

THE PASTORS' PEN

articles from the elders of BBC

In this first of several articles, I will begin to address the matter of biblical church governance—specifically, what is known as “congregationalism” or “Elder-led congregationalism.” The purpose is to help each member of Brackenhurst Baptist Church to show up to work.

Recently at our quarterly members meeting, it was explained that the congregation is assigned a twofold biblical job description in the New Testament.

First, the congregation is tasked by Jesus Christ to admit and dismiss church members (Matthew 16:13–19; 18:15–20). Second, the congregation is tasked with protecting the gospel (Acts 15:1–30; Galatians 1:6–10). Included under this latter responsibility is the matter of affirming those who aspire to serve as elders (1 Timothy 3:1–7; Titus 1:5–9). All of these are weighty responsibilities—very weighty.

In the first responsibility, we are being called upon to affirm a person's profession of faith. What a joy when we can heartily do so, and what sorrow when we *cannot* do so.

The second responsibility is likewise a sobering responsibility. The health of the church is very much related to the fidelity of its message. Each church member must know the gospel and therefore be equipped to oppose counterfeit gospels. Related to this, to the degree the congregation is grounded in the gospel, it will be able to discern the character, conviction and competence of those recommended to be considered for the eldership.

Now, if these are job descriptions—if these are responsibilities that each member is tasked to do—then we must show up in order to do our jobs. We must show up *at work to work*.

No employer would long tolerate an employee who was not consistently at work.



If the worker does not show up, the employer, in most cases, will not pay up. In such a case, everyone loses. But when the employee does show up, then both she and the employer are in a

better position for both to profit—as long, of course, as the worker knows what she is supposed to be doing when she gets there!

This metaphor may help us to understand the importance of our quarterly members meetings, and how we can make the most of them, for our good to the glory of God.

For Members Only

First, when it comes to member's meetings, they are for *members*. If you work for Absa, then those down the block at FNB do not expect you to show up *there*. But Absa expects your presence. So with BBC.

When a quarterly meeting takes place, we don't expect visitors. In fact, in most cases, this is not a meeting for visitors. A members' meeting is just that: for members only. Since we will ordinarily be discussing family matters, the meeting will usually be limited to the family.

Some, including myself, feel a bit awkward about informing visitors that the quarterly meeting is only for church members. But to protect the confidentiality of each member, in most cases it is prudent to restrict attendance to members only. This can be communicated in such a way that non-members need not be offended. Though there may be some quarterly meetings where

non-members will be allowed to attend, this will not ordinarily be the case.

Assembly Required

Second, if each of us will fulfil our God-given responsibilities, then a simple and yet essential element is our bodily presence. The corporate “amen,” as well as the corporate “nay,” require vocal chords to be present. Therefore, the appeal of the eldership is that each member prioritise attendance at these quarterly meetings. To facilitate this, please take note of the following dates for the 2019 members' meetings: Wednesday, 20 February 2019 (AGM); Sunday, 19 May 2019; Sunday, 18 August 2019; and Sunday, 17 November 2019.

It continues to strike me (though it no longer shocks me) that, often, the very people who have particular concerns about congregational life are absent from the church when those matters are addressed. Though sometimes members are providentially hindered from attendance (illness, frailty, out of town, work issues, etc.), in too many cases absences are merely a statement of disinterest. Brothers and sisters, this ought not to be! Please, show up prepared to do your job.

On-the-Job Training

Third, as with any job, often the best vehicle for learning is doing. The old practice of apprenticeship (which, in my opinion, needs to be revived!) was a very productive means towards improving one's skills and therefore helping a company to be more productive. So with our members' meetings.

As indicated at our recent members' meeting, these four unique gatherings each year provide opportunities for us to be instructed from Scripture how we should respond to concrete situations. These meetings will provide a platform from which we, as a congregation, will practically apply God's word, thereby strengthening our skill at fulfilling our biblical responsibilities. The fruit will be a healthier expression of biblical congregationalism.

For instance, when admitting new members into the church, we will be learning, and/or reminded of the importance of one's profession of faith, the importance of baptism, and the importance of covenantal commitment. I trust we will also be further grounded in the essential role of the membership taking responsibility to understand the gospel and what we should expect of those who profess to believe it. When matters of doctrine and/or discipline are brought before the church, we are being provided with an opportunity to hear from God's word and to be strengthened in our understanding of those matters. The meetings will provide a forum to ask questions about these issues and, I trust, to hear biblical answers.

Since these members meetings are a family affair, think of them in relation to the teaching of Deuteronomy 6:6–9:

And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

Moses expected believing parents to teach their household the word of the Lord. And the way he expressed this command indicates that it was to be accomplished, not only by rote instruction, but also in everyday talk. That is, regardless of the activity in which the family was involved—whether sitting at home, walking along a path, or tucking the children in for a good night's sleep—every situation was to be stewarded as an opportunity to teach truth about God and how to live for him. Likewise, these members' meetings are real-life opportunities to learn as we apply truth. As we meet as a family, we are being provided with the opportunity to practically learn what the Bible teaches regarding body life.

In conclusion, let me encourage each member of BBC to show up to your job, so that you might be further equipped to do your job, resulting in our church being built up (Ephesians 4:12) with a view to “grow[ing] up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ” (Ephesians 4:15).