

# **Office of Elder**

July 14, 2024

Elders are the overseers of the church. They serve the church by leading the congregation. They are charged to shepherd the congregation, oversee the church, teach the Word, and equip the congregation for ministry.

Elders began appearing in the Bible very early in the book of Acts. At first, they were seen alongside the Apostles; and later, in the absence of the Apostles, the leadership of the church passed entirely to elders. New churches had elders appointed by those missionaries who helped found them.

## **EXAMINATION OF BIBLICAL TEXTS**

### **Purpose of Elders**

#### **Guard the Flock**

Acts 20:28–30 *“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. “I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them.”*

Elders are to guard themselves and the flock, oversee the congregation, shepherd the church, and protect the church from the wolves who would destroy the church.

#### **Shepherd the Flock**

1 Peter 5:1–4 *“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, 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; nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.”*

The elders are to shepherd the flock, exercise oversight voluntarily and eagerly, and be examples for the flock. They are not to do it for “sordid gain” (i.e. greediness) or under compulsion.

## **Equip the Saints**

Ephesians 4:11–12 *“And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ;”*

The elders are a gift to the church, intended to equip the church for ministry and build up the body of Christ.

## **Oversee the Church**

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,”*

Titus 1:10–11 *“For there are many rebellious men, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, who must be silenced because they are upsetting whole families, teaching things they should not teach for the sake of sordid gain.”*

The elders are to help bring order to the church. They also deal with church discipline and silence those who spread false teaching.

## **Honoring Elders**

1 Timothy 5:17–20 *“The elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, “You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing,” and “The laborer is worthy of his wages.” Do not receive an accusation against an elder except on the basis of two or three witnesses. Those who continue in sin, rebuke in the presence of all, so that the rest also will be fearful of sinning.”*

Elders should be honored and can be compensated, especially those who labor at preaching and teaching. They should not be accused without multiple witnesses, and when necessary, should be publicly rebuked as an example to the church.

## **Qualifications of Elders**

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. An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not addicted to wine or pugnacious, but gentle, peaceable, free from the love of money. He must be one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity (but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of*

*the church of God?), and not a new convert, so that he will not become conceited and fall into the condemnation incurred by the devil. 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, namely, if any man is above reproach, the husband of one wife, having children who believe, not accused of dissipation or rebellion. 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, but hospitable, loving what is good, sensible, just, devout, self-controlled, 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.”*

The qualifications of elders are more stringent than that of deacons. Generally speaking, the character qualifications of elders are more descriptive than that of deacons. Additionally, there are two distinct qualifications given for elders that are not required for deacons.

- The ability to teach, including exhortation in sound doctrine and refutation of false teachers, and
- Hospitality

## **APPLICATION TO BEULAH**

### **Recognition of Existing Elders**

The Leadership Team proposes that those already ordained into ministry form the founding Elder Team. This includes Steven Greene, Will Murray, Terry Pearman, and Joseph York. Among their duties, they will be charged with seeking out others who are called and willing to serve as elders in the church.

Elders who are also on staff as pastors will serve continually by virtue of their office. Those who are not on staff will be elected to three-year terms and may serve two consecutive terms before taking a one-year break. The initial Elder Team will organize their terms in such a way to avoid all the terms expiring in the same year.

### **Nomination and Election**

The elders shall annually nominate men who meet the qualifications for elder, have been examined thoroughly, and have completed any training and preparation prescribed by the elders. They will be presented before the church, and members will have opportunity (four weeks) to bring concerns to the elders about a candidate. The church will have a vote of affirmation in conference for elder candidates. Because Titus 1:5 describes elders as being

appointed to office by church leadership, the vote of affirmation will be understood as the willingness of the congregation to submit to the spiritual authority of the elders, including those who are candidates.

## **Duties**

The duties of the elders are as follows:

- Devote themselves to prayer and the ministry of the Word (Acts 6:2-4)
- Equip the saints for the work of ministry (Ephesians 4:11-12)
- Shepherd and guard the flock (Acts 20:28-30, 1 Peter 5:1-4)
- Defend sound doctrine and church discipline (Titus 1:10-11)
- Oversee the ministry of the church (1 Timothy 3:5, 1 Peter 5:2)

## **Pastors and Elders**

For ease of communication and to reduce confusion amongst the church, we will refer to all those who are ordained to lead the church as elders, including those who are in paid staff positions and those who are not. Collectively, we will refer to that group as the Elder Team. Individually, it is not necessary to use the title *elder* when referring to an elder.

Those who are called to a specific vocational ministry (Leader Pastor, Associate Pastor, etc.) within the church will continue to be called pastors. This distinction is made for clarity in communication. It should still be understood that all elders hold office within the church and have the same qualifications, ordination, and oversight of the church as any who are also on staff as pastors.