

Dear Brothers Dan, Jesse, and Dennis,

Gentlemen, I understand that the three of you would like to meet with me regarding what the Scripture says about pastors. Though we may not be able to meet in the upcoming weeks to discuss your concerns in this matter, I first want you all to know of my love and respect for each of you by communicating in writing regarding this issue, especially to insure that we are all of the same mind and understanding, and are not relying on oral communication that can easily be forgotten, misunderstood, or miscommunicated to or by others.

While this letter is a bit long, I sincerely ask that you read it before we consider any apparent need for the type of meeting you have in mind. Please know that I am not against any authority, as God is the ultimate authority and has delegated authorities for the purpose of “punishing evildoers” and for the “praise of them that do well” (1 Peter 2:14). However, I would take issue with those who would claim an authority not delegated to them by the LORD and that which is not in accord with His design.

Brethren, for some years now, even prior to Pastor Hooks coming, you have known our labors with young people in VBS ministry, and, officially beginning in 2000, creation ministry with all ages. We first launched out in 1997 to raise financial support to travel with the Kistler evangelistic team. Not long after we began that work, Tabernacle took us on for support without us even asking the church. 2017 marks nearly 20 years that our church has supported us financially and in many other ways. In 2000, after “seed truths” of creation science had been sown in our minds during our prior time of ministry in an assistant pastorate at Faith Baptist in Shelbyville, TN ('94-'97), when those truths were allowed by God to “germinate” in our hearts, we began to apply the foundational message of creation to our summer VBS programs. Since then, we have developed five different themes through the study and application of the teaching both of God’s Word and His works. Hence, we have gained and continue to gain understanding of His design for all of life, including the application of God’s design to “non-science” areas like marriage and music.

Being initially trained in Bible at Pensacola Christian College, I didn’t have the privilege of gaining an expertise in the physical sciences as there were no such classes in my Bible major. However, over the years I have learned that such a lack of knowledge can be, and has been, partially fulfilled in other ways, such as through books, DVDs, or by having special meetings with guests who are trained scientists, or at least ones who have more knowledge and experience than I do. February 4-12 of this year, the LORD blessed to allow us to sponsor two area conferences, the first one at Eastside Baptist in Statesville and a second one at Tabernacle Baptist in Virginia Beach. We were privileged to learn from Frank Sherwin (MA in zoology), researcher, writer, and scientist with the Institute for Creation Research in Dallas, TX.

While heavily involved in the first of these conferences, Brother Jesse began to urge me through texting to meet with you prior to our leaving the area for the Virginia conference. At that point, I was not totally sure of all the reasons for the meeting, and later Brother Payne informed me that you settled on the matter of our position on a pastor.

At first, I had every intention of meeting with you all after we return from serving in Tennessee and Virginia. Notably, however, Jesse’s insistence on a meeting with you while we were busily serving in Statesville, brought a question to mind, one that since has loomed large in my

thinking: “Why did he suddenly have a change in perspective, pressing me to have a meeting on this subject when we were heavily involved in ministry?” We were already hard-pressed with everything else going on, and the additional pressure was extremely distracting mentally, and disheartening spiritually to the groundbreaking work, as it was our first such endeavor in Statesville. After all, I had spoken with both Jesse and Dennis before we left the area, and no such urgency was expressed or even hinted. Hence, I had left with the impression that a meeting after we got back to NC was in order. After the Leaders Luncheon in Hickory on Tuesday, February 7, I did stop by the school to pick up mail and happened to catch Jesse in the school foyer. He asked me if I was going to be at a meeting with you all that evening at 5 pm. I realized that he had not received the group texts which included my answer about the proposed meeting, and told him that I wasn’t going to be able to come. In addition, I reminded him that he had not expressed urgency on the meeting the day before we left for Statesville with our trailer when I stopped by his office to see if “there was anything to chat about before we left.” To my question that Tuesday, he responded with no definitive reason for the urgency, except that “things can build.” My thought later was that if we are the focus of the concern, the issue should subside if we are away, since there is no one there to exacerbate it.

If you will, please allow me to remind us all of what God said in some of His Scriptures wherein is expressed His design for pastors, those who shepherd His assemblies of believers. First, every pastor must himself be a believer; that is, he must be, and recognize himself to be, a sheep of God’s flock and of the flock where he shepherds. Second, as the Apostle Paul wrote to the Ephesians, pastors are gifts to the saints, along with apostles, prophets, evangelists, and teachers. This passage contains the one and only use of the word "pastor" in the English NT, but as is noted below, it is not the only passage which describes the nature and character which these individuals must exhibit. I have inserted the Ephesians passage below, including some underlining and highlights, followed by some notes.

