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A table of contents for the *Calvary Baptist Theological Journal* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_cbtj.php

Pastor-elder-overseer

Greg Wasser

With the exception of water baptism, perhaps no other Bible doctrine has caused as much dissension among Bible-believing Christians as church polity. Even the names of certain denominations, such as the Presbyterians, Congregationalists, and Episcopalians, reflect their own particular form of church government. The strife and confusion that has resulted has led many to conclude that polity is not important, or even that the New Testament lays down no specific order for governing local churches. For instance, a noted evangelical writes:

The New Testament writers, it would seem, are not interested in establishing a blueprint. They are more concerned with 'life' than with defining too closely how the church should be governed and who should do what... There are no uniform models for ministry in the New Testament; the patterns are flexible and versatile¹.

Such ambivalence, however, raises some very important questions: If there are no uniform models for church government in the NT, then were not the apostles in disagreement over this matter? And yet were they not God's channel of revelation? Does this not imply that God's teaching on the subject is only relative or at worst contradictory? Would God, who insists that all things be done decently and in order (I Cor 14:40), fail to provide a blueprint for the local church, which is an integral part of His plan for this age? In answer to these questions, Bible-believing Baptists would say that

There is to be found in the Bible a divinely ordained system of church government...What we find is a pattern and a sufficient one. We must assert that what we find in the pages of scripture is for our use and that having discovered, as best we can, the apostolic practice, it is our duty to follow it.²

The pattern that Baptists have found in the NT is that there are only two offices in the local church, that of the pastor and deacon. However, the Bible also mentions elders and bishops. Are these separate officers in the church, or are they pastors with the three titles being used interchangeably? The purpose of this article is to answer those questions. To

do so, this survey will consider how the doctrine of the pastoral office was revealed throughout the New Testament. Early Christians did not have a fully organized church on the Day of Pentecost, and neither did they get their church structure in toto from Jewish or other sources.³ For the sake of brevity, only those passages where the Greek words *presbyteros*, *episkopos*, and *poimen* (and their derivatives) are used will be examined.⁴ Special attention will be given to the pastor's position and his duties in the congregation. The following passages will be reviewed in the order they were revealed: James 5:13-16; Acts 11:27-30; Acts 14:21-23; Acts 15:1-23; Acts 20:17-38; Ephesians 4:11-16; Philippians 1:1; I Timothy 3:1-7; I Timothy 5:17-19; I Peter 5:1-4; Titus 1:5-9.

James 5:13-16

The first reference to church leadership is found in the epistle of James. James, the half-brother of Jesus and leader of the church in Jerusalem after the first persecution (Acts 12:17; 15:13; 21:18), was an eminently practical man who dispensed wisdom to his readers who faced a variety of situations in daily living. If they suffered, he said, they should pray; if they were cheerful, singing should be their response (v 13). But what if they were sick? Rather than suggesting that they go see a doctor or perhaps even one who had the gift of healing, James tells them to call for the elders of the church. It is helpful at this point to include a brief background study of the word elder.

Long before NT times the word elder was used as a title of honor in many ancient cultures. For instance, in Egypt it was a popular designation for village leaders whose duties often depended on the size of their community. Priests in pagan temples were sometimes called elders, while inscriptions found in Asia Minor indicate that there it was used as a technical term for the members of a corporation.⁵ The title was even more familiar to the Jews. Moses appointed seventy elders to help shoulder the burdens of his leadership (Num 11:16-30). From that time elders became a fixed feature of Jewish life. Each sizeable village and city had its own elders; they sat at the entrance to the town where they dispensed justice (Deut 25:7, Ruth 4:1-12). When the synagogue appeared during the Exile, elders administered its affairs; they did not always teach, but they saw to its government and disciplined its members.⁶ J B Lightfoot summarizes the importance of elders throughout Jewish history:

In the lifetime of the lawgiver, in the days of the judges, throughout the monarchy, during the captivity, after the return, and under Roman domination, the 'elders' appear as an integral part of the governing body of the country.⁷

In the gospels the word is used primarily in reference to a class of religious leaders who are often associated with the chief priests and the scribes. However, it is also sometimes used as a comparative designation of age, as in Luke 15:25, where it describes the older brother of the pro-

digal son.⁸ In Acts 2:17 *presbyteroi* is translated old men; these are contrasted with younger men on the basis of age. In these two instances the usage reflects the lexical meaning of the word, which is to denote greater age. It is the comparative of *presbys* (meaning old), so the concept of age is always inherent in the word itself.⁹ Age and experience was always held in high esteem in ancient cultures (much in sharp contrast to our own) and only men who were greatly respected obtained positions of leadership as elders. Men who became elders certainly were noted for their physical and spiritual maturity.

