

THE OFFICE OF ELDER

The New Testament pictures the office of elder as being central to the nature and mission of the Church. The practice of the Apostle Paul in establishing local churches was to appoint elders in each city (Acts 14:23). When Paul spoke to the leaders of the Church at Ephesus, he addressed the elders (Acts 20). Virtually every NT author who writes about the early church recognized an organizational structure ruled by designated leaders to whom respect and submission were due, who were either designated as elders or may be rightly presumed to be such. Luke (Acts 11:30; 14:23; 20:17, 28), Paul (I Tim.3; Titus 1; Phil 1:9), Peter (I Peter 5:1-5), James (5:14), and the author of Hebrews (13:7, 17) all wrote in this way. It is also very significant that the rule of elders is represented in a wide variety of geographical areas: Jerusalem to Antioch (Acts 11:30; Acts 15), all of Asia Minor (Acts 14:23; 20; I Peter 5), Greece (Phil. 1:1; I Thess. 5:12, 13; I Cor. 16:15f), and the island of Crete (Titus 1:5-9).

There are three words that are frequently used in the NT that describe the function and responsibility of the elder. He is called “elder” (I Peter 5:1-5; James 5:14), “bishop” or “overseer” (Phil. 1:1; I Tim 3:1,2), and a shepherd (I Peter 5:2; Acts 20:28). Although some people make a distinction between the office of elder and that of bishop, Scripture makes it clear that these refer to the same office by using these terms interchangeably to speak of the same people (compare Acts 20:17 and 20:28); Titus 1:5 and 1:7; and I Tim. 3:1ff and 5:17).

All elders are given by the Lord Jesus Christ the responsibility for the total spiritual oversight and care of His people. Each local congregation elects and sets apart men to this office and ministry, recognizing in them the already present spiritual qualifications and gifts. These men are to:

- (1) Oversee the entire ministry of the church,
- (2) Provide spiritual and discerning leadership to the ministries, goals, and activities of the church,
- (3) Be responsible for the teaching ministry of the Word and the correct administration of the sacraments,
- (4) Shepherd and care for the individual members of the church, and
- (5) Administer church discipline when necessary.

The Bible makes a distinction within the one office of elder, recognizing differing functions and gifts, a distinction reflected in our terms “teaching” and “ruling” elder (I Tim. 5:17). A teaching elder is a man who, in addition to the functions described above, also has heightened gifts for teaching and equipping the saints, and who usually feels called by God to a lifetime of service in such a ministry. A teaching elder is also called a “minister” or “pastor”, whereas a ruling elder is usually a layman.

- Leadership and Ministry Skill Development (Eph 4:11-16): Reading the Bible (how to read and interpret), leading a B.S., sharing the gospel, telling your story, apologetics, Qualities/Characteristics of a Biblical leader, Effective Ministry Management; Emphasis on SERVANT leadership (Matt 20:25-28; John 13; Phil 2)

(2) Leadership Community

- Sun PM monthly for prayer, evaluation, planning, communication, encouragement, team building

OFFICER TRAINING (Really, just a subset or outgrowth of leadership training; not much new!)

- Document: NPC Leadership Class Schedule
- Review Westminster Standards (G.I. Williamson)
- Documents:
 - (1) "Presbyterianism and the PCA"
 - (2) "The Three-Part Structure of Presbyterianism"
 - (3) "The Office of Elder"
 - (4) "General Responsibilities of an Elder"
 - (5) "The Elders of the Church"
 - (6) "Theology Questions"
 - (7) "BCO Questions"
 - (8) "The Office of Deacon"
 - (9) "Deacon Training Schedule"
- Disc
- Q & A