

Congregational Eldership
May 20, 2018

Before we move into our teaching tonight, it was suggested that I introduce myself to you. Many of you know me, especially if you have been in Romans, but you may not know why Lisa and I left Bethlehem Baptist Church to come to Meadow Creek. That is a very fair question and a question I would ask if I were sitting where you are sitting.

In a nutshell, Lisa and I came here because we believed God wanted us to. We had heard several years ago that Meadow Creek was struggling. We had known about Meadow Creek for 25 years or more and had many friends attend here. So we began to pray for Meadow Creek, and as we did, we heard that Pastor Jerry and some men of Meadow Creek, particularly Eric Ness, were hoping Meadow Creek could become a healthy, vibrant church. The more we prayed, the more we felt that God moving us to consider coming to Meadow Creek.

One day I told Lisa that I thought I should meet Eric Ness, though he did not know me. I thought it might be odd to call him out of the blue, but felt I should do something. Then one night, we were at the Bethlehem Seminary graduation (it was Jared's graduation night) and we were all crowded in the fellowship hall. I took a step back and stepped on a man's foot. As I wheeled around, I was looking face to face with a man wearing a name tag, "Eric Ness". I laughed and we spent the rest of the night talking about what God was doing at Meadow Creek.

For the next several months, we began meeting with Pastor Jerry and Eric, getting to know them and then Lisa and me. We sensed an alignment of both our view of God, his word and the church.

During this same time frame, I asked the elders of Bethlehem Church to consider releasing us from our ministry and membership at Bethlehem and blessing us to come to Meadow Creek to be a part of this body and help as we could. We did not know what they might look like. We knew we did not want to go without the elders' blessing as they were charged with watching over our souls.

The elders prayed and considered and then released us with blessing and support. The many men connected with Bethlehem that have preached is evidence of that support.

We loved Bethlehem – the people of Bethlehem, its view of God, its preaching and its ethos. But Lisa and I believe God called us here, and this is our church home. We have no desire to return to Bethlehem as members. Sure, we like to visit and see friends and worship with them, but that is not our church family. You are our church family. We believe that and feel that. Even this morning I was marveling at the love that God has given me for you all, even many I barely know.

Tonight is a very good night. I love to gather with the body of Christ, to eat, to laugh, to sing together, to pray together, and now to consider God's word together. So thanks for welcoming us and for many our church family and for being here tonight and being the body of Christ to us.

If you have questions, you can ask me later.

Now, we will turn to the purpose of our 10 Weeks of Gathering:

- This is the coming together of the body to think and wrestle through 10 questions on elder leadership to answer one question: "Should Meadow Creek Church adopt elder leadership?"
- As we do this, we are acknowledging the biblical roots of the Meadow Creek and this church's deep love for the Bible. I love that about Meadow Creek. We have discussed and we believe that the existing deacon based governance structure grew out of the early members' understanding of the Bible and their experiences. We want to build on that and pursue further our understanding of biblical church leadership and its forms.
- A word about resources. As we tackle each of these questions, there are a number of men studying together and we are using a number of resources.
 - Would the men who have been part of this study so far please stand? This is helpful as we are laboring to handle God's word accurately and the questions and probing of others helps us do that.
 - We are also helped by a number of resources. If you are interested in those resources, see me afterwards, and I can share the titles with you.
 - Tonight, we want to give you two of the resources:
 - Understanding Church Leadership, and
 - Understanding the Congregation's Authority.We have 30 copies of each. You should take a set per family, if you will read them.
- Here are our 10 questions – Read each.

We want to answer these questions by looking at God's Word and letting it direct us. We want to wrestle through this together. So, each week, as we walk through various texts, write down questions you may have, because we will have 20 minutes at the end of this teaching time to addressing them.

Tonight we will set the stage for the next 10 weeks by answering this **overview** question: What is congregational elder leadership?

To answer this question, let's start by supplying some definitions that will provide us common language for our discussion. We can test these definitions as we go, but this will be our working definitions:

- **Elders:** Christ-minded men, who are not new converts and who are able to teach, chosen by the congregation who give themselves to:
 - praying and ministering the Word (teaching and preaching);
 - shepherding or caring for the members of the body by knowing, feeding, protecting, watching over, and leading them;
 - overseeing the life of the church;
 - modeling Christ-like maturity with their lives; and
 - raising up faithful and qualified men to serve, shepherd, and lead the church.

