

# The Eldership

The Role of Elders • New Testament Words • The Work of Elders  
The Qualifications of Elders • Member Responsibilities

## The Role of Elders

In Old Testament times (Exodus 18:13ff) Jethro counseled Moses to spread the burden of leadership among able men who were to serve as rulers of thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens. In Numbers, chapter 11, there is the selection of a group of seventy from the elders of Israel to be special officers. Each community had its council of elders, whose duty was to be leaders and exercise oversight.

In New Testament times the Jews had a council of elders, the council of seventy-one (the Sanhedrin), a sort of a supreme court. [Matthew 15:2, 16:21, 26:57; Acts 25:15]

Elders appear in the New Testament church first in Jerusalem and Judea, associated with James and the apostles [Acts 11:30; 15:2,4,6,22,23; 16:4; 21:18]. Paul appointed elders in the churches [Acts 14:23]; met with the elders of Ephesus [Acts 20:17]; addressed the Philippian letter to the overseers (bishops) [Philippians 1:1]; instructed Timothy and Titus concerning appointing elders [1 Timothy 3:1ff; Titus 1:5ff]. Peter wrote to them in 1Pe.5:1-4.

Those appointed were to have some function, some responsibility, some authority. It is not merely an honorary title. As with other words in the New Testament, the words to describe them help us determine their role in the church of Jesus Christ.

– compiled from various sources

The following admonition is addressed to the elders [*presbuteros*] of Ephesus in Act.20:17,28:

*“Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers [episkopos], to shepherd [piomen] the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.”*

Three designations (elder, overseer, pastor) are found in this passage. Each designation presents a different facet of the same position.

**All designations refer to the same position.**

## New Testament Words

**ELDER** (*presbuterous*) Act.20:17. Originally meant an older man, then one who by age and experience and wisdom has the capacity of overseeing.

**PRESBYTERY** (*presbuterion*) 1Ti 4:14. (Form of the Greek word translated elder. Board of elders, or eldership.

**BISHOP** (KJ) (*episkope*) 1Ti.3:1. Overseership. To superintend, guard, care for, watch out for.

**OVERSEER** (*episkopos*) Act.20:28. (Same Greek word translated as bishop)

**PASTOR** (*poimen*) Eph.4:11. One who tends, cares for, feeds, protects (as a shepherd).

**SHEPHERD** 1Pe.5:2 (*piomen*). (Same Greek word translated as pastor.)

**STEWARD** (*oikonomos*). Lit., a house manager; metaphorically used to refer to those given charge of the “house of God.” Tit.1:7

### SUMMATION

Qualified older men (**elders**) comprising a body of elders (**presbytery**) that superintends (**oversees**) the congregation of the Lord’s people among them – caring for, feeding, and protecting its members (**shepherding, pastoring**).

## The Work of Elders

**FEED.** Teach; provide teaching. In private, public, in classes, etc.

**WATCH.** Counseling; guarding and protecting those under their charge from evil and error from without and from within; disciplining (including teaching); reproving, rebuking and exhorting.

**RULE.** Taking the oversight, assuming the lead. Insisting on a “thus-says-the-Lord” in matters of doctrine. In matters of judgment, doing what is expedient with due consideration for the flock.

**LEAD.** [Hebrews 13:17] Not pushing; not demanding, but commanding. Not as lords, but as leaders.

**EXAMPLE.** Example in morals, ethics, work and service, faith and fidelity. Example in personal life involving family, occupation, community.

# Qualifications of Elders

*(Combined Categories)*

Texts: 1 Timothy 3:1-7, Titus 1:5-9

## **EXPERIENCE:**

Not a novice

A married man

Ruling his own house well

## **REPUTATION:**

Blameless (without reproach)

Having a good report of those outside the church

## **ABILITY:**

Able to teach

Able to exhort with sound doctrine

Able to refute those who oppose and contradict sound doctrine

Able to hold to the faithful word

## **CHARACTER:**

### **Positive:**

Temperate

Self-controlled

Sober-minded (serious minded)

Just

Holy

Hospitable

Lover of good

Gentle

Of good behavior; orderly

### **Negative:**

No striker

No brawler

Not contentious

Not soon angry

Not self-willed

Not a lover of money

Not given to wine

# Followership

(Yes, there is such a word.) Definition: (1) The act or condition of following a leader; adherence. (2) A group of followers; a following. –The American Heritage Dictionary

**It is hard to have leadership without followership.** This is true of any organization, including the church. It is incumbent on those who lead to act in such a way as to instill confidence in the followers, and it is essential that the members be good followers, putting their trust in those who lead.

## SCRIPTURE REFERENCES

*Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.*

Hebrews 13:17

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

1 Timothy 5:17

*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, and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work.*

1 Thessalonians 5:12-13

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

1 Timothy 5:19

## SUMMATION

**The responsibility that elders have to the members:** Rule well, fairly and impartially; acting prayerfully and carefully; being aware that they are shepherding a “flock” that belongs to the Lord.

**The obligation that members have to their leaders:** to submit to their leadership as far as it is in accord to will of God; to respect (honor) them for their work sake; to appreciate them for the work they do; to esteem them highly; to be careful about making an accusation against them; to hold them accountable.