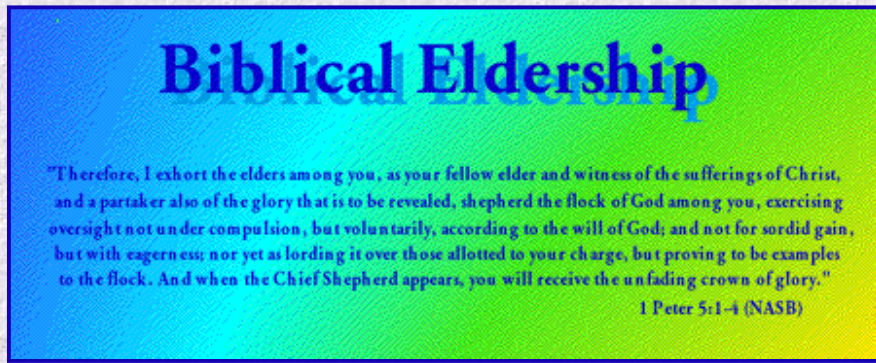


# BIBLICAL ELDERSHIP HOMEPAGE



**Welcome to the Biblical Eldership Homepage. This page is dedicated to the study of eldership and the restoration of Biblical eldership to our churches.**

**Plurality of Leadership  
No Clergy -- Laity division  
Humble Servant Leadership**

**We realize that church polity is just a starting point in the restoration of Biblical practices in the church. We are also holding up other church practices to the "light" of Scripture and try to make it a practice to test all things by the Word of God. Please see articles and websites listed below on other topics. If you have comments, ideas, criticism, suggestions, etc... Please contact us.**

**"They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men. [ Isaiah 29:13 ]**

**You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to the traditions of men." And he said to them: "You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions!" [Mark 7:7-9]**

**"Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true." [Acts 17:11]**

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### **APOLOGETIC ON BIBLICAL ELDERSHIP** **by Bo Salisbury**

Our apologetic will consist mainly of a number of statements, with references, which we believe to be the clear teaching of God's Word on the subject of church leadership. It is our feeling that by producing a lengthy and detailed apologetic, we would simply be "re-inventing the wheel," since there are a number of works available which quite accurately reflect our views on the issue. Some examples are *Biblical Eldership* by Alexander Strauch. Within the apologetic we will list some common objections and attempt to answer these. If you want to respond to the author of this article Please send e-mail to [Bo Salisbury](#).

[Click Here to Go to \*\*APOLOGETIC ON BIBLICAL ELDERSHIP\*\*](#)



**NEW**

## **Articles on Elders and Deacons by Vern J. Peterman**

A document listing the verses in the New Testament relating to Elders. A commentary on the verses in the New Testament relating to Elders and another commentary on the verses relating to Deacons..

[Click Here to Go to Eldership Document](#)

[Click Here to Go to Commentary on Eldership Verses](#)

[Click Here to Go to Commentary on Deacon Verses](#)

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## **IN SEARCH OF BIBLICAL CHURCH LEADERSHIP by Rebecca L. Brennan**

This is a testimony of a personal search for Biblical church leadership and the realization that our present traditional church model of leadership did not match up with scripture. If you want to respond to the author of this article Please send e-mail to [Patrick and Rebecca Brennan](#).

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## **REDISCOVERING THE PAST: Biblical Eldership in Light of Scripture and History by Patrick J. Brennan**

This document is also available with the Greek text. The Greek text cannot be sent by email or displayed on this web page. If you would like a copy of this document Please send me your (snail) mailing address. Otherwise the article on this web page is identical except it does not contain the Greek text. If you have any other comments or suggestions Please send e-mail to [Patrick and Rebecca Brennan](#).

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## **OLD TESTAMENT LEADERSHIP by Art Mealer**

This is an article which shows that God's heart has always been to have no other king but Him. We, the church have failed in this just like Israel did.

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## **RICHARD BAXTER: Shepherd of Souls by Bo Salisbury**

This is a free download of a book by Bo Salisbury. The heart of being a shepherd is captured in these pages. Enjoy it as I did.

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## **BIBLICAL ELDERSHIP: Restoring the Eldership to It's Rightful Place in the Church (Revised) by Alexander Strauch**

This is a free download of a booklet by Alexander Strauch published by Lewis and Roth. It is a synopsis of his longer book on Biblical Eldership.

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## **RETHINKING THE WINESKIN: The Practices of the New Testament Church by Frank A. Viola**

This is one of the best books on church restoration that I have seen. I highly recommend that everyone read this. This book captures the heart of the New Testament church. This book can be ordered from this site.

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## **WHO IS YOUR COVERING: A Fresh Look at Leadership, Authority, and Accountability by Frank A. Viola**

This is another of Frank Viola's books. This book continues where RETHINKING THE WINESKIN leaves off. Highly recommended. This book can also be ordered from this site.

[Click Here to Go to WHO IS YOUR COVERING: A Fresh Look at Leadership, Authority, and Accountability](#)

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## **BIBLICAL ELDERSHIP DISCUSSION GROUP**

A discussion group of people interested in the topic of Biblical Eldership. If you are interested in this topic or have questions this is an excellent resource.

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## **RESOURCES AND MATERIALS AVAILABLE ON ELDERSHIP**

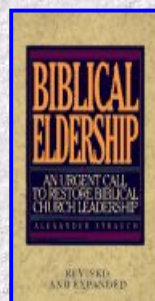
\*\*\*ALEXANDER STRAUCH RESOURCES, MATERIALS AND INFORMATION

Excellent Resources on Eldership and Deacons

Alexander Strauch Resources available from Amazon.com



[Click Here or on the Book Below to see Resources Available by Alexander Strauch](#)



**\*\*\*A LIST OF BOOKS ON ELDERSHIP, CHURCH RESTORATION, NEW TESTAMENT PRACTICES AND OTHER TOPICS**

These are books that I feel are worth reading. I do not totally agree with everything in these books but they challenge one to read the Scriptures for themselves.

[Click Here to See a List of all Resources Available Including Alexander Strauch Resources](#)

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## **ELDERSHIP WEBSITES**

These sites deal with church government or related topics. Some sites listed are churches or groups that espouse plurality of leadership. A sites inclusion in this list does not mean that we agree with all of their material, only that they may be of interest to those researching the topic of eldership.

[Click here to see list](#)

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## **HOME CHURCH WEB-SITES**

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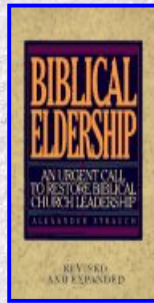
Patrick J. Brennan \* Biblical Eldership Homepage \* [brennanp@nccn.net](mailto:brennanp@nccn.net) \* Revised January 16, 2002

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**You can Buy This and Other Eldership Books at Amazon.com**



[Click Here to Buy Alexander Strauch and Other Resources at Amazon.com](#)



## Elders, Overseers, Pastors (Shepherds)



Acts 20:17, 28-31 (NAU)

17 From Miletus he [Paul] sent to Ephesus and called to him the **elders** of the church...

28 "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the **flock**, among which the Holy Spirit has made you **overseers**, to **shepherd** the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.

29 "I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the **flock**;

30 and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them.

31 "Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears.

Eph 4:11-16 (NAU)

11 And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as **pastors** and teachers,

12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ;

13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.

14 As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming;

15 but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him

who is the head, even Christ,

16 from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.

1 Tim 3:1-7 (NAU)

1 It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office of **overseer**, it is a fine work he desires to do.

2 An **overseer**, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach,

3 not addicted to wine or pugnacious, but gentle, peaceable, free from the love of money.

4 He must be one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity

5 (but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?),

6 and not a new convert, so that he will not become conceited and fall into the condemnation incurred by the devil.

7 And he must have a good reputation with those outside the church so that he will not fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.

1 Tim 5:17-20

17 The **elders** who rule [guide] well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching.

18 For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing," and "The laborer is worthy of his wages."

19 Do not receive an accusation against an **elder** except on the basis of two or three witnesses.

20 Those who continue in sin, rebuke in the presence of all, so that the rest also will be fearful of sinning.

Titus 1:5-9 (NAU)

5 For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint **elders** in every city as I directed you,

6 namely if any man is above reproach, the husband of one wife, having  
children who believe, not accused of dissipation or rebellion.

7 For the **overseer** must be above reproach as God's steward, not self-willed,  
not quick-tempered, not addicted to wine, not pugnacious, not fond of sordid gain,  
8 but hospitable, loving what is good, sensible, just, devout, self-controlled,  
9 holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, so  
that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who  
contradict.

1 Pet 5:1-4 (NAU)

1 Therefore, I exhort the **elders** among you, as your fellow elder and witness  
of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed,  
2 **shepherd** the **flock** of God among you, exercising **oversight** not under  
compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain,  
but with eagerness;

3 nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be  
examples to the **flock**.

4 And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading  
crown of glory.

See also: I Thessalonians 5:12,13; I Timothy 3:8-13; Hebrews 13:17; James 5:13-15

## Some Key Points:

- Elder=overseer=shepherd. God desires action and character, not titles or authority figures
- A “pastor”, from the latin for “shepherd”, is an elder/overseer/shepherd. If pastors were something different, there would be only one mention of pastors in all the New Testament and no qualifications given. Also, see I Timothy 5:17-20 for elders that “preach and teach”.
- Since Jesus is the Chief Shepherd, elders/overseers/shepherds are really “undershepherds”

- The title “bishop”, taken from “overseer”, is a distinction of authority not given in Scripture
- Deacons are servants and leaders of servants. A good deacon isn’t automatically a good elder

## Commentary on Selected Verses Mentioning “Elders”

The chosen text for this is given in Acts 20:27-35, in which Paul had arranged to meet the elders of the church at Ephesus for the last time, at Miletus. Paul had been speaking to them about his ministry with them, when in verse 27 he breaks into the discourse about their own responsibility as elders / shepherds / overseers. This passage is frequently *overlooked in the selection of elders*, in that elders must not only meet the character qualifications (as given in 1 Timothy chapter 3 and Titus chapter 1), but be fully prepared to step into the job responsibilities to which God calls them. Further, this passage calls for an ongoing process and vigilance among elders which is often neglected. Below is the verse by verse quote from this passage (NASU), with each verse followed by its commentary.

*27"For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God.*

The Apostle Paul, just prior to changing the subject of his discourse from his own ministry to that of warnings and exhortation to the elders, tells them that he has not held back from conveying to them “the whole purpose of God”. The word translated “shrink” is *hupostello*, which would mean to *draw back*<sup>[1]</sup>. Paul did indeed teach them diligently, as Acts 19: 8-10 indicates, in which it says that he

taught daily in the school of Tyrannus about two years time. Acts 19:20 states of Ephesus that, "So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed." Acts 20:31 reveals that Paul spent, in total, about three years time in Ephesus.

Paul's use of the Greek word *anaggello* is translated "declaring", and it means "to announce"<sup>[2]</sup>, which is the translation given for this word in the Net Bible<sup>[3]</sup>. Its use reinforces the prior phrase, in which Paul made clear that he didn't hold back the truth from them. It was boldly and broadly presented, not privately or in any limited exposure.

Further, Paul didn't speak to them about a few narrow subjects, but instead conveyed to them "the whole purpose of God". This phrase is translated "whole counsel of God" in the King James Version. The footnote for the word "purpose" in the Net Bible says, "or plan"<sup>[4]</sup>. Paul didn't simply tell them about a few areas of truth, or focus on emotional recovery or on program development. He gave them the full spectrum of what God had laid out in his Scriptures (then being the Old Testament) and in the Lord's special revelations to Paul himself.<sup>[5]</sup>

*28"Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit*

*has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.*

The elders of the church were not advised, but *commanded* (imperative mood) to be on guard for themselves, the elders, and all the flock of God – the church under their care. Though Paul had told the Ephesian elders previously about what he had done among them, his warning to them was also part of his responsibility, but he was in these words fulfilling the last of his responsibility on site. From there he could only write and pray (which he did, cf. Epistle to the Ephesians). Notice that the first part of the command was to be on guard for the elders themselves<sup>[6]</sup>. The elders themselves should not be ignored, simply assuming that the elders will be fine without care and attention. The elders could themselves fall short, become neglectful, or even turn against the flock either overtly or covertly. It has been shown throughout history that elders / shepherds / overseers can stumble morally, drift in their teaching of the truth, or be distracted from the key areas of focus of their responsibility. Paul subsequently further addresses this substantial risk. Paul, in warning them to be on guard for the flock, is telling them to look after the flock in various respects. There are a variety of ways in which “being on guard for the flock” will require diligent attention.

Paul’s next phrase tells us two primary things:

- It is the Holy Spirit who given them their position of responsibility, and
- He has made them overseers.

The assignment of responsibility to elders, therefore, should not stem from earthly motivations, and not primarily from personal inclinations. It should not be the result of a popularity contest (i.e., motivated by the forces of the crowd), nor simply from a felt need or personal “qualifications”. There should, instead, be a true conviction from the Lord among the mature leadership that each elder is there by assignment of the Holy Spirit - and no less! Further, in addition to the term “elder” (Greek: *presbuteros*), meaning one who is older and having the corresponding wisdom, the apostle also gives us the term “overseer”. Now an overseer (Greek: *episcopos*, *episcopoi*, in the plural) is one who watches over things circumspectly. He has a responsibility to look at things in overview, looking for proper balance, looking for the future needs and direction, and the like. Earle makes note of the fact that verse 17 calls these men elders (*presbuteroi*), yet now calls these same men overseers (*episcopoi*)<sup>[7]</sup>, and in the next phrase gives them an assignment to be shepherds – the verb equivalent of what is elsewhere translated “pastor” (Ephesians 4:11)<sup>[8]</sup>. Distinctions between an elder, overseer (sometimes titled “bishop”) and a pastor are therefore not made on the basis of Scripture, but rather on the basis of unguided developments within church history and on church tradition. The elders who are also overseers

appointed by the Holy Spirit are given the responsibility to shepherd (i.e., pastor) the flock. This means having ongoing and substantial concern for the spiritual equivalent of protection, feeding and watering, bedding, guidance and selection of proper paths, tending to maintenance of health and treatment of disease and injury, correction, birthing, bringing strays back in line, and finding the lost.

Note finally that these instructions come with two important qualifiers:

- The flock is God's (not the elders' flock, and certainly not belonging to one specific elder)
- The cost of the flock was not cheap, but pricelessly expensive – it was bought with the blood of Christ.

Now sacrificial lambs for the Jerusalem (versus Ephesian) temple service of those times were raised to be slaughtered, and their blood was to be shed. Here, however, note that it was God who paid the price by the blood of His own Lamb for the sheep of His flock. It is these over whom the shepherds (elders and overseers) are given charge, and who will one day give an account (Hebrews 13:17).

*29 "I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock;*

Note well that Paul’s words given before this verse are not based on suspicions or fears, but on what Paul characterizes as certainties. He *knows* that these savage wolves will come in, and not just maybe or likely. The apostle makes clear that the wolves seek to come in among them – not just harass from the outside or along the edges. Further, they will not just stand about, observing, but will not spare the flock. Their intent is to take some down. They have in mind to do damage.

*30and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them.*

This may have been shocking for the Ephesians elders to hear. The “wolves” would *come in*, he has told them, but this threat, Paul says, would come from among the elders in Ephesus themselves. This kind of threat to the flock has proven itself to be real – not that “proof” was ever needed. Over the course of history and in our own times, men with the title of pastor, elder, and bishop have indeed inflicted great damage through moral failure, doctrinal error, divisiveness and factious seduction.

*31"Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears.*

He again tells them to be on the alert. This relates back to his call for them to be “on guard”. He told them to recall how his admonishments were not occasional or convenient. They were night and day – constant and vigilant. Furthermore, he told not just a few or a selected number of them, but *each one*. It becomes clear that each one therefore had a responsibility, as Paul had discharged his before God and themselves. Even more, as shepherds, they had seen an example. This reminds us of the obligation of shepherds from I Peter 5: 1-4, that they, in turn, be examples before the flock. Paul never “lords it over them”, but instead serves *himself* as an example.

Finally, Paul’s time spent among the Ephesians was not simply academic nor theoretical nor dispassionate. The culture of the times had plenty of that (cf. Paul’s discussions in Athens in Acts 17). In contrast, what Paul told them was a one who cared deeply and took his assignment to heart in the most serious way. His expression was not only deeply felt, but most sincerely displayed in visible means – with tears.

*32"And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.*

With these words, Paul is passing the baton quite genuinely unto them. It is not as if he, or any other apostle, would have nothing more to say – he would – as would Timothy and the apostle John. But Paul had indeed done what was required of him, and recognizes now that the responsibility – the duty – is for Paul's to leave in their hands and for them to be responsible to God, who is most able and the divine enabler.

*33"I have coveted no one's silver or gold or clothes.*

While certainly Paul could have called for more in the way of monetary support, he instead makes clear that he fell short of what he could have demanded. This is not a claim that he didn't receive it, but rather a revealing of his motivations – he did not covet. It was not in his heart to look for monetary gain from the Ephesian church. He leaves that as an example for them as well.

*34"You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my own needs and to the men who were with me.*

Paul made tents, as is well known, and he may well have contributed to the needs of others by being of physical service in other ways. He was not lazy or leeching.

*35 "In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive.""*

Being an elder, he is telling them, *is hard work*. It's going to take lots of effort.

There will be more giving than one will receive physical compensation for.

Many tasks will appear thankless by any earthly measure. But Paul calls in the statement of our Lord because it is true – in the eternal perspective. That is the perspective that an elder is to have. I Peter 5:4 says that for the elder who lives as an example, there will be a crown of life<sup>[9]</sup>.

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[1] Zodhiates, Spiros, *The Complete Word Study New Testament, Greek Dictionary of the New Testament* (Chattanooga: AMG, 1991), 74.

[2] *Ibid*, 885.

[3] *Net Bible, New English Translation* (Biblical Studies Press, 1996), 475.

[4] *Ibid*.

[5] MacArthur, John, *MacArthur Study Bible, NKJV* (Nashville: Word, 1997), 1672.

[6] Walvoord, John, Roy Zuck, *The New Testament Bible Knowledge Commentary* (Victor,

1983), 414.

[7] Earle, Ralph, *Word Meanings in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Hendrickson, 1974), 119.

[8] Ibid.

[9] crown = Greek: *stefanos*, a victor’s crown, *PC Study Bible software*, 2000.

## Commentary on Verses Mentioning Deacons

The selected text for commentary is 1 Timothy 3:8-13. Paul is writing his first letter to Timothy, with the initial assignment given to him that he go to Ephesus to silence the false teachers. In the middle of this, his first letter of instruction to Timothy (of the two we have copies of), Paul tells Timothy what character qualifications elders must have. Next, he follows immediately with the character qualifications required of deacons. It is these qualifications that are given below, verse by verse. Following each verse is the commentary, explaining the meaning and some application of each.

*8Deacons likewise must be men of dignity, not double-tongued, or addicted to much wine or fond of sordid gain,*

The word “deacons” is based on the similar-sounding Greek word *diakónous*<sup>[1]</sup> which is typically translated “servants”, “ministers” or “deacons”. Paul uses alongside this word “likewise”, referring, apparently to the character qualifications for elders, given in the previous verses. On further examination of the qualifications for deacons, the similarity between the qualifications for elders and those for deacons will become apparent.

There are important qualities of the Greek, translated in the phrase “must be men of dignity” which we should note:

- The Greek word here is *semnoús*<sup>[2]</sup> (transliterated), which comes from the Greek noun *semnotes*. Earle says that this word conveys “majesty of Christian living”.<sup>[3]</sup>
- *Semnous* is in the form such that it is a *predicate anarthrous (no definite article) adjective (giving description)*<sup>[4]</sup>. It is a descriptive assertion about what a deacon should have.
- Paul relies on the sense of the verbs used for the qualifications for elders here (so, the word “likewise”). This implies the imperative mood and present tense. A *current character qualification* is called for here, not digging up the distant past.
- This is a positive requirement, in other words, a character qualification the deacon *should have*, versus one he is *not to have*.

Paul follows this with three characteristics in the negative: The deacons is *not* to have these characteristics. They are:

- *not double-tongued*
- *not addicted to much wine*

- *or fond of sordid gain*

Now Paul is addressing current personality characteristics here. The double-tongued person (Greek: *dilogos*), according to Earle, is, literally, “one who is saying the same thing twice”, communicating the idea of “double-talk”. This could otherwise be described as saying one thing to one person and another thing to a different person. The Net Bible translated this characteristic as being “two-faced”<sup>[5]</sup>. This would result from someone who didn’t know where they stood on matters and/or was constantly trying to please different people, without a concern for consistency, integrity or sincerity<sup>[6]</sup>. Speaking of the one addicted to much wine, Paul is not dealing with the substance, as if that were the problem, but with the character of the person. It is clear from the New Testament that Jesus and apostles both drank wine in moderation, but this is addressing the person who is out of balance and fulfills a deep need with a substance rather than his personal dependence upon the Lord. The requirement that the deacon not be one characterized by being “fond of sordid gain” identifies one who places an inordinate value on earthly wealth and advantage. This person is one who has not learned that heavenly gain is of greater, even incomparable value, but instead has settled upon earthly gain at any cost – even at the expense of spiritual substance.

A deacon who is off-balance in this regard is likely to abuse the office to seek gain for himself.

*9but holding to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience.*

In contrast to these negative aspects list above, the apostle Paul says that the deacons are to be of a character such that they hold (Greek: *echontas*) to the mystery of the faith. Now Paul had told the church in person and through various epistles about the mysteries which he had been entrusted with by special and personal revelation from the Lord. Piper calls these mysteries: A truth hidden up to this point, but now revealed.<sup>[7]</sup> Full discussion of these mysteries, which Paul apparently refers to as a singular mystery here, is beyond the scope of this commentary.<sup>[8]</sup> The end of this verse is completed with the condition “with a clear conscience”. There must be nothing that these men would not have dealt with to the point of reconciliation – nothing that would hinder a pure and open walk with God and fair dealings with men.

*10These men must also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons if they are beyond reproach.*

The implication here is not to rush them into the role, discovering things about them as they rise to the surface, but let the testing take place prior to selection, and perhaps in similar works of service, before placing them into the role in any official or evident way.

*11 Women must likewise be dignified, not malicious gossips, but temperate, faithful in all things.*

Now this verse is one that is used at times to justify women serving as deaconesses (along with a few other passages). The comments of a few are noteworthy on this point:

- John MacArthur takes these as a reference to deaconesses [\[9\]](#)
- The Net Bible is indeterminate here [\[10\]](#)
- Earle notes that this refers to the deacons' wives, and makes no reference to deaconesses [\[11\]](#)
- Ward is indecisive here [\[12\]](#)
- The New Testament Bible Knowledge Commentary is indecisive [\[13\]](#)

What these comments seem to avoid is that the following verse addresses the “husband of one wife” requirements, but not the other way around. Further, the

seven deacons appointed by the apostles in the book of Acts were all men.

*12Deacons must be husbands of only one wife, and good managers of their children and their own households.*

The husband of one wife requirement, virtually identical to that for elders, is evidently not a “no divorced person may serve” stipulation, but rather it avoids womanizers (who may not be divorced, but should still not serve), and polygamists – a common problem of that day. As well, the deacon cannot hope to manage the affairs of the church if his own family and household is out of order.

*13For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a high standing and great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.*

Serving well is spiritually of note. The Lord regards such service well.

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## *In Search of Biblical Church Leadership*

*by Rebecca Brennan*

*Biblical Eldership Homepage <http://www.nccn.net/~brennanp/>*

# **In Search of Biblical Church Leadership**

After going to the Word to find the qualifications for a pastor in 1991, I was surprised to find that there was no place in the New Testament for a singular human man to head the local church, or the church as a whole, but only the one God-man, Christ Jesus. Ephesians 1:22-23(NIV) says:

Eph 1:22 And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, Eph 1:23 which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

As I studied the Word, I found directions only for an eldership rule and that only in the plural. (Acts 11:30; 14:23; 15:2; 16:4; 20:17-38; 1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:6-9; 1 Peter 5:1-3{All references from NIV})

Act 11:30 This they did, sending their gift to the elders by Barnabas and Saul.

Act 14:23 Paul and Barnabas appointed elders [ Or Barnabas ordained elders; or Barnabas had elders elected ] for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust.