Ephesians 4:4-16

- 4 There is **one body**, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in **one hope** of your calling;
- 5 **One Lord, one faith, one baptism**,
- 6 **One God** and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.
- 7 But unto every one of us is **given** grace according to the measure of the **gift** of Christ.
- 8 Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and **gave gifts** unto men.
- 9 (Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth?
- 10 He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.)

- 11 And he **gave**
 - and some, apostles; [literally: “**the** apostles”]
 - and some, prophets; [literally: “and **the** prophets”]
 - and some, evangelists; [literally: “and **the** evangelists”]
 - and some, pastors [literally: “and **the** pastors”]
 - and teachers; [lit: “and teachers”]

(THE PURPOSE...)

- 12 For the **perfecting** [*katartismos*--complete preparation] of the saints,
for the **work** [*ergon*--work, toil, labour] of the ministry,
for the **edifying** [*oikodomé*--building, construction] of the body of Christ:
- 13 Till we **all** come in the unity of the faith,
and of the knowledge of the Son of God,
unto a perfect man,
unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ:

14 That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive;

15 But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ:

16 From whom **the whole body** fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.

In these verses, God stated that He specifically gave to some the gift of pastoring. In the actual text of verse 11, Paul used the Greek word *poi-mén'* (poy-MAYN) which in English is translated, "pastor." In contrast to the single NT occurrence of the English noun, this Greek noun occurs eighteen times in seventeen verses of the NT, and in those seventeen references where the translation "pastor" does *not* occur, the word *poi-men'* is translated "**shepherd**" or "**shepherds**." This indicates that God's design for those He has gifted as "pastors" is that they act as "shepherds." However, "shepherds" of flocks do not "feed" their flocks as the word is widely understood today. God's shepherds "feed" the flock by leading them to fresh green grass and clear safe waters where the sheep (pastors themselves included) eat and drink for themselves and develop into healthy, reproducing sheep in accord with the design of the Master, the LORD Jesus Who is the "Great Shepherd of the sheep" (Hebrews 13:20).

In addition to "pastors," the LORD Jesus Christ also gave other gifted men, with all to work together, each recognizing the specific gifts of the others, for the complete preparation of the saints, of whom every gifted individual is also a member. In fact, the perfecting of the saints *is* the work of the ministry...*is* the edifying of the body of Christ, and this all continues until we all reach the goal of oneness in the faith and full knowledge of the Son of God, which *is* the perfect (or, complete) man, which *is* the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. Thus, pastors are one of God's gifted men who are to work to bring the members of the body of Christ into the unity and knowledge which insures that all are working together to fulfill the design of God.

The Apostle did not stop at using "shepherd" to describe God's design for pastors. He also described them using terms like "elder" (1 Timothy 5:17) and "bishop" (1 Timothy 3:1; Titus 1:7). These words help us to see more fully other aspects of God's design for these men, but we must be careful not to impose a modern concept on those ancient terms. Rather, we must define these words as the Creator intended:

The term "elder" (presbuteros - 1 Timothy 5:1, 19; 1 Peter 5:1, 5) applies to those who are **mature, stable, established believers whose lives exhibit their firmness in God**. The word does not only refer to believers who are simply "older believers," but to individuals with an assured faith where initial indications of strength and validity have not given way to weakness and doubting. Elders are believers whose faith does not require experiences and exhortations to maintain its strength and effectiveness. **Their faith is an established fact, a reality of life, an absolute knowing, which is not dependent upon any outside influences to encourage them to continue believing, causing firmness, to God**. The Word of God indicates that those who "pastor" are not to be "novices" (1 Timothy 3:6), but mature believers whose faith and walk with God is firm and unmoveable, that is, pastors must be elders, but this does not mean that the term "elder" applies only to "pastors" (e.g. Revelation 4:4). Accordingly, we should expect to find multiple "elders" in a church where each member is truly growing in his or her knowledge and understanding of God and His Word, according to His design and

not man's. If each member is not progressing to this maturity level in Christ, then something is wrong either in the members, the teaching and preaching, or the pastor who is overseeing the flock. In other words, if the pastor is a true elder, understanding the true nature and design of God for His flock, he will be leading all of the sheep to the fresh green grass and the clear safe water which develops each one into an "elder," because such growth and development are the very design of the Creator Master. It is not the design of God for the sheep to be dependent upon a man or men.

