

Elders at Icard: Our Move to a Plurality of Elders

Catawba River Baptist Association – 1/11/2024

Online at: <https://michealpardue.com/pastor-resources>

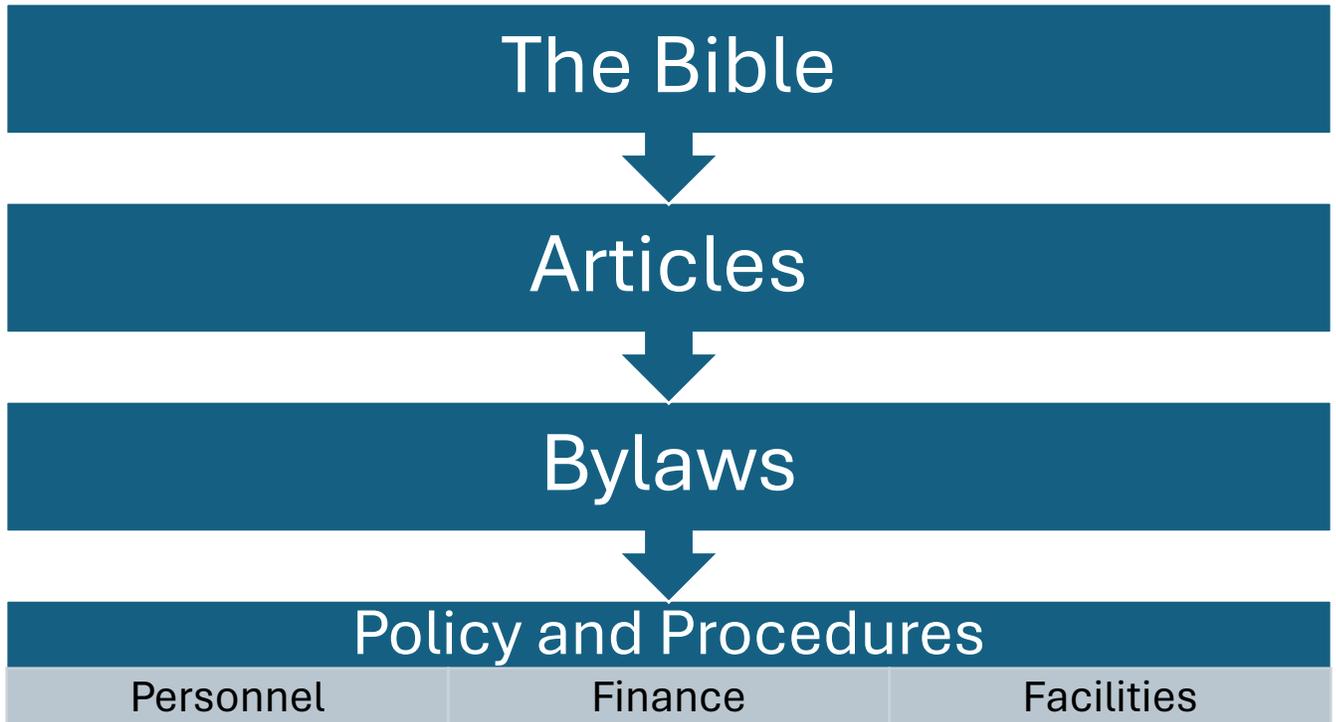
❖ Our Background

- History of the church structure over the last 30 years.
 - Pastor led (I think)
 - Leadership team
 - Vision Team

❖ Our Transition

- 2014 Constitution
 - This constitution, like several others they had, was developed out of conflict and a desire to fix problems.
 - It was largely crafted without me.
 - My failure was not leading in the beginning of the development.
- 2021 Constitution
 - Our Vision Team asked me to do re-writes to the Constitution before COVID. I used COVID to lead the way I hoped to lead under a new Constitution.
 - I met with key leaders who had either worked on the previous Constitution or were prominent voices that our church members listen to.

