

The Governance by the Elders

1 Peter 5:1-11; Hebrews 13:17

Pastor Russ Kennedy

Wisdom Decision Making as a Chapel Distinctive

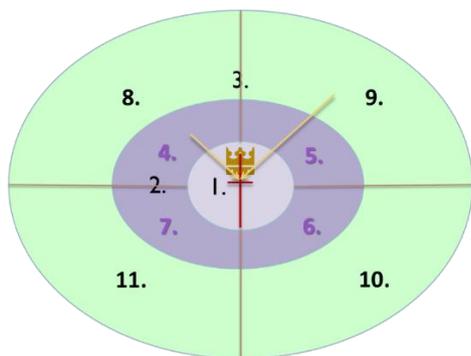
What then does this mean for how we choose to do ministry?

In all things, we aim to please God as our sovereign Lord and Head of the church.

A Model – Aspiration and Application

How do we think about what we are doing? Usually in our conversations we are using the simple model. The following represents the relationships between the will of God and the wisdom from God in ministry decisions.

1. Christ-centered
Gospel-grounded
2. Will of God, Commanded
3. Wisdom from God
Do what is best



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4. Preach the Word...
 5. Make disciples...
 6. Fellowship with one-another...
 7. Serve one another...

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8. Gathering ministries
 9. Discipleship ministries
 10. Community ministries
 11. Serving ministries

What does this mean in the real world of life and ministry?

Clear, wise obedience to what God commands.

Doing what God requires and what avoiding what God forbids.

Careful distinguishing between what is necessary as a church and what is allowed as a church.

There are very few things that a church must do to be a church.

There are many things a church can do that are Commis-sional in nature.

There are many things other churches do that we will not do.

There are many things other churches do we cannot do.

Regular discussion and decisions about what is best.

Most decisions we are making are within the realm of choosing what is best.

Most decisions we make are:

Based on principles, patterns, practices of the New Testa-ment.

Advised by a wide consideration of historical precedent and contemporary counsel.

Consciously rejecting much of the world's influences that come through contemporary "needs".

We will rightly struggle in decisions with:

A rapidly changing culture where we must serve in the world...

Coping with what people want versus what they actually need.

Trying to stay true to our distinctives when so many of them are disregarded by people.

Identifying our own preferences that are driving the ministries or ministries we oversee.

Dealing with people who elevate their preferences to the level of oughtness.

People will struggle with:

Approaching leadership to give advice, counsel in way that pleases the Lord.

Turn legitimate wants, desires, preferences into demands.

Being unwilling to accept and submit to the wisdom decisions leadership makes.

How then do we take this way of wisdom and apply it to leadership? How a church is led and governed is a distinctive. One of our challenges as a church is helping people not to overlay the common models and approaches to church leadership. Many are wise applications of the texts and so are fine as they go. Many are simply the corporate world (a la John Maxwell and others) sweetened with a few texts and then served in the church. When you do church the world's way, you get the world's benefits, but you also are disobeying God and getting the world's problems.

From careful thinking about the Scripture, we believe we are doing God's will and wisely implementing the principles, patterns, and practices of the New Testament. The model of church leadership we have adopted has strengths and weaknesses. We accept that. All models have strengths and weaknesses. We live in an Ecclesiastes world... there is no perfect model of church governance. And if there were one, as soon as people started using it they would create problems.

Let us then have a look at the Chapel distinctives in eldership governance.

Its Faithful Shepherding (v.1-4)

This orientation must begin with the leadership of the church. There must a constant passion for the glory of God in the elders of the church. Peter begins with this appeal to elders for Biblical shepherding.

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: ² 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; ³ not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. ⁴ And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.

Its Shared Experience (v.1)

Peter's appeal is based on common ground shared by the elders to whom he is writing.

