

# **SOUTHWEST ELDERS' CONFERENCE**

NEW TESTAMENT ELDER  
THE MOST IMPORTANT JOB ON EARTH

AUGUST 27-28, 2010  
[WWW.SWEDLERSCONF.COM](http://WWW.SWEDLERSCONF.COM)

TEACHING NOTES  
JAMES G. MCCARTHY

**OPENING MESSAGE**  
**FRIDAY EVENING, 5:00 PM**

*WHY I LIKE THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH*

**1. THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH IS BASED ON THE WORD OF GOD**

“For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles—if indeed you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace which was given to me for you; by revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief. And by referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit”(Ephesians 3:1-5).

**2. THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH IS A PLACE OF WORSHIP**

“And when He had taken some bread and given thanks, He broke it, and gave it to them, saying, “This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me” (Luke 22:19).

**3. THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH IS GOD’S FAMILY**

“Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God; and whoever loves the Father loves the child born of Him” (1 John 5:1).

**4. THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH IS A PLACE OF TRAINING**

“And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:11-13).

**5. THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH IS A PLACE OF SERVICE**

“Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. And there are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all persons. But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good” (1 Corinthians 12:4-7).

**6. THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH IS AT THE CENTER OF CHRIST’S PLAN FOR REACHING THE WORLD**

“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:19-20).

**7. THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH IS CHRIST’S CHURCH**

“Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her; that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she should be holy and blameless” (Ephesians 5:25-27).

**GENERAL SESSION #1**  
**FRIDAY EVENING, 7:00 PM**

*THE LOCAL ASSEMBLY*  
*ITS IMPORTANCE IN THE MIND OF GOD*  
*EPHESIANS 3:8-19*

<sup>8</sup>To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ, <sup>9</sup> and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God, who created all things; <sup>10</sup> in order that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places. <sup>11</sup> This was in accordance with the eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord, <sup>12</sup> in whom we have boldness and confident access through faith in Him.

Ephesians 3:8-12

**1. GOD GAVE PAUL A TWO-FOLD MINISTRY (Ephesians 3:8-9)**

- A. To Preach to the Gentile the Unfathomable Riches of Christ (Ephesians 3:8).
- B. To Bring to Light the Administration of the Mystery of the Church (Ephesians 3:9).

**2. GOD GAVE PAUL A MINISTRY IN KEEPING WITH HIS ETERNAL PURPOSE (Ephesians 3:10-12)**

- A. To Manifest the Manifold Wisdom of God to the Rulers and Authorities in the Heavenly Places (Ephesians 3:10).
- B. To Serve in Accordance with God's Eternal Purpose that He Carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord (Ephesians 3:11).

**3. PAUL'S PRAYER TO THE FATHER FOR THE CHURCH (Ephesians 3:14-19)**

- A. That the Father would Grant You to be Strengthened with Power through His Holy Spirit in the Inner Man (Ephesians 3:16)
- B. That Christ May Dwell in Your Hearts through Faith (Ephesians 3:17)
- C. That You May be Able to Comprehend the Mystery of the Church (Ephesians 3:18)
- D. That You May be Able to Know the Love of Christ (Ephesians 3:19)
- E. That You May be Filled Up to All the Fullness of God (Ephesians 3:19)

**GENERAL SESSION #2**  
**SATURDAY MORNING, 9:20 AM**

*STRUCTURE VS. FREEDOM*  
*THE ELDERSHIP'S RESPONSIBILITY TO OVERSEE*

<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. <sup>29</sup> I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; <sup>30</sup> and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. <sup>31</sup> Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears. <sup>32</sup> And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.

Acts 20:28-32

<b>Commands</b>	Be on guard for yourselves (Acts 20:28a) Be on guard for all the flock (Acts 20:28b) <b>position:</b> among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers <b>purpose:</b> to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood
<b>Reasons</b>	I know that savage wolves will come in (Acts 20:29) <b>time:</b> after my departure <b>position:</b> among you <b>associated circumstance:</b> not sparing the flock  I know that men will arise (Acts 20:30) <b>position:</b> from among your own selves <b>associated circumstance:</b> speaking perverse things <b>purpose:</b> to draw away the disciples after them
<b>Conclusion</b>	Therefore be on the alert <b>manner:</b> remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears (Acts 20:31)
<b>Commendation</b>	And now (Acts 20:32) I commend you to God I commend you to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified

## **Principles for Overseers Shepherding God's Flock Under Grace**

**Elders should teach the difference between law and grace.**

“For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ” (John 1:17).