❖ Our Structure in our Documents



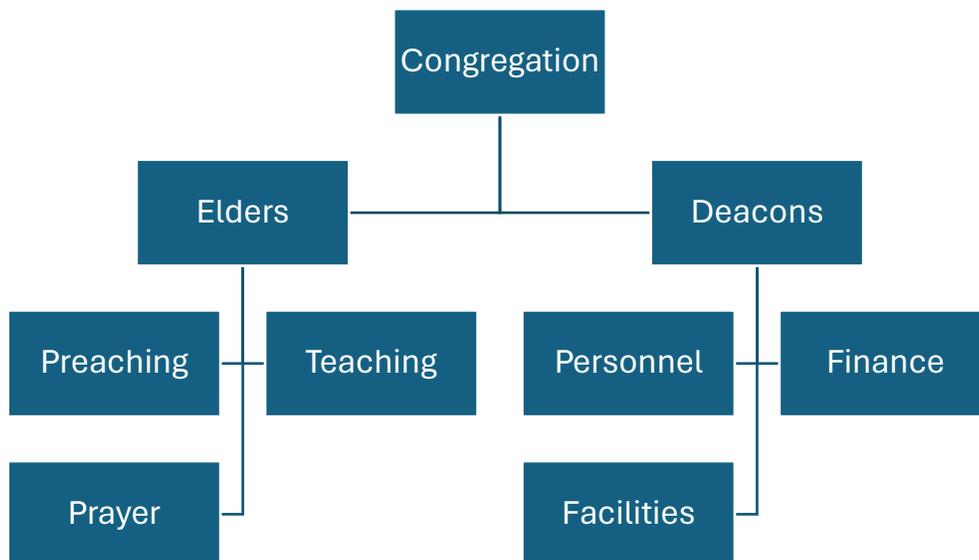
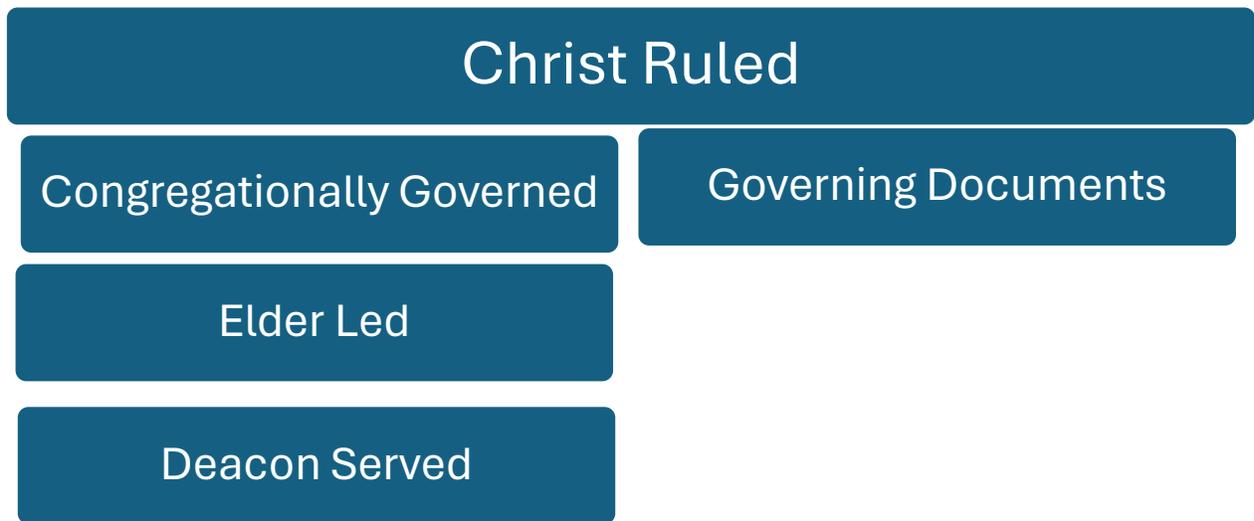
➤ **Articles and Bylaws**

- Articles filed as legal documents with the state of NC that are clear on who we are and our membership.
- Bylaws that are clear on our processes but amendable as needed.
- We had them reviewed by the Alliance Defending Freedom (<https://adflegal.org/>) for any religious freedom concerns.

