

Ecclesiology — Church Leadership

ELDER IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

(presbuteros):

(1) The word is used adjectivally to *denote seniority* (Luke 15:25; 1 Timothy 5:2).

(2) Referring to the Jewish elders of the synagogue, usually associated with the scribes and Pharisees, and New Testament passages cited in the previous article.

(3) It denotes certain persons appointed to hold office in the Christian church, and to exercise spiritual oversight over the flock entrusted to them. From the references in Acts 14:23; 20:17 it may be inferred that the churches generally had elders appointed over them. That "elders" and "bishops" were in apostolic and sub-apostolic times the same, is now almost universally admitted; in all New Testament references their functions are identical. The most probable explanation of the difference of names is that "elder" refers mainly to the person, and "bishop" to the office; the name "elder" emphasizes what he is, while "bishop," that is "overseer," emphasizes what the elder or presbyter does.

See BISHOP; CHURCH GOVERNMENT; MINISTRY.

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Elder - (Easton's Bible Dictionary)

The "elders" of the New Testament church were the "pastors" (Eph. 4:11), "bishops or overseers" (Acts 20:28), "leaders" and "rulers" (Heb. 13:7; 1 Thess. 5:12) of the flock. Everywhere in the New Testament bishop and presbyter are titles given to one and the same officer of the Christian church. He who is called presbyter or elder on account of his age or gravity is also called bishop or overseer with reference to the duty that lay upon him (Titus 1:5-7; Acts 20:17-28; Phil. 1:1).

A — 1: πρεσβύτερος

(Strong's #4245 — Adjective — presbuteros — pres-boo'-ter-os)

an adjective, the comparative degree of presbus, "an old man, an elder," is used (a) of age, whether of the "elder" of two persons, Luke 15:25 , or more, John 8:9 , "the eldest;" or of a person advanced in life, a senior, Acts 2:17; in Hebrews 11:2 , the "elders" are the forefathers in Israel; so in Matthew 15:2; Mark 7:3,5; the feminine of the adjective is used of "elder" women in the churches, 1 Timothy 5:2 , not in respect of position but in seniority of age; (b) of rank or positions of responsibility, (1) among Gentiles, as in the Sept. of Genesis 50:7; Numbers 22:7; (2) in the Jewish nation, firstly, those who were the heads or leaders of the tribes and families, as of the seventy who assisted Moses, Numbers 11:16; Deuteronomy 27:1 , and those assembled by Solomon; secondly, members of the Sanhedrin, consisting of the chief priests, "elders" and scribes, learned in Jewish law, e.g., Matthew 16:21; 26:47; thirdly, those who managed public affairs in the various cities, Luke 7:3; (3) in the Christian churches, those who, being raised up and qualified by the work of the Holy Spirit, were appointed to have the spiritual care of, and to exercise oversight over, the churches. To these the term "bishops," episkopoi, or "overseers," is applied (see Acts 20 , ver. 17 with ver. 28, and Titus 1:5,7), the latter term indicating the nature of their work, presbuteroi their maturity of spiritual experience. The Divine arrangement seen throughout the NT was for a plurality of these to be appointed in each church, Acts 14:23; 20:17; Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 5:17; Titus 1:5 . The duty of "elders" is described by the verb episkopeo. They were appointed according as they had given evidence of fulfilling the Divine qualifications, Titus 1:6-9; cp. 1 Timothy 3:1-7; 1 Peter 5:2; (4) the twenty-four "elders" enthroned in heaven around the throne of God, Revelation 4:4,10; 5:5-14; 7:11,13; 11:16; 14:3; 19:4 . The number twenty-four is representative of earthly conditions. The word "elder" is nowhere applied to angels. See OLD.