“For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law, but under grace” (Romans 6:14).

**The tone of the elders' instruction should be gracious, not legalistic.**

### **Law**

“You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor” (Exodus 20:13-16).

“Cursed is he who does not confirm the words of this law by doing them” (Deuteronomy 27:26).

### **Grace**

“Therefore, laying aside falsehood, speak truth, each one of you, with his neighbor, for we are members of one another. Be angry, and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not give the devil an opportunity. Let him who steals steal no longer; but rather let him labor, performing with his own hands what is good, in order that he may have something to share with him who has need” (Ephesians 4:25-28).

### **Law**

“At the end of every third year you shall bring out all the tithe of your produce in that year, and shall deposit it in your town” (Deuteronomy 14:28).

### **Grace**

“Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body” (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

**The elders' goal should be heartfelt obedience to the Lord, not rigid conformity to standards.**

“But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed, and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness” (Romans 6:17-18).

“We have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him” (2 Corinthians 5:9).

“But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith” (1 Timothy 1:5).

“Slaves, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in the sincerity of your heart, as to Christ; not by way of eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart” (Ephesians 6:5-6).

**The elders' goal should be action motivated by love.**

“And David had a craving and said, ‘Oh that someone would give me water to drink from the well of Bethlehem which is by the gate!’ So the three mighty men broke through the camp of the Philistines, and drew water from the well of Bethlehem which was by the gate, and took it and brought it to David. Nevertheless he would not drink it, but poured it out to the Lord; and he said, ‘Be it far from me, O Lord, that I should do this. Shall I drink the blood of the men who went in jeopardy of their lives?’ Therefore he would not drink it. These things the three mighty men did” (2 Samuel 23:15-17).

“For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; and He died for all, that they who live should no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf” (2 Corinthians 5:14-15).

“If I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing” (1 Corinthians 13:2).

**The elders must recognize that grace is a messy business. They must be prepared to tolerate a measure of inconsistency in the flock as believers progress toward mature principled living.**

“Now accept the one who is weak in faith, but not for the purpose of passing judgment on his opinions” (Romans 14:1).

“No one puts new wine into old wineskins; otherwise the new wine will burst the skins, and it will be spilled out, and the skins will be ruined. But new wine must be put into fresh wineskins” (Luke 5:37-38).

**The elders must take charge and lead, maintaining biblical standards and order within the assembly.**

“But let all things be done properly and in an orderly manner” (1 Corinthians 14:40).

“I write so that you may know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth” (1 Timothy 3:15).

“Teach and preach these principles” (1 Timothy 6:2).

“These things speak and exhort and reprove with all authority. Let no one disregard you” (Titus 2:15).

## **Summary**

New Testament Christianity thrives in an environment in which elders exhibit grace and emphasize heartfelt love for God and His people while maintaining biblical standards of godly conduct and order.

*PRINCIPLES OF CONSENSUS DECISION-MAKING*

DECISION MAKING IN THE  
NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH

**Elders must be men committed to the Lordship of Christ**

**Luke 6:46**

And why do you call Me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?

**1 Corinthians 2:14-16**

But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised. But he who is spiritual appraises all things, yet he himself is appraised by no man. For who has known the mind of the Lord, that he should instruct Him? But we have the mind of Christ.

**Elders must be men committed to the unity of the eldership and the church.**

**1 Corinthians 1:10**

Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree, and there be no divisions among you, but you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment.

**Elders must be men of godly character, able to serve Christ in conjunction with other elders.**

**1 Timothy 3:1-7**

It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do. An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not addicted to wine or pugnacious, but gentle, uncontentious, free from the love of money. He must be one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity (but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?); and not a new convert, lest he become conceited and fall into the condemnation incurred by the devil. And he must have a good reputation with those outside the church, so that he may not fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.

**Titus 1:5-9**

For this reason I left you in Crete, that you might set in order what remains, and appoint elders in every city as I directed you, namely, if any man be above reproach, the husband of one wife, having children who believe, not accused of dissipation or rebellion. For the overseer must be above reproach as God's steward, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not addicted to wine, not pugnacious, not fond of sordid gain, but hospitable, loving what is good, sensible, just, devout, self-controlled, holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, that he may be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict.

**Elders must be men who know how to make decisions in a godly manner.**

### **Example from the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15:1-32)**

#### **I. The Problem—Christian leaders disagreed on the relationship of Gentile believers to Jewish Law.**

“And some men came down from Judea and *began* teaching the brethren, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.” And when Paul and Barnabas had great dissension and debate with them, . . .” (Acts 15:1-2a).

