

## Five Terms That Describe an Elder

### Introduction:

The church we read about in the Bible was organized in a very simple way. A general pattern was to have 2 or more qualified men overseeing each local congregation or church. These men could be referred to as the "eldership". Each man must meet several high qualifications which the Bible lists in two passages. Elders are the spiritual leaders of a congregation. They also watch out for the souls of the members like a shepherd.

1. Christ is the head of every local church. There is no human head of the church.
2. The Bible is the only written creed for each local church, rather than a man-made written creed.
3. Each local church is autonomous and self-governing. No outside interference from others.
4. No organizational tie between local churches.
5. No organization larger than local churches.
6. The Bible uses Elder, Presbyter, Overseer, Bishop, Shepherd, Pastor interchangeably and they all refer to a single office in the church.
7. Local churches appoint their own plurality of elders using 1 Timothy 3, and Titus 1 as guidelines for the qualifications.
8. Elders have authority only over the members of the local church, not members from outside congregations.

### I. Five Terms That Describe an Elder

A. There are four main terms used to describe this position of authority: (elder, overseer, shepherd, steward)

1. Each term gives us a little more information about the function of the office: Christians are described as: priests, saints, children citizens, soldiers, etc. In the same way we have different descriptive terms for the eldership.
2. These terms are not honorary titles but descriptions of work to be done: a. It would be wrong to call someone "Elder Smith", or "Pastor Brown"
3. In the table below, you will notice four individual terms (elder, overseer, shepherd, steward) and one collective term (eldership: which is simply the plural of term elder).

<b>Five terms describing the office of an elder</b>			
<b>Term</b>	<b>Greek word</b>	<b>Definition:</b>	<b>Emphasis</b>
Elder or presbyter	Presbureros	An older man a senior	Experience
Overseer or bishop	Episcopos	A guardian or superintendent	Oversight
Shepherd or pastor	Poimen	Metaphoric term (tending flocks)	Protection
Steward	Oikonomo	Metaphoric term (treasurer)	Trustworthy

Eldership	Presbuterion	Group of older men/elders	Plurality & equality
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B. Proof that all terms refer to same office because of their interchangeable usage:

<b>All terms refer to same single office</b>				
	Elder or Presbyter (Presbureros)	Overseer or bishop (Episcopos)	Shepherd or pastor (Poimen)	Steward (Oikonomo)
<b>Acts 20:17,28</b>	✓	✓	✓	
<b>Tit 1:5,7</b>	✓	✓		✓
<b>1 Pe 5:1,2</b>	✓		✓	

C. Why do people confuse the one office, for many distinct offices:

1. People are taught false doctrine from their denominations, that the "office of Bishop" is a different office than the "office of Pastor" and the "office of Elder" and the "office of Steward". They are falsely taught that these are three distinct offices, rather than three descriptive terms that describe the same ONE office.
2. A failure to be shown that in scripture, these terms are used interchangeably, as seen in the chart above. The fact remains, that if these four terms
3. A failure to recognize that the English terms "Elder and Presbyter come from the same Greek word "Presbureros". That the English terms "Overseer and Bishop come from the same Greek word "Episcopos". And that the English terms "Shepherd and Pastor come from the same Greek word "Poimen". Part of the confusion is that one Bible translation will consistently translation the Greek word "Presbureros" as "Elder, while another translation will render the same Greek word "Presbureros" as Presbyter. We are find no fault with these translations, but people simply do not look closely enough to notice what is really going on between translations.
4. Each of the three Greek words are translated into two English words, where one of these English word is a true translation and the other is a meaningless man-made ecclesiastical, church term invented by various churches. To prove the point, when in everyday language do we ever use the words, Presbyter or Bishop or Pastor. They have no use or meaning outside of religion and their meaning is obscure. However meaning the words, Elder or Overseer or Shepherd are understood by all and are used in all areas of life. Another example of this is the word "Baptism", which comes from the Greek word "Baptizo" and is translated "immersion". If Bible translations only used the true translations of all these words, it would greatly reduce confusion as well as immediately prove that "Baptism" is immersion, not sprinkling.

<b>Greek Word</b>	<b>True translation</b>	<b>Meaningless "gobbledy goop" words that have no use outside of religion.</b>
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Presbureros	Elder	Presbyter
Episcopos	Overseer	Bishop
Poimen	Shepherd	Pastor
Baptizo	Immersion	Baptism

D. Why did God use four different terms to describe the one office? Simple! Each term gives us a distinct view of the various functions of that one office. If God had used only one word, it would not be nearly as clear as it is with the four terms.

