

An Introduction to the Eldership

INTRODUCTION:

A. The Church belongs to Christ

1. **Matthew 16:18** – . . . On this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.
2. **Ephesians 5:23** – For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body.
3. **Matthew 28:18** – . . . All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.
4. **Revelation 17:14** – . . . For He is Lord of Lords, and King of Kings.

B. We understand that:

1. Christ is the Head of the church.
2. He has all authority in Heaven and on earth.
3. No man, or group of men, has the right to bind anything upon God's people which Christ has not bound.
4. No man, or group of men, has the right to excuse God's people from any commandment that Christ has enjoined upon His people.
5. No man, or group of men, has the right to change in anyway that which Christ has made a part of His blood-bought institution . . . The church.

C. God knew that men would try to do that which it was not His will that it be done. Therefore, in His wisdom, God recognized the need for leadership among His people in order to carry out His purposes here on earth.

1. He has provided that Godly men should be set apart to lead, guide, and to direct the people, as He has directed, in each congregation of the local church.
2. The Bible refers to them as elders.

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE ELDERSHIP

A. The titles or designations by which these men are known are . . . Elders . . . Bishops . . . Pastors . . . Shepherds.

1. These designations all refer to the different aspects of the work of the office.
 - a. The word **ELDER** means maturity, development, and stability . . . More than merely a man of many years.
 - b. The word **BISHOP** means **OVERSEER**, one who plans and directs the work of the church.
 - c. The word **PASTOR** has about the same meaning as the word **SHEPHERD** as they both apply to the care and oversight of the members of the church.

B. Familiar passages pertaining to elders.

1. **Titus 1:5** - For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you —
2. **Acts 14:23** - So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.
3. **1 Thessalonians 5:12-13** - And we urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labor 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. Be at peace among yourselves.
4. **Hebrews 13:17** - Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.
5. **Acts 20:28** - 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.
6. **1 Timothy 5:19** - Do not receive an accusation against an elder except from two or three witnesses.
7. **1 Timothy 3:1-8** - This is a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work.
 - 2 A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach;
 - 3 not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous;
 - 4 one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence
 - 5 (for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?);
 - 6 not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the same condemnation as the devil.
 - 7 Moreover he must have a good testimony among those who are outside, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.
8. **Titus 1:6-9** - If a man is blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of dissipation or insubordination.
 - 7 For a bishop must be blameless, as a steward of God, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money,
 - 8 but hospitable, a lover of what is good, sober-minded, just, holy, self-controlled,

9 holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict.

9. **1 Peter 5:1-4** - 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:

2 Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly;

3 nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock;

4 and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.

C. Concerning the Lord's church:

1. It is divine in origin.
2. Purchased with the blood of Christ.
3. Has a divine purpose.
4. Has a divine headship and authority.
5. Has an obedient family of believers.
6. Has scripturally qualified men serving as spiritual overseers.
7. Is available to us today in its simple New Testament form.

D. it is important to note from the New Testament that it is God's order that there be a PLURALITY of elders in every congregation of the Lord's church.

GENERAL THOUGHTS ABOUT THE ELDERSHIP

A. When James A. Garfield took office as the 20th President of the United States, he stated that he would be stepping DOWN from the office of the eldership into the new position. In so stating, he was emphasizing to the importance of the eldership.

B. In reflecting upon the importance of the eldership, consider carefully the following:

1. The idea of the eldership originated with God and not with man.
2. When men serve in the eldership, they do so as mere mortals.
 - a. The idea of the eldership originated with God . . . Not Man.
 - b. When men serve in the eldership, they do so as mere mortals.
 1. They are not perfect.
 2. They are not without faults.
 3. They will make mistakes.
 - c. MOST of the qualifications for becoming an elder are spiritual qualities that should be present in the lives of every Christian.
 - d. Just as a man may qualify to be an elder, he may later become disqualified to serve.
 - e. The appointment to serve as an elder is not necessarily an appointment for life.

