

# Biblical Evidence for Eldership

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*Detailed Outline*

*Part 2 of 9*

## **I. The New Testament Teaches and Models Both Plurality of Elders and Pastoral Eldership**

### **A. The Old Testament Witnessed to Government by the Plurality of Elders**

1. Eldership is not something new that was invented in the last few decades.
2. God's people have always had a council of elders: This is witnessed in passages from Exodus 3:16 to the books of James and Revelation.
3. The problem is that our modern traditions have blinded our eyes to what Scripture says.

### **B. Jesus Christ Established Plurality of Leadership for His Church**

1. Jesus Christ never trained any man alone or appointed one man head of His Church. He dedicated Himself to training twelve apostles, not one apostle with eleven advisers. He appointed twelve as a counsel to be the first leadership body of his church.
2. Yet within the apostolic team, there was first among equals. Peter, James, and John stand out among their colleagues as exceptional leaders, and especially Peter as the chief speaker of the apostolic body. Peter, James, and John were first among equals. Some of the other apostles we know very little about.
3. We call this doctrine first among equals. While this terminology is not precisely used in Scripture, this is our way of explaining what our Lord did.
  - a) Peter was not the head apostle. He was a leader among the apostles. There is a big difference between these two.
  - b) The others were not Peter's assistants; they were not his helpers. They had as much apostolic authority as Peter. They simply had different gifts and abilities. Peter was gifted as a leader, so he was the natural spokesperson for the group.
  - c) Jesus had to remind them many times that they are brethren and that they were to serve one another as brethren. They were not to fight over preeminent positions or rank themselves.
4. This is what we observe in the Book of Acts – an apostolic council of twelve men leading the church.

## C. The New Testament Established Pastoral Eldership by the Plurality of Elders

In its major features, pastoral oversight of the local church by the plurality of elders is plainly and amply set forth by the New Testament writers. It is a consistent pattern seen throughout the New Testament.

In fact, the New Testament offers more instruction regarding elders than it does regarding such important church subjects such as the Lord's Supper, the Lord's Day, baptism, or spiritual gifts.

### 1. Examples of Eldership

- a) Consider the consistent example of plural leadership by elders that existed among the first Christian churches. These local churches were spread over a wide geographical and culturally diverse area from Jerusalem to Rome.
  - 1) Elders are found in the churches of Judea and the surrounding area (Acts 11:30; James 5:14, 15).
  - 2) Elders governed the church in Jerusalem (Acts 15, 21).
  - 3) Among the Pauline churches, leadership by the plurality of elders was established in the churches in Derbe, Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch (Acts 14:20-23); in the church in Ephesus (Acts 20:17; 1 Tim. 3:1-7; 5:17-25); in the church in Philippi (Phil. 1:1); and in the churches on the island of Crete (Titus 1:5).
  - 4) According to the well-traveled letter of 1 Peter, elders existed in churches throughout northwestern Asia Minor: Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia (1 Peter 1:1; 5:1).
- b) We see eldership as a pattern like none other demonstrated to us by the early churches for the local church.

### 2. Instruction about Elders

- a) Not only does the New Testament provide examples of elder-led churches, it includes explicit instructions to churches about how to support, protect, discipline, restore, select, and call elders. The apostles intended these instructions to be obeyed, and they should be regarded as normative teaching for all Christian churches at all times.
- b) James instructs those who are sick to call for the elders of the church (James 5:14).
- c) Paul instructs the Ephesian church to financially support elders who labor "at preaching and teaching" (1 Tim. 5:17-18).
- d) Paul instructs the local church about protecting elders from false accusation, disciplining elders who sin, and restoring fallen elders (1 Tim. 5:19-22).
- e) Paul instructs the church regarding the proper qualifications for eldership (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9).

- f) To the church in Ephesus, Paul states that anyone who desires to be an elder desires a “fine work” (1 Tim. 3:1).
- g) Paul instructs the church to examine the qualifications of prospective elders (1 Tim. 3:10; 5:24, 25).
- h) Peter instructs the young men of the church to submit to church elders (1 Peter 5:5).
- i) Paul teaches that elders are the household stewards, leaders, instructors, and teachers of the local church (Titus 1:7, 9; 1 Thess. 5:12).

### 3. Instruction and Exhortation to Elders

Besides giving instruction to churches about elders, Paul, Peter, and James directly instruct elders to pastor and oversee the local church: The two passages are Acts 20:28 and 1 Peter 5:1-2.

- a) Acts 20
  - 1) Paul reminds the Ephesians elders that the Holy Spirit placed them in the church to be overseers and pastor the church of God (Acts 20:28).
  - 2) Paul exhorts elders to **guard the church** from false teachers (Acts 20:28) and to be alert to the constant threat of false doctrine (Acts 20:31).
  - 3) Paul reminds elders to work hard, help the needy, and be generous like the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 20:35).
- b) 1 Peter 5:1-5
 

*Shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight... (1 Peter 5:2 ESV)*

  - 1) Peter directly charges elders to willingly pastor and oversee the local congregation (1 Peter 5:1, 2).
  - 2) Peter warns elders not to be too domineering (1 Peter 5:3).
  - 3) Peter promises elders that when the Lord Jesus returns they will receive “the unfading crown of glory” (1 Peter 5:4).
  - 4) Peter exhorts elders to be clothed in humility (1 Peter 5:5).
- c) James tells elders to pray for the sick and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord (James 5:14).

### 4. The Deficiency of a Church without Eldership

- a) Paul viewed a local church without qualified, recognized elders as deficient.
 

*For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order [to set right] what remains and appoint elders in every city as I directed you. (Titus 1:5 NASB)*
- b) At the beginning of Paul’s church planting ministry, He and Barnabas appointed elders for their newly planted churches.

*When they [Paul and Barnabas] had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed. (Acts 14:23 ESV)*

- c) “Set in order”
  - 1) Paul is telling Titus to “set right what is lacking and appoint elders in every city as I directed you.”
  - 2) Right order in the church requires the appointment of biblically qualified elders. I. Howard Marshall makes this comment on the term “set in order” or “to set right:”

*The term may thus express ... the idea of authority to act (to make appropriate and needed reforms) such as might be given to lawmakers or by an apostle to his delegate. (The Pastoral Epistles, p. 151)*
  - 3) A properly constituted local church has qualified functioning local elders, or it is deficient. Things need to be set right in the church.
- d) In summary, a church needs elders because the Bible says so. No more needs to be said. In the next message, I will define pastoral eldership, but let me first make one more point about the importance of eldership.