

# CHURCH GOVERNANCE

## *Elders*

Christ is the head of the church and has all \_\_\_\_\_,  
therefore any authority in the church is a \_\_\_\_\_  
authority.

An elder's authority or the congregation's authority \_\_\_\_\_  
on the authority of Christ.

And the fundamental question is how does that authority work itself out in  
the life of the church?

There are a few different ways that this has been structured in the history of  
the church, especially since the Reformation.

**Episcopalians** (Anglicans, Methodists, Roman Catholics, etc.) give a  
bishop authority over several churches.

**Presbyterians** give authority to gatherings of elders over several  
churches.

**Elder-Rule** advocates say final authority belongs to the elders of an  
independent church.

**Elder-Led Congregationalists** say the Bible gives that final authority to  
the gathered congregation as led by the pastors/elders.<sup>1</sup>

In order to understand the proper perspective we have to start with the  
purpose of the church, which is to make and grow

\_\_\_\_\_.

<sup>1</sup> Taken from *Understanding the Congregation's Authority* by Jonathan Leeman.

Everything in the life of the church is built on that very understanding that our main purpose is to see people's lives change through teaching everyone to \_\_\_\_\_ Christ.

***Matthew 28:18-20***

*18 And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."*

***Colossians 1:28-29***

*28 Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. 29 For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.*

From that understanding we get two differing exercises of authority, we get what the congregation has been authorized to do and we get what the elders have been authorized to do.

And these two are not in opposition to one another but a logical outworking of the ministry and authority of Christ in and through his people.

***What is the responsibility of the congregation?***

***What is the responsibility of the elders?***

## WHAT ARE ELDERS

**πρεσβύτερος (presbyteros)**: a person of \_\_\_\_\_  
and \_\_\_\_\_ in matters of socio-religious  
concerns, both in Jewish and Christian societies—‘elder.’

**ποιμαίνω (poimainō)**: (a figurative extension of meaning ‘to shepherd,’)  
to lead, with the implication of providing for—‘to \_\_\_\_\_  
and to help, to guide and take care of.’

**ἐπισκοπή (episkopos)**: a religious role involving both service and  
leadership—‘office, position, ministry as church  
\_\_\_\_\_’<sup>2</sup>

### **1 Peter 5:1-3**

*So I exhort the **elders** among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: 2 **shepherd** the flock of God that is among you, exercising **oversight**, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; 3 not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.*

### **A working definition:**

Elders are \_\_\_\_\_ Christian men who have been called  
out and \_\_\_\_\_ by God and  
\_\_\_\_\_ by the church to lead, teach, protect, and  
care for a local body, \_\_\_\_\_ Christ-like character  
in both life and doctrine.

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<sup>2</sup> Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996).

## WHAT DO ELDERS DO

### **Alexander Strauch**

*Elders lead the church [1 Tim 5:17; Titus 1:7; 1 Peter 5:1–2], teach and preach the Word [1 Timothy 3:2; 2 Timothy 4:2; Titus 1:9], protect the church from false teachers [Acts 20:17, 28–31], exhort and admonish the saints in sound doctrine [1 Timothy 4:13; 2 Timothy 3:13–17; Titus 1:9], visit the sick and pray [James 5:14; Acts 6:4], and judge doctrinal issues [Acts 15:6]. In biblical terminology, elders shepherd, oversee, lead, and care for the local church”.<sup>3</sup>*

The fundamental purpose of the elders is that the congregation will be equipped and growing in their disciple making efforts as they seek to instill doctrinal \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ of the saints.

## ELDERS EQUIP THE SAINTS FOR THE WORK OF THE MINISTRY

Ephesians 4:11-15

## ELDERS EQUIP THROUGH PREACHING AND TEACHING

1 Timothy 5:17

1 Timothy 3:2

2 Timothy 4:2

Titus 1:9

## ELDERS LEAD AND OVERSEE THE CONGREGATION

1 Timothy 5:17

1 Timothy 3:1

Titus 1:7

1 Peter 5:1-2

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<sup>3</sup> Strauch, A., & Howery, M. (2024). *Biblical eldership: Restoring the eldership to its rightful place in the local church*. Biblical Eldership Resources.

