

# Church Governance by a Plurality of Biblically Qualified Elders

{Submission of congregants to the Elders of their home church}

A faithful reading of the Holy Scriptures gives us a clear understanding of the form of government which is to rule the local church. That form of government is a plurality of biblically qualified Elders. Congregants are to be submitted to the Elders of their home church. The Bible requires that we practice true submission to the plurality of biblically qualified Elders, which God has placed over us, at our home church. The true submission that God requires of us is to be wholeheartedly and joyfully in submission to them.

By the leading of His Holy Spirit, under the written direction of the Holy Scriptures, God leads us to the specific local assembly with which He desires that we would **voluntarily** associate with, in a committed, long term relationship, in fulfillment of the **commandment that requires** us to assemble for corporate worship. One biblically very important criterion for selecting a home church is that it be governed by a plurality of biblically qualified Elders.

Biblical submission to Elders is not merely a proposition by proposition consideration of each perception, understanding and direction of our Elders, against **our own** understanding of the Scriptures. It is actually much more than that. In true biblical submission, we do not merely submit to correct propositions, but rather **we submit to people** that God has, in His sovereignty, placed over us. We are commanded to submit to **the Lord Jesus Christ as the First and Most Supreme Person** and, **in our submission to Him**, the authorities He places us under (parents/husbands – in the family, Elders – in the church, governors – in the state, employers – in the workplace, teachers – in the schools and etc.).

**The foundation of true biblical submission is in our being of one mind and of one judgment with Christ regarding all that the Holy Scriptures teach and the direction of the Elders in all matters of the body life at the local church, and thereby the body of Christ is truly unified.**

Our submission to the Elders of our home church takes on a special significance which goes far beyond our submission to all other leaders in all other domains {family (especially as an adult child/wife of an unbeliever), state, workplace, schools and etc.}. God has raised up these particular men (our Elders) as mature, godly and competent (especially in the Scriptures) **believers to watch over our souls**. They are to help us, as God's agents, more fully believe, understand, obey and love God and His Word. We are to take very seriously and be very receptive to their particular structuring/refining/correcting of our thinking about and practice of the Christian faith.

Of course we never render over **absolute lordship** to Elders or any person other than Christ. We are never permitted by God to disobey His will, as revealed in the Bible, in order to obey any leader of any institution, even the ones God established. But our submission to Elders must go far beyond a very limited submission (only in the areas of the absolute core essentials of the Confession of the Church), and must include all of Scripture and all of the areas of the local church's body life. In this submission we recognize God calling us to associate ourselves **voluntarily with a particular church, under a particular set of Elders** to which we are **joyfully submitted**.

God allows us to ask our Elders, respectfully and in good faith, for answers to questions and for reasons for their positions, in order that we may be able to **better understand** and be **more fully submitted to God, Holy Scripture and our Elders**.

If ever such a time comes that our differences become so significant and not resolvable, by reasoning together through the Holy Scriptures, and we reach a point where we are no longer of **the same mind and judgment**, then for the sake of unity, we are to place ourselves under, what is in our opinion, more faithful leadership in another place. We can not merely remain and "**agree to disagree**."

In all of this, we receive and are submitted to God's Lordship and sovereign direction of us.

## **God's Holy Spirit has placed your Elders over you.**

### **Acts 20:28 (NASB95)**

<sup>28</sup> "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.

## **God requires you to obey your Elders.**

### **Hebrews 13:17 (NASB95)**

<sup>17</sup> Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.

## **You are not to speak evil of your rulers.**

### **Exodus 22:28 (NASB95)**

<sup>28</sup> "You shall not curse God, nor curse a ruler of your people.

## **The Elders who rule well are to be honored, especially those who preach and teach.**

### **1 Timothy 5:17-22 (NASB95)**

<sup>17</sup> The elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching. <sup>18</sup> For the Scripture says, "YOU SHALL NOT MUZZLE THE OX WHILE HE IS THRESHING," and "The laborer is worthy of his wages." <sup>19</sup> Do not receive an accusation against an elder except on the basis of two or three witnesses. <sup>20</sup> Those who continue in sin, rebuke in the presence of all, so that the rest also will be fearful of sinning. <sup>21</sup> I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of His chosen angels, to maintain these principles without bias, doing nothing in a spirit of partiality. <sup>22</sup> Do not lay hands upon anyone too hastily and thereby share responsibility for the sins of others; keep yourself free from sin.

## **The church is not to receive accusations against an Elder except on the basis of two or three witnesses.**

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## **God commands younger men to be subject to their Elders and be clothed in humility.**

### **1 Peter 5:1-5 (NASB95)**

<sup>1</sup> Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, <sup>2</sup> shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; <sup>3</sup> nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock. <sup>4</sup> And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. <sup>5</sup> You younger men, likewise, be subject to your elders; and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE.

**Our statement of faith (LBC 1689), adopted February 2011, which congregants have personally affirmed, requires respect of Pastors and Elders. It further requires that all who are admitted to the assembly are under the censure and government of the church.**

**The SBC Constitution as amended by the resolution of February 2011, requires that you continue to believe, acknowledge and practice**

**" . . . that Scripture is sufficient and supreme in its authority over all the affairs of the spiritual life of SBC and the Elders as God's under-shepherds and the final court of appeals for the interpretation and implementation of Scripture in this church body."**