James speaks of elders (plural) of the church (singular). Whether a church had more than one elder would depend on its size and its needs. Strong states:

There is no evidence...that the plurality which frequently existed was due to any other cause than the size of the churches for which these elders care. The New Testament example...does not require a plural leadership in every case.¹⁰

A plurality of elders would not rule out the leadership of one elder among the others. Synagogues were known to have a prominent head called the ruler of the synagogue. It is only natural for people to look up to one leader.

James also speaks of one area of their duties. James makes reference to believers who were sick (literally, without strength), so sick that they were unable to attend church services.¹¹ These church members had the responsibility of calling the elders to their home instead of expecting them to come on their own. Much like pastors today, the elders were expected to visit and pray with the sick,¹² but with one added responsibility, to anoint them with oil. Rather than using *chrīo*, the sacred word for anointing (Christ or anointed one comes from it), James employs the word *aleipho*, which means to rub. People of the Middle East used oil for medicinal purposes.¹³ In essence, the church elders were to provide the equivalent of medical attention (there were few doctors in those days), as well as spiritual help, especially if a church member was unable to procure it for himself.¹⁴ Such practice was not unusual in those times; Westcott cites rabbinical writings where a rabbi was sent for in times of sickness, and Polycarp listed visitation of the sick as one of the duties of elders.¹⁵ Here should be a concern for pastors today: caring for those in their congregation who are ill and seeing that their spiritual and physical needs are met. As James says, the elders should minister to the whole person.¹⁶

Acts 11:27-30

At first only the apostles exercised authority in the church and cared for the people. Soon however the rapid growth of the congregation required the appointment of deacons to care for the physical needs of the believers. When the church in Antioch sent famine relief to their poor brethren in Jerusalem, they instructed Barnabas and Saul to deliver it

to the elders there. This seems surprising in the light of Acts 6:1-6, for deacons had been chosen to dispense material things. The reason Barnabas and Saul brought the relief to the elders was that they were the recognized leaders of the church, higher in authority and position than the deacons. The ultimate responsibility for the congregation's needs lay with them, although the actual distribution of the funds was done by the deacons.¹⁷

Acts 14:21-23

After their outstanding success on their first missionary endeavor, Barnabas and Paul returned to Antioch by the way they had come. Along the route back they stopped in every city where they had left a nucleus of believers and encouraged them to stand strong in the Lord. Then, Luke reports, they ordained elders in every church. Who did the ordaining and how it was done has been a point of contention. The word ordain is not the usual word for ordination into the ministry; it is the word *cheirotoneo* which literally means to stretch out (*teino*) the hand (*cheir*). It was used at first to describe the voting that took place in the free assembly in Athens,¹⁸ but later took on the more general meaning of appointing or electing by any means. It occurs only once elsewhere in the New Testament at II Corinthians 8:19 where Paul describes one (probably Luke) "who was also chosen of the churches to travel with us." In this instance, the obvious reference is to a church vote. However in Acts 10:41 where a compound form of the verb appears, the meaning is more that of appointing.¹⁹ Yet the congregations must have had a say in the matter. That the same word can mean to vote as well as to appoint may indicate that Luke intended both meanings. In any case,

Luke does not feel that it is necessary here in Acts 14 to repeat details as to the method of choosing to the eldership, since he has already given details twice before (Acts 1,6). We may be reasonably sure that the selection of elders here in Acts 14 was made by the congregation under the direction of the apostles who set forth the qualifications.²⁰

In other words, as in Acts 1 and 6, the appointment by the missionaries was no more than their sanction of the people's choice.²¹ From such evidences of church polity in the NT, those in office guide in the election process, but the people do the choosing. The leaders of the church can screen out an unworthy candidate, but the church cannot be compelled to accept officers it does not want.²²

Some object that elders were appointed as early as two years after the gospel was first preached. It was the practice of Paul and Barnabas to begin their efforts in the synagogue of each city if it had one (cf Acts 13:46; 14:1), so they frequently reaped a nucleus of Jews and proselytes who were quite familiar with the Old Testament Scriptures.²³ Perhaps their newness in the Lord explains why the missionaries played a greater part in the selection of elders than would normally be expected. Although

some have argued that “this first case is intended to be typical of the way of appointment in all later cases,”²⁴ it is better understood as the practice in infant churches rather than in established churches. Paul and Barnabas commended these congregations to the Lord because they realized that they probably would not be able to return to oversee later selection processes. Their actions, however, do have something to say of their concept of the local church:

It is probable that, in Paul’s estimation, some definite organization was implied in the idea of a church, and until the brotherhood in a city was organized, it was not in the strictest sense a church...The fundamental part of the church organization lay in the appointment of elders.²⁵

