

ELDERS, OVERSEERS & BISHOPS

1. The word “*ELDER*” is the Greek word “*presbuteros*.”

A. According to “*Vine’s Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*” it is translated: “...an adjective, the comparative degree of *presbus*, an old man, an elder, is used —

(a) *Of age*, whether of elder of two persons, **Luke 15:25**, or more, **John 8:9**, ‘the eldest;’ or of a person advanced in life, a senior, **Acts 2:17**; in **Hebrews 11:2**, the ‘elders’ are the forefathers in Israel; so in **Matthew 15:2**; **Mark 7:3,5**; *the feminine of the adjective is used of elder women in the churches, I Timothy 5:2, not in respect of position but in seniority of age.*”

(b) *Of rank or positions of responsibility —*

(1) *among Gentiles*, as in Sept. of **Genesis 50:7**; **Numbers 22:7**;

(2) *in the Jewish nation*, **firstly**, those who were the heads or leaders of the tribes and families, as of the 70 who assisted Moses, **Numbers 11:16**; **Deuteronomy 27:1**, and those assembled by Solomon; **secondly**, members of the Sanhedrin, consisting of the chief priests, elders and scribes, learned in Jewish public affairs in the various cities, **Luke 7:3**.

(3) *in the Christian churches*, those who, being raised up qualified by the work of the Holy Spirit, were appointed to have the spiritual care of, and to exercise oversight over, the churches. To these the term Bishops, *episkopoi*, or Overseer is applied.”

2. “*BISHOP*” or “*OVERSEER*” is the Greek word “*episkopos*.”

A. According to “*Vine’s*” it is translated: “*Episkopoi* (Bishop or Overseer) indicates the nature of their (Elders) work (the duties of the office — to oversee). *Presbuteroi* (Elder) indicates their maturity of spiritual experience (qualifications of the office).

The Divine arrangement seen throughout the New Testament was for a plurality of these to be appointed in each church, **Acts 14:23; 20:17; Philippians 1:1; I Timothy 5:17; Titus 1:5**. The duty of Elders is described by the verb *episkepee*. They were appointed according as they had given evidence of fulfilling the Divine qualifications in **Titus 1:6-9; I Timothy 3:1-7; and I Peter 5:2**.”

3. Both *PRESBUTEROS* (*ELDER*) and *EPISKOPOS* (*BISHOP* or *OVERSEER*) refer to the same office:

A. **Acts 20:17,28**: “...Paul sent to Ephesus for the **Elders** (*presbuteros*) of the Church...Guard yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you **Overseers** (*episkopos*).”

B. **I Peter 5:1,2**: “To the **Elders** (*presbuteros*) among you, I appeal as a fellow Elder (*presbuteros*)...Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, serving as overseers...” (The word **Overseer** or *episkopos* is not in the original manuscripts, but

implied in both KJV and NIV because they are “*shepherds*” or oversee the flock or Church as *Acts 20:28* tells us is the job of an *episkopos Overseer*)

C. Titus 1:5-7: “...appoint *Elders (presbuteros)* in every town...Since an *Overseer (episkopos)* is entrusted with God’s work...”

D. Philippians 1:1: “Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus...together with the *Overseers (episkopos)* and *Deacons*...”

(1) Here Paul uses “*Overseers and Deacons*” instead of “*Elders and Deacons*” as he referred to them in *Titus 1:5* and *Acts 20:17*.

4. The Church NEEDS *ELDERS (Overseers)*.

A. Acts 14:23 says Paul and Barnabas appointed Elders (presbuteros) in almost every Church they started. When they were unable to accomplish this mission for lack of time, they passed it on to other men (such as Timothy and Titus).

(1) For instance, *Titus 1:5* says Titus was told by the Apostle Paul to appoint Elders (presbuteros) in the churches in Crete.

5. *ELDERS* were to OVERSEE ALL MATTERS OF THE CHURCH. No where does it say in the Bible that Elders are to oversee only the spiritual matters, and the Deacons are to tend to only the non-spiritual matters of the Church.

A. Acts 15:2 tells us when Paul and Barnabas debated with other Jewish Christians concerning the **doctrinal question** of circumcision, they went to Jerusalem (first Church) before the Apostles and Elders (presbuteros) in order to get the problem resolved.

B. Acts 11:30 tells us that when Paul and Barnabas took up offerings to help the Christians in Judea, they brought the **money** to the Elders (presbuteros).

C. James 5:13-16 tells us whenever a Christian is **sick**, he should call for the Elders (presbuteros) to pray for him.

D. I Peter 2:25 describes Jesus as our Elder (episkopos), who is the overseer of our souls, and guides our lives.

E. Acts 6:1-6 Tells us that the first Deacons were given jobs as appointed to them by the Overseers (Apostles). Even though the first job mentioned was taking care of the widows, it is clearly indicated by the laying on of hands (their ordination), that they would also be spiritual leaders in the Church, as Stephen and Phillip demonstrated with the Spirit’s Power.