1. Men may choose to step down.
 2. Circumstances in a man's life may change that would require him to step down.
- f. When a man is appointed to serve as an elder, he should continue to grow as a Christian.
1. There is room for growth for ELDERS.
 2. There is room for growth for DEACONS.
 3. There is room for growth for MINISTERS/EVANGELISTS.
 4. There is room for growth for TEACHERS.
 5. There is room for growth for all MEMBERS.
- g. A man should not be considered for the eldership based upon:
1. Popularity
 2. Personality
 3. Business experience
 4. Wealth
 5. Education
 6. Prestige in the community
 7. Etc.

But rather, it must be based upon his desire to serve and accompanied by the God-given qualifications found in the Bible.

- h. In selecting elders, no qualification should be set aside or compromised. **The man must fit the qualifications rather than altering the qualifications to fit the man.**
- i. Remember that church historians have often mentioned that the first major modification of Christ's original plan for His church came in the field of church government.
1. Not only was this departure the first major departure, but it was one of the most far reaching in that it laid the foundation for other departures.
 2. It was simply this:
 - a. Soon after the death of the apostles, uninspired men began exalting one elder above the others, and reserving for that exalted elder alone the title of bishop.
 - b. From this seemingly innocent beginning, a dangerous trend developed which ultimately triggered a struggle for power among church leaders.
 - c. In spite of Christ's teachings, soon individual "bishops" were presiding over several congregations within a district which came to be known as a diocese.
 - d. Eventually, these "bishops" within certain regions started meeting together to discuss mutual and current problems. By

the third century formal meetings were taking place attended by the “bishops” within a given Roman province.

- e. These meetings, innocent at first, soon gave rise to the formulation of human rules and doctrinal statements to be used by the churches.
Note: These doctrinal statements were doctrines and commandments of mere uninspired men and not those of Christ, His apostles, or the Bible.
- f. Then came the first human creed designed to govern all Christians.
 1. Known to us today as the Nicene Creed, it was written in 325 A.D. by bishops from the western portion of the Roman Empire when they met together for the first world-wide council at Nicea, a town in eastern Turkey near Constantinople. Today it is know as Iznik.
 2. The council was called together by Constantine, the Roman Emperor.
 3. Any Christian who would not subscribe to the Nicean Creed was branded as a heretic.
 4. Some Christians remained true to God and rejected the creed of men.
- g. Since Rome was the most prominent world center, succeeding Roman bishops enjoyed more and more prestige and power. Over the years, the Roman bishop came to be acknowledged generally as the only UNIVERSAL ruler of the Roman Church.
- h. Then it happened . . . In 606 A.D. Boniface III took to himself the title of Universal Bishop of the Catholic Church.
 1. “Catholic” means “universal.”
 2. Later, the title came to be known as “Pope.”
 3. The people were now looking to a mere man as the head of the church.
 4. **Ephesians 5:23** is still in the Bible . . . “Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body.
 5. Even among the apostles some 600 years earlier, there not one who would dare claim such power.
 6. It all began with man changing what God said about the eldership . . . And those changes, unapproved by God or His holy word . . . continue even to this day.

CONCLUSION:

A. God's plan must be honored and followed . . . Faithfully.

B. John Gipson writes:

I have a great love for elders and, for the most part, I think that they are the hardest working and least appreciated of any group I know. They are men who have been screened under the exacting standards of 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1, and have proven themselves over a period of years to those who know them best...brothers and sisters in Christ.

Elders are not perfect. They have faults and weaknesses like the rest of us. But, I am convinced that they have fewer of them than most of us. The ones I know are humble, dedicated men, earnestly striving to do the will of God and praying constantly for wisdom from above. They talk and pray and agonize. Countless hours are spent in conference and consultation, on planning and pleading. And most of it is done without so much as a "thank you".

They are the first to be criticized and the last to be praised. When things are going well, elders praise the preacher and the people, and during the decline they suffer the stings and arrows of the critics in silence. They are called upon daily to make decisions which are difficult and many times unpopular to some of the congregation.

Actions which often seem mystifying could be readily explained if they were willing to break a confidence and tell it like it is. But rather than see any member suffer, elders frequently take abuse without offering any defense. If any men in the world are deserving of our support and love and appreciation and cooperation, the elders should have it.

NOTE: Can these sentiments not be our sentiments as well?

B. God's Plan for Man's Salvation