Deacon - (Easton's Bible Dictionary)

Anglicized form of the Greek word diaconos, meaning a "runner," "messenger," "servant." For a long period a feeling of mutual jealousy had existed between the "Hebrews," or Jews proper, who spoke the sacred language of palestine, and the

"Hellenists," or Jews of the Grecian speech, who had adopted the Grecian language, and read the Septuagint version of the Bible instead of the Hebrew. This jealousy early appeared in the Christian community. It was alleged by the Hellenists that their widows were overlooked in the daily distribution of alms. This spirit must be checked. The apostles accordingly advised the disciples to look out for seven men of good report, full of the Holy Ghost, and men of practical wisdom, who should take entire charge of this distribution, leaving them free to devote themselves entirely to the spiritual functions of their office (Acts 6:1-6). This was accordingly done. Seven men were chosen, who appear from their names to have been Hellenists. The name "deacon" is nowhere applied to them in the New Testament; they are simply called "the seven" (21:8). Their office was at first secular, but it afterwards became also spiritual; for among other qualifications they must also be "apt to teach" (1 Tim. 3: 8-12). Both Philip and Stephen, who were of "the seven," preached; they did "the work of evangelists."

1: διάκονος

(Strong's #1249 — Noun — diakonos — dee-ak'-on-os)

(Eng., "deacon"), primarily denotes a "servant," whether as doing servile work, or as an attendant rendering free service, without particular reference to its character. The word is probably connected with the verb dioko, "to hasten after, pursue" (perhaps originally said of a runner). "It occurs in the NT of domestic servants, John 2:5,9; the civil ruler, Romans 13:4; Christ, Romans 15:8; Galatians 2:17; the followers of Christ in relation to their Lord, John 12:26; Ephesians 6:21; Colossians 1:7; 4:7; the followers of Christ in relation to one another, Matthew 20:26; 23:11; Mark 9:35; 10:43; the servants of Christ in the work of preaching and teaching, 1 Corinthians 3:5; 2 Corinthians 3:6; 6:4; 11:23; Ephesians 3:7; Colossians 1:23,25; 1 Thessalonians 3:2; 1 Timothy 4:6; those who serve in the churches, Romans 16:1 (used of a woman here only in NT); Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:8,12; false apostles, servants of Satan, 2 Corinthians 11:15. Once diakonos is used where, apparently, angels are intended, Matthew 22:13; in v. 3, where men are intended, doulos is used." * [* From Notes on Thessalonians, by Hogg and Vine, p. 91.]

Diakonos is, generally speaking, to be distinguished from doulos, "a bondservant, slave;" diakonos views a servant in relationship to his work; doulos views him in relationship to his master. See, e.g., Matthew 22:2-14; those who bring in the guests (vv. 3,4,6,8,10) are douloi; those who carry out the king's sentence (v. 13) are diakonoi. Note: As to synonymous terms, leitourgos denotes "one who performs public duties;" misthios and misthotos, "a hired servant;" oiketes, "a household servant;" huperetes, "a subordinate official waiting on his superior" (originally an under-rower in a war-galley); therapon, "one whose service is that of freedom and dignity." See MINISTER, SERVANT. The so-called "seven deacons" in Acts 6 are not there mentioned by that name, though the kind of service in which they were engaged was of the character of that committed to such.

1: ἐπίσκοπος

(Strong's #1985 — Noun Masculine — episkopos — ep-is'-kop-os)

lit., "an overseer" (epi, "over," skopeo, "to look or watch"), whence Eng. "bishop," which has precisely the same meaning, is found in Acts 20:28; Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:7; 1 Peter 2:25. See OVERSEER.

Note: Presbuteros, "an elder," is another term for the same person as bishop or overseer. See Acts 20:17 with verse Acts 20:28. The term "elder" indicates the mature spiritual experience and understanding of those so described; the term "bishop," or "overseer," indicates the character of the work undertaken. According to the Divine will and appointment, as in the NT, there were to be "bishops" in every local church, Acts 14:23; 20:17; Philippians 1:1; Titus 1:5; James 5:14. Where the singular is used, the passage is describing what a "bishop" should be, 1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:7. Christ Himself is spoken of as "the ... Bishop of our souls," 1 Peter 2:25. See ELDER.