

## THE OFFICE OF AN ELDER

### I. Definition of New Testament words used to describe the office of Elder

Three New Testament Greek words are used in connection with the same office:

- 1) **“Presbuteros”** - translated **“Elder”**
- 2) **“Episkopos”** - translated **“superintendent”** or **“bishop”**
- 3) **“Poimen”** - translated **“shepherd”** or often **“pastor”**

### II. An explanation of the words used to describe office of an Elder

A careful examination and understanding of these New Testament words will show that they refer to the same office, but describe different aspects or functions. This knowledge eliminates a New Testament basis for a hierarchical system among the clergy. These words, which have become the basis for historical titles, really refer to the same office of a New Testament Elder. Hence, the concept of bishop, presbyter, district overseer, an episcopal system or papal system, when used to rank clergy, does not have a biblical basis. Rather the words pastor, shepherd, elder, presbyter, overseer, bishop refer to the same New Testament office in apostolic usage as seen in the New Testament.

The English word **“elder”** specifically translates from **“presbuteros,”** but included in the umbrella term is the meaning of **“episkopos”** and **“poimen”** as well. The nouns presbuteros and episkopos are clearly used interchangeably in the New Testament, while poimen (used only once in the noun form) refers to the same office. The three words each describe different aspects of the office of an Elder, and in so doing, the words shed light on the specific function of a New Testament Elder.

- 1) **“Presbuteros”** relates more to the kind of person who holds the office (ie. Elder), while episkopos and poimen call attention to the function (ie, overseeing and shepherding) which the office requires of its holders.

The address to the Ephesian Elders in Acts 20:17-28, used all three words, and these words, presbuteros, episkopos and poimen (in the verb form), are regarded by Paul as descriptive of the same office. The same is clear in Titus 1:5-7, where presbuteros and episkopos are used interchangeably. For a discussion of the relationship between the two words (presbuteros and episkopos) in the first century see J.B. Lightfoot, St. Paul’s Epistle to the Philippians (Grand Rapids; Zondervan, 1953), pp. 191-201.

1) **“Presbuteros” (Contd.)** - Such is clear in passages where the verb form of poimen clearly is describing the function of Elders (eg. in I Peter 5:1-5, the Elders are told to “shepherd” (poimanate) the flock of God.) The word poimen similarly is used in conjunction with episkopos in Acts 20:28.

The Elder’s Handbook states (Christian Library Press, Grand Rapids, 1979, pg. 18):

*“It is clear that God willed from the origins of His Church that His people should be led by elders. It was thus in ancient Israel. It was so in New Testament times. It is recorded that, “they appointed Elders for them in every Church” (Acts 14:23), with reference to Paul and Barnabas. St. James takes Elders for granted: “Is any among you sick? Let him call the Elders of the Church”. James 5:14.*

*We note that the Elders are always spoken of as several. They were selected or elected from among the unordained believers, the laity. And the Reformation re-established lay rule of the Church through the Eldership.*

*The Church is theocratic, not democratic. She is ruled by a King. His scepter is the inspired Word. His agents are appointed according to that Word: preaching or teaching Elder, ruling Elder, and Deacon.*

*The New Testament uses two terms to designate the office of ruling Elder, namely “presbyter” and “bishop”. These terms are used interchangeably for the ruling (and also teaching) office, as in the account of St. Paul’s last meeting with the Elders of the Church at Ephesus: “He sent to Ephesus and called to him the presbyters of the Church” (Acts 20:17). Later, when these were come to him, Paul says, “Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you bishops: (Acts 20:28).*

Presbuteros denotes the age and maturity of the office-holder. Indeed, the very English translation “elder” conveys the idea of maturity and wisdom that only time can bring. However, in light of the fact that several prominent New Testament Elders were relatively young men, such as Timothy (I Timothy 4:12), we may deduce that the “age” and “maturity” of the office-holder related more closely to spiritual growth than physical maturity. In other words, the New Testament Elder was one who was mature and knowledgeable in the Faith, a gradual achievement which could only come with time. Functionally, an implication of such an observation is that the office of Elder was recognized by the church as the channel through which divine wisdom, direction and counsel were mediated to the church. In Acts 6:4, prayer and teaching to provide direction and spiritual growth for church were the primary responsibilities of the apostles (who were the first Elders of the church).

2). **“Episkopos,”** properly translated **“superintendent”** or **“bishop”**, calls attention to the needed administrative gifts of the Elder while presbuteros focuses on the development of the individual who holds the office. Elders are those who perform the specific role of “overseeing” or “superintending” the local church. Paul, in addressing the Philippian church, writes *“to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi with the bishops and deacons”* (Philippians 1:1). The Greek word for **“bishop”** is **“episkopos”** which means **“overseer”**.

3). Finally, **“poimen,”** literally translated **“shepherd”** and often **“pastor”**, connotes still another aspect of the office of Elder. Elders not only “oversee” the church, but as shepherds, they feed and protect the flock, (i.e. the church).

The word “pastor” occurs only once in the New Testament (Ephesians 4:11). However, the word translated “pastor” (poimen) is translated “shepherd” 17 times. In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word **“raah”** is translated **“pastor”** 8 times, **“herdman”** 7 times, and **“shepherd”** 62 times. A pastor then, is a divinely “given” the call to “shepherd”, “tend, feed and protect” God’s sheep. Our Lord Jesus Christ is *“the good Shepherd”* (John 10:11); *“the great Shepherd”* (Hebrews 13:20); and *“the chief Shepherd”* (I Peter 5:4). He is the perfect Pastor!