Their plurality – Notice that this is addressed to a group of men: elders, shepherds and overseers. The New Testament requires that churches be led by elders (Acts 14:23; 20:17,28; Philippians 1:2). The idea of there being only one elder, shepherd (pastor) or overseer is not Biblical.

Their identity – Elders are to pastor (shepherd) the church, exercising oversight (govern/administrate) the church. The three words used in the New Testament are not for three different offices or positions in the church. Elder, pastor, overseer/administrator are all one office.

Their unity – Two connecting unities are mentioned: the elders *among* the people and the elders together as *fellow* elders.

Their testimony – Peter is not just someone who saw the sufferings of Jesus, but one who testified of it. At the center of Peter’s preaching was the gospel of the cross of Christ. Elders are to testify in their ministries to realities they have experienced. Elders themselves must be gospel-grounded, Christ-centered, cross-embracing, sacrificial men.

Their expectancy – Elders serving together in the gospel must have a passion for the glory of Jesus. It is not to be merely theoretical, but rather a deeply shaping expectancy. It is good for elders to ponder deeply that there is glory yet uncovered.

Its Required Analogies (v.2a)

How are we to think of the eldership? What kinds of paradigms or models or analogies does the Bible use? The Bible gives us two analogies that establish the required categories for the eldership.

The Analogy of Shepherding

This analogy is used primarily to speak of how elders are to take care of the people in the church. This analogy sees the leadership as shepherds and the people as sheep and the church as a flock. What does that mean in real world terms? Shepherds are to feed, protect, guide, train and to heal the flock.

A Shepherd must keep in mind that this is God’s flock. Shepherds do not own the flock. God has given us this flock to tend. We must give our primary attention to their flock. Remember that in the Bible, the word “pastor” only occurs one time and it is a mistranslation of the word everywhere else translated shepherd (Ephesians 4:11). Train yourself when you use the word “pastor” to think “shepherd”. That is ALL Biblically the word means. The office

that I hold is that of elder. What all of us who are elders do is to shepherd and to oversee. But we have chosen to use the word pastor as a title in order to remind ourselves of our primary role and to communicate practically with others who think differently.

The Analogy of Overseeing

Here we have the verb form of the word *episkopos*. If the word for shepherds and servants (deacons) had been translated as consistently as this word has, we would have far less misunderstanding about church leadership, at least from a Biblical perspective.

The word is used to refer to those who were appointed by emperors and kings to govern newly established (or conquered) city-states. He was responsible to the king, but the king's authority was delegated to him. He was to govern the colony or city.

Our translation picks up on the two primary aspects of this word.

Serving – The idea here is the elders are serving God. They are under the authority of God. They are not ruling as a king whose word was law, but as a governor accountable to the king. The elders govern *under God's authority*.

Overseeing – The elders do govern God's community, the congregation. They are to teach, apply and implement God's Word in an authoritative way. Elders do have authority – it is a delegated and mediated authority, but it is still to be submitted to.

Therefore, we refer to eldership *governance* and not to elder *rule*. Elder rule has come to stand for an oversight that is absolute and often, tyrannical. The rule of the church is the

Word of God. The governing of the church is given to the elders under the Word.

Its Contrasted Problems (v.2b-3)

Do you ever think that the church in Bible days was very different from our day? It was in many ways, but in many others, it is no different. The passion of the elders for the glory of God will require them to deal some real problem areas for leadership.

Reluctance

The wording is a bit difficult. Does it mean that elders are not to be compelled to serve, but must come forward voluntarily? Or, does it mean that the elder does not view ministry as something he has to do, but as something he wants to do because it is God's will? Maybe both. This phrase is modifying the verb *be shepherds*.

Materialism and Professionalism

Peter simply says what is to be true of Christians generally and certainly of its elders. We cannot serve money; we must be serving God. Simplicity and frugality ought to mark the life and ministry of all elders, but particularly vocational elders. Peter seems to have in mind here those elders whose living is supplied by the church. We call them vocational or staff elders. One must not become an elder just so that one has a way of making a living.