❖ **Our Structure in our People**

➤ **Core Values**

- Gospel Driven
- Christ Exalting
- Biblically Faithful
- Christ Ruled
- Congregationally Governed
- Elder Led
- Deacon Served
- Missions Sending
- Community Engaged



➤ **7 Elders (3 staff and 4 lay elders)**

▪ The Roles of Elders at Icard

- Subject to the will of the Church, the Elders will oversee the preaching and teaching ministry of the church and set the vision for the church's ministry. The Elders shall take particular responsibility to examine and instruct prospective members, examine and recommend all prospective candidates for offices and positions, oversee the work of the Deacons and appointed church agents and committees, conduct worship services, administer the ordinances of baptism and communion, equip the membership for the work of the ministry, encourage sound doctrine and practice, admonish and correct error, oversee the process of church discipline, coordinate and promote the ministries of the church, and mobilize the church for world missions. Further, the Elders should seek to ensure that all who minister the Word to the Church, including outside speakers, affirm our fundamental gospel convictions and do not teach our church anything contrary to the Statement of Faith and additional statements of belief in the bylaws. The Elders shall be comprised of not less than six men who satisfy the qualifications for the office of Elder set forth in 1 Timothy 3:1–7 and Titus 1: 6–9. No Elder shall hold the office of Deacon during his tenure.
- **Teach.** An Elder must be “an able teacher” (1 Tim. 3:2; see 5:17). He must hold “to the faithful message as taught, so that he will be able both to encourage with sound teaching and refute those who contradict it” (Tit. 1:9). Jesus’ under-shepherds feed Jesus’ sheep with Jesus’ word.
- **Lead.** Just as shepherds lead their flocks, so Elders lead local congregations. The biblical writers also call Elders “overseers,” a title that highlights their role as leaders (Acts 20:28; 1 Tim. 3:1; Tit. 1:5, 7). Hebrews instructs Christians to “obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account” (Heb. 13:17).
- **Model.** Elders lead by example. Shepherd the church “not [by] lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock” (1 Pet. 5:3). Not surprisingly, the New Testament lists of Elder qualifications focus predominantly on character (1 Tim. 3:1-7, Tit. 1:5-9; 1 Pet. 5:1-4). An Elder’s most basic job is to say “Imitate me as I also imitate Christ” (1 Cor. 11:1).
- **Pray.** Elders should take up the apostolic shepherding mantle and say, “we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the preaching ministry” (Acts 6:4). Ultimately Elders are powerless in themselves to mature anyone in Christ; only the Holy Spirit can do that through God’s Word.

➤ **7 Deacons**

▪ The Role of Deacons at Icard

- Deacons shall at all times regard themselves as servants to the church family by serving as Deacon of the week and assisting in pastoral care to families. They may give counsel to the Elders in practical and spiritual matters as requested. They may assist the pastor in the observance of the ordinances of the church as necessary. They shall arrange for their regular meetings and have such committees as are necessary to discharge their duties. They, along with the Elders, have the responsibility of screening new Deacon nominees.

❖ Resources

➤ Books

- *Elders in the Life of the Church: Rediscovering the Biblical Model for Church Leadership* by Phil Newton & Matt Schmucker
- *Church Elders* by Jeramie Rinne
- *Biblical Foundations for Baptist Churches: A Contemporary Ecclesiology* by John S. Hammett
- *Biblical Eldership: An Urgent Call to Restore Biblical Church Leadership* by Alexander Strauch
- *Baptist Foundations: Church Government for an Anti-Institutional Age* edited by Mark Dever and Jonathan Leeman
- *Why Elders?: A Biblical and Practical Guide for Church Members* by Benjamin L. Merkle
- *By Whose Authority? Elders in Baptist Life* by Mark Dever (<https://www.9marks.org/community/WhoseAuthority/>)
- *A Display of God's Glory* by Mark Dever (<https://www.9marks.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/A-Display-of-Gods-Glory-free-ebook.pdf>)

➤ Websites

- <https://www.9marks.org/article/what-members-are-asking-about-elders/>
- <https://www.dennyburk.com/southern-baptists-and-elders/>
- <https://www.biblicaleldership.com/>

➤ Organizations

- The Pillar Network (<https://thepillarnetwork.com/>)
- 9Marks (<https://www.9marks.org/>)
 - These are two distinctly Southern Baptist organizations.