The term "overseer" (episkopos – 2 Timothy 4:22 "bishop"; 1 Peter 2:12 "visitation"; 2:25 "Bishop") applies to those who have already demonstrated a **willingness to assume greater responsibility, and the associated accountability to God, for protecting and developing those whom the Creator has brought into their sphere of influence.** These are individuals who have recognized the widely varying needs of the members both in their immediate flock of believers and in the world around them, and they desire to be used by God to "watch over" His sheep, insuring that each one reach full success in the Master's design. Certainly, this word must apply to "pastors," because this is an aspect of the function of a shepherd, but it is not the sole or primary aspect.

Regarding the number of elders for a local church, we see in **Acts 20:16-17** that Paul "determined to sail by **Ephesus**...And from Miletus he sent to **Ephesus**, and called the **elders** of **the** church." (Note that the local-ness of the church leaders he called was a city: **Ephesus**, and that this is in harmony with the fact that the churches of Asia in the Book of Revelation were all cities.)

There is a modern belief referred to as "elder rule" that Scripture does not teach. It is an erroneous belief that the leadership of a church should consist of a group of members that function as an oligarchy, or a governing few. However, according to Acts 20, God's design does involve multiple "elders" who interact completely voluntarily, actively involving one another in the oversight of the ministry, and developing every other "sheep" who desires to grow and learn, taking each at his or her particular level of knowledge and ability. Another erroneous modern concept, which is incompatible with Scripture, is that a single individual exists "at the top" of a local assembly, like a pope according to Catholic doctrine or as a corporate CEO in the business world. God clearly states that His shepherds are not to act "**as being lords** over God's heritage."

"The **elders** which are among you I exhort, who am also an **elder**, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight [**episkopeo**] thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; **Neither as being lords over God's heritage**, but being ensamples to the flock." 1 Peter 5:1-3

"**Lording**" means "**to exercise dominion over,**" or "**to control**" God's people, or His "heritage." Pastors are themselves sheep who are to lead as "**ensamples**" (1 Pet. 5:3) to the flock and to all others as well. They are not, nor should they function as, "lords over" their particular assembly of believers. They should be exemplary in receiving counsel from "the church" and especially those who truly care for "the church." *Taken further, no one, regardless of position or prestige, has authority outside of the realm of truth and right!* God does not and will not give authority to violate His perfect design. Though man has **free will** and the **ability** to violate God's design, he is responsible and accountable to the ultimate Authority, God, for his use (or misuse) of the authority and opportunities delegated to him. Those who use the authority delegated from God must take great

care to exercise it within the criteria of His perfect, revealed design.

Angels in Revelation:

The word “angel” in the Book of Revelation, chapters 1-3, has been interpreted to indicate the sole human leader of each of the seven churches of Asia. However, the context of the book, chapters, and a number of verses clearly shows that “angel” means “angel,” just as the KJV translators rendered the original Greek. All of God’s Word is inspired (2 Timothy 3:16), and we must needs include in this “angel” analysis the previously-mentioned verses that describe the design of God for the leaders of His believers, especially in the text where Paul called for “the elders” of Ephesus. Hence, there is no Scriptural basis for “one man at the top” of the leadership of a given assembly of believers. Rather, the design of God communicated in His Word is a body of elders/pastors throughout a city, which is a “local church” (e.g. Ephesus, Thyatira, Philippi, Sardis, etc). These men are tasked with the responsibilities involved in leading/shepherding the people of God.

While taking Advanced NT at Tabernacle Baptist College & Seminary in Virginia Beach, in my studies toward an eventual Masters in Religious Education, I learned more clearly that the Scripture means what it says, and says what it means. In the case of “angel” [*angelos*: e.g. Revelation 1:1; 1:20] in Revelation 1-3, the word does indeed mean a heavenly being from God and not a human messenger, just as the translators of the King James version indicated. This translation is consistent throughout Revelation. Just as Genesis 1:1 is the beginning verse and foundational to all of Scripture, the beginning verse of Revelation is key to the rest of the book.

Revelation 1:1 states that the revelation was that “which God gave unto Him, to shew unto His servants...and **He sent and signified it by His angel** unto His servant John.” The word “signified” (1:1) includes the word “sign” and is a form of the same Greek word, “*semeion*” which is used to refer to the miraculous (e.g. “signs and wonders” in Acts 7:36; 14:3; 2:22; 2:43; 4:30; 5:12; 7:36; 14:3; Rom. 15:9; 2 Cor 12:12, etc.) Hence, the angels of God assigned to each church (Thyatira, Ephesus, Sardis, Laodicea, etc.) in some way miraculously **signified**—“showed” (22:6) or “testified” (22:16) (Gr. *martureo*, meaning “to witness”) the letters from God, to Jesus, through John’s writing. For consistency of interpretation, one must take the word “angel” in this verse as a mighty being from God.

