



The Role of Elders

1 Timothy 3:1-7

Introduction

Just before Jesus returned to the Father, he gave His followers the Great Commission to go into all the world and make disciples (Matt 28:18). The Apostle Paul and his companions – along with a number of other early missionaries – took this commission seriously and travelled throughout the known world at that time, preaching the Good News and demonstrating the Kingdom through signs and wonders. These early Kingdom-adventurers didn't go to plant churches, they went to preach Jesus – but the by-product of people coming to faith was that churches were established. As Christians gathered together in such communities, elders were appointed over the churches in each town (Acts 14:23 & Titus 1:5).

The role of 'elder' (Greek – 'presbuteros') was much like that of the community leaders in the Old Testament – those who would sit at the city gate to govern the life of the community, making important decisions, sharing their wisdom and dispensing justice. In the days of Jesus, the synagogues retained the role of elders – those who oversaw all aspects of the religious life of the communities. Another word found in the

What are ELders?

'Presbuteros' = **ELDER**

'Episkopos' = **OVERSEER** (Bishop in NKJ)

- They shepherd the church (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:2)
- They direct the affairs of the church (1 Tim 5:17)
- They teach and defend sound doctrine (1 Tim 5:17)
- They are servant leaders (1 Peter 5:2; Luke 22:26)
- They provide headship/covering (Heb 13:17)

New Testament for an elder is 'Overseer' (Greek – 'episkopos') – the word from which we get the name 'bishop'. This was the word that was more widely used in non-Jewish communities to talk about those who were entrusted with directing the affairs of the church (1 Tim 5:17). Functionally, an Overseer is exactly the same as an Elder. Today the titles Pastor, Vicar, Minister or Priest might be used in talking about the same role.

It appears that, although there were usually several elders in each church, there was a lead elder – what some people refer to as 'the first amongst equals' (i.e. James in the Jerusalem Church).

Life Group questions...

- 1. Do you agree that 'everything rises and falls with leadership' (i.e. that the success or otherwise of an organisation depends largely on its leaders)?**
- 2. Can you think of examples in the Bible of good leadership and bad leadership?**
- 3. If you were on a panel appointing a new pastor for a church, what questions would you ask them?**
- 4. Read 1 Timothy 3:1-7 & Titus 1:5-9. What do you notice about the qualifications for eldership? Are these very different to what should be expected of all Christians?**
- 5. Read 1 Peter 5:1-3. Why do you think Peter emphasises these as qualities elders should have? Compare this to what Jesus said in Luke 22:24-27.**

[Optional Exercise]

Spend a few moments composing a job description for a church elder/leader.

- 6. How role do you play in supporting Damian – and the leadership team – in leading our church onto God's agenda?**