**The Elders: Another Perspective**

Bible Reading 1 Pet 5:1-11 [] = unused in sermon

**Introduction[[1]](#footnote-1)**

Many contemporary Church crises are undiagnosed failures of eldership, for eldership which is a very practical form of ministry. Hillsong’s very public humiliation over the broken leadership of Brian Houston, who had long term addictions to legal substances, should have been avoided if elders had the courage to call him to resign years ago. At the other end of the scale, the need of a relative to find pastoral care in his local church was unmet because most of the leadership were in their own marriage crises. Contrast this with the situation where a senior pastor’s wife left him he immediately put a letter of resignation in the hands of his elders, stating that if they could find fault in him he would stand down. This is biblical (Titus 1:6) and wise. The decision of the eldership has protected him from demonic and human accusations, and, I believe, “saved his life and ministry”. We could contrast this with the situation in some other churches, where the eldership team is composed of mature married couples. This perfectly illustrates the wisdom needed for Church maturing and growth.

My broad exposure to the Church long ago led me to conclude that treating *differences* over church government as something essential[[2]](#footnote-2) is a confusion. My personal motto, “Any friend of Jesus is a friend of mine.”, enables me to enjoy fellowship with all sorts of Christians[[3]](#footnote-3), and to work with them in Christ’s name.

People have been debating church government for centuries[[4]](#footnote-4). Are elders part of the *esse*/essential nature of the Church, *bene esse*/good for the Church, or an expression of its *plene esse*/fulness?[[5]](#footnote-5) [As I consider that only the personal presence of Jesus[[6]](#footnote-6) is essential to the life of his Bride and Body[[7]](#footnote-7), and take these words of his literally, “Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. 19 Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, vit will be done for them by my Father in heaven. 20 For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.”” (Matt 18:20),] I have concluded eldership is for the *good* of the Church and its recognition a dimension of her *fulness*. Whether recognised or not, I consider that elders are always present in a congregation[[8]](#footnote-8). Yet to grasp and *act upon* the New Testament teaching of eldership, we must appreciate the dynamic of the earliest gospel movement against resistance from Judaism[[9]](#footnote-9), false teaching from within[[10]](#footnote-10), and political persecution outside (from the Roman Empire).

To attain biblical accuracy on eldership it is essential to be centred on the life of Christ (see footnote 7 above) and to enjoy his indwelling life[[11]](#footnote-11) as the true content of Christian ministry. Jesus is ceaselessly at work serving his Bride in the power of the Holy Spirit by the gifts he dynamically gives to his Body. The exalted reigning Lord loves the Church through the Spirit as the superb expression of his glorious life (Acts 2:33; Eph 5:22-27). [The pattern of all ministries, is: Christ receives from the Father through the Spirit, believers receive from Christ in the Spirit, believers pass on what they have received from Christ to others. Being reconciled in Christ (2 Cor 5:19), God draws us covenantly into relationship with himself so that we become his fellow workers (1 Cor 3:9; 2 Cor 6:1) in the service of the gospel for the salvation of the world.]

**Jesus and the Elders**

In the New Testament Jesus is the substance and motivation of all leadership, he is the “good shepherd’ (John 10:10), the “great shepherd” (Heb 13:20) and the “shepherd and guardian of our souls” (1 Pet 2:25). It’s the manifestation of the life of the indwelling Saviour which makes someone to be an elder and this explains the primacy of character