#### **II. The Solution**

##### **A. The elders in Antioch sent Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem to discuss the problem with the apostles and elders.**

“. . . *the brethren* determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them should go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders concerning this issue” (Acts 15:2b).

##### **B. Paul and Barnabas presented the problem to the church, apostles, and elders.**

“Therefore, being sent on their way by the church, they were passing through both Phoenicia and Samaria, describing in detail the conversion of the Gentiles, and were bringing great joy to all the brethren. And when they arrived at Jerusalem, they were received by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they reported all that God had done with them” (Acts 15:3-4).

##### **C. Christian Pharisees insisted on Gentile compliance to the Law of Moses.**

“But certain ones of the sect of the Pharisees who had believed, stood up, saying, ‘It is necessary to circumcise them, and to direct them to observe the Law of Moses’” (Acts 15:5).

##### **D. The apostles and elders investigated and debated the matter.**

“And the apostles and the elders came together to look into this matter. And after there had been much debate . . .” (Acts 15:6-7a).

##### **E. Peter argued against Gentiles being obliged to obey the Law of Moses.**

“. . . Peter stood up and said to them, ‘Brethren, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. And God, who knows the heart, bore witness to them, giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He also did to us; and He made no distinction between us and them, cleansing their hearts by faith. Now therefore why do you put God to the test by placing upon the neck of the disciples a yoke which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? But we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as they also are’” (Acts 15:7b-11).

##### **F. Barnabas and Paul spoke of God’s work among the Gentiles.**

“And all the multitude kept silent, and they were listening to Barnabas and Paul as they were relating what signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles” (Acts 15:12).

## **G. James facilitated a decision.**

### **1) James summarized Peter's statement.**

“And after they had stopped speaking, James answered, saying, ‘Brethren, listen to me. Simeon has related how God first concerned Himself about taking from among the Gentiles a people for His name.’” (Acts 15:13-14).

### **2) James correlated Peter's statement to Amos 9:11-12.**

“And with this the words of the Prophets agree, just as it is written, “After these things I will return, And I will rebuild the tabernacle of David which has fallen, And I will rebuild its ruins, And I will restore it, In order that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord, And all the Gentiles who are called by My name,” Says the Lord, who makes these things known from of old” (Acts 15:15-18).

### **3) James proposed a solution.**

#### **a) The Gentiles should not be required to obey Jewish Law.**

“Therefore it is my judgment that we do not trouble those who are turning to God from among the Gentiles . . .” (Acts 15:19).

#### **b) A letter should be sent to the Gentiles instructing them to abstain from four practices that were offensive to Jews.**

“. . . but that we write to them that they abstain from things contaminated by idols and from fornication and from what is strangled and from blood. For Moses from ancient generations has in every city those who preach him, since he is read in the synagogues every Sabbath” (Acts 15:20-21).