Act 15:2 This brought Paul and Barnabas into sharp dispute and debate with them. So Paul and Barnabas were appointed, along with some other believers, to go up to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders about this question.

Act 16:4 As they traveled from town to town, they delivered the decisions reached by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem for the people to obey.

Act 20:17 From Miletus, Paul sent to Ephesus for the elders of the church. Act 20:18 When they arrived, he said to them: "You know how I lived the whole time I was with you, from the first day I came into the province of Asia. Act 20:19 I served the Lord with great humility and with tears, although I was severely tested by the plots of the Jews. Act 20:20 You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you but have taught you publicly and from house to house. Act 20:21 I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus. Act 20:22 And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there. Act 20:23 I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me. Act 20:24 However, I consider my life worth nothing

to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me--the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace. Act 20:25 Now I know that none of you among whom I have gone about preaching the kingdom will ever see me again. Act 20:26 Therefore, I declare to you today that I am innocent of the blood of all men. Act 20:27 For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God. Act 20:28 Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. [ Traditionally bishops ] Be shepherds of the church of God, [ Many manuscripts of the Lord ] which he bought with his own blood. Act 20:29 I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Act 20:30 Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. Act 20:31 So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears. Act 20:32 Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified. Act 20:33 I have not coveted anyone's silver or gold or clothing. Act 20:34 You yourselves know that these hands of mine have supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions. Act 20:35 In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'" Act 20:36 When he had said this, he knelt down with all of them and prayed. Act 20:37 They all wept as they embraced him and kissed him. Act 20:38 What grieved them most was his statement that they would never see his face again. Then they accompanied him to the ship."

1Ti 3:1 Here is a trustworthy saying: If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, [ Traditionally bishop; also in verse 2 ] he desires a noble task. 1Ti 3:2 Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, 1Ti 3:3 not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. 1Ti 3:4 He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect. 1Ti 3:5 (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?) 1Ti 3:6 He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil. 1Ti 3:7 He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap.

Tit 1:6 An elder must be blameless, the husband of but one wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient. Tit 1:7 Since an overseer [ Traditionally bishop ] is entrusted with God's work, he must be blameless--not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain. Tit 1:8 Rather he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined. Tit 1:9 He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.

1Pe 5:1 To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ's sufferings

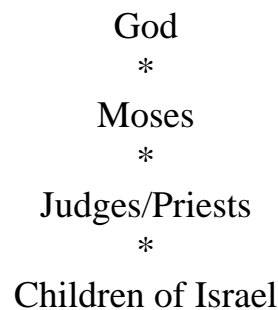
and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed: 1Pe 5:2 Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers--not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; 1Pe 5:3 not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.

I could see that the elders were to oversee; take care of God's flock, His people; watch over them; not lord it over them; be good examples to them; take care of God's work; teach; be gentle and peaceful; be good leaders; must not be new believers; have respect of those not even in the church; be careful for themselves and for all the people God has given them; be like shepherds protecting the flock from men who will come like wild wolves and try to destroy the flock and men from their own groups who will rise up and twist the truth; to name a few.

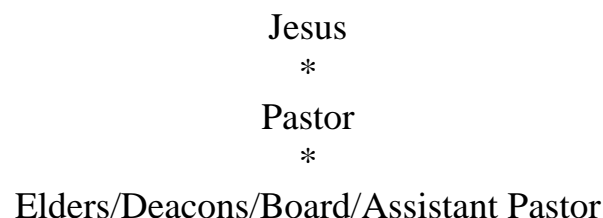
I realized at that point that the majority of church denominations, whether they call themselves denominations or not, are committing the sin of idolatry; that is, putting anyone or anything on the throne reserved for God alone. **Jesus Christ** is to be the **only head** of the church. (Ephesians 1:22-23)

Any form of church government or leadership that puts a **human man** as the **head** instead of the **God man, Christ Jesus, alone**, and that doesn't have a group of elders *as equals* leading under Christ, is in idolatry and thus not scriptural and in sin. A "type" of church government that I have found, for an example of this is as follows:

Using the Old Testament Moses leadership to base their government style on, they show that God was the head of Moses, Moses was over the Judges and Priests who in turn were over the Children of Israel. In a flow chart it would look like this:



Out of that, they have created a government that equates Moses to the head Pastor; the Judges and Priests to the Elders, Deacons, Board and Assistant Pastor; and the Children of Israel to the Congregation. On a flow chart, it would look like this:



\*

### Congregation

The major problem with this is that Moses was a forshadowing of Jesus and should be equated with Jesus, who was "The Prophet" who fulfilled the law and the prophets.(John 7:40, Matthew 5:17 {both from NIV})

Joh 7:40 On hearing his words, some of the people said, "Surely this man is the Prophet."

Mat 5:17 "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.">

Moses, himself, points to Jesus' coming and being a prophet like himself. Deuteronomy 18:15-16 (NIV) says this:

Deu 18:15 The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him. Deu 18:16 For this is what you asked of the LORD your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly when you said, "Let us not hear the voice of the LORD our God nor see this great fire anymore, or we will die."

If we are going to use the Old Testament government and equate it with the New Testament it should equate like the following:

God\*\*\*\*\*God The Father (1 Cor. 11:3)

\* \*

\* \*

Moses\*\*\*\*\*Jesus (Eph. 1:22-23)

\* \*

\* \*

Judges/Priests/Elders\*\*\*\*\*Elders

\* \*

\* \*

The Children of Israel\*\*\*\*\*The Congregation of Believers

In conclusion we are reminded of the importance of following the scripture in Matthew 5:17-20 (NIV).

Mat 5:17 "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. Mat 5:18 I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. Mat 5:19 Anyone who breaks

one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. Mat 5:20 For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven."



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*REDISCOVERING THE PAST: Biblical Eldership in Light of Scripture and History*

by Patrick J. Brennan

*Biblical Eldership Homepage* <http://www.nccn.net/~brennanp/>

# REDISCOVERING THE PAST: Biblical Eldership in Light of Scripture and History

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## *Old Testament Leadership*

*by Art Mealer*

*Biblical Eldership Homepage <http://www.nccn.net/~brennanp/>*

# OLD TESTAMENT LEADERSHIP

by Art Mealer

As Israel became a nation, the twelve tribes originally looked to a group of leaders within each tribe for leadership. No one man ruled. When necessary, they cooperated nationally, achieving consensus for decision making. Only God, as communicated by the prophets in God's word, had binding authority. All were committed to God's authority:

In times of great desperation, God often raised up a lone figure. That lone figure did not become an Office or Position to be filled by others. These were prophets, judges, leaders like Moses and Joshua. But these did not become permanent fixtures, while the Elders were.

"And God said moreover unto Moses, ...Go, and gather the elders of Israel together, and say unto them,.... And they shall hearken to thy voice: and thou shalt come, thou and the elders of Israel, unto the king of Egypt, and ye shall say unto him, The Lord God of the Hebrews hath met with us: and now let us go, we beseech thee, three days journey into the wilderness, that we may sacrifice to the Lord our God." - Exodus 3:15-18

"And he said unto Moses, Come up unto the Lord, thou, and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel; and worship ye afar off. And Moses alone shall come near the Lord: but they shall not come nigh; neither shall the people go up with him. And Moses came and told the people all the words of the Lord, and all the judgments: and all the people answered with one voice, and said, All the words which the Lord hath said will we do." -Exodus 24:1-3

We often speak of Israel as a Theocracy, with God as the head of the nation. Yet, in time, we find single human rulers of this Theocracy- the kings. Was having a single human leader God's plan? I am sure you know Saul was Israel's first king, yet several hundred years previously Israel began seeking a king to rule her. The story begins in the time of the judges, around 1250 BC:

"Then the men of Israel said unto Gideon, Rule thou over us, both thou, and thy son, and thy sons son also: for thou hast delivered us from the hand of Midian." Judges 8:22

Gideon was a national hero. He was strongly identified with God, and had some excellent experience in leadership and in determining the mind of God in men's affairs. He was a natural, and everyone affirmed

this. Yet, Gideon refused, as well as refusing the position for his sons. It was a tragedy they did not listen.

"And Gideon said unto them, I will not rule over you, neither shall my son rule over you: the Lord shall rule over you." -Judges 8:23

Soon after Gideon's death, the men of Shechem did in fact make one of his sons, Abimelech, their King:

"And all the men of Shechem gathered together, and all the house of Millo, and went, and made Abimelech king," -Judges 9:6a

Israel's first real experience with a king was long before Saul, albeit limited in scope to a small area, and lasted only three years. It began with Abimelech murdering 70 of his own family (all but one of his potential rivals), and ended with his own followers murdering him. Nothing good came of it. They would not want another king for a long time. The tribal elders together, as equals, continued to lead each tribe, and cooperated on a national basis when necessary, with God as their King. Memories fade, and eventually, the idea of an earthly king took hold again around 1000 BC:

"Then all the elders of Israel gathered themselves together, and came to Samuel unto Ramah, And said unto him, Behold, thou art old, and thy sons walk not in thy ways: now make us a king to judge us like all the nations." -I Samuel 8:4,5

Throughout the book of Judges a cycle of rebellion, followed by judgement, repentance, God raising up a national leader, and deliverance is repeated many times. There is no question that in a crisis you need a strong, decisive leader. Consensus building takes time. When required, and for short duration's, God often uses a single leader. But it is not presented as the norm.

"And when they forgat the Lord their God, he sold them into the hand of Sisera, captain of the host of Hazor, and into the hand of the Philistines, and into the hand of the king of Moab, and they fought against them. And they cried unto the Lord, and said, We have sinned, because we have forsaken the Lord, and have served Baalim and Ashtaroth: but now deliver us out of the hand of our enemies, and we will serve thee. And the Lord sent Jerubbaal, and Bedan, and Jephthah, and Samuel, and delivered you out of the hand of your enemies on every side, and ye dwelled safe." -I Samuel 12:9-11

Now in I Samuel, they are tired of this endless cycle and want stability. Instead of looking to clean up their rebellious actions, which brought God's judgement in the form of attacks from neighboring kingdoms, they simply wanted a full-time deliverer. They were not facing or solving the root problem of their sin. Perhaps, if the issue was, "how do we best glorify God," they may have taken a look at what caused their problems. Instead they focused on the results. They weren't concerned with nebulous faith anymore, just "real" concrete solutions:

"And when ye saw that Nahash the king of the children of Ammon came against you, ye said unto me, Nay; but a king shall reign over us: when the Lord your God was your king." -I Samuel 12:12

The world system, and our own natures, are always in direct opposition to God's ways. Always laying a snare for our self-reliance, they are also "logical." As I stated earlier, in special times of crisis, God often raised up a lone leader to rescue Israel from the grip of their enemies. Still, God was their true source of safety. The world's system used kings as permanent warrior-leaders to keep their enemies at bay. The world continues to promote the idea that, apart from God, they can offer us a better way, a better life. Israel adopted the world's structure. People who adopt this mindset will often say something like, "We all know," or "Everyone knows," instead of "God's word says." I have said that myself all too often. How does God view their decision?

"And the Lord said unto Samuel, Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them." -I Samuel 8:7

Putting a man in God's place as head of His people is an outright rejection of God's leadership and authority. The results of rejecting the organizational structure would be corrupting to the man taking God's role, enslaving and subsuming the people for his own needs:

"Now therefore hearken unto their voice: howbeit yet protest solemnly unto them, and shew them the manner of the king that shall reign over them. And Samuel told all the words of the Lord unto the people that asked of him a king. And he said, This will be the manner of the king that shall reign over you: He will take your sons, and appoint them for himself, for his chariots, and to be his horsemen; and some shall run before his chariots. And he will appoint him captains over thousands, and captains over fifties; and will set them to ear his ground, and to reap his harvest, and to make his instruments of war, and instruments of his chariots. And he will take your daughters to be confectionaries, and to be cooks, and to be bakers. And he will take your fields, and your vineyards, and your oliveyards, even the best of them, and give them to his servants. And he will take the tenth of your seed, and of your vineyards, and give to his officers, and to his servants. And he will take your menservants, and your maidservants, and your goodliest young men, and your asses, and put them to his work. He will take the tenth of your sheep: and ye shall be his servants." -I Samuel 8:9-17

God gave good advice and fair warning. Talk about visionaries- God has twenty-twenty future vision. Everything He warned came to pass. They had to know He was right. I must sadly admit that many a time I have marched off blinded by my desire for my own way, no matter the cost. Good counselors may come and whisper or yell, I will dismiss them equally. I have a better way! Always it has cost me dearly. It is a common experience in the history of God's people.

The effect this action has on the leaders themselves is so important. This is the warning, the reason we must be very careful not to fall into this role. Being in God's place among God's people will most certainly destroy our ability to serve. Even the natural men around us say, "power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely." Man cannot handle being in God's place.

"Nevertheless the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel; and they said, Nay; but we will have a king over us; That we also may be like all the nations; and that our king may judge us, and go out before

us, and fight our battles." -I Samuel 8:19, 20

They traded God's invisible leadership and protection for a visible head, a king, someone they could see and their enemies could see. They hoped this would make them safe. It looked so good on the surface. Still, God is willing to work with this people. He has chosen them, and though He may have to chastise them, He will not abandon them.

"And Samuel said unto the people, Fear not: ye have done all this wickedness: yet turn not aside from following the Lord, but serve the Lord with all your heart; And turn ye not aside: for then should ye go after vain things, which cannot profit nor deliver; for they are vain. For the Lord will not forsake his people for his great names sake: because it hath pleased the Lord to make you his people." -I Samuel 12:20-22

Can God's people be effective with an inappropriate organizational structure? The answer is clearly yes, according to this passage. But their leader will be under constant attack by pride, consuming the people for his own needs, using their abilities and resources to serve him and not God. The people will be greatly tempted to trust in the wrong things, in empty things, in powerless things of the world; and their labors will be to serve their King and not their God. Yet we have this promise: He will not forsake us, even in our foolishness and rebellion. Why would we not want to repent and choose his ways?

In summary, God clearly intended a heavenly, not earthly throne: He was to be Israel's King. God's PLAN was to use a plurality of leaders, elders, to rule Israel under Him, not a single man. The problems Israel would face included their kings assuming superiority over the people, consuming the people for their own ends. Soon they would no longer trust in God at all, but would put their trust in empty ways of the world that have no power. We also know that within two generations the nation would be divided, and only the yet future coming Messiah can put them back together again. Robbed of their rightful responsibilities toward God, serving a man instead: fruitless, ineffective in their mission; divided, fighting among themselves till they are so weak they are enslaved by their enemies. I wish that did not sound familiar.

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# **BIBLICAL ELDERSHIP**

## **Restoring the Eldership to Its Rightful Place in the Church**

(Revised)

**Alexander Strauch**

LEWIS AND ROTH PUBLISHERS

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Alexander Strauch lives with his wife and four children in Littleton, Colorado. The author of *The New Testament Deacon: The Church's Ministry of Mercy* and *The Hospitality Commands*, Mr. Strauch has been a teacher and an elder at Littleton Bible Chapel for the past twenty-five years.

This booklet is an abridgment of *Biblical Eldership: An Urgent Call to Restore Biblical Church Eldership* by Alexander Strauch.

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## THE PROBLEM

While attending a sacred music concert, I received an insightful lesson in ecclesiology. As I walked into the main foyer of the church where the concert was being held, I immediately noticed the photographs and names of the senior pastor and his staff arranged in a pyramid within a glass encasement. The senior pastor's photograph was at the top, his three associate pastor's photographs were below, and the rest of the church staff's photographs completed the base of the pyramid. As I walked further into the building and down a side hall, I saw another glass encasement that contained the photographs and names of the church elders. I immediately thought, *What a superb illustration of how the church elders have been pushed aside to a scarcely visible position in the church!* This is quite different from the New Testament model of eldership.

My first encounter with church elders occurred when I was a young teenager preparing for confirmation. During confirmation classes, I told the minister about my conversion to Christ, which had taken place the previous summer at a Bible camp. He was so intrigued by my youthful, exuberant testimony of Christ that he asked me to share my story with the church elders. So I met with the elders and told them about my new relationship with Jesus Christ. They sat speechless, looking totally puzzled. I was saddened by their response because I realized that they didn't understand what I was saying. That experience left me with little confidence in the elders or the church.

My next encounter with church elders, however, was altogether different. While attending college away from home, I was invited to a church that taught and practiced authentic biblical eldership. The elders of this church took seriously the New Testament commands for elders to be biblically qualified and to actively pastor the flock of God. They provided strong leadership, loving pastoral care and discipline, sound Bible teaching, and humble, sacrificial examples of Christian living. As a result, they were highly esteemed by the church. The inspiring example of these men first awakened in me a positive interest in the subject of church eldership.

Later, while attending seminary, my growing interest in eldership was vigorously challenged. During a class on church polity, which stubbornly resisted any notion of an elder-led church, I asked the professor, "But what do you do with all the scriptural texts on elders?"

He quickly responded, "Numbers of texts on elders mean nothing!"

I thought, but didn't have the nerve to express it publicly, *Well, what does mean something? Your nonexistent texts on clerics?* This and other similar experiences served only to stir my increasing conviction that eldership was a biblically sound doctrine that most churches either ignored or misinterpreted.

Several years later, I was preparing a series of sermons on the doctrine of the Church. When I came to the subject of eldership, I was shocked to discover that there was no full-length book on the subject. There were small booklets, journal articles, and chapters within books, but no thorough treatment of the subject from an expository viewpoint. This lack of exposition was hardly believable, especially when I considered the elders' primary role as leaders in the first churches and the number of scriptural texts devoted to elders. It finally ignited my desire to write on the subject of eldership.

I don't believe any doctrine of Holy Scripture should be neglected or defined out of existence. Yet this is precisely what many churches have done to the biblical doctrine of eldership. Even among churches that claim to practice eldership, elders have been reduced to being temporary, lay, church board members, which is quite contrary to the New Testament model of pastoral eldership. Although such churches may have an eldership, it is not a biblical eldership.

Literally tens of thousands of churches worldwide practice some form of eldership because they believe it to be a biblical teaching. Unfortunately, because the advocates of eldership have been so terribly delinquent in adequately articulating this doctrine, a great deal of confusion and unbiblical thinking surrounds the topic among most elder-led churches. There are persistent, crippling misconceptions about eldership that hinder churches from practicing authentic biblical eldership. This subject is too important to the local church to be bogged down in confusion and error.

To help remedy this appalling confusion over eldership, I wrote *Biblical Eldership: An Urgent Call to Restore Biblical Church Leadership*. This book was aimed primarily at churches that practice eldership but may misconstrue its true biblical Christian character and mandate. This booklet briefly summarizes *Biblical Eldership*. Hopefully it will whet your appetite to read the entire book, but more important, it will motivate you to study further the biblical teaching on eldership. Precious truths, no doubt, still await discovery.

## BIBLICAL ELDERSHIP DEFINED

Despite what all the New Testament communicates, the doctrine of biblical eldership has been sorely misunderstood. Even churches that claim to be governed by a plurality of elders have redefined eldership so that its original purpose and noble standing have, in practice, been eclipsed by the ordained pastor and his staff. To clarify biblical eldership in light of contemporary church practices, I present the following five, distinguishing features of a New Testament, Christian eldership: pastoral leadership, shared leadership, male leadership, qualified leadership, and servant leadership.

### Pastoral Leadership

When most Christians hear about church elders, they think of an official church board, lay officials, influential people within the local church, or advisers to the pastor. They think of elders as being policymakers, financial officers, fund-raisers, or administrators. I call these types of elders "board elders." People don't expect "board elders" to teach the Word or be involved pastorally in people's lives. Victor A. Constien, a Lutheran official and author of *The Caring Elder*, illustrated this popular view of the elders' role when he wrote, "Members of a congregation's board of elders are not assistant pastors. They *assist* their pastor. . . elders help facilitate and strengthen the working relationship of the church staff."

Such a view, however, not only lacks scriptural support but flatly contradicts New Testament Scriptures. A person doesn't need to read Greek or be professionally trained in theology to understand that the contemporary, church-board concept of eldership is irreconcilably at odds with the New Testament definition of eldership. According to the New Testament, elders lead the church, teach and preach the Word, protect the church from false teachers, exhort and admonish the saints in sound doctrine, visit the sick and pray, and judge doctrinal issues. In biblical terminology, elders shepherd, oversee, lead, and care for the local church.

Therefore, when Paul and Peter directly exhort the elders to do their duty, they both employ shepherding imagery. *It should be observed that these two giant apostles assign the task of shepherding the local church to no other group or single person but the elders.* Paul reminds the Asian elders that God the Holy Spirit placed them in the flock as overseers for the

purpose of shepherding the church of God (Acts 20:28). Peter exhorts the elders to be all that shepherds should be to the flock (1 Peter 5:2). We, then, must also view apostolic, Christianized elders to be primarily pastors of a flock, not corporate executives, CEOs, or advisers to a pastor.

If we want to understand Christian elders and their work, we must understand the biblical imagery of shepherding. As keepers of sheep, biblical elders are to protect, feed, and lead the flock and to help meet the flock's many practical needs. Using these four, broad, pastoral categories, let us briefly consider the examples, exhortations, and teachings of the New Testament regarding shepherd elders.

**Protecting the Flock:** A major part of the New Testament elders' work is to protect the local church from false teachers. As Paul was leaving Asia Minor, he summons the elders of the church in Ephesus for a farewell exhortation. The essence of Paul's charge is this: *guard the flock--wolves are coming*:

And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church . . . . "*Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock*, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. I know that after my departure *savage wolves will come in among you*, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. *Therefore be on the alert.*" (Acts 20:17,28-31a; italics added).

According to Paul's required qualifications for eldership, a prospective elder must have enough knowledge of the Bible to be able to refute false teachers:

For this reason I left you in Crete, that you might set in order what remains, and appoint elders in every city as I directed you, namely, if any man be above reproach . . . holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, *that he may be able . . . to refute those who contradict* [sound doctrine] (Titus 1:5,6a,9; italics added).

The Jerusalem elders, for example, met with the apostles to judge doctrinal error: "And the apostles and the elders came together to look into this [doctrinal] matter" (Acts 15:6). Like the apostles, the Jerusalem elders had to know the Word so that they could protect the flock from false teachers.

**Feeding the Flock:** Unlike modern, church-board elders, all New Testament elders were required to be "able to teach" (1 Tim. 3:2). Listing elder qualifications in his letter to Titus, Paul states, "[The elder must hold] fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, that he may be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict" (Titus 1:9). In an extremely significant passage on elders, Paul writes about some elders who labor at preaching and teaching and thus deserve financial support from the local church:

Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially *those who work hard at preaching and teaching*. For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing," and "The laborer is worthy of his wages" (1 Tim. 5:17,18; italics added).

Paul reminds the Ephesian elders that he has taught them and the church the full plan and purpose of God: "For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God" (Acts 20:27). Now it was time for the elders to do the same. Since elders are commanded to shepherd the flock of God (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:2), part of their shepherding task is to see that the flock is fed God's Word.

**Leading the Flock:** In biblical language, to shepherd a nation or any group of people means to lead or govern (2 Sam. 5:2; Ps. 78:71, 72). According to Acts 20 and 1 Peter 5, elders are to shepherd the church of God. So, to shepherd a local

church means, among other things, to lead the church. To the church in Ephesus, Paul writes, "Let the elders who rule [lead, direct, manage] well be considered worthy of double honor" (1 Tim. 5:17a). Elders, then, are to lead, direct, govern, manage, and otherwise care for the flock of God.

In Titus 1:7, Paul insists that a prospective elder be morally and spiritually above reproach because he will be "God's steward." A steward is a "household manager," someone with official responsibility over the master's servants, property, and even finances. Elders are stewards of God's household, the local church.

Elders are also called "overseers," which signifies that they supervise and manage the church. Peter uses the verb form of *overseer* when he exhorts the elders: "Therefore, I exhort the elders among you . . . shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight" (1 Peter 5:1a,2a). In this instance, Peter combines the concepts of shepherding and overseeing when he exhorts the elders to do their duty. Hence we can speak of the elders' overall function as being the pastoral oversight of the local church.

**Helping to Meet the Flock's Many Practical Needs:** In addition to the familiar, broad categories of protecting, feeding, and leading the flock, elders are also to bear responsibility for meeting the practical, diverse needs of the flock. For example, James instructs sick members of the flock to call for the elders of the church: "Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord" (James. 5:14). Paul exhorts the Ephesian elders to care for the weak and needy of the flock: "In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner *you must help the weak* and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive' " (Acts 20:35; italics added).