Tyranny

The kind of tyranny in view here is that of a leadership that requires of the congregation what it itself does not do. It creates two classes, lords and servants. It is the self-view of leadership that is evident in most dictatorships. The lifestyles and levels of sacrifice are totally different. Godly leadership sets the example by requiring of itself what is required of the church.

The second aspect has to do with the way the elders govern. There is to be a sense that the flock is entrusted to the elders and that there is an accountability to God in the manner and methods used. Jesus clearly told the disciples that the church is not to be governed like the world using its principles and methods. This means that the elders must not abuse or that the church must not ignore their authority.

Its Heavenward Motivations (v.4)

A godly eldership with a passion for the glory of Christ will be driven by two great motivations.

The Supremacy of our Chief Shepherd

Elders who shepherd and govern well do so under Christ. We recognize Him as our Chief Shepherd, the pastor of the church. He is supreme and preeminent. We exist and minister for Him. We look to Him as our Divine pattern. And we bow to Him as our final authority. This is why I am not called “the pastor”. I know that people mean well. But I am a shepherd of this church along with the other elders. Jesus Christ is the Chief Shepherd.

The Satisfaction of the Glorious Reward

Elders who shepherd and govern well do so for a heavenly crown. Earthly applause and recognition is short, feeble and fickle. But to have served well and bow before Christ so that my faithfulness brings Him honor and pleasure makes the struggle worth it all.

If elders are to lead, govern, shepherd and oversee the church, what then is the responsibility of the flock?

Its Humble Submitting (v.5-7)

In the light of the shepherding and governing of elders, Peter encourages the church in its submitting to one another and to its leadership.

⁵ 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.” ⁶ Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, ⁷ casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.

Commanded Expression (v.5a)

The command is introduced by the word *likewise*. In the same way that elders are submitting to God and the church submits to elders, then younger people (it is a comparative) are to be put under submission (passive voice) to the elders (those governing the church). Many have commented that younger people often struggle with submission. Those who have been trained to submit and support the elders will generally do so through their Christian lives.

Required Attitude (v.5b)

He moves from the small group he has been addressing to the congregation. We are to be clothed in humility toward one another, not as a covering over our pride, but as attractive grace that supports relationships. Without humility to one another, younger Christians will not submit to older Christians, the church will not submit to elders and elders will not submit to God.

Peter argues this from Proverbs 3:34. We are to humble ourselves before God and in our relationships. Otherwise, God will oppose us. Pride calls forth from God personal and powerful opposition. What happens when God is against us?

Can we win? Or God will give us grace. Grace is needed to be humble. But if we are not humble, we will not be given grace for anything else. Do you long for the enabling and sustaining grace of God so much that you will humble yourself?

Expectant Purpose (v.6)

Humbling yourself requires that you believe in an obeying way two important truths.

The humility and submission of verse 5 flows out of understanding God's power, His authority over you. You can humbly submit because you have bowed your will and heart to the power of God. When we submit to God, submitting to the authorities God has placed over us is much easier.

If you submit to God, then His power will work in His providence to bring honor when it is the proper time. All of this is a simple trust in God. Do you trust God enough to submit yourself under His mighty hand? Do you really think that He has the power to work out His purposes and fulfill His promises?

Relieved Worry (v.7)

In this context, the anxiety and worry is about all the possibilities if we do humbly submit. When we humbly submit to those who are older, to one another, to the elders and to God, we feel (and actually are) very vulnerable.

This worry is ended by a trusting commitment. There must be a decisive throwing of your anxiety and worry and care on Christ. And you must leave it there. Too many are taking our burdens to Jesus and then hauling them away.

This commitment is motivated by theological reflection. Big words to say something simple: “God cares for me.” I will give all my anxieties and worries about what may happen if I humble myself and submit myself to God because I trust His character and His care for me. I will reflect and think and be transformed by the character of God.