1. **Elder** indicates an older man with wisdom that can only come from age and experience.
2. **Overseer** indicates a position of top authority, one who is in charge and makes all final decisions for the local congregation.
3. **Shepherd** is a metaphoric term that indicates the men are to show love, care, dedication and self sacrifice for the members as sheep. The men are not literally Shepherding sheep, but are doing so in a metaphoric sense that everyone immediately understands.
4. **Steward** indicates a man who can be trusted with great treasures. Of course the greatest of these treasures, are the souls of the local church members, over whom he is in charge. But it also indicates the fact that the men are also in charge of the churches financial assets, including church buildings and the weekly collection of money from the church on the first day of every week through freewill offerings.

E. Although a different office, God did the same thing with "Pulpit preacher" terms by using three distinct Greek words to describe that one office:

1. **Minister** indicates one who serves as a servant.
2. **Evangelist** indicates one who spreads the good new of the seed of the Gospel everywhere.
3. **Preacher** indicates one who proclaims the message of God.

## II. Unscriptural terms used by denominations: Titus 2:1

A. Paul told us to "speak the things which are fitting for sound doctrine." Tit 2:1 This means that we must use Bible terms to describe Bible things. Many denominations use terms that are not found in the Bible.

B. Unscriptural manmade terms, many of which are titles only God Himself would wear! In fact most of these terms are outright blasphemous for a man to wear!

- Pope
- Universal Bishop
- Ecumenical Patriarch
- Patriarch
- Metropolitan or Archbishop
- Protopresbyter
- Cardinal
- Arch-bishop
- Archpriest
- His All Holiness
- His Eminence
- His Beatitude
- His Grace
- Very Reverend
- Right Reverend
- Reverend Father
- Reverend
- Father

C: Various terms used by denominations today. Each of the four sets of terms refer to the same greek word.

1. Overseer: Bishop, Episcopate, Bishopric, Diocese
2. Elder: Presbyter, Presbyterate
3. Shepherd: Pastor
4. Servant: Deacon, Diaconate

### III. Scriptural terms misused by denominations: Titus 2:1

1. Applying "pastor" as a synonym for the pulpit preacher. All pastors are pulpit preachers, but not all preachers are pastors.
2. Applying "pastor" "Elder" or "Bishop" to any women. Women are forbidden to be such: 1 Tim 2:12
3. Applying "pastor" to any young man, any single man, or a married man who has no children, or a married man whose children are not faithful in Christ
4. Applying "evangelist" exclusively to pulpit preachers who preach in different churches every Sunday, while refusing to call a "located preacher" an "evangelist" because he preaches in the same church every Sunday. The terms, evangelist, preacher and minister are interchangeable terms and the Bible makes no distinction as to whether the minister is located or moving around from week to week.
5. Applying "elder" to any young man, as Mormon missionaries insist they be called as they go door to door. Such a term applied to a young man is a violation of common sense.

### IV. Bible Qualifications For Pastors:

A. There are two passages that list qualifications: 1 Tim 3:1-7 & Tit 1:5-9

1. These qualifications are what all Christian's should strive to meet.
2. Most churches today will set human standards that ignore Bible directives

B. Six qualifications that many modern day pastors don't meet:

1. Elders must be men.
2. Elders must be married.
3. Elders must have children who are old enough to be believing Christians.
4. Elders must have PROVEN that they can keep their children under control WITHOUT REBELLION. [the big test is with teenagers]
5. Must be what "elder" implies: an older man of experience. Men under 40 years old are never called elderly. When 18 year old Mormon missionaries demand that a 70 year old man address them as "elder" when they knock on his door, it is as illogical as it is insulting! Calling anyone under 30 years of age and "elder" is a clear violation of what the word elder means!
6. Must have enough Bible knowledge to be able to refute false doctrine.

C. An evangelist/preacher/minister is different from an elder/pastor/overseer

1. Elders in the New Testament were not always full time preachers: 1 Ti 5:17 "Let the ELDERS who rule well be considered worthy of double honor especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching."
2. Full time preachers in the New Testament were not always elders.
3. Apostle Paul was not an elder: no where in the Bible is Paul referred to as an elder. Paul wasn't married: 1 Cor 7:7, therefore was not even qualified: 1 Ti 3:2,4,5.
4. Peter on the other hand, was both a full time preacher and an elder. 1 Peter 5:1 "I [Peter] ... your "FELLOW elder"

D. The Bible pattern for elders is absolutely foreign to most denominations as they rely heavily upon human creeds to set standards.

## **V. The Limit of the Elder's Authority**

A. Elders authority in the Bible was limited to within one local congregation:

1. 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."
2. 1 Pet 5:1-3 "Therefore, I exhort the elders AMONG YOU ... shepherd the FLOCK OF GOD AMONG YOU ... proving to be examples to the flock"
3. 1 Pet 5:1 "I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow-elder"
4. Peter was an elder but he was not higher in rank than any other elder.
5. All elders in the eldership are of equal authority.

