

Eldership (Adapted from Sojourn Church, Houston)

Eldership at Restoration Church Bryan

We believe that elders are qualified male leaders who oversee the church through leadership, teaching, and shepherding (1st Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9; 1st Peter 5:1-5).

A Theological Study of Elders

The New Testament uses various terms to describe the office of an *elder* including, *pastor*, *bishop*, and *overseer*. There has been some debate in the church concerning whether or not the terms are synonymous. However, most scholars agree that *the New Testament uses the term bishop, elders, and presbyters interchangeably*.¹ Like English, the Greek language also uses different words for the same meaning.

For the sake of keeping our study as concise as possible, we will draw attention to only a few passages in Scripture to lay a theological foundation for elders in the New Testament. In the scriptures below we see the Greek words, *episkopos* and *presbuteros* used to describe the office of an overseer/elder.

- Acts 14:21-23: “When they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God. And when they had appointed **elders (presbuteros)** for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they believed.”
- 1st Timothy 3:1-7: “The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of an **overseer (episkopos)**, he desires a noble task. Therefore, an **overseer (episkopos)** must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God’s church? He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.”
- 1st Timothy 5:17: “Let the **elders (presbuteros)** who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching.”
- Titus 1:5-9: “This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint **elders (presbuteros)** in every town as I directed you - if anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife, and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination. For an **overseer (episkopos)**, as God’s steward must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined. He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and rebuke those who contradict it.”
- 1st Peter 5:1-5: “So I exhort the **elders (presbuteros)** among you, as a fellow **elder** and witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising **oversight (episkopeo)**, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for

¹ Strong, J. (1996). The exhaustive concordance of the Bible: Showing every word of the text of the common English version of the canonical books, and every occurrence of each word in regular order. (Electronic ed.) (G4245). Ontario: Woodside Bible Fellowship.

shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples of the flock. And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders.”

There are quite a few things that we can conclude from the passages listed above.

1. The terms elder and overseer are in fact used interchangeably. In Paul’s letter to Titus, he uses the words elder and overseer to describe the qualifications for the same job. In Peter’s letter to the churches in dispersion, he also uses the Greek terms *presbuteros* and *episkopeo* in his instruction to shepherd the flock of God.
2. Elders were appointed in every church. In Acts 14, it is clear that elders should be appointed in the church to care for the growing number of disciples.
3. Elders are almost always mentioned in **plurality**. Therefore, it is safe to say that God desires for the church to be led by a **team** of qualified men.
4. All elders should be able to teach, but certain elders are specifically called to “labor” in preaching and teaching. In 1st Timothy 5:17-18, the Apostle Paul implies that there are certain elders who will specialize in preaching and teaching.
5. **Elders are male only.** One of the primary responsibilities of an elder is to teach and lead with authority. In 1st Timothy 2:12-14, Paul forbids the women to teach and exercise authority over the men. It would be impossible for women to serve as an elder considering the responsibility to exercise authority and teach the entire church. For more on this, please see the section on *Male-Only Elders*.
6. Elders should be **tested and qualified**. Only men of the finest character are fit for leadership in God’s church.
7. Elders **lead under the authority of Jesus**. In 1st Peter 5, the elders are exhorted as those who shepherd the flock of God. Meaning, elders are nothing more than under-shepherds of the chief Shepherd, Jesus Christ.
8. Elders lead the church. There is no biblical precedent for staff, deacons, committees, or advisory boards to govern the church.

Elders as Overseers, Leaders, Teachers, and Shepherds

In addition to the qualifications of an elder, the Bible also provides the specific duties of elders.

- Overseers: Elders must oversee the general mission and vision of the church (1st Peter 5:2).
- Leaders: Elders must lead a biblical and exemplary life for others to follow (Hebrews 13:7).
- Teachers: Elders must be able to teach sound doctrine and refute false teaching (1st Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:9).
- Shepherds: Elders must care for the flock of God through pastoral care, church discipline, and praying for the sick (1st Peter 5:1-3; Matthew 18:15-17; James 5:13-15).

Male-Only Elders

Scripture reveals that the qualifications for eldership are specific to men only. In the book of Genesis, it is clearly stated that God created everything. He made humanity male and female, which means that men and women are equal but different. Genesis 2:18, reads: *“the Lord God said, ‘It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make a helper fit for him.’”* It is important to understand that God made Adam first, as the head of all creation. He then chose to make Eve as a helper fit for Adam. We must root our thinking in how God originally designed the Earth to function before Adam & Eve rebelled against their Creator. God created man and woman to be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it (Genesis 1:28). He created them for partnership and unity in marriage (Genesis 2:24). When the serpent deceived Eve in the

Garden, God ultimately held Adam responsible for both of their sin (Genesis 3:9-12). As a result of their rebellion, God subjected His creation to a curse, which further resulted in woman's sinful desire to rule over her husband (Genesis 3:16).

