

## CHURCH POLITY

At HERITAGE BAPTIST CHURCH our understanding of a biblical church polity is that the *assembly* (church), under Christ, is the last rule and authority on earth; not an outside sole Elder who presides over a body of churches; nor an outside board of Elders who presides over a local church, or churches; nor an Elder, or Elders, inside the local church presiding over the congregation. We do recognize that Elders, (bishops, overseers, pastors), have been given special authority to not merely *lead*, but also to ‘*rule*’ over the local church ([1 Tim. 5:7](#)). However, we believe that the definition of this ‘*rule*’ must also harmonize with the rest of Scripture.

We believe that the “*keys of the kingdom of heaven*” that Jesus mentions to Peter in ([Matt. 16:18-19](#)), concerning the building of His church, is the same thing mentioned a few chapters later when Jesus is discussing church discipline. We believe that it is not Peter alone who has been given the keys, but all believers who are together united as a local assembly.

*“If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. 16 But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. 17 If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. 18 **Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.** 19 Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. 20 For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.”* - [Matthew 18:15-20](#) (ESV)

We believe, therefore, that the authority and power to exercise church discipline and ex-communication resides in the church, not the Elders. Elders are simply not mentioned nor addressed here (or in [1 Cor. 5](#)).

“It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for a man has his father's wife. 2 And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you. 3 For though absent in body, I am present in spirit; and as if present, I have already pronounced judgment on the one who did such a thing. 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. . . 9 I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people— 10 not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. 11 But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one. 12 For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? 13 God judges those outside. “Purge the evil person from among you.”  
- [1 Corinthians 5:1-5,9-13](#) (ESV)

The church, (assembly, congregation), is who Paul is addressing regarding church discipline being exercised, not Elders. According to Jesus and Paul, the *assembly* is who has the authority to remove its members. We believe the congregation also has the authority to authorize and receive new members based upon the witness of the rest of Scripture.

“Now if anyone has caused pain, he has caused it not to me, but in some measure—not to put it too severely—to all of you. 6 For such a one, this punishment by the majority is enough, 7 so you should rather turn to forgive and comfort him, or he may be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. 8 So I beg you to reaffirm your love for him.” - [2 Corinthians 2:5-8](#) (ESV)

We believe that if the congregation has this authority, then it is not biblical for a sole Elder or a board of Elders to remove from or add to the membership of the local church by their power, for they alone do not have the power. We believe that it is up to the church to do these things, for they together have the authority and power, which has been given to them by Christ Himself, as laid out in the Scriptures.

### **What Authority Do Elders Have?**

In short, we believe Elders have the authority to teach the congregation how they are to rightly exercise the *keys of the kingdom of heaven* and how they ought to live as God's people.

*“And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, 12 to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ” - [Ephesians 4:11-12](#)*

We believe that it is the *work* of the Elders to rightly handle the word of God ([2 Tim. 2:15](#)).

We believe that the Elders are *responsible* for devoting themselves to reading, exhorting, and teaching from the Scriptures ([1 Tim. 4:13](#)).

We believe that the Elders are under *obligation* to be able to hold firm to the trustworthy word, so that they may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and rebuke those who contradict it ([Titus 1:9](#)).

We believe that it is the Elders who are to *properly* lead the congregation into wisdom and discernment because the members bear a great responsibility.

We believe that it is important to recognize that the *individuals* who occupy the office of Elder do not possess authority in and of themselves, but wield authority *through* the office in which they reside. In other words, the authority *of* the office resides *in* the office.

## Is Congregationalism Democracy?

The Cambridge Platform of 1648 may have answered it best;

*“This Government of the church, is a mixt Government (and so hath been acknowledged long before the term of Independency was heard of): In respect of Christ, the head and King of the church, and the Sovereaigne power residing in him, and exercised by him, it is a Monarchy: In respect of the body, or Brotherhood of the church, and power from Christ graunted unto them, it resembles a Democracy: In respect of the Presbytery and power committed to them; it is an Aristocracy (X.3).”*

\*Williston Walker, *The Creeds and Platforms of Congregationalism* (New York: Pilgrim, 1991), 217–18.

We have to recognize that there are several layers and spheres of authority in the church; Christ is *Head* ([Eph. 5:23](#); [1 Peter 2:24-25](#)), Elders are *undershepherds* ([1 Peter 5:1-4](#)), and the congregation as a whole holds the keys ([Matt. 16:13-19](#); [Matt. 18:15-20](#); [1 Cor. 5](#); [2 Cor. 2:6-7](#)).