In addition to the three official titles (presbuteros, episkopos and poimen), which convey through connotation the role of Elder, the New Testament explicitly discusses the function of Elders in several other key passages. I Peter 5:1-5, establishes the two-fold primary responsibility of Elders. Elders “tend” (i.e. feed) the flock of God (vs. 2) and also “take the oversight” or “superintend” the local body of Christ, inasmuch as Elders have been given charge by God (vs. 2).

### **III. An explanation of role of Elders in the New Testament**

The New Testament seems to distinguish between Elders who “tend” (feed) the flock of God and Elders who “administrate” or “superintend” and “take the oversight” of the flock. (I Peter 5:2). We distinguish between two types of Elders:

1) **Teaching Elders** - pastor (shepherd, lead and teach) the flock. These would be those who are called to the ministry to minister the word of God, spiritually feeding the flock - ordained ministry that is an accepted ministry gift as found in Ephesians 4:11, and become pastors and teachers and serve the Body in that function. They are supported by the congregation and looked to for spiritual leadership.

1) **Teaching Elders (Contd.)** - Other teaching Elders may reside within the congregation and provide spiritual ministry, but are not supported by the congregation and not considered a pastor or associate pastor. They should be respected by the congregation as a teaching Elder. These will also sense a divine call to ministry and meet the same qualifications of Elder, but are not at this time in full-time ministerial position with regards to this congregation.

2) **Administrative or Ruling Elders** - are also called of God to their ministry or function, which is one of administration. They are laymen who serve on the Board of Elders and help to govern the flock of God. Where as Teaching Elders find their calling in the ministry gifts of Ephesians 4:11, these Administrative Elders find their motivation or calling in Romans 12:8, *“he that ruleth, (let him rule) with diligence.”* Administrative Elders should be called to their ministry, just as Teaching Elders are. The same seriousness of responsibility rests on each and they should meet the same qualifications, being equally dedicated to the task of caring for the flock. The difference is one of function, for the role that they fill in relationship to the people is different. However, they together are the spiritual overseers of the flock.

3). **Explanation of the difference** - this two-fold emphasis is seen in I Timothy 5:17, where the Scripture implies that certain Elders *“labor in the word and doctrine”*, and as such, devote more time to the ministry of teaching and preaching. The next verse teaches that such Elders should be remunerated accordingly, since their *“labor in preaching and teaching”* would probably preclude their working regularly in a secular profession.

This *“double honor, especially for those who labor in the word and doctrine”* refers to more than respect and recognition, but includes remuneration, because verse 18 quotes Deuteronomy 25:4, as the Old Testament principle of supporting the ministry. Verse 18 also refers to this principle as established by Jesus in Luke 10:7. Paul also quotes Deuteronomy 25:4 in I Corinthians 9:1-11, where he argues that the church has the responsibility to provide materially for its leader.

Thus, it appears that I Timothy 5:17 suggest two categories of Elders: (1) those whose time is spent primarily in the administration of the church; and (2) those who excel and labor in teaching and preaching in addition to administration. We may conclude that the second category is full-time ministers of the church (unlike the first group), and depend on the people of God for their subsistence. Hebrews 13:7; I Thessalonians 5:12; and I Timothy 3:2-5 reiterate the two-fold role of New Testament Elders. Hebrews 13:7 literally reads, *“Remember the ones who are leading you, who spoke to you the word of God.”* This passage, as well as the others mentioned, highlights the administrative and teaching roles of the Elders.

4) ***Plurality of Elders in the New Testament*** - We conclude from the study of the Acts of the Apostles and the various New Testament Epistles that first century Christian congregations were administered by a plurality of Elders. The New Testament never refers to the Elder of a local body. Numerous scriptures may be cited (i.e. Acts 14:23; 15:2; I Thessalonians 5:12; Hebrews 13:17; Philippians 1:1; James 5:14) as evidence that groups of Elders in individual churches prayerfully governed the affairs of the local church.

The idea of a “pastor” who functions as the autonomous leader of a local body is foreign to the New Testament and may be traced to the rapid development of church government subsequent to the first century New Testament church.

Too often plurality of Elders has been taken to mean plurality of headship without regard to the establishment of ministry gifts by Christ, the one true Head. In an effort to follow New Testament structure, some have seen the truth of plurality of Elders, and consequently proceeded to eliminate the role of pastor or shepherd in a local body. Plurality of Elders does not necessarily mean plurality of authority. Thus, one truth is substituted for another truth, and the result is still error. The whole truth seeks a balance to the entire teaching of the word of God. The following copy of a letter from noted author Jamie Buckingham graphically illustrates this truth:

#### **A New Perspective...by Jamie Buckingham**

*Every spiritual leader must eventually face the question of authority and responsibility.*

*Like many churches seeking to be led by the Spirit we've made some bad mistakes during our 11 year history. One of those was listening to incomplete teaching declaring not only the plurality of elders in a local church but the plurality of authority. Since we were a group which dared color outside the lines of tradition, we moved ahead proclaiming that our elders had equal authority. As a result, at one time this church had 5 spiritual heads--which by any standard is the definition of a monster.*

