

The Foundation of Serving the Church:
Scriptural Considerations for Elders
Sunday, February 16, 2020

I. Background for the term or position of an Elder.

A. In almost all early societies around the world there have been people serving their communities as an “elder.”

1. These were usually older and wiser men of a particular group.

2. This was also true in our scriptural examples.

Genesis 50:7 (NASB)

7 So Joseph went up to bury his father, and with him went up all the servants of Pharaoh, the elders of his household and all the elders of the land of Egypt,

Numbers 22:7 (NASB)

7 So the elders of Moab and the elders of Midian departed with the fees for divination in their hand; and they came to Balaam and repeated Balak’s words to him.

B. The “Elders of Israel” were referred to in the O.T. from the beginning!

Exodus 12:21 (NASB)

21 Then Moses called for all the elders of Israel and said to them, “Go and take for yourselves lambs according to your families and slay the Passover lamb.

II. Christian Elders of the Early Church.

A. The first place we see elders mentioned in the Early Church is in Jerusalem.

Acts 11:29-30 (NASB)

29 And in the proportion that any of the disciples had means, each of them determined to send a contribution for the relief of the brethren living in Judea. 30 And this they did, sending it in charge of Barnabas and Saul to the elders.

1. Another situation in which we find reference to elders is the Jerusalem Council.

Acts 15:2, 4, 6, 22, 23 (NASB)

2 And when Paul and Barnabas had [a]great dissension and debate with them, the brethren determined that Paul and Barnabas and some others of them should go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders concerning this issue.

4 When they arrived at Jerusalem, they were received by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they reported all that God had done with them.

6 The apostles and the elders came together to look into this matter.

22 Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men from among them to send to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas—Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas, leading men among the brethren,

23 and they sent this letter by them, “The apostles and the brethren who are elders, to the brethren in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia who are from the Gentiles, greetings.

2. It is noteworthy that church issues and doctrinal issues were sent to the Elders to decide upon.
3. In Jerusalem you see three (3) distinctive positions: “The church, apostles and elders.”
4. Notice how the Holy Spirit played a role in these decisions!

Acts 15:28 (NASB)

28 “For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these essentials:

5. The picture that’s painted in Acts 15 is one that shows the apostles and elders under the guidance of the Holy Spirit make decisions regarding ethical and doctrinal matters.
6. The elders appear once again in Acts 21:8 during Paul’s final visit to Jerusalem. Notice he always engaged “elders.”

Acts 21:18 (NASB)

18 And the following day Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present.

7. We know nothing about how the elders in Jerusalem emerged or put in place for guidance. Since it was the beginning stages of Christianity we can assume they simply “surfaced as leaders.”
- B. From the birthing of the Church and moving into Paul’s writings and instructions we see much more “definition and example” of the ministry of Elders.

III. The term “Elder” as a title for a church leader occurs explicitly three (3) times in the Pauline letters. (Although referenced many more times.)

1 Timothy 5:17-19 (NASB) (This is two verses.)

17 The elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching. 18 For the Scripture says, “You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing,” and “The laborer is worthy of his wages.” 19 Do not receive an accusation against an elder except on the basis of two or three witnesses.

Titus 1:5 (NASB)

5 For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city as I directed you,

- A. There are two more references in Acts for elders in the churches Paul related to and instructed.

Acts 14:21-23 (NASB)

21 After they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, 22 strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying, "Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God." 23 When they had appointed elders for them in every church, having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

1. Luke tells of the progression of the gospel in establishing the Kingdom of God and The Church he encourages discipling of the converts/believers.
2. He directs that structure and management of the churches are done through the "appointment" of elders.
3. This was done through seeking the Holy Spirit by "prayer and fasting." In other words, by God's direction!

- B. Notice some of the explanation and descriptions of the elders.

1 Thessalonians 5:12 (NASB)

12 But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction,

1. Elders are the ones "who labor" among the believers!
2. They are responsible before God for the care of believers!
3. The "instruction" of the believers is part of their responsibility!

- C. Throughout every scripture reference concerning the early Church Elders receive their position by appointment not election!

1. According to scripture, the election of servants is for deacons.

Acts 6:2-4 (NASB)

2 So the twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples and said, "It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables. 3 Therefore, brethren, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task. 4 But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word."

2. It seems that The Lord makes a distinction between how the Church is served! This is for the sake of serving the Body of Christ properly, not an arrogance of position.
3. The congregation was engaged when it concerned those who serve them on a “practical everyday” level.
4. The Holy Spirit was consulted through leadership concerning the appointment of elders.

Acts 20:28 (NASB)

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.
(episkopus-overseer, bishop, elder)

- D. For Paul, as you read the various epistles or scriptures, the title of elder, overseer, shepherd, pastor is the same in most cases.
 1. We should never squabble over the English words used to describe the person ministering to the churches. It's useless.
 2. Rather, the appointment, position and responsibilities that person has before God is of utmost importance!

Acts 20:27-32 (NASB)

27 For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God. 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. 29 I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; 30 and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. 31 Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears. 32 And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.

3. Any leadership position is serious business! God loves His Church!
4. The position of shepherd, elder and minister is VERY serious.
5. Remember, we are caring for someone else's Bride!