

Church 101

Lesson 5 Elders

PART I EXPLANATION

Introduction: In the New Testament church there are two offices that are clearly taught in the scriptures: bishops and deacons. (Phil. 1:1) The term elder is the primary term that is used in the scriptures to designate this first office. However, the term used most frequently today is “pastor”. There are a total of four different terms that are used to refer to this office: elder, pastor, bishop, and overseer. All of these terms are synonymous and refer to the same office and are used interchangeably in the same text. (Acts 20:17,28; Titus 1:5-7; I Peter 5:1-4) The reason that the various terms are used is to explain and emphasize the different aspects of this office and ministry.

The term elder is the Jewish term, which refers to the spiritual maturity of the individual. The term pastor is used to illustrate the nature of the work as similar to that of a shepherd of a flock. The terms bishop and overseer are the Greek terms where the same word is translated two different ways. Overseer obviously emphasizes the oversight required of the office; while the term bishop emphasizes the official position.

In each of the instances recorded in the New Testament, the usage of the office is always used in the plural sense. For example, Paul “ordained **elders** in every church”, he addressed the “**elders** of the church of Ephesus, he wrote to the “**bishops** and deacons” at Philippi, he told Titus to “ordain **elders** in every city” etc. This seems to indicate that the churches had more than one man filling this office. This practice is rarely practiced today. It has been replaced with the concept of “the pastor” or of a “senior pastor” along with “associate” or “assistant” pastors.

Ironically, we do not know of a single pastor in any of the churches of the NT and the terms “assistant” or “associate” pastor are never used. (Some claim that Timothy was “the pastor” at Ephesus. We would claim that he was sent by Paul to be an evangelist *to* and not a pastor *of* the church I Tim. 1:3 II Tim. 4:5) Instead the officers are always referred to in a plurality.

Another primary teaching of the scriptures regarding the office of a bishop is the importance of his calling and qualifications for the ministry. The appointment to this office must first begin with a saved man, followed by God calling him personally into the ministry. There must be a distinct, personal, and Divine calling into the ministry. (Col. 4:17; Acts 13:2,20:28; I Tim. 1:12) This is often confused today as merely being a desire or a burden, and the phrase “surrendered to the ministry” is often used. While each minister should be ‘surrendered to the ministry’ he must also be ‘called to the ministry’. Merely a desire or burden is not sufficient cause for any man to enter the ministry.

However, just because a person is ‘called to the ministry’ does not mean that he is immediately qualified for the ministry. The office of a bishop has clearly defined qualifications that are required of a person who aspires to this position. (I Timothy 3; Titus 1) The primary qualification and expectation is that the individual must be blameless, “as the steward of God”. Webster’s dictionary defines blameless as ‘without fault, innocent’. The Bible then lists specific areas that he must be blameless in: marriage, personal character, his home and children, spiritual maturity, and reputation.

Failure to meet any of these criteria means that they are not yet qualified to hold this sacred office, regardless of their calling, their ability, or the need. They must first be proven to

meet all of the qualifications else they are disqualified for the position. Once they have been proven, the Bible teaches that they must be ordained by the “laying on of the hands of the presbytery”. This is the recognition by other ordained men of validity of God’s calling and of the individuals qualification for the ministry. This serves to protect the ministry from renegades and great harm being done to the Lord’s churches.

The Bible warns elders to “lay hands suddenly on no man”, but to make diligent search into their fitness for the position. Sadly, many churches today have ignored or are not even aware of ordination being a necessity. Because of the high demand for someone to ‘fill the pulpit’ and the short supply of God called and qualified men, many churches have endorsed a preacher who has never been ordained and doesn’t come close to meeting the scriptural qualifications for the office. Ordaining men to this office who fail to meet these qualifications has had devastating affects upon the condition of the church and particularly the integrity of the office.