➤ Document Resources

- <https://ncbaptist.org/about/bylaws/>
- <https://fairviewchurch.org/documents/>
- <https://www.fbicard.org/resources>
- <https://www.capitolhillbaptist.org/about-us/what-we-believe/constitution/>

The Importance of a Plurality of Elders

Michael G. Brown

Living in Milan, I enjoy taking walks around the perimeter of Sforza Castle. Built in the fifteenth century, this structure was one of the largest citadels in Europe for hundreds of years. Its massive walls, more than a hundred feet high, loom over the outer moat like a towering tsunami of brick, making the castle practically impenetrable. There was a time when these walls extended around the entire city, protecting its inhabitants from invasions and providing them with a sense of security. In the medieval world, a city without walls was almost unimaginable. It would have been defenseless and unlikely to survive.

The vast walls of an ancient city illustrate the church's need for a plurality of elders. Just as ramparts and fortified gates helped safeguard a city so that civic life could prosper, so too a plurality of faithful overseers in the church helps preserve life in the kingdom of God. A church in which the senior pastor is the sole elder or possesses the most authority among its leaders is in a very vulnerable position, exposed to the perils of power, personality, and conflict. One need only observe the course of many influential evangelical churches in recent years to see how true this is. In most cases, the eventual collapse resulted in part from a lack of shared authority among a group of elders.

There are at least four biblical and practical reasons that a plurality of elders is necessary. First, it provides the church with greater accountability. According to the Bible, believers are accountable for their doctrine and life. What they believe and how they live are to be in line with Scripture. The elders of the local church have the weighty responsibility of holding the members of the congregation accountable. "Obey your leaders and submit to them," says the writer to the Hebrews, "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" (Heb. 13:17). Notice that this verse speaks of leaders in the plural. Christians are not accountable to one leader alone. Instead, Christ cares for His church through a plurality of elders. This shared accountability helps protect the flock from the spiritual abuse and bullying that could more easily occur in a church where everyone is accountable to one man.

Moreover, the pastor himself is also accountable to the elders. The biblical model for church government is not a hierarchical system in which the senior pastor is a bishop over the elders of the church. In the New Testament, "bishops" (also translated "overseers") and "elders" (also translated "presbyters") are synonymous. For example, when Paul instructs Titus to "appoint elders in every town" (Titus 1:5), he describes the qualifications for these elders, calling them overseers: "For an overseer, as God's steward, must be above reproach" (Titus 1:7). He uses the two terms to describe the same office. Likewise, in his farewell address to the leaders of the church in Ephesus, Paul "called the elders of the church to come to him" (Acts 20:17). He then addressed them as "overseers" or "bishops" of the church of God (Acts 20:28). These terms are never used in Scripture to describe differing ranks of authority or a single leader governing the church alone. This means that the pastor serves the congregation alongside the ruling elders but not over them. He himself is an elder who labors "in preaching and teaching" (1 Tim. 5:17). Even though he has biblical training and spiritual gifts for rightly dividing the Word of God, his vote is not more important than the votes of other elders; nor does he possess veto power over

the consensus of the group. He is to work in harmony with the other elders, respecting their leadership and submitting to their collective wisdom. There is no place in the church for one leader to domineer over another. The only “boss” in the church is the Lord Jesus Christ. He alone is the head of the body (Eph. 1:20–22).

Second, a plurality of elders provides the church with a greater chance of success in her mission. Before He ascended into heaven, Jesus gave the church its marching orders:

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matt. 28:18–20)

According to our Lord, the goal of the church’s mission is to make disciples. The means of the church’s mission is the ministry of the Word and sacraments in the local church. This is how Christ has chosen to gather His redeemed people, receive their worship, nurture their faith, and bond them as a community rooted and established in love (Rom. 12; Eph. 4; Phil. 1:27–2:11).

None of this is possible, however, without a plurality of elders in the local church. The ministry of the Word is not dependent on the minister of the Word alone. The Apostles appointed elders to oversee the congregation (Acts 14:21–23; see Phil. 1:1; James 5:14) and deacons to serve the body with mercy (Acts 6:1–7). Without these officers functioning in their God-ordained roles, the pastor cannot remain devoted to prayer, preaching, and teaching. He inevitably becomes overwhelmed with administration and involved in tasks that rightly belong to the elders and deacons. Worse still, he runs the risk of defining the church’s mission according to his own vision and building the ministry around his giftedness and personality. When these things happen, the spiritual consequences are disastrous. When a congregation is blessed with a plurality of faithful officers, however, the results are bountiful: “And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly” (Acts 6:7).