Divine wisdom dictated to Paul and Barnabas that the only hope for the survival of these fledgling churches was strong qualified leadership. Briefly it should be noted again that a plurality of elders is mentioned. The phrase in every church is distributive (church by church) and indicates that several elders were appointed in each church.²⁶

Acts 15:1-23

While the early church was predominantly Jewish, its character quickly began to change as Paul and his associates brought many Gentile converts into the body of Christ. This new influx prompted debate among Jewish Christians: how much of the Mosaic law should the Gentile believers observe? Some went so far as to say that without circumcision a Gentile could not be saved, while Paul and Barnabas upheld salvation by faith alone (v 1). When controversy erupted, the church in Antioch decided to send Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem in order to find answers to this sticky problem. With instructions to meet with the apostles and elders (v 2), they arrived in Jerusalem where they were welcomed by the same group (v 4). When similar controversy arose among the believers there, it was the apostles and elders who came together to consider the matter (v 6). That these two groups are mentioned together several times in relation to these doctrinal issues indicates that they had authority among the people and took a leading part in the decisions of the church.²⁷ This is not to say that elders were equal in authority to the apostles (the apostles are always mentioned first), but

This verse would seem to imply that even though the apostles were there with all their apostolic authority over the church, still the elders of each congregation were also looked on as leaders in those congregations—men whose function was not superseded or impinged upon even by an apostle.²⁸

Since no other officers in the church are mentioned, such as the deacons, it can be concluded that the elders held a high position of authority in the church. Because of their position they took a leading part in the important discussions that took place (v 7).

In the course of discussion, Peter offered his opinion and Barnabas and Paul testified of God's working among the Gentiles. The final speaker was James. Who this man was and what his position was is not clear. Many are agreed that he was the half-brother of Jesus. Concerning his position, some have said that he is the nearest thing in the early church to what we consider a (senior) pastor.²⁹ This is not the only time James is mentioned in this capacity. In Acts 12:17 he is especially singled out among the people to be informed of Peter's escape from the hand of Herod.³⁰ Paul called him a pillar of the church in Galatians 2:9 and even mentioned his name first before that of Peter and John.³¹ He is also known as an apostle (Gal 1:19), most likely in the sense of a witness to the resurrected Lord (cf I Cor 15:7). All this evidence makes James much more than a temporary spokesman. Admittedly, James is never called an elder, but his name is mentioned often in connection with the elders of the Jerusalem church.³² Since at times he is mentioned alone and at other times he is included with the elders, it can be inferred that while one among several elders, he had a greater authority.³³

Further proof of James' authority is evident as he begins his speech, "Brethren, listen to me" (v 13). As the last speaker, he had the final word as he summarized Peter's remarks and how they agreed with OT prophecy.³⁴ James concluded, "Therefore, my sentence is" (v 19). The wording here is emphatic (I for my part judge);³⁵ it was a common phrase used in the Greek town assemblies to introduce one's opinion. Although James was not settling the matter simply by his own opinion,³⁶ his authority was obvious in his manner and words, and his judgment carried great weight when the Jerusalem church made its recommendations.³⁷ Such was James' influence as the chief elder; his word was not law, but his opinion was highly respected and considered by those who heard him.

Acts 20:17-38

After Paul had completed his third missionary journey, he prepared to set sail for Jerusalem for what would be the beginning of the last chapter of his life. While on the way, he stopped over in Miletus, where he called for the elders of the church of Ephesus. This group of men had a special place in his heart, for he had ministered in their city for over three years. Most likely he would never see them again, so with words of warm exhortation he instructed them on how to care for the saints in their charge.

In his address, Paul explained to these elders that the Holy Spirit, not Paul, had made them overseers over the flock; theirs was a heavenly calling. Paul uses *episkopos*, sometimes translated bishop in the New Testament. A more accurate rendering that better conveys its meaning is overseer. Etymologically, it means one who looks upon, looks at, or takes care of; hence, an overseer, superintendent, or guardian.³⁸ Although it was most often used in a general sense, it was at times employed as an official title. In Attic Greek it was applied to commissioners sent to govern

new colonies, while later it was used to refer to officers responsible for various municipal and commercial matters.³⁹ Even priests in the temple of Apollo at Rhodes claimed the title,⁴⁰ as well as the presidents of heathen fraternities who had the duty of administering their funds.⁴¹ In the Septuagint it was used of taskmasters over building operations (II Chron 34:12,17; Isa 60:17), of captains of small groups (Neh 11:9,14,22), and of Eleazar, who was responsible for the oversight of the Tabernacle (Num 4:16). Even the Qumran community had its equivalent of an overseer. His duty was examining candidates for membership, teaching the works of God, and caring for the members of the community.⁴²