Definitions: *For English use the Webster’s 1828 Dictionary and copy all appropriate definitions for each word. For the Greek and Hebrew use a Strong’s Concordance and copy the definition. The Strong’s number is in parenthesis.*

English: **Eldership** -

Bishop -

Presbyter -

Pastor -

Greek:

(1985) **episkopos** *ep-is'-kop-os*

(4245) **presbuteros** *pres-boo'-ter-os*

(4166) **Poimen** *poy-mane'*

Hebrew:

(1419) **gadole** *gaw-dole'*

Quotation:

“I don’t believe any doctrine of Holy Scripture should be neglected or defined out of existence. Yet this is precisely what many churches have done to the doctrine of eldership. Even among churches that claim to practice eldership, the elders have been reduced to temporary church board members, which is quite contrary to the New Testament, apostolic model of pastoral eldership. Although such churches may have an eldership, it is not a biblical eldership...I am fully convinced that if reverent, accurate exposition of God’s Word will not convince Christian people of the nature and importance of biblical eldership, then nothing will.” Alexander Strauch

“Extremes and errors still exist today. On the one hand there are Baptist churches where scriptural leadership has abdicated itself in favor of a board of deacons or other officials, while others have adopted a quasi-Presbyterian model by implementing a collegiate or consensus-style rule by a body of church elders. At the other end of the spectrum there exist Baptist churches that are literally plagued by a dictatorial, domineering, “don’t-ever-question-the-‘man of God’” style of leadership that rule more through fear than by love.” Robert Sargent

“Offices in the church are of divine constitution. They can, therefore, be neither changed nor multiplied nor abrogated by human authority. Nor can the power belonging to a church office by divine appointment be increased or lessened by man....The government and spiritual oversight of the church. These functions are indicated in the designations of the office. Elder, derived from the Jewish usage, denotes a spiritual ruler. Bishop, from the Greek, designates one who has the oversight of others. Pastor or shepherd, signifies one who guides, feeds, and protects the flock.” Hezekiah Harvey

“The number of pastors in each church is not fixed by Scripture, but it is probably, alike from apostolic example and from history, that in the Apostolic age there were ordinarily several who together constituted the presbytery of the church.” Hezekiah Harvey

“The guidance of the communities was everywhere entrusted to a Council of elders.” Neander

“Yea, so far doth this cursed vice (pride) prevail, that in great congregations, which have need of the help of many preachers, we can scarcely, in many places, get two of equality to live together in love and quietness, and unanimously to carry on the work of God. But unless one of them be quite below the other in parts, and content to be so esteemed, or unless he be a curate to the other, and ruled by him, they are contending for precedency, and envying each other’s interest, and walking with strangeness and jealousy towards one another, to the shame of their profession, and the great wrong of the people. I am ashamed to think of it, that when I have been laboring to convince persons of public interest and capacity, of the great necessity of more ministers than one in large congregations, they tell me, they will never agree together. I hope the objection is unfounded as to the most; but it is a sad case that it should be true of any. Nay, some men are so far gone in pride, that when they had rather take all the burden upon themselves, though more than they can bear, than that any one should share with them in the honor, or that their interest in the esteem of the people should be diminished.” Richard Baxter

“Unholiness in a preacher’s life will either stop his mouth from reproving, or the people’s ears from receiving.” William Gurnall

The call into the ministry: “The inward call is not enough; to preserve order in the church, an outward call is necessary.” Thomas Watson

“No man may intrude into the sheepfold as an under-shepherd; he must have an eye to the chief Shepherd, and wait for his beck and command. Or ever a man stands forth as God’s ambassador, he must wait for the call from above; and if he does not so, but rushes into the sacred office, the Lord will say of him and others like him, “I sent them not, neither commanded them; therefore they shall not profit this people at all, saith the Lord.”...That hundreds have missed their way, and stumbled against a pulpit is sorrowfully evident from the fruitless ministries and decaying churches which surround us. It is a fearful calamity to a man to miss his calling, and to the church upon whom he imposes himself, his mistake involves an affliction of the most grievous kind. It would be a curious and painful subject for reflection – the frequency with which men in the possession of reason mistake the end of their existence, and aim at objects which they were never intended to pursue....When I think upon the all but infinite mischief which may result from a mistake as to our vocation for the Christian pastorate, I feel overwhelmed with fear lest any of us should be slack in examining our credentials; and I had rather that we stood too much in doubt, and examined too frequently, than that we should become cumberers of the ground....As well be a professor without conversion, as a pastor without calling. In both cases there is a name and nothing more.” CH Spurgeon

“To labor in the dark, without an assured commission, greatly obscures the warrant of faith in the Divine engagements; and the Minister, unable to avail himself of heavenly support, feels his “hands hang down, and his knees feeble” in his work. On the other hand, the confidence that he is acting in obedience to the call of God—that he is in His work, and in His way—nerves him in the midst of all difficulty, and under a sense of his responsible obligations, with almighty strength.” Charles Bridges

