

Reference: VARIOUS

Church: GRACE

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The government of the church - elders

Purpose: To show the Biblical pattern for the government of the church by a plurality of elders. To look at the qualifications elders must have and how they are appointed.

1. Introduction

Continuing the series on the church

Now come to the first of our sessions on its government

How does the Bible say that the church should be governed?

Does God leave it to us to decide?

The church is so precious to God that it cannot be so

We do find clear indications in Scripture

We find “elders”, “overseers” and “deacons”

2. “Elders”, “Overseers” and “Bishops”

Acts 20:17 From Miletus he (Paul) sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church.

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.

Elder = presbuteros

Overseer = episkopos – also rendered as “bishop”

Elders are referred to as overseers in this passage

So elders are overseers are bishops - interchangeable

3. Plurality

Elders and overseers in relation to church are always plural

Acts 14:23 When they had appointed elders for them in every church (*Antioch, Lystra, Iconium*), having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

Titus 1:5 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,

James 5:14 Is anyone among you sick? Then he must call for the **elders** of the church and they are to pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord;

Singular only used for qualifications of an elder

Or when Peter, John refer to themselves as elders

Conclude that local churches should have more than one elder

Why would this be beneficial?

They bring a variety of gifts – blend

Two heads are better than one

Mutual support and encouragement

Prevents the minister being set on a pedestal

4. Qualifications

1 Timothy 3:1-7 It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do. 2 An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, 3 not addicted to wine or pugnacious, but gentle, peaceable, free from the love of money. 4 He must be one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity 5 (but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?), 6 and not a new convert, so that he will not become conceited and fall into the condemnation incurred by the devil. 7 And he must have a good reputation with those outside the church, so that he will not fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.

Titus 1:5-9 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, 6 namely, if any man is above reproach, the husband of one wife, having children who believe, not accused of dissipation or rebellion. 7 For the overseer must be above reproach as God's steward, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not addicted to wine, not pugnacious, not fond of sordid gain, 8 but hospitable, loving what is good, sensible, just, devout, self-controlled, 9 holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict.

Draw out the qualifications from these two passages:

4.1. **A man**

Should go without saying but not today

4.2. **The desire**

A feature of the call. Not pressed men!

4.3. **Above reproach**

Blameless; avoiding even the appearance of evil

Not giving cause for scandal

4.4. **The husband of one wife**

Not polygamous was primary intent of the day

Does it mean an elder must be married?

Certainly must be happily married!
May be advantages for an elder to be married
Or at least for married elders to be part of the plural eldership
Would you exclude someone who is divorced & remarried?
Depends on whether the divorce was legitimate

4.5. Temperate

Means control over legitimate appetites
He must control them and not *vice-versa*

4.6. Prudent

Self controlled – not rash or hasty in judgments
Not making ill-considered decisions

4.7. Respectable

Modest, courteous and orderly.
Inoffensive in terms of etiquette etc.

4.8. Hospitable

This is expected of all believers
Romans 12:13 contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality.
Hebrews 13:2 Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it.
1 Peter 4:9 Be hospitable to one another without complaint.

Elders are to lead by example

4.9. Able to teach

Not necessarily public ministry – Titus 1:9

4.10. Not addicted to wine

Not drinking for the sake of it - Not drinking to excess
Applies by extension to other appetites

4.11. Not pugnacious but gentle

No verbal or physical violence. Patient
Also take account of individual's situation in deciding approach

4.12. Peaceable

Promote peace and unity in the church
Not quarrels and divisions
Blessed are the peacemakers

4.13. Free from the Love of Money

Matthew 6:24 No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other.
You cannot serve God and wealth.

No surprise this must be true of an elder

4.14. Managing his household well

Firm but tender - ensuring proper respect at all times
Must children be Christians?
May present a few problems – wait for them to be saved?
Also may suggest that parents responsible for the children's faith
Gill commented as follows:
At most the phrase can only intend that they should be brought up in the faith, in the principles, doctrines and ways of Christianity.

4.15. Not a recent convert

What is the condemnation incurred by the Devil?
Elevated himself above his station through pride

4.16. Of good reputation

The world may not like our faith but will admit our integrity
In appointing elders, should seek opinions of
Neighbors, workmates – get references
Why important? To make sure life is consistent

4.17. Not self-willed

Arrogant, inflexible, inconsiderate

4.18. Not quick-tempered

Why not? Lack of self-control - Anger is always close to sin

4.19. A lover of the good

Philippians 4:8 Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things.

Spiritual and physical good

Fills mind and heart with good things. Why important?

4.20. Just

Honesty, fair dealing, trustworthy, faithful

4.21. Devout

Pure and holy life

5. Duties

5.1. Ministry of the Word and Prayer

Acts 6:1-2 Now at this time while the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic Jews against the native Hebrews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving of food. 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.

5.2. Shepherds of the flock

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.

1 Peter 5:1-2 Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, 2 shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness;

5.3. Ruling the church

1 Timothy 5:17 The elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching.

Implies differing functions among the elders

In choosing those to support full time, preaching elders come first.

Hebrews 13:17 Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.

5.4. Being examples in everything

Philippians 3:17 Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us.

2 Thessalonians 3:7-9 For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example, because we did not act in an undisciplined manner among you, 8 nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it, but with labor and hardship we kept working night and day so that we would not be a burden to any of you; 9 not because we do not have the right to this, but in order to offer ourselves as a model for you, so that you would follow our example.

1 Timothy 4:12 Let no one look down on your youthfulness, but rather in speech, conduct, love, faith and purity, show yourself an example of those who believe.

1 Peter 5:3 nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock.

All should be benefit by following elder's example

6. Appointment

How many elders should we have?

6.1. Recognition by the church

Not a matter of finding nice men

But of recognizing those whom God has gifted

Desire, gift & opportunity constitute the call

Need a spiritual and healthy church to discern

Examples in Bible – done with prayer and fasting:

Luke 6:12-13 It was at this time that He went off to the mountain to pray, and He spent the whole night in prayer to God. 13 And when day came, He called His disciples to Him and chose twelve of them, whom He also named as apostles:

Acts 13:1-3 Now there were at Antioch, in the church that was there, prophets and teachers: Barnabas, and Simeon who was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. 2 While they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." 3 Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.

Acts 14:23 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.

Appointing those to whom church will submit

Who will lead the Lord's church for its good

6.2. Setting apart to the work

Normally done by laying on of hands by existing elders

1 Timothy 4:14 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.

1 Timothy 5:22 Do not lay hands upon anyone too hastily and thereby share responsibility for the sins of others; keep yourself free from sin.

2 Timothy 1:6 For this reason I remind you to kindle afresh the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands.

7. Conclusions

Who is sufficient for these things?

But the grace of God is sufficient

How we should pray for the elders!