Ah, how blessed we are to have these two paragraphs engrafted into our lives. Shepherds lovingly guiding and guarding the sheep through teaching. Sheep humbly and prayerfully submitting while trusting God.

Its Submissive Obedience (Hebrews 13:17)

¹⁷ Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.

There are three commands that are given as part of following spiritual leadership. Two were given in reference to their own elders and one in reference to the author.

Obey your leaders

The word is usually translated by the words *be persuaded* or *be confident*. The verb here is an imperative or a command in the passive voice. We are being commanded “to be persuaded” by our spiritual leaders. The author of Hebrews uses the same word in 11:8 and in 5:9. It is significant that every translation I have in English and in German and Spanish translates this word by “obey.” Therefore I am persuaded to obey my spiritual leaders.

Submit to their authority

This phrase is one word in the Greek. Most translations make it “submit” and then add “to them” for clarity. The word means “to put oneself under another.” In the

battlefield, it meant to withdraw or surrender. It is an imperative or command in the active voice. Therefore, we put ourselves under the authority of our spiritual leaders. Both words are colored by the idea of conflict and disagreement. It seems to me that what they are being commanded to do is to be persuaded by their spiritual leaders and to surrender or withdraw from conflict with them. Now we know that sinning elders are to be dealt with (1 Timothy 5:19-20). Elders are to be open to the counsel and opinions of those in the congregation. And the congregation is to not stubbornly resist the spiritual leaders.

What is to motivate us to obey and submit?

The elders are responsible to give an account to God for you. We are like soldiers on the night watch. We carefully stay alert because we will give a report to the commander.

This makes shepherding a joy and not a burden. There is no joy like seeing children progressing growing up in humble submission. And there is no grief like a rebellious, stubborn son who resists and will not bend his will.

This makes the ministry profitable to you. Sometimes the usefulness of ministry fails because of failure in the elder or elders. Sometimes the ministry is without profit because of the people.

Its Practical Application

How we work this out at the Chapel

Becoming an Elder

How does one become an elder at the Chapel?

Disciplined onto the Eldership

The Flock Elder disciplines men who become elders. It is a process of growing as a godly man. The process also includes taking the Counseling Training Course, doing at least one Bible Study Workshop, and reading some key books to develop deeper and wider theological acumen. The prospective elder will also go through the elders handbook which is organized as a study guide.

Examined for Qualifications

There are formal steps where a prospective elder is examined for his qualifications. These include a self-examination worksheet drawn from most of the New Testament texts on eldership, current issues exam, doctrinal affirmation. There is a personal interview with the elders leading to a call or not.

Appointed by Ordination

After a two week period for the congregation to discuss any issues with the prospective elder, then the man is ordained into the Eldership at the Chapel in a public morning gathering.

Plurality & Parity

One of our most important distinctives is our commitment to plurality and parity.

The Elders as a Body

First, we believe in plurality. There are to be more than one elder/pastor/overseer. All through the New Testament, the language is elders, plural, of the church, singular.

The elders are all equal. None have greater authority. We have no senior pastor, no lead pastor. There is varying experience, gifts, abilities, perspectives that yield various

levels of leadership. But, at the end of the day, each elder submits to the Elder body and each elder has one, and only one, vote.

The elders govern as a body. No single elder governs the whole church. In this respect, I am not the senior pastor. I serve at the pleasure of the elders. I serve under other elders when serving in their ministries. Elders serve under me only in the ministries that are assigned to me.

Principles of Unanimity

In our decision making, we operate on a principle of unanimity. Since we are operating in the field of wisdom, we are seeking peace and harmony while accepting and affirming diversity of perspectives and values. On each decision, we want all to vote yes. If there is one who simply cannot vote yes, he is invited to enter his objection into the record but then, as one who is in submission to the Elder Body, votes yes. The exception to this is in doctrinal issues, statements, etc. Then, we must keep writing, thinking, discussing until we have it written in a way that all can affirm with a clear conscience.