Since Adam & Eve's rebellion, gender roles have been confused and abused. God designed men and women to **compliment** one another. He intended for the man to lead and provide for his household and the woman to care for and support her husband. In today's society this idea seems archaic and even a little barbaric because we are so far removed from the original rhythm that God created mankind to walk in. After World War II, western culture began to experience a dramatic shift in gender roles. While the men were off at war, the women went to work. Prior to this it was normal and acceptable for a family to be a single income household, where the man assumed the role of leader and breadwinner in the family. This had dramatic implications on how the average household would be organized from then on.

The 60's and 70's were two decades that changed the sociological landscape in America, forever. Women began to view their prior role as mothers and wives as oppressive and out of date. While there is no doubt that equal opportunity for a woman is wonderful, this movement greatly damaged the harmony of the average home. Over the past 50 years in America, the importance of marriage has been minimized, raising children at home is no longer seen as an honorable occupation for women, and men have become more irresponsible, immature, and lazy. It appears that God's words to Eve have come true, "*your desire shall be for (against) your husband...*" ²

It is wonderful that women are not viewed as second-class citizens in American society. It is also wonderful that women are afforded the same opportunities as men. Women should never be oppressed by or subjected to a male-chauvinistic world. However, **a biblical worldview will not support the idea that women should be the leaders of the household or the church.** God simply did not design women to lead out in these two areas. He designed women to be a helpmate to the man. This does not mean that God values women any less than men or that women cannot take a leadership position in culture. It **simply means that men and women have different roles in the house and church.** God designed men to absorb the responsibility of leadership and provision. Perhaps our problem today is that we see so many weak men and so many strong women that it becomes impossible to believe that God designed society to function differently than it does now. But, He did.

In the Old Testament, God chose men to lead His people, from Noah to Abraham, Moses to David, and from the priests to the prophets. In the New Testament Jesus chose twelve men as his apostles, although he befriended, loved, taught, honored, healed, served, and included women in his ministry. He did not, however, put them in a position of senior leadership. It is evident in the pages of church history that the pattern of male leadership in the church continued even after the death of the original apostles. Nonetheless, the issue of whether or not women should lead the church even arose in the days of the early church.

In 1st Timothy, Paul addresses an issue in the church at Ephesus where apparently the women were behaving in an unruly and disrespectful manner to church leadership. In 1st Timothy 2:11-14, he writes: "*I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man, rather she is to remain quiet. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor.*" **Paul emphatically commanded that women should not teach or have authority over men in the church.** While there is enormous controversy about the meaning of the word Paul uses for "authority," we follow the standard Greek lexicon understanding: "To assume a stance of independent authority, give orders, to dictate." **This definition also describes the level of authority elders are to**

² Genesis 3:16 b

hold in the church.³ This understanding seems logical in the context, seeing that what immediately follows in the next chapter is the requirements for elders, which includes being a mature Christian man and an exemplary husband and father.

Many people argue that Paul's exhortation is outdated due to the fact that society has evolved. While there is no doubt that 1st century culture was oppressive toward women, it is **important to see that Paul doesn't root his exhortation in culture. He grounds his command in the created order and the deception of Eve. Paul was concerned with the created order not the cultural practices.**

No matter how much society evolves, we cannot separate ourselves from Scripture. At the end of the day, we are to be people of the Book (Bible). If Scripture does not hold the final authority in our lives, then we will be forced to rely on the opinions of man. When interpretation is in the power of the interpreter, the Word of God can be twisted to mean anything. We must do everything we can to understand the historical context and original meaning of the Bible. We believe that Scripture should interpret Scripture. When we do this, we come to the conclusion that God has designed men to lead the home and the church.

To that end, Restoration holds to a **complementarian⁴ theological model**, meaning that we believe God created men and women equal but distinct in their role and function in the family and church.

Qualifications for Elders

In 1st Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9, Paul lists specific qualifications of elders in the church. All who desire to become an elder at Sojourn Community Church must meet the following qualifications.

Relation to God⁵

- A man: He is a masculine leader.
- Above reproach: He is without any character defect.
- Able to teach: He is an effective Bible communicator that is able to refute false doctrine.
- Not a new convert: He is a mature Christian that has been tested and approved.

