

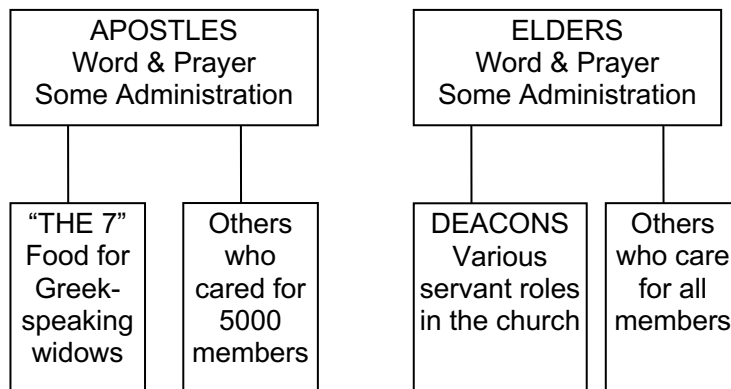
Roles of Elders

I. Pastoral Leadership (mostly a shepherd imagery)

Elders primarily serve in a pastoral capacity, which includes the following...

A. Elders teach the church (a shepherd feeds the flock in green pastures).

1. “Shepherd the flock” includes teaching the Word (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:2).
2. “Able to teach” is a basic elder requirement in this highest office of the church (1 Thess. 5:12; 1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:9b).
3. His foundation must be Scripture (Titus 1:9a).
4. Paul modeled the teaching content as the full plan and purpose of God (Acts 20:20, 27).
5. The church should pay elders who work hard at preaching and teaching (1 Tim. 5:17-18; cf. pastor-teachers in Eph. 4:11). For practical purposes, such elders could be called “pastor-teachers” (Eph. 4:11), but nothing in the term “pastor-teacher” denotes a paid position *per se*.
6. The Acts 6:1-7 principle is that the highest ruling body in the church must commit to teaching and prayer—and delegate what is necessary to maintain these priorities.
 - a) In Acts 6, apostles filled this highest role. However, the Jerusalem church also had elders (Acts 11:30; 15:4).
 - b) As the apostles died out and as leaders were selected for other churches, elders filled this role (Acts 14:23).

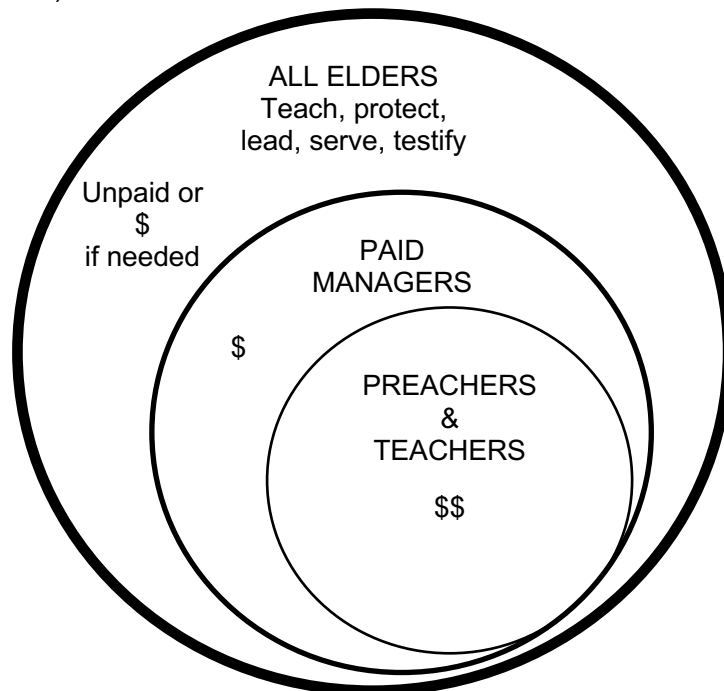


7. The mention of “overseers” (elders) before deacons (“overseers and deacons”) shows their prominence (Phil 1:1). There is evidence for deacons only here at Philippi and also at Ephesus (1 Tim. 3:8-13).

B. Elders protect believers from heresy (a shepherd uses his rod against enemies).

1. Judge doctrinal error (Acts 15:6).
2. Guard the flock from false teachers (Acts 20:17, 28-31a).
3. Know the Word well to refute heretics (Titus 1:5, 6a, 9).