*It sounded good, but it didn't work. The reason it didn't work was it wasn't scriptural. God does not lay the mantle of apostolic authority on a council nor a congregation--but on a man. Yet in order to function that man must be responsible to those under him.*

*Looking back, I realize one of the reasons we fell into error was our reaction against abuse. Not only had we seen bishops, with a flick of their ecclesiastical pen, quench the Spirit in an entire diocese, but we had seen men of God voted out of their God-appointed charges by angry congregations who accused the pastor's wife of wearing shorts to the supermarket.*

*Gradually we have swung back on course. Authority does not rest in an extra-local bishop, nor in the sheep--but in the apostle, in the local flock. However, if that man of authority is not submitted, then his authority is only legal--not spiritual.*

*Over these last months of intense soul-searching, our 9 elders have concluded there can be but one spiritual head. However, I realize one of my reasons for backing away from that authority was my firm belief in submission. Now I understand the spiritual leader has authority only when he submits. The fact I am submitted to them gives the elders freedom to recognize apostolic authority.*

*“You are captain of this ship,” they have said. “Either hold us accountable or get off.” So, fellow saints and sailors, we’ve started swabbing the decks. We’ll be sharing with you shortly some of the big administrative changes we’re making. The Good Ship Zion needs to be a tight ship. Thank God for able crewmen.*

#### **IV. Selection of Elders in the New Testament**

*“Any office has its authority from its author. In a democracy political office has its authority from the people; they create and fill that office by way of constitution and political process. The people author the office, give its holder his authority and require an accounting of his stewardship. ‘Tis not so in the Church.”*

*“The Author of the office of Elder in the Church is God. Elders have their authority, therefore, from Him. They exercise their authority effectively only in conformity to His Word. God holds them accountable to Himself.” (p. 141, *The Elders Handbook*; Berghoef, DeKoster, Christian Library Press, 1979)*

The New Testament principle behind the selection of Elders seems to be “Elders appoint Elders”. New Testament Elders were not “elected” democratically by the local congregation, but were recognized and appointed by other existing Elders. They were:

**1) Recognized** - This means that the choosing of Elders is not a matter of selection from a list of potential candidates, nor was it done on a basis of popularity, friendship or obligation. Rather it was the recognition of a ministry, divinely given by a person who fulfilling this role in the sight of God and in the sight of the people. He is to be seen as an Elder fulfilling the ministry of leadership in that capacity, and meeting the qualifications.

**2) Appointed** - This appointment to office is then a recognition of what God has set apart for this ministry. God-called men with this ministry are then set apart with prayer to now perform the function to which God has called them. They now serve the congregation which receives this Elder as a God-ordained ministry to this Body.

This is the scriptural pattern as seen in the Word. Jesus really began the process of selection by choosing 12 men to follow Him, and eventually to carry on the ministry of the Church which began at Pentecost. Later, as the Holy Spirit prepared others for Eldership ministry, the reputed pillars of the church ratified or recognized their call by appointing other ministries, Elders and Deacons, to their respective ministries.

Even the Apostle Paul, who emphasized that his ministry was received “*not of man, neither by man but by Jesus Christ*” (Galatians 1:1), received the recognition and endorsement of fellow Elders (Galatians 1:18, 19; Galatians 2:7-9).

Timothy officially became an Elder only when the presbytery (I Timothy 4:14) (i.e. groups of Elders in his home area) recognized his calling and commissioned him through he laying on of hands. Later he, as well as Titus, were instructed to ordain Elders in the areas to which they were sent to minister (I Timothy 1:3; 3:1; Titus 1:5).

In the Acts, Paul and Barnabas would preach to a city on a missionary journey, leave the baby church to grow in ministry as they moved on to further areas. They later returned to those churches to ordain Elders (Acts 14:21-23), recognizing the ministry that God had placed in certain ones during the intervening time of development. Paul exhorts Timothy to “lay hands suddenly on no man” (I Timothy 5:22) for Elders are to be “not a novice” (I Timothy 3:6), but men of spiritual maturity, called and equipped of God for the ministry to which they are called. Then they are to be recognized and appointed to their office by fellow Elders.

Thus, it seems that New Testament Elders were first called by God (Acts 20:28; Ephesians 4:11), and then were recognized by the existing Eldership of a local Body. On the basis of the limited information given in the New Testament with regard to Eldership selection, it appears that local congregations entrusted their Elders with the responsibility of choosing additional Elders who then serve the people. Please note this was not done arbitrarily, but was in keeping with several factors:

- 1) The call of God must be evident
- 2) The qualifications must be met
- 3) Time must be allowed to assure God’s leading in the matter
- 4) The best interests of the people and their will, welfare and consensus

should be evident for Elders rule must be sensitive to the needs and spiritual well-being of the people (I Peter 5:1-5; Acts 20:28). The younger (in maturity and faith) submit to the elder (v.5), but the Elders feed and take oversight as loving shepherds who are example to the flock, not as “*lords over God’s heritage*”.

Therefore, it is inconceivable that an Elder would be selected against the will of the congregation. The responsibilities he is to assume and the qualifications he must meet preclude any ill-will or contention of spirit in assuming his office. Without the love and respect of the Body, and prospective Elder should remove himself, if he does not have the blessing of the people. The demanding Eldership qualifications and role assured that all Elders selected would be respected and accepted, both socially and spiritually by the Body.