B. Many churches today do not follow the Bible pattern for an elder's authority:

1. One bishop/elder is never over other bishop/elders in rank: all are equal.
2. One bishop/elder is never over more than one local church churches
3. The pyramid type organization is contrary to the Bible pattern and did not come to full development until 606 AD when pope Boniface III claimed to be the one man who ruled every local church world wide. This was 600 years too late to be the Bible pattern and represents a serious apostasy in organization.

B The Baptist church, for example, admits in their official creed book (The Hiscox Standard Baptist Manual), that new offices not found in scripture have been added long after the Bible was written:

1. "CHURCH OFFICERS: In the New Testament we find that in apostolic times, and for many years after, pastors and deacons only were known as permanent church officers. Others have been added at later times, for a variety of reasons." (The Hiscox Standard Baptist Manual)
2. "THE WIDER FELLOWSHIP OF BAPTISTS: Because churches are the only Christian organizations provided for in the New Testament, it may be said that they are the only ones really essential to the accomplishment of the purposes of Christ. Experience, however, has demonstrated that churches in fellowship with one another are able to fulfill the work of the gospel more effectively than churches alone." (The Hiscox Standard Baptist Manual)
3. What we observe in these two quotes from the Hiscox Standard Baptist Manual, is the following: First, they admit that new offices were added to the church many years after the Bible was completed. Second, they admit that local churches with no organizational tie between them, was the Bible pattern, but because of human wisdom, an organization was invented to tie local churches together on a global basis.

## **VI. The Plurality Of Elders**

A. There is a pattern in the Bible where two or more men serve as elders. Never do you find a church with only one elder appointed.

B. The divine directive:

1. Tit 1:5 "For this reason, I left you in Crete, that you might set in order what remains, and APPOINT ELDERS IN EVERY CITY as I directed you."

2. Acts 14:23 "And when they had APPOINTED ELDERS IN EVERY CHURCH, having prayed and fasted, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed."

C. Let's examine the Bible pattern of plurality within specific local congregations:

1. JERUSALEM: Acts 15:4 "when they arrived at Jerusalem, they were received by the ELDERS" (Acts 15:2; 15:6; 15:22; 15:23; 16:4; 21:18)
2. EPHESUS: Acts 20:17,28 Paul "called to him the ELDERS OF THE CHURCH."
3. JUDEA: Acts 11:29,30 "sending it in charge of Barnabas and Saul TO THE ELDERS"

D. Let us look at various other references:

1. Jas 5:14 "Is anyone sick? Let him call the ELDERS OF THE CHURCH."
2. 1 Pe 5:1-3 "Therefore, I exhort the ELDERS among you
3. 1 Ti 4:14 "the laying on of hands of the PRESBYTERY." (assembly of aged men)
4. 1 Ti 5:17 "Let the ELDERS who rule well be considered worthy of double honor

E. Singular usage here refers to each individual elder:

1. 1 Ti 3:1,2 "If any man aspires to the OFFICE OF OVERSEER
2. Tit 1:7 "for the OVERSEER must be above reproach"
3. 1 Ti 5:19 "Do not receive an accusation against an ELDER except..."
4. 2 Jn 1 "The ELDER to the chosen lady and her children"
5. 3 Jn 1 "The ELDER to the beloved Gaius whom I love in truth"

F. Presbytery: Plural use of "elder" [Gr. Presbureros, singular] in the New Testament: "Presbuterion" [plural of Presbureros]. Three passages in total. The first two, refer to the leading group of Jewish elders. The last one refers to an eldership within a single local church.

1. "When it was day, the Council [Presbuterion] of elders of the people assembled, both chief priests and scribes, and they led Him away to their council chamber" (Luke 22:66)
2. "as also the high priest and all the Council [Presbuterion] of the elders can testify." (Acts 22:5)
3. "Do not neglect the spiritual gift within you, which was bestowed on you through prophetic utterance with the laying on of hands by the presbytery [Presbuterion]. " (1 Timothy 4:14)

## **VII. Four Organizational Possibilities for Local Churches**

A. Unscripturally organized:

1. Pastor system (one man over church)
2. Unqualified men (Position worse than having no elders at all)
3. any organization larger than local church (world headquarters etc.)

B. Unscripturally unorganized: church has qualified men who are not elders

C. Scripturally organized: a church which has a qualified eldership

D. Scripturally unorganized:

1. a church without elders because no one qualified: Acts 14:1-3,6,8,21-23

2. a church with no elders, when qualified men could be appointed, "lacks": Tit 1:5

## **Conclusion:**

A. There are four terms: elder, overseer, shepherd & steward

1. They all refer to the same thing
2. They are used interchangeably
3. The terms are not titles but teach us about the role, function and work
4. 4. It is wrong to view pastors elders and bishops as three different offices

B. The Bible gives clear qualifications for the office which most churches ignore. The modern day "pastor system" as employed by most denominations, where one man is over the church rather than a group of men is unscriptural.

C. An elder can only oversee one local congregation