- C. Elders lead believers (a shepherd guides his flock, a “household manager” takes care of the master’s servants, property, and finances).
1. Leading is primarily by example (1 Pet. 5:3).
 2. “Shepherd the flock” includes leading the church (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:2).
 3. In biblical language, shepherding a nation or group means to lead or govern (2 Sam. 5:2; Ps. 78:71-72).
 4. Elders exercise oversight of the body (Acts 20:28; Phil. 1:1; 1 Thess. 5:12; 1 Tim. 3:1-2; Tit. 1:7; 1 Pet. 5:2).
 5. All elders should be honored, meaning that the church makes sure their material needs are met. Those elders who rule [lead, direct, manage] well should be paid the most, especially preachers and teachers (1 Tim. 5:17a).
 - a) This verse distinguishes paid from unpaid elders, assuming that those with a vocation outside the church do not need a church salary. Elders who devote more time to the church should be paid more to relieve them of needing another means to make a living.
 - b) Taking into account I.A.5. above, three types of elders are noted in verses 17-18: unpaid, paid teachers/preachers, and paid managers (though all elders must be “able to teach”).



- D. Elders serve/care for the church in practical ways:
1. Care for the flock like managing one’s own family and home (1 Tim. 3:5).
 2. Pray for the sick (Jas. 5:14). Anointing with oil was a shepherd’s role to their sheep.
 3. Help the weak in the flock (Acts 20:35)—counsel and comfort those who are bereaved.
 4. Work hard for the saints (1 Thess. 5:12; 1 Tim. 5:17).

5. Officially welcome visitors (Acts 15:4).

E. Elders testify to the church and world in an official capacity:

1. Represent the church to appoint (ordain) qualified leaders (1 Tim. 4:14; 5:22).

2. Accept and distribute money (Acts 11:30).

3. Send representatives of the church to serve in official capacities (Acts 15:22).

II. Shared Leadership

A. All NT texts refer to a plurality of leadership. The “overseer” (elder) in the singular (1 Tim. 3:1) refers to a man who is representative of the larger group of shepherds. This pastoral team is never called a “board” as “board” is an administrative term from the business world.

B. Peter appealed to “fellow elders” (1 Pet. 5:1), so his readers had more than one elder.

C. Paul modeled team ministry in all his travels (with Barnabas, Luke, Silas, etc.) and elder appointments (e.g., Acts 14:21).

III. Male Leadership

A. All OT and NT occurrences of elders are men. Similarly, while Christ had both male and female disciples, all twelve original apostles were males (Matt. 10:1-4).

B. Male spiritual leadership for NT elders is in line with the OT pattern of having male priests. However, women sometimes served in administrative roles as queens and judges (Judges 4–5). Further, women sometimes were prophetesses in both the OT (Exod. 15:20-21) and NT (Luke 2:36-38; 1 Cor. 11).

C. Male leadership is particularly underscored by the requirement that an elder be the “husband of one wife” (1 Tim. 3:2; Tit. 1:6).

IV. Qualified Leadership

A. Elders must be evaluated by 20-22 criteria, depending on how one divides similar characteristics in parallel texts in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:6-9.

B. Please refer to the NT Survey studies under Selecting Leadership (p. 223), Elder Qualifications (pp. 224-230), and Deacon Qualifications (pp. 231-234). Summaries of the qualifications of both offices are on pages 235-236.

V. Difficult Leadership: Why is being an elder so difficult?

A. Few Christian men can genuinely qualify for the 20 or more elder requirements noted in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:6-9.

B. One can be sure that Satan and his demons will concentrate untiring efforts to make sure leaders will not function in their biblical role.

C. The time demands to meet people’s pastoral needs are extensive! Few men manage their own family well while meeting the flock’s needs—especially if they work outside the church.

Three Major Tasks of Elders

The multitude of tasks that elders handle can be boiled down into three general areas: **teaching** (point A on page 236a), **pastoring** (protect and lead on points B and C on page 236a), and **administration** (serve/care as well as testify on pages 236b-236c). These three roles overlap for the pastor-teacher (Eph. 4:11) as he fulfills them in a greater capacity due to his having more time available to meet needs and also due to the opportunities that come with his position.

