

The Office of Elder

- I. Consider the names of the pastoral office. **ACT 20:17, 28; TIT 1:5, 7; EPH 4:11; 1CO 4:1-2.**
- A. elder: An elder person, *lit.* or *fig.*; a parent; an ancestor, forefather; a person superior in age, senior.
 - B. presbuteros (Strong's G4245): Also means a term or rank or office. Among the Christians, those who presided over the churches. (TDNT)
 - C. A pastor is senior by virtue of office rather than age.
 - D. An elder may be a young man. **1TI 4:12.**
- II. Consider the following definitions:
- A. bishop: A spiritual superintendent or overseer in the Christian church. An overlooker, inspector, a watchman.
 - 1. The Greek *episkopos* (Strong's G1985) is translated *overseer* in **ACT 20:28** and *bishop* in **1TI 3:2**.
 - 2. episkopos: A superintendent, that is, Christian officer in general charge of a church.
 - 3. From **ACT 20:28** and **1PE 5:1-2**, it is seen that elders are the *overseers* of the churches.
 - B. overseer: One who oversees or superintends, a supervisor, *esp.* one whose business it is to superintend a piece of work or a body of workmen.
 - 1. superintendent: An officer or official who has the chief charge, oversight, control or direction of some business, institution, or works; an overseer.
 - 2. From **TIT 1:5-7**, we see that an elder is a bishop.
 - 3. Also, we see that he is the *steward of God*. c/w **1CO 4:1-2**.
 - C. steward: An official who controls the domestic affairs of a household; supervising the service of the master's table, directing the domestics, and regulating household expenditure; a major-domo.
 - 1. major-domo: Chief of the house.
 - 2. chief: The head of a body of men, of an organization, state, town, party, office, etc.; foremost authority, leader, ruler.
 - D. pastor: ad. L. 'pastor-em' shepherd, *lit.* feeder, giver of pasture; a herdsman or shepherd.
 - 1. In **ACT 20:28**, *feed* translates *poimano* (Strong's G4165), and in **EPH 4:11**, *pastor* translates *poimen* (Strong's G4166).
 - 2. From **JER 23:2; 3:15**, it is plain that pastors are spiritual feeders.
 - 3. From **ACT 20:28** and **1PE 5:1-2**, it is evident that those who *feed* the people have the *oversight* of the people. Therefore, pastors (the ordained teachers, **EPH 4:11**) have the rule of the church. **HEB 13:7**.
 - a. The pastor, or gospel preacher is the N.T. counterpart to the O.T. priest, who was to instruct the people. **LEV 10:11; MAL 2:7** c/w **1CO 9:13-14**.
 - b. The priests presided in matters of judgment and were the ministers of God. **DEU 17:9; 21:5**.
 - E. minister: A servant, attendant; one who acts under the authority of another; one who carries out executive duties as the agent or representative of a superior.
 - 1. A pastor acts under the authority of Christ as His minister.
 - 2. His duties are administrative, not legislative.
 - F. Combining all these passages, we see that the elder is the steward of God, the overseer

(bishop) and feeder (pastor) of the church.

III. The following passages mention a plurality of elders.

A. Consider the church at Jerusalem.

1. (ACT 11:30) Which also they did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.
2. (ACT 15:2) When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question.
3. (ACT 15:4) And when they were come to Jerusalem, they were received of the church, and of the apostles and elders, and they declared all things that God had done with them.
4. (ACT 15:6) And the apostles and elders came together for to consider of this matter.
5. (ACT 15:22-23) Then pleased it the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas; namely, Judas surnamed Barsabas, and Silas, chief men among the brethren: And they wrote letters by them after this manner; The apostles and elders and brethren send greeting unto the brethren which are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia:
6. (ACT 16:4) And as they went through the cities, they delivered them the decrees for to keep, that were ordained of the apostles and elders which were at Jerusalem.
7. (ACT 21:18) And the day following Paul went in with us unto James; and all the elders were present.