In this passage the two terms elders and overseers are used interchangeably; the same men are called both elders and overseers (vv 17,28). The early church fathers did the same;⁴³ it was not until the end of the second century that Ignatius of Antioch first introduced a third and separate office of the bishop as one superior in authority to the elders.⁴⁴ Later, bishops extended their pastoral authority over a group of churches in a certain geographical area.⁴⁵ Yet even then men such as Jerome who studied their Bibles discovered that "the elder is identical with the bishop."⁴⁶ This same truth has been realized by many, no matter what their denominational affiliation. J B Lightfoot, an Anglican, says:

It is a fact now generally recognized by theologians of all shades of opinion, that in the language of the New Testament the same officer of the church is called indifferently "bishop" and "elder" or "presbyter."⁴⁷

In describing the position of the Ephesian elders toward their congregation (over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, v 28), the rendering of the AV can be misleading. It tends to make the overseers seem distinct from and superior to the flock, whereas a better translation, among, keeps them level with the people, although still greater in authority.⁴⁸ Although authority is essential to the office, that is not the basic idea here.⁴⁹ They received their office and authority because they had been "made" overseers. The Greek word here means "to set or place." The Holy Spirit first created the position and then prepared these men as the right individuals to fill the position. The Holy Spirit provided the pattern for the local church as well as the gifts men needed to be qualified for spiritual leadership.⁵⁰

As overseers of the flock, Paul exhorts them to feed the church of God (v 28). Here Paul uses the verbal form of *poimen*, shepherd or pastor. These same men were known as elders, overseers, and pastors.

The same spiritually mature individual (elder) who is entrusted with the responsibility to feed the flock through teaching (pastoring) is given the responsibility to oversee the flock (bishop). 'Elder' refers to the dignity surrounding the office; 'bishop' speaks of the duties relating to the office; and 'shepherd' relates to the ministry of feeding and protecting.⁵¹

This concept of pastoring or shepherding is not restricted merely to that of feeding, but must encompass the entire work of the shepherd,

which includes protecting the flock (vv 29-30). Closely intertwined with the idea of overseeing, these two descriptions of church leadership describe in picturesque language the complete care elders are to have for their congregations.⁵²

Ephesians 4:11-16

Three years after his tearful good-bye to the Ephesian elders, Paul pens this wonderful letter to the congregation they served. Writing on one of his favorite themes, the church, Paul expresses his desire for their unity. That unity, he explains, comes from right living and right doctrine (vv 1-6). That is their part, but God too unifies them. He has given each one of them gifts (vv 7-8) and He has given them men to prepare them to use their gifts (v 11). When all work together, teacher and student alike, the local church matures and unity is the by-product.

Those whom Paul lists as men given to the church are apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers.⁵³ Actually, there are two groups mentioned here. Those in the first group, apostles and prophets, held temporary offices; they disappeared from the scene as the New Testament was being completed.⁵⁴ They formed the foundation of the church (cf 2:20). The second group builds on that foundation; they are the permanent officers of the church. Evangelists are itinerant missionaries or church planters, such as Paul was.⁵⁵ The others are pastor-teachers. In the original the recurring *tous de* (translated some) is not found before teachers; a simple *kai* connects it with pastors.⁵⁶ Hence, a better translation would be and He gave some pastor-teachers.

As God's gift to the church, the pastor's primary role is that of a teacher; his goal is to prepare his people to minister and edify (v 12). The New Testament knows nothing of the great gap between the clergy and laity as it is practiced in many churches today. The pastors do not do all the work; they prepare the people to minister to others. The people and the pastors work together, with the pastors guiding and directing their joint efforts. This is the sense of verse 12.⁵⁷

Philippians 1:1

In his salutation to the church in Philippi, a work which Paul himself had started, he addresses two groups, the people and their leaders. The leaders he mentions are the bishops (overseers) and deacons. This was a duly organized church and the officers in that assembly that Paul greets are the bishops and deacons.⁵⁸ He chooses to call them overseers, but he could have addressed them as pastors or elders. This is only more proof that

If the Scriptures be appealed to, and primitive churches be accepted as examples, it would seem to be a question settled, that in apostolic times, and for many years after, pastors and deacons only were known as permanent church officers.⁵⁹

Of all of Paul's epistles, Philippians is the only letter in which Paul directly addresses the church leaders. Certainly that does not mean that churches such as in Corinth or Galatia did not have pastors or deacons; Paul sometimes spoke of church officers in more general terms (cf Rom 12:8; I Cor 12:28; 16:16; I Thess 5:12).⁶⁰ He may have included the bishops and deacons here in his greeting to thank them for their initiative in sending the love gifts to Paul or to encourage them to carry out Paul's instructions.⁶¹

I Timothy 3:1-7

In the first of what are commonly known as the pastoral epistles, Paul writes to Timothy, his true son in the faith (v 2). Paul and Timothy had travelled and worked together on several missionary endeavors, but now Timothy was in Ephesus, dealing with the false teachers there (v 3). Paul offers practical advice to his younger colleague, to show him how to conduct (himself) in the house of God (3:15). With that purpose in mind, this letter can be very helpful understanding the pastoral office.

