

ELDERSHIP (A POSITION STATEMENT)

Last Revised: March 18, 2004

We recognize the office of elder to be the highest calling in the New Testament Church. The apostolic injunction is to “shepherd the flock of God.” Therefore, we approach the office, its qualifications, and its expectations with the utmost humility and severity. We believe the qualifications for eldership are clearly revealed by the Holy Spirit in 1 Timothy 3:1-7, Titus 1:6-9, and 1 Peter 5:2-4.

Many churches claim to be elder-led. We offer the following beliefs about the role of an elder to clarify our understanding and commitment to biblical leadership.

1. Jesus Christ is the Chief Shepherd and the Head of His church. These are positions and roles He has never abdicated nor delegated to a pope or “senior pastor.”
2. There is no distinction between a “pastor” and an “elder”—between the “professional” minister and the “lay” minister. Any such distinctions are false ones drawn without sufficient biblical warrant.
3. While all elders are equal in authority and position, not all are similarly gifted or equipped. God, in His infinite wisdom, has gifted and impassioned various elders in various ways. Because of the distribution of giftedness, some elders will function as “firsts among equals.”
4. The church should pursue those elders exceptionally gifted to preach and teach the Word, seeking to monetarily free them to exercise their giftedness and calling for the benefit of the body.
5. The elder, as a shepherd, is a servant of Christ’s church not a lord over her.
6. The elder’s primary responsibility is the spiritual welfare of the church through the ministry of the Word and prayer.
7. There must be a rigorous yet reasonable process through which a man must go to become an elder—including an inspection of his qualifications, a proving of his biblical knowledge and theological understanding, and a testing of his aspiration.