As shepherds of the flock, the elders must be available to meet the sheep's needs. This responsibility includes: visiting the sick and comforting the bereaved; strengthening the weak; praying for *all* the sheep; visiting new members; providing counsel for couples who are engaged, married, and/or divorcing; and managing the many, day-to-day details related to the inner life of the congregation.

**Hard Work and Sacrifice:** When the church eldership is viewed as a status or board position in the church, there will be plenty of volunteers. When it is viewed as a demanding, pastoral work, few people will rush to volunteer. One reason there are so few shepherd elders or good church elderships is that, generally speaking, men are spiritually lazy. That is a major reason why most churches never establish a biblical eldership. Men are more than willing to let someone else fulfill their spiritual responsibilities, whether it be their wives, the clergy, or church professionals.

Biblical eldership, however, can't exist in an atmosphere of nominal Christianity. There can be no biblical eldership in a church where there is no biblical Christianity. If a biblical eldership is to function effectively, it requires men who are firmly committed to living out our Lord's principles of discipleship. Biblical eldership is dependent on men who seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness (Matt. 6:33), men who have presented themselves as living and holy sacrifices to God and view themselves as slaves of the Lord Jesus Christ (Rom. 12:1,2), men who love Jesus Christ above all else, men who willingly sacrifice self for the sake of others, men who seek to love as Christ loved, men who are self-disciplined and self-sacrificing, and men who have taken up the cross and are willing to suffer for Christ.

Some people say, "You can't expect laymen to rear their families, work all day, and shepherd a local church." That statement is simply not true. Many people rear families, work, and give substantial hours of time to community service, clubs, athletic activities, and/or religious institutions. The cults have built up large lay movements that survive primarily because of the volunteer time and efforts of their members. We Bible--believing Christians are becoming a lazy, soft, pay-for-it-to-be-done group of Christians. It is positively amazing how much people can accomplish when they are motivated to work toward a goal they love. I've seen people build and remodel houses in their spare time, for example. I've also seen men discipline themselves to gain a phenomenal knowledge of the Scriptures.

The real problem, then, lies not in men's limited time and energy but in false ideas about work, Christian living, life's priorities, and--especially--Christian ministry. To the Ephesian elders, Paul says, "You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my own needs and to the men who were with me. In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive' " (Acts 20:34, 35). How do working men shepherd the church and still maintain a godly family life and employment? They do it by self-sacrifice, self-discipline, faith, perseverance, hard work, and the power of the Holy Spirit. R. Paul Stevens, author and instructor at Regent College in Vancouver, British Columbia, sets us on the right track when he writes:

And for tentmakers to survive three full-time jobs (work, family and ministry), they must also adopt a sacrificial lifestyle. Tentmakers must live a pruned life and literally find leisure and rest in the rhythm of serving Christ (Matt. 11:28). They must be willing to forego a measure of career achievement and private leisure for the privilege of gaining the prize (Phil. 3:14). Many would like to be tentmakers if they could be wealthy and live a leisurely and cultured lifestyle. But the truth is that a significant ministry in the church and the community can only come by sacrifice.

## Shared Leadership

Shared leadership should not be a new concept to a Bible-reading Christian. Shared leadership is rooted in the Old Testament institution of the elders of Israel and in Jesus' founding of the apostolate. It is a highly significant but often overlooked fact that our Lord did not appoint one man to lead His church. He personally appointed and trained twelve men. *Jesus Christ gave the church plurality of leadership.* The Twelve comprised the first leadership council of the church and, in the most exemplary way, jointly led and taught the first Christian community. The Twelve provide a marvelous example of unity, humble brotherly love, and shared leadership structure.

Shared leadership is also evidenced by the Seven who were appointed to relieve the Twelve of the responsibility of dispensing funds to the church's widows (Acts 6:3-6). The Seven were the prototype of later deacons. There is no indication that one of the Seven was the chief and the others were his assistants. As a body of servants, they worked on behalf of the church in Jerusalem. Based on all the evidence we have, the deacons--like the elders--formed a collective leadership council.

The New Testament reveals that the pastoral oversight of many of the first churches was committed to a plurality of elders. This was true of the earliest, Jewish-Christian churches in Jerusalem, Judea, and neighboring countries as well as many of the first Gentile churches. Interestingly enough, Protestants don't challenge the plurality of deacons in an effort to create a singular deacon, yet many challenge the plurality of elders. It is odd that most Christians have no problem accepting a plurality of deacons but are almost irrationally frightened by a plurality of elders that is far more evident in the New Testament. Despite such fears, a plurality of leadership through a council of elders needs to be preserved just as much as a plurality of deacons.

I am convinced that the underlying reason many Christians fear the plurality of elders is that they don't really understand the New Testament concept of plural elders or its rich benefits to the local church. New Testament eldership is not, as many think, a high-status, church-board position that is open to any and all who desire membership. On the contrary, an eldership patterned after the New Testament model requires qualified elder candidates to meet specific moral and spiritual qualifications before they serve (1 Tim. 3:1-7). The qualifications of such elder candidates must be publicly examined by the church (1 Tim. 3:10). The elders selected must be publicly installed into office (1 Tim. 5:22; Acts 14:23). They must be motivated and empowered by the Holy Spirit to do their work (Acts 20:28). Finally, they must be acknowledged, loved, and honored by the entire congregation. This honor given by the congregation includes the provision of financial support to elders who are uniquely gifted at preaching and teaching, which allows some elders to serve the church full or part time (1

Tim. 5:17,18). Thus a team of qualified, dedicated, Spirit-placed elders is not a passive, ineffective committee; it is an effective form of leadership structure that greatly benefits the church family.

**A Council of Equals:** Leadership by a council of elders is a form of government found in nearly every society of the ancient Near East. It was the fundamental, governmental structure of the nation of Israel throughout its Old Testament history (Ex. 3:16; Ezra 10:8). For Israel--a tribal, patriarchal society--the eldership was as basic as the family unit. So when the New Testament records that Paul, a Jew who was thoroughly immersed in the Old Testament and Jewish culture, appointed elders for his newly founded churches (Acts 14:23), it means that he established a council of elders in each local church.

By definition, the elder structure of government is a collective leadership in which each elder shares equally the position, authority, and responsibility of the office. There are different names for this type of leadership structure. More formally it is called collective, corporate, or collegiate leadership. In contemporary terms, it is referred to as multiple church leadership, plurality, shared leadership, or team leadership. I use these terms synonymously throughout this booklet. The opposite of collective leadership is unitary leadership, monarchical rule, or one-man leadership.

**First Among a Council of Equals: Leaders Among Leaders:** An extremely important but terribly misunderstood aspect of biblical eldership is the principle of "first among equals" (1 Tim. 5:17). Failure to understand this principle has caused some elderships to be tragically ineffective in their pastoral care and leadership. Although elders are to act jointly as a council and share equal authority and responsibility for the leadership of the church, all elders are not equal in their giftedness, biblical knowledge, leadership ability, experience, or dedication. Therefore, those among the elders who are particularly gifted leaders and/or teachers will naturally stand out among the other elders as leaders and teachers within the leadership body. This is what the Romans called *primus inter pares*, which means "first among equals," or *primi inter pares*, which means "first ones among equals."

The principle of "first among equals" is observed first in our Lord's dealings with the twelve apostles. Jesus chose and empowered all of them to preach and heal, but He singled out three for special attention--Peter, James, and John ("first ones among equals"). Among the three, as well as among the Twelve, Peter stood out as the most prominent ("first among equals").

As the natural leader, the chief speaker, and the man of action, Peter challenged, energized, strengthened, and ignited the group. Without Peter, the group would have been less effective. When surrounded by eleven other apostles who were his equals, Peter became stronger, more balanced, and was protected from his impetuous nature and his fears. In spite of his outstanding leadership and speaking abilities, *Peter possessed no legal or official rank or title above the other eleven. They were not his subordinates. They were not his staff or team of assistants. He wasn't the apostles' "senior pastor."* He was simply first among his equals, by our Lord's approval.

The "first-among-equals" leadership relationship can also be observed among the Seven who, as we've seen, were chosen to relieve the apostles of certain responsibilities (Acts 6). Philip and Stephen stand out as prominent figures among the five other brothers (Acts 6:8-7:60; 8:5-40; 21:8). Yet, as far as the account records, the two held no special title or status above the others.

The concept of "first among equals" is further evidenced by the relationship of Paul and Barnabas during their first missionary journey. They were both apostles, yet Paul was "first among equals" because he was "the chief speaker" and dynamic leader (Acts 13:13; 14:12). Although clearly the more gifted of the two apostles, Paul held no formal ranking over Barnabas; they labored as partners in the work of the gospel. A similar relationship seems to have existed between Paul and Silas, who was also an apostle (1 Thess. 2:6).

Finally, the "first-among-equals" concept is evidenced by the way in which congregations are to honor their elders. Concerning elders within the church in Ephesus, Paul writes, "Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, 'You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing,' and 'The laborer is worthy of his wages' " (1 Tim. 5:17,18). All elders must be able to teach the Word, but not all of them desire to work fully at preaching and teaching. The local church should properly care for those who are specially gifted in teaching and spend the time to do so. Let us be clear about the fact that it is the spiritual giftedness of the elders that causes the church to grow and prosper spiritually, not just the eldership form of government per se.

This doesn't mean, however, that elders who are first among their equals do all the thinking and decision making for the group, or that they become the "pastors" while the others are "merely elders." To call one elder "pastor" and the rest "elders," or one elder "the clergyman" and the rest "lay elders," is to act without biblical precedence. To do so will not result in a biblical eldership. It will, at least in practice, *create a separate, superior office over the eldership, just as was done during the early second century when the division between "the overseer" and "elders" occurred.*

The advantage of the principle of "first among equals" is that *it allows for functional, gift-based diversity within the eldership team without creating an official, superior office over fellow elders.* Just as the leading apostles, such as Peter and John, bore no special title or formal distinctions from the other apostles, elders who receive double honor form no official class or receive no special title. The elders, then, who labor in the Word and exercise good leadership are, in the words of Scripture, "leading men among the brethren" (Acts 15:22).

## Male Leadership

There is much about biblical eldership that offends churchgoing people today: the concept of elders who provide pastoral care, a plurality of pastors, and the idea of so-called "lay" or nonclerical pastor elders. Yet nothing is more objectionable in the minds of many contemporary people than the biblical concept of an all-male eldership. A biblical eldership, however, must be an all-male eldership.

For the Bible-believing Christian, the primary example of male leadership is found in the person of Jesus Christ. The most obvious point is that Christ came into the world as the Son of God, not the daughter of God. His maleness was not an arbitrary matter. It was a theological necessity, absolutely essential to His person and work.

During His earthly ministry, Jesus trained and appointed twelve men whom He called "apostles" (Luke 6:13). Jesus' choice of an all-male apostolate affirmed the creation order as presented in Genesis 2:18-25. Luke informs us that before choosing the Twelve Jesus spent the entire night in prayer with His Father (Luke 6:12). As the perfect Son, in complete obedience and submission to His Father's will, Jesus chose twelve males to be His apostles. These men were God the Father's choice. Jesus' choice of male apostles was based on divine principles and guidance, not local custom or traditions.

As we've seen, the Twelve followed the example of their Lord and Master by appointing seven men, not seven men and women, when they needed to establish an official body of servants to care for the church's widows and funds (Acts 6:1-6). Thirty years after Christ's ascension into heaven, Peter wrote to the churches of northwestern Asia Minor and exhorted his Christian sisters to submit to their husbands in the same way the "holy women" of the Old Testament age did (1 Peter 3:5). He also exhorted husbands to care for their wives and reminded them that their wives were fellow heirs "of the grace of life" (1 Peter 3:7). Thus Peter continued to follow His Lord's example and taught both role distinctions and male-female equality.

The biblical pattern of male leadership continued throughout the New Testament era. Regarding the marriage relationship,

Paul could not have stated more pointedly the divine order of the husband-wife relationship. In complete agreement with Peter's instruction on the wife's marital submission, Paul teaches that the husband is empowered and commanded to lead in the marriage relationship and that the wife is instructed to submit "as to the Lord." The following texts speak for themselves:

- "Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord" (Eph. 5:22).
- "But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything" (Eph. 5:24).
- "For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church" (Eph. 5:23).
- "Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord" (Col. 3:18).
- "But as for you, speak the things which are fitting for sound doctrine . . . that they [older women] may encourage the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be sensible, pure, workers at home, kind, being subject to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be dishonored" (Titus 2:1,4,5).

Just as Paul teaches male headship in the family, he teaches male headship in the local church (1 Tim. 2:8-3:7). Because the family is the basic social unit and the man is the established family authority, we should expect that men would become the elders of the larger church family. Consider Paul's instructions in 1 Timothy 2:12: "But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man." In the same way that every individual family is governed by certain standards of conduct, so the local church family is governed by certain principles of conduct and social arrangement. The letter of 1 Timothy specifically addresses the issue of proper order and behavior of men, women, and elders in the local church family. To his representative in Ephesus, Paul writes, "I am writing these things to you, hoping to come to you before long; but in case I am delayed, *I write so that you may know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth*" (1 Tim. 3:14, 15; italics added).

A major aspect of the church's social arrangement concerns the behavior of women in the congregation. In the church in Ephesus, as a result of false teaching that may have challenged the validity of traditional gender roles, Christian women were acting contrary to acceptable Christian behavior. In order to counter improper female conduct in the church, Paul restates Christian principles of women's conduct: "Let a woman quietly receive instruction with entire submissiveness. But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet. For it was Adam who was first created, and then Eve. And it was not Adam who was deceived, but the woman being quite deceived, fell into transgression" (1 Tim. 2:11-14).

First Timothy 2:11-14 should settle the question of women elders. Paul prohibits women from doing two things: (1) teaching the men of the church; and (2) exercising authority over the men.

Note that immediately following his instruction in 1 Timothy 2:11-15, that prohibits women from teaching and leading men, Paul describes the qualifications for those who oversee the local church (1 Tim. 3:1-7). Significantly, the qualifications assume a male subject. Thus the overseer is to be "the husband of one wife" and "one who manages his own household well" (1 Tim. 3:2*b*,4*a*). Paul gives no suggestion of women elders in this passage.

## Qualified Leadership

In a letter to a young presbyter named Nepotian, dated A. D. 394, Jerome (A.D. 345-419) rebukes the churches of his day for their hypocrisy in showing more concern for the appearance of their church buildings than the careful selection of their church leaders: "Many build churches nowadays; their walls and pillars of glowing marble, their ceilings glittering with gold, their altars studded with jewels. Yet to the choice of Christ's ministers no heed is paid."

Multitudes of churches today repeat similar error. Many of them seem oblivious to the biblical requirements for their spiritual leaders as well as to the need for each congregation to properly examine all candidates for leadership qualities in light of biblical standards (1 Tim. 3:10). The most common mistake made by churches that are eager to implement biblical eldership is to appoint biblically unqualified men. Because there is always a need for more shepherds, it is tempting to allow unqualified, unprepared men to assume leadership in the church. This is, however, a time-proven formula for failure. A biblical eldership requires biblically qualified elders.

The overriding concern of the New Testament in relation to church leadership is to ensure that the right kind of men will serve as elders and deacons. The offices of God's church are not honorary positions bestowed on individuals who have attended church faithfully or who are senior in years. Nor are these offices to be viewed as church-board positions to be filled with good friends, rich donors, or charismatic personalities. Nor are they positions that only graduate seminary students can fill. The church offices--both eldership and deaconship--are open to all men who meet the apostolic, biblical requirements. The New Testament unequivocally emphasizes this. Consider these points:

- To the troubled church in Ephesus, Paul insists that a properly constituted, biblical Christian church (1 Tim. 3:14,15) must have qualified, approved elders:

It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do. *An overseer, then, must be* above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not addicted to wine or pugnacious, but gentle, uncontentious, free from the love of money. *He must be* one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity (but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?); and not a new convert, lest he become conceited and fall into the condemnation incurred by the devil. *And he must have* a good reputation with those outside the church, so that he may not fall into reproach and the snare of the devil (1 Tim. 3:1-7; italics added).

- Paul, as we've seen, also insists that prospective elders and deacons be publicly examined in light of the stated list of qualifications. He writes, "And let these [deacons] also [like the elders] first be tested [examined]; then let them serve as deacons if they are beyond reproach" (1 Tim 3:10; cf. 5:24, 25).
- When directing Titus in how to organize churches on the island of Crete, Paul reminds him to appoint only morally and spiritually qualified men to be elders. By stating elder qualifications in a letter, Paul establishes a public list that will guide the local church in its choice of elders and empower it to hold its elders accountable:

For this reason I left you in Crete, that you might set in order what remains, and appoint elders in every city *as I directed you, namely, if any man be* above reproach, the husband of one wife, having children who believe, not accused of dissipation or rebellion. For the *overseer must be* above reproach as God's steward, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not addicted to wine, not pugnacious, not fond of sordid gain, but hospitable, loving what is good, sensible, just, devout, self-controlled, holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, that he may be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict (Titus 1:5-9; italics added).

- When writing to churches scattered throughout northwestern Asia Minor, Peter speaks of the kind of men who should be elders. He exhorts the elders to shepherd the flock "not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock" (1 Peter 5:2, 3).

It is highly noteworthy that the New Testament provides more instruction concerning the qualifications for eldership than on any other aspect of eldership. Such qualifications are not required of all teachers or evangelists. One person may be gifted as an evangelist and be used of God in that capacity, yet be unqualified to be an elder. An individual may be an

evangelist immediately after conversion, but Scripture says that a new convert cannot be an elder (1 Tim. 3:6).

When we speak of the elders' qualifications, most people think that these qualifications are different than those of the clergy. The New Testament, however, has no separate standards for professional clergy and lay elders. The reason is simple. There aren't three separate offices--pastor, elders, and deacons--in the New Testament-style local church. There are only two offices--elders and deacons. From the New Testament perspective, any man in the congregation who desires to shepherd the Lord's people and meets God's requirements for the office can be a pastor elder.

The scriptural qualifications can be divided into three broad categories relating to moral and spiritual character, abilities, and Spirit-given motivation.

**Moral and Spiritual Character:** Most of the biblical qualifications relate to each candidate's moral and spiritual qualities. The first, overarching qualification is that of being "above reproach." The meaning of "above reproach" is defined by the character qualities that follow the term. In both of Paul's lists of elder qualifications, the first, specific, character virtue itemized is "the husband of one wife." This means that each elder must be above reproach in his marital and sexual life.

The other character qualities stress the elder's integrity, self-control, and spiritual maturity. Since elders govern the church body, each one must be self-controlled in the use of money, alcohol, and the exercise of his pastoral authority. Since each elder is to be a model of Christian living, he must be spiritually devout, righteous, a lover of good, hospitable, and morally above reproach before the non-Christian community. In pastoral work, relationship skills are preeminent. Thus a shepherd elder must be gentle, stable, sound-minded, and uncontentious. An angry, hotheaded man hurts people. So, an elder must not have a dictatorial spirit or be quick-tempered, pugnacious, or self-willed. Finally, an elder must not be a new Christian. He must be a spiritually mature, humble, time-proven disciple of Jesus Christ.

**Abilities:** Within the lists of elder qualifications, three requirements address the elder's abilities to perform the task. He must be able to manage his family household well, provide a model of Christian living for others to follow, and be able to teach and defend the faith.

**Able to manage his family household well:** An elder must be able to manage his family household well. The Scripture states, "He must be one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity (but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?)" (1 Tim. 3:4, 5). The Puritans referred to the family household as the "little church." This perspective is in keeping with the scriptural reasoning that if a man cannot shepherd his family, he can't shepherd the extended family of the church. Managing the local church is more like managing a family than managing a business or state. A man may be a successful businessman, a capable public official, a brilliant office manager, or a top military leader but be a terrible church elder or father. Thus a man's ability to oversee his family household well is a prerequisite for overseeing God's household.

**Able to provide a model for others to follow:** An elder must be an example of Christian living that others will want to follow. Peter reminds the Asian elders "to be examples to the flock" (1 Peter 5:3b). If a man is not a godly model for others to follow, he cannot be an elder even if he is a good teacher and manager. The greatest way to inspire and influence people for God is through personal example. Character and deeds, not official position or title, is what really influences people for eternity. Today men and women crave authentic examples of true Christianity in action. Who can better provide the week-by-week, long-term examples of family life, business life, and church life than a local-church elder? That is why it is so important that an elder, as a living imitator of Christ, shepherd God's flock in God's way.

**Able to teach and defend the faith:** An elder must be able to teach and defend the faith. It doesn't matter how successful

a man is in his business, how eloquently he speaks, or how intelligent he is. If he isn't firmly committed to historic, apostolic doctrine and able to instruct people in biblical doctrine, he does not qualify to be a biblical elder (1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:9).

The New Testament requires that a pastor elder "[hold] fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching" (Titus 1:9a). This means that an elder must firmly adhere to orthodox, historic, biblical teaching. "Elders must not," one commentator says, "be chosen from among those who have been toying with new doctrines." Since the local church is "the pillar and support of the truth" (1 Tim. 3: 15b), its leaders must be rock-solid pillars of biblical doctrine or the house will crumble. Since the local church is also a small flock traveling over treacherous terrain that is infested with "savage wolves," only those shepherds who know the way and see the wolves can lead the flock safely to its destination. An elder, then, must be characterized by doctrinal integrity.

It is essential for an elder to be firmly committed to apostolic, biblical doctrine so "that he may be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict" (Titus 1:9b). This requires that a prospective elder must have applied himself for some years to the reading and study of Scripture, that he can reason intelligently and logically discuss biblical issues, that he has formulated doctrinal beliefs, and that he has the verbal ability and willingness to teach other people. There should be no confusion, then, about what a New Testament elder is called to do. He is to teach and exhort the congregation in sound doctrine and to defend the truth from false teachers. This is the big difference between board elders and pastor elders. New Testament elders are both guardians and teachers of sound, biblical doctrine.

**Spirit-given Motivation for the Task:** An obvious but not insignificant qualification is the elder's personal desire to love and care for God's people. Paul and the first Christians applaud such willingness and created this popular Christian saying: "If any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do" (1 Tim. 3:1). Peter, too, insists that an elder must shepherd the flock willingly and voluntarily (1 Peter 5:2). He knew from years of personal experience that someone who views spiritual care as an unwanted obligation cannot fulfill the shepherding task. An elder who serves grudgingly or under constraint is incapable of genuinely caring for people. He will be an unhappy, impatient, guilty, fearful, and ineffective shepherd. Shepherding God's people through this sin-weary world is far too difficult a task--fraught with too many problems, dangers, and demands--to be entrusted to someone who lacks the will and desire to do the work effectively.

A true desire to lead the family of God is always a Spirit-generated desire. Paul reminds the Ephesian elders that the Holy Spirit--not the church or the apostles--placed them as overseers in the church to shepherd the flock of God (Acts 20:28). The Spirit called them to shepherd the church and moved them to care for the flock. The Spirit planted the pastoral desire in their hearts. He gave them the compulsion and strength to do the work and also the wisdom and appropriate gifts to care for the flock. The elders were His wise choice to complete the task. In the church of God, it is not man's will that matters; it is God's will and arrangement that matter. So, the only men who qualify for eldership are those whom the Holy Spirit gives the motivation and gifts for the task.

A biblical eldership, then, is a biblically qualified team of shepherd leaders. A plurality of unqualified elders provides no significant benefit to the local church. I agree fully with the counsel of Jon Zens, who writes, "Better have no elders than the wrong ones." The local church must in all earnestness insist on biblically qualified elders, even if such men take years to develop.

## Servant Leadership

Just as Christianity influenced the Roman Empire, the Greco-Roman world also affected the course of Christianity. Citing pagan influences on early Christianity, Kenneth Scott Latourette--renowned church historian and professor of Christian

missions--states that the Roman concepts of power and rule corrupted the organization and life of the early churches. He observes that "the Church was being interpenetrated by ideals which were quite contrary to the Gospel, especially the conception and use of power which were in stark contrast to the kind exhibited in the life and teaching of Jesus and in the cross and the resurrection." This, Latourette goes on to say, proved to be "the menace which was most nearly disastrous" to Christianity.