All of these authorities mentioned work in concert with each other. The church is all under Christ ([1 Cor. 11:3](#)), all members are under their Elders ([Hebrews 13:17](#)), and yet the local church has the authority to ‘bind and loose’ ([Matt. 16:13-19](#); [Matt. 18:15-20](#); [1 Cor. 5](#); [2 Cor. 2:6-7](#)).

If the church appears at times to be a democracy it is in efforts to follow God’s Word and obey His commands of them. Mark Dever explains it this way;

*“A church is not just straightforward democracy, for churches recognize our fallen state, our tendency to err, as well as the inerrancy of God’s Word. So the members of a local church are democratic, perhaps, only in the sense that they work together as a congregation to try to understand God’s Word.”*

\*Mark Dever, *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church* (3rd edition) (Illinois: Wheaton, 2013), 238

### Can a Woman Be An Elder?

We believe that the Scriptures are clear on this issue.

Elders must be able to teach the congregation ([1 Tim. 3:2](#), [5:17](#); [2 Tim. 2:2,15](#), [4:2](#); [Titus 1:9](#)) it is, therefore, impossible for a woman to exercise the role and office of Elder since women are forbidden to teach or exercise authority over a man ([1 Tim. 2:12](#)).

We also see that Elders must be a *'husband of one wife'* which would automatically exclude women from this office because they are not male and therefore cannot be a husband of one wife ([1 Tim. 3:2](#), [Titus 1:6](#)).

We see that women are instructed to teach the *'younger women'* in the church ([Titus 2:3-6](#)) specifically, not the men.

In short we, at HERITAGE BAPTIST CHURCH, do not believe that women can be Elders. The office of Elder, (bishop, overseer, pastor) is for men only.

## MEMBERSHIP

Here at HERITAGE BAPTIST CHURCH, we hold a high view of church membership and by extension, we hold a high view of our church members. Because of our view of biblical church polity (see above), and our subscribed statement of faith (see further above), we require all those considering membership to undergo our *Church Membership* program and interview(s) with an Elder(s). *The Church Membership* program consists of (4) in-person classes. We also will need the individual considering membership to provide permission for HERITAGE BAPTIST CHURCH Elders to contact the individual's previous church (if applicable).

Under Christ, this congregation is governed by its members. Therefore, it is the privilege and responsibility of members to attend members' meetings and vote on the election of Elders and Deacons, on accepting others into membership, on decisions regarding membership status, and on such other matters as may be submitted to a vote. An election or motion is considered *'affirmed'* by achieving a two-thirds vote.

The church shall recognize the termination of a person's membership following his or her death, and it shall also recognize the termination of a person's membership following his or her self-professed apostasy as confirmed by congregational vote. Additionally, the church may recognize the termination of a person's membership after he or she has voluntarily resigned or joined with another church. Membership may also be terminated as an act of church discipline (ordinarily, but not necessarily, at the recommendation of the elders) upon the vote of at least two-thirds of the members present at any regular or special meeting of the members. The church shall have the authority to refuse a member's voluntary resignation or transfer of membership to another church, either to proceed with a process of church discipline or for any other biblical reason.

\* for more information see our *Church Covenant*.

## **STATEMENT ON MARRIAGE, GENDER, AND SEXUALITY**

We believe that God wonderfully and immutably creates each person as male or female, without any errors or confusion, according to His will. These two distinct, complementary genders together reflect the image and nature of God ([Genesis 1:26-27](#)). Rejection of one's biological sex is a rejection of the image of God within that person.

We believe that the term "marriage" has only one meaning: the uniting of one man and one woman in a single, exclusive union, as delineated in Scripture ([Genesis 2:18-25](#)). We believe that God intends sexual intimacy to occur only between a man and a woman who are married to each other ([1 Corinthians 6:18; 7:2-5; Hebrews 13:4](#)). We believe that God has commanded that no intimate sexual activity be engaged outside of a marriage between a man and a woman.

We believe that any form of sexual immorality (including adultery, fornication, homosexual behavior, bisexual conduct, bestiality, incest, and use of pornography) is sinful and offensive to God ([Matthew 15:18-20; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10](#)).

We believe that in order to preserve the function and integrity of HERITAGE BAPTIST CHURCH as the local Body of Christ, and to provide a biblical role