

Elders in Church Life Titus 1:5-9

New Testament Churches Had Elders, Bishops and Pastors

- Elder – (PRESBUTEROS) from the word meaning older in age. It became a term used to designate a respected office:
 - among Jews it designated the members of the Sanhedrin Council.
 - among the Greeks it was city officials.
 - among Christians it is used for a church leader who holds a respected office.
- Bishop – (EPISKOPOS) from the word meaning “to look after, to look upon, to have the care over.” Essentially, the word just means “overseer.”
- Pastor – (POIMEN) means shepherd.
 - Used literally it is the herdsman who cares for the sheep’s safety and growth.
 - Metaphorically, it is the authority who defends the flock from attack, guides them to nourishment and mends them when wounded or sick.

1 Peter 5:1-4

1 The **elders** which are among you I exhort, who am also an **elder**, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed:

2 **Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind;**

3 **Neither as being lords over God’s heritage, but being ensamples to the flock.**

4 **And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.**

Acts 20:17,28

17 Paul ... “called the **elders** of the **church**”

20 **Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.**

It is evident from the wording that the three titles are not distinct offices, but three different ways of addressing the same men depending on the context.

- You might refer to them as elder because of the respected office.
- You might call him a bishop because his job includes being an overseer.
- You can say pastor – because you understand the congregation is God’s flock and he is a shepherd of that flock.

New Testament Churches Had Multiple Elders

From the very first reference, the use of the term “elder” in the New Testament is almost exclusively plural. A quick count suggested 15 of the 20 times the word is used of a church officer, it is in the plural form (elders).

There is nothing in the New Testament that even hints at a limit of one pastor per church. The letters written to individual churches that include plural terms is overwhelming evidence that the normal experience of New Testament churches included a plurality of elders.

- Acts 20:17, “And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called the **elders of the church.**”
- James 5:14 *Is any sick among you? let him call for the **elders of the church**; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord:*
- Philippians 1:1 *Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at **Philippi**, with the **bishops** and deacons:*
- Acts 14:23, “And when they had ordained them **elders in every church ...** “
- Titus 1 – Paul says he left Titus on Crete in verse 5 to “ordain **elders in every city.**”

A plurality of elders in the New Testament that is the standard arrangement and a single pastor/elder/bishop would be the exception, not the rule. (That is assuming we can find a New Testament church with a single pastor/elder/bishop. We can't.) Any church seeking to conform to the New Testament example will pursue the plurality of elders.

New Testament Churches Had Qualified Elders

Titus 1:6-9 suggests four basic areas of qualifications:

- Blameless in married life
- Blameless in family life
- Blameless in character
- Blameless in doctrine

Verse 7 includes five specific negative characteristics:

- Not selfwilled
- Not soon angry
- Not given to wine
- No striker
- Not greedy

Verse 8 gives six positive characteristics:

- A lover of hospitality
- A love of good men
- Sober
- Just
- Holy
- Temperate

New Testament Churches Were Led and Taught By Elders

If a church has multiple elders, they are not to become a board of authority which runs the church. Elder-led churches still maintain congregational rule. Elders are both leaders and servants of the church.

The primary means by which elders exercise leadership in the church is by teaching. That is why the qualifications in 1 Timothy 3 include, “apt to teach.” An elder is the kind of person who is able to teach before the assembled congregation and the kind of person whose character you'd be comfortable coming to for Biblical advice.