I believe it is more accurate to say that the conceptual and structural changes that occurred within the church during the early centuries of Christianity proved to be disastrous. Christianity, the humblest of all faiths, degenerated into the most power-hungry and hierarchical religion on earth. After Emperor Constantine elevated Christianity to legal religious status in A.D. 312, the once-persecuted Christians fiercely persecuted all their opposition. An unscriptural clerical and priestly caste arose that was consumed by the quest for power, position, and authority. Even Roman emperors had a guiding hand in the development of Christian churches. The pristine character of the New Testament church community was lost.

When we read the Gospels, however, we see that the principles of brotherly community, love, humility, and servanthood are at the very heart of Christ's teaching. Unfortunately, like many of the early Christians, we have been slow to understand these great virtues and especially slow to apply them to church structure and leadership style.

New Testament, Christlike elders are to be servant leaders, not rulers or dictators. God doesn't want His people to be used by petty, self-serving tyrants. Elders are to choose a life of service on behalf of others. Like the servant Christ, they are to sacrifice their time and energy for the good of others. Only elders who are loving, humble servants can genuinely manifest the incomparable life of Jesus Christ to their congregations and a watching world.

A group of elders, however, can become a self-serving, autocratic leadership body. Thus Peter, using the same terminology as Jesus, warns the Asian elders against abusive, lordly leadership: ". . . nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock" (1 Peter 5:3). Peter also charges the elders, as well as everyone else in the congregation, to clothe themselves in humility just as Jesus clothed Himself in humility: "All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble" (1 Peter 5:5*b*). With similar concern, Paul reminds the Ephesian elders of his example of humility. In Acts 20:19, he describes his manner of "serving the Lord with all humility" and implies that they, too, must serve the Lord in the same manner. Because of pride's lurking temptation, a new Christian should not be an elder: "And not a new convert, lest he become conceited and fall into the condemnation incurred by the devil" (1 Tim. 3:6).

In addition to shepherding others with a servant spirit, the elders must humbly and lovingly relate to one another. They must be able to patiently build consensus, compromise, persuade, listen, handle disagreement, forgive, receive rebuke and correction, confess sin, and appreciate the wisdom and perspective of others--even those with whom they disagree. They must be able to submit to one another, speak kindly and gently to one another, be patient with their fellow colleagues, defer to one another, and speak their minds openly in truth and love. Stronger and more gifted elders must not use their giftedness, as talented people sometimes do, to force their own way by threatening to leave the church and take their followers with them. Such selfishness creates ugly, carnal power struggles that endanger the unity and peace of the entire congregation.

The humble-servant character of the eldership doesn't imply, however, an absence of authority. The New Testament terms that describe the elders' position and work--"God's stewards," "overseers," "shepherd," "leading"--imply authority as well as responsibility. Peter could not have warned the Asian elders against "lording it over those allotted to your charge" (1 Peter 5:3) if they had no authority. As shepherds of the church, elders have been given the authority to lead and protect the local church (Acts 20:28-31). The key issue is the attitude in which elders exercise that authority.

Following the biblical model, elders must not wield the authority given to them in a heavy-handed way. They must not use

manipulative tactics, play power games, or be arrogant and aloof. They must never think that they are unanswerable to their fellow brethren or to God. Elders must not be authoritarian, which is incompatible with humble servanthood. When we consider Paul's example and that of our Lord's, we must agree that biblical elders do not dictate; they direct. True elders do not command the consciences of their brethren but appeal to their brethren to faithfully follow God's Word. Out of love, true elders suffer and bear the brunt of difficult people and problems so that the lambs are not bruised. The elders bear the misunderstandings and sins of other people so that the assembly may live in peace. They lose sleep so that others may rest. They make great personal sacrifices of time and energy for the welfare of others. They see themselves as men under authority. They depend on God for wisdom and help, not on their own power and cleverness. They face the false teachers' fierce attacks. They guard the community's liberty and freedom in Christ so that the saints are encouraged to develop their gifts, to mature, and to serve one another.

In summary, using Paul's great love chapter, we can say that a servant elder "is patient . . . kind . . . not jealous; . . . [a servant elder] does not brag . . . [a servant elder] is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly . . . does not seek [his] . . . own . . . [a servant elder] is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; [a servant elder] bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things" (1 Cor. 13:4-7).

## BIBLICAL EVIDENCE FOR PASTORAL LEADERSHIP BY THE PLURALITY OF ELDERS

Christians who profess the Bible to be God's infallible, all-sufficient Word agree that they must establish their church practices and doctrines on the teachings of the Bible. Many contemporary scholars say, however, that the New Testament is ambiguous or silent regarding the topic of church government and conclude that no one can insist upon a biblical model of church government (by elders or anyone else) for all churches because the Bible doesn't. George Eldon Ladd, author of *A Theology of the New Testament* and former professor at Fuller Theological Seminary, expresses this view most concisely: "It appears likely that there was no normative pattern of church government in the apostolic age, and that the organizational structure of the church is no essential element in the theology of the church." Although this is a widely held view among scholars today, it must be challenged because it simply does not fit biblical evidence.

In its major features, local church leadership (or government) by the plurality of elders is plainly and amply set forth by the New Testament writers. J. Alec Motyer, former principal of Trinity College in Bristol, England, captures the true spirit of the New Testament when he writes, ". . . it is not as much as hinted in the New Testament that the church would ever need--or indeed should ever want or tolerate--any other local leadership than that of the eldership group."

Not only does the New Testament record the existence of elders in numerous churches, it also gives instruction about elders and to elders. In fact, the New Testament offers more instruction regarding elders than it does regarding such important church subjects such as the Lord's Supper, the Lord's Day, baptism, and spiritual gifts. When you consider the New Testament's characteristic avoidance of detailed regulation and church procedures (when it is compared to the Old Testament), the attention given to elders is amazing. "This is why," writes Jon Zens, editor of the journal *Searching Together*, "we need to seriously consider the doctrine of eldership; it jumps out at us from the pages of the New Testament, yet it has fallen into disrepute and is not being practiced as a whole in local churches."

### A Consistent, New Testament Pattern

To hear some scholars speak, you would think that the Bible doesn't say one word about church elders or church government. But that is not true. The New Testament records evidence of pastoral oversight by a council of elders in nearly all the first churches. These local churches were spread over a wide geographical and culturally diverse area--from Jerusalem to Rome.

**Examples of Eldership:** Consider, as recorded in the New Testament, the consistent pattern of plural leadership by elders that existed among the first Christian churches.

Elders are found in the churches of Judea and the surrounding area (Acts 11:30; James 5:14, 15).

Elders governed the church in Jerusalem (Acts 15, 21).

Among the Pauline churches, leadership by the plurality of elders was established in the churches in Derbe, Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch (Acts 14:20-23); in the church in Ephesus (Acts 20:17; 1 Tim. 3:1-7; 5:17-25); in the church in Philippi (Phil. 1:1); and in the churches on the island of Crete (Titus 1:5).

- According to the well-traveled letter of 1 Peter, elders existed in churches throughout northwestern Asia Minor: Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia (1 Peter 1:1; 5:1).
- There are strong indications that elders existed in churches in Thessalonica (1 Thess. 5:12) and Rome (Heb. 13:17).

**Instruction About Elders:** Not only does the New Testament provide examples of elder-led churches, it includes explicit instructions to churches about how to care for, protect, discipline, select, restore, and call the elders. The apostles intended these instructions to be obeyed, and they should be regarded as normative teaching for all Christian churches at all times.

- James instructs those who are sick to call for the elders of the church (James 5:14).
- Paul instructs the Ephesian church to financially support elders who labor "at preaching and teaching" (1 Tim. 5:17, 18).
- Paul instructs the local church about protecting elders from false accusation, disciplining elders who sin, and restoring fallen elders (1 Tim. 5:19-22).
- Paul instructs the church regarding the proper qualifications for eldership (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9).
- To the church in Ephesus, Paul states that anyone who desires to be an elder desires a "fine work" (1 Tim. 3:1).
- Paul instructs the church to examine the qualifications of prospective elders (1 Tim. 3:10; 5:24, 25).
- Peter instructs the young men of the church to submit to church elders (1 Peter 5:5).

Paul teaches that elders are the household stewards, leaders, instructors, and teachers of the local church (Titus 1:7, 9; 1 Thess. 5:12;).

**Instruction and Exhortation to Elders:** Besides giving instruction to churches about elders, Paul, Peter, and James give these instructions directly to elders:

- James tells elders to pray for the sick and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord (James 5:14).

Peter directly charges elders to willingly pastor and oversee the local congregation (1 Peter 5:1, 2).

Peter warns elders not to be too domineering (1 Peter 5:3).

- Peter promises elders that when the Lord Jesus returns they will receive "the unfading crown of glory" (1 Peter 5:4).
- Peter exhorts elders to be clothed in humility (1 Peter 5:5).

Paul reminds the Ephesians elders that the Holy Spirit placed them in the church to be overseers and pastor the church of God (Acts 20:28).

- Paul exhorts elders to guard the church from false teachers (Acts 20:28) and to be alert to the constant threat of false doctrine (Acts 20:31).
- Paul reminds elders to work hard, help the needy, and be generous like the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 20:35).

## Promotes the True Nature of the New Testament-Style Local Church

The local church's structure of government makes a profound statement about the nature of the local church and its philosophy of ministry. The local church is not an undefined mass of people; it is a particular group of people that has a unique character, mission, and purpose. I am convinced that the elder structure of government best harmonizes with and promotes the true nature of the local church as revealed in the New Testament. We will consider four ways in which the elder structure of government complements the nature and theology of the local church.

**The Church Is a Close-knit Family of Brothers and Sisters:** Of the different New Testament terms used to describe the nature of the church--the body, the bride, the temple, the flock--the one most frequently used is the family, particularly the fraternal aspect of the family--brothers and sisters. Robert Banks, a prominent leader in the worldwide, home-church movement, makes this observation in his book, *Paul's Idea of Community*:

Although in recent years Paul's metaphors for community have been subjected to quite intense study, especially his description of it as a "body," his application to it of "household" or "family" terminology has all too often been overlooked or only mentioned in passing.

Banks further comments on the frequency and significance of these familial expressions:

So numerous are these, and so frequently do they appear, that the comparison of the Christian community with a "family" must be regarded as the most significant metaphorical usage of all.... More than any of the other images utilized by Paul, it reveals the essence of his thinking about community.

The local Christian church, then, is to be a close-knit family of brothers and sisters. Brotherliness also provided a key guiding principle for the management of relationships between Christians (Rom. 14:15,21; 1 Cor. 6:8; 8:11-13; 2 Thess. 3:14,15; Philem. 15,16; James 4:11). Jesus insisted that His followers were true brothers and sisters and that none among them should act like the rabbis of His day who elevated themselves above their fellow countrymen:

"But they do all their deeds to be noticed by men; for they broaden their phylacteries, and lengthen the tassels of their garments. And they love the place of honor at banquets, and the chief seats in the synagogues, and respectful greetings in the market places, and being called by men, Rabbi. *But do not be called Rabbi*; for One is your Teacher, and *you are all brothers*" (Matt. 23:5-8; italics added).

In complete obedience to Christ's teaching on humility and brotherhood, the first Christians resisted special titles, sacred clothing, chief seats, and lordly terminology to highlight their community leaders. They also chose an appropriate leadership structure for their local congregations--leadership by a council of elders. The first Christians found within their biblical heritage a structure of government that was compatible with their new, spiritual family and their theological beliefs. Israel was a great family, composed of many individual families. The nation found leadership by a plurality of elders to be a suitable form of self-government that provided fair representation to its members. The same is true of the local Christian church. The elder structure of government suits an extended family organization like the local church. It allows any brother in the community who desires it and qualifies for it to share fully in the leadership of the community.

**The Church Is a Nonclerical Community:** The local church is not only an intimate, loving family of redeemed brothers and sisters, it is a nonclerical family. Unlike Israel, which was divided into sacred priestly members and lay members, the first-century, Christian church was a people's movement. The distinguishing mark of Christianity was not found in a clerical hierarchy but in the fact that God's Spirit came to dwell within ordinary, common people and that through them the Spirit manifested Jesus' life to the believing community and the world.

It is an immensely profound truth that no special priestly or clerical class that is distinct from the whole people of God appears in the New Testament. Under the new covenant ratified by the blood of Christ, every member of the church of Jesus Christ is a holy saint, a royal priest, and a Spirit-gifted member of the body of Christ. Paul teaches that a wide diversity of gifts and services exists within the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12), but he says absolutely nothing about a mystical gap between sacred clergy and common laity. If it exists, surely something as fundamental to the Church as a clergy-laity division should at least be mentioned in the New Testament. The New Testament, however, stresses the oneness of the people of God (Eph. 2:13-19) and the dismantling of the sacred-secular concept that existed between priest and people under the old covenant (1 Peter 2:5-10; Rev. 1:6).

Clericalism does not represent biblical, apostolic Christianity. Indeed, the real error to be contended with is not simply that one man provides leadership for the congregation, but that one person in the holy brotherhood has been sacralized apart from the brotherhood to an unscriptural status. In practice, the ordained clergyman--the minister, the reverend--is *the Protestant priest*.

Biblical eldership cannot exist in an environment of clericalism. Paul's employment of the elder structure of government for the local church is clear, practical evidence against clericalism because the eldership is nonclerical in nature. The elders are always viewed in the Bible as "elders of the people" or "elders of the congregation," never "elders of God." The elders represent the people as leading members from among the people.

When establishing churches, Paul never ordains a priest or cleric to perform the church's ministry. When he establishes a church, he leaves behind a council of elders chosen from among the believers to jointly oversee the local community (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5). Obviously that was all he believed that a local church needed. Since the local congregation of his day was composed of saints, priests, and Spirit-empowered servants, and since Christ was present with each congregation through the person of the Holy Spirit, none of the traditional, religious trappings such as sacred sites, sacred buildings, or sacred personnel (priests, clerics, or holy men) were needed. Nor could such be tolerated. To meet the need for community leadership and protection, Paul provides the nonclerical, elder structure of government--a form of government that would not demean the lordship of Christ over His people or the glorious status of a priestly, saintly body of people in which every member ministered.

**The Church Is a Humble-Servant Community:** I am convinced that one reason the apostles chose the elder system of government was because it enhanced the loving, humble-servant character of the Christian family. The New Testament offers a consistent example of shared leadership as the ideal structure of leadership in a congregation where love, humility,

and servanthood are paramount. When it functions properly, shared leadership requires a greater exercise of humble servanthood than does unitary leadership. In order for an eldership to operate effectively, the elders must show mutual regard for one another, submit themselves one to another, patiently wait upon one another, genuinely consider one another's interests and perspectives, and defer to one another. Eldership, then, enhances brotherly love, humility, mutuality, patience, and loving interdependence--qualities that are to mark the servant church.

Furthermore, shared leadership is often more trying than unitary leadership. It exposes our impatience with one another, our stubborn pride, our bullheadedness, our selfish immaturity, our domineering disposition, our lack of love and understanding of one another, and our prayerlessness. It also shows how underdeveloped and immature we really are in humility, brotherly love, and the true servant spirit. Like the saints at Corinth, we are quick to develop our knowledge and public gifts but slow to mature in love and humility.

I believe that churches today desperately need a revival of love, humility, and the servant spirit. Such a revival must begin with our leaders, and biblical eldership provides the structure through which leaders learn to work together in mutual love and humility. Since the eldership represents a microcosm of the entire church, it provides a living model of loving relationships and servanthood for the entire body. Thus, leadership by a plurality of elders ideally suits the humble-servant church.

**The Church Is Under Christ's Headship:** Most important, biblical eldership guards and promotes the preeminence and position of Christ over the local church. Jesus left His disciples with the precious promise that "where two or three have gathered together in My name, there I am in their midst" (Matt. 18:20). Because the apostles knew that Jesus Christ, by the Holy Spirit, was uniquely present with them as Ruler, Head, Lord, Pastor, Master, Overseer, High Priest, and King, they chose a form of government that reflected this distinctive, fundamental, Christian truth. This truth was not a theoretical idea to the early Christians--it was reality. The first churches were truly Christ centered and Christ dependent. Christ alone provided all they needed in order to be in full fellowship with God and one another. Christ's person and work was so infinitely great, final, and complete that nothing--even in appearance--could diminish the centrality of His presence among and sufficiency for His people.

So, during the first century no Christian would have dared to take the position or title of sole ruler, overseer, or pastor of the church. We Christians today, however, are so accustomed to speaking of "the pastor" that we do not stop to realize that the New Testament does not. This fact is profoundly significant, and we must not permit our customary practice to shield our minds from this important truth. There is only one flock and one Pastor (John 10:16), one body and one Head (Col. 1:18), one holy priesthood and one great High Priest (Heb. 4:14ff), one brotherhood and one Elder Brother (Rom. 8:29), one building and one Cornerstone (1 Peter 2:5ff.), one Mediator, and one Lord. Jesus Christ is the "Senior Pastor," and all others are His undershepherds (1 Peter 5:4).

To symbolize the reality of Christ's leadership and presence over the local church and its leaders, one church places an empty chair at the table next to the chairman during all elders' meetings. This is a visual reminder to the elders of Christ's presence and lordship, of their position as His undershepherds, and of their dependence on Him through prayer and the Word.

## **Promotes the Protection and Sanctification of Spiritual Leaders**

We come now to two, extremely significant reasons for and benefits of pastoral leadership by a council of qualified elders. First, the shared leadership structure of eldership provides necessary accountability protection from the particular sins that plague spiritual leaders. In turn, this protects the spiritual character of the local church and the testimony of the Lord's name. Second, the eldership structure provides peer relationships to help balance elders' weaknesses and correct their

character, an essential component in the sanctification process of spiritual leaders.

**Leadership Accountability:** English historian Lord Acton said, "Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely." Because of our biblical beliefs in the dreadful realities of sin, the curse, Satan, and human depravity, we should understand well why people in positions of power are easily corrupted. In fact, the better we understand the exceeding sinfulness and deceitfulness of sin, the stronger our commitment to accountability will be. The collective leadership of a biblical eldership provides a formal structure for genuine accountability.

Shared, brotherly leadership provides needed restraint concerning such sins as pride, greed, and "playing god." Earl D. Radmacher, chancellor of a Baptist seminary in America, writes, "Human leaders, even Christian ones, are sinners and they only accomplish God's will imperfectly. Multiple leaders, therefore, will serve as a 'check and balance' on each other and serve as a safeguard against the very human tendency to play God over other people."

It was never our Lord's will for one individual to control the local church. The concept of the pastor as the lonely, trained professional--the sacred person presiding over the church who can never really become a part of the congregation--is utterly unscriptural. Not only is this concept unscriptural, it is psychologically and spiritually unhealthy. Radmacher goes on to contrast the deficiencies of a church leadership that is placed primarily in the hands of one pastor to the wholesomeness of leadership when it is shared by multiple pastors:

Laymen . . . are indifferent because they are so busy. They have no time to bother with church matters. Church administration is left, therefore, largely in the hands of the pastor. This is bad for him, and it is bad also for the church. It makes it easier for the minister to build up in himself a dictatorial disposition and to nourish in his heart the love of autocratic power.

It is my conviction that God has provided a hedge against these powerful temptations by the concept of multiple elders. The check and balance that is provided by men of equal authority is most wholesome and helps to bring about the desired attitude expressed by Peter to the plurality of elders: ". . . shepherd the flock of God among you, not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock (1 Peter 5:2,3)."

In addition to providing close accountability, genuine partnership, and peer relationships--the very things most imperial pastors shrink from at all costs--shared leadership provides the local church shepherd with accountability for his work. Church leaders (like all of us) can be lazy, forgetful, fearful, or too busy to fulfill their responsibilities. Thus they need colleagues in ministry to whom they are answerable for their work. Coaches know that athletes who train together push one another to greater achievement. When someone else is running alongside him or her, a runner will push a little harder and go a little faster. The same is true in the Lord's work. That is one reason why the Lord sent out His disciples in twos.

**Peer Relationships:** One of the deep joys of my life has been to share the pastoral leadership of a church with a team of dedicated pastor elders. As partners in the work of shepherding God's precious, blood-bought people, we have sharpened, balanced, comforted, protected, and strengthened one another through nearly every conceivable life situation. I do not hesitate to say that the relationship with my fellow elders has been the most important tool God has used, outside of my marriage relationship, for the spiritual development of my Christian character, leadership abilities, and teaching ministry. The eldership has played a major role in the sanctification process of my Christian life.

Shared leadership can provide a church leader with critically needed recognition of his faults and deficiencies and can help to offset them.. We all have blind spots, eccentricities, and deficiencies. We all have what C. S. Lewis called "a fatal flaw." We can see these fatal flaws so clearly in others but not in ourselves. These fatal flaws or blind spots distort our judgment. They deceive us. They can even destroy us. This is particularly true of multitalented, charismatic leaders. Blind to their

flaws and extreme views, some talented leaders have destroyed themselves because they had no peers who could confront and balance them and, in fact, wanted none.

When a single leader is atop a pyramidal structure of organization, the important balancing of one another's weaknesses and strengths normally does not occur. Note the strong language Robert Greenleaf, author of the book *Servant Leadership*, uses to convey his observations:

To be a lone chief atop a pyramid is *abnormal and corrupting*. None of us are perfect by ourselves, and all of us need the help and correcting influence of close colleagues. When someone is moved atop a pyramid, that person no longer has colleagues, only subordinates. Even the frankest and bravest of subordinates do not talk with their boss in the same way that they talk with colleagues who are equals, and normal communication patterns become warped.

I believe that traditional, single-church pastors would improve their character and ministry if they had genuine peers to whom they were regularly accountable and with whom they worked jointly.

## An Apostolic Directive

Since Paul established the elder structure of government among Gentile churches (Acts 14:23) and, most likely, the Twelve established it among Jewish churches (Acts 15:6; James 5:14), the New Testament writers assumed eldership to be a fixed, apostolic institution. In Titus 1:5, Paul tells Titus and the churches that a church is not properly ordered until qualified elders (plural) have been appointed. So he orders Titus to install elders: "Appoint elders in every city as I directed you" (Titus 1:5b). By doing this, Paul is going against customary cultural practices because both the Jewish synagogue and Greco-Roman society commonly practiced one-man oversight. Thus Paul's choice of the elder structure of government is intentional. He is not simply accommodating himself to current social norms. His instruction to Titus establishes an apostolic directive that should be followed by Christians today.

Many scholars contend, however, that only the instructions about elders, not the elder structure, are universally binding on churches. They say that Paul's instructions regarding the qualifications of an elder are binding but that the structure is not. By making this distinction, they can eliminate the eldership structure from the church and apply the biblical instructions to their self-appointed institutions--the clerical structure or the singular pastorate. But this is an erroneous distinction. How, for example, would a critically important passage such as 1 Timothy 5:17, 18 apply to the singular pastorate? This instruction makes sense only in the context of a plurality of elders.

I conclude, therefore, that the instructions given to elders and about elders, as well as the eldership structure itself, are to be regarded as apostolic directives (Titus 1:5) that are normative for churches today. Ladd is quite wrong when he claims that "there was no normative pattern of church government in the apostolic age, and that the organizational structure of the church is no essential element in the theology of the church."

We would do well to heed Alfred Kuen's sober warning against doubting the full sufficiency of Scripture in order to direct the practices of our churches today. Kuen, a Bible teacher at the Emmaus Bible Institute in Switzerland, writes:

Has not the history of twenty centuries of Christianity proved that the plan of the primitive church is the only one which is suitable for all times and places, is most flexible in its adaptation to the most diverse conditions, is the best able to resist and stand against persecutions, and offers the maximum of possibilities for the full development of the spiritual life?

Each time that man has believed himself to be more intelligent than God, that he has painstakingly developed a religious

system "better adapted to the psychology of man," more conformable to the spirit of our times, instead of simply following the neotestamentary model, his attempt has been short-lived because of failure due to some unforeseen difficulty.

All heresies and deviations in the church spring from the abandonment of the Scripture and of the model for the church which they present.

In short, as Alfred Kuen concludes, "the churches established by the apostles remain the valid models for churches of all times and places."