Paul begins this section with one of his faithful sayings: "If a man desires the office of a bishop, he desires a good work" (v 1). Later in the chapter he refers to deacons (vv 8ff). If the local church had any more than these two offices of overseer and deacon, certainly Paul would have laid down qualifications for them, too. This is again further proof that overseers, pastors, and elders are equivalent titles for the same office.⁶²

Paul goes on to say that to have the desire for the office of overseer is not enough; one must also meet the strict qualifications for the position (vv 2-7). If such requirements were in order, this is evidence then "that the Lord intended that the offices or functions of (overseer)...continue in the churches throughout the ages."⁶³ If each succeeding generation of churches is to appoint overseers, then they must know how to discern qualified men for that office.⁶⁴ And if a potential officeholder must first be personally qualified and then trained and appointed by the church, then his appointment certainly should be a lifelong matter.⁶⁵

Of the qualifications listed here, the position of overseer is restricted to men. There are several reasons for this: (1) the original overseers were the apostles, who were men; (2) Paul previously said that he did not allow a woman to have authority over men (2:12); (3) every adjective in this list, as well as the word overseer, is masculine; and (4) Paul says the overseer must be the husband of one wife (v 2).⁶⁶ Also, only men who were spiritually mature could qualify; new converts were excluded (v 6). This reflects the basic meaning of the word elder, that of man who is older, more spiritual, and experienced in the work of the church.⁶⁷

Two duties inherent in the pastoral office, teaching and administration, are evident here. First, an overseer must be able to teach (v 2). The emphasis given to this qualification indicates the importance Paul attached to the teaching gift in the church leadership.⁶⁸ John Calvin recognized

that teaching is “the chief gift in a bishop, who is elected principally for the sake of teaching; for the church cannot be governed in any other way than by the Word of God.”⁶⁹ Since the overseer must also administer, his fitness for the position depends on his own success in managing his household (vv 4-5). Just as the emphasis in pastoring is teaching and in overseeing is ruling, so the man who fills this two-fold office must be capable of doing both well.

Significantly, overseer is singular in this passage while deacons is plural. Hendriksen tries to argue that the definite article before “overseer” makes it generic, representing the entire class, but he gives no explanation as to why Paul does not do the same with the deacons.⁷⁰ Since some NT churches had a plurality of elders the best conclusion is that the Scriptures allow for plurality of leadership but do not dictate it.

I Timothy 5:17-19

In continuing his instruction on the order of the local church, Paul turns to what the church’s attitude should be toward its elders. In verse 17 Paul refers to elders who have performed their ministry well in ruling and teaching. The wording in this verse has led some to try to make a distinction between elders who only teach and elders who only rule. John Calvin was the first to make this differentiation.⁷¹ Jon Zens, a Baptist who usually sympathizes with Reformed views, calls this distinction artificial.⁷² The NT certainly militates against the teaching that there are two kinds of elders. The elder is also a bishop and a pastor; as bishop the elder rules and as pastor he teaches (Acts 20:17-38; Eph 4:11-16; I Tim 3:2,4-5). Since the elder performs both duties, the distinction in I Timothy 5:17 is not between ruling elders and teaching elders or between lay elders and paid pastors, but between those who rule and teach and those who rule and teach well. It is not the function in question here, but the execution of the function.⁷³

This verse does not give sufficient warrant for the Reformed view of two classes of elders, those who ruled and those who taught. Every elder engaged in teaching (3:2). However, some would do so with more energy and excellence than others. The differentiation in this verse is between those who do the work perfunctorily and those who labor to the end of their strength in performing their function.⁷⁴

These elders who have performed their ministry well are entitled to double honor, as Paul says. The Greek word for honor, *time*, usually means respect or reverence, but can also have the sense of compensation, as in honorarium.⁷⁵ Which meaning it takes depends on the surrounding context and the teaching of Scripture as a whole. In the verse that follows, Paul quotes from Deuteronomy 25:4 as scriptural support for honoring faithful elders: “Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn.” Since he uses this same scripture in I Corinthians 9:9 to support his argu-

ment that he and Barnabas should benefit financially from those whom they benefitted spiritually, it should have the same intent here in this passage, that of urging financial remuneration for the elders.⁷⁶ Earlier in this same chapter Paul makes a similar connection; widows should be honored in the local church by supporting them materially (cp v 3 with vv 4,8,16).⁷⁷ Similarly, in Christ's understanding of the fifth commandment, He too tied financial support in with honoring one's parents (Matt 15:1-9).⁷⁸ Further, in Galatians 6:6 Paul urged those who were taught in the Word to share their material blessings with those who did the teaching.⁷⁹ There is thus substantial indication that "honor" here refers to financial remuneration, a salary.