Relation to Family

- Husband of one wife: He is a one-woman man who is sexually pure and not addicted to pornography, not held captive by sexual lust.
- Submissive children: He is a successful father. His children demonstrate respect and submission to his authority.
- Manages family well: He provides for, leads, organizes, and loves his family well. His wife lovingly submits to his leadership and demonstrates emotional/spiritual maturity and stability.

Relation to Self

- Sober-minded: He is mentally and emotionally stable. He isn't double minded.
- Self-controlled: He is disciplined and makes sound decisions.

³ "Authentento," in *A Geek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (BDAG), edited and revised by Fredrick William Danker (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000)

⁴ See appendix below for more info.

⁵ Adapted from Mark Driscoll, *A Book You'll Actually Read on Church Leadership* (Wheaton, IL, Crossway 2008) 15, 16.

- Not a drunkard: He is without addictions.
- Not a lover of money: He is financially content and upright.

Relation to Others

- Respectable: He is worth following and imitating.
- Hospitable: He welcomes strangers and non-Christians into his life and home.
- Not violent: He is even-tempered.
- Gentle: He is kind, gracious, and loving.
- Not quarrelsome: He is peaceable, not divisive or contentious.
- Well thought of by outsiders: He is known and respected by non-Christians.

Elders Wives

Considering that 1st Timothy 3:11 gives qualifications for deacons' wives and women in ministry, it is a fair assumption that an elder's wife should at least live by the same standard as a deacon's wife. It simply would not make sense for a deacon to be called to a higher standard than an elder. Therefore, an elder's wife is a qualifying factor determining whether or not he should lead the church. An elder's wife must be emotionally stable, spiritually mature, and of good character. If there is one person who can disqualify an elder for ministry, it would be an unstable wife.

Elders at Restoration Church Bryan

The elder team is comprised of qualified men who meet and maintain the standards expressed in 1st Timothy 3 and Titus 1. These men may be vocational or non-vocational elders whose main responsibility is to shepherd the flock of God with wisdom and integrity. The Lead Pastor/Teaching Pastor will function as the **first among equals on the elder team.**

All elders will provide general oversight in Restoration Church Bryan. However, some elders will be directly involved in certain ministries such as preaching & teaching, missional communities, local & international missions, church planting, administration, worship & arts, etc.

Restoration's Practice for Installing Elders

In order for a man to become an elder at Restoration Church Bryan he must first aspire to the position. Once he has made his desire known, the elder team will conduct an initial interview with him and his wife to ask a few preliminary questions. If the aspiring elder shows promise in interview he will be given personal assessment questions, theological questions, and study assignments to work through. Upon completion of these assignments, the he will be placed into the official elder candidacy phase. Elder candidates will undergo a **6 to 12 month period of study, training, and testing.** If the elder candidate completes the candidacy phase, a final interview will be conducted with the candidate and his wife to ensure that they are ready and willing to commit themselves to lead the Body of Christ at Restoration Church Bryan. After the interview, elder candidates will be brought before the church for ordination. If there are no legitimate concerns brought forth regarding the elder candidate by members, the elder team will lay hands on him, pray for him, and commission him as a new elder of Restoration Church Bryan before the congregation.

Eldership Candidacy Process:

Read Bible Doctrine (by Wayne Grudem) - 34 chapters, 471 pages, ch. 1 starts on p. 17, Avg. pages per week 13.38!

Goal: Read one chapter each week

Additional Passages for study: 1 Tim. 3, Titus 1, Acts 20

- **Phase 1:** The elder's character and walk with Jesus
 - Humility: CJ Mahaney
 - Gospel Eldership (Thune) ch. 3
- **Phase 2:** The elder and his FAMILY (home/ marriage)
 - The Shepherd Leader at Home: Timothy Witmer
- **Phase 3:** Eldership roles/ responsibilities: Biblical Eldership (Strauch) - selected passages
 - Biblical Eldership: Alexander Strauch
 - Gospel Eldership (Thune) ch. 4
 - ***Eldership: Finding Faithful Elders & Deacons, Church Elders
- **Phase 4:** The elder and his teaching - Phase 4 & 5 SWITCHED IN MEMBER INFO PACKET
 - How Sermons Work: David Murray
 - Additional resources (Keller, Hughes)
- **Phase 5:** The elder as a leader: The Shepherd Leader
 - The Shepherd Leader: Timothy Witmer
 - Spiritual Leadership: Oswald Sanders
- **Phase 6:** The elders as teammates
 - Sticky Teams: Larry Osborne

4 Essential C's for an Elder: Calling, character, competence, chemistry