

Biblical Church Administration:
Elders, Plurality of Elders, and Elder-led Church
Text: Acts 14:21-28

Introduction:

Purpose?

Jonathan Griffiths said, *“The office of eldership is given in Scripture to provide spiritual nurture and protection for the church. Elders are to shepherd the flock of Jesus Christ through the faithful ministry of the Word and are to lead by godly example.”*

Background:

This is Paul’s first missionary journey with Barnabas. After struggling much with these places: Cyprus, Lycia, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe (these are all in Modern day Turkey [former Galacia]), Paul made sure that they appointed elders in these places to preserve and keep the faith of churches in these places. Which Paul revisited and affirmed the significance of their works.

Why appoint elders? Even after our passage, in Chap 15, where the first Jerusalem Council took place. There were elders alongside the apostles in the church at Jerusalem (v. 2). These demonstrate that the office of elders is already evident during the early church period.

Today, we have three points to learn about biblical eldership. I have been studying these topics for more than a month when I was asked to teach these to the church through the council.

Main Idea:

1. Conforming to the NT Church

When I was asked to fill up the application form as the interim pastor of UCBC, in the section where I was asked about my view of church administration, I wrote (verbatim): *“In the context of the Church administration, I believe in the biblical principle of congregationalism with the plurality of elders.”*

UCBC as an SBC affiliated church, we no longer have any question about congregationalism. We believe that—under the lordship of Christ—we are all priests or the principle of the priesthood of every believer. Meaning, we are all equal in God’s sight. No one is above anyone. I may be the pastor, it is my role to equip and shepherd the flock, but I am not above anyone here. We are the same in God’s sight. But we have different roles. My role is to equip, train, teach, preach, and care for the sheep. (Hence, I faithfully preach what the Bible states; I lead and guide the church to what the Bible reveals). While the flock does the commands of God—ministry, evangelism, outreaches, activities, and discipleship. Not everything should be placed on the pastoral table. Other practical stuff is addressed in the next sermon on Deacons.

Now, as a congregation, we believe that we have One Spirit—the same Holy Spirit—that indwelt us all. Therefore, when we decide, we pray for the guidance and decision of the church as a whole. In the SBC principle, it is 2/3. Here, we acknowledge that everyone may have a disagreement with others, but we believe through the Spirit we can all be united in our decision. So, when we decide, despite minor disagreements, we recognize God’s will and the work of the Spirit through the church. This becomes the decision of the church as a whole without blaming others nor regrets in the future.

Indeed, the plurality of elders is biblical (**James 5:14** [Elders to pray for the sick]; **1 Timothy 5:17** [*“The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching.”*]; **Titus 1:5** [Paul telling Titus to appoint elders]; **Acts 14:23** [Paul and Barnabas appointing elders]).

Observing how the Bible speaks about the “elders,” it is always in a plural form. It presents us that plurality of elders is normal in the New Testament church. That is our first point. If our church ought to follow the Scriptural New Testament Church, then we ought to follow the plurality of the “elders.”

My question is: if the church wants to be biblical or just keeps on experimenting which is which? Of course, we contend and stand firm to what the Bible states.

2. Commanded by God in Scriptures

I will not lay out the Old Testament and Jewish context principles today. But to summarize, elders had a great part in their communities. This is also similar to our tribal, or provincial community setting in our Philippine context. Wherein, we would always seek the advice of the elders before making a decision. We even do that before where we do “pamamanhikan” or other stuff that includes the confirmation of our grandparents or community leader.

Similarly, God has commanded us in His Word to appoint leaders. In Titus 1:5-9, v.5 only, *“The reason I left you in Crete was that you might put in order what was left unfinished and appoint[a] elders in every town, as I directed you.”* Also, in 1 Timothy 3:1-7, and in our passage Acts 14 verse 23.

Elders are important to the church because, first and foremost, they are the leaders that Christ has appointed to oversee His church. This is not a mere suggestion – it is the biblical mandate. A church cannot be a fully healthy church without elders, and a church can most certainly not be a healthy church without qualified elders (1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9). At the very least, there should be elders being raised up where there are no qualified elders yet. Elders are so important that one of Paul’s first apostolic decisions in the churches that he established was to appoint elders there (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5), noted by Costi Hinn.

Interchangeable: “The terms πρεσβύτερος (presbuteros), ποιμήν (poimen), and ἐπίσκοπος (episkopos) are all used to describe the same office in the New Testament. Overseers, pastors, shepherds, and elders are all operating as the same kind of servant leader(s) of the church.” (Costi Hinn)

Titus 1:5-9, presbuteros in v5; episkopos in v7; and Ephesians 4:11, “So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers.” (Granville Sharp Rule)

3. Commissions/Calls Elders: Who appoints elders?

The church through the Holy Spirit. In Acts 20:28, *“Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.”* This is Paul’s farewell to the elders in Ephesus (v. 17)

Indeed, it is the Holy Spirit that calls a person to Eldership. But this is achieved through the church. That is why we have to affirm the appointees or “nominated” to the Eldership position. Now, I know I am a young pastor, but I have seen the dirtiest parts of different churches. When we nominate or appoint an Elder or Deacon, we give out their names because we know the person is really deserving of it. But make sure that you do not put the person in that office just to shame or try to gossip about his life, ministry, and so on. Ohhh...if that is your heart, we need to talk.

The “Qualifications and Roles” will be explored in our Bible Study groups. Both for the Elders and Deacons. So, I hope that we are all ready for our next Bible Study series. But we will wait for those who are still finishing Anand Mahadevan’s series.

But to give some functions of the Elders:

1. They are the spiritual leaders and models (1 Peter 5:3)
2. Teacher/ preachers of the Word (1 Tim 3:2; 2 Tim 4:2; Titus 1:9)
3. Caring for the souls (Heb 13:17)
4. Protects the church from false teachings (Acts 20:28-31)
5. Models Unity (Eph. 4:3, 11-13)

You see? Without Elders, the church is somehow incomplete, or maybe, unhealthy. We cannot function well having one Elder JR. We need more elders alongside some deacons and deaconesses.

If we have more questions, we can have the Bible study as our avenue to explore this. That is the beauty of attending home groups, bible study groups, and theology classes. You can dig deeper, ask difficult questions, and some clarity with your confusions. I do not know everything but I am willing to journey and explore God’s Word with everyone.

Conclusion:

After exploring the biblical significance of plurality of elders, congregationalism, and elder-led church, we ought to learn more about the matters of functions or roles, qualifications, and other important stuff. I am aware that many of you have learned this before. But being reminded and reviewing it and allowing ourselves to learn from God’s Word again exemplifies the willingness and purity of hearts toward the health of our church—UCBC.

After learning these things partnered with intentional and consistent prayer, we now let the Spirit work through us—as we let God lead us—to appoint Elders (we already have one, but we need more) and Deacons (which we will learn next Sunday). So, our prayer is that may God touch the hearts of those who really have compassion and love—first and foremost to Christ—and His church.

Elder-led concept.

We need more Elders and Deacons that will see these roles as gifts and not mere duties that will stress them.

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July 4, 2021