That the honor (or honorarium) given should be a double honor is not to be taken too strictly; Paul uses it in a figurative sense as a comparison.⁸⁰ Those who merely perform their duties deserve honor (a salary), but those who excel in their labors deserve double honor (a raise, so to speak). This is the least that the church can do for them, for their responsibilities are too great to fulfill if they must make a living for themselves and their family.⁸¹

I Peter 5:1-4

As Peter the apostle addresses elders in his first epistle, he reminds them that he too is an elder and therefore knows what the position requires. Their first and foremost duty, he instructs them, is to feed the flock of God (v 2). Not surprisingly, the word Peter uses for feed is the same word found in John 21:16 and Acts 20:28, referring to the entire work of a shepherd. Paul closely intertwined the twin concepts of shepherding and overseeing. Now Peter does the same, for he too connects these two thoughts in telling these elders to pastor the flock and take its oversight (vv 2-3). By doing so they would be following in the footsteps of their Lord, who is the Shepherd and Bishop of men's souls (2:25).⁸² Shepherds had to watch over their flock, as well as find pasture for them. Administrators such as kings were also called shepherds.

Peter warns these fellow elders against seeking dishonest gain; do not do it for filthy lucre, he says (v 2). He warned against men in leadership positions only for what they could get out of it financially. Paul had earlier said that such men were not fit for the office (I Tim 3:3). However, how could this have been a problem, if it were not that elders were receiving a salary from the church? Perhaps some of these early church leaders received such a paltry wage that they were eager to get more.⁸³

In one further warning, Peter urges these men not to act as lords over those entrusted to their care (v 3). As elders in the congregation they possessed great authority and the subtle temptation existed to misuse that power.⁸⁴ However, the church is not their church; it is God's flock (v 2), for He purchased it with the blood of His own Son (Acts 20:28). It is only theirs in the sense that it has been given to them as stewards; they serve merely as undershepherds to the Chief Shepherd (v 4).⁸⁵

Titus 1:5-7

Titus' relationship to Paul was much the same as that of Timothy; Paul considered him as if he were his very own son, for they had also travelled and worked together on many occasions. Now Titus had been sent to the island of Crete to set things in order in the churches there (1:5). One of his first tasks was to appoint elders in every city. Although the wording here is the same as in Acts 14:23, the word for appoint is a different one; it does, however, have a similar meaning of setting down, establishing, arranging. It does not mean to ordain, as in the sense of laying on of hands.⁸⁶

How the elders were to be appointed is not explained by Paul; evidently Titus understood exactly how it was to be done from past experience in working with Paul. He probably acted as the presiding officer over the selection process, instructing the people on the conditions of the office and weeding out any unsuitable candidates if necessary.⁸⁷ Much like Paul and Barnabas did in Acts 14, Titus would have exercised a much greater role because the work was new. The church in Ephesus was twelve years old when Paul gave instructions to Timothy that a spiritual novice should not hold the position of overseer (I Tim 3:6); he seems to waive that requirement here, probably because the churches there had not been in existence as long.⁸⁸

After describing to Titus some of the qualifications of an elder, Paul continues, "Let the bishop be...(v 7)." Paul is not adding a third officer to the local church; once again he is equating the titles of elder and bishop with the same man. The evidence is incontrovertible:

Either the conjunction *gar* has no meaning and the writer is talking about two different offices; or else he is still talking intelligible Greek, but is using the two words 'presbyter' and 'bishop' to refer to the same office.⁸⁹

One final note is that the importance of teaching in the elder's ministry is once again repeated. He must hold fast to the teaching of the Word of God, knowing it well enough that he can urge others to heed it.

Conclusion

There are several conclusions based on the study of these passages. One is that there are only two offices in the local church. Although the Bible refers to elders, bishops, and pastors (besides the deacons), these are only different titles for the same office. They are used interchangeably (Acts 20:17-38; I Pet 5:1-4; Titus 1:5-9). Therefore we must reject the episcopalian form of church government that sets bishops apart from and over pastors. At the same time we must also set aside the presbyterian system of polity as unscriptural, for it makes a false distinction between ruling and teaching elders (or lay and pastoral elders) that Paul did not make (I Tim 5:17-19). Finally, the Plymouth Brethren are wrong in rejecting paid pastors, for that same passage shows that elders should be

honored financially for their ministry. The only church polity that has any foundation in the Bible is Baptist polity. It recognizes the interchangeable use of the three terms elder, bishop, and pastor; insists that pastors both teach and rule; requires that each church support its pastor financially; and even allows for a plurality of leadership by hiring assistant pastors when the work grows beyond the capability of its first pastor.

