

Elders—What Are They?

Introduction: Before ever getting into such things as qualifications, one must first have a working understanding of what elders are. That is the goal of this study. The descriptive terms used for those who hold this position tell us much about it.

I. Elder or Presbyter.

- A. This comes from the Greek word PRESBUTEROS.
- B. Has two different usages in The New Testament.
 - 1. In regard to age.
 - a. Older men (**Acts 2:17**).
 - b. Forefathers (**Matt. 15:2**).
 - 2. Used to indicate rank or office.
 - a. Used of members of Sanhedrin (**Matt. 16:21**). “Because in early times the rulers of the people, judges, etc., were selected from the elderly men” (Thayer, p. 535).
 - b. Used “among Christians, those who presided over the assemblies or churches - **1 Peter 5:1, 5**” (Thayer, p. 536).
- C. Implication is that of experience and wisdom which is crucial in guidance.

II. Bishop or Overseer.

- A. This comes from the Greek word EPISKOPOS.
 - 1. (Noun) “An overseer, a man charged with the duty of seeing that things to be done by other are done rightly - Titus 1:7” (Thayer, p. 243).
 - 2. (Verb) “to look upon, inspect, oversee, look after, care for: spoken of the care of the church which rested upon the presbyters - **1 Peter 5:2**” (Thayer, p. 242).
- B. This word signifies the aspect of administration. Sees that things are being done correctly.

III. Pastor or Shepherd.

- A. This comes from the Greek word POIMEN. It refers to one who feeds.
 - 1. Properly: A real shepherd of sheep (**Lk. 2:8**).
 - 2. Metaphorically: Of one who has been entrusted with the care and control of others; to protect and tend to their needs.
 - a. Christ (**Jn. 10:14-16; Heb. 13:20; 1 Peter 2:25**).
 - b. Those who govern the church (**Acts 20:28; Eph. 5:11; 1 Peter 5:2**).
- B. This one refers to the responsibility and accountability of the office (**Heb. 13:17**).

IV. Note The Interchangeable Relationship Of These Words.

A. Acts 20:17, 28.

“From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called for the **elders** of the church. Therefore take heed to yourselves and to 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.”

B. 1 Peter 5:1-2.

“The **elders** who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow **elder** and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: **Shepherd** the flock of God which is among you, serving as **overseers**, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly.”

Conclusion: This divinely ordained position in a local church is an important one and requires serious involvement. Here is why: It takes an older man who has the wisdom gained through experience (elder). He must be willing to see that things get done and get done correctly (bishop). He is responsible and accountable for the souls committed to his charge (pastor).