



**First Bible Church**

DECATUR ♦ MADISON

# **The Difference Between Elders *and* Pastors**

GLORIFYING GOD BY  
HELPING PEOPLE  
KNOW, LOVE, OBEY  
AND EXALT  
JESUS CHRIST



## The Difference Between Elders and Pastors at First Bible Church

Position Statement

Approved by Board of Elders on August 4, 2004

### Biblical Considerations

1. The “Elder Board” and the Staff Pastors at First Bible Church are required to meet the same Biblical qualifications of 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. They are equally qualified. This has been our practice because of common sense and constitutional requirements (Article 5, Section 2; Article 5, Section 4, “Full Time Staff”).
2. The terms “pastor” and “elder” are interchangeable in the New Testament.

*Acts 20:17,28 From Miletus, Paul sent to Ephesus for the elders of the church...Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds (pastors) of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.*

3. Scripture seems to differentiate between two kinds of elders: Ruling Elders and Teaching Elders

*1Tim. 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.*

### Historical Considerations

John Calvin, 1548: “We may learn from this that there were at that time two kinds of elders; for all were not ordained to teach. The words plainly mean, that there were some who “ruled well” and honorably, but who did not hold the office of teachers. And, indeed, there were chosen from among the people men of worth and of good character, who, united with the pastors in a common council and authority, administered the discipline of the church, and were a kind of censors for the correction of morals. Ambrose complains that this custom had gone into disuse, through the carelessness, or rather through the pride, of the doctors, who wish to possess undivided power”. (Commentary on 1 Timothy 5:17).

Samuel Miller, 1843: “...at the period in which it is written, there were two kinds of elders, one whose duty it was to labor in the word and doctrine, and another who did not thus labor, but only ruled in the church. The apostle declares that elders who rule well are worthy of double honor, but ESPECIALLY, those who labor in the word and doctrine. Now if we suppose that there was only one class of elders then in the church, and that they were all teachers, or laborers in the word and doctrine, we make the inspired apostle speak in a manner utterly unworthy of his high character. There was, therefore, a class of elders in the apostolic church who did not, in fact, or at any rate, ordinarily, preach, or administer sacraments, but assisted in government—in other words, Ruling Elders” (*The Ruling Elder*, 72,73)

Wayne Grudem, 1994: “Here Paul seems to imply there is a special group of elders who “labor in preaching and teaching.” This means at least that there are some among the elders who give more time to the activities of preaching and teaching, and may even mean that there are some who “labor” in the sense of earning a living from that preaching and teaching. (*Systematic Theology*, 915)

## Observations

1. Each seems to be an office filled by men who are gifted for the task:

Eph. 4:11 *It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be **pastors and teachers**,*

*1Cor. 12:28 And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third **teachers**, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of **administration**, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues.*

Rom. 12:8 *if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; **if it is leadership, let him govern diligently**; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.*

2. The term “Elder Board” is not used in the Scripture. “Board” is borrowed from the American business model. The word “elder” is borrowed from the Jewish Model in the Old Testament. The word used in the Scripture is not “Board” but “Council”.

*Ps. 107:32 Let them exalt him in the assembly of the people and praise him in the council of the elders.*

*Luke 22:66 At daybreak the council of the elders of the people, both the chief priests and teachers of the law, met together, and Jesus was led before them.*

3. Summary: It seems the Teaching Elders focus on shepherding and nourishing the people by *teaching the church* (preaching, teaching, instruction). The Ruling Elders focus on shepherding the people by *governing the church* (organizing the church, supervising, administrating, casting vision, praying for the church, enforcing the law, protecting the peace, and carrying out church discipline).

The Ruling Elders undoubtedly lean heavily on the counsel of the Teaching Elders in matters of doctrine, theology, discipleship, and pastoral care. The Teaching Elders lean heavily on the counsel of the Ruling Elders in matters of administration, organization, direction-setting, as well as formative and corrective church discipline.

There will be some necessary overlap (Ruling Elders must be able to teach and Teaching Elders must be able to lead and govern), but they will focus on their main functions.