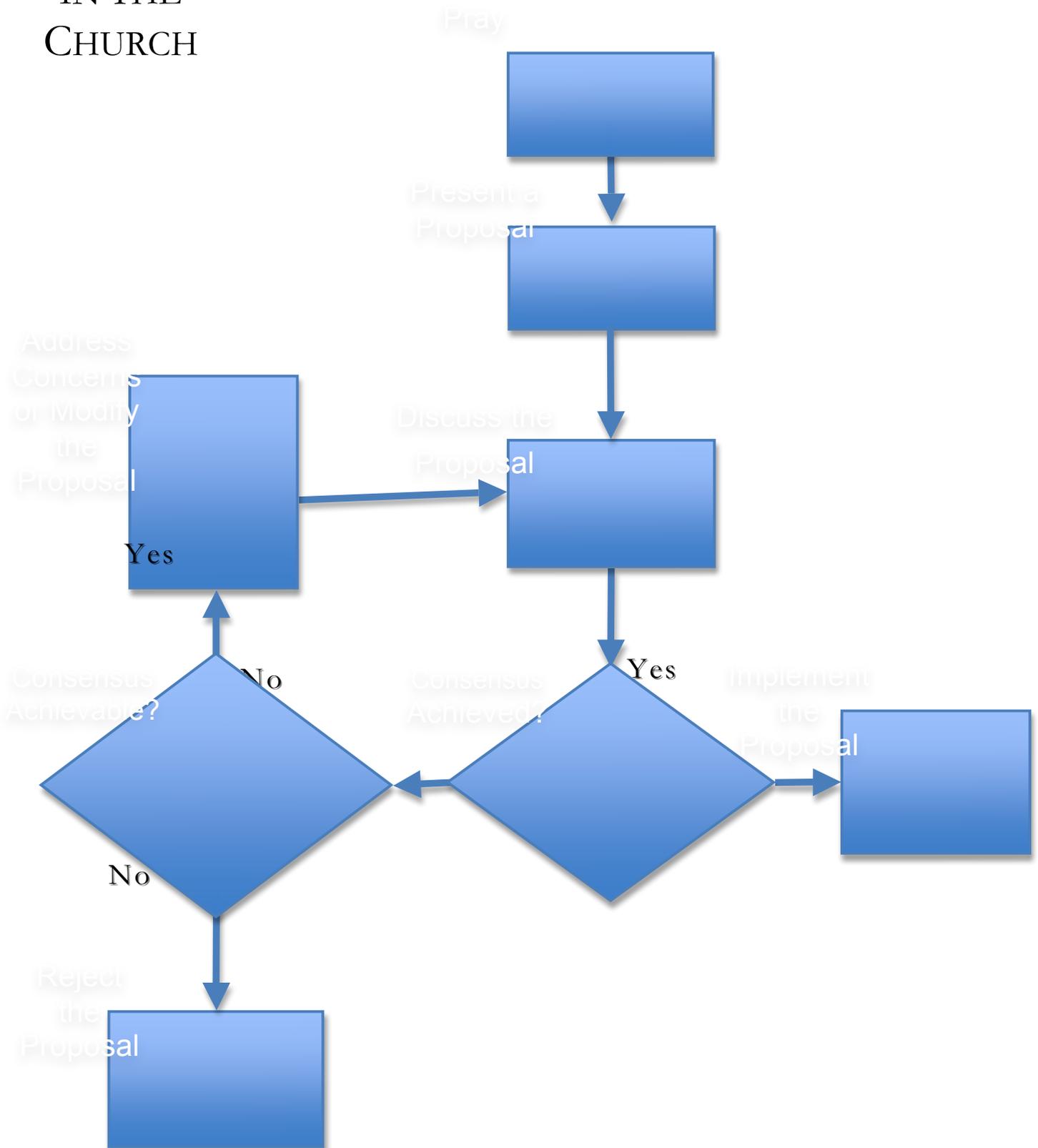
## **H. The apostles, elders, and whole church agreed to send men and a letter to Antioch.**

“Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men from among them to send to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas—Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas, leading men among the brethren, and they sent this letter by them, “The apostles and the brethren who are elders, to the brethren in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia who are from the Gentiles, greetings. “Since we have heard that some of our number to whom we gave no instruction have disturbed you with *their* words, unsettling your souls, it seemed good to us, having become of one mind, to select men to send to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. “Therefore we have sent Judas and Silas, who themselves will also report the same things by word *of mouth*. “For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these essentials: that you abstain from things sacrificed to idols and from blood and from things strangled and from fornication; if you keep yourselves free from such things, you will do well. Farewell” (Acts 15:22-29).

## **III. The Result: The Christians in Antioch rejoiced.**

“So, when they were sent away, they went down to Antioch; and having gathered the congregation together, they delivered the letter. And when they had read it, they rejoiced because of its encouragement. And Judas and Silas, also being prophets themselves, encouraged and strengthened the brethren with a lengthy message” (Acts 15:30-32).