6. The DUTIES OF THE *ELDERS (Overseers)*:

A. *I Thessalonians 5:12,13*: “Now we ask you brothers to respect those who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord and who admonish (instruct) you. Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work.”

- (1) Elders must labor among the Church (working with the people).
- (2) The Elders are in charge (responsible)
- (3) The Elders give the instructions

B. *Acts 20:28*: “Guard yourselves and all the flock (Church) of which the Holy Spirit has made you Overseers (*episkopos*). Be shepherds of the Church of God which He bought with His own blood.”

- (4) Shepherds were overseers of the whole flock in every area. They were to lead, guard, guide, and be responsible for the whole flock.

C. *Hebrews 13:17*: “Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over your souls as men who must give account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be no advantage to you.”

- (5) Elders watch over the souls of the Church people. This refers to keeping out false doctrine and those who would try and lead them astray from the Truth. It is why Paul told the Ephesian Elders in *Acts 20:28-31* to “...Be shepherds of the church...I know that after I leave savage wolves will come in among you...even from your own number men will arise and distort the Truth in order to draw away disciples after them. So be on your guard!”

D. *I Peter 5:1-4*: “To the Elders (*presbuteros*) among you, I appeal as a fellow Elder (*presbuteros*)...Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, serving as Overseers (*episkopos*) — not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.”

- (6) Shepherds never pushed the flock. They are not dictators. An Elder should never ask anyone to do anything he isn’t willing to do himself. Elders, as Jesus showed His disciples, lead by example.

E. *Titus 1:6-13*: “An Elder...must hold firmly to the trust-worthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it. For there are many rebellious people, mere talkers and deceivers...they must be silenced, because they are ruining whole households by teaching things they ought not to teach...therefore, rebuke them sharply, so that they will be sound in the faith.”

(7) Elders must preach and teach only sound doctrine.

(8) They must encourage the Church to follow only what the Bible says, and not go beyond what is written in the Bible (*read: I Corinthians 4:6, Hebrews 13:8,9, Galatians 1:6-9, and Revelation 22:18,19*).

(9) They must silence anyone who is teaching false doctrine!

(10) As *I Timothy 3:2* reminds us, the Elder must be “able to teach.” He must know His Bible well enough to not just be able to teach others the Truth, but to be able to know when someone is teaching false doctrine to his flock.

F. I Corinthians 5:1-13: *“It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you...a man has his father’s wife...shouldn’t you rather have been filled with grief and have put out of your fellowship the man who did this?...Hand this man over to Satan, so that his sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved...you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolator or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat...Are you not to judge those inside (the Church)? God will judge those outside. Expel the wicked man from your number.”*

(11) There are times when the Elders must expel people from the Church. In this instance because of sexual immorality. In *II Thessalonians 3:6-16*: Of those who refuse to work; and *Titus 3:10*: of those who stir up trouble in the Church, trying to divide people and draw some away to themselves.

G. Matthew 18:15: *“And if your brother sins, go and reprove him in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed. And if he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.”*

(12) there are times when the Elders must be judges, and the Church becomes the courthouse (as Paul told the Corinthian Church in *I Corinthians 5 & 6:1-6*). But, remember, that the Bible is the Law Book (*James 2:12*)! The Elders are just seeing to it that the God’s Law is being enforced.

PASTORS, PREACHER, EVANGELIST, MINISTER

1. There is only one Scripture that uses the word “PASTOR”— *Ephesians 4:11*: “It was He (Jesus) who gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, **and some pastors...**”

A. The word “**Pastor**” is the Latin translation (most of the earliest Greek manuscripts were translated for the Roman Catholic Church in Latin) of the Greek word “**poimen**” or “**shepherd**.”

B. The only office “**shepherd**” refers to is that of “**Elder**” or “**Overseer**.” *Acts 20:17,28* tells us that the **Overseers (Elders)** are to be **shepherds** of the Church.

C. Peter (*an Apostle, Prophet/Preacher, Evangelist, or Shepherd or Pastor*) also referred to himself as an **Elder** in *I Peter 5:1,2*.

(1) *I Timothy 5:17*: “Let the Elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at **preaching** and teaching.”

(2) *Philippians 1:1*: “Paul and Timothy...to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers and deacons...” Why did Paul leave out the Preacher or Pastor of the Church?

(3) *Acts 14:23* says Paul and Barnabas appointed Elders in every Church they started. Why not any Preachers or Pastors? Who did the preaching when they left? Read *I Timothy 5:17,18*: “The Elders who direct the affairs of the Church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is **preaching and teaching**. For the Scripture says, ‘**Do no muzzle the ox while it is treading out the grain,**’ and ‘**The worker deserves his wages.**’”

(4) According to *James 5:13-16*, we should only call on the Elders when someone is sick. Did Paul not want them to call on the Apostles, or Evangelists, or Prophets (Preachers), or Pastors?