Officers and Why...

We do have officers on the elders: chairman, vice-chairman and secretary/clerk. These three serve as the trustees. They have a role on the eldership. Chair and vice-chair are responsible to lead the meetings and the secretary to maintain notes and minutes of the meetings. All of this required by law of a church which is incorporated.

Elders as Pastors

Shepherding people and the church as our primary responsibility. A man serving as an elder is required to shepherd people and will be a pastor of a Flock. He may serve with another elder, but, all elders will shepherd people. Anyone

aspiring to the eldership must want to shepherd people. There is no one on the eldership having an exclusive preaching, teaching, or administrative role.

All elders are pastors, shepherds. We do not distinguish elders as non-staff and pastors as staff. We do not use the title “Pastor” to distinguish staff or vocationally supported elders from others. We are all elders. We are all pastors. All elders are called “Pastor... ” and their first name.

Elders as Teachers

All elders must be able to teach. Some elders will have the gift of teaching. We expect that elders will be studying, thinking, growing, developing, cultivating their understanding of the Word and their communication of the Word. We believe that teaching is the heart of the church ministry. We teach things into existence even among ourselves as elders.

Elders as Overseers (Administration)

The elders as a body govern or administrate the church. This is the corporate aspect of oversight. At present, all elders participate in this general oversight. Anything that is “whole church” is overseen by the Elders. This includes approving budget, Ministry Organizing Documents, doctrinal and theological issues, mission and vision, church organizing documents, public stances on Biblical or cultural issues, approving elders, deacons, ministry leaders and teachers, as well as ministries which are not overseen by an elder or elders. All elders are involved in the decision to exercise church discipline.

As able and willing, elders may be asked and assigned to oversee a ministry. This is not the elder’s “job description.” Elders do not have job descriptions. They have roles serving among the Elder body and over the ministries they lead. Startup ministries and some other ministries require an elder

to be involved in with the work that ministry does. Most do not. To understand how this works, you need to understand how ministries work:

All (most?) ministries at the Chapel have a Ministry Organizing Document (MOD). This is approved by the Elders Body and shapes the ministry.

An elder assigned to a lead a ministry is to do so within the scope of the MOD. He may not operate outside of the MOD, cannot change the MOD himself, but may submit requests for change to the Elders.

Ministry Teams then carry out the work of that ministry. There are rare exceptions to this, but the aim is for teams to lead and do the day-to-day work of the ministry. Most ministry teams have one or more deacons (male or female) who lead and direct the team. That deacon(s) report to the elder over the ministry and are to carry out the ministry under the elder's direction and within the scope of the MOD.

Elders as Preachers

As elders have interest, ability, and time, they will have pulpit opportunities. The pulpit is not reserved for those who have the preaching or prophetic enablement. While that is desired of the elder overseeing the pulpit ministry, elders will have the opportunity to preach, mostly in a series but sometimes when they design and deploy a series.

Elders as Staff

Unlike many churches, we have chosen to not emphasize having staff pastors who do the ministry. We believe that the ministry should primarily be done by the people. We financially support elders upon the elder's request, the need is evident, and the Elders approve. Through most of the Chapel's history, staff elders have come from inside the eldership.