# CONSENSUS DECISION-MAKING IN THE CHURCH



## PRINCIPLES OF CONSENSUS DECISION-MAKING IN THE CHURCH

- Elders must take adequate time to understand the issues related to a pending decision, bring it before God in prayer, receive direction from the Lord, and reach an agreement (Psalm 40:1; Proverbs 3:5-6; James 1:5). This may include getting advice from others in the assembly (Proverbs 15:22).
- Elders must commit to work toward an agreement and to avoid speech that is disrespectful or adversarial (1 Corinthians 1:10; Philippians 2:1-4).
- Elders must put aside their personal preferences and consider the needs of the church as a whole (1 Corinthians 12:12-14).
- Elders should give greater weight to the opinions of those who have much at stake in a decision or who will carry the burden of executing a decision (Ephesians 4:2-3).
- Elders should give greater weight to the opinion of those who have more expertise in a matter than those lacking such expertise (Philippians 2:3).
- Elders who do not have a strong sense of God's leading in a matter or who do not understand it well should defer to those who do (Proverbs 11:14).
- Before making a decision, all elders should have an opportunity to speak and to be heard. They should listen to one another and weigh the pros and cons together. They should decide on the course of action that best meets the biblical principles and priorities that God has set forth for the church. Ultimately, this is *to do the will of God* (Ephesians 6:6).
- Ideally, all elders will be in full agreement with a particular course of action. Sometimes this is difficult to achieve. If unable to reach a unanimous, unqualified agreement, it is acceptable that all *consent* to a particular course of action. This means that though an individual elder would prefer one course of action, he is willing to go along with an alternate course of action.
- If after much discussion, an elder not only disagrees with a proposal but objects to it, he is responsible to clearly express his opposition. Under such circumstances, no consensus has been reached and the proposal has failed.
- If the elders cannot form a consensus, they should delay making a decision to provide more time for prayer, study, and consultation. If a consensus cannot be formed, elders should take the course of action that requires the least amount of change. Usually this means to do nothing new or different.
- Though the elders may invite the deacons or other saints to discuss a matter with them or advise them, the elders nonetheless maintain the right of making the final decision (1 Peter 5:1-4; Hebrews 13:17).
- Once the elders have formed a consensus and have made a decision, each elder must support the decision before the church as one man. They should avoid any expression of disunity or lack of support for the decision (1 Corinthians 1:10; James 5:12).
- Those saints who disagree with a decision of the elders can take solace in the fact that they are not personally responsible for the decision or its outcome. The Lord will hold the elders responsible for the decision, not the congregation (Hebrews 13:17).

## QUESTIONS THE ELDER CHAIRMAN MIGHT ASK TO HELP THE ELDERS TO FORM A CONSENSUS

- Has everyone had an opportunity to speak and to be heard?
- Does everyone feel that the group understands your position?
- Do we need more time to think or pray about this decision?
- Are there any other Scriptures that might help us with this decision?
- Those of you who are opposed to this proposal, is there any way in which we might modify it, so that you could support it?
- Does anyone have additional information that we should consider before making a decision?
- Are we ready to make a decision?
- Those of you who have expressed concerns about this proposal, are you now willing to support it?
- Is every one in favor of going ahead with this proposal?

## USEFUL DEVICES TO HELP FORM A CONSENSUS WHEN HAVING DIFFICULTY COMMUNICATING

	<b>agreement</b>	<b>concern</b>	<b>opposition</b>
<b>colored cards</b>	green	yellow	red
<b>hand signals</b>	wiggling fingers	time-out signal	fist
<b>thumb signals</b>	thumb-up	thumb-sideways	thumb-down

**BALANCING AN ELDER’S RESPONSIBILITY TO LEAD AS  
A MEMBER OF A TEAM WITH HIS RESPONSIBILITY TO LEAD AS AN INDIVIDUAL**

<b>An Elder’s <i>Normal</i> Stance Leading as a Team Member</b>	<b>An Elder’s <i>Exceptional</i> Stance Leading as an Individual</b>
Discerning the Holy Spirit’s guidance through the elders as a group.	Discerning the Holy Spirit’s guidance as an individual.
Deferring to others who have more knowledge about an issue, who are more experienced, or who are more directly involved in a matter.	Asserting one’s judgment in a matter when an elder believes he understands it better than the other elders.
Saying little or granting tacit approval when the matter is not very important to an elder or it does not directly affect the ministries in which he is serving.	Speaking up when something is important to an elder or directly involves his ministry.
Communicating one’s reasons for a position in objective terms that all can understand and evaluate.	Communicating one’s subjective leading for a position that probably only he will be able to appreciate.
Joining the elders in forming a consensus that together they might make timely decisions.	Standing alone when convinced that the other elders are wrong about an important decision.
Working to find creative solutions and principled compromises when divided.	Clearly communicating when he is unwilling to support a decision, exercising his veto power.

Maintaining the balance between acting as a team member and acting as an individual can be difficult. Elders need to be sensitive to the viewpoint of an elder who is standing alone, recognizing that sometimes the individual is right and the group is wrong. Scripture records many such examples, including Noah, the prophets, and the Lord Jesus. At the same time, elders must recognize that the Lord normally leads through the eldership as a group. “In abundance of counselors there is victory” (Proverbs 11:14).

Elders must take corrective action when an elder’s exceptional stance becomes his normal stance: regularly acting in an independent manner, blocking all progress, or leading with an attitude of superiority and self-importance. Diotrephes, is one such example (3 John 1:9).

