

“Elder Shepherding”
Grace Bible Fellowship
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1. Typical Leadership models in America Today:

- A. One Pastor-(Little House on the Prairie, Andy Griffith)
- B. Senior Pastor—plurality of Deacons [Pastor Rules]
- C. Senior Pastor—plurality of Deacons [Deacons Rule]
- D. Senior Pastor—plurality of Deacons [Congregation Rules]
(the above models have no Elders, and the Deacons function as Elders)
- E. Senior Pastor and a Board of Trustees
- F. Senior Pastor, Elders and Deacons (3 distinct offices)

2. New Testament Leadership Model: Plurality of Qualified Elders (only 2 offices)

3. Definition: “Elder” is from the Greek word for “presbyter”; from the Hebrew *zachain*, meaning “bearded one” referring to “older” and hopefully “wise/experienced men”
4. Origin: Moses was the first to have a plurality of men called “elders” that helped him rule over the assembly (Exodus 3:16; 17:5; 18:12; Numbers 11:16-17—1400 BC); “elders” had official functions in Israel in the days of Joshua (20:4—1350 BC), the Judges (8:16), the Monarchy (Ruth 4:2—1000 BC), the Divided Kingdom—(2 Kings 10:1, 870 BC), the Psalms (107:32), the Captivity (Ezekiel 14:1—590-570 BC), after the Exile (Ezra 10:14—458 BC), in the Intertestamental Period (1 Maccabees 12:25—150 BC), as part of the antagonistic Jewish oligarchy in Jesus’ day (Matthew 21:23—AD 25), and as the Jewish enemies of the Apostles (Acts 4:5)
5. Christian usage: “elders” appear in the church for the first time in Acts 11:30 where they ruled in the church of Jerusalem in conjunction with the Apostles (15:2, 4, 22; 16:4); the Christian model may have been adopted from the Jewish model of “elders” who ruled in the synagogue; synagogues arose during the Exile after the Temple was destroyed
6. The Biblical Mandate for Elders in Every Church: God laid the foundation of the Church through His Apostles (Ephesians 2:20; 3:5). Peter, the Apostle to the Jewish Christians, and Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles, both recognized a plurality of elders in the local church (1 Peter 5:1; Titus 1:5).

Paul required the appointment of elders in every city: ***“I left you in Crete so that you should...appoint elders in every city” (Titus 1:5).***

Paul appointed a plurality of elders in every local church: ***“they [Paul and Barnabas] had appointed elders for them in every church” (Acts 14:23).***

There are to be a plurality of elders in every church in every city!

7. Elders (Presbyters), Bishops (Overseers/Episkopals), and Pastors: These terms are used interchangeably in the New Testament:

“[Paul] called to him the elders (presbuterous) of the church [of Ephesus—note one church, plurality of elders]...Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you [notice Who chooses Elders ultimately] overseers [episkopous—bishop], to shepherd [poimainein—verb form, ‘to pastor’] the church of God” (Acts 20:17, 28).

The 3 terms are also interchangeable in 1 Peter 5:1-2. Titus 1:5 and 1:7 equates elders with overseers/bishops.

Functionally, the word for elders always occurs in the plural in the NT with reference to the church.

In both passages 1) ‘elders’ emphasizes their qualifications (maturity), 2) ‘overseers’ emphasizes their office and ‘shepherding/pastoring’ refers to their duty/action.

In the NT, in relation to the church, the word for Pastor is almost always used as a verb and not a noun—“to shepherd or to pastor” (the exception is in Ephesians 4:11); the words for elders and overseers occur as nouns.

The title “Senior Pastor” never occurs in the NT in reference to man; Jesus is the only One called a “Senior Pastor” (1 Peter 5:4).

8. Non-Biblical Terms for Church Leadership: Pope, Cardinal, President, Archbishop, Priest, Reverend, Monk, Doctor, Prelate, Monsignor, Father, Session, Cleric, Superintendent, Senior Pastor
9. Elders have specific spiritual qualifications: (1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9)—elders are men, not women—they have always been men in the Bible.
10. Elders have delegated authority: a) they are called to “rule” in the church (1 Timothy 5:17), they have “charge” over the flock (1 Thess 5:12; 1 Peter 5:3); b) church members are called to “submit” to the elders (1 Peter 5:5) “appreciate” and “esteem” the elders (1 Thess 5:12-13), “honor” the elders (1 Timothy 5:17); “call for the elders” when in need (James 5:14), “imitate” them (Hebrews 13:7) and “obey” the elders (Hebrews 13:17).

“Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you” (Hebrews 13:17).

Elders are to be ordained (1 Timothy 4:14; 5:22).

11. Elders have specific duties: They are to a) teach and preach the Word (1 Tim 3:2; 5:17); b) guard and protect the flock from false teaching (Acts 20:28); c) train and appoint church leaders (1 Timothy 4:14); d) rule the affairs of the church (1 Timothy 5:17); e) pray for the sick (James 5:14); f) manage the money and resources of the church (Acts 11:30); g) make decisions for the church (Acts 16:4); h) represent the church (Acts 15:23); i) listen to the church (Acts 15:22); j) shepherd the saints (Acts 20:17, 28); k) train the saints to do ministry (Ephesians 4:11-12)
12. Elders and Deacons: The office of Elder is distinct from the office of Deacon. Deacons have specific qualifications (1 Timothy 3:8-13). Deacons do not rule; they are not overseers; they are subject to the Elders/Pastors; ‘Deacon’ means ‘servant’—that’s what they do—they are not necessarily gifted at leading others but they are gifted in temporal service areas of the church (Acts 6:1-6). Every church should have a plurality of Deacons. They are not required to preach and teach.

“To all the saints in Philippi, including the overseers and deacons” (Philippians 1:1)

Deacons did not exist in the OT or in the days of Jesus as Elders did. God instituted the office of Deacon after the Church began (beginning in Acts 6).
13. Elders Term of Office: There is no age requirement for Elders; and there are no term limits; Elders serve as long as they are called and qualified.
14. Benefits of a Plurality: Jesus had a plurality of Apostles by design; together they ruled and pastored the first church in Jerusalem; Paul always ministered and pastored with a plurality of other godly men; one man cannot properly manage a church—a plurality of shepherds provides a division of power, diversity of gifts and areas of specialization, mutual accountability and mutual encouragement
15. Jesus and Elders: Jesus is the Head, Lord and ultimate Boss of the Church; Elders are His servants; Jesus is called the “Shepherd (Pastor) and Overseer” in 1 Peter 2:25. God’s Word has authority over Elders in the Church; the Holy Spirit has authority over Elders in the Church