

## **I. The local church and leadership: Who's in charge?**

Grace Fellowship is committed to a New Testament philosophy of ministry which recognizes and submits to the supreme authority of Jesus Christ.

The New Testament reveals that there is one body, the Church, with one head, Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 12; Eph. 1:22) and the Church has only one Chief shepherd, Jesus Christ (1 Pet. 5:4).

Essentially the church as the body of Christ is a spiritual organism with Christ as head. Jesus Christ is called the "Chief Shepherd" (1 Pet. 5:4). Jesus Christ rules over and watches over His church. (Eph. 1:23; Col. 1:18). It is God's intention that the local church be a picture and a miniature replica of the universal church. As such, each local church is complete in itself. Each church has a unity of its own. Each is a body of Christ in its own right. (Acts 8:1; 11:22; 16:5; Rom. 16:5; 1 Cor. 1:2; 2 Cor. 1:1; Gal. 1:2; 1 Thess. 1:1).

Therefore, Grace Fellowship believes that God ordained leadership in a local church must search the Scriptures and seek the mind of Christ through the guidance of the Holy Spirit for direction and guidance in the decision-making process. Grace Fellowship recognizes that God may choose to move the church in a particular direction through the members of the body. (1 Cor. 12:4-11).

Grace Fellowship recognizes that God has placed families within the Body of Christ that He has ordained parental authority over families. Fathers are directly accountable to God for their families. Grace Fellowship believes that the family is the basic social structure and that parents have the ultimate responsibility to train up their children in the ways of the Lord not the church. However, Grace Fellowship believes that the Church has a duty to support and strengthen the family by providing biblical instruction, encouragement and opportunities for spiritual growth and ministry. (Deut. 6:1-9; Eph. 4:11-16; 6:4)

## **II. The biblical model of leadership. One or many leaders?**

Grace Fellowship believes there are two divinely appointed church offices: elders and deacons. (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Tit. 1:5-9) The New Testament model for leadership in the local church calls for a plurality of elders/pastors not one singular pastor. Grace Fellowship believes that pastoral oversight of the New Testament church was committed to a plurality of elders and not invested in a professional clergyman called the pastor. The New Testament points to a plurality of elders because the Greek word for elder is plural. Not only are there explicit statements of shared leadership but also examples of shared leadership are evident throughout the New Testament. Eldership rule best fits the concept of the priesthood of believers and bridges the mystical gap between clergy and laity. (1 Peter 2:4-5).

This does not mean that all have equal abilities. (1 Cor. 12:4). Within the framework of elders' ministries there will be great diversity as each exercises his Spiritual gifts. (1 Cor. 12:7). Some will demonstrate special giftedness in the areas of administration or service; others will evidence stronger gifts of teaching, exhortation, or other abilities. Some will be highly visible; others will function in the background. All are within the plan of God for the church

### **III. Elders- Who are they?**

Biblically, the focal point of all church leadership is the elder. It is the elders who are charged with teaching, feeding, and protecting the church, and it is the elders who are accountable to God on behalf of the church. (Acts 20:17, 28).

In the plan God has ordained for the church, leadership is a position of humble, loving service. Leaders of God's people must exemplify purity, sacrifice, diligence, and devotion. With the tremendous responsibility of leading the flock of God comes potential for either great blessing or great judgment.

Biblical evidence points to elders and overseers as one and the same office (Acts: 20:17,28). Overseers and pastors are not distinct from elders; the terms are simply different ways of identifying the same people. The difference in terms is best understood to mean that elder emphasizes the dignity and honor of the office while overseer and pastor points out the function of the office. (1 Peter 5:1-2).

How are elders chosen? The New Testament clearly indicates that elders were uniquely set apart or appointed to their office. It is not so much that they are chosen or elected but that they are recognized by their qualifications (I Tim. 3:1-7) and that the Holy Spirit has raised them up (Acts 20:28). Elders were known and publicly recognized by the laying on of hands (I Thess. 5:12; I Tim. 5:22). In other words, the elder is known by the work he does and his fulfillment of the biblical requirements and not by election to a position.

### **IV. Qualifications of the Elders/Overseers- 1Timothy 3:1-7: and Titus 1:5-16. Who's qualified to do the job?**

What makes a man an elder? What are the qualifications of an elder? The biblical standards and qualifications are given in I Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9. True elders are men of godliness and spiritual character. They must be mature in the faith. The overarching quality for elders is that they must be 'blameless.' The rest of the qualifications elaborate on what it means to be blameless. Blameless means that there is no valid accusation of wrongdoing against him. His life must be an example for people to follow and no overt or flagrant sin mars his life in any area such as outside the church and inside his own family. All the qualifications point to men of godly character.

Scripture prohibits women from serving as elders. First Timothy 2:11-12 says, "A woman must quietly receive instruction with entire submissiveness. But I do not allow a

woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet.” Women are to be under the authority of elders. God excludes them from teaching men or holding positions of authority over men.

## **V. Duties of the Elders/Overseers- Acts 20:17-38 and 1 Peter 5:1-4**

Elders are charged with the care and feeding, as well as the spiritual guidance, of the entire church. There is no higher earthly authority above the local church, and no greater resource to know the mind and heart of God with regard to issues in the church. (Acts 20:17, 28; 1 Peter 5:1-5).

Elders are responsible to shepherd the flock by preaching, teaching, leading and praying (I Tim. 3:1-7; Tit. 1:5-9; Acts 20:17, 28; 1 Peter 5:1-5). Deacons are responsible to assist the elders in ministering to the temporal needs of the church (I Tim. 3:8-13; Acts 6:1-5). Elders and deacons are to be in submission to the headship of Jesus Christ. The local assembly of believers is to be in submission to those in authority over them.

Scripture implies that anyone at a lower level of leadership involved in decision making as it relates to church policy or doctrine should be under the elders’ authority. However, a position of leadership does not imply spiritual superiority.

We must always remember that everyone is a minister. There are no “ministers” and “laymen.” The principles that govern the life of the body are unity, diversity and interdependence. (1 Cor. 12:4-7). Everyone is a minister. The body of Christ should not consist of predominantly spectators whose spiritual gifts are not used.

## **VI. Benefits of a plurality of leadership. Can one leader really do it all?**

Proper biblical government by elders strengthens the church, and the biblical norm for church leadership is a plurality of elders (Acts 11:30; Acts 14:23; Acts 15:2; Acts 20:17; Tit. 1:5; I Pet. 5:1-2). Furthermore, it is the only pattern for church leadership given in the New Testament. Nowhere in Scripture do we find a local assembly ruled by majority opinion, or by one pastor.

There are tremendous benefits in having a plurality of elders. Multiple elders can provide a lightening of the workload, protect the church by balancing the strengths and weaknesses and promote accountability among the leadership. The task of ruling is not a one-man job. “Ministry” is the work of the whole body of Christ. Ministry is not the work of one person or a team of leaders. All believers have a spiritual gift that God intends for his/her use to service other members of the body. A multiplicity of elders allows an elder to function in the area of his spiritual gift and thus with more gifts in operation by the leadership, more individual needs are met, and more effective leadership takes place in the body.