1Pe 5:1-3 ESV

1 So I exhort the elders (presbyteros) 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 (poimaino/pastor) the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight (episkopeo), 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.

Supportive texts to consider: Acts 20; I Peter 5:2; Hebrews 13:17; I Timothy 3:1-7; Acts 6:4; James 5:14; II Tim. 2:2;

- **Deacons:** Christ-minded men and women chosen by the congregation who manage the church's resources in a way that serves the unity of the church and supports the ministry of the Word.

There are three aspects of the work of the deacons:

1. They care for the physical needs of the Church
2. They work for the unity of the body
3. They support the ministry of the Word

Act 6:1-6 ESV

1 Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. 2 And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, "It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve (diakoneo) tables. 3 Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. 4 But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word." 5 And what they said

pleased the whole gathering, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. 6 These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands on them.

Supportive text to consider: Acts 6:1-7; I Timothy 3:8-13; Romans 1:11-12; I Cor. 12:4-7, 12, 26

- **Congregation:** The assembled members of a local church who recognize its elders and deacons and serve as the final authority in disputes between Christians, doctrine, discipline and membership, while trusting and submitting under the elders' leadership.

Gal 1:6-9 ESV

6 I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel-- 7 not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. 8 But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you (plural) a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. 9 As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed.

Supportive texts to consider: Matt. 18:15-17; Gal. 1:6-9; I Cor. 5; II Cor. 2:6-8; Hebrews 13:17.

- **Member:** Christians identified within a local gathering or community of believers (church) who help preserve the gospel message, affirm gospel citizens, regularly meet together for worship and mutual encouragement, love and disciple one another, and submit to one another for the care of their souls.

1Co 5:4-5 ESV

4 When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, 5 you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.

Supportive texts to consider: I Cor. 5, II Cor. 2:6-8; John 13:34-35; Hebrews 10:24-25.

Q: What is elder-led congregationalism?

There are two parts” 1. Elder-led and 2. Congregationalism.

We will talk more about these two parts in weeks to come, but for now we will define these two parts as follows:

Congregationalism requires you, the average church member to take responsibility for other church members. You must know the gospel, you must protect the gospel in our church and you must work for the progress of the gospel in the lives of church members and those outside of the church.

Elder-led means that biblically qualified men selected by the congregation lead, train and equip the congregation to minister.

Elders give the congregation job training, and the congregation has the job of ministering the gospel.

Q: What does the relationship between the elders and members look like?

(These 5 characteristics of relationships between elders and the congregation are on page 38 of *“Understanding Church Leadership”*.)

1. The congregation should recognize elders, which it appoints, as gifts from God for their good, and elders must recognize the God-given authority of the congregation.
2. The church should trust, protect, respect and honor its elders (I Tim. 5:17), and elders should direct the affairs of the church and the church should submit to their leadership.
3. Elders must be willing for their lives to be open to inspection and for his home to be actively open to outsiders, giving hospitality and enfolding others into his family’s life.
4. The elders’ use of authority should demonstrate their understanding that the church belongs not to them, but to Christ. Elders should cherish the church, treat it carefully and gently, and lead it faithfully and purely for the glory of God because they will give an account to Christ for their stewardship.
5. The congregation will benefit as God builds up the church through the elders/ shepherds he gives.

Q: Isn’t this all about governance? Why does governance matter?

To answer this question, we must understand the purpose of the church.

Read Ephesians 2:19-22 – “a holy temple in the Lord” – What did the temple in the O.T. do? It displayed God’s glory.

From where is God’s glory chiefly displayed today? In local bodies of believers or churches around the world, or “holy temples” who are “being built together for God’s dwelling in the Spirit.” (2:22)

Now Ephesians 4:11-16-

How is this holy temple built? By God's giving of gifts in the form of roles in the church: Apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastor-teachers (shepherd/elders) for "equipping the saints (body members) for the work of the ministry, to build up the body of Christ" so that each of the members is like Christ and loves like Christ, caring for the other members of the body.

The congregation or members are the temple and the elders, who are part of the temple, too, are responsible, like the priests of the OT and under the chief-elder, Christ, to care for the temple so that it reflects the glory of God most fully.

So, governance or leadership matters because it is God's design for the building up of his holy temple to display his glory.