

AUTHORITY IN THE LOCAL CHURCH

This document summarizes conclusions reached in a series of lessons delivered by Dan Miller to the Adult Class of Eden Baptist Church from September 22, 1996 to January 26, 1997.

1. **Jesus Christ exercises absolute authority over Eden Baptist Church.**

- This church is the sole and absolute possession of Jesus Christ (Matt 16:18). He is our head—the very source of our life and the controlling authority of our organization (Eph 1:18-23; Col 1:15-18). No doctrine taught, decision made, or action taken by this assembly has any merit unless it conforms to the will of Christ.
- Furthermore, the intent of this assembly must not only be to operate within the tolerance of Christ's will, but to enthusiastically pursue strict conformance to that will as the only means to fruitful ministry and ultimate satisfaction.
- To this end, the doctrine, decisions and actions of this church must be pursued in an ongoing atmosphere of humble, dependent, persistent prayer and in careful, demonstrable conformity to the written Word of God.
- Never, under any circumstance, is the church permitted to violate the will of Christ.

2. **The Apostles exercise foundational authority over Eden Baptist Church.**

- As uniquely chosen (Matt 10:1-4; Acts 1:1-26) witnesses of the resurrected Christ, the New Testament apostles serve as the authoritative foundation of EBC (Eph 2:11-22; 3:1-6; 4:11-13).
- This foundation is realized today in the authoritative documents of the New Testament (1 Cor 14:37, 38; 2 Pet 3:16). Never is the church permitted to violate the will of the apostles as recorded in the inspired texts of the New Testament.

3. **The Overseer\Elders exercise functional authority over Eden Baptist Church.**

- With the passing of the apostles, the functional authority over individual New Testament churches was transferred to morally qualified local church elders (Acts 11:1,30; 14:23; 15:2-6,22,23; 16:4; 20:17; 1 Tim 3:1-7).
- The elders are vested with ruling authority in the assembly and are to be honored as spiritual leaders by the assembly (1 Thess 5:12-13; 1 Tim 5:17; Heb 13:17).
- By its very nature, this authority cannot circumvent the authority of the apostles or of Christ (1 Cor 5:1-5; 2 Pet 3:16), nor should it ever violate or displace the priesthood of the individual believer (Acts 15:12, 22; 1 Pet 2:5, 9; 5:3).

- According to the pattern of a godly husband and father, the elders are to render a type of leadership marked by humble respect, self-sacrificing love, and spiritual nurture (1 Tim 3:4, 5; with Eph 5:25ff). According to the pattern of a faithful shepherd, they are commissioned by Christ to protect (Acts 20:17,28-31a), lead (1 Tim 3:4,5; 5:17; Heb 13:17; 1 Pet 5:1-2), feed (Matt 28:20; John 21:17; 1 Pet 5:1-2; Titus 1:9; 1 Tim 4:13; 5:17-18), and care (James 5:14; 1 Thess. 5:12) for the flock with an attitude of humble willingness and unpretentious zeal (1 Pet 5:1-4).
- It is appropriate for a church to have one overseer. It is ideal for a church to have more than one elder in which case a single overseer will serve as leader among equals. Some elders may not have primary responsibilities in teaching and preaching while the overseer will always shoulder such responsibility (1 Tim 5:17; 1 Tim 3:1-7; Acts 5:1ff; 12:1-3,16-17; 14:23; 15:1-2,6,13-19; 21:1,17-18).

4. **The Deacons exercise derivative authority over Eden Baptist Church.**

- Deacons are morally qualified, exemplary servants of the church who are entrusted with official ministry responsibilities (Phil 1:1; 1 Tim 3:8-13).
- Unlike the elders, their specific duties are not defined in Scripture and are thus to be designed to meet the unique needs of EBC. Their capacity as faithful servants is to be noteworthy, their labors officially recognized by the assembly, and their work directly beneficial to the function of the elders (Acts 6:1-7).
- While deacons are to be noted leaders in the church's ministry, the Scriptures do not specifically invest them with authority over the assembly.

5. **The Flock of Eden Baptist Church is to render willing submission as believer-priests to the qualified leadership of the church.**

- There is no biblical evidence that the flock is ever subject to any ecclesiastical authority outside its assembly.
- Christ calls his people to willingly submit to the qualified leadership of the church (Heb 13:17; 2 Thess 5:12-13). Such submission is never to supersede the flock's prior responsibility to Christ and the apostles, nor in any way should such submission violate the conscience or individual priesthood of the believer (Acts 15:13, 19, 22).
- The submission of a church to her leadership is to be of the same nature as the submission of a wife to her husband (1 Tim 3:4-5; Heb 13:17; 1 Thess 5:12-13; Eph 5:22-24). It is to be rendered honorably, as an act of faith, and with a view to pleasing Christ.