

## The New Testament pattern of multiple pastors/elders in every church

- 1) → **Acts 6:1-7**
- 2) <sup>NASB</sup> **Acts 14:21-23** After [Paul and Barnabas] had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, <sup>22</sup> strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and *saying*, “Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.” <sup>23</sup> When they had appointed **elders for them in every church**, having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.
  - a) <sup>NASB</sup> **Ecclesiastes 4:9** Two are better than one because they have a good return for their labor. <sup>10</sup> For if either of them falls, the one will lift up his companion. But woe to the one who falls when there is not another to lift him up. <sup>11</sup> Furthermore, if two lie down together they keep warm, but how can one be warm *alone*? <sup>12</sup> And if one can overpower him who is alone, two can resist him. A cord of three *strands* is not quickly torn apart.
- 3) <sup>NASB</sup> **Acts 15:2** And when Paul and Barnabas had great dissension and debate with them, *the brethren* determined that Paul and Barnabas and some others of them should go up **to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders** concerning this issue.
- 4) <sup>NASB</sup> **Acts 15:22** Then it seemed good to the apostles and **the elders**, with the whole church [of Jerusalem], to choose men from among them to send to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas— Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas, leading men among the brethren
- 5) <sup>NASB</sup> **Acts 20:17** From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him **the elders of the church**.
- 6) <sup>NASB</sup> **Philippians 1:1** Paul and Timothy, bond-servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the **overseers** and deacons:
- 7) <sup>NASB</sup> **1 Timothy 5:17-23** 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*.
- 8) <sup>NASB</sup> **1 Peter 5:5** 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.
- 9) <sup>NASB</sup> **Hebrews 13:17** 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.
- 10) <sup>NASB</sup> **James 5:14** Is anyone among you sick? *Then* he must call for **the elders of the church** and they are to pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord;
- 11) <sup>NASB</sup> **Titus 1:5** For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and **appoint elders in every city** as I directed you.

### In Baptist Life:

- 1) The first president of the Southern Baptist Convention, W. B. Johnson of South Carolina, wrote in his book, *The Gospel Developed*, “Each [New Testament] church had a plurality of elders.” Concerning his present day, Johnson asserted, “A plurality in the bishopric [that is, the *pastorate*] is of great importance for mutual counsel and aid, that the government and edification of the flock may be promoted in the best manner.”
- 2) Danny Akin, President of Southeastern Baptist Seminary (SBC): “The argument for a plurality of elders, pastors, overseers, leaders is easier to make based upon the Biblical evidence. For example, every time the word elder (*presbuteros*) appears in the context of church leaders, it is always in the plural. (e.g., Acts 14:23; 16:4; 20:17; 21:18; 1 Timothy 5:17, Titus 1:5; James 5:14; 1 Peter 5:1)<sup>1</sup>
  - a) Danny Akin’s *A Theology for the Church* (SBC) printed by LifeWay: “The direct evidence in the New Testament indicates that the common and even expected practice was to have a plurality of elders in each local congregation.”<sup>2</sup>
- 3) Grudem’s *Systematic Theology* (SBC)—“There is quite a consistent pattern of plural elders as the main governing group in the New Testament churches.”<sup>3</sup>
  - a) “Two significant conclusions may be drawn from this survey of the New Testament evidence. First, no passage suggests that any church, no matter how small, had only one elder. The consistent New Testament pattern is a plurality of elders ‘in every church’ (Acts 14:23) and ‘in every town’ (Titus 1:5). Second, we do not see a diversity of forms of government in the New Testament church, but a unified and consistent pattern in which every church had elders governing it and keeping watch over it (Acts 20:28; Hebrews 13:17; 1 Peter 5:2–3).”<sup>4</sup>



“We do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord,  
and ourselves as your bond-servants for Jesus’ sake.”

2 Corinthians 4:5 (NASB)

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<sup>1</sup> Danny Akin, *Perspectives on Church Government*, (Broadman and Holman: Nashville, 2003), pg. 64.

<sup>2</sup> Mark E. Dever, “The Church,” in *A Theology for the Church*, ed. Daniel L. Akin (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2007), 804.

<sup>3</sup> Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 912.

<sup>4</sup> Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 913.