The Scripture passages just studied outline many of the responsibilities of elder/pastor/overseer. He holds a position of authority in the church. He is considered the leader of the church; his concern is with the spiritual needs of the people, which are far more important in the light of eternity than their physical needs, the domain of the deacons. At the same time he is warned against misusing that God-given authority; he has been put in trust with God's flock and so should act accordingly (I Pet 5:4). His ministry concerns the whole person, physical (James 5:14-16), material (Acts 11:27-30), and spiritual (I Pet 5:1-4). By teaching and feeding his people and managing the affairs of the church, he and the congregation can work together to accomplish God's purposes, the salvation of the lost and the edification of the saints.

Notes

¹ Michael Harper, "Duplicating the New Testament Church" *Eternity*, 29:4 (Apr 1978) p 24

² John Legg, "Eldership: The Biblical Doctrine" *The Banner of Truth* (Dec 1969) p 8

³ B W Powers, "Patterns of New Testament Ministry—Elders" *The Churchman*, 87:3 (Autumn 1973) p 166

⁴ Other words which are used of those in leadership in the church are *didaskalos*, *poistamenos*, and *hegoumenos*.

⁵ James Hope Moulton and George Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm B Eerdmans Publ Co, 1974) p 535

⁶ William Barclay, *The Letters of James and Peter* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960) pp 311-312

⁷ J B Lightfoot, *St Paul's Epistle to the Philippians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publ House, 1953) p 96

⁸ D Lake, "Elder in the New Testament" *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, ed Merrill C Tenney (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Corp, 1975) 2:266-267

⁹ Mike Parker, "The Basic Meaning of 'Elder' in the New Testament" *Baptist Reformation Review* (Spring 1978) p 37

¹⁰ Augustus H Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1907) p 915; see also Manfred E Kober, "The Case for the Singularity of Pastors" *Baptist Bulletin* (June 1982 p 10; Lake, p 267, and Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *A Survey of Bible Doctrine* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1972) p 143

¹¹ D Edmond Hiebert, *The Epistle of James* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1979) P 318

¹² Daniel Heyden believes that the sickness mentioned here is emotional and/or spiritual not physical in *Bibliotheca Sacra* (July-Sept 1981) pp 258-259

¹³ Spiros Zodhiates, *The Patience of Hope: An Exposition of James 4:13-5:20* (Chattanooga: AMG Publ, 1981) pp 122-124

¹⁴ *Ibid*, p 127

¹⁵ *Ibid*, p 122

¹⁶ See Jay Adams' discussion of this aspect in *Shepherding God's Flock* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979) pp 110-119

¹⁷ Powers, p 173

¹⁸ Charles W Carter and Ralph Earle, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids, Zondervan Publ House, 1959) p 203

¹⁹ Gareth L Reese, *New Testament History: A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Acts* (Joplin: College Press, 1976) p 519

²⁰ *Ibid*, pp 519-520

²¹ *Ibid*, p 266

²² Legg, p 14: see also Edward T. Hiscox, *Principles and Practices for Baptist Churches* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publ, 1980) pp 98-99

²³ Parker, p 42

²⁴ William M. Ramsay, *St Paul the Traveller and Roman Citizen* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1982) p 121

²⁵ *Ibid*, p 120

²⁶ Joseph Addison Alexander, *Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publ House, 1956) p 528

²⁷ Barclay, p 313

²⁸ Reese, p 532

²⁹ Kober, p 10; see Jon Zens, "The Major Concepts of Eldership in the New Testament" *Baptist Reformation Review*, 7:2 (Spring 1978) p 28; Judy Schindler, "The Rise of One-Bishop Rule in the Early Church" *Baptist Reformation Review*, 10:2 (Second Quarter, 1981) p 3

³⁰ Reese, *New Testament History*, p 791, no 53

³¹ F F Bruce, *Commentary on the Book of Acts* (Grand Rapids: Wm B Eerdmans Publ Co, 1954) pp 252-253

³² Cf Acts 21:18; other apostles such as Peter and John also served as elders (I Pet 5:1; II John 1:1); see Reese, pp 791-792

³³ Lightfoot, p 197

³⁴ Carter and Earle, p 213

³⁵ Reese, p 543

³⁶ Alexander, p 545

³⁷ Carter and Earle, p 215; Everett F Harrison, *Acts: The Expanding Church* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1975) p 237

³⁸ Reese, p 750

³⁹ D G Steward, "Bishop (Elder)" *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, ed Merrill C Tenney (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Corp, 1975) 1:617