Confessions (Look up and read these articles)

New Hampshire Baptist Confession of Faith of 1833

Article XIII A New Testament Church

London Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689

Chapter 26 Of The Church - paragraphs 8-11

PART II EXPLORATION

Key Questions (*Answer in writing*)

1. What are the four names given to the position of leadership in a local church?

2. What are the two offices in the local church?

3. What are the five areas that a man must be blameless in to be qualified for the ministry?
4. What are four things that must happen before a man enters the ministry?
5. Besides God, who is responsible for ordaining men into the ministry? Why?
6. How does ordination prevent renegades from entering the ministry?
7. What does it mean to be called to the ministry?
8. What is meant by the husband of one wife in I Timothy 3?
9. What causes churches to endorse preachers who have never been ordained or are not qualified for the position?
10. What affect has ordaining non-called and unqualified men to the ministry had?

Key Scriptures:

Acts 14:23 Paul and Barnabas revisited and confirmed churches they had started and prior to leaving them they _____ elders in _____ church.

Acts 20:17 Paul called for the _____ of the individual _____ at Ephesus.

Acts 20:28 In his speech to the elders at Ephesus, Paul reminded them that it was the _____ that had _____ them _____ with the responsibility to _____ the church.

Romans 10:15 Paul asked the rhetorical question how a man could preach _____ he had been _____ to preach the gospel.

Ephesians 4:11 Christ has given offices to His church for their benefit. He gave the temporary offices of

_____ and _____ along with the perpetual offices of evangelists and _____ .

Philippians 1:1 Paul addressed the church at Philippi in three groups: _____ , along with the _____ and _____ used in the plural.

Colossians 4:17 The man Archippus was exhorted to fulfill the ministry he had _____ from the _____ .

I Thessalonians 5:12-13 The Thessalonian Christians were challenged to know _____ who were the spiritual officers of the church and to esteem them _____ because of the importance of their work.

I Timothy 1:12 Paul was thankful that Christ _____ him and _____ him into the ministry.

I Timothy 3:1-7 Here Paul explains to Timothy the qualifications for the _____ of a bishop. He must first of all be _____ in these areas. If he can't _____ his own house and children how will he be able to take _____ of the church? He must not be a _____ . He must have a good reputation with those that are _____ the church lest he fall into _____ and the snare of the _____ .

I Timothy 4:14 Timothy was ordained to the ministry by the _____ on of _____ of the _____ .

I Timothy 5:17-22 The elders that _____ well are worthy to be paid _____ if they labor in the _____ and in _____ . The scripture teaches that the laborer is worthy of his _____ . Timothy was warned not to listen to an _____ unless there were _____ or _____ witnesses. However, if there was sufficient evidence that the elder had sinned he was supposed to _____ him before the entire church, so that others would fear. He was warned against exercising _____ and from ordaining someone _____ because he would be a _____ of their sin.

II Timothy 4:5 Timothy was an _____ .

Hebrews 13:7 The Hebrew Christians were told to remember _____ who ruled over them and spoke the word of God to them.

Hebrews 13:17 They were also told to _____ them that ruled over them for _____ were watching for their _____ and would give _____ to God.

James 5:14 Those who were sick were told to call for the _____ of the _____ and have _____ pray over them.

I Peter 5:1-5 Peter exhorted the _____ among them to _____ the flock of God and to take the _____. He warned them against lording it over God's _____ instead of being _____ to the flock as under-shepherds to Christ the Chief Shepherd. He gave instruction for how the elders in a church were to relate to each other. The _____ elders were to _____ to the older elders and they were to be _____ to each other and to be clothed with _____. As shepherds of the flock they were to watch out for the _____ described as a _____ seeking to devour the sheep.

Key Chapter(s) (*Read daily and summarize in your own words the meaning of the chapter*):
Titus 1

I Peter 5

PART III EXPECTATION

Memory verse: I Corinthians 4:1-2

Personal definition: (*Write a definition in your own words*)

Elder -

Personal confession: (*Study the confessions and write your confession in your own words*)

Office of a bishop:

Meditation question: (*be prepared for discussion*)

How do you determine whether someone is genuinely called to the ministry?

Extra Credit:

Identify what a Presbyterian model of church leadership is and explain what is wrong with it.