

Elders & Deacons
...and their wives

By Frank Jamerson

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SPIRITBUILDING PUBLISHING
15591 N. State Rd. 9, Summitville, Indiana, 46070

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LESSON 1: DEFINITIONS

INTRODUCTION:

- A. We need to study the qualifications and work of elders to prepare men to do this work, and to know when men are qualified to be appointed.
- B. The proper understanding of the qualifications and work of elders will show that not all good men are qualified. Many good Christians have neither the qualifications nor abilities to be overseers of the church.
- C. This first lesson will be devoted to an understanding of biblical Greek words that apply to elders. This knowledge is necessary if one is to understand the subject.

DEFINITIONS:

- A. **Presbuteros:** elder or presbyter.
 - 1. Used of age:
 - a. Where two persons are spoken of - the elder, Luke 15:25.
 - b. Advanced in life, an elder, a senior, Acts 2:17; 1 Timothy 5:1.
 - c. Forefathers (Hebrews 11:2); received from the fathers, Matthew 15:2; Mark 7:3, 5.
 - 2. Used of rank or office:
 - a. "Among the Jews: members of the great council or Sanhedrin. In early times the rulers of the people, judges, etc., were selected from the elderly men, Matthew 16:21; 26:47, 57, 59; 27:3, 12, 20, 41; 28:12" (Thayer).
 - b. Sanhedrin: "In the N.T. the word sometimes, especially when used in the plural (Matthew 10:17; Mark 13:9), means simply 'court of justice,' i.e. any judicatory, Matthew 5:22. But in most cases it is used to designate the supreme Jewish Court of Justice in Jerusalem in which the process against our Lord was carried on..." (I.S.B.E.).
 - c. "Among Christians: those who presided over the assemblies or churches, Acts 11:30; 14:23; 15:2, 4, 22; 16:4; 21:18; 1 Timothy 5:17, 19; Titus 1:5; 2 John 1; 3 John 1; 1 Peter 5:1, 5" (Thayer).
 - 3. Elders must be men of mature age and experience.
- B. **Episkopos:** (bishop, overseer).
 - 1. "An overseer, a man charged with the duty of seeing that things

Overseeing the work...

to be done by others are done rightly, any curator, guardian, or superintendent” (Thayer). See Acts 20:28; Titus 1:7; Philippians 1:1.

2. *Episkopeo* (a verb) means “to look upon, oversee, look after, care for; spoken of the care of the church which rested upon the presbyters, 1 Peter 5:2” (Thayer).
3. The word *bishop* describes his function of watching for souls, cp. Ezekiel 3:17.

C. **Poimen:** pastor, shepherd.

1. A herdsman - one who feeds the church.
 - a. “Properly: Matthew 9:36; 25:32; 26:31; Mark 6:34; 14:27; Luke 2:8, 15, 18, 20; John 10:2, 12; in the parable, he to whose care and control others have committed themselves, and whose precepts they follow, John 10:11, 14” (Thayer).
 - b. Metaphorically: the presiding officer, manager, director, of any assembly: so of Christ the Head of the church, (John 10:16; 1 Peter 2:25; Hebrews 13:20); of the overseer of the Christian assemblies (pastors), Ephesians 4:11” (Thayer).
2. *Poimaino* (a verb, thus expressing action) means “to feed, to tend a flock...Luke 17:7; 1 Corinthians 9:7...To rule, govern: Of rulers, (Matthew 2:6; Revelation 2:27; 12:5; 19:15); of the overseers (pastors) of the church, John 21:16; Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:2” (Thayer).

CONCLUDING NOTE:

All three words are used to refer to the same office. See Acts 20:17, 28; Titus 1:5, 7, and 1 Peter 5:1, 2. Also *presbuteros* and *episkopos* may be used interchangeably: “That they did not differ at all from the (*episkopoi*) bishops or overseers...is evident from the fact that the two words are used indiscriminately, Acts 20:17, 28; Titus 1:5, 7... The title (*episkopos*) denotes the function, (*presbuteros*) the dignity...” (Thayer).

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. **DEFINITIONS:** (In your own words define, giving more than just the various translations used by translators)
 - A. *presbuteros* -
 - B. *episkopos* -
 - C. *poimen* -
2. Which one of the above words is used to refer to age, and what age do you consider elderly?

Shepherding the flock...

3. Give three ways the Bible uses this word (question #2) in referring to people?
 - A.
 - B.
 - C.
4. To what does the word *Sanhedrin* usually refer?
5. When it is used relative to the Jews, to what does it refer?
6. Which of the above words best describes an office?
7. Give four English words that Thayer uses as synonyms for the word *episkopos*:
8. What does the word *poimaino* tell us about the work of elders?
9. Why do you think different terms are used for this work?
10. If you were an elder, which one of these words (presbuteros, episkopos, poimen) would you consider to be most reflective of...
 - A. what you would do? _____
Reason: _____
 - B. what you would be?
Reason: _____
 - C. the nature of your actions? _____
Reason: _____

Overseeing the work...

TRANSLATION OF WORDS: Place a 1, 2, 3, etc. in the blanks.

- | | | |
|-----------------|----------------|--------------|
| 1. presbuteros | ___ evangelist | ___ pastor |
| 2. episkopos | ___ presbyter | ___ minister |
| 3. poimen | ___ shepherd | ___ bishop |
| 4. diakanos | ___ elder | ___ teacher |
| 5. euangelistes | ___ overseer | |
| 6. didaskalos | | |

TRUE-FALSE:

1. ___ The word elder in both Luke 15:25 and I Timothy 5:1 refers to one's age.
2. ___ The word bishop denotes the function.
3. ___ The words elder and presbyter denote dignity.
4. ___ The words elders and overseers are never used interchangeably.
5. ___ The words evangelist and pastor are translated from the same Greek word.
6. ___ Some good older men do not qualify to be elders.
7. ___ Men who presided over assemblies (churches) were referred to as elders.
8. ___ It is not important to understand the meaning of various Greek words relative to the subject of elders.

FILL IN THE BLANKS:

1. "From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and _____ the _____ of the _____," Acts 20:17.
2. "Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you _____, to _____ the church of God which He purchased with His own blood," Acts 20:28.
3. "...appoint _____ in every city, as I commanded you," Titus 1:5.
4. "For a _____ must be blameless as a _____ of God...," Titus 1:7.
5. "The _____ who are among you, I exhort, I who am a fellow _____, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: _____ the _____ of God which is among you..." 1 Peter 5:1, 2.