## CONCLUSION

A filing cabinet drawer full of objections can be raised against pastoral leadership by a plurality of elders. For the Bible-believing Christian, however, the real issue is this: is pastoral leadership by a plurality of elders biblical? Is it apostolic? It is my contention that it is! Both the apostles, Paul and Peter, mandate that the local church elders pastor the flock of God (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:1, 2; cf. Titus 1:5). We have no right, then, to take away the elders' God-given mandate. Yet that is precisely what most churches have done by applying the apostolic mandate to shepherd the local church to a single, professional pastor and by subordinating the eldership to the pastor. Where in the New Testament do we find references to the ordained (reverend-clergyman) pastor and his advising elders? We don't! We find only pastor elders mentioned.

We must admit, however, that most traditional, clergy-led churches will find pastoral leadership by a plurality of qualified pastor elders to be difficult if not impossible to implement. So, to try to implement biblical eldership will require two conditions. First, each local church and its leaders must be firmly convinced that eldership is a scriptural teaching. Second, the local church must be committed to make the difficult, personal changes necessary in order to make eldership work for God's glory.

These two conditions, of course, are essential when implementing any unfamiliar or difficult biblical practice or doctrine. If you were to ask, for example, "does marriage work?" many people would answer that it doesn't appear to be working. So should we discard the institution of marriage and look for something better? No! The marriage institution is God's will for the human race, as revealed in the Bible. So, in order to make marriage work we must first believe it to be a biblical teaching and then be committed to making it work. Only then will marriage work. The same conditions hold true for implementing a biblical eldership. We must believe it is scriptural and be committed by God's help to making it work effectively.

To be sure, the incorporation of pastoral eldership into the local church is not the cure-all for every problem. Eldership creates its own problems, and these must be understood and continually addressed. However, when properly implemented, biblical eldership allows the church to be what God designed it to be, fosters the spiritual development of the leading men within the church family, and honors the teaching of God's precious Word.

**The following materials on church eldership can be ordered from your local book store or Lewis & Roth Publishers (800-477-3239).**

*Biblical Eldership:*

*An Urgent Call To Restore*

*Biblical Church Leadership*

by Alexander Strauch

(Revised and Expanded, 1995)

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*Study Guide to Biblical Eldership:*

*Twelve Lessons for Mentoring Men for Eldership*

by Alexander Strauch

(This guide book is designed primarily as a mentoring tool for training prospective new elders.)

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*The Mentor's Guide to Biblical Eldership:*

*Twelve Lessons for Mentoring Men for Eldership*

by Alexander Strauch and Richard Swartley

(This guide is for the mentoring elder only, not the trainee. It is the leader's guide for the *Study Guide to Biblical Eldership*.)

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**John MacArthur, Jr. writes:**

"Mr. Strauch has made a fine contribution to the subject of eldership. I am confident that it will be helpful to many."

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"At last, a thorough biblical study on the basis of church government and especially the function and ministry of elders! This study cuts through the accumulation of the centuries in the government of the church and returns to the freshness of the original blueprint of the Lord Himself. New churches will find it a valuable guideline to effective functioning and older churches will find it a trustworthy corrective."

**S. Lewis Johnson, former professor at Dallas Theological Seminary, reviewing *Biblical Eldership*, states:**

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"Our eldership has gone through *Biblical Eldership* and the guide book twice. It has been the finest investment of our time in the twelve years that I've been at the church. It has helped us see what we're all about and has gotten us to function the way God designed us to. *Biblical Eldership* is a fine work and a thorough Biblical exposition on eldership".

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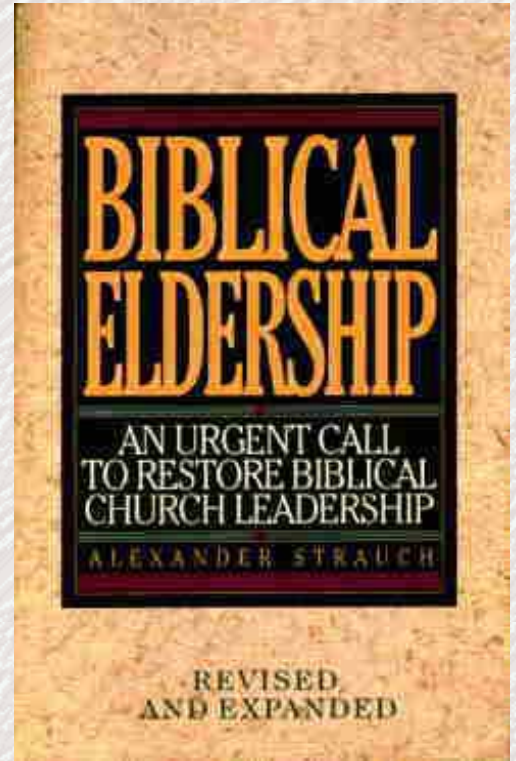
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It is our goal to make available the best in written and Biblical form material that will enhance the Eldership and shared leadership ministry in the local church.  
I Peter 5

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*Resources and Materials Available on Eldership*

by Patrick and Rebecca Brennan

*Biblical Eldership Homepage* <http://www.nccn.net/~brennanp/>

# Resources and Materials Available on Eldership

**Listed below are books and other resources from Alexander Strauch.**

- *Biblical Eldership: An Urgent Call to Restore Biblical Church Leadership.* ISBN 0-936083-11-5
- *Biblical Eldership: Restoring the Eldership to It's Rightful Place in the Church.* ISBN 0-936083-15-8
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- *They Keep Watch Over Your Souls (Hebrews 13:17)* This is a 4 cassette tape series of 8 sermons on Biblical Eldership.

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*Rediscovering the Past: Biblical Eldership in Light of Scripture and History*  
 by Patrick J. Brennan and Rebecca L. Brennan  
 Biblical Eldership Homepage <http://www.users.cts.com/sd/b/brennanp/>

## INTRODUCTION

I believe the emergence of a monarchical system of leadership in our churches today was *due to a straying from apostolic teachings and has been accepted without investigation*. I think the scriptures are clear and that Biblical principles clearly show that this model is in opposition to what God intended for His church. Just as Israel was not intended to be ruled by a king, Christ's church is not to be ruled by a pastor. Just as there is no longer any need for animal sacrifices and priests, Christ's church does not need a clergy to act as priests (to administer communion, baptism, marriages, funerals etc.). We have created our own priesthood with men in submission to these priests instead of being in submission to the ONE HIGH PRIEST JESUS CHRIST. Also by having one man in authority there is lack of accountability. This system also hinders body ministry and individual growth because one man is in charge and people expect the pastor to do things and they are not encouraged to use their gifts because they are usually controlled by the pastor and are subject to his approval or disapproval.

It is my premise that only two offices are currently available for the church. The office of elder (also called bishop or overseer) and the office of deacon. The office of bishop is described in Greek with the word **episkope** (office of bishop) which is used as a title. In some places in scripture this same word means visitation. The description of this office is described in Greek with the word **episkopos** (overseer). Therefore one who holds the office of bishop (**episkope**) is one who is an overseer, guardian, bishop (**episkopos**). The word **presbuteros** is used to describe an elder or presbyter. The word **poimen** is used for shepherd. I will attempt to show that **episkope** (office of bishop) and **presbuteros** (elder) are equivalent and that they both are **episkopos** (overseers or guardians) of congregations and they are also both called to be a **poimen** (shepherd - i.e. one who feeds, tends, cares for).

The Septuagint (LXX) uses **episkopos** (overseer) in a similar way to secular Greek. It incorporates the idea of divinity and also a sense of overseeing. In ancient Greece it was used to describe various official offices as a form of respect (i.e. it was used as a title).

The word **episkope** (office of bishop) describes an office that one may seek. 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9 outline qualifications and not duties. The candidate must give proof in his own home that he can control the congregation. Catholicism by mandating that a priest be celibate is in direct opposition to scripture because the scriptures clearly show that an elder may be married.

1Tim. 3:1-7 (NASB) It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the **office of overseer**, it is a fine work he desires to do. 2 An **overseer**, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, 3 not addicted to wine or pugnacious, but gentle, uncontentious, free from the love of money. 4 He must be one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity 5 (but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?); 6 and not a new convert, lest he become conceited and fall into the condemnation incurred by the devil. 7 And he must have a good reputation with those outside the church, so that he may not fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.

Titus 1:5-9 (NASB) For this reason I left you in Crete, that you might set in order what remains, and appoint **elders** in every city as I directed you, 6 namely, if any man be above reproach, the husband of one wife, having children who believe, not accused of dissipation or rebellion. 7 For the **overseer** must be above reproach as God's steward, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not addicted to wine,

not pugnacious, not fond of sordid gain, 8 but hospitable, loving what is good, sensible, just, devout, self-controlled, 9 holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, that he may be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict.

The word **presbuteros** may be used as an adjective to mean just one who is older in age or older or more mature spiritually. It may also be used substantivally (in place of a noun) to mean an older person, ancestor, elder, or presbyter. The later two uses are most relevant to this article.

The Hebrew word **zaqen** is similar in meaning to the Greek presbuteros. It also has a two-fold meaning of age or title (maturity).

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## OPENING SCRIPTURE AND COMMENTS

The following scriptures will give a general background and feeling for what we are presenting here:

1Sam. 8:1-22 (NASB) And it came about when Samuel was old that he appointed his sons judges over Israel. 2 Now the name of his first-born was Joel, and the name of his second, Abijah; they were judging in Beersheba. 3 His sons, however, did not walk in his ways, but turned aside after dishonest gain and took bribes and perverted justice. 4 Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah; 5 and they said to him, "Behold, you have grown old, and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now appoint a king for us to judge us like all the nations." 6 *But the thing was displeasing in the sight of Samuel when they said, "Give us a king to judge us." And Samuel prayed to the LORD.* 7 *And the LORD said to Samuel, "Listen to the voice of the people in regard to all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me from being king over them.* 8 *Like all the deeds which they have done since the day that I brought them up from Egypt even to this day - in that they have forsaken Me and served other gods - so they are doing to you also.* 9 Now then, listen to their voice; however, you shall solemnly warn them and tell them of the procedure of the king who will reign over them." 10 So Samuel spoke all the words of the LORD to the people who had asked of him a king. 11 And he said, "This will be the procedure of the king who will reign over you: he will take your sons and place them for himself in his chariots and among his horsemen and they will run before his chariots. 12 And he will appoint for himself commanders of thousands and of fifties, and some to do his plowing and to reap his harvest and to make his weapons of war and equipment for his chariots. 13 He will also take your daughters for perfumers and cooks and bakers. 14 And he will take the best of your fields and your vineyards and your olive groves, and give them to his servants. 15 And he will take a tenth of your seed and of your vineyards, and give to his officers and to his servants. 16 He will also take your male servants and your female servants and your best young men and your donkeys, and use them for his work. 17 He will take a tenth of your flocks, and you yourselves will become his servants. 18 Then you will cry out in that day because of your king whom you have chosen for yourselves, but the LORD will not answer you in that day." 19 *Nevertheless, the people refused to listen to the voice of Samuel, and they said, "No, but there shall be a king over us, 20 that we also may be like all the nations, that our king may judge us and go out before us and fight our battles."* 21 Now after Samuel had heard all the words of the people, he repeated them in the LORD's hearing. 22 And the LORD said to Samuel, "Listen to their voice, and appoint them a king." So Samuel said to the men of Israel, "Go every man to his city."

Matt. 23:5-8 (NASB) "But they do all their deeds to be noticed by men; for they broaden their phylacteries, and lengthen the tassels of their garments. And they love the place of honor at banquets, and the chief seats in the synagogues, and respectful greetings in the market places, and being called by men, Rabbi. *But do not be called Rabbi; for One is your Teacher, and you are all brothers*".

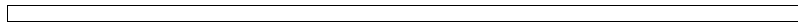
1Pet. 5:1-4 (NASB) Therefore, I exhort the *elders* among you, as your *fellow elder* and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, 2 *shepherd* the flock of God among you, exercising *oversight* not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; 3 *nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge*, but proving to be *examples* to the flock. 4 And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.

Luke 22:24-27 (NASB) And there arose also a dispute among them as to which one of them was regarded to be greatest. 25 And He said to them, "The *kings of the Gentiles lord it over them*; and

those who have authority over them are called 'Benefactors'. 26 But not so with you, but let him who is the greatest among you become as the youngest, and *the leader as the servant*. 27 For who is greater, the one who reclines at the table, or the one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at the table? But I am among you as the one who serves".

Below is a quote from Jerome in the 4th century clearly stating his view that there was originally no difference between bishops and elders in the early church. Jerome was well versed in the original Biblical languages:

A presbyter and a bishop are the same...the churches were governed by a joint council of the presbyters...If it be supposed that it is merely our opinion and without scriptural support that bishop and presbyter are one...examine again the words the apostles addressed to the Philippians...Now Philippi is but one city in Macedonia, and certainly in one city there could not have been numerous bishops. It is simply that at that time the same persons were called either bishops or presbyters.



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## THE ANALOGY OF SHEPHERD IN RELATION TO ELDERSHIP

In Palestine, in Later Judaism there are some rabbinical lists of thieving and cheating occupations. Included on this list are shepherds, along with publicans and tax collectors. These occupations were deprived of certain civil rights including not being able to hold a judicial office or be a witness in court. Jesus had to counter this animosity and stereotype when telling people that He was the Good Shepherd (John 10:11,14)

John 10:11 (NASB) "I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep.

John 10:14 (NASB) "I am the good shepherd; and I know My own, and My own know Me,

In 1Peter 2:25 we see Christ as the Shepherd and Guardian (Overseer) of our souls. He provides for His sheep and He keeps watch over His sheep. He surpasses all previous examples of shepherds of God's people including Moses.

1Pet. 2:25 (NASB) For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls.

He is called the Great Shepherd in Hebrews 13:20 and the Chief Shepherd in 1Peter 5:4.

Heb. 13:20 (NASB) Now the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant, even Jesus our Lord,

1Pet. 5:1-4 (NASB) Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, 2 shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; 3 nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock. 4 And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.

In John 10:1-5 we see the Good Shepherd willing to give His life for His flock. Jesus knows His sheep. He is *not* a hireling. Today many shepherds (pastors) are hirelings. Jesus' only pay was our relationship with Him, which He was glad to die for in order to attain.

John 10:1-5 (NASB) "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter by the door into the fold of the sheep, but climbs up some other way, he is a thief and a robber. 2 But he who enters by the door is a shepherd of the sheep. 3 To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name, and leads them out. 4 When he puts forth all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. 5 And a stranger they simply will not follow, but will flee from him, because they do not know the voice of strangers."

The word is always used with the sense of metaphor when congregational leaders are called shepherds and not as a title or office. This is also true when the verb **poimaino** (to feed, pasture, tend a flock; 1Peter 5:2; Acts 20:28; John 21:16) is used for the work of these men or the noun **poimnion** (flock) is used for the congregation.

The shepherds are the **presbuteros** (elders) (1Peter 5:1; Acts 20:17) and **episkopos** (overseers) (Acts 20:28). The shepherds task is therefore to take care and serve the local congregation ( Acts 20:28; 1Peter 5:2-4).

Only once in John 21:15-17 does the church universal seem to be taken in context when referring to Peter being told by the risen Jesus to shepherd His sheep.

John 21:15-17 (NASB) So when they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to him, "Tend My lambs." 16 He said to him again a second time, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to him, "Shepherd My sheep." 17 He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me?" Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, "Do you love Me?" And he said to Him, "Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You." Jesus said to him, "Tend My sheep."

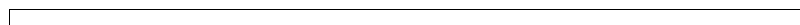
**Poimen** (shepherd) and **episkopos** (elder) are closely linked in describing a shepherd. Christ was described as the shephard and bishop (or overseer) of souls. In other places in scripture elders are told to oversee, shepherd, and feed the flock of Christ. This verse suggests the current titles of pastor and bishop that are used today. Christ is one who has the fullest knowledge of his flock and is the example as the most giving and self-sacrificing Shepherd. Elders can only try and emulate His example. The term **episkopos** (elder) has always incorporated divine being and action, from the earliest uses of the word from the time of Homer. There is also incorporated in the term a lack of assumption outwardly but of an inner significance. Look how far we have come in our model of church government today. The lack of outward assumption has all but dissapeared. It may have started with the verse in 1 Timothy 5:17 with the differentiation of **kalos proestotes** (those who rule well) and the rest of the **presbuteroi** (elders, plural of **presubteros**) with the claim of double honor and reward to the former.

1Tim. 5:17 (NASB) Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching.

The idea of shepherd (pastor) in relation to congregational leaders is used only once in Ephesians 4:11.

Eph. 4:11 (NASB) And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers,

The absense of the article in the greek text before **didaskalous** (teachers) which follows **poimenas** (pastors) shows that pastors and teachers in this scripture form a single group (Granville Sharp Rule). This verse also shows that the title or office of pastor was not recognized. This verse is talking about "gifts" and not "offices".



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## ARGUMENTS AGAINST DIFFERENT TYPES OF ELDERS

There are two verses I want to look at under this topic. First we will look at 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13. Many believe this verse to be talking about 3 different types of elders.

1Th. 5:12-13 (NASB) But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction, 13 and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Live in peace with one another.

In the greek this verse has one plural article and 3 plural participles joined by the conjunction *kai*. This is another example of the Granville Sharp Rule. Paul is talking about one group of individuals with 3 functions and not 3 different groups of individuals. The plural forms of these words again shows us that leadership was not a one man operation but a plurality of leadership by a group of men.

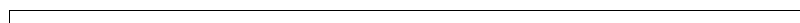
Next we will look at the verse in 1 Timothy 5:17.

1Tim. 5:17 (NASB) Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching.

The participle **proestotes** (rule) is perfect, present, 3rd person, plural, nominative. This means that those elders who *have already been ruling well* will be worthy of double honor. In other words it is not because of a seminary degree or lack of one that they are given double honor but on their past experience of having ruled well. The perfect tense makes this clear. This verse is also talking about elders and therefore those who receive double honor are already elders in the congregation. This is something that happens due to giftedness by God, not by designation by men with the title pastor. The double honor is earned and cannot be mandated. The verse also says that those who rule well are worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching. It does not limit double honor to only those who preach and teach. Those who rule well are also worthy, but it does emphasize those who preach and teach.

This is totally the opposite of what happens in most churches today. The person who has the seminary degree or other experience is hired to lead a congregation and paid for his efforts. But scripture says that those who *have already been ruling well* are worthy of double honor and that is directed to the existing elders and not to an outsider.

If we look at this verse critically we see that there are not ruling elders and teaching elders as some may say. There are elders in the plural and they will differ in giftedness as given by God. One elder may excel in one area and the other elders may seek his guidance in humbleness. But in another area that same elder who was sought out before may seek the guidance of another elder. God may raise up someone new to the eldership and he may be very gifted in an area that another elder previously stood out. The older elder should be humble enough to praise God for His providing to the congregation the giftedness it needs to function and be able to humbly learn from this new elder. This attitude of humbleness is the key to eldership.



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# THE EVIDENCE FOR THE EQUIVALENCE OF ELDER AND BISHOP AND PLURALITY OF ELDERSHIP

Looking at Titus 1:5-9 and 1 Timothy 3:1-7 are key verses in understanding this concept. The qualifications of **presbuteros** (elder) in Titus 1:5-9 are equivalent to those in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 for **episkopos** (overseer). In Titus we see that the words **presbuteros** (elder, verse 5) and **episkopos** (overseer, verse 7) are used interchangeably signifying their equivalence. Also, Titus uses **presbuteros** (elder) where 1 Timothy uses **episkopos** (overseer) also suggesting their equivalence.

Many would point to the singular use of **episkopos** (overseer) in Titus 1:7 and 1 Timothy 3:2 as an indication of there being one bishop over others, but the form is arthrous (with article) and is in reference to a bishop as a type or category. There is no monarchical example of the episcopate in the scriptures.

In 1 Clement 42-44 we see also the equation of **episkos** (overseer) with **presbuteros** (elder). The idea of hierarchy is expressed in this document. We see God--Christ--apostles--bishops--deacons. Also within this document he gives scriptural evidence of the offices of bishop and deacon in his own translation of Isaiah 60:17 which differs from the Massorah and LXX. The purpose of this letter was to address a schism in the church at Corinth. It seems that some younger men in the congregation had deposed the established leadership of the congregation. The leadership in Rome was concerned and Clement as one of the leaders sent this letter to the church at Corinth in an effort to bring about peace and reconciliation.

*First Clement (42.1-44.9) APOSTOLIC FATHERS (trans. and ed., J. B. Lightfoot)*

42:1 The Apostles received the Gospel for us from the Lord Jesus Christ;

42:2 Jesus Christ was sent forth from God.

42:3 So then Christ is from God, and the Apostles are from Christ.

42:4 Both therefore came of the will of God in the appointed order.

42:5 Having therefore received a charge, and having been fully assured through the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ and confirmed in the word of God with full assurance of the Holy Ghost,

42:6 they went forth with the glad tidings that the kingdom of God should come.

42:7 So preaching everywhere in country and town, they appointed their first fruits, when they had proved them by the Spirit, to be bishops and deacons unto them that should believe.

42:8 And this they did in no new fashion;

42:9 for indeed it had been written concerning bishops and deacons from very ancient times;

42:10 for thus saith the scripture in a certain place, {I will appoint their bishops in righteousness and their deacons in faith}.

43:1 And what marvel, if they which were entrusted in Christ with such a work by God appointed the aforesaid persons?

43:2 seeing that even the blessed Moses who was a {faithful servant in all His house} recorded for a sign in the sacred books all things that were enjoined upon him.

43:3 And him also the rest of the prophets followed, bearing witness with him unto the laws that were ordained by him.

43:4 For he, when jealousy arose concerning the priesthood, and there was dissension among the

tribes which of them was adorned with the glorious name,

43:5 commanded the twelve chiefs of the tribes to bring to him rods inscribed with the name of each tribe.

43:6 And he took them and tied them and sealed them with the signet rings of the chiefs of the tribes, and put them away in the tabernacle of the testimony on the table of God.

43:7 And having shut the tabernacle he sealed the keys and likewise also the doors.

43:8 And he said unto them, Brethren, the tribe whose rod shall bud, this hath God chosen to be priests and ministers unto Him.

43:9 Now when morning came, he called together all Israel, even the six hundred thousand men, and showed the seals to the chiefs of the tribes and opened the tabernacle of the testimony and drew forth the rods.

43:10 And the rod of Aaron was found not only with buds, but also bearing fruit.

43:11 What think ye, dearly beloved?

43:12 Did not Moses know beforehand that this would come to pass?

43:13 Assuredly he knew it.

43:14 But that disorder might not arise in Israel, he did thus, to the end that the Name of the true and only God might be glorified:

43:15 to whom be the glory for ever and ever.

43:16 Amen.

44:1 And our Apostles knew through our Lord Jesus Christ that there would be strife over the name of the bishop's office (**episkope**).

44:2 For this cause therefore, having received complete foreknowledge, they appointed the aforesaid persons,

44:3 and afterwards they provided a continuance, that if these should fall asleep, other approved men should succeed to their ministration.

44:4 Those therefore who were appointed by them, or afterward by other men of repute with the consent of the whole Church,

44:5 and have ministered unblameably to the flock of Christ bin lowliness of mind, peacefully and with all modesty, and for long time have borne a good report with all these men we consider to be unjustly thrust out from their ministration.

44:6 For it will be no light sin for us, if we thrust out those who have offered the gifts of the bishop's office (**episkope**) unblameably and holily.

44:7 Blessed are those presbyters (**presbuteros**) who have gone before, seeing that their departure was fruitful and ripe:

44:8 for they have no fear lest any one should remove them from their appointed place.

44:9 For we see that ye have displaced certain persons, though they were living honourably, from the ministration which had been respected by them blamelessly.

It is clear that *bishop's office* in 44:6 is being used interchangeably with *presbyters* in 44:7.

Also the Didache (15:1-4) gives us insight.

*The Didache or Teaching of the Apostles (15:1-4) APOSTOLIC FATHERS (trans. and ed., J. B. Lightfoot)*

15:1 Appoint for yourselves therefore bishops (**episkopos**) and deacons worthy of the Lord, men who are meek and not lovers of money, and true and approved;

15:2 for unto you they also perform the service of the prophets and teachers.

15:3 Therefore despise them not;

15:4 for they are your honourable men along with the prophets and teachers.