## Practical Reasons For These Two Classes of Elders To Meet Monthly

1. To nurture a strong sense of camaraderie or teamwork between the Elders and Staff. By frequent joint meetings the Ruling Elders are in a better position both to encourage the staff pastors and, if necessary, admonish them.
2. Without meeting together, the Senior Pastor becomes responsible to communicate information from Elders to Staff and from Staff to Elders. Opinions could be formed almost solely on the Senior Pastor’s evaluations. By a joint council, this duty is largely eliminated, the Senior Pastor’s administrative burdens are lightened, and it creates an environment where Elders and Staff feel a freedom to approach one another directly.

3. One of the functions of the Ruling Elders is to maintain a brotherly accountability relationship with the Teaching Elders. For that reason, the Ruling Elders (except the Senior Pastor) are unpaid. This frees them to give unbiased oversight of the time and money management of the Teaching Elders (who are paid). This is one of the duties of their office, which they were elected by the members to do. A closer relationship between Ruling Elders (Elders) and Teaching Elders (Pastoral Staff) makes this accountability relationship more probable.
4. Most of the shepherding duties of the Elders and Staff Pastors overlap. Yet without monthly meetings together, there would be little communication between elders and staff. The result would be duplication in some cases and neglect in others. The church of God would not be shepherded as it ought.
5. Joint monthly meetings provides time to pray, plan, discuss, and dream together throughout the year.
6. The Ruling Elders, by virtue of age and experience, would be a strong asset to the Pastors, especially in administrative areas. Because they are not involved in the daily affairs of the church, they can be more objective and detached in their observations.
7. The Pastors, by virtue of training and education, would be a strong asset to the Ruling Elders, especially in the areas of one-on-one ministry and pastoral skills. Because the pastors are involved daily in the business of the church and the lives of its members, they have a good sense of the church's current condition.
8. By praying, working, studying, discussing together, there is a sense of ownership among both Elders and Pastors.
9. Though the Elders are charged with charting the course of the ministry and protecting sound doctrine, lack of regular fellowship with the pastors may deprive the Elders of good counsel from the sources who know more about this ministry than anyone in our church: Staff Pastors. (Example: choosing candidates for Elder or Deacon).

### **Specific Issues Addressed**

1. For the sake of convenience and understanding, we will continue to refer to the Ruling Elders as the Elder Board. When the Ruling Elders meet alone, their meetings will be referred to as *Executive Session Meetings*. We will also continue to refer to the Teaching Elders as the Pastoral Staff. When the Teaching Elders meet alone, we will continue to refer to their meetings as *Staff Meetings* (Every Tuesday at 9:00 a.m.). When the Ruling Elders meet with the Teaching Elders in a joint meeting (Second Tuesdays, 6:00 p.m.), this meeting will be referred to as the *Council of Elders*.
2. Ruling Elders are welcome at anytime to sit in on a Staff Meeting.
3. The Staff Pastors, excluding the Senior Pastor, will be *non-voting* members of the Council of Elders. Therefore, no constitutional change is required.
4. The Staff Pastors will continue to meet weekly at 9:00 on Tuesday mornings to manage the church's schedule, conduct daily operations, and pray for the needs of the church.

5. Throughout the year, discussion of some agenda items would not be appropriate for the Pastoral Staff participation. The two most obvious are: 1) staff performance evaluations; 2) staff salaries. These are largely seasonal issues. Executive Sessions can be called by the Chairman of Elders at any time as needed.
6. Often, it will be most convenient for the Council of Elders to be followed immediately by a meeting of the Executive Session. The Pastoral Staff will be excused to leave after the Council of Elders and prior to the Executive Session.
7. The Senior Pastor, who serves both as a Ruling Elder and Teaching Elder, will maintain his position of authority in daily managing of the Pastoral Staff. The Pastoral Staff will continue to report directly to the Senior Pastor.
8. The Chairman of the Elder Board and Senior Pastor will prepare the Agenda for the Council of Elders. Any member of the Council of Elders can request to have an item placed on the agenda. These requests need to be made to the Chairman or the Senior Pastor before 4:00 p.m. on the Thursday before the second Tuesday.