⁴ Eph 2:20

Since the Ephesians 4 ministries still function today, it is vital for elders to be in relationship with apostles and their teams. It is very difficult to re-lay foundations when the building has already been built so right from the start, elders need to work well with apostolic teams.

These teams can bring for example, wisdom into difficult circumstances⁵⁵, doctrinal clarity⁵⁶, pastoral care and advice⁵⁷ and momentum for church planting⁵⁸. In fact, the bible suggests that the Ephesians 4 ministries are essential for the church to become all that it is meant to be.⁵⁹

Apostles also work alongside churches in appointing elders. After a season of teaching, prayer and fasting, apostles should lay hands and appoint elders in local churches.⁶⁰

However, it is clear that more work is needed to clarify how the Ephesian 4 ministry teams work with local eldership. We propose further study and investigation into this area.

9) Congregation's responsibilities towards Eldership

Hebrews 13:17 command to *“Obey your leaders and submit to them”* can sound like an excuse for elders to demand instant obedience from the church family but when leaders are demonstrating Christ-like leadership, it is in the congregation's benefit to follow. In fact, this verse continues: *“Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you.”* In other words, it is unprofitable and unwise to rebel against servant leadership as it can lead to God judging us for our disobedience in the long run⁶¹.

What does it mean to submit and obey spiritual authority when our culture glorifies rebellion? Clearly it involves our actions and attitudes. It is our understanding that God is in ultimate authority and delegates it to his representatives⁶² so we submit to godly leadership as we submit to God. We want to negotiate, bargain and procrastinate but we need to simply obey cheerfully.

This is possible as God has given church elders responsibility to watchfully cover and protect the people. They ultimately are accountable to God for

⁵⁵ see 1 Cor 3,5,6,8,11,14

⁵⁶ Eph 2:14-18

⁵⁷ 2 Cor 11:28

⁵⁸ Romans 15:18-22

⁵⁹ Eph 4:12-13

⁶⁰ Acts 14:23

⁶¹ Rom 13:1-2

⁶² Rom 13:1-2

their actions in the church and if they teach they are held to a higher standard of accountability⁶³.

Congregations can make the leaders' work a burden or a joy. It is miserable leading people who don't want to be led. Practically, the congregation has a responsibility to encourage, trust and serve the elders with a good attitude. This affects how we speak about people in authority, to them in person and with others. Scripture advises us not to even entertain a bad thought about an elder unless it is confirmed by three or more witnesses⁶⁴!

This loving attitude towards the eldership is also expressed through prayer and rewarding the elders for serving in the church⁶⁵. The 1 Timothy 5 passage suggests they are to be given 'double honour', especially those involved with teaching and preaching. It is unclear precisely what this means but the context seems to imply financial aid – though not all elder are paid. At Mosaic we ask our trustees to make recommendations concerning salaries and pay scales for our eldership staff.

10) How does the Eldership function as a team?

There are several schools of thought regarding how the eldership functions as a team, chiefly because there is very little in the bible concerning this issue.

Some would suggest that because all are accountable before God for the leading of the church and all carry equal authority within the church, they should all be equal decision makers.

However, theologically there seems to be some precedent for there to be a leader within the team, a first among equals if you like. Jesus clearly led his team of Apostles and then chose three (Peter, James and John) to witness his power, glory and agony⁶⁶ (first among equals). After the ascension, Peter rose up to become the leader of the first prototype church in Jerusalem⁶⁷. Timothy, Titus and others were sent by Paul to lead eldership teams and James modelled a leadership role among the Jerusalem elders⁶⁸. Paul seems to promote this idea by encouraging the Ephesians⁶⁹: *“The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching.”*

This may appear unfair or hierarchical yet Alexander Strauch⁷⁰ points out that *“failure to understand the concept of “first among equals” (or 1 Timothy 5:17) has caused some elderships to be tragically ineffective in their pastoral care*

⁶³ Heb 13:17

⁶⁴ 1 Tim 5:19

⁶⁵ 1 Tim 5:17

⁶⁶ Luke 8:51; 9:28; Mark 14:33

⁶⁷ Acts 1:15

⁶⁸ Acts 12:17; Titus 1:5

⁶⁹ 1 Tim 5:17-18

⁷⁰ Alexander Strauch 'Biblical Eldership' p.45

and leadership. Although elders act jointly as a council and share equal authority and responsibility for the leadership of the church, all are not equal in their giftedness, biblical knowledge, leadership ability, experience, or dedication. Therefore, those among the elders who are particularly gifted leaders and/or teachers will naturally stand out among the other elders as leaders and teachers within the leadership body to make decisions”.

Just as we see men and women’s roles being compatible with equality and diversity, surely we can see this within an eldership team too?