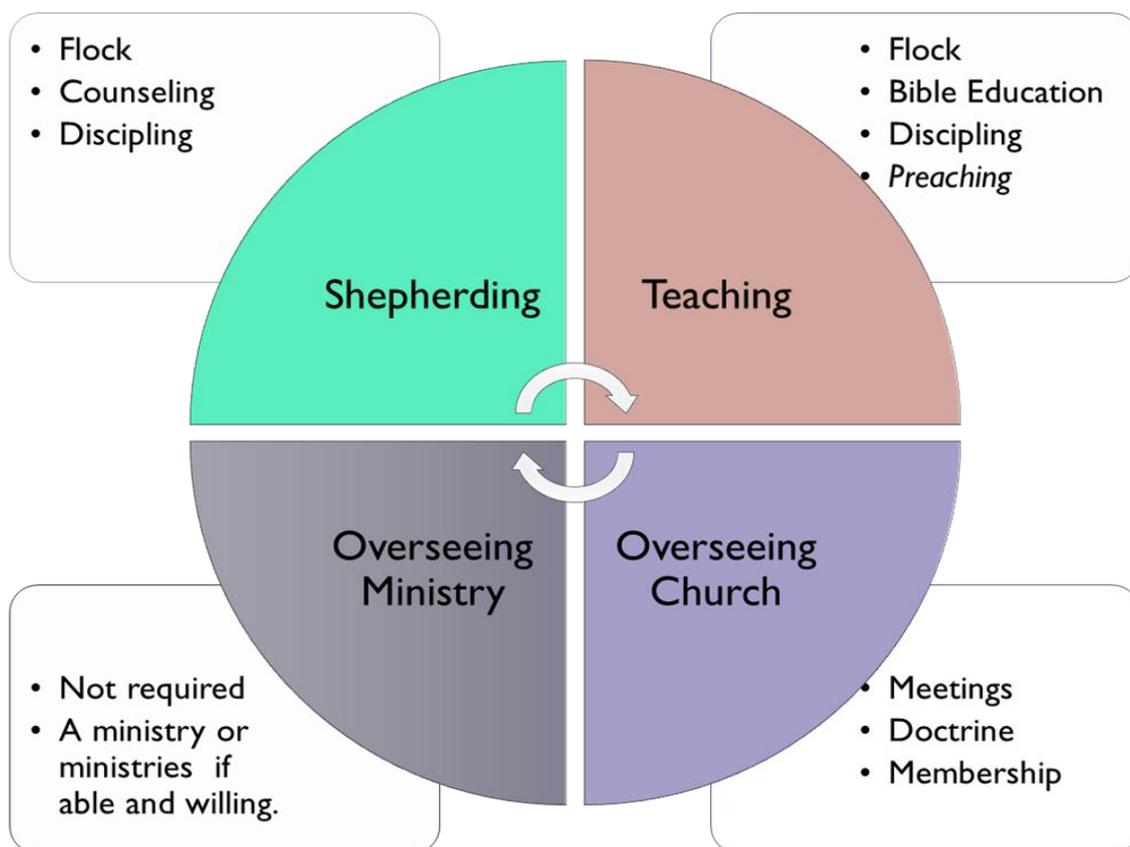
Only with an intern elder, partially supported, was he hired from outside the Chapel. This does not mean that we would not, but our commitment is raise up elders from ourselves and to vocationally support them as we can.

Because of what we believe and how we deploy the eldership, hiring someone outside the church would be difficult. After all, how many New Covenant, doctrines of grace, post-tribulation, plurality and parity, Biblical Counseling, elder-qualified, Way of wisdom, reject the idea of a call to ministry, men outside the Chapel who are not presently vocational pastors, do you know?

Its Deployed Ministry

I offer these graphics as we wrap up.

Eldership Roles and Responsibilities



Current Elders and their Assignments

Tim Rech

- Springboro Flock
- Missions
- Chairman of the Elders

Dale Evans

- Bellbrook Flock
- Children's Ministries
- Vice-Chair of the Elders

Tim Nixon

- Kettermont Flock
- Counseling
- Outreach
- Clerk of the Elders

Jason Brodehl

- Franklin-West Carrolton Flock
- Youth Ministries

Jon Daiello

- Centerville Flock
- Men's Ministries

Russ Kennedy

- Centerville Flock
- Pulpit
- Worship
- Campus

Summary

Please pray for us...

Support your Flock Elder/Pastor...

Be poised to hear and heed your Elders...

Bring your concerns to the elder of that ministry...

Grant us grace even as we seek wisdom from God...