

ELDERS

1 Timothy 3:1 *This is a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work.*

THE OFFICE OF AN ELDER

In Acts 20 Paul calls to himself the elders of the church of Ephesus. This passage is important because in it Paul calls the elders by three terms: ELDER (Greek *Presbuteros*), OVERSEER/BISHOP (Greek *Episkopos*), and SHEPHERD/PASTOR (Greek *Poimon*).

Acts 20:17 *From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the **elders** of the church.*

Acts 20:28 *"Be on guard for yourselves and for 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."*

While it is common today for denominations to make a distinction between the elders, overseers or pastors, in the New Testament church they are all the same work. The interchangeable use in locations such as Ephesians 4:11 or Titus 1 make it clear that there is no distinction between these words; they all refer to the same office or work.

EXAMPLES OF ELDERS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

The New Testament provides us with multiple examples of New Testament elders. Specific men who were elders include James, brother of Jesus (Acts 21:18), Peter, an apostle to Christ (1 Peter 5:1), and John, an apostle to Christ (2 John 1:1). There are also references to the eldership of congregations (every example of a church having elders always had a plurality of elders; this is both in the New Testament, and in early church writings, until the apostasy of Ignatius in the second century AD). General examples of elders include the elders of Jerusalem (Acts 11:30, Acts 15, Acts 21); the elders of the churches established in Asia (Acts 14:23); the elders of Ephesus (Acts 20:17-28), and the overseers of Philippi (Php. 1:1).

QUALIFICATIONS OF ELDERS

There are two passages which call men to the work of being elders: Titus 1 and 1 Timothy 3. In Titus 1, Paul tells Titus that this purpose sets in mind the fact that a congregation without elders (or deacons or an evangelist(s)) is lacking or wanting the pattern. Most of the qualifications for elder or deacon are spoken of in other locations as the expectation of a mature Christian.

Qualifications of Elders in I Timothy 3:1-11		
Stated Qualification (NKJV/NASB)	Greek Word and meaning (Strong's)	Comments
a man & husband		An elder is a man and husband of one wife. This is a gender specific role.
desires the work of an elder	<i>oregomai</i> : to stretch oneself, i.e. reach out after (long for):--covet after, desire.	All Christians are to desire to better themselves (1 Cor. 12:31). This does not speak as much to wanting to be Lord, but wanting to serve.
blameless	<i>anepileptos</i> : from not arrested, i.e. (by implication) inculpable:--blameless, unrebukeable.	No Christian should stand accusable in the moment (1 Tim. 5:7). While we have all

		been sinners before Christ, an elder must not be seen culpable now.
husbands of one wife	<i>Aner mia gune</i> : one woman man	There are several possible meanings here: (1) That he possess a wife; (2) That he is scripturally married (3) That he has only married once, and is married only once. The third point would be the safest, as it would include the previous two. Consider a similar term in 1 Timothy 5:9 (although the word for "one" is different; in 1 Tim. 3 it could mean first, and 1 Tim. 5 it refers to the number one).
temperate	<i>Nephaleos</i> : sober, i.e. (figuratively) circumspect:--sober.	Speaks here to the balanced emotional state; this person has their emotions under control. Seen in Titus 2:2 for all Christians.
sober-minded/ prudent	<i>sophron</i> : safe (sound) in mind, i.e. self-controlled (moderate as to opinion or passion):--discreet, sober, temperate.	Here sober-minded means self-controlled. They are not given to outbursts (of wrath, etc). Too, it could mean that they are not overly opinionated.
of good behavior/ respectable	<i>kosmios</i> , kos'-mee-os : orderly, i.e. decorous:--of good behaviour, modest.	We translate the word <i>Cosmos</i> from this, and refer to the order of the universe. This concept reflects our need to have our lives in order.
hospitable	<i>philoxenos</i> , fil-ox'-en-os : fond of guests, i.e. hospitable:--given to (lover of, use) hospitality.	All Christians are to practice this; in Hebrews 13:2 an example of this command is referenced back to Abraham and Lot.
able to teach	<i>didaktikos</i> : instructive ("didactic"):--apt to teach.	In Hebrews 5:12, the audience is rebuked for not being at the point of being a teacher. We all ought to be able to communicate the Gospel. An elder must be able to do this, and to refute the gainsayer (Tit. 1:9).
not given to wine,	<i>paroinos</i> : (NOT) staying near wine, i.e. tippling (a toper):--given to wine.	All Christians are to reject drunkenness (Eph. 5:18). Consider that this applies to any intoxicant.
not violent/ pugnacious	<i>plektes</i> : a smiter, i.e. pugnacious (quarrelsome):--striker.	Consider the error of Romans 1:30 or the violence of Genesis 6.
not greedy for money (KJV-NKJV only)	<i>aischrokerdes</i> : sordid:--given to (greedy of) filthy lucre.	Spoken of the deacons too in 3:9. This speaks to the honesty of an elder's business reputation.