## ELDERS PROTECT AND CARE FOR GOD'S SHEEP

John 21:15-17

Acts 20:28-31

## ELDERS BEAR RESPONSIBILITY BEFORE GOD

Hebrews 13:17

## WHY ONE MAN CAN'T DO IT ALONE

### *A defense for plurality*

The concept of shared leadership is a common theme throughout the Bible. One of the first examples we see in relation to God's people is in the life of \_\_\_\_\_ (Numbers 11:16-17).

Another is in relation to the Jewish leaders in Jesus' day (Mark 11:27).

Jesus trained 12 disciples who were a prototype for what became elders and the first century church exercised this practice from its very conception.

Acts 11:30

Acts 14:23

Acts 20:17

James 5:14

1 Peter 5:1

And we can assume there was a distinction in how they exercised their role and responsibility. 1 Timothy 5:17

### ***A need for plurality***

Accountability - 1 Timothy 5:19-20

*Plural eldership serves to prevent one man from falling prey to the temptation of dominating a congregation.”<sup>4</sup>*

It also prevents a congregation from usurping the responsibility that has been delegated to the elders.

Burden Sharing and Pastor longevity - Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

Wisdom - Prov 11:14

Keeps Christ as the Head of the Church, not the pastor.

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<sup>4</sup> Newton, P. A. (2005). *Elders in congregational life: Rediscovering the biblical model for Church leadership*. Kregel Publications.

## Should a Church Have Elders?

by Mark Dever

There are many pragmatic reasons why a church might have elders. A plurality of elders can help to carry the burden of pastoral ministry; they can bring a rich variety of experience to bear on the issues and problems every pastor faces; they can hold the pastor accountable in a context of shared ministry; they can save the pastor from a multitude of errors in judgment before it ever becomes apparent in a congregational meeting. The list could go on.

But the best reason a church should have elders is because the New Testament says that it should. Throughout his epistles, and especially the pastoral epistles, Paul makes it plain that every New Testament church should have elders, that is men who “direct the affairs of the church” (1 Tim. 5:17–18). He commissioned Titus to make sure that all the churches in Crete had elders (Titus 1:5). And he took the time to outline for both Timothy and Titus what sort of men should be called to that office (1 Tim. 3:1–7; Titus 1:6–9), as well as the procedure that should be followed should a man need to be removed from the office (1 Tim. 5:19–20). So central were elders in Paul’s thinking that, though eager to reach Jerusalem by Pentecost, he took the time to call the Ephesian elders together and give them one last exhortation (Acts 20:16–38), the heart of which was that they be faithful as “shepherds of the church of God.”

Of course, elders were not just Paul’s idea. Peter too assumed their presence in the churches to which he wrote, and gave them a message identical to Paul’s: Be shepherds of God’s flock (1 Peter 5:1–4). So did the author of Hebrews (Heb. 13:17).

So the Bible clearly teaches that New Testament churches are to be led by elders. At the end of the day, this question is just another way of asking whether or not we are going to allow the Scriptures to be the sole authority in the life of the church. For though there are lots of pragmatic reasons to

have elders, from the perspective of a pastor, there are more pragmatic reasons not to have them. Elders can slow a senior pastor down, they can disagree with him, they can even tell him on occasion that he's wrong. Pragmatically speaking, who would want that?

But Peter and Paul remind us that the churches we pastor are not our own. We are pastors of God's church, God's flock. And so it is God's Word that must have the final say. Jesus created the church, he died for the church. He is its only King and law-giver. If we are committed to shepherding Christ's church, and not our own, then we must be willing to do it his way. According to the Bible, his way includes elders.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Further reading: Edmund Clowney, *The Church* (IVP, 1995) ch. 14; T.E. Peck, *\_Notes on Ecclesiology\_* (repr. GPTS Press, 1994), ch. 16. The problem with both of these recommendations is that they are written by Presbyterians, who claim far more for the authority of elders than Scripture warrants. Nevertheless, they both lay out clearly the argument from Scripture for the presence of elders in the local church.