

# Resources Regarding Elders

*We offer this information to help the Charlotte Church as we begin our search for additional elders. Other information on the subject can be found in books and online. We encourage every member of the congregation to be in prayer and study as we seek to add more leaders to serve the church. Let's all work together to build a great congregation to the glory of God!*

- Rick Maule

## I. Bible Words

Three words are used in the New Testament to designate a person who serves as a congregational elder:

### **Elder - Greek word: *presbutero* = “an older man”**

- The word is used 66 times in the NT – It sometimes refers to the office of “church elder” but it can just mean an older person like the “elder son” in Luke 15:25.
- The word “elder” describes their qualification (age), but not their role of service (overseeing/shepherding)
- Jews and 1st Century people often had “elders” leading and ruling over their communities, synagogues or towns (Acts 6:12)
- Elders were held to be wiser, more tested, well-known, trusted and fatherly (Deut. 32:7)
- The word *presbutero* can refer to others (men and women – Titus 2:3) who are older and experienced, but have not necessarily been appointed to the office of “congregational elder.”

### **Bishop – Greek word: *episcopos* = “an overseer, a supervisor”**

- From two roots: *epi* = over, and *scopos* = to watch or examine
- The term is used 5 times in NT
- The word describes their function or role in the church as overseers
- It describes a person put in charge, a leader/steward responsible for promoting security, health and productivity.

### **Shepherd or Pastor – Greek word: *poimein* = “a shepherd”**

- This word is used 29 times in the New Testament – not always referring to the office of elder (For example, shepherds greeted the baby Jesus - Lk. 2:8)
- The word describes their role and points to a goal – to guard the flock, feed it, provide security (what sheep need!) and to help the flock to grow.

### **All three of the above terms are to be seen as referring to the same person.**

- Titus 1:5 (elder) and 1:7 (overseer) refer to the same man
- I Peter 5:1-2 (elders), (shepherds) and (overseers) = the same men
- Acts 20:17, 28 (elders, overseers and shepherds) = the same people
- The qualifications in I Tim 3 and Titus 1 are generally the same

**There always appears to be a *plurality of elders in a local church*** (more than one). It can be debated as to whether in an extreme situation there might be only one elder, but the goal should be to have more than one. This also seems safer in practical terms.

## II. The Duties of an Elder

As we study the New Testament, we can see church elders performing a number of functions:

- They oversee, rule, govern, and direct the church (I Tim 5:17, I Peter 5:2)
- They guard the flock spiritually (Acts 20:28, 31, I Peter 5:2)
- They care for and serve the needs of people (Acts 20:28, 35, 36; II and III John)
- They care for the physical needs of members (James 5:14-16, II and III John)
- They pray for the sick, anoint and hear confessions (James 5:16)
- They work to keep the church correct in its doctrine (Titus 1:9)
- Their leadership provides security and stability for the congregation by occupying a permanent position in a local church (Titus 1:5, Act 14:23, Phil 2:19, 2 Tim 4:21)
- They demonstrate strength in their family example and ministry (I Tim 3:4)
- They oversee financial gifts and their distribution (Acts 11:30)
- They appoint ministers (I Tim 4:14)
- They make major decisions on biblical issues (Acts 15:2, 6)
- They welcome missionaries and their reports from other churches (Acts 15:4, 18, 21)
- They seek and receive advice and encouragement from other churches and their leaders (Phil 1:1)
- They make big decisions (Acts 15:23)
- They send representatives or delegates (15:22)
- They send letters from the church (Acts 15:23)
- They take action upon decisions made in cooperation with other elders (Acts 15:25)
- Their edicts were to be obeyed (Acts 16:4)
- They demonstrate passionate dedication to their specific task (I Tim 3:1)

## III. The Qualifications of an Elder

The New Testament contains two passages listing qualifications to be considered when choosing and appointing congregational elders:

### I Timothy 3:1-7

3:1 – A candidate for elder ***must truly desire or “set his heart on” (NIV) the role.*** As we see in another passage (I Peter 5:2), a man shouldn’t serve out of compulsion, but because he really wants to do it.

3:2 He ***must be “blameless” (KJV)*** or “above reproach” (NIV). In other words, the excellence of his reputation and example would lead us to doubt those who might venture to bring a charge against his character.