## **V. Qualification of Elders**

The qualifications for Eldership were given by Paul to Timothy for the purpose of evaluating those who seem to be called to this ministry and serve as guidelines for the selection of Elders. The detailed lists given in I Timothy 3:1 and Titus 1:6-8 are correlated and here expounded on to serve as a description of the role of Elder.

## **VI. God sets the Qualifications:**

It is not surprising that for the office He has instituted, God sets the qualifications for admission and retention there. These qualifications are explicit in His Word. The Elder candidate must bear them in mind as he contemplates a call or appointment to this office. Likewise, the congregation should be sure of the qualities they should expect to see in their Elders.

The demands laid by the Scriptures upon all Christians are laid also upon the Eldership - both teaching and ruling Elders. Through Paul's letters to Timothy and to Titus, the Lord sets down further specific requirements for appointment, either as teaching (preaching) or ruling (administrative) Elder. You will notice in his first letter to Timothy, Paul speaks of the Elder as "bishop", that is, as overseer. In writing to Titus, the inspired apostle used the terms "Elder" and "bishop" interchangeably, as we have observed before.

These are high qualifications. They set guidelines for the knowledge of the congregation and for the Eldership in setting goals for their own conduct. As these qualifications are considered the following quote from The Elders Handbook, (Grand Rapids, 1979) seems especially fitting:

*"The Elder must avoid, here, both a false pride and a mistaken humility:*

*1. **A false pride:** do not too quickly suppose that your appointment by the Spirit, through the congregation, to your high office endorses all your behavior as fully in accord with the Spirit's requirements. What the Lord sees in you is the aspiration to become, year by year, more of what He expects His elders to be - this is why He gives the guidelines. What the Spirit inspired Paul to set down regarding the elder serves as a measure for mutual watchfulness by the eldership, and by the congregation. You will serve the Lord and His Church best so long as you recognize that, in meeting His standards, you have not arrived but are on the way. God will bless that attitude.*



2. ***A mistaken humility:*** do not refuse nomination to the eldership if, in the judgment of the congregation you merit that honor, by letting Paul's high measure of the office discourage you. Recall the comfort of the Psalmist: "As a father pities his children, so the Lord pities those who fear Him. For He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust" (Psalms 103:13-14). He has observed in you the will to do His will, not the perfect doing of it. So long as your aspiration is to be, as best you can, what the Lord requires of stewards though you may know, as perhaps others do not, of your shortcomings."

Eldership qualifications fall into three categories: **(1) personal requirements; (2) family qualifications, and (3) ministerial requirements.** The qualifications in this list are qualities which are prerequisite to Eldership. A person who is seriously deficient in any of the Eldership qualifications is necessarily prohibited from Eldership until such a time as the weakness is corrected. While there may be isolated instances in the life of an Elder when his actions do not reflect the qualities set forth in I Timothy 3 and Titus 1 (i.e., Peter's hypocrisy at Antioch - see Galatians 2), he must generally manifest those special attributes in his life which are indicative of the Eldership office.

One is justified in interpreting the lists of Eldership qualities in I Timothy 3 and Titus 1 to pertain to the quality of the person's lifestyle following conversion. Indeed, it is the very act of conversion and the process of sanctification which accomplished such quality of character, lifestyle, etc. It stands to reason, then, that an Elder may have been a notorious sinner (drunkard, intemperate, immoral, etc.) prior to his confrontation with Jesus Christ (i.e., Paul was a zealous persecutor of Christians). The test of a transformed life is the demonstrated excellence of Christian character that such a person exhibits after regeneration.

<b>PERSONAL</b>	<b>I Timothy 3</b>	<b>Titus 1</b>
1. Above reproach .....	3:2	1:6
2. Temperate (vigilant) .....	3:2	
3. Sensible (master of himself) .....	3:2	1:8
4. Good behavior (dignified) .....	3:2	1:8
5. Hospitable .....	3:2	1:8
6. Sober (not addicted to wine) .....	3:3	1:7
7. Gentle (not violent) .....	3:3	1:7
8. Not quarrelsome .....	3:3	1:7
9. Patient .....	3:3	
10. Not self-willed .....		1:7
11. Not a lover of money .....	3:3	1:7
12. A lover of goodness .....		1:7
13. Holy .....		1:8

## **FAMILY**

- |                                    |     |     |
|------------------------------------|-----|-----|
| 1. Husband of one wife .....       | 3:2 | 1:6 |
| 2. Good manager of household ..... | 3:4 | 1:6 |

## **MINISTERIAL**

- |                               |     |     |
|-------------------------------|-----|-----|
| 1. Teacher/teachable .....    | 3:2 | 1:9 |
| 2. Not a recent convert ..... | 3:6 |     |
| 3. Good reputation .....      | 3:7 |     |

### **Explanation of Qualifications of Elders**

#### **I. Personal**

##### **1. Above Reproach (blameless)** (I Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:6)

The life an Elder must be above reproach. An unassailable character will command respect as an Elder. Any accusation should be without foundation and proved to be false when investigation is necessary. He should present no obvious defect of character or conduct, in his past or present life, which the malicious, whether within or without the church, can exploit to his discredit.

