

Principles of Ecclesial Eldership in the First Century

- 1) The word "elder" in the NT is used in one of 2 ways. Depending on context it can mean an older man (1Tim 5:1) or it can refer to an ecclesial office called "elder. There is some overlap in the terms as the office of "elder" was usually held by an older man.
- 2) The office of "elder" is exactly the same as the office of "overseer" ("bishop" in KJV) (Tit 1:5-7, 1Pet 5:1-2). For the rest of this list the term "elder" to refer to the office of "elder" or "overseer".
- 3) The office of "deacon" was a distinct role to that of "elder" and both roles are distinct to that of the rest of the ecclesia (1Tim 3, Acts 6:1-6, Phil 1:1)
- 4) "Deacons" literally means servants, or "waiters at tables". They were not "junior-elders", it was a different function though overlap could occur (Acts 6).
- 5) "Deacons" could probably be either brothers or sisters. "Elders" were only ever taken from the brothers. (1Tim 3 etc.)
- 6) Primary distinction between "elders" and "deacons" is that elders were to be "teachers". They were specifically assigned to be responsible for the spiritual growth of the ecclesia, and were expected to be known for their devotion to the word of God, prayer and preaching (Acts 6:1-6, 1Tim 3, 1Tim 5:17)
- 7) Ecclesia's MUST have elders (Tit 1:5-7, 1Tim 3 etc.) This follows the Old Testament example where God provided Israel with a class of teachers (i.e. the priests and Levites)
- 8) Elders must have certain qualifications (1Tim 3, Tit 1)
- 9) Elders must want to do the role (1Tim 3:1)
- 10) Elders were then selected either by appointment of a special individual (like Timothy or Titus) or by the whole ecclesia (Acts 1, Acts 6). Either way, the potential elders must meet the required qualifications.
- 11) Elders could be disciplined and removed from their office for failure to live up to it (1Tim 5, 3John 9-10)
- 12) Elders were instructed to act as servants to the ecclesia, following the example of the Lord washing the feet of the disciples (1Pet 5:1-3)
- 13) The ecclesia was required to show the elders submission and obedience. The elders are described as having "oversight", being "leaders", "being over the ecclesia" and "being shepherds" (Heb 13:7, 17, 24, 1Tim 5:17, 1Thess 5:12, 1Cor 16:15-16, 1Pet 5:5, Acts 20:31, Jude 8).
- 14) Elders were entrusted with the salvation of the rest of the ecclesia, and were like shepherds to protect the ecclesia from that which could harm them (1Pet 5, Acts 20, Heb 13 etc.)
- 15) Elders and the rest of the ecclesia are still equal, in the same sense that we are all equal in Christ. Differing ecclesial functions (like that of man or woman) should not imply that one is better than another.
- 16) The role of elder was probably a full time task.
- 17) The ecclesia was to materially support its elders (1Tim 5, 1Cor 9, Gal 6:6)
- 18) An ecclesial elder was recognised as such by all in the ecclesia. One was not at liberty to ignore an elder on the basis that one did not recognise an elder as such.
- 19) Each city was an ecclesia (as opposed to containing several ecclesias. Each city had one set of elders.