Otherwise, if “angel” is a human messenger, such a messenger not only was indicated by the “stars” in the right hand of Christ (1:20), but also was used by God to “signify” the message to the Apostle John (1:1). Are we to believe the Apostle John had an earthly pastor who miraculously confirmed (“signified”) the revelation of God to him? I think not. “Angel” should be interpreted the same throughout the entirety of Revelation, as a mighty heavenly being. There is no reason Biblically to interpret “angel” in chapters 1-3 as anything other than God’s mighty messengers (e.g. 14:6, 7), just as the King James translators translated the word “*angelos*.” This is reaffirmed in chapter 22.

1:1 “sent and **signified by his angel...**”

(22:6) And he said unto me, These sayings *are* faithful and true: and the Lord God of the holy prophets **sent his angel** to **shew unto his servants** the things which must **shortly be done**.

1:1 “shew unto His servants”

1:1 “shortly come to pass”

(22:7) Behold, I come quickly: blessed is he that keepeth the sayings of the prophecy of **this book**.

(22:8) And I John saw these things, and heard *them*. And when I had heard and seen, I fell down to worship before the feet of **the angel which shewed me these things**. (cf. 1:1 "...signified it by his angel unto his servant...")

(22:9) Then saith he unto me, See *thou do it* not: for I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren the prophets, and of them which keep the sayings of **this book**: worship God.

(22:10) And he saith unto me, Seal not the sayings of the prophecy of **this book**: for the time is at hand.

****Verses 7, 9, & 10 clarify Revelation as one entire book****

(22:16) I Jesus have sent **mine angel** to testify unto you these things **in the churches**. I am the root and the offspring of David, *and the bright and morning star*. (This verse reaffirms that the message was to the churches and not to the angels themselves.)

Therefore, Scripture teaches and Paul exemplified in writing that, according to God, "local" is a city (e.g. Ephesus, Sardis, Thyatira, etc.) and that multiple pastors ("elders") existed throughout each city serving as overseers of the people. Paul gave instruction to both Timothy and Titus for the qualifications of these pastors/bishops/elders, and specifically said to Titus:

For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain **elders** in **every city**, as I had appointed thee: (Titus 1:5)

As far as the challenge that the messages (e.g. "Repent" or "Thou has left thy first love") are not to the angels, this is correct, as all of seven letters indicate that the Spirit was speaking "to the churches", not "to the angels." Therefore, the "angels" themselves are not told to repent, nor are they admonished because they "left their first love." Each one is simply tasked with signifying to the church under his oversight the portion of the letter written by John to that church.

All of this, of course, is not "new" teaching as it has been the Word of God since Paul and John penned their texts under inspiration of the Holy Spirit. That which is thought to be "new" truth is deemed thus because men have chosen to follow the words of men and not the Words of Scripture, sometimes for ages. Many and far-reaching have been, and still remain, such erroneous doctrines (e.g. the "gap theory" or "Calvinism") which men have developed because they thought "whatever the Bible means to me is what God meant it to say," and they reach their errors because they rarely engage in intensive, analytical study of the Word as God gave it. It is far easier to read and express the words of other men, men who themselves did not seek the actual meaning which God built into His Scriptures.

Creation truth, the very foundation of the revelation of God, today is often met with skepticism, rooted in views such as "it's not needed" or "it's new teaching," and its significance in proclaiming God's design for His people, His pastors, and His plan for how HIS body should operate is often being neglected. The result has developed through years of men, who had been entrusted to preach and teach the truths of Scripture, preaching instead their own fallible ideas of how *they* think things should work. The foundational and critical doctrine of creation is not "new." It has been greatly minimized, and its foundational truth has been replaced by the erroneous perspectives of

men. Such perspectives bring only the destruction which cannot be avoided, as men (regardless of their position in an assembly) are subject to error in their understanding of Scripture.

In light of and concerning these matters, brethren, I sincerely ask you to do as did the Bereans, to “search the Scriptures daily whether those things were so” (Acts 17:11). In a separate document, I can upon request, detail for you the main personal circumstances which have led us up to the present. As far as meeting with you as a group, I am better at writing or re-writing out my thoughts. Hence, I am more than happy to share with you such writing in person or by email. All of these things considered, I have re-considered meeting with you as a group and thank you in advance for your understanding in this. May the God-Who-Is bless each of us with a sense of the wisdom and understanding He has placed within our grasp as we seek His way and leading in our lives and ministries.

Brother Jeff