Third, a plurality of elders provides the church with greater preservation of the truth. Exhorting the Ephesian elders, Paul said:

Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock . . . speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be alert. (Acts 20:28–31)

Ruling elders have the responsibility of maintaining the purity of the Word and sacraments in the local church. They must be vigilant to guard the gospel so that each generation can rediscover it. We live at a time when people do not “endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions” (2 Tim. 4:3). A body of elders in the local church helps ensure that the congregation stays on course doctrinally and does not become carried away by the theological whims and personal opinions of one leader. As the proverb says, “In an abundance of counselors there is safety” (Prov. 11:14).

Fourth, a plurality of elders provides the flock of Christ with greater pastoral care. In the Old Testament, a multitude of elders were appointed to assist Moses in caring for the people of God. The Lord gave a portion of the Spirit that was on Moses to seventy elders so that they would help carry this burden (Num. 11:16–17). Likewise, in the new covenant church, elders share the responsibility of pastoral care with the minister. Peter writes: “So I exhort the elders . . . shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight” (1 Peter 5:1–2). Elders do this in a variety of practical ways. They shepherd the flock through family visitation and biblical discipline. They assist in catechizing the youth of the church and actively promote the work of evangelism and missions. They provide biblical counsel and help minister to the sick and dying. In short, they ensure that the flock is healthy and that everything in the church is done decently and in good order. No one man has all the gifts that are necessary to build up the church. Having a plurality of elders supplies the congregation with greater pastoral care by bringing men with different gifts into the church’s leadership so that they can complement the pastor’s strengths and compensate for his weaknesses.

As a pastor myself, I am grateful to the Lord for the many godly elders with whom I have served over the past twenty years in ministry, both in the United States and in Italy. I am thankful for the ways that they have held me accountable for my doctrine and behavior, having the love and courage to correct me when I have needed it. I am thankful for their commitment to the mission of the church, always reminding me that it is about proclaiming Christ through the ordinary means of grace. I am thankful for their fidelity to the gospel and the Reformed creeds and confessions, helping me stay on track theologically and not lose focus on Jesus. I am thankful for their willingness to use their gifts for the pastoral care and spiritual well-being of the flock, setting us an example of Christlike servant-leadership. According to the promise of Scripture, when the Chief Shepherd appears, they will receive “the unfading crown of glory” (1 Peter 5:4). Until then, may King Jesus continue to fortify the walls of His kingdom in every local church with a plurality of faithful elders.

Should a Church Have Elders?

Mark Dever

There are many pragmatic reasons why a church might have elders. A plurality of elders can help to carry the burden of pastoral ministry; they can bring a rich variety of experience to bear on the issues and problems every pastor faces; they can hold the pastor accountable in a context of shared ministry; they can save the pastor from a multitude of errors in judgment before it ever becomes apparent in a congregational meeting. The list could go on.

But the best reason a church should have elders is because the New Testament says that it should. Throughout his epistles, and especially the pastoral epistles, Paul makes it plain that every New Testament church should have elders, that is men who “direct the affairs of the church” (1 Timothy 5:17-18). He commissioned Titus to make sure that all the churches in Crete had elders (Titus 1:5). And he took the time to outline for both Timothy and Titus what sort of men should be called to that office (1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:6-9), as well as the procedure that should be followed should a man need to be removed from the office (1 Timothy 5:19-20). So central were elders in Paul’s thinking that, though eager to reach Jerusalem by Pentecost, he took the time to call the Ephesian elders together and give them one last exhortation (Acts 20:16-38), the heart of which was that they be faithful as “shepherds of the church of God”.

Of course, elders were not just Paul’s idea. Peter too assumed their presence in the churches to which he wrote, and gave them a message identical to Paul’s: Be shepherds of God’s flock. (1 Peter 5:1-4). So did the author of Hebrews (Hebrews 13:17).