B. Notice that James appears to have been the leader of the church at Jerusalem even with its plurality of elders. **ACT 12:17; 15:13-29; 21:18; GAL 2:12.**

C. Consider other churches.

1. (ACT 14:23) And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed.
2. (ACT 20:17) And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the church.
3. (ACT 20:28) Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.
4. (PHIL 1:1) Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons:
5. (1TH 5:12-13) And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; And to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. And be at peace among yourselves.
6. (1TI 5:17) Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine.
7. (TIT 1:5) For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee:
8. (HEB 13:7) Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation.
9. (HEB 13:17) Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with

- joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you.
10. **(JAM 5:14)** Is any sick among you? 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:
 11. **(IPE 5:1)** The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed:
- D. In the case of **ACT 14:23; TIT 1:5; HEB 13:7, 17; JAM 5:14; and 1PE 5:1**, more than one local church is being dealt with. Thus, there may have been one elder per church or several per church.
 - E. Though there were a plurality of elders at Ephesus, Paul wrote Timothy alone and obviously charges him with the oversight of matters at Ephesus.
- IV. The following passages allow for a single elder in a church.
- A. **(LUK 12:42)** And the Lord said, Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his lord shall make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of meat in due season?
 - B. See **REV 2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14.**
 - C. A single pastor can:
 1. learn and hold fast all doctrine necessary. **2TI 1:13; 2:15; 3:14-17.**
 2. teach all doctrine necessary. **1TI 3:2; 4:11-16; 2TI 2:24; 4:2.**
 3. defend the doctrine. **TIT 1:9-14.**
 4. teach and ordain other elders. **2TI 2:2; TIT 1:5-9.**
 5. evangelize. **2TI 4:5.**
 6. plant churches. **EPH 4:11-12; 1CO 3:5-11; TIT 1:5.**
 - D. If a single pastor can do any and all work required of a minister, then a church can be fully equipped with only one pastor.
- V. In conclusion, the N.T. *permits* a plurality of elders in a church, but it does not *require* a plurality of elders.
- A. Some N.T. churches, like Jerusalem were quite large. **ACT 21:20.**
 - B. The pattern for justifying a plurality of rule or delegation of duty is this: when the existing authority is overburdened by the sheer mass of the responsibilities at hand, help may be required. **NUM 11:14-17; ACT 6:1-4.**
- VI. **(ITI 5:17-18)** Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine. For the scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. And, The labourer is worthy of his reward.
- A. This text has been appealed to as proof for two types of official elders: ruling elders and teaching elders.
 - B. The antecedent of “they” is the word “elders.” They, who labour in the word and doctrine, are elders that rule well.
 - C. The word “especially” is an adverb modifying the verb phrase “let...be counted.”
 1. It is not an adjective modifying “elders.”
 2. This passage is not setting forth a special kind of elder.
 - D. **v. 18** shows that the double honour is reward for the work of the ministry.
 - E. The text simply teaches that elders who make their living by preaching are especially to be counted worthy of being paid for their services.

- VII. (**1TI 5:1-2**) Rebuke not an elder, but intreat him as a father; and the younger men as brethren; The elder women as mothers; the younger as sisters, with all purity.
- A. This was written to a pastor. Therefore, can a pastor rebuke a member who is older than himself?
 - B. If someone is so much as a few minutes older than another, he is his elder in age.
ROM 9:12.
 - C. If this forbids a pastor from rebuking someone older than himself in age, then in some cases a pastor cannot rebuke many or most of the church. How then can he fulfill **2TI 4:2**?
 - D. In **TIT 2:15**, Titus was commanded to teach, exhort, AND REBUKE the things in that chapter, which include instruction to aged men and women.
 - E. The elder in **1TI 5:1** cannot be limited to the elder *in age*. The language is broad enough to include the elder *in office* also.
 - F. In the church, God gives the elder in office authority over the elder in age. Pastors oversee ALL the flock. **ACT 20:28.**
 - G. Timothy was to impart this instruction to the church at large that the members might be blameless. **1TI 5:7.**
 - H. *Rebuke* is juxtaposed to *intreat*.
 1. rebuke: To beat down or force back; to repress or check (a person); to repulse; to reprove, reprimand, chide severely.
 2. intreat: To treat; to handle; asking, asking of somebody or for something.
 3. *Intreat* translates *parakaleo* (Strong's G3870) meaning “to call near, i.e., invite, invoke (by imploration, hortation, consolation) beseech, call for, comfort, desire, exhort, intreat, pray.”
 - I. This is instruction to the church members to personally appeal to one another as in a family.
 1. In families, the father is generally not to be rebuked.
 2. A minister should intreat older men as fathers and older women as mothers in a personal context.
 3. But in the office of pastor, he must deal with older members as with the rest, rebuking as required. **1TI 5:20-21.**
 4. There must be a distinction made between a minister's personal and official relationships.