

# The Individual Christian in the Church

## The Elder

### Introduction:

When one becomes a Christian, they are added to the Lord's church (Acts 2:41). The church, on a local level, is comprised of people and has organization (Phil. 1:1). For the past several weeks we have looked at the individual Christian's responsibility that exists apart from the church. Today we would like to begin looking at the individual Christian's responsibility in the church. This first lesson shall examine the elders in the church (Acts 14:21; Titus 1:5). We will follow up on this lesson in the coming weeks as we examine the individual responsibility of the deacon, preacher, and all members of the church.

### I. Who are the Elders in the Church?

- A. **Elder** (*presbuteros*) = "an elder in respect of age, person advanced in years" (Moulton 340).
- B. **Bishop** (*episkopos*) = "an inspector, overseer; a watcher, guardian" (Moulton 160). "Superintendent" (Thayer 243).
- C. **Pastor {shepherd} (poimen)** = "to be shepherd over the sheep... to tend a flock" (LS 652). "one who tends flocks or herds, a shepherd, herdsman... a pastor, superintendent, guardian... to feed, pasture, tend a flock... to direct" (Moulton 333) (consider Jesus' statement regarding being the "good Shepherd" (Jn. 10:7ff).
- D. **Men of repute and pillars in the church:** Consider Gal. 2:2; Acts 15:6

### II. The Elder's Work:

- A. The work of the elders is defined in the terms above. These men are compared to shepherds who have true care and concern for the flock they tend. When a sheep goes astray, the elder will do all within his power to have that sheep come back to the fold. The elder will be one that is thereby on watch and guard over the sheep that he has been appointed to oversee. He will inspect the faith of brethren and direct them in the paths they should follow (consider Matthew 18:10-14).
- B. Consider I Thessalonians 5:12; The "*labor*" and "*work*" of these elders is to "*admonish you.*" To "*admonish*" (*noutheteo*) = "to put in mind, to admonish, warn, advise" (LS 536). "To reprove (to rebuke for a fault or misdeed; scold... to find fault with) mildly or kindly but seriously" (AHD 80).
- C. Some elders may labor full time in the word of God and thereby be compensated (I Tim. 5:17-18).
- D. The elder "*watches*" our for the souls of those sheep he shepherds (Acts 20:28ff; Heb. 13:17).
- E. The Lord has given the church these men for our perfecting in the knowledge of Christ (Eph. 4:11-13).

### III. What qualifies a man to serve in this Capacity within the Church?

- A. The elder "*must*" (I Tim. 3:2) meet the qualifications outlined in I Tim. 3 and Titus 1:5ff.
- B. There are approximately 23 qualifications for the elder (cf. chart).

### IV. The Individual Christian's Responsibility toward the Elders of the Church:

- A. I should "*know them*" (I Thess. 5:12) i.e., "to regard with favor" (Moulton 283).
- B. I should "*esteem them exceeding highly in love for their work's sake*" (I Thess. 5:13).
- C. I should consider the elder that "*rules well*" with "*double honor*" (I Tim. 5:17-18).

D. I should “*obey and submit*” to their rule because they “*watch on behalf of my soul*” (Heb. 13:17).

### **Conclusion**

Jesus is the head of the church (Eph. 5:23). The Lord has delegated rule in His church to the elders. This does not give them the authority to make new doctrine but rather to care for the people of God in their locality. The elders are compared to shepherds who watch, guard, correct, and perfecting the saints of God under their care (sheep). The elder is not an individual who turns aged and then decides he will participate in this office. The elder is clearly one who prepares to serve in this capacity and has an earnest desire to care for God’s people. God’s people, in turn, should treat said man with honor, respect, subjection, and obedience. The church of Christ in any given locality is as strong as its elders.