D. *I Timothy 4:13,14*: “Until I (Paul) come, devote yourself to the public reading of the Scriptures, to preaching, and to teaching. Do not neglect **your gift**, which was **given you** through a prophetic message **when the body of Elders laid their hands on you.**”

(1) Timothy was set aside (or ordained) for a special job of preaching and teaching the Gospel by the laying on of hands of the Elders. And, when Paul goes on in this same letter to *chapter 5:17,18*, he refers to those Elders who preach and teach as “**Elders who...deserve his wages.**” Sounds like a Preacher or Pastor!

(2) It is noteworthy to point out here that the Apostle Paul, himself, was part of this “**body of Elders**” who “**laid their hands on**” Timothy. For, in Paul’s second letter to Timothy, he reminds him in *II Timothy 1:6* to: “...**fan into flame the gift**

of God, which is in you *through the laying on of my hands.*”

(3) In *II Timothy 1:11* Paul says he “...was appointed a herald (preacher), and an Apostle, and a teacher.” He make no mention of being an Elder, yet according to his own words in *I Timothy 5:17,18*, the job of certain Elders “whose work is preaching and teaching,” were paid by the Church to “direct the affairs of the Church.” **Obviously, this is a special Elder that we call “Pastor (Poimen or Shepherd).”**

E. Remember, *Acts 14:23* says that Paul appointed Elders for every Church he started; and, like Timothy, after prayer and fasting, he committed them to the Lord. One of these men, like Timothy, would have taken the full-time paid position of **Pastor (preaching and teaching Elder)** as *Ephesians 4:11 and I Timothy 5:17,18* describe.

(1) **How did they commit them to the Lord?** *I Timothy 4:13,14 and II Timothy 1:6* explain it was through the body of Elders (of which the Apostle Paul was a part).

(2) Remember, in *Acts 6:1-6* there is no mention of the Elders, or Pastor, or Prophet (Preacher) or Evangelist having a part in appointing the first seven Deacons, **because the 12 Apostles were the Elders (Overseers), Pastors, Prophets, Preachers, and Evangelists!**

(3) Peter made this fact very clear in *I Peter 5:1*: “to the Elders among you, I appeal as a fellow Elder...Be shepherds (poimen or pastors) of God’s flock that is under your care, serving as Overseers...”

2. What should we call the one we pay to preach and teach?

A. MINISTER (This is the Greek word, *diakonos* which may be translated “minister” or “servant.” It views a servant in relationship to his work, whereas *doulos* is also translated “servant” or “slave,” but views him in relationship to his master.)

(1) To see the difference in a minister servant, and a slave servant; Paul wrote the following while in prison, recorded in *Colossians 1:7*: “*Epaphras, our dear fellow servant (doulos slave), who is a faithful minister (changed the word to diakonos) of Christ...*”

(2) *I Timothy 4:6*: Paul called Timothy a “**Minister**”

(3) *Acts 6:4*: The Apostles told the first Church they were to give their attention to the “**Ministry of the Word.**”

(4) *II Corinthians 6:3*: Paul said he was a “**Minister (or Servant) of God**”

(5) *Colossians 1:25*: Paul he was the Church's "...**Minister (or Servant)** by the commission God gave me to present to you the Word of God..."

(6) *I Corinthians 16:15,16*: "You know that the **household of Stephanas** were the first converts in Achaia, and they have devoted themselves to the **service (ministry from diakonos) of the saints**. I urge you, brother, to submit to such as these and to everyone who joins in the work and labors at it."

B. PREACHER (This is the Greek word *kerux* translated "preacher or herald.")

(1) In *I Timothy 2:7* and *II Timothy 1:11*: Paul said he was appointed as a "Preacher" or "Herald."

(2) In *I Timothy 4:13* and *5:17*: Paul said Timothy's job was "preaching."

C. EVANGELIST (This is the Greek word *euangelistes*, translated "messenger of good, denotes a preacher of the Gospel")

(1) *II Timothy 4:5*: Paul told Timothy to do the work of an "Evangelist."

(2) *Acts 21:8*: Philip, one of the seven original Deacons in the first Church (as recorded in *Acts 6:1-6*), who took Christianity to the Samaritan (*Acts 8:4-25*), and baptized the Ethiopian eunuch (*Acts 8:26-40*), was called "**Philip The Evangelist, one of The Seven.**"

(3) In *I Corinthians 1:17* Paul said: "For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to **preach the Gospel.**" (The phrase "**preach the Gospel**" is the Greek word for evangelize.)

(4) *Ephesians 4:11*: "It was He (Christ) who gave some to be Apostles, some to be prophets, some to be **evangelists...**"

D. PASTOR (This is the Latin translation of the Greek word *poimen* or shepherd.)

(1) *Ephesians 4:11*: "It was He (Christ) who gave some to be Apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be **pastors and teachers.**"

(2) It is also important to remember, in *I Timothy 5:17,18*, "You know that the household of Stephanas were the first converts in Achaia, and they have devoted themselves to the service (ministry) of the saints. I urge you, brother, to submit to such as these and to everyone who joins in the work and labors at it."

Paul called the one who "directed the affairs of the Church," whose "work was preaching and teaching" — "**Elder.**"