gentle	<i>Epieikes</i> : appropriate, i.e. (by implication) mild:--gentle, moderation, patient.	All Christians put on the gentleness of Christ (Php. 4:5). It is also a key characteristic of evangelists in 2 Tim. 2.
not quarrelsome/ peaceable	<i>Amachos</i> : peaceable:--not a brawler.	Tied directly to the previous quality. We get the word " <i>macho</i> " from the opposite meaning; an elder is the opposite of macho (2 Tim. 2:24).
not covetous/ free from the love of money	<i>Aphilarguros</i> : unavaricious:--without covetousness, not greedy of filthy lucre.	All Christians are to be without covetousness (Heb. 13:5). Consider the danger of such idolatry if leading the body of Christ.
one who rules his own house well/ one who manages his own household well	<i>Proistemi</i> : to stand before, i.e. (in rank) to preside, or (by implication) to practise:--maintain, be over, rule.	All fathers have this obligation (Eph 6:4). The language of "rule" is not the authoritarian type (see Matt. 20:25), but to be the source of moral integrity in the home (headship).
children in submission/ keeping his children under control	<i>Hupotage</i> : subordination:--subjection. <i>Teknon</i> : a child (as produced):--child, daughter, son.	In this case, there is to be a resulting characteristic from the headship of a man who will be an elder. Uniquely, the purpose of this commandment is explained (as though it was known that it would cause controversy). We are told that the ability to manage children translates to the care of the church.
not a novice/ new convert	<i>Neophutos</i> : newly planted, ie (figuratively) a young convert ("neophyte"):--novice.	All Christians are to grow (2 Pet. 3:18); fundamentally, an elder is a mature Christian.
Has a good testimony among those who are outside/ a good reputation with those outside	<i>Marturia</i> : evidence given (judicially or genitive case):--record, report, testimony, witness.	All of us are to have a good reputation among unbelievers (1 Pet. 2:12). However, since this man stands in headship in the church, he must be known to have this reputation. This command it qualified as to avoid the devil's snare.

**Qualifications of Elders in Titus 1:6-9
(Duplications with 1 Tim. 3 are not listed)**

Stated Qualification (NKJV/NASB)	Greek Word and meaning (Strong's)	Comments
Having faithful children not accused of dissipation or insubordination/ having children who believe, not accused of dissipation or rebellion.	<i>Pistos</i> :objectively, trustworthy; subjectively, trustful:--believe(-ing, -r), faithful(-ly), sure, true	Here is the most controversial commandment. There are two views to this passage; that the faithful child is faithful to their parents (paralleling it to 1 Tim. 3:4), or that the child is faithful to God. Both answers would be found in being faithful to God, making that the safest interpretation. One question is whether either faithfulness exists in the child or a Godly man who is not faithful to God (2 Chron. 28:9). The Greek language gives no deeper contextual meaning.
Not self-willed	<i>Authades</i> : self-pleasing, i.e. arrogant:--self-willed.	2 Pet 2:10 They are presumptuous, self-willed. They are not afraid to speak evil of dignitaries,
Not quick tempered	<i>Orgilos</i> ; irascible:--soon angry	Eph 4:31 Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice.
Loves what is good	<i>Philagathos</i> : fond to good, i.e. a promoter of virtue:--love of good men.	Php 4:8 whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy--meditate on these things.
Just	<i>Dikaïos</i> : equitable (in character or act); by implication, innocent, holy (absolutely or relatively):--just, meet, right(-eous).	Heb 10:38 Now the just shall live by faith; But if anyone draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him."
Holy	<i>Hosios</i> : properly, right i.e. hallowed (pious, sacred, sure):--holy, mercy, undefiled	1 Pet 1:15 but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, 16 because it is written, "Be holy, for I am holy."
Holding Fast the word	<i>Antechomai</i> : to hold oneself opposite to, i.e. (by implication) adhere to; by extension to care for:--hold fast, hold to, support.	2 Timothy 1:13 Hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus.