##### **2. Temperate (vigilant)** (I Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:8)

The Elder is to be filled with spiritual and moral earnestness. He is not given to excess, but moderate, well-balanced, calm, careful, steady and sane. This pertains to his physical, moral, mental and social tastes and habits. He is to be ever watchful (vigilant) to maintain Christian character and testimony.

##### **3. Sensible (sober)** (I Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:8)

Serious thinking. The self-controlled or sensible man is the man of sound mind. He is consistently level-headed or clear-headed, capable of sound decisions. Not swayed by sudden impulses, fads or public pressure.

##### **4. Good Behavior - Dignified** (I Timothy 3:2)

Inner moral excellence and outward orderly behavior that is respected, adding dignity to the office.

##### **5. Hospitable** (I Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:8)

An openness to share; giving of ourselves to others, being open to receive those in need, taking the leadership in setting an example of hospitality as the Body shares together. Many Christians were banished, persecuted and rendered homeless. In

Acts the church broke bread together and gave of their means in sharing with the Body and its needs. (See also Romans 12:13).

**6. No Drunkard** (I Timothy 3:3; Titus 1:7)

A command like this may sound strange, but it must be remembered that in Bible lands wine was and is a common beverage. In keeping with the concept of self-control and temperance, an Elder was not to be a drunkard or “*one who lingers (or sits long) besides his wine.*” He is not to be a slave to wine. He was to be moderate in all things.

**7. Gentle (not violent - “no striker”, KJV)** (I Timothy 3:3; Titus 1:7)

An Elder must not be a violent man, one who is “*ready with his fists.*” “*The weapons of our warfare are not carnal.*” “*No striker*” means “*not to strike back.*”

**8. Not Quarrelsome but Forbearing and Peaceable** (I Timothy 3:3 Amp.; Titus 1:7) (Not a brawler, not soon angry) These terms refer to not being contentious or quarrelsome, not getting into arguments or stirring up strife. Elders should endeavor to radiate a spirit of peace.

**9. Patient** (I Timothy 3:3)

To offset the pressures of the office, an Elder cannot be short tempered, quick to demand or insist on having his own way immediately. He must exhibit the fruit of the Spirit and patiently seek to accomplish the will of God.

**10. Not Self-Willed** (Titus 1:7)

An Elder shall not be stubborn or have his will dominated by the self life. The attitude shall not be pre-determined by his own mind but be objective so as to be able to make decisions according to the will of God.

**11. Not a Lover of Money** (I Timothy 3:3; Titus 1:7)

“*Not a lover of money--insatiable for wealth and ready to attain it by questionable means.*” (Amp. Bible) Money must not be the motivation behind his decision making. This word contains the thought of one who was trusted to keep the community purse and would be responsible to administer charitable relief.

**12. Lover of Goodness** (Titus 1:8)

Appreciate that which is good, right and stand for full development of that which is good and right in the world, the church and in men. A man of noble principles.

**13. Holy (devout)** (Titus 1:8)

Pure, a reflection of the nature of God, without guile or deceit, being a participant in the process of sanctification. Exemplary in his relations both to his fellow-man and to God.

## **II. Family**

### **1. “The Husband of One Wife” (I Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:6)**

This is restrictive, not imperative. It does not mean that an overseer must be married, but that if he is married, he must have only one wife, rather than reflect the heathen in that day of polygamy. The literal translation is “a man of one woman” in other words one who is not promiscuous in his attitude or behavior; a secure family man who loves, appreciates and relates to his own wife and whose conduct with members of the opposite sex is above reproach.

### **2. Good Manger of Household (I Timothy 3:4,5; Titus 1:6)**

The head of his household who has established principles as to a godly home. His children, even if wayward and rebellious, know the principles for which his parents stand, and that this home is structured according to Biblical standards. The children should therefore, respect the stand taken by the parents as this household has the reputation of being a godly Christian home. The Elder rules his household well, that is, he lays down scriptural principles, is sincere, “*with gravity*”, and is consistent, which should earn the respect of his children.

The father’s **FIRMNESS** makes it **ADVISABLE** for a child to obey; his **WISDOM** makes it **NATURAL** for a child to obey; his **LOVE** makes it a **PLEASURE** for a child to obey.

## **III. Ministerial**

### **1. An Apt Teacher (I Timothy 3:3; Titus 1:9)**

*“He must hold fast to the sure and trustworthy Word of God as he was taught it, so that he may be able both to give stimulating instruction and encouragement in sound (wholesome) doctrine, and to refute and convict those who contradict and oppose it--showing the wayward their errors.” (Titus 1:9 Amp.)*

An Elder must be firmly grounded in the Word of God and be able to explain or instruct those needing instruction, correction or edification. The ruling Elders do not need to function as a teaching Elder, that is in front of a class, but they should be able to instruct one in the Word, answer problems that arise, be grounded in scriptural principles so as to be able to make scriptural decisions, to answer any problems or need that arises, and thus, they are “*apt, or able, to teach*” anyone Christian principles based on the Word. He must hold firm to the sure Word as taught.

