

What the Bible Says About...

The Relationship Between the Church and its Elders

INTRO.

A. The churches in which I grew up were young, small churches without elders.

I like being in a church that has elders. We are a team. ... and I want you to have that same attitude.

B. God has given elders a special role in the church - *"They keep watch over you as men who must give an account."*

- In view of the seriousness of their responsibility, each member is admonished, *"Be easily persuaded by them so that they may do this with joy, not groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you."* - [Hebrews 13:17](#)

I- A BRIEF BIBLICAL HISTORY OF "ELDERS"

A. Early in the history of the formation of His special nation, Israel, God designated a special group of leaders known as "elders."

- [Exodus 18:21](#)- [Moses was instructed]-*"select capable men from all the people—men who fear God, trustworthy men who hate dishonest gain—and appoint them as officials over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens."*

- Later, as Moses rehearses this event, he will provide additional insight into the qualifications required for these men:

- [Deuteronomy 1:15-17](#)- *"So I took the leading men of your tribes, wise and respected men...[and I charged them], Do not show partiality in judging; hear both small and great alike. Do not be afraid of any man, for judgment belongs to God."*

- Still later, shortly after leaving Mt. Sinai, God instructed Moses to choose 70 "elders" whom he ordained by "causing his Spirit to rest on them." - [Numbers 11:16-17, 25](#)

B. Once the nation was settled in a land, they were instructed to appoint city councils comprised of elders who would "sit at the city gates" to advise, instruct and settle disputes. - [Deuteronomy 16:18-20](#)

C. By New Testament times, the council of 70 elders had evolved into a judicial body called the "Sanhedrin"

- Each city could have its own lesser Sanhedrin of 23 judges, but there could be only one Great Sanhedrin of 71.

- It was this Great Sanhedrin which condemned Jesus for blasphemy and incited the people to demand his death.

- [Matthew 26:57-59ff](#)

D. As churches were being established in various locations, a body of elders was appointed in each church.

- [Acts 15:4](#)- the church in Jerusalem had elders

- [Acts 14:23](#)- Paul and Barnabas ordained elders in each church they established

- [Acts 20](#)- during his voyage to Rome, Paul *"sent to Ephesus for the elders of the church"*

- In Peter's letter to the Christians scattered throughout Asia Minor- [1 Peter 5:1-4](#)- *"To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder..."*

E. Qualifications for elders in the church are outlined - [1 Timothy 3](#) and [Titus 1](#)

A study of the heritage of "elders" reveals that these men have consistently been older, wise men whose lives are to be emulated and who will direct the affairs of, and provide counsel to God's people, ensuring that the community lives consistently by God's teaching.

II- WHAT ARE THE ELDERS' RESPONSIBILITIES TO THE CHURCH?

A. **Generally**, we get a picture of their work from their biblically-designated "titles":

1. Elder - "one who is older" - indicates spiritual experience and understanding

2. Bishop/Overseer - "One who watches over" - indicates the character of their responsibility

3. Pastor/Shepherd - "One who guides, leads and tends herds/flocks" (not merely one who feeds them)

- Note: [Acts 20:17,28](#) and [I Peter 5:1-2](#) - all three terms are used synonymously

B. Some **specific charges** to elders (aside from those inherent w/in qualifications in Timothy & Titus):

1. [Acts 20:28](#) - *"take heed/guard/protect themselves and flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers... [watch out for] savage wolves..."*

2. [Hebrews 13:7](#)- word denotes one who "leads, rules, governs, oversees"

- "...speak the word of God... live a life that others should imitate."

3. [I Peter 5:1-4](#)- willingly shepherd those entrusted to you... be an example to the flock.

4. [I Thessalonians 5:12-13](#)- "admonish"- "train by word" those you lead

C. So, an elder's responsibility to the church is that he must protect, teach, guide, lead and be an example to the church.

III- WHAT IS THE CHURCH'S RESPONSIBILITY TO THE ELDERS?

- [I Thessalonians 5:12](#) - *"Respect them"* - (lit. "know them") ; implies - "regard favorably"

- [I Thessalonians 5:13](#) - *"esteem them exceedingly highly in love because of their work"*

- [I Timothy 5:17](#) - *"if he leads well, let him be counted worthy of double honor"*

- [Hebrews 13:17](#) - *"obey" ("be easily persuaded by") and be submissive to them"*

- [I Timothy 5:19](#) - Do not receive an accusation against them unless there are two or three witnesses

- [v20](#) - adds, *"Those who continue to sin are to be rebuked publicly, so that the others may take warning."*

- [I Timothy 5:1](#) - *"Do not rebuke [any older man- presbuteros] sharply, but beseech him as your father"*

CONCL.

A. Too many young (and not so young) preachers feel like, and in some cases have been taught, that it's "them against me." The whole church suffers.

I have special empathy for elders- Preachers, generally, receive teaching and training for their ministry; elders generally have no formal training for the awesome responsibility of tending, feeding and guiding God's flock.

B. When spiritual men lovingly lead, guide, protect, teach and encourage God's people

And when God's people, honor, respect, love and submit to their leadership

- God will bless that church.

... Let's pray.