



# Elders can learn to make difficult decisions... together

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Harmony and variety of giftedness among the elders is critical for the health of the church

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It was 28 years ago that I sat down to my very first elders meeting. With glazed eyes and rubbery knees, I sat wondering what my responsibilities really were. Would I ever find the combination of godliness and wisdom I knew were needed? It was all very scary. Now, after many years and many meetings, both with my own local elders and with other groups, I find it still somewhat frightening. I have experienced well chaired, efficiently run meetings as well as very poorly organized and orchestrated meetings. Some were filled with joyous enthusiasm, others with pain and tension. Some with agenda items that were boring or routine, others that were mind-numbing or spectacular. But, there is no escaping the fact that one of the most pressing needs is for elders to make difficult decisions ... together. To make them without fracturing the unity. Without anyone resigning. Without anyone avoiding anyone else. My conclusion is: it can be done! I would like to propose four ingredients that will help make it happen.

## **Elders who take time to pray**

Godly men who will lay aside their own agendas to pursue the heart of God. What does He want? What is best for His people in this community? Our own preferences and biases are usually quite evident, but good men will see beyond their personal preferences.

## **A congregation which values its shepherds and understands decision-making**

Elders who serve the members of the congregation well are usually appreciated, but frequently the decision-making process of congregations is ambiguous and poorly understood. The elders must clarify with the congregation any fog that exists. Teaching how eldership rule really works is necessary as well

as an understanding of the submissive spirit that goes with it (Heb 13:17). The elders need to hear what the congregation is saying and feeling, since they need the entire body's genuine support in prayer and action. It is best to have a written decision-making process so that newcomers can be properly introduced to the fellowship. Many in our circles say they believe in multiple-elder leadership. On paper or in theory, all is wonderful. It is still wonderful in practice as long as the elders make the "right decisions." But when there is disagreement, some will suddenly want congregational rule - "Let's have a questionnaire or a congregational vote," etc.

## **It helps if a church has the right elders**

A careful eye must be given to the biblical requirements. Very high on the list are "gentleness" and "not quarrelsome." They must be team players. What evidence is there that they can lead and work well with others? How have they functioned in Sunday School, small groups, youth ministry, deacons boards, etc.? Do they have the needed experience and gifts? Do people respect them? Is the process by which people become elders well understood by the congregation? Is it written down? Does the congregation have opportunity for input? How? Harmony and variety of giftedness among the elders is critical for the health of the church. Their unity becomes the basis for the unity of the whole church!

## **Elders must be willing to keep on learning**

Whatever processes we develop will have flaws. They will need to be improved, adjusted or changed. That requires willingness and respect. Is someone's personality intimidating? Does someone talk too much? Is anyone pushy, or domineering? Evaluate from time to time and

Paul  
Fletcher

identify the things that bring tension. Make sure the chairman gives the quiet people opportunity to express themselves. Be sure that everyone understands before they come into the elders group what the decision making process is (have it written down). It must be clear from the beginning that the group will not be consistently slowed down or hampered by a persistently negative person or even a happy positive person who happens to disagree. But it's not only making decisions Those not preferring a decision must learn to

endorse and support direction they wouldn't have taken personally. Most happy homes have spouses who have learned this lesson. It will go a long way in producing a happy eldership!

Yes-I maintain that elders can be happy in their work together. I have experienced it many times through the years. They will be happiest when they can differ and yet lovingly honour the opinions and decisions of their fellow elders.

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