2. **Not a Recent Convert** (I Timothy 3:6)

This means “*not one newly planted*”, either as a newcomer to the faith, young in Word or experience, or a newcomer to the Body. Elders should be established, respected, trusted men, spiritually knowledgeable in the Word with experience and insight. “*He must not be a beginner in the faith, for fear of his becoming conceited and sharing the devil’s downfall.*” (J.B. Philips)

“The temptation to promote recent converts, especially ones of social rank and influence, must have been great in a youthful church like Ephesus, but the dangers are obvious”. (J.N.D. Kelly)

3. **Thought of Well by Outsiders (Respected)** (I Timothy 3:7)

An Elder must be known even to worldly people, outsiders with whom he has dealings, as a man of character, a man against whom it is not possible to level any just charges of wrongdoing. He is a respected person in the community as well as at home and church.

**Responsibility of Elders - the 7 Fold Work of the Elder**

1. **“Feed”**

**Acts 20:28** “*Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the FLOCK, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you OVERSEERS, to FEED (shepherd, that is, tend and feed and guide - Amp.) the church of God...*”

**I Peter 5:2** “*FEED THE FLOCK of God which is among you, taking the OVERSIGHT thereof...*”

**JBP** “*I urge you then to see that your FLOCK OF GOD is properly FED and cared for.*” The word translated “*feed*” is the verb form of the word translated “*shepherd*” and beside feeding includes “*protection, regulation, and the whole care of a shepherd for his flock.*”

**AMP** “*Tend - nurture, guard, guide and fold - the flock of God that is (your responsibility).*”

The responsibility of the “OVERSEER SHEPHERD” is a great one. He must not only “Shepherd” EACH sheep, but also tend the “WHOLE FLOCK.” Probably all that we are going to consider in the seven-fold work of the “overseer” is comprehended in this word “shepherd”.

In the matter of “*feeding the flock*” great care must be taken in providing the proper food. “*The sincere milk of the Word*” must be given the “*newborn babes*” (I Peter 2:2), while “*strong meat*” must be served “*to them that are of full age (full grown men)*”

(Hebrews 5:14). It is to be remembered that an Elder must be “*apt to teach*” (I Timothy 3:2). “*They are to labor in the Word and Doctrine.*” (I Timothy 5:17)

## 2. “Lead”

**Hebrews 13:7, 17, 24** - “Never forget your LEADERS, who first spoke to you the Word of God. Remember, how they lived, and imitate their faith. Obey your RULES and recognize THEIR AUTHORITY. They are like men standing guard over your spiritual good, and they have great responsibility. Try to make their work a pleasure and not a burden - by so doing you will help not only them but yourselves. Greetings to all your LEADERS and all your church members.”

**AMP** (vs. 17) “*OBEY YOUR SPIRITUAL LEADERS and submit to them - continually recognizing their authority over you; for they are constantly keeping watch over your souls and guarding your spiritual welfare, as men who will have to render an account (of their trust). (Do your part to ) let them do this with gladness, and not with sighing and groaning, for that would not be profitable to you (either).*”

Such leaders are:

- a). Those who “*speak to you the Word of God*”
- b). “*Live their faith*”
- c). “*Stand guard over your spiritual good*”
- d). “*Have great responsibility*”
- e). “*Are constantly keeping watch over your souls and guarding your spiritual welfare*”
- f). “*Will have to render an account (of their trust)*”

“The flock“ should:

- a). “*Obey your spiritual leaders*”
- b). “*Submit to them*”
- c). “*Recognize their authority over you*”
- d). “*Try to make their work a pleasure and not a burden*”

### 3. “Rule”

The word translated “*rule*” in the following passages means “*to stand before, i.e., (in rank) to preside: maintain, be over, rule.*”

**I Timothy 5:17** “*Let the elders that RULE will be counted worthy of double honor, especially they who labor in the word and doctrine.*”

**I Thessalonians 5:12,13** (Amp) “*Now also we beseech you, brethren, get to know those who labor among you - recognize them for what they are, acknowledge and appreciate and respect them all - your leaders who are OVER (same word as “rule” in I Timothy 5:17) you in the Lord, and those who warn and kindly reprove and exhort you. And hold them in very high and most affectionate esteem in (intelligent and sympathetic) appreciation of their work.*”

**Romans 12:8** “*He that RULETH, with diligence*”.

**JBP** “*Let the man who wields authority think of his responsibility.*”

### 4. “Be Examples”

**I Peter 5:3** “*Neither as being lords over God’s heritage, but being ENSAMPLES to the flock.*”

**Amp** “*Not (as arrogant, dictatorial and overbearing persons) domineering over those in your charge, but BEING EXAMPLES - patterns and models of Christian living - to the flock.*”

It is instructive to note how the Word of God maintains the balance of truth. In our last point we saw the Elders “ruling”. Taken by itself, this might encourage “arrogant dictatorial and overbearing persons.” Our present scripture, however, forbids this sort of thing. There must be authority, but it must be exercised properly.

### 5. “Care”

**Timothy 3:5** “*If a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he TAKE CARE of the church of God?*”

The meaning of such “*care*” is inferred in the preceding verse. The Elder “*must have proper authority in his own household, and be able to control and command the respect of his children*” (JBP). What he is required to do on the domestic level he must be able to do on the church level. A responsible father is concerned with the over-order,

atmosphere, health, and general well-being of his family. So the Elder is to have the same kind of concern for the church over which he shares the oversight.