⁴⁰ Merrill F Unger, *Unger's Bible Dictionary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1957) pp 244-245

⁴¹ Moulton and Milligan, p 296

⁴² Stewart, pp 617-618

⁴³ Unger, p 296

⁴⁴ Raymond E Brown, "Episcopo and Episcopos: The New Testament Evidence" *Theological Studies* 41:2 (June 1980) p 334

⁴⁵ Clinton Bennet, "Baptists, Bishops, and the Sacerdotal Ministry" *The Baptist Quarterly* 19:8 (Oct 1982) pp 376-377

⁴⁶ Henry C Thiessen, *Introductory Lectures in Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Wm B Eerdmans Publ Co, 1949) p 418

⁴⁷ Lightfoot, p 95

⁴⁸ Alexander, p 711

⁴⁹ Legg, p 10

⁵⁰ Reese, p 750

⁵¹ Kober, p 9

⁵² Adams, p 8

⁵³ In Paul's list he fails to mention deacons; this would indicate that their authority and function is different from the others. Their concern is with the mundane matters of the church; the apostles, et al, were primarily interested in the spiritual welfare of the people.

⁵⁴ John Brown, *Exposition of First Peter*, Vol 2 (Marshallton, DE: The National Foundation for Christian Education, nd) pp 184-185

⁵⁵ William Hendriksen, *Galatians and Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979) p 197

⁵⁶ John Eadie, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians* (Minneapolis: James and Klock Christian Publ Co, 1977) p 304

⁵⁷ Hendriksen, pp 197-198

⁵⁸ John Eadie, *A Commenatary of the Greek Text of the Epistle of Paul to the Philippians* (Minneapolis: James and Klock Christian Publ Co, 1977) p 4

⁵⁹ Hiscox, p 84

⁶⁰ Harrison, p 225

⁶¹ William Hendriksen, *Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979) p 49

⁶² Lightfoot, p 97

⁶³ Reese, p 264

⁶⁴ Zens, p 28

⁶⁵ Powers, p 177

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, pp 175-176

⁶⁷ Lake, p 268

⁶⁸ Patrick Fairbairn, *Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publ House, 1956) p 137

⁶⁹ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon* (Grand Rapids: Wm B Eerdmans Publ Co, 1948) pp 294-295

⁷⁰ William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of Thessalonians, Timothy, and Titus* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979) p 346

⁷¹ Calvin, p 138

⁷² Zens, p 30

⁷³ Fairbairn, p 216

⁷⁴ Homer A Kent, *The Pastoral Epistles* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1958) p 181-2

⁷⁵ William F Arndt and F Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Chicago: Univ of Chicago Press, 1979) p 825

⁷⁶ Kent, p 182

⁷⁷ Hendriksen, *Thessalonians, Timothy, and Titus* pp 179-181

⁷⁸ Legg, pp 12-13

⁷⁹ Powers, p 179

⁸⁰ Fairbairn, pp 216-217

⁸¹ Powers, p 174

⁸² E Edmond Heibert, "Counsel for Christ's Undershepherds: An Exposition of I Peter 5:1-4" *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 139:556 (Oct-Dec 1982) p 335

⁸³ Barclay, p 315

⁸⁴ Heibert, "Counsel for Christ's Undershepherds" p 337

⁸⁵ *Ibid*, p 334

⁸⁶ Kent, p 218

⁸⁷ Ramsay, p 122

⁸⁸ Kent, p 134

⁸⁹ A E Harvey, "Elders" *Journal of Theological Studies*, 25:2 (Oct 1974) p 330

Book Reviews

Marsden, George M, **Reforming Fundamentalism** (Grand Rapids: Wm B Eerdmans Publ Co, 1987, 311 pp hard \$19.95); reviewed by E Robert Jordan

I believe the most important book published in the Christian world in 1987 is the book *Reforming Fundamentalism* by George M Marsden. Unwittingly George Marsden has done true Biblical Fundamentalism a real service with the writing and publishing of this book. As Fundamentalists we can teach the doctrinal position and the associational position of the New Evangelicals. But we haven't been able to document the ethical position of the New Evangelical. This book certainly does it in bold black and white print.

So often you hear a few fundamentalists saying "The Neo Evangelical loves, or the Neo Evangelical forgives, or the New Evangelical is compassionate." But after reading this book and seeing the relationship of the professors, business men, trustees, etc, you will certainly have a change of mind. One thing is certain after reading it. . . ll of true love is not on the side of the New Evangelical, and all of the heat is not on the side of real Fundamentalism.

Marsden shows clearly how Fundamentalism at Fuller and other institutions went from true Fundamentalism to the extreme position of New Evangelicals and their denial of the inerrancy of Scripture as it is today. Every pastor and student considering the ministry should read this book and have it in their library.