

Who Determines “The Essentials” of the Local Church? (...and how?)

1. Some debate about the phrase, “In Essentials Unity, In Non-essentials, Liberty, In all Things Love.”
 - a. **Blogged reflection on the statement:** <http://raincitypastor.blogspot.com/2007/10/in-essentials-unity-in-non-essentials.html>
 - b. **More history than you will want to read:**
<http://www.mun.ca/rels/restmov/texts/unitas/essrev.html>
 - c. **“Our Position,” a document written by Isaac Errett in 1904 for the purpose of establishing some clarity of doctrinal positions within the Restoration Movement.**
<http://www.mun.ca/rels/restmov/texts/ierrett/ourposition.html>

2. **IN THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH AS A WHOLE: God, Jesus & the Holy Spirit determine “The Essentials” upon which church unity is to be established.**
 - a. **Jesus prayed for a unity to be modeled after his relationship with God. John 17:20-21**
"My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, 21 that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.

 - b. **Jesus gifted earthly leadership to cooperatively facilitate a unity based upon knowledge of Jesus Christ, and faith in, as well as obedience to Him. Eph 4:11-13**
It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, 12 to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up 13 until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

 - c. **God used the Apostles and the authors of Scripture to provide an adequate understanding of God and Jesus Christ which would encourage the church in purpose and unity. Col 2:1-4**
I want you to know how much I am struggling for you and for those at Laodicea, and for all who have not met me personally. 2 My purpose is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, 3 in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

 - d. **God used the Jerusalem Elders (with the Apostles present and dominantly involved in providing direction) to settle issues of doctrinal dispute using the process of reasoning through Scripture, prayer, and the leading of the Holy Spirit. Acts 15:6-15**
The apostles and elders met to consider this question. 7 After much discussion, Peter got up and addressed them: "Brothers, you know that some time ago God made a choice among you that the Gentiles might hear from my lips the message of the gospel and believe. 8 God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us. 9 He made no distinction between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith. 10 Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of the disciples a yoke that neither we nor our fathers have been able to bear? 11 No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are." 12 The whole assembly became silent as they listened to Barnabas and Paul telling about the miraculous signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through them. 13 When they finished, James spoke up: "Brothers, listen to me. 14 Simon has described to us how God at first showed his concern by taking from the Gentiles a people for himself. 15 The words of the prophets are in agreement with this, as it is written: ...

- e. **Any church that does not take seriously the Biblical criteria for leadership will assign the role of leadership to individuals that are chosen by them, rather than by God. The church will then decline into confusion, disunity, and destruction. This process can be seen in Revelation 1-3 e.g. Rev 2:5-6** *Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place.*
3. **IN THE LOCAL CHURCH FOR TODAY: The Elders' of the local church have been appointed as the "Overseers" and "Shepherds" of the flock.**
- a. **Ephesus had elders that were charged to guard the church against those who would seek to destroy it by "distorting the truth."** **Acts 20:28-31** *"Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. 29 I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. 30 Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. 31 So be on your guard!"*
- b. **The Church at Philippi had elders ("Overseers")** **Phil 1:1** *Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons:*
- c. **Churches throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia had elders and were commissioned to "Oversee the flock."** **1 Peter 5:1-2** *To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ's sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed: 2 Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers*
- d. **The Church at Thessalonica had elders who worked hard and were to be respected even as they admonished the followers.** **1 Thess 5:12-13** *Now we ask you, brothers, to respect those who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you. 13 Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work. Live in peace with each other.*
- e. **Good elders watch over the Saints as ones who must give an account.** **Heb 13:17** *Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you.*
- f. **Good elders have a positive track record of life and ministry.** **Heb 13:7-8** *Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.*
- g. **Good elders that teach and preach are to be compensated with honor and financial remuneration.** **1 Tim 5:17** *The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching.*
- h. **The greatest indicator of God chosen leadership is their desire to serve the church rather than control it.**
- **1 Peter 5:1-4** *Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers — not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not*

greedy for money, but eager to serve; 3 not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.

- **Mark 10:42-45** *"You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. 43 Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, 44 and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. 45 For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."*

4. What happens if the Eldership in a local church is wrong?

a. God provided a Scriptural process for confronting/restoring the erring brother/leader/eldership.

- **There must be "two or three witnesses" of an Elder(ship) in error. 1 Tim 5:19-21** *Do not entertain an accusation against an elder unless it is brought by two or three witnesses. 20 Those who sin are to be rebuked publicly, so that the others may take warning. 21 I charge you, in the sight of God and Christ Jesus and the elect angels, to keep these instructions without partiality, and to do nothing out of favoritism.*
- **Similarly, as in Matthew 18 there should be an assumption of love and respect through a one-on-one time of biblical instruction given to the "erring" leader(ship). Acts 18:24-26** *Meanwhile a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was a learned man, with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures. 25 He had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and he spoke with great fervor and taught about Jesus accurately, though he knew only the baptism of John. 26 He began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately.*
- **Any rejection of one-on-one instruction should be followed by Jesus' process of confrontation. Matt 18:15-17** *If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. 16 But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony 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, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector.*
- **Any leader(ship) rejecting clear Scriptural instruction should be disassociated from the church. 2 Thess 3:14-15** *If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of him. Do not associate with him, in order that he may feel ashamed. 15 Yet do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother.*
- **Any leader(ship) that acts divisively in the church should be exposed as gossiping and harmful to the church. 3 John 9-10** *I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to be first, will have nothing to do with us. 10 So if I come, I will call attention to what he is doing, gossiping maliciously about us. Not satisfied with that, he refuses to welcome the brothers. He also stops those who want to do so and puts them out of the church.*