## 6. “Admonish”

**I Thessalonians 5:12** “*Know them which labor among you, and are over you in the Lord, and ADMONISH you.*”

**Amp** “... those who warn and kindly reprove and exhort you.” The word translated “admonish” means “*to put in mind; call attention to, i.e. (by implication) to caution or reprove gently, warn.*” Paul is the only one to use the word in the New Testament. It is used for:

- a) Christians admonishing one another (Colossians 3:16; Romans 15:14)
- b) Elders generally admonishing the church (Acts 20:31; I Corinthians 4:14; Colossians 1:28)
- c) Elders specifically admonishing those who are sinning (I Thessalonians 5:14; II Thesalonians 3:14,15)

## 7. “Pray for the sick”

**James 5:14,15 (Amp)** “*Is any among you sick? He should call in the church elders The spiritual guides. And THEY SHOULD PRAY OVER HIM, anointing him with oil in the Lord’s name. And the prayers (that is) of faith will save him that is sick, and the Lord will restore him; and if he has committed sins, they shall be forgive.*”

Here we are considering a body of people called “the church” with properly qualified “elders”. The one who is requesting prayer is of the church being referred to as “one among you”. This is physical healing ministered by God through Elders as they obey “the apostles” doctrine on the matter.

### **The Relationship of Elders to the People**

This ministry of Elders is done in relationship to the people of God — the local flock over which the Holy Spirit has made them overseers. Their duties are reflected from the following aspects:

#### 1). **Negative:**



No Elders shall gather persons in loyalty to himself, but server unselfishly to support the ministry of his office, the church and the Pastor with whom he is called to work. Any gathering of a group unto himself, personally, shall immediately disqualify an Elder from further service to the Body, and he shall be relieved of the office and all attendant duties.

An Elder shall do nothing to divide the body. He shall not be subversive--having the spirit of Absalom, as in II Sam. 15:2-6. He shall not take sides in issues that would tend to divide the Body. He should not be critical, two-faced or accusing, but administer his office in an uplifting, wholesome and respectable fashion.

**2). Positive:**

The Elder should give himself to the Word and prayer, taking the oversight of the flock. He should pray for, counsel and teach, serve and visit as the body needs his service. He should set an example in attendance, participation and support, being sensitive to the needs of others. He should wholeheartedly support the pastoral ministry, church policy and financial needs. It is his responsibility to promote unity and harmony and help to quite and dissension within the body.

**3). Commitment to Elders:**

As the people of the “flock” commit themselves to the “care and leading” of overseers, it is necessary that the overseers must first commit themselves to the people. Therefore, each Elder shall make a commitment of himself to his office, to the people of God and to the ministry with whom he serves. This should be done before assuming office and re-affirmed periodically.

An open letter from the Pastor to all prospective ministries and officers with whom he works including staff, Elders, Deacons and Deaconesses.

Dear Brothers and Sisters:

According to the structure of our church as found in our church constitution, which is patterned after the New Testament principle, the government of the church, with its power and authority, rests principally with its leadership. If you are chosen to serve the congregation in an official capacity, you will have tremendous responsibility and authority - especially Elders. For this reason, it is absolutely imperative that all persons who stand in a place of ministry and hold an office, be God's choice, and be in total agreement with the principles set forth in the Word regarding the Body of Christ. They must be men and women of calling, convictions, and dedication.

The scriptures admonish us to judge ourselves so as to not be judged. We must all give account to God for our actions as well as our ministry. Therefore, it behooves each one, from Pastor to Elder to Deacon to Deaconess, to carefully, prayerfully and candidly look at his call, commitment and commission to serve. "One thing is required in stewards that a man be found faithful." (I Corinthians 4:2)

You will be known in the congregation by the office you hold. Your candidacy may be presented before the congregation for their witness as to your call and ministry.

Therefore, you are asked to prayerfully and seriously examine your heart, your life, your motives and your relationship with God and the church--as well as the world. Please evaluate yourself so that we together might ascertain God's will for this assembly in relationship to your ministry and office; being assured that those who are entrusted with responsibility are themselves very trustworthy.

Periodically, (recommended annually) each office of the church, including Pastor, will be asked to re-evaluate his commitment and relationship to this assembly and the call of God. It is expected that once a person is qualified to serve the Body of Christ he will continually seek to remain in a spirit of openness, love and unity.

This evaluation is to be prayerfully considered by the pastors and Elders in their effort to help provide continuous direction for the assembly. Please consider willingly, objectively and honestly your life in relationship to each of these areas. We stand before God first and foremost, and before men as the anointed of the Lord.

The following 10 areas of our life and call are very revealing, but if we are to work together as one in the Body of Christ, we must be open one with another, share our hurts and our failures, as well as our blessings and absolute necessity. Any area that you feel needs more explanation or development, please come to us openly for consultation, that we “may grow up into the perfect man to the measure of the stature of Christ.”

Thank you for your cooperation and willingness to serve, even if it means submitting your life as an open book to your brethren in Christ. “And herein do I exercise myself to have always a conscience, void of offence toward God and toward men.” (Acts 24:16)

Please feel free to respond to me openly, even in writing if you desire, in regard to your evaluation of these 10 major areas. Then, please make your pledge of commitment and let us, as one voice, serve God acceptably, for the benefit and edification of His Body.

May we have a long-lasting and beautiful relationship in serving God together.

In the Spirit of unity,

Your Pastor

## 10 Areas of Self Evaluation

(Please do not try to answer each question on paper, but honestly answer before the Lord as you measure yourself in each area.)

