

## A Study of Biblical Eldership

1. Why study about elders?
  - A. It is found in God's Word and we must be able to give an answer for it.
  - B. The office of an Elder was common in the early New Testament Church and is found in a great many churches to day including Southern Baptist.
  
2. Is studying eldership a non-Baptist thing to do? No.
  - A. Baptists are "people of the Book" and are willing to study anything in the Bible
  - B. It is a familiar term in Baptist history
    1. In 1846, W. B. Johnson, the first president of the Southern Baptist Convention, affirmed the position of elder as separate from deacon.
    2. The word "elder" appeared in every historic Baptist confession of faith until the 1963 version of the Baptist Faith & Message. In the 1925 BF & M, we read in section 12 about the church, "*Its Scriptural officers are bishops, or elders, and deacons.*"
  - C. Within Southern Baptist Churches there is a resurgence of interest in elders.
  
3. What role does the congregation have in church leadership according to the Bible?
  - A. Church Discipline

Matthew 18:15-17	<i>"tell it to the church"</i>
1 Cor. 5:4-5	<i>"when you are assembled"</i>
2 Cor. 2:6	<i>"by the majority"</i>
  
  - B. Selected special servants

Acts 6:2-5	<i>"Brothers, choose seven men from among you"</i>
	<i>"This proposal pleased the whole group"</i>
  
  - C. Evaluate those who teach you

Gal. 1:6-9	this was written to the entire church
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  - There is no indication that a church is to operate as a "committee of the whole"
  - "We need to trust that God gives particular people gifts to serve as church leaders." – Mark Dever
  - Ephesians 4:11-12 – *"It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service..."*
  - Hebrews 13:17 - *Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you.*
  
4. How is the term "elder" used in the New Testament?
  - There are three words used interchangeably Elder, Overseer (or Bishop), and Shepherd (or Pastor) that describe the same position. The following passages illustrate this.

Acts 20:17-18 – *"From Miletus, Paul sent to Ephesus for the elders of the church. 18When they arrived, he said to them..."* and then in v. Acts 20:28 – *"Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood."*

1 Peter 5:1-3 – *"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: 2Be 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; 3not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock."*

- A. Elder – Presbyter - in Greek it is *presbuteros*  
It is used 67 times in the NT. 16 times it refers to a church leader.

Acts 11:30	<i>sending their gift to the elders</i>
Acts 14:23	<i>Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church</i>
Acts 15:2,4,22,23,16:4	<i>the apostles and elders</i>
Acts 20:17	<i>sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church</i>
Acts 21:18	<i>all the elders were present</i>
1 Tim. 4:14	<i>the body of elders laid their hands on you.</i>
1 Tim. 5:17	<i>The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor</i>
1 Tim. 5:19	<i>Do not entertain an accusation against an elder unless</i>
Titus 1:5	<i>appoint elders in every town, as I directed you</i>
James 5:14	<i>call the elders of the church to pray over him</i>
1 Peter 5:1	<i>To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder</i>

B. Bishop – Overseer – in Greek it is *episkopos*

It is used 9 times in the NT. 6 times it refers to church leaders.

Acts 20:28	<i>of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers</i>
Philippians 1:1	<i>with the overseers and deacons</i>
1 Timothy 3:2	<i>the overseer must be above reproach</i>
Titus 1:7	<i>an overseer is entrusted with God's work</i>
1 Timothy 3:1	<i>if any man aspires to the office of overseer</i>
1 Peter 5:2	<i>exercising oversight</i>

C. Pastor – Shepherd – in Greek it is *poimen*

It is used 28 times in the NT. 3 times it refers to church leaders.

Ephesians 4:11	<i>and some to be pastors and teachers</i>
Acts 20:28	<i>Be shepherds of the church</i>
1 Peter 5:2	<i>Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care</i>

D. Miscellaneous words of leaders

Hebrews 13:7	<i>Remember your leaders</i>
Hebrews 13:17	<i>Obey your leaders and submit to their authority</i>
Hebrews 13:24	<i>Greet all your leaders and all God's people</i>
1 Thessalonians 5:12	<i>appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord</i>
1 Timothy 5:17	<i>Let the elders who rule well</i>

5. What are elders to do?

- A. Oversee, Lead  
1 Peter 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*
- B. Equip  
Ephesians 4:12 - *for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry*
- C. Teach  
1 Timothy 5:17 - *whose work is preaching and teaching.*  
1 Timothy 3:2 - *able to teach*
- D. Protect, Care, Help  
Titus 1:9-11  
Acts 20:28-31  
1 Peter 5:1-2  
1 Thess. 5:12-14
- E. Pray  
James 5:14 - *call the elders of the church to pray over him*
- F. Be Examples  
1 Peter 5:3 - *being examples to the flock*
- G. Ordain others  
1 Timothy 4:14 - *with the laying on of the hands of the eldership*

6. What are the requirements to be an elder?

Scriptural requirements are found in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9

7. Is the position of deacon and elder the same?

No, according to 1 Timothy 3, a distinction is made in both title and responsibility. The elder is to teach and lead while the deacon (*diakonos*) is to serve. The scriptural qualifications for each position are very similar with the only difference in that an elder must be gifted to teach.

8. Are elders simply the members of the pastoral staff?

While members of the pastoral staff may serve as elders, it is clear from Scripture that elders were selected from those within the church, not brought in from another place.

Acts 14:23            *Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church*

Titus 1:5            *appoint elders in every town, as I directed you*

9. How are elders selected?

A. The Desire of the man

1 Timothy 3:1 - *It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do.*

B. The Conviction of existing leadership

Titus 1:5 - *appoint elders*

Acts 14:23 - *Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church*

C. The Recognition of the church

Acts 6:3 - *But select from among you, brethren,*

10. How is a church benefited by elders?

A. In following Scripture, a church will be blessed.

B. There is a plurality of leadership, not just in hands of one person.

C. After pastor resigns or is removed, there is constant, on-site leadership during the interim.

D. With mutual submission of elders, there is true accountability over pastor; a church is protected from a pastor that is teaching false doctrine, unethical, or problematic.

E. More complete leadership with plurality of leaders, inadequacies and weaknesses are covered by others.

F. There is a larger group of people recognized by the church to teach. It is part of what an elder is ordained to do.

G. There is no clerical hierarchy, leaders and ministers come out of the body.

H. A stream-lined process for decisions to be made and recommendations brought to the body as required.

I. More people are freed up to be involved in serving and ministering.

J. Church leaders are put into positions by Biblical requirements, thus safe-guarding the church from those in leadership positions that are not spiritually qualified.

K. The church is blessed with godly leaders who pray to the Head of the Church (Jesus Christ) about the direction of His church and then work together to bring this vision to the body. \

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Biblical Eldership

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