## **SAMPLE**

### **Elders' Mission Statement**

As elders we shall glorify God and show our love for Him by shepherding the flock of God among us, exercising oversight (John 21:15-17; 1 Peter 5:1-5). We shall proclaim the gospel and defend the truth (Matthew 28:19-20; Titus 1:9-11). We shall provide for “the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ” (Ephesians 4:12). We shall be on guard for ourselves and for all the flock for which the Holy Spirit has made us overseers, knowing that one day we shall give an account to the Chief Shepherd (Acts 20:17-35; Hebrews 13:17). We recognize this is a high calling, requiring men with godly character full of the Spirit and wisdom (1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9). By God’s grace we shall be those men.

### **Elders' Commitment**

To take a spiritual approach to ministry, serving in reliance upon God. In all that we do, we shall seek His wisdom and His ways both in our conduct and ministry.

To never bring discredit to our office. Should we fail in this commitment, we shall bring the matter to the attention of our fellow elders, not waiting until our failure has been discovered by others.

To personally care for the saints, knowing that our calling as an elder is not that of one who simply sits on a board and makes decisions.

To be a servant-leader, never lording our position over the flock, but being an example to all.

To not allow our secular employment or ministry outside the local church to keep us from our responsibilities as elders.

To take the time to minister to those that we have asked to serve with us in ministry, keeping the needs of our team as a higher priority than the needs of the tasks before us.

To be accountable to our fellow elders in our service, accepting their counsel and criticism.

To seek to form a consensus with our fellow elders on matters under discussion that we might serve in unity. We will yield to those who have a greater knowledge of a matter or who will be more closely involved in its execution. We will not take offense when things are not done our way. Neither will we work in opposition to a decision once it has been made.

To support the doctrinal position of the elders as a whole, never promoting a contrary teaching in the assembly. If in the course of time we are no longer be able to do this, we will step down from the eldership rather than cause division in the assembly.

To respect our fellow elders by respecting their time. We will consistently attend the meetings of the elders and inform them in advance of known absences. We will arrive on time and come fully prepared.

To take full responsibility to accomplish that which we commit to do. We will adhere to a “no excuse policy.” When matters outside our control prevent us from fulfilling our responsibilities, we will promptly take steps to ensure that our responsibilities are covered by others and that our fellow elders are informed. We will execute our responsibilities in a timely manner, including responding to phone calls, email letters, and text messages.

To guard the confidentiality of the work of the elders, not discussing with others any matter of a sensitive nature or matters that are scheduled to be made public at a later date.

To step down from the eldership in the Lord’s timing. We will be sensitive to the Holy Spirit’s leading and the consensus of our fellow elders in this matter, not wishing to remain in office beyond the time allotted to us by the Lord. We will step down if we are unable to fulfill the above commitments for personal or family reasons, if we no longer sense the Lord’s calling, if we no longer meet the biblical requirements for being an elder, if we become too old to function effectively as an elder, or if we believe that the time has come to place the oversight into the hands of the next generation.

# THE CHAIRMAN OF THE ELDERS

## Overview

The chairman of the elders serves as a facilitator. He is to help the elders reach their common objectives by scheduling their meetings, establishing an agenda, chairing their meetings, assisting them to make good decisions, and publishing the minutes of the elders' meetings.

In no sense is the elder chairman the head elder. The elders are jointly responsible for the proper oversight of the church. When dealing with a difficult issue, all elders are responsible to work together and assist their fellow elders in reaching a true consensus. All elders are also free at anytime to initiate additional meetings of the elders or add items to the agendas of their meetings. To avoid the perception that the elder chairman has greater authority in the church than the other elders, it may be best to rotate the chairmanship among the elders every six months or so. In situations in which one elder excels in administration and service, it may be best to have him serve as chairman indefinitely. In some assemblies, the elders may prefer to divide the responsibilities outlined here among several men, thus eliminating the need of an elder chairman.

## Responsibilities

### 1. Schedule the Elders' Meetings

The chairman should schedule regular meetings for the elders, providing several weeks' notice. This is probably best done by publishing a schedule six months in advance.

### 2. Maintain a Master Agenda

The chairman should provide the necessary leadership to see that important issues are presented, discussed, and resolved by the elders in a timely manner. He should keep a master agenda that includes:

- the pastoral needs of the church
- items that elders have asked to be placed on the agenda
- pressing matters upon which the elders need to act
- open issues from previous meetings
- major events coming up on the church calendar
- the elders' review of the annual budget

### 3. Publish the Agenda

At least one week in advance of a scheduled meeting, the chairman should distribute a provisional agenda, so the other elders can review it, make suggested additions, and prepare for items for which they are responsible. At least one day in advance of the elders' meeting, the chairman should publish the final agenda for the meeting. It should include: 1) items to be discussed; 2) the person responsible for preparing and presenting each topic; 3) the amount of time allotted for each topic; 4) the dates of future elders' meetings; and 5) the master agenda of items for future consideration.