I will examine myself in relationship to:

### **1. My Scriptural Qualifications:**

- a. Please check the explanation for each of the 18 qualifications noting your strong and weak areas.
- b. Determine to strengthen the weak areas to be to the glory of God.
- c. Consult with the Pastor if any significant deficiency is noted which might impair your effective service.

### **2. My Call of God to This Ministry:**

- a. Do you feel “motivated” by the Spirit for this ministry?
- b. Have you grown in experience and conviction to serve in this place at this time?
- c. What assurance do you sense in prayer that God is leading in this way?
- d. Can you openly accept the idea of being identified to the people as an office holder in this capacity?
- e. Do you feel you stand before God as His minister?

### **3. My Spiritual Experience:**

I have followed the Lord in each experience as He has led. Think back in your life to review His dealings and how long it has been since:

Salvation? \_\_\_\_\_ Baptism in Spirit? \_\_\_\_\_

Process of sanctification? \_\_\_\_\_ Water Baptism? \_\_\_\_\_

Beginning ministry and growth development? \_\_\_\_\_

### **4. My Commitment to this Local Body of Christ at Fountaingate Christian Assembly:**

- a. I have been coming to Fountaingate Christian Assembly for \_\_\_\_\_ years?
- b. I am wholeheartedly with the church and its Pastor, and can support the ministry here completely without reservation.
- c. I feel led of God that this is my body, where I fit, I belong and I serve.
- d. I will faithfully attend and support the church.

**5. My Association with my Family:**

- a. I have taken a stand for godliness, and everybody knows where I stand in my Christian convictions.
- b. *“As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”*
- c. My example is such as to be respected.
- d. I endeavor to exhibit the fruit of the Spirit in my actions and relationships.
- e. I love my wife (husband) and children and try to show it.
- f. As far as I know, our family is in scriptural order.

**6. My Reputation in the World:**

- a. Our neighbors and business associates know of our Christian stand and commitment.
- b. I am above reproach and completely honest in all my business dealing.
- c. I am financially responsible and not excessively in debt.
- d. My word can be depended on.
- e. As far as I know, there is no area of accusation of my life and business dealing which could bring reproach on the cause of Christ.

**7. My Victory in My Personal Life and Habits:**

- a. I have renounced all sinful and worldly habits, having been cleansed of past defilements.
- b. I am free from all immorality and uncleanness, having presented my body to the Lord and His service.
- c. I stand for holiness and a life above reproach.

**8. My Life of Prayer, the Word and Worship:**

Recognizing the importance and need of these, I covenant to continually develop:

- a. My prayer life, interceding for the church, the people and the ministry.
- b. My personal Bible study and knowledge of the Word, having personal devotions and family altar as often as possible.
- c. My participation and leadership in corporate praise and worship.  
As a leader, I will try to set an example in these matters.

**9. My Relationship with other Members of the Body:**

- a. I harbor no ill-will or hard feeling toward any other members of the Body of Christ.
- b. This includes past problems, grudges and unforgiveness, as well as present associations. There is nothing between me and another member of the Body, so that I feel I can openly pray for and counsel with any member of the Body.
- c. My heart is clean and open before God and His people.

**10. Love...”the greatest of these is love”:**

I can honestly say I have a love for the Body. The Pastor, the staff, and all the ministries in the church, and I long to reach the world with the message of Jesus Christ. I will pray for and always remain in openness and love for my fellow-laborers in the church, and everything I do shall be motivated by love.

**Pledge of Commitment**

If chosen, I pledge myself to work untiringly and unselfishly for the good of this people.

I will work in whole-hearted cooperation with the Pastor and other leadership in this assembly to see the work of God prosper.

I will be unselfish in my decisions and opinions; always seeking the mind of Christ for His people and their spiritual welfare, which shall be more important than my personal wishes.

If, for any reason, at any time I am unable to continue this pledge, either for personal incompatibility with the principles and practices of the church and its leadership; for unrepentant sin or repeated failure in my life; a doubt of the call of God to this office; or merely a lack of time; strength or energy, I will most naturally and willingly request to be removed from this office of leadership and relinquish my place of authority. As long as I remain in office, my highest goal is to do His work in regard to this assembly, its Pastor and other leaders.

With all good conscience before God, I am prepared to serve this congregation (or continue to serve as) as a \_\_\_\_\_  
(Please write in your office: teaching Elder or ruling Elder).

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

After prayerful evaluation, I do not feel I should serve in this capacity at this time.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Should an affirmation by the active membership be desired, a form similar to this may be used. Sufficient time should be allowed for prayerful consideration between the presentation and the calling of a ministry. Sufficient time should be allowed for prayerful consideration between the presentation and the calling of a ministry.

**FOUNTAINGATE CHRISTIAN ASSEMBLY  
ELDER AFFIRMATION**

**PLEASE CHECK ONE OF THE FOLLOWING:**

\_\_\_\_\_ After prayer and careful consideration I affirm  
\_\_\_\_\_ to serve as an Elder

\*An Elder must be an active member of this church, and be willing to stand for affirmation, following an interview with a member of the eldership of this church

\_\_\_\_\_ I have reservations about \_\_\_\_\_  
serving as an Elder for the following reasons:  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ I am not well enough acquainted to participate in this affirmation.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Your Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date