What is said in 15:1 is important because it does *not* say appoint elders (**presbuteros**) and deacons but bishops and deacons. If bishops were superior and above elders and they were two distinct

offices then you could not appoint bishops without appointing elders also. This verse hints at equivalence between the terms elder and bishop.

The term **episkopoi** (plural of **episkopos**, i.e. overseers) is never used for the itinerate apostles, prophets and teachers of the Gospel. It is used only in fixed local congregations.

1Thessalonians 5:12-13 does not mention 3 distinct offices (i.e. those who labor, those who have charge, and those who give instruction). Because there is only one article and 3 participles Paul is talking about a single group and not 3 distinct offices. Also the participles are in the plural and denote plurality of leadership.

1Th. 5:12-13 (NASB) But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction, 13 and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Live in peace with one another.

In Acts 20:16-17 Paul called the elders (plural) of the church (singular) of the Ephesians. This an example of more than one elder for a local congregation and no mention of a head elder or assistant elders. He introduces the speech in Acts 20:17 by referring to the elders in the plural.

Acts 20:16-17 (NASB) For Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus in order that he might not have to spend time in Asia; for he was hurrying to be in Jerusalem, if possible, on the day of Pentecost. And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church.

In Acts 20:28 Luke records Paul's words to the Ephesian elders that he had called together in Acts 20:17.

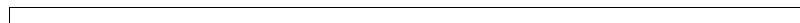
Acts 20:28 (NASB) Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.

In Paul's speech (Acts 20:28) he tells the elders (those he called together in Acts 20:17) to be overseers (**episkopous**, plural form of **episkopos**) and to shepherd (from the verb **poimaino**) the flock. All the **presbuteros** (elders-Acts 20:17) are called **episkopoi** (overseers, in the plural-Acts 20:28) without exception. From this we see that:

- 1) They are elders in status, not due to physical age. They are bishops in responsibility.
- 2) Their responsibility is described in terms of shepherding (from the verb **poimaino**).
- 3) There were several elders in one congregation with none taking precedence. There was plurality of leadership.
- 4) The calling comes from the Holy Spirit.
- 5) The elders are to be watchful and solicitous of their congregations.

In Acts 20:28 there is no formal or permanent name of office yet, but Paul did direct his words to a definite group of men.

The title of the office of elder derived differently for Greek and Jewish Christians. The obvious term for Jewish Christians was **presbuteros** (elder) and the Greek Christians introduced **episkopos** (overseer).



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## THE ABSENCE OF THE MENTION OF ELDERS IN PAUL'S EPISTLES

In Acts, 1 Timothy and Titus there is mention of Paul appointing elders. In his epistles to the churches (Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians) he does not mention the word elder (**presbuteros**). This can be explained in two ways. The first is that Paul did not appoint elders and that Luke in writing Acts wrote anachronistically to conform to later church practices. This theory also denies Paul's authorship of 1 Timothy and Titus. This explanation denies the divine inspiration and inerrancy of the scriptures. The second explanation is that Paul was not writing to the elders at these churches and he was addressing the entire congregation. In one of his epistles, Philippians, Paul does mention overseers (**episkopos**) and deacons in his greeting, but they are included along with the rest of the congregation. He is not directing his letter to them specifically but to the entire congregation of which they are a part. This verse points out that overseers (**episkopos**) did exist and refutes the first explanation mentioned above, but also follows the pattern of Paul to address his epistles to the entire congregation.

In 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13 Paul mentions teachers and those that are in charge over the congregation so we know there were leaders, but they alone were not the only ones to correct the problems addressed in this epistle. The responsibility belonged to the entire congregation, so Paul wrote the epistle to the entire congregation of Thessalonica. Also the body of believers at Thessalonica were brand new and Paul had probably not appointed elders there yet, but it is evident that there were men God was raising up and who were actively teaching and overseeing.

1 Th. 5:12-13 (NASB) But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction, 13 and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Live in peace with one another.

The word **proistemi** (to lead, guide, direct, translated in NASB to have charge over) here denotes the action of leading or taking charge (verb) and is not denoting a position of leadership (noun). This is the same verb used in 1 Timothy 5:17 where the elders who rule well receive double honor.

The absence of Paul addressing the elders specifically in his epistles does not hint towards the absence of elders but his view that the church body as a whole shared in the responsibility of following Christ.

Three perspectives of elders are mentioned in the scriptures.

- (1) The historical perspective as seen in Acts written by Luke.
- (2) The requirements as given by Paul in 1 Timothy and Titus.
- (3) The admonishment of the entire congregation and not just the elders by Paul in his epistles.

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## FIRST CLUE OF THINGS CHANGING FROM BIBLICAL NORM

With the death of the original apostles and prophets appointed directly by Christ, the **episkopos** and the **diakonos** were left to continue their work. The importance of these offices continued to increase with the concept of bishop gradually developing into a monarchical system (Syria and Asia Minor at beginning of the 2nd century). This process continued and leadership took precedence over the humble servant model of the original eldership.

Quote from *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, edited by G. Kittel, Volume 2, page 620:

"We can only reduce it to the formula that the fact of leadership triumphed in virtue of its inherent force. Ignatius, himself a true leader, bears testimony to this in all his epistles. In the ecclesiastical sphere, however, this organized leadership entails the great danger of advancing a claim to be not merely a joint expression of the will of the society but to possess full authority to decide what is eternal truth and what is not. No human power can control the truth. Even the episcopate can only serve it."

The first sign of subjection to a bishop and of a monarchical system is seen in the writings of Ignatius (1 -2nd century A.D.) He was one of the Apostolic Fathers and stressed in his writings subjection to the bishop. He was the first to contrast the office of bishop with the presbyter. He subordinated the presbyters to a monarchical bishop and the members of the congregation were subordinate to both the presbyters and bishop. However, he did not subordinate other bishops to the bishop of Rome. He was also the first to use the word Catholic. This subordination and monarchical rule was only within the local congregations at this time. This is the first sign of the plurality of eldership changing to a monarchical system. (From *Christianity Through the Centuries*)

There was thought to be division in Ignatius's church and he seemed to be dealing with it by making submission to the bishop (he uses bishop as one who is over the elders and deacons) as almost doctrine. Nowhere in scripture does it say to submit to a "head elder" or "head bishop". It talks only of elders ( or bishops or overseers) as plural. Examples of this in his writings follow with my comments added:

**Epistle of St. Ignatius of Antioch to the Magnesians 2:1; 3:1-2; 4:1; 6:1-2; 7:1; 13:1-2.**  
**(Translated by Charles H. Hoole, 1885)**

2:1 Since, therefore, I have been deemed worthy to behold you through Damas, your bishop, who is worthy of God, and your worthy presbyters Bassus and Apollonius, and my fellow-servant the Deacon Sotion, of whom may I have joy, because he is *subject to the bishop* as to the grace of God, *and to the presbytery* as to the law of Jesus Christ.

3:1 And you it beseemeth not to despise the youth of your bishop, but to award all reverence unto him, respecting the power of God the Father which is in him, even as I have known the sacred presbyters to do, not having regard to his apparently youthful position, but as wise men in God yielding unto him: yet not unto him but unto the Father of Jesus Christ, who is bishop of all.

3:2 It is therefore right that we should obey without any hypocrisy, to the honour of him who hath willed that we should do so; since not only doth a man deceive the visible bishop, but he also sets at



**Epistle of St. Ignatius of Antioch to the Trallians 2:1-3; 3:1; 7:1-2; 12:2; 13:1-2. (Translated by Charles H. Hoole, 1885)**

2:1 For when ye are subject unto the bishop as unto Jesus Christ, ye appear unto me not to live according to man, but according to Jesus Christ who died for us, that ye, by believing on his death, might escape death.

2:2 It is necessary, therefore, that ye should do nothing without the bishop, as indeed ye do, and that ye should submit yourselves to the presbytery also, as to the Apostles of Jesus Christ, our hope, in whom we shall be found walking.

2:3 It is necessary, also, that the deacons, being ministers of the mysteries of Jesus Christ, should in every way please all men. For they are not ministers of meat and drink, but servants of the Church of God; it is therefore their duty to avoid offences as fire.

3:1 In like manner, let all men reverence the deacons, and the bishop likewise, even as Jesus Christ who is the Son of the Father; and the presbyters as the council of God, and as the bond of the Apostles. Without these there is no Church;

We are to only give reverence to God. Reverence to man is confused with reverence to God.

7:1 Guard yourselves, therefore, against such as these. And this will happen unto you if ye be not puffed up, and separate not from our God Jesus Christ, and the bishop, and the commandments of the Apostles.

In the same breathe he says not puffed up he compares his position of bishop to God and the Apostles.

7:2 He who is within the altar is pure; that is, he who doeth anything apart from the bishop and the presbytery and the deacons, he is not pure in his conscience.

12:2 my bonds exhort you which I bear about for the sake of Jesus Christ, asking that I may attain unto God. Abide in your unity, and in prayer one with another, for it becometh each of you separately, and especially the presbyters, to refresh the bishop unto the honour of the Father, Jesus Christ and the Apostles.

13:1 The love of the Smyrnaeans and Ephesians saluteth you. Remember in your prayers the Church which is in Syria, of which I am not worthy to be called bishop, being the last of them.

13:2 Farewell in Jesus Christ, being subject to the bishop as to the commandment; and in like manner also to the presbytery. And do ye each of you love one another with undivided heart.

**Epistle of St. Ignatius of Antioch to the Philadelphinas 2:1; 4:1; 7:1-2. (Translated by Charles H. Hoole, 1885)**

2:1 Being, therefore, children of light and truth, avoid division and evil teachings; but where the shepherd is, there do ye follow as sheep.

4:1 Be diligent, therefore, to use one eucharist, for there is one flesh of our Lord Jesus Christ, and one cup, for union with his blood; one altar, even as there is one bishop, together with the presbytery and the deacons, who are my fellow-servants, to the end that whatever ye do, ye may do it according unto God.

7:1 For even though some have held that I was a deceiver according to the flesh, yet the Spirit, being

of God, is not deceived; for he knoweth from whence he cometh, and whither he goeth, and he searcheth out hidden things. I cried while I was among you, and spake with a loud voice, saying, Give heed unto the bishop, and to the presbyters, and to the deacons.

Not lording it over them - elders are to minister to people's needs without claim to titles and honor.

7:2 But they suspected that I spake these things because I knew beforehand the division of certain of them; but he, for whose name I am in bonds, is witness unto me that I knew not these things through the flesh of man. But the spirit preached, saying these things: Do nothing apart from the bishop; keep your flesh as the temple of God; love unity, avoid divisions; be imitators of Jesus Christ, even as he is of his Father.

**Epistle of St. Ignatius of Antioch to the Smyrnaeans 12:2. (Translated and edited by J.B. Lightfoot )**

12:2 I salute also your bishop, who is worthy of God, and your godlike presbyters, the deacons, who are my fellow-servants, and all of you, both individually and in common, in the name of Jesus Christ, in his flesh and his blood, in his passion and resurrection, both fleshly and spiritual, in the unity both of God and of yourselves. Grace be unto you, mercy, peace, and patience for ever.

**Epistle of St. Ignatius of Antioch to the Ephesians 5:1-3; 6:2. (Translated and edited by J.B. Lightfoot )**

5:1 For a fact, if I in a short time became so warmly attached to your bishop - an attachment based not on human grounds but on spiritual - how much more do I count you happy who are as closely knit to him as the Church is to Jesus Christ, and as Jesus Christ is to the Father! As a result, the symphony of unity is perfect.

5:2 Let no one deceive himself: unless a man is within the sanctuary, he has to go without the Bread of God. Assuredly, if the prayer of one or two has such efficacy, how much more that of the bishop and the entire Church!

5:3 It follows, then: he who absents himself from the common meeting, by that very fact shows pride and becomes a sectarian; for the Scripture says: God resists the proud. Let us take care, therefore, not to oppose the bishop, that we may be submissive to God.

6:2 Furthermore: the more anyone observes that a bishop is discreetly silent, the more he should stand in fear of him. Obviously, anyone whom the Master of the household puts in charge of His domestic affairs, ought to be received by us in the same spirit as He who has charged him with this duty. Plainly, then, one should look upon the bishop as upon the Lord Himself.

**Epistle of St. Ignatius of Antioch to the Polycarp 6:1-2. (Translated and edited by J.B. Lightfoot )**

6:1 Give ye heed to the bishop, that God also may give heed to you. I am devoted to those who are subject to the bishop, the presbyters, the deacons. May it be granted me to have my portion with them in the presence of God. Toil together one with another, struggle together, run together, suffer together, lie down together, rise up together, as God's stewards and assessors and ministers.

6:2 Please the Captain in whose army ye serve, from whom also ye will receive your pay. Let none of you be found a deserter. Let your baptism abide with you as your shield; your faith as your helmet; your love as your spear; your patience as your body armor. Let your works be your deposits, that ye may receive your assets due to you. Be ye therefore long-suffering one with another in gentleness, as God is with you. May I have joy of you always.

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# VOCABULARY - LEXICAL FORMS OF WORDS

We will be looking at a few words and variations of those words. I have listed them here for easy access and for ease of understanding. We will primarily be looking at the nouns **episkope**, **episkopos** and **poimen** and the adjective (also used substantively) **presbuteros** but I have listed other words that are similar or related to the topic at hand.

**apostolos** - noun - found in GNT/LXX - someone who represents fully the person who sent; one who is commissioned; bearer of the N.T. message.

**diakonia** - noun - found in GNT/LXX - service, office, ministry, aid, office of deacon

**diakonos** - noun - found in GNT/LXX - servant, helper, deacon (masculine), deaconess (femine)

**didaskolos** - noun - found in GNT/LXX - teacher

**episkopeo** - verb - found in GNT/LXX - to look at, inspect, to be circumspect, heedful, to oversee, to exercise the office of

**episkope** - noun - found in GNT/LXX - visitation, office, office of a bishop

**episkopos** - noun - found in GNT/LXX - overseer, guardian, bishop

**presbuterion** - noun - found in GNT - council of elders

**presbuteros** - adjective/substantive - found in GNT/LXX - older (adjective); older person, ancestor, elder, presbyter (substantive)

**proistemi** - noun - found in GNT/LXX - to lead, direct, guide

**poimaino** - verb - found in GNT/LXX - to feed, pasture, tend a flock

**poimen** - noun - found in GNT/LXX - shepherd

**poimne** - noun - found in GNT/LXX - flock

**sumpresbuteros** - noun - found in GNT - fellow elder, fellow presbyter

GNT = Greek New Testament

LXX = Septuagint

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## SINGULAR USES OF WORDS AS OPPOSED TO PLURAL USEAGE

- plural uses of these words would give us hints that the norm was plurality of leadership.
- singular uses of these words would give us hints that the norm may have been a single (in number) man leading congregations.
- searches were done for lexical forms and the greek words will be listed by lexical form.

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### **presbuteros** (elder)

There are only 3 instances in the N.T. of this word being used as a singular. All other uses in the N.T. are in the plural form. The singular uses are as follows:

- 1 Timothy 5:19 when it is used as a type.
- 2 John 1:1 where John calls himself "the elder".
- 3 John 1:1 where John calls himself "the elder".

None of these verses can be taken to show that a single person was to lead a local congregation but the remainder of verses in the N.T. do tend to show that a plurality of elders was the norm.

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### **presbuterion** (council of elders)

The form of this word is singular but it expresses plurality. It is used in the N.T. only to refer to a Jewish council of elders and never in regards to the Christian community.

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### **episkope** (visitation, office, office of a bishop)

There are only 4 instances in the N.T. of this word being used and all of them take the singular form. The uses are as follows:

- Luke 19:44 where the word is translated visitation.
- Acts 1:20 where the word is used to describe the office that Judas held.
- 1 Timothy 3:1 where the word describes the office of overseer as a type.
- 1 Peter 2:12 where the word is translated visitation.

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### **episkopos** (overseer, guardian, bishop)

There are only 3 instances in the N.T. of this word being used as a singular. It is used twice in the plural form.

The singular uses are as follows:

- 1 Timothy 3:2 where it is used as a type.
- Titus 1:7 where it is used as a type.



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*Apologetic on Biblical Eldership*

by Bo Salisbury

*Biblical Eldership Homepage*<http://www.nccn.net/~brennanp/>

## **Introduction**

Our apologetic will consist mainly of a number of statements, with references, which we believe to be the clear teaching of God's Word on the subject of church leadership. It is our feeling that by producing a lengthy and detailed apologetic, we would simply be "re-inventing the wheel," since there are a number of works available which quite accurately reflect our views on the issue. Some examples are *Biblical Eldership* by Alexander Strauch. Within the apologetic we will list some common objections and attempt to answer these.

### **Our Definition of Oversight by A Plurality of Elders**

We believe that a local church is to exist under the leadership of a plurality of elders, in which each elder shares in the oversight and shepherding of God's flock (Acts 14:23). There is no division between lay elders and an ordained minister, but each elder is in fact a shepherd (pastor) and overseer (Acts 20:28 & 1 Peter 5:1 & 2).

However, the Holy Spirit distributes different gifts to each elder and different levels of diligence, due to such circumstances as age, vocation, physical stamina and family. Therefore, it is to be expected that some elders will spend more time and exert more effort in their oversight of the congregation. So, one or more may stand out or even receive material assistance from the church (1 Timothy 5:17,18). But, the paid elder or the leader who is more visible to the congregation will remain a member of the college of elders. There is no hierarchy. The opportunity to serve as an elder is open to any male member of the local church who has the desire to humbly serve the body and who meets the Scriptural qualifications (1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9). The eldership oversees and shepherds the local body and has no jurisdiction over any other fellowship. The congregation is to submit to the guidance and care of the elders, who serve as the undershepherds and household stewards of Jesus (Hebrews 13:17). Yet, there is to be no clergy/laity division, so there must be close cooperation among the elders, deacons, and the congregation. Our ideal is to serve as leaders among the brethren. We affirm that the foundational truth which upholds this form of church government is that Jesus Christ is the Chief Shepherd (Senior Pastor) and Overseer of His church

(1 Peter 2:25 & 5:4).

## **Biblical Apologetic**

### **Acts 11:27-30**

The Elders in Judea receive the offerings for the poor, exercising temporal oversight of the church.

**Acts 14:23**

Paul and Barnabas appointed elders in every church and commended them to the Lord. In this passage, Luke used the distributive form of *kata* with *ekklesian*, making it clear that elders (plural) were appointed at each church (singular), or literally, church by church.

**Acts 15**

The elders, along with the congregation in Jerusalem, united with the apostles to deliberate over doctrinal controversy. There is no mention of pastors or overseers.

**Acts 20:17-38**

Paul exhorted the elders of Ephesus to pastor (shepherd) the flock of God and states that the Holy Spirit has made them overseers, demonstrating that the elders are not merely advisers or counselors. Here, the words "elders" and "overseers" are used interchangeably.

**1 Timothy 5:17,18**

Elders who rule well are to be shown double honor by the congregation, including material assistance. No mention is made of a monarchical or senior pastor being paid.

**Titus 1:5-9**

In this passage, Paul's words to Titus show us that a church is not set in order until elders are appointed. The passage again points to the fact that Paul considered an elder to be an overseer, as well as God's household steward.

**James 5:14**

Here, the congregation is instructed to call upon the elders of the church if they are sick.

**1 Peter 5:1-5**

Peter charged the elders of the church to exercise oversight (*episcopountes*) and to pastor (shepherd) the flock of God, resulting in a crown of glory at the appearing of the Chief Pastor (shepherd). He exhorted the elders not to abuse their God-given oversight of the people.

## Objections

**Objection 1:** A pastor (overseer) is an elder, but an elder is not always a pastor.

**Response 1:** This concept is never stated in the New Testament. There are no examples of this being the case anywhere in the New Testament. On the contrary, the Bible clearly states that elders are to pastor the flock of God

(Acts 20:28 & 1 Peter 5:2) and there are numerous examples of a plurality of elders overseeing a body.

**Response 2:** A common explanation for the spread of the monarchical episcopacy in the second century, is that the bishop was eventually elevated from among the elders. This is a late development, which can only be "read into" the New Testament.

**Objection 2:** When reference is made to elders (plural) in the New Testament, it is referring to single pastors or overseers of house churches in a city or region. Each church had three orders of church officers; a pastor/overseer, a group of elders who acted as his advisers, and deacons.

**Response 1:** This notion is purely speculative since there are absolutely no explicit statements in the New Testament that such was the case. Based on the evidence available in the Scriptures, one could just as easily conclude that each house church had five pastors, or ten. The New Testament never states that this form of church polity was in existence and all but a very few scholars agree that this form of government, known as the monarchical episcopacy, did not exist during New Testament times. The vast majority of scholars agree that the first indisputable example of a monarchical bishop was Ignatius, based upon a letter which he wrote about 115 a.d.. It is clear from the tone of this letter, as well as other evidence, that his view of the monarchical bishop had not been widely accepted. A few other scholars, while denying that there was a monarchical form of church government during the lifetime of the apostles, feel that the church was definitely moving in that direction by the close of the first century. This group, along with those who thought that a monarchical form was instituted by the apostles, both share a view of scripture which greatly influences their ideas on the subject. They believe that the Pastoral Epistles were not written by the apostle Paul, but were pieced together by his followers either very late in his life or after his death. They also believe that Luke erred in his chronology when dealing with the life of Paul, because the doctrines attributed to Paul are too developed. When the Pastorals and the Acts are thrown out, Paul never shows a connection between elders and overseers, so they conclude that these must have been separate offices.

**Response 2:** It is interesting to note that when the New Testament writers address believers in cities, they refer to them as "the church," but when addressing saints in a region they refer to "the churches." In both cases, the elders are addressed in the plural. It is thus, natural to assume that if an apostle recognized each house church as a distinct body with it's own leaders, he would address them as "the churches," at Rome for example. But, it would appear that each city, no matter how large or small, was regarded by the apostles as one church. A good example of this is seen in Acts 14:23 where Luke uses *kata* distributively with *ekklesian*, stating that in each church, Paul and Barnabas appointed a number of elders.

**Response 3:** The language doesn't allow us to make the assumption that Paul is addressing a number of house-churches. Any conclusion that he is addressing more than one body of believers would be purely speculative. When Paul wrote to the church at Philippi, he only recognized two orders; deacons and overseers. If there was a third order, elders who acted as advisers to the pastors, we should expect Paul to greet them as well. But,

there were clearly only two offices. This is substantiated by the fact that, after the turn of the first century, Polycarp wrote to the church (singular again) at Philippi and made no mention at all of an overseer. He only knows of deacons and elders. So, Polycarp appears to have the understanding, like Paul, that the term "overseer" and "elder" denote the same leader. It is also interesting to note that Polycarp, the disciple of the apostle John, did not consider himself a monarchical bishop, but a member of the presbytery. There is one very unlikely explanation for elders in Polycarp's letter. The church of Philippi could have devolved a church, which was led by a monarchical bishop in the first century to rule by a plurality of elders in the second. But, since there is no trace of the monarchical episcopacy in the New Testament and the general trend was in the opposite direction, this is very unlikely.

**Response 4:** There are no New Testament records of a monarchical bishop or pastor being appointed to a church. There are no letters or instructions to a monarchical bishop or pastor. There are no qualifications given for a pastor. There are qualifications given for an overseer, but in Titus and Acts the word translated "overseer" is used interchangeably with the word for "elder". On the other hand, there are numerous references to a plurality of elders in a single church in the New Testament.

**Objection 3:** Titus and Timothy are examples of a pastor overseeing a congregation, with a group of elders as advisors.

**Response 1:** We are never told in scripture that either Timothy or Titus were pastors or overseers. The descriptions we have of their travels with Paul and his special assignments for each of them suggest a much different office than what we have come to know as a pastor. Many commentators feel that they fit into the category of evangelist. Indeed, Paul exhorts Timothy to "do the work of an evangelist", but probably the most accurate description is that of "Paul's legate" or "Paul's representative," since they received the authority to perform certain duties for the apostle in different cities and regions. They were certainly itinerant ministers.

**Response 2:** Titus was left in Crete to set in order the churches in every city there. He was not sent to a single church, but to many. If Titus was occupying the office of overseer or pastor, he more closely resembled the Roman Catholic bishop or archbishop than an evangelical Christian pastor. The same is true of Timothy in Ephesus. If Ephesus was made up of a number of house churches which were governed by a single pastor or overseer, then Timothy was clearly not anything like the twentieth century pastor, but the top of a hierarchical pyramid in Ephesus.