In generating a provisional agenda, the chairman should consider the following areas:

1. Urgent needs of the saints requiring special prayer by the elders.
2. Serious and pressing problems needing the pastoral input of the elders.
3. A systematic pastoral review of the spiritual condition of the saints as individuals.
4. The overall spiritual health of the body.
5. Unfinished business from the previous elders' meeting.
6. The completion of action items from the previous elders' meeting.
7. Requests from the deacons or saints, asking for input from the elders.
8. Items referred to the elders by ministry leaders.
9. Long range planning.
10. Major upcoming events on the church calendar.
11. Preparation of an annual master calendar for the ministries of the church.
12. Preparation for special seasonal programs, such as Christmas or summer.
13. Input for the deacons on the next budget for the church.
14. Direction concerning the ministry responsibilities of the saints, such as the recognition of new elders or deacons, and the staffing of various ministries.
15. Policies of the church that are lacking, not working, or are not being implemented correctly.
16. Theological issues facing the church that need to be settled.
17. Challenges to the unity or purity of the church.
18. Relationships among leaders or other individuals.

#### **4. Preside over the Elders' Meetings**

The chairman should direct the elders' meeting, ensuring that discussion stays on topic, that the agenda is followed, that everyone is heard, that over-talkers are controlled, that clear decisions are made, that action items are assigned, and that the meeting ends on time. The chairman should provide refreshments for longer meetings.

#### **5. Provide for Minutes of the Elders' Meetings**

The chairman should ask one of the other elders to take minutes during the meeting. He should check that the minutes accurately reflect what transpired during the meeting and that all action items are included. The chairman should distribute the minutes to the other elders.

#### **6. Direct the work of the Eldership**

Between the monthly meetings of the elders, the chairman should coordinate the work of the elders, making sure that urgent matters have been addressed in a timely manner and that action items from the previous meeting are being executed. If needed, he should schedule additional meetings of the elders. He should also respond to requests for input from the elders or ask one of the other elders to respond.

**SAMPLE  
ELDERS' AGENDA**

Date	Location	Time
May 5	Sam's home	7:00-10:00 PM

Description	Person Responsible	Allotted Time	Approx. Time
<b>I. Prayer</b>			<b>7:00</b>
<b>II. Pastoral Concerns</b>			<b>7:15</b>
Jerry Z. in rehab	Stephen	5	
Taylor/Eastman Wedding	Sam	10	
Galt Family Crisis	Robert	15	
Update on Visitation Program	Stephen	15	
Recent visitors	Sam	15	
<b>III. Updates on Open Action Items</b>			<b>8:15</b>
review of our meeting with the deacons	Tony	10	
problems with the high school ministry	Robert	20	
next preaching topic and schedule	Stephen	15	
startup of evangelistic outreach downtown	Tony	15	
<b>IV. New Ministry Concerns</b>			<b>9:15</b>
poor participation at the Breaking of Bread	Sam	5	
lack of evangelistic fruit	Sam	15	
need to develop more Sunday School teachers	Robert	15	
selection of speaker for retreat	Stephen	10	
<b>V. Closing Prayer</b>	Chairman		<b>10:00</b>

<b>Master Agenda of Future Items for the Elders</b>
plan meeting with the deacons
encouraging men to share at the Lord's Supper
Saturday of prayer for the elders

**Next Elders' Meetings:** June 4, June 18, July 2, July 16, August 5, August 19

**GENERAL SESSION #4**  
**SATURDAY AFTERNOON, 12:40 AND 1:45 PM**

*CONSENSUS DECISION-MAKING*  
*DEMONSTRATIONS & COMMENTARY*

**Time to Paint the Kitchen**

**Time:** A decision must be reached in 10 minutes or less.

**Agenda Item for Elders Meeting:** Decide on the color to paint the chapel kitchen.

**Background**

A small controversy has erupted in the body over what color to paint the kitchen. Normally such decisions are made by the deacons, but unable to resolve the matter, the deacons have asked the elders to decide on the color.

The controversy began when a painting contractor was hired to paint the building's interior. The work is now almost finished. In 48 hours, the painters will start on the kitchen, the last room in the building to be painted.

