

“ELDERS IN EVERY CHURCH”
Acts 14:23

Introduction:

1. God has given a pattern for His one, true church.
 - a. This pattern is the New Testament.
 - b. We must follow the N.T. pattern in order to restore the Lord’s church.
2. There is a specific pattern for the organization of the church.
 - a. Jesus Christ is the only Head of the church.
 - b. The New Testament is the sole constitution of Christ’s church.
 - c. The offices of apostles and prophets belonged to the infancy of the church.
 - d. Elders, deacons, evangelists and teachers continue in the church today.
3. We shall answer three questions about elders in God’s church.

Discussion:

I. WHAT ARE ELDERS?

- A. Several names are used for elders which tell about their work and qualifications:
 1. Paul “sent to Ephesus and called for the elders of the church” (Acts 20:17).
 2. He warned the elders: “Therefore take heed to yourselves and to 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” (Acts 20:28).
 - a. Elders were a distinct group within the church.
 - b. Paul referred to them as overseers {bishops-KJV}..
 - c. They were told to “shepherd” {feed} the flock of God (v. 28).
 - d. Elders are overseers who do the work of shepherds (pastors).
 3. The same officers in the church are called by names which indicate their qualifications and work.
 - a. “Elder” is from “presbuteros” and refers to age and maturity.
 - b. “Overseer” {bishop} comes from “episkopos” and refers to superintendence.
 - c. “Shepherd” {pastor} comes from “poimen” and refers to the work of tending and feeding the flock.
 4. The office of the evangelist is not the same as that of elders.
 5. Elders are pastors; preachers are not!

B. When a congregation is fully organized, it has a plurality of elders.

1. The church in Jerusalem had elders (Acts 11:30).
2. Paul and Barnabas “appointed elders in every church” (Acts 14:23).
3. The church at Philippi had “overseers” (Phil. 1:1).
4. Titus was told to “appoint elders in every city” (Tit. 1:5).
5. Elders are only over the congregation where they are members.

“The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly” (1 Pet. 5:1,2).

II. WHAT ARE THE QUALIFICATIONS OF ELDERS?

A. The qualifications are given in two places in the New Testament (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Tit. 1:5-9).

1. **DESIRE:** One should want to be an elder, not for power or prestige but in order to humbly serve.
2. **BLAMELESS:** Not sinlessly perfect (1 Jn. 1:8) but one against whom no charge of wrongdoing can be proven.
3. **HUSBAND OF ONE WIFE:** Only a man can be an elder. He must be Scripturally married (Matt. 19:9).
4. **TEMPERATE:** Vigilant in KJV. “This is from a Greek word which refers to the use of wine, and almost surely forbids the use of any wine at all” (Roy Lanier, Sr, The Church, p. 106).
5. **SOBER-MINDED:** Serious in mood, solemn, balanced under all circumstances.
6. **OF GOOD BEHAVIOR:** Punctual, disciplined and orderly.
7. **HOSPITABLE:** One who opens his home to guests and cheerfully shares what he has with others (Heb. 13:1,2; 1 Pet. 4:9).
8. **ABLE (apt-KJV) TO TEACH:** One who knows the Bible well and has the ability to teach it publically and privately.
9. **NOT GIVEN TO WINE:** The ASV (1901) has “not a brawler.” An elder does not drink alcoholic beverages; does not brawl.
10. **NOT VIOLENT:** An elder must keep his temper under control and not resort to physical violence.
11. **NOT GREEDY FOR MONEY:** The ASV translates “No lover of money.”
12. **GENTLE:** Patient in KJV. An elder will be kind, patient, courteous and tenderhearted in his dealings with others.
13. **ONE WHO RULES WELL HIS OWN HOUSE:** His wife and children must respect and obey him (Eph. 5:22-24; 6:1-3).
14. **NOT QUARRELSOME:** KJV has “not a brawler.” ASV has “not contentious.” He should strive to live at peace with all men (Rom. 12:18).

15. **NOT COVETOUS:** This is the unlawful desire for gain or for the property of others (Col. 3:5).
16. **NOT A NOVICE:** He must be a mature Christian, not a recent convert.
17. **A GOOD TESTIMONY FROM THOSE OUTSIDE THE CHURCH:** a good reputation in the community for honesty and integrity.
18. **HAVING FAITHFUL CHILDREN:** He must be a family man. His children will be a credit to him. They will be faithful Christians.
19. **NOT SELF WILLED:** An elder has no authority to act unilaterally. He must not be stubborn and insist on his own way (3 Jn. 9,10).
20. **NOT QUICK TEMPERED:** He must keep his tongue and temper under control.
21. **A LOVER OF WHAT IS GOOD:** He must love the good and the right, whether people or principle.
22. **JUST:** An elder must be impartial in judgment and treat all fairly.
23. **HOLY:** He must pure in life, devout in worship, reverent toward God.
24. **SELF-CONTROLLED:** Self-disciplined (1 Cor. 9:25,27).
25. **HOLDS FAST THE FAITHFUL WORD:** He must be all to exhort his fellow Christians as well as expose false teachers (Tit. 1:9).

B. Every elder must possess every one of these qualifications.

III. WHAT IS THE WORK OF ELDERS?

- A. They shepherd the flock (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:1-4).
- B. They watch out for the souls of the members as “those who must give an account” (Heb. 13:17).
- C. They rule over the church (1 Tim. 5:17).
 1. Christians must “remember those who rule over you” (Heb. 13:7) and “obey those who rule over you” (Heb. 13:17).
 2. Elders are shepherds and not lords (1 Pet. 5:3).
- D. When elders sin, they are to be rebuked (1 Tim. 5:19, 20).
- E. Elders must guard the church against false teaching (Tit. 1:9; Rom. 16:17).
- F. Elders must take the lead in church discipline (1 Cor. 5: 2 Thess. 3:6).

Conclusion:

1. Elders have the most important and demanding office in the world (Heb. 13:17).
2. Members of the congregation should love, respect, trust and follow Godly elders.
3. A church may Scripturally exist without elders until qualified men are available.