**Response 3:** Paul told Timothy that elders who rule well are to be given material assistance from the congregation. If Timothy was the pastor of a single church, then this passage raises some real problems. First, if elders are simply advisers to the pastor who governs the congregation, then why were elders ruling, preaching, and teaching? Secondly, the idea of an elder receiving wages when there is a "full-time" pastor in the congregation is completely foreign to our modern concept of the pastor. The ruling elder in question is not identified as an assistant or associate pastor. In fact, there is no such designation in the New Testament. The concept of a single overseer or pastor who has the authority to appoint assistants is not seen in the

church until long after the close of the first century.

**Response 4:** If Titus and Timothy were pastors or overseers of a local congregation, then it would seem very curious for Paul to be concerned about appointing qualified men who desired the office of overseer. If there was only one pastor or overseer of a congregation, then the position had already been filled by Titus in his fellowship and Timothy in his.

**Objection 4:** James at Jerusalem is an example of a church under the leadership of a single pastor or overseer. At the council of Jerusalem, he gave his judgement, proving that he had the authority to do so.

**Response 1:** James is never identified as the monarchical overseer or pastor of the church in Jerusalem, so any such designation would be purely speculative. It is interesting to note that almost every mention of James in the book of Acts mentions him in the company of the elders, which is consistent with the concept of oversight by a group of elders.

**Response 2:** If the Jerusalem church was made up of house churches, each having its own pastors and elders, then James would more closely resemble a Roman Catholic bishop than a modern evangelical pastor.

**Response 3:** Many scholars feel that James was one of the leading men at Jerusalem because of his wisdom and piety. But, he was still a member of the presbytery, with no special title or office. The apostle Peter provides a parallel to this situation. He was the leading apostle, but he never received an honorific title or exercised any hierarchical authority over the twelve. The twelve provided oversight of the universal church within a plurality. In fact, Peter was on such equal footing with the rest of the apostles that Paul withstood him to his face when he was in error. Many churches, which are governed by a plurality of elders have one elder who, for the sake of order, is the president or spokesman for the group. This is another possible explanation for the position of James.

**Response 4:** James was presiding over the council at Jerusalem and he summed up the arguments and proposed the solution which was thought to be wise by all in attendance. If his pronouncement was based on the authority of his office at Jerusalem, then he was truly out of order because there were apostles (the twelve) present. The context makes it clear that James' judgement was not based on his authority, but was a summation of what had been said during the council.

**Objection 5:** Ephesian 4:11 states that there is an office of pastor-teacher.

**Response 1:** Nowhere in the New Testament is there an account of the apostles appointing a pastor-teacher. There are no epistles or instructions addressed to anyone holding the office of pastor-teacher and there are never any qualifications given for the office of pastor-teacher. This could very well be, as a number of commentators and scholars agree, a reference to the gifts which Christ has given the church through the elders, who pastor and teach the flock. This list follows closely with the list of gifts to the church which Paul gives to the church at Corinth. This is a very reasonable explanation since elders are admonished in a number of passages to pastor, to be able to teach, and to protect the church from false teachers.

**Objection 6:** The New Testament never states that every church is to be pastored by a plurality of elders.

**Response 1:** A possible explanation is that, although each church is to be ruled by a plurality of elders, it was not stated explicitly because some churches did not have men who meet the Scriptural qualifications for leadership. It would be theologically impossible to declare that a group of Christians are not really part of the Body of Christ, because they don't have qualified leaders. And, such was the case in new churches in New Testament times and it is still the case today, as small groups of people are evangelized and come together as a church. But, as churches grow and men mature, God provides the church with qualified leaders from within. In fact, a church may function for years with only one elder, but the ideal is that as more men desire the work of shepherding the flock of God and meet the qualifications, they can join those who are already engaged in the work.

**Response 2:** It is recognized by the vast majority of New Testament scholars that church organization evolved as time passed. There are a number of examples of churches which existed with little or no leadership for a period of time. But, it is clear that Paul did not consider a church to be set in order until elders were appointed. From the New Testament record, it is clear that the highest form of church order which was achieved during the lifetime of the apostles and was composed of two orders; elders/overseers and deacons. New Testament scholars and historians are in agreement that the form of church government known as the monarchical episcopacy, with its three orders of a bishop/overseer presiding over a council of advisors/elders and deacons, did not begin to be practiced until after New Testament times and was not the dominant form until late in the second century. So, in summation, although it is not explicitly stated, rule by a plurality of elders was the highest organization of church polity established and practiced under the authority of the apostles.

**Response 3:** If absence of an explicit statement is thought to diminish from the case for rule by a plurality of elders, then the case for a single pastor or overseer is non-existent. Not only are there no explicit statements that each congregation is to be ruled by a single pastor or overseer, but there are no examples of such a form of government in existence during the lifetime of the apostles. There are no greetings or instructions directed to a monarchical pastor or overseer and no apostle ever appointed one man to lead a body of believers.

**Response 4:** It should be remembered that some of the central doctrines of our faith such as the Trinity are not supported by an explicit statement, but are the result of painstaking, inductive study of the Scriptures. Although rule by a plurality of elders is not explicitly commanded, the New Testament is very explicit in presenting its practice.

**Objection 7:** Elders are always spoken of in the plural and overseers in the singular, so they denote separate offices.

**Response 1:** The vast majority of New Testament scholars and historians hold the view that Paul used the two words interchangeably to denote the same office in Acts and Titus. The use of the singular form of the word translated as "overseer" is thought to be generic when listing the

qualifications for anyone desiring the office and not referring to one overseer ruling a church. Paul uses the generic singular in the same letter to describe a woman who is "a widow indeed", but we would not conclude that there can only be one widow per congregation, simply because Paul goes from the plural to the singular. The fact that the monarchical episcopacy did not come into existence until long after Paul's death, also makes it improbable that Paul is referring to a single bishop/overseer ruling a congregation.

**Response 2:** In his epistle to the Philippians, Paul greets the overseers (plural). These are the same officers who Polycarp addresses as elders in his epistle to the church at Philippi.

**Objection 8:** Rule by a plurality of elders doesn't work. It is not practical.

**Response 1:** The same can be said of any form of church government, including oversight by a single pastor. There are many churches and denominations which hold a variety of forms of government and they have experienced liberal tendencies, schisms, and all manner of problems. The fact is, there have been quite a large number of churches throughout history which have been governed by a plurality of elders and have been quite successful. Before we can judge the effectiveness of any form of leadership, we must question how we define a successful church. Is it the number of people, the doctrine, the spiritual maturity of the members, their belief in the gift of tongues, Biblical inerrancy, the wealth and social standing of their members, their servant spirit, and so on?

**Response 2:** Marriage doesn't work. About half of the marriages performed in the United States this year will end in divorce. It's obvious; marriage does not work. But, those of us who believe that marriage was instituted by God enter into a marriage covenant and we resolve to make it work, by the Grace of God. The same is true of eldership. We believe that, apart from God, it doesn't work. But, we believe that God has given us an ideal of church government and we hope to achieve that ideal by submitting to one another and by submitting to God.

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by Patrick J. Brennan

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# OPENING SCRIPTURE AND COMMENTS

The following scriptures will give a general background and feeling for what we are presenting here:

1Sam. 8:1-22 (NASB) And it came about when Samuel was old that he appointed his sons judges over Israel. 2 Now the name of his first-born was Joel, and the name of his second, Abijah; they were judging in Beersheba. 3 His sons, however, did not walk in his ways, but turned aside after dishonest gain and took bribes and perverted justice. 4 Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah; 5 and they said to him, "Behold, you have grown old, and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now appoint a king for us to judge us like all the nations." 6 *But the thing was displeasing in the sight of Samuel when they said, "Give us a king to judge us." And Samuel prayed to the LORD. 7 And the LORD said to Samuel, "Listen to the voice of the people in regard to all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me from being king over them. 8 Like all the deeds which they have done since the day that I brought them up from Egypt even to this day - in that they have forsaken Me and served other gods - so they are doing to you also. 9 Now then, listen to their voice; however, you shall solemnly warn them and tell them of the procedure of the king who will reign over them."* 10 So Samuel spoke all the words of the LORD to the people who had asked of him a king. 11 And he said, "This will be the procedure of the king who will reign over you: he will take your sons and place them for himself in his chariots and among his horsemen and they will run before his chariots. 12 And he will appoint for himself commanders of thousands and of fifties, and some to do his plowing and to reap his harvest and to make his weapons of war and equipment for his chariots. 13 He will also take your daughters for perfumers and cooks and bakers. 14 And he will take the best of your fields and your vineyards and your olive groves, and give them to his servants. 15 And he will take a tenth of your seed and of your vineyards, and give to his officers and to his servants. 16 He will also take your male servants and your female servants and your best young men and your donkeys, and use them for his work. 17 He will take a tenth of your flocks, and you yourselves will become his servants. 18 Then you will cry out in that day because of your king whom you have chosen for yourselves, but the LORD will not answer you in that day." 19 *Nevertheless, the people refused to listen to the voice of Samuel, and they said, "No, but there shall be a king over us, 20 that we also may be like all the nations, that our king may judge us and go out before us and fight our battles."* 21 Now after Samuel had heard all the words of the people, he repeated them in the LORD's hearing. 22 And the LORD said to Samuel, "Listen to their voice, and appoint them a king." So Samuel said to the men of Israel, "Go every man to his city."

Matt. 23:5-8 (NASB) "But they do all their deeds to be noticed by men; for they broaden their phylacteries, and lengthen the tassels of their garments. And they love the place of honor at banquets, and the chief seats in the synagogues, and respectful greetings in the market places, and being called by men, Rabbi. *But do not be called Rabbi; for One is your Teacher, and you are all brothers*".

1Pet. 5:1-4 (NASB) Therefore, I exhort the *elders* among you, as your *fellow elder* and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, 2 *shepherd* the flock of God among you, exercising *oversight* not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; 3 *nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge*, but proving to be *examples* to the flock. 4 And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.

Luke 22:24-27 (NASB) And there arose also a dispute among them as to which one of them was regarded to be greatest. 25 And He said to them, "The *kings of the Gentiles lord it over them*; and those who have authority over them are called 'Benefactors'. 26 But not so with you, but let him who is the greatest among you become as the youngest, and *the leader as the servant*. 27 For who is greater, the one who reclines at the table, or the one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at the table? But I am among you as the one who serves".

Below is a quote from Jerome in the 4th century clearly stating his view that there was originally no difference between bishops and elders in the early church. Jerome was well versed in the original Biblical languages:

A presbyter and a bishop are the same...the churches were governed by a joint council of the presbyters...If it be supposed that it is merely our opinion and without scriptural support that bishop and presbyter are one...examine again the words the apostles addressed to the Philippians...Now Philippi is but one city in Macedonia, and certainly in one city there could not have been numerous bishops. It is simply that at that time the same persons were called either bishops or presbyters.

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# VOCABULARY - LEXICAL FORMS OF WORDS

We will be looking at a few words and variations of those words. I have listed them here for easy access and for ease of understanding. We will primarily be looking at the nouns **episkope**, **episkopos** and **poimen** and the adjective (also used substantively) **presbuteros** but I have listed other words that are similar or related to the topic at hand.

**apostolos** - noun - found in GNT/LXX - someone who represents fully the person who sent; one who is commissioned; bearer of the N.T. message.

**diakonia** - noun - found in GNT/LXX - service, office, ministry, aid, office of deacon

**diakonos** - noun - found in GNT/LXX - servant, helper, deacon (masculine), deaconess (femine)

**didaskolos** - noun - found in GNT/LXX - teacher

**episkopeo** - verb - found in GNT/LXX - to look at, inspect, to be circumspect, heedful, to oversee, to exercise the office of

**episkope** - noun - found in GNT/LXX - visitation, office, office of a bishop

**episkopos** - noun - found in GNT/LXX - overseer, guardian, bishop

**presbuterion** - noun - found in GNT - council of elders

**presbuteros** - adjective/substantive - found in GNT/LXX - older (adjective); older person, ancestor, elder, presbyter (substantive)

**proistemi** - noun - found in GNT/LXX - to lead, direct, guide

**poimaino** - verb - found in GNT/LXX - to feed, pasture, tend a flock

**poimen** - noun - found in GNT/LXX - shepherd

**paimne** - noun - found in GNT/LXX - flock

**sumpresbuteros** - noun - found in GNT - fellow elder, fellow presbyter

GNT = Greek New Testament

LXX = Septuagint



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# INTRODUCTION

I believe the emergence of a monarchical system of leadership in our churches today was *due to a straying from apostolic teachings and has been accepted without investigation*. I think the scriptures are clear and that Biblical principles clearly show that this model is in opposition to what God intended for His church. Just as Israel was not intended to be ruled by a king, Christ's church is not to be ruled by a pastor. Just as there is no longer any need for animal sacrifices and priests, Christ's church does not need a clergy to act as priests (to administer communion, baptism, marriages, funerals etc.). We have created our own priesthood with men in submission to these priests instead of being in submission to the ONE HIGH PRIEST JESUS CHRIST. Also by having one man in authority there is lack of accountability. This system also hinders body ministry and individual growth because one man is in charge and people expect the pastor to do things and they are not encouraged to use their gifts because they are usually controlled by the pastor and are subject to his approval or disapproval.

It is my premise that only two offices are currently available for the church. The office of elder (also called bishop or overseer) and the office of deacon. The office of bishop is described in Greek with the word **episkope** (office of bishop) which is used as a title. In some places in scripture this same word means visitation. The description of this office is described in Greek with the word **episkopos** (overseer). Therefore one who holds the office of bishop (**episkope**) is one who is an overseer, guardian, bishop (**episkopos**). The word **presbuteros** is used to describe an elder or presbyter. The word **poimen** is used for shepherd. I will attempt to show that **episkope** (office of bishop) and **presbuteros** (elder) are equivalent and that they both are **episkopos** (overseers or guardians) of congregations and they are also both called to be a **poimen** (shepherd - i.e. one who feeds, tends, cares for).

The Septuagint (LXX) uses **episkopos** (overseer) in a similar way to secular Greek. It incorporates the idea of divinity and also a sense of overseeing. In ancient Greece it was used to describe various official offices as a form of respect (i.e. it was used as a title).

The word **episkope** (office of bishop) describes an office that one may seek. 1Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9 outline qualifications and not duties. The candidate must give proof in his own home that he can control the congregation. Catholicism by mandating that a priest be celibate is in direct opposition to scripture because the scriptures clearly show that an elder may be married.

1Tim. 3:1-7 (NASB) It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the **office of overseer**, it is a fine work he desires to do. 2 An **overseer**, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate,

prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, 3 not addicted to wine or pugnacious, but gentle, uncontentious, free from the love of money. 4 He must be one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity 5 (but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?); 6 and not a new convert, lest he become conceited and fall into the condemnation incurred by the devil. 7 And he must have a good reputation with those outside the church, so that he may not fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.

Titus 1:5-9 (NASB) For this reason I left you in Crete, that you might set in order what remains, and appoint **elders** in every city as I directed you, 6 namely, if any man be above reproach, the husband of one wife, having children who believe, not accused of dissipation or rebellion. 7 For the **overseer** must be above reproach as God's steward, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not addicted to wine, not pugnacious, not fond of sordid gain, 8 but hospitable, loving what is good, sensible, just, devout, self-controlled, 9 holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, that he may be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict.

The word **presbuteros** may be used as an adjective to mean just one who is older in age or older or more mature spiritually. It may also be used substantively (in place of a noun) to mean an older person, ancestor, elder, or presbyter. The later two uses are most relevant to this article.

The Hebrew word **zaqen** is similar in meaning to the Greek presbuteros. It also has a two-fold meaning of age or title (maturity).

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*Rediscovering the Past: Biblical Eldership in Light of Scripture and History*

by Patrick J. Brennan

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# THE EVIDENCE FOR THE EQUIVALENCE OF ELDER AND BISHOP AND PLURALITY OF ELDERSHIP

Looking at Titus 1:5-9 and 1 Timothy 3:1-7 are key verses in understanding this concept. The qualifications of **presbuteros** (elder) in Titus 1:5-9 are equivalent to those in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 for **episkopos** (overseer). In Titus we see that the words **presbuteros** (elder, verse 5) and **episkopos** (overseer, verse 7) are used interchangeably signifying their equivalence. Also, Titus uses **presbuteros** (elder) where 1 Timothy uses **episkopos** (overseer) also suggesting their equivalence.

Many would point to the singular use of **episkopos** (overseer) in Titus 1:7 and 1 Timothy 3:2 as an indication of there being one bishop over others, but the form is arthrous (with article) and is in reference to a bishop as a type or category. There is no monarchical example of the episcopate in the scriptures.

In 1 Clement 42-44 we see also the equation of **episkos** (overseer) with **presbuteros** (elder). The idea of hierarchy is expressed in this document. We see God--Christ--apostles--bishops--deacons. Also within this document he gives scriptural evidence of the offices of bishop and deacon in his own translation of Isaiah 60:17 which differs from the Massorah and LXX. The purpose of this letter was to address a schism in the church at Corinth. It seems that some younger men in the congregation had deposed the established leadership of the congregation. The leadership in Rome was concerned and Clement as one of the leaders sent this letter to the church at Corinth in an effort to bring about peace and reconciliation.

*First Clement (42.1-44.9) APOSTOLIC FATHERS (trans. and ed., J. B. Lightfoot)*

42:1 The Apostles received the Gospel for us from the Lord Jesus Christ;

42:2 Jesus Christ was sent forth from God.

42:3 So then Christ is from God, and the Apostles are from Christ.

42:4 Both therefore came of the will of God in the appointed order.

42:5 Having therefore received a charge, and having been fully assured through the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ and confirmed in the word of God with full assurance of the Holy Ghost,

42:6 they went forth with the glad tidings that the kingdom of God should come.

42:7 So preaching everywhere in country and town, they appointed their first fruits, when they had proved them by the Spirit, to be bishops and deacons unto them that should believe.

42:8 And this they did in no new fashion;

42:9 for indeed it had been written concerning bishops and deacons from very ancient times;

42:10 for thus saith the scripture in a certain place, {I will appoint their bishops in righteousness and their deacons in faith}.

43:1 And what marvel, if they which were entrusted in Christ with such a work by God appointed the aforesaid persons?

43:2 seeing that even the blessed Moses who was a {faithful servant in all His house} recorded for a sign in the sacred hooks all things that were enjoined upon him.

43:3 And him also the rest of the prophets followed, bearing witness with him unto the laws that were ordained by him.

43:4 For he, when jealousy arose concerning the priesthood, and there was dissension among the tribes which of them was adorned with the glorious name,

43:5 commanded the twelve chiefs of the tribes to bring to him rods inscribed with the name of each tribe.

43:6 And he took them and tied them and sealed them with the signet rings of the chiefs of the tribes, and put them away in the tabernacle of the testimony on the table of God.

43:7 And having shut the tabernacle he sealed the keys and likewise also the doors.

43:8 And he said unto them, Brethren, the tribe whose rod shall bud, this hath God chosen to be priests and ministers unto Him.

43:9 Now when morning came, he called together all Israel, even the six hundred thousand men, and showed the seals to the chiefs of the tribes and opened the tabernacle of the testimony and drew forth the rods.

43:10 And the rod of Aaron was found not only with buds, but also bearing fruit.

43:11 What think ye, dearly beloved?

43:12 Did not Moses know beforehand that this would come to pass?

43:13 Assuredly he knew it.

43:14 But that disorder might not arise in Israel, he did thus, to the end that the Name of the true and only God might be glorified:

43:15 to whom be the glory for ever and ever.

43:16 Amen.

44:1 And our Apostles knew through our Lord Jesus Christ that there would be strife over the name of the bishop's office (**episkope**).

44:2 For this cause therefore, having received complete foreknowledge, they appointed the aforesaid persons,

44:3 and afterwards they provided a continuance, that if these should fall asleep, other approved men should succeed to their ministration.

44:4 Those therefore who were appointed by them, or afterward by other men of repute with the consent of the whole Church,

44:5 and have ministered unblameably to the flock of Christ bin lowliness of mind, peacefully and with all modesty, and for long time have borne a good report with all these men we consider to be unjustly thrust out from their ministration.

44:6 For it will be no light sin for us, if we thrust out those who have offered the gifts of the bishop's office (**episkope**) unblameably and holily.

44:7 Blessed are those presbyters (**presbuteros**) who have gone before, seeing that their departure was fruitful and ripe:

44:8 for they have no fear lest any one should remove them from their appointed place.

44:9 For we see that ye have displaced certain persons, though they were living honourably, from the ministration which had been respected by them blamelessly.

It is clear that *bishop's office* in 44:6 is being used interchangeably with *presbyters* in 44:7.

Also the Didache (15:1-4) gives us insight.

*The Didache or Teaching of the Apostles (15:1-4) APOSTOLIC FATHERS (trans. and ed., J. B. Lightfoot)*

15:1 Appoint for yourselves therefore bishops (**episkopos**) and deacons worthy of the Lord, men who are meek and not lovers of money, and true and approved;

15:2 for unto you they also perform the service of the prophets and teachers.

15:3 Therefore despise them not;

15:4 for they are your honourable men along with the prophets and teachers.

What is said in 15:1 is important because it does *not* say appoint elders (**presbuteros**) and deacons but bishops and deacons. If bishops were superior and above elders and they were two distinct offices then you could not appoint bishops without appointing elders also. This verse hints at equivalence between the terms elder and bishop.

The term **episkopoi** (plural of **episkopos**, i.e. overseers) is never used for the itinerate apostles, prophets and teachers of the Gospel. It is used only in fixed local congregations.

1Thessalonians 5:12-13 does not mention 3 distinct offices (i.e. those who labor, those who have charge, and those who give instruction). Because there is only one article and 3 participles Paul is talking about a single group and not 3 distinct offices. Also the participles are in the plural and denote plurality of leadership.

1Th. 5:12-13 (NASB) But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction, 13 and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Live in peace with one another.

In Acts 20:16-17 Paul called the elders (plural) of the church (singular) of the Ephesians. This an example of more than one elder for a local congregation and no mention of a head elder or assistant elders. He introduces the speech in Acts 20:17 by referring to the elders in the plural.

Acts 20:16-17 (NASB) For Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus in order that he might not have to spend time in Asia; for he was hurrying to be in Jerusalem, if possible, on the day of Pentecost. And from

Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church.

In Acts 20:28 Luke records Paul's words to the Ephesian elders that he had called together in Acts 20:17.

Acts 20:28 (NASB) Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.

In Paul's speech (Acts 20:28) he tells the elders (those he called together in Acts 20:17) to be overseers (**episkopous**, plural form of **episkopos**) and to shepherd (from the verb **poimaino**) the flock. All the **presbuteros** (elders-Acts 20:17) are called **episkopoi** (overseers, in the plural-Acts 20:28) without exception. From this we see that:

- 1) They are elders in status, not due to physical age. They are bishops in responsibility.
- 2) Their responsibility is described in terms of shepherding (from the verb **poimaino**).
- 3) There were several elders in one congregation with none taking precedence. There was plurality of leadership.
- 4) The calling comes from the Holy Spirit.
- 5) The elders are to be watchful and solicitous of their congregations.

In Acts 20:28 there is no formal or permanent name of office yet, but Paul did direct his words to a definite group of men.

The title of the office of elder derived differently for Greek and Jewish Christians. The obvious term for Jewish Christians was **presbuteros** (elder) and the Greek Christians introduced **episkopos** (overseer).

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# THE ABSENCE OF THE MENTION OF ELDERS IN PAUL'S EPISTLES

In Acts, 1 Timothy and Titus there is mention of Paul appointing elders. In his epistles to the churches (Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians) he does not mention the word elder (**presbuteros**). This can be explained in two ways. The first is that Paul did not appoint elders and that Luke in writing Acts wrote anachronistically to conform to later church practices. This theory also denies Paul's authorship of 1 Timothy and Titus. This explanation denies the divine inspiration and inerrancy of the scriptures. The second explanation is that Paul was not writing to the elders at these churches and he was addressing the entire congregation. In one of his epistles, Philippians, Paul does mention overseers (**episkopos**) and deacons in his greeting, but they are included along with the rest of the congregation. He is not directing his letter to them specifically but to the entire congregation of which they are a part. This verse points out that overseers (**episkopos**) did exist and refutes the first explanation mentioned above, but also follows the pattern of Paul to address his epistles to the entire congregation.