The present color of the kitchen is white. The women's committee, which takes care of refreshments on Sunday morning and the occasional lunches and dinners of the church, told the deacons that they would like to see the color changed. The present color is dull and drab and shows every mark. They want a bright color such as Persian Mellon, a deep yellow with a rich warm glow. They say the color reminds them of the sun and will promote good feelings in the kitchen

Two of the elders' wives, neither of whom are on the women's committee, want to paint the kitchen lavender. Yellow was popular three or four years ago, they say, but now is dated.

The deacons told the elders that they don't really care what color the kitchen is painted, except that white is hard to keep clean and shows dirt easily. Their six wives, none of whom are on the women's committee, have suggested yellow (2), green (2), blue (1), and lavender (1).

One of the deacon's wife took a poll in the assembly. She found that none of the men cared much about the color, but all women had strong feelings about it. She submitted a list of thirteen different suggestions, representing the input of twenty-five women. Yellow had the most support (6), followed by lavender (5), green (4), and ten other suggestions with one person each supporting each color. The most interesting was black with white trim.

Last Sunday, Mrs. Thompson, the widow of one of the founding elders of the church was in tears. Everyone was criticizing the present color of the kitchen. She informed them her husband had selected the color and broke down crying. Now no one wants to say anything about the color for fear of hurting Mrs. Thompson. That was when the deacons washed their hands of the problem and referred it to the elders.

At today's meeting, the elders must decide on what to do. It is now Saturday morning at 8:00 am. The painters will start work on the kitchen Monday morning. One of the elders' has just received a text message from one of the deacons: "TRY NOT TO SPLIT THE CHURCH OVER THE KITCHEN." They think he was joking. The elders must now decide what to do.

## John and Mary Go to China, or Do They?

**Time:** A decision must be reached in 25 minutes or less.

**Agenda Item for Elders Meeting:** Commendation of John and Mary Ma as missionaries to China.

### Background

John and Mary Ma have been in the assembly seven years. There are 150 adults in the church and it has been growing steadily for the past six years at the rate of about ten adults per year.

John and Mary were new believers when they first came into the assembly, but they have matured remarkably. John is a gifted teacher and has been effective in evangelism. He is well organized, a good administrator, a self-starter, and very faithful. Mary is quiet but a good wife and mother and a strong support for John. They have three children, ages three, five, and seven. For the past four years, they have felt the call to serve the Lord in China as missionaries. Mr. Paul, a senior missionary in China has invited them to work with him. He is eighty-four years old and needs a younger man to come alongside, help with the work, and eventually take it over. John would like to be that man.

Three years ago, John and Mary spoke to the elders about going overseas. The elders asked them to wait and grow some more. John and Mary have done well during this period. They have taken some Chinese language classes at a local college and have made good progress. They have also grown remarkably as Christians.

Three months ago, John came to the elders and expressed his concern about waiting much longer. His children are growing up quickly. With each year, it will be more difficult for his children to adjust to the culture and to learn the Chinese language. Additionally, he and Mary are finding it hard to be on hold, not knowing if they are going or staying. It is affecting their home life, and John's career as the assistant manager of a bank. Also, if they are to go to China, they would want as much time with Mr. Paul as they can get. With him being so elderly, they are concerned that the opportunity to learn from him is slipping away.

The elders agree that they need to make a decision about John and Mary's commendation. Everything looks positive except one area: lingering concerns about John's over-familiarity with women. Red McDuffie, one of the elders, told them when John's commendation first came up three years earlier, that he didn't fully trust John. "Why is he always talking to the women?" Red asked. "I rarely see him speaking to the men. He seems to enjoy being the center of their attention." Whitey Smith, another of the elders, told him, "John has led several of those women to the Lord. There's a natural pastoral bond. He's concerned for them." Red didn't buy it. "I'm afraid it's going to lead to sin," Red said.

At the elders' meeting last month, the five elders discussed the Ma's commendation briefly. Red again expressed his concern. "John has grown a lot, but I still don't like the way he's so friendly with the women." Kelly Clarke, an elder and an executive at one of the largest companies in town, became impatient with Red. "What do you want, sinless perfection?" Kelly asked. "The guy hasn't done anything and you're ready to accuse him of adultery. I think John and Mary are more than ready to go to China."

Mr. Hall, a man in his nineties who helped start the church, recently told the elders that he didn't want to see John and Mary leave the assembly. "Since they've been with us, we've seen a lot of blessing. I'm afraid if they go overseas, the assembly will fall into decline."

Over the past month, three men have told the elders that they fully support the commendation of John and Mary. One said that he felt the elders were doing the Ma's a disservice in holding them back from the work the Lord.

The elders must now decide what to do.