At Mosaic we have the primary teaching elder holding the position of first among equals as per the instructions to Timothy⁷¹. He leads the team of elders though all elders contribute to the decision making and hold equal authority to avoid the team simply become functional. At the same time, the eldership is still a team and so there needs to be a commitment to build friendship, support, prayer and trust into their times together, along with times to receive the Holy Spirit who anoints us for leadership.

11) Disciplining Elders

In the (hopefully) unlikely situation where elders are asked to step down from leadership the bible offers some advice. Firstly, the principle of accountability should help safeguard the elders and the congregation. Elders are not only accountable to God but also one another⁷². Moreover, scripture also shows us that there is accountability beyond themselves to apostolic teams. Paul demonstrated this with the Ephesian elders at Miletus and clearly had a mutually accountable relationship⁷³.

Secondly, Paul was aware of the pressures elders face and was clearly appealing to the Old Testament practice of having two or three witnesses to substantiate an accusation of a serious offence⁷⁴.

If the accusation is upheld, Paul then explains that because of the high accountability an elder has in his office and the level of trust from the church that is involved, any rebuke or church discipline needs to happen publically. Albert Mohler⁷⁵ states: *“Clearly, leadership carries a higher burden, and the sins of an elder cause even greater injury to the church. The public rebuke is necessary, for the elder sins against the entire congregation.”*

Thirdly, the apostolic team needs to be involved right from the start. They will already have relationship with the eldership and the church and will provide an outside authority which will help deal with the fall out from such an event occurring.

⁷¹ 1 Tim 5:17-18

⁷² Acts 20:28,30

⁷³ Acts 20:17-18,28-30

⁷⁴ 1 Tim 5:19-20

⁷⁵ R. Albert Mohler ‘Church Discipline’ quoted in Phil Newton ‘Elders in congregational life’ p153

12) Can women be elders?

One of the questions we are asked most frequently by people joining Mosaic Church concerns the issue of women in leadership.

We have written another paper entitled 'Women in Leadership' in which we argue women can fulfil every role within church life (e.g. leading a small group, leading the music or preaching) except eldership. This is often called the "low complementarian" position as opposed to the "egalitarian" position, which says all roles within the church are open to women including eldership.

We realise this may be an unpopular position given the culture which we live in and may seem like women are 'second class citizens'. However, we believe we have grounded all our findings in scripture⁷⁶. Below is a brief synopsis of what the paper argues. This really is only a thumbnail sketch of the argument and we would encourage you to read the paper for further details.

1. Within the Trinity we see equal status but different roles. Each person is equally divine and equally worthy but the Son is seen to be subject to the Father's will. There is, therefore, equality in value but distinction in role.
2. Within the creation account we see that men and women, who are made in the image of God, are also equal in value but are given differing roles. Paul shows us in Ephesians 5 that these can be termed headship and submission.
3. Our definition of submission and our definition of headship come from Christ. Submission is free and voluntary and is not a sign of weakness but strength. Headship is taking the initiative in laying one's life down to serve and bless the other.
4. Whenever Paul talks to specific churches about the involvement of women in the church he always backs it up by referring back to the creation account. So, although what Paul is saying is for a specific church in a specific context and time, he grounds his argument in universal principles.

However, we do want to stress that this is a secondary issue and should not become an issue that divides Mosaic Church or diverts us from 'making disciples of all nations'.

13) Theory to practice:

How do we transition from a leadership team (made up of men and women) to a male eldership team? Newton⁷⁷ gives a clear and helpful model for this process divided into three stages:

⁷⁶ Genesis 1-3, Ephesians 5, 1 Corinthians 11, 1 Corinthians 14, 1 Timothy 2-3

⁷⁷ Phil Newton 'Elders in congregational life' p126

Evaluation Phase	Presentation Phase	Implementation Phase
Assess Study Probe Summarise Screen	Exposition Discussion Qualifications	Pray Fast Consider Appoint elders Review

After this paper is agreed and potential candidates approved with the help of our apostolic team, we suggest that we introduce the concept to our leaders (deacons) initially. After their understanding and approval we will teach into the subject on a Sunday and then visit each small group to engage with further questions and discussions. We will ask the church to pray and fast for a season to consider the candidates and then appoint elders.

As the new eldership team is formed there also needs to be regular reviews to make sure the team is working well.

We suggest that the old leadership team is disbanded and a new leadership team formed that will meet with the elders from time to time and will work alongside them in leading the church. This will be made of up of qualified men and women who have responsibilities in the church.

Questions:

Thank you for taking time to read this paper. If you still have questions or concerns about eldership then please feel free to contact the Leadership Team via the church office. Our hope is to move Mosaic Church forward into biblical leadership and we ask that you will pray and fast for us as we make these decisions.

Mosaic Leadership Team