3:2 He **must be “the husband of one wife”** (NIV). On the most basic level, this requires an elder to be a monogamist, but the implication goes beyond “having only one spouse.” An elder should be a man who has been faithful and successful in his relationship to one woman over the course of time.

3:2 He **must possess the quality of “temperance”** (NIV). The Greek word here points to the quality of emotional restraint (“vigilance” KJV) and the ability to think before acting. He should be a person in control of his urges.

3:2 Similarly, **he should be “sober” (KJV) or “self-controlled”** (NIV). This implies that he is a person whose actions and words are governed by wisdom and not impulse.

3:2 His lifestyle **should likewise be “of good behavior”** (KJV) or “respectable” (NIV). The word used here might be translated as “orderly” and means that his life is one consistently governed by principle rather than erratic passions.

3:2 An elder **should be known as a “hospitable”** (NIV) person. The Greek term here implies that he is not merely willing to occasionally host people into his home, he is a man who is “given to hospitality” (KJV) and has an active passion for generosity in the use of his home and wealth.

3:2 In order to serve as an overseer for the church, an elder is required to **be “able to teach”** (NIV). This means he is not only willing to present a spiritual lesson to others, he should be good at it! He must be effective in the art of instructing, motivating and equipping others.

3:3 An elder **cannot be “given to much wine”** (NIV). The clear implication of these words is that an elder should not be excessive in his use of alcoholic beverages and should certainly not be a drunkard or addict.

3:3 When facing challenging social conflicts, an elder **should not be violent in his reactions** (“not a striker” KJV). While this certainly prohibits one who employs physical violence, it points to a person of generally even temperament.

3:3 When faced with a volatile discussion, **he is “gentle” (NIV) and patient**. Even when opposed, he is ready to “gently correct” others (II Timothy 2:25).

3:3 He is described as **not being a “quarrelsome” (NIV) person**. In other words, he is easy to talk to and tries to move conversations toward peace and unity.

3:3 With regard to materialism, he is **not known as a greedy person** (“not a lover of money” NIV). This quality is seen in his lifestyle of generosity and a desire to put God and people ahead of financial concerns.

3:4 An elder should be **known as an effective leader and manager in his home**. (He must “manage his own family well” NIV). Not only is he a person whose home life is orderly and spiritual, he is the leader who is responsible for making it that way.

3:4-5 One specific quality of his home life is that **his children have a deep respect for his example and leadership** and they “obey him with proper respect” (NIV). His ability to lead and inspire his family is the same quality of character that will equip him to “take care of God’s church” (NIV).

3:6 It is important that an elder *not be “a novice” (KJV) or “a recent convert” (NIV)*. While this emphasizes that wisdom and experience will be required to lead and shepherd the church, the verse points to a particular trap that a less-experienced man might fall into. The power associated with the office of elder might inflate a young Christian’s ego and can lead him to “lord it over” the flock (see I Peter 5:3 NIV).

3:7 An elder should *have a good reputation in the eyes of the world* (“be well thought of by outsiders” ESV). He will be more than a servant of the church; he will be a spokesman and representative for the congregation. This means his example affects everyone and any flaw in his words or actions will be magnified in the flock and will be a blotch on the image of the church in the community.

### **Titus 1:6-9**

1:6 The requirement that an elder be **blameless** “above reproach” (ESV) is the same as what we saw in I Timothy 3:2.

1:6 Similarly, the need to be **“the husband of one wife”** (NIV) has already been covered in the discussion of I Timothy 3:2 (above).

1:6 Here the scriptures expand upon the requirements related to the elder’s family life. *His children must be ones “who believe” (NIV, or “faithful” KJV) who are “not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient” (NIV)*. This is not just a question of whether his children have at some point in the past been baptized, but that their faithfulness and moral character are a positive visible reflection of their upbringing.

1:7-8 As we saw in I Timothy 3, we are again reminded that an elder should be *“blameless – not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to much wine, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain... hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined” (NIV)*.

1:8 The idea that an elder should be a skilled teacher is expanded on here. *He must “hold firm to the trustworthy word” (ESV)* so he can build others up with proper doctrine and can correct those who are in error.