So the Bible clearly teaches that New Testament churches are to be led by elders. At the end of the day, this question is just another way of asking whether or not we are going to allow the Scriptures to be the sole authority in the life of the church. For though there are lots of pragmatic reasons to have elders, from the perspective of a pastor, there are more pragmatic reasons not to have them. Elders can slow a senior pastor down, they can disagree with him, they can even tell him on occasion that he’s wrong. Pragmatically speaking, who would want that?

But Peter and Paul remind us that the churches we pastor are not our own. We are pastors of God’s church, God’s flock. And so it is God’s Word that must have the final say. Jesus created the church, he died for the church. He is its only King and law-giver. If we are committed to shepherding Christ’s church, and not our own, then we must be willing to do it his way. According to the Bible, his way includes elders.

Further reading:

Edmund Clowney, *The Church* (IVP, 1995) ch. 14; T.E. Peck, *_Notes on Ecclesiology_* (repr. GPTS Press, 1994), ch. 16. The problem with both of these recommendations is that they are written by Presbyterians, who claim far more for the authority of elders than Scripture warrants. Nevertheless, they both lay out clearly the argument from Scripture for the presence of elders in the local church.

10 Things You Should Know about Church Elders

Jeramie Rinne

1. Elders are shepherds.

Both the Old and New Testaments repeatedly employ the metaphor of "shepherding" to describe the spiritual leadership of God's people. Not surprisingly, the New Testament views elders as shepherds as well (e.g. Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:1-4). The elders' mission is to lead, teach, protect and love their church members the way shepherds care for the sheep in a flock, so that the church members will grow up into spiritual maturity (Ephesians 4:11-13).

2. Elders are pastors.

This second point restates the first, but it bears repeating. The word "pastor" means "shepherd." We often call paid preachers "pastors" and lay leaders "elders." This distinction can subtly shape our thinking so that we view pastors as the professional ministers and elders as the church's board of directors who support the ministers. But a pastor is an elder, and an elder is a pastor. Elders should do those things in a local church that they assume a pastor would do, even if they spend fewer hours per week than the paid pastor.

3. Elders are plural.

We always find elders (plural) in New Testament churches (e.g. Acts 15:4; 20:17; Titus 1:5). Each congregation should have a team of shepherds.

4. Elders must be godly.

The New Testament job descriptions for elders focus largely on character qualities (e.g. 1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9). Elders must be self-controlled, sensible, holy, and hospitable. They can't be drunkards or bullies or money-grubbers. Elders must be "above reproach."

5. Elders should model godliness.

The elders' character matters because the elders model Christian maturity for the church (1 Peter 5:3; Hebrews 13:7). Church members should be able to see in their elders inspiring, albeit imperfect, examples of the character of Jesus.

6. Elders should teach.

Elders must be able to teach (1 Timothy 3:2) so that they can build up the church in sound doctrine and refute false teachers (Titus 1:9; cf. Acts 20:30-31). Elder teaching can take lots of shapes: one-to-one instruction, small groups, classes, or preaching. An elder doesn't need a PhD in biblical studies, but he does need to be able to faithfully explain biblical truth.

7. Elders must lead.

Elders have a measure of authority over the local church. That's why the New Testament also calls them "overseers." The elders' authority is not absolute or unquestionable, nor should it be exercised in a domineering manner. Yet God calls his shepherds to provide leadership for the flock, and, in general, God expects the church to submit to that leadership (Hebrews 13:17).

8. Elder leadership starts at home.

If married, an elder should be "a one-woman man" (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:6), which at the very least means that he is a faithful husband. If he has children, he must parent them well so they're not out of control (1 Timothy 3:4). You should demonstrate able leadership of your own household before you presume to lead God's household.

9. Elders must be men.

Male-only eldership is a hotly contested issue. And yet the Bible seems extremely straightforward: an elder must be a "one-woman man." Just as God calls men to be the heads of their households, so he calls faithful men to lead his church.

10. Elders are not Jesus.

Jesus is the Chief Shepherd, and elders are merely his temporary helpers (1 Peter 5:4). At their best, elders model Jesus' character, teach Jesus' word, and lead the church by pointing it toward Jesus and his mission. Good elders never lose that awareness that they themselves are still sheep, utterly dependent on the grace of the Good Shepherd.