THE APPOINTMENT OF ELDERS

There are five passages in the New Testament that discuss the appointment or placement of elders. Some provide a direct example of this being done, while some merely point to their accomplishment. We do not see that men personally held any authority in this appointment, since the authority came of God (Jesus and the Holy Spirit). The work of evangelists in this seems to be in revealing the qualifications/calling of the men. The laying on of hands is descriptive not of the method but of the passing of divine authority (see Hebrews 6:2). It was accompanied by prayer and fasting.

The means which the men appointed were determined is not evident. While they are called and appointed by the Holy Spirit through Scripture, the determination of that calling is not revealed. We do see in Acts 6 that the Holy Spirit called seven men to serve, and it was up to the congregation to determine who was called.

Passage	Who Appointed	How Was It Done	Other Points
Acts 14:23 <i>So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.</i>	Paul & Barnabas	With prayer, fasting & commendation	Within one year of the establishment of the church
Titus 1:5 <i>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</i>	Titus		Titus's work was chiefly to appoint elders
1 Timothy 5:21-22 <i>I charge you before God and the Lord Jesus Christ and the elect angels that you observe these things without prejudice, doing nothing with partiality. Do not lay hands on anyone hastily, nor share in other people's sins; keep yourself pure.</i>	Timothy	Laying on of hands	This passage seems to refer to elders (previous verses), but may have a broader context; As well, there were already elders in place in Ephesus (Acts 20)
Ephesians 4:11 <i>And He (Jesus) Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers,</i>	Jesus Christ		Generic appointment of Elders
Acts 20:28 <i>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.</i>	Holy Spirit		within 3 years of the establishment of the church; also, the appointment appears generic
1 Corinthians 12:28 <i>And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues.</i>	God		No mention of elders here, but the parallel to Ephesians 4:11 is very suggestive

DUTIES OF ELDERS

From the passages listed below we can see a theme of the duties of elders: (1) to stand before the church as an example of Godliness and (2) to preserve the congregation by seeing that they are provided for (fed spiritually) and correcting those who are in error. These tasks are the authority of the elders. Like any other authority from scripture, they have to observe the generic and specific limits of their authority.

Passage	Duties
Ephesians 4:11-12,13 <i>And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the (1) equipping of the saints (2) for the work of ministry, (3) for the edifying of the body of Christ..... till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man.....</i>	To aid in the church's work of: 1. Equipping Christians 2. Work of ministry (<i>Diakonia</i>) 3. Building up (<i>Oikodoma</i>)
1 Peter 5:1-4 <i>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: Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, servng as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.</i>	1. Shepherd (verb) 2. Serving (eagerly and willingly) 3. By being examples
1 Timothy 5:17 <i>Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine.</i>	1. Rule (<i>proistemi</i> : to stand before)
Hebrews 13:7 <i>Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct.</i>	1. Rule (<i>hegeomai</i> : to lead, i.e. command with official authority)
Hebrews 13:17 <i>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.</i>	1. Rule (<i>hegemoi</i>)
1 Thessalonians 5:12 <i>And we urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you,</i>	1. Labor 2. Admonish
Acts 20:28-31 <i>"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. For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. Therefore watch....."</i>	1. Take heed/watch for false teachers from without and within
Titus 1:9,11 <i>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..... whose mouths must be stopped.....</i>	1. Exhort 2. Convict those who contradict (disputer/gainsayer)
Titus 1:7 <i>For a bishop must be blameless, as a steward of God.....</i>	1. Stewardship (<i>oikonomos</i> , the house feeder)
1 Timothy 3:5 <i>for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?</i>	1. Take care (<i>epimeleomai</i> , to care over)

There are several places where the authority of oversight is not present; this generally coincides with the absence of the authority of the church. In the home, the head of the home is the father (1 Tim 3:4, 1 Tim 3:12), who stands before his family in headship. The protector of the home is the mother (Tit 2:5, Eph. 6:1). As well, the head of the marriage is the husband (Eph. 5:23). In the community, the head of the community is "Caesar" (Rom 13:1, 1 Pet 2:13). Finally, in other churches, that authority is not present between churches. The head of other Christians (as a single church) is Christ, and the oversight of other churches are those elders appointed there (Acts 20:28).