In 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13 Paul mentions teachers and those that are in charge over the congregation so we know there were leaders, but they alone were not the only ones to correct the problems addressed in this epistle. The responsibility belonged to the entire congregation, so Paul wrote the epistle to the entire congregation of Thessalonica. Also the body of believers at Thessalonica were brand new and Paul had probably not appointed elders there yet, but it is evident that there were men God was raising up and who were actively teaching and overseeing.

1Th. 5:12-13 (NASB) But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction, 13 and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Live in peace with one another.

The word **proistemi** (to lead, guide, direct, translated in NASB to have charge over) here denotes the action of leading or taking charge (verb) and is not denoting a position of leadership (noun). This is the same verb used in 1 Timothy 5:17 where the elders who rule well receive double honor.

The absence of Paul addressing the elders specifically in his epistles does not hint towards the absence of elders but his view that the church body as a whole shared in the responsibility of following Christ.

Three perspectives of elders are mentioned in the scriptures.

(1) The historical perspective as seen in Acts written by Luke.

- (2) The requirements as given by Paul in 1 Timothy and Titus.
- (3) The admonishment of the entire congregation and not just the elders by Paul in his epistles.



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# THE GIFT OF PASTOR/TEACHER

In Ephesians 4:11-12 the topic is not of offices, but of gifts. These are the gift of special men to the church by the resurrected Christ.

Eph. 4:11-12 (NASB) And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ.

Pastor/teachers are God's gift to the church. Elders are pastor/teachers that have been given to the local church. The purpose of an eldership is not for "lording over", or for being the vessel by which God reveals himself to a group of people, but to oversee the congregation and the gifts given to that congregation. The eldership are not necessarily the most gifted people in the congregation. Words of wisdom and knowledge, prophecy, etc. are not the domain of the eldership. They are to oversee a congregation and they must be apt to teach, but there may be other men in a congregation that are able to teach, also.

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# THE ANALOGY OF SHEPHERD IN RELATION TO ELDERSHIP

In Palestine, in Later Judaism there are some rabbinical lists of thieving and cheating occupations. Included on this list are shepherds, along with publicans and tax collectors. These occupations were deprived of certain civil rights including not being able to hold a judicial office or be a witness in court. Jesus had to counter this animosity and stereotype when telling people that He was the Good Shepherd (John 10:11,14)

John 10:11 (NASB) "I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep.

John 10:14 (NASB) "I am the good shepherd; and I know My own, and My own know Me,

In 1Peter 2:25 we see Christ as the Shepherd and Guardian (Overseer) of our souls. He provides for His sheep and He keeps watch over His sheep. He surpasses all previous examples of shepherds of God's people including Moses.

1Pet. 2:25 (NASB) For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls.

He is called the Great Shepherd in Hebrews 13:20 and the Chief Shepherd in 1Peter 5:4.

Heb. 13:20 (NASB) Now the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant, even Jesus our Lord,

1Pet. 5:1-4 (NASB) Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, 2 shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; 3 nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock. 4 And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.

In John 10:1-5 we see the Good Shepherd willing to give His life for His flock. Jesus knows His sheep. He is *not* a hireling. Today many shepherds (pastors) are hirelings. Jesus' only pay was our

relationship with Him, which He was glad to die for in order to attain.

John 10:1-5 (NASB) "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter by the door into the fold of the sheep, but climbs up some other way, he is a thief and a robber. 2 But he who enters by the door is a shepherd of the sheep. 3 To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name, and leads them out. 4 When he puts forth all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. 5 And a stranger they simply will not follow, but will flee from him, because they do not know the voice of strangers."

The word is always used with the sense of metaphor when congregational leaders are called shepherds and not as a title or office. This is also true when the verb **poimaino** (to feed, pasture, tend a flock; 1Peter 5:2; Acts 20:28; John 21:16) is used for the work of these men or the noun **poimnion** (flock) is used for the congregation.

The shepherds are the **presbuteros** (elders) (1Peter 5:1; Acts 20:17) and **episkopos** (overseers) (Acts 20:28). The shepherds task is therefore to take care and serve the local congregation ( Acts 20:28; 1Peter 5:2-4).

Only once in John 21:15-17 does the church universal seem to be taken in context when referring to Peter being told by the risen Jesus to shepherd His sheep.

John 21:15-17 (NASB) So when they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to him, "Tend My lambs." 16 He said to him again a second time, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to him, "Shepherd My sheep." 17 He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me?" Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, "Do you love Me?" And he said to Him, "Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You." Jesus said to him, "Tend My sheep."

**Poimen** (shepherd) and **episkopos** (elder) are closely linked in describing a shepherd. Christ was described as the shephard and bishop (or overseer) of souls. In other places in scripture elders are told to oversee, shepherd, and feed the flock of Christ. This verse suggests the current titles of pastor and bishop that are used today. Christ is one who has the fullest knowledge of his flock and is the example as the most giving and self-sacrificing Shepherd. Elders can only try and emulate His example. The term **episkopos** (elder) has always incorporated divine being and action, from the earliest uses of the word from the time of Homer. There is also incorporated in the term a lack of assumption outwardly but of an inner significance. Look how far we have come in our model of church government today. The lack of outward assumption has all but dissapeared. It may have started with the verse in 1 Timothy 5:17 with the differentiation of **kalos proestotes** (those who rule well) and the rest of the **presbuteroi** (elders, plural of **presubteros**) with the claim of double

honor and reward to the former.

1Tim. 5:17 (NASB) Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching.

The idea of a shepherd (pastor) in relation to the church is used only once in Ephesians 4:11.

Eph. 4:11 (NASB) And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers,

This verse is talking about "gifts" and not "offices".



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# ARGUMENTS AGAINST DIFFERENT TYPES OF ELDERS

There are two verses I want to look at under this topic. First we will look at 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13. Many believe this verse to be talking about 3 different types of elders.

1Th. 5:12-13 (NASB) But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction, 13 and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Live in peace with one another.

. Paul is talking about one group of individuals with 3 functions and not 3 different groups of individuals. The plural forms of these words again shows us that leadership was not a one man operation but a plurality of leadership by a group of men.

Next we will look at the verse in 1 Timothy 5:17.

1Tim. 5:17 (NASB) Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching.

The participle **proestotes** (rule) is perfect, present, 3rd person, plural, nominative. This means that those elders who *have already been ruling well* will be worthy of double honor. In other words it is not because of a seminary degree or lack of one that they are given double honor but on their past experience of having ruled well. The perfect tense makes this clear. This verse is also talking about elders and therefore those who receive double honor are already elders in the congregation. This is something that happens due to giftedness by God, not by designation by men with the title pastor. The double honor is earned and cannot be mandated. The verse also says that those who rule well are worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching. It does not limit double honor to only those who preach and teach. Those who rule well are also worthy, but it does emphasize those who preach and teach.

This is totally the opposite of what happens in most churches today. The person who has the seminary degree or other experience is hired to lead a congregation and paid for his efforts. But scripture says that those who *have already been ruling well* are worthy of double honor and that is directed to the existing elders and not to an outsider.

If we look at this verse critically we see that there are not ruling elders and teaching elders as some may say. There are elders in the plural and they will differ in giftedness as given by God. One elder may excel in one area and the other elders may seek his guidance in humbleness. But in another area that same elder who was sought out before may seek the guidance of another elder. God may raise up someone new to the eldership and he may be very gifted in an area that another elder previously stood out. The older elder should be humble enough to praise God for His providing to the congregation the giftedness it needs to function and be able to humbly learn from this new elder. This attitude of humbleness is the key to eldership.



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# SINGULAR USES OF WORDS AS OPPOSED TO PLURAL USEAGE

- plural uses of these words would give us hints that the norm was plurality of leadership.
- singular uses of these words would give us hints that the norm may have been a single (in number) man leading congregations.
- searches were done for lexical forms and the greek words will be listed by lexical form.

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## **presbuteros** (elder)

There are only 3 instances in the N.T. of this word being used as a singular. All other uses in the N.T. are in the plural form. The singular uses are as follows:

- 1 Timothy 5:19 when it is used as a type.
- 2 John 1:1 where John calls himself "the elder".
- 3 John 1:1 where John calls himself "the elder".

None of these verses can be taken to show that a single person was to lead a local congregation but the remainder of verses in the N.T. do tend to show that a plurality of elders was the norm.

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## **presbuterion** (council of elders)

The form of this word is singular but it expresses plurality. It is used in the N.T. only to refer to a Jewish council of elders and never in regards to the Christian community.

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## **episkope** (visitation, office, office of a bishop)

There are only 4 instances in the N.T. of this word being used and all of them take the singular form. The uses are as follows:

- Luke 19:44 where the word is translated visitation.
- Acts 1:20 where the word is used to describe the office that Judas held.

1Timothy 3:1 where the word describes the office of overseer as a type.

1Peter 2:12 where the word is translated visitation.

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**episkopos** (overseer, guardian, bishop)

There are only 3 instances in the N.T. of this word being used as a singular. It is used twice in the plural form.

The singular uses are as follows:

1Timothy 3:2 where it is used as a type.

Titus 1:7 where it is used as a type.

1Peter 2:25 where it is used for Jesus.

The singular uses give us no reason to assume a one man leadership model.

The plural uses are as follows:

Acts 20:28 where the word is translated overseers.

Philippians 1:1 where the word is translated overseers.

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**poimen** (shepherd)

There are 13 instances in the N.T. of this word being used as a singular in a total of 12 verses. All other uses are in the plural.

The singular uses are as follows:

Matthew 9:36

Matthew 25:32

Matthew 26:31

Mark 6:34

Mark 14:27

John 10:2

John 10:11 (used twice)

John 10:12

John 10:14

John 10:16

Hebrews 13:20

1Peter 2:25

In these verses the word never refers to a shepherd as one who is over a congregation (i.e. as a pastor).

They are general metaphors of Jesus as Shepherd.

The plural uses are as follows:

Luke 2:8

Luke 2:15

Luke 2:18

Luke 2:20

These verses all refer to the shepherds who were present during the birth of Christ and do not relate to the subject. The only other plural use is in Ephesians 4:11. This word in this verse is used as a type and does not shed any light on the subject. However it is interesting to note that assistant pastors and associate pastors are not listed in this or any other scripture.

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**sumpresbuteros** (fellow elder, fellow presbyter)

There is only 1 instance in the N.T. of this word being used. It is in the plural form 1Peter 5:1 where it is used as fellow elders.



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*Biblical Eldership Homepage* <http://www.nccn.net/~brennanp/>

# FIRST CLUE OF THINGS CHANGING FROM BIBLICAL NORM

"I wrote something to the church; but Diotrephes, who loves to be first among them, does not accept what we say. For this reason, if I come, I will call attention to his deeds which he does, unjustly accusing us with wicked words; and not satisfied with this, neither does he himself receive the brethren, and he forbids those who desire to do so and puts them out of the church. Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good. The one who does good is of God; the one who does evil has not seen God." 3 John 1:9-11

This is the very first example of a monarchical type of leader. We see a very negative picture painted for this type of leadership in John's letter.

With the death of the original apostles and prophets appointed directly by Christ, the **episkopos** and the **diakonos** were left to continue their work. The importance of these offices continued to increase with the concept of bishop gradually developing into a monarchical system (Syria and Asia Minor at beginning of the 2nd century). This process continued and leadership took precedence over the humble servant model of the original eldership.

Quote from *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, edited by G. Kittel, Volume 2, page 620:

"We can only reduce it to the formula that the fact of leadership triumphed in virtue of its inherent force. Ignatius, himself a true leader, bears testimony to this in all his epistles. In the ecclesiastical sphere, however, this organized leadership entails the great danger of advancing a claim to be not merely a joint expression of the will of the society but to possess full authority to decide what is eternal truth and what is not. No human power can control the truth. Even the episcopate can only serve it."

The first sign of subjection to a bishop and of a monarchical system is seen in the writings of Ignatius (1 - 2nd century A.D.) He was one of the Apostolic Fathers and stressed in his writings subjection to the bishop. He was the first to contrast the office of bishop with the presbyter. He subordinated the presbyters to a monarchical bishop and the members of the congregation were subordinate to both the presbyters and bishop. However, he did not subordinate other bishops to the bishop of Rome. He was also the first to use the word Catholic. This subordination and monarchical rule was only within the local congregations at this time. This is the first sign of the plurality of eldership changing to a monarchical system. (From *Christianity Through the Centuries*)

There was thought to be division in Ignatius's church and he seemed to be dealing with it by making submission to the bishop (he uses bishop as one who is over the elders and deacons) as almost doctrine. Nowhere in scripture does it say to submit to a "head elder" or "head bishop". It talks only of elders ( or bishops or overseers) as plural. Examples of this in his writings follow with my comments added:

**Epistle of St. Ignatius of Antioch to the Magnesians 2:1; 3:1-2; 4:1; 6:1-2; 7:1; 13:1-2. (Translated by Charles H. Hoole, 1885)**

2:1 Since, therefore, I have been deemed worthy to behold you through Damas, your bishop, who is worthy of God, and your worthy presbyters Bassus and Apollonius, and my fellow-servant the Deacon Sotion, of whom may I have joy, because he is *subject to the bishop* as to the grace of God, *and to the presbytery* as to the law of Jesus Christ.

3:1 And you it beseemeth not to despise the youth of your bishop, but to award all reverence unto him, respecting the power of God the Father which is in him, even as I have known the sacred presbyters to do, not having regard to his apparently youthful position, but as wise men in God yielding unto him: yet not unto him but unto the Father of Jesus Christ, who is bishop of all.

3:2 It is therefore right that we should obey without any hypocrisy, to the honour of him who hath willed that we should do so; since not only doth a man deceive the visible bishop, but he also sets at nought the invisible one. But he who doeth such things has to give an account not unto the flesh, but unto God, who knoweth the secret things.

4:1 It is therefore fitting not only to be called Christians, but also to be so, and not to be as some who acknowledge the bishop, but do all things apart from him; but such appear to me not to be of good conscience, since they do not steadfastly assemble themselves together according to the commandment.

6:1 Since, then, I have in the persons of those above mentioned beheld as it were your whole multitude in faith and have loved you, I exhort you to be careful to do all things in the unity of God, **since the bishop sits in the place of God, and the presbyters in the place of the synod of the Apostles, and the deacons, who are most dear to me, have been entrusted with the ministry of Jesus Christ**, who was with the Father before the world began, and was manifested in the end.

BISHOP \*\*\*\*\* GOD  
 \* \*  
 \* \*  
 PRESBYTERS \*\*\*\*\* APOSTLES  
 \* \*  
 \* \*  
 DEACONS \*\*\*\*\* JESUS

According to Ignatius the bishop was over the presbyters and they in turn were over the deacons. Since he makes the analogy of the bishop representing God, and the presbyters representing the Apostles, and the deacons representing Jesus, it necessarily follows that God is over the apostles and that the apostles were over Jesus. It is clear why this was not considered scripture, but it gives us a very good idea at how off the church models were becoming so early in the church's history.

6:2 Do ye all then, having put on the same divine disposition, have respect one to another, and let no one behold his neighbour according to the flesh, but love each other continuously in Jesus Christ. Let there be nothing in you that shall be able to divide you, but be ye united to the bishop and to those who preside, after the form and doctrine of incorruption.

7:1 As, therefore, the Lord did nothing apart from the Father, being united to him, neither by himself nor by the Apostles, so neither do ye anything without the bishop and the elders; neither try that anything should appear reasonable to yourselves separately; but let there be in unison one prayer, one supplication, one mind, one hope, in love, and in blameless joy. There is one Jesus Christ, than which there is nothing better.

13:1 Be diligent, therefore, to be confirmed in the doctrine of the Lord and of his Apostles, that ye may be prosperous in all things, whatsoever ye do, both in flesh and spirit, in faith and love, in the Son and the Father and the Spirit, in the beginning and the end, together with your *most worthily-distinguished bishop*, and the nobly woven spiritual crown of your presbytery, and of your deacons, who walk according to God.

See Matthew 23:5-8 "...do not be called Rabbi.....you are all brothers."

13:2 Submit yourselves to your bishop and to each other, as Jesus Christ to his Father according to the flesh, and the Apostles to Christ, and to the Father, and to the Spirit; that there may be a union both fleshly and spiritual.

**Epistle of St. Ignatius of Antioch to the Trallians 2:1-3; 3:1; 7:1-2; 12:2; 13:1-2. (Translated by Charles H. Hoole, 1885)**

2:1 For when ye are subject unto the bishop as unto Jesus Christ, ye appear unto me not to live according to man, but according to Jesus Christ who died for us, that ye, by believing on his death, might escape death.

2:2 It is necessary, therefore, that ye should do nothing without the bishop, as indeed ye do, and that ye should submit yourselves to the presbytery also, as to the Apostles of Jesus Christ, our hope, in whom we shall be found walking.

2:3 It is necessary, also, that the deacons, being ministers of the mysteries of Jesus Christ, should in every way please all men. For they are not ministers of meat and drink, but servants of the Church of

God; it is therefore their duty to avoid offences as fire.

3:1 In like manner, let all men reverence the deacons, and the bishop likewise, even as Jesus Christ who is the Son of the Father; and the presbyters as the council of God, and as the bond of the Apostles. Without these there is no Church;

We are to only give reverence to God. Reverence to man is confused with reverence to God.

7:1 Guard yourselves, therefore, against such as these. And this will happen unto you if ye be not puffed up, and separate not from our God Jesus Christ, and the bishop, and the commandments of the Apostles.

In the same breathe he says not puffed up he compares his position of bishop to God and the Apostles.

7:2 He who is within the altar is pure; that is, he who doeth anything apart from the bishop and the presbytery and the deacons, he is not pure in his conscience.

12:2 my bonds exhort you which I bear about for the sake of Jesus Christ, asking that I may attain unto God. Abide in your unity, and in prayer one with another, for it becometh each of you separately, and especially the presbyters, to refresh the bishop unto the honour of the Father, Jesus Christ and the Apostles.

13:1 The love of the Smyrnaeans and Ephesians saluteth you. Remember in your prayers the Church which is in Syria, of which I am not worthy to be called bishop, being the last of them.

13:2 Farewell in Jesus Christ, being subject to the bishop as to the commandment; and in like manner also to the presbytery. And do ye each of you love one another with undivided heart.

**Epistle of St. Ignatius of Antioch to the Philadelphinas 2:1; 4:1; 7:1-2. (Translated by Charles H. Hoole, 1885)**

2:1 Being, therefore, children of light and truth, avoid division and evil teachings; but where the shepherd is, there do ye follow as sheep.

4:1 Be diligent, therefore, to use one eucharist, for there is one flesh of our Lord Jesus Christ, and one cup, for union with his blood; one altar, even as there is one bishop, together with the presbytery and the deacons, who are my fellow-servants, to the end that whatever ye do, ye may do it according unto God.

7:1 For even though some have held that I was a deceiver according to the flesh, yet the Spirit, being of God, is not deceived; for he knoweth from whence he cometh, and whither he goeth, and he searcheth out hidden things. I cried while I was among you, and spake with a loud voice, saying, Give heed unto the bishop, and to the presbyters, and to the deacons.

Not lording it over them - elders are to minister to people's needs without claim to titles and honor.

7:2 But they suspected that I spake these things because I knew beforehand the division of certain of them; but he, for whose name I am in bonds, is witness unto me that I knew not these things through the flesh of man. But the spirit preached, saying these things: Do nothing apart from the bishop; keep your flesh as the temple of God; love unity, avoid divisions; be imitators of Jesus Christ, even as he is of his Father.

**Epistle of St. Ignatius of Antioch to the Smyrnaeans 12:2. (Translated and edited by J.B. Lightfoot )**

12:2 I salute also your bishop, who is worthy of God, and your godlike presbyters, the deacons, who are my fellow-servants, and all of you, both individually and in common, in the name of Jesus Christ, in his flesh and his blood, in his passion and resurrection, both fleshly and spiritual, in the unity both of God and of yourselves. Grace be unto you, mercy, peace, and patience for ever.

**Epistle of St. Ignatius of Antioch to the Ephesians 5:1-3; 6:2. (Translated and edited by J.B. Lightfoot )**

5:1 For a fact, if I in a short time became so warmly attached to your bishop - an attachment based not on human grounds but on spiritual - how much more do I count you happy who are as closely knit to him as the Church is to Jesus Christ, and as Jesus Christ is to the Father! As a result, the symphony of unity is perfect.

5:2 Let no one deceive himself: unless a man is within the sanctuary, he has to go without the Bread of God. Assuredly, if the prayer of one or two has such efficacy, how much more that of the bishop and the entire Church!

5:3 It follows, then: he who absents himself from the common meeting, by that very fact shows pride and becomes a sectarian; for the Scripture says: God resists the proud. Let us take care, therefore, not to oppose the bishop, that we may be submissive to God.

6:2 Furthermore: the more anyone observes that a bishop is discreetly silent, the more he should stand in fear of him. Obviously, anyone whom the Master of the household puts in charge of His domestic affairs, ought to be received by us in the same spirit as He who has charged him with this duty. Plainly, then, one should look upon the bishop as upon the Lord Himself.

**Epistle of St. Ignatius of Antioch to the Polycarp 6:1-2. (Translated and edited by J.B. Lightfoot )**

6:1 Give ye heed to the bishop, that God also may give heed to you. I am devoted to those who are subject to the bishop, the presbyters, the deacons. May it be granted me to have my portion with them in the presence of God. Toil together one with another, struggle together, run together, suffer together, lie

down together, rise up together, as God's stewards and assessors and ministers.

6:2 Please the Captain in whose army ye serve, from whom also ye will receive your pay. Let none of you be found a deserter. Let your baptism abide with you as your shield; your faith as your helmet; your love as your spear; your patience as your body armor. Let your works be your deposits, that ye may receive your assets due to you. Be ye therefore long-suffering one with another in gentleness, as God is with you. May I have joy of you always.



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# A CRITICAL LOOK AT TRADITIONAL LEADERSHIP MODELS

Let us look at the traditional form of leadership. It is based on the model of Moses and the elders he chose. But Moses died and the elders continued to lead. They were disobedient and greedy and therefore not effective leaders. The people became disillusioned and wanted a king. This was not God's will but He allowed it. Below are parallels of O.T. government contrasted with N.T. government.

Old Testament (Traditional)	New Testament (Biblical)
God*****	Jesus
*	*
*	*
Moses (called by God)*****	Apostles (called by Jesus)
*	*
*	*
Elders ruled (appointed by Moses)*****	Elders
*	*
*	*
Kings***** (they rejected God for a king)	Monarchical Rule (we reject God for a pastor)

Moses was called by God to be His spokesman to the nation Israel. In the same way Jesus appointed apostles to represent Him. Inherent in the word apostle is the authority and commission of the one who commissioned or sent the apostle. You cannot separate the sender from the one sent. Legally the one sent represents the sender in full authority. It is clear that in both the O.T. and N.T. we have men chosen by God (Jesus) to set up His government on earth. Moses appointed elders (judges) to help him rule the people. In the same way the apostles appointed elders to help lead God's people. Moses and the apostles had something unique that subsequent leadership did not share...That is direct commissioning and authority from God Himself. God knowing that Moses and the apostles were human and would die used these men to set up his government. In both cases with the deaths of Moses or the apostles the remaining leadership was a plurality of eldership. This did not sit well with men in Moses's day or in the early church. In the O.T. we see the elevation of men to kings and in the N.T. we see the elevation of men to senior pastors, bishops, and popes. **There is only one King and Shepard and Teacher. His name is Jesus.**

This is where the traditional system of church government breaks down. God's intention was originally for rule by elders even in the O.T. Because of man's disobedience the elders became corrupt, and instead of repenting and getting it right they chose another system that mimicked the world and God allowed it. The Christian church also strayed far away from the Apostolic model for church government. Pride and disobedience also crept in and another type of monarchy took place. A major blow to this monarchy was given in the Reformation, but in my opinion it did not go far enough. Again the church copied the world model. Instead of biblical eldership, the pastor/minister model was promoted. Ordination and worldly credentials superceded the scriptural examples of rule by elders. Why are we using an O.T. model when there is a N.T. model? We have an O.T. model for remission of sins (animal sacrifice) and a N.T. one (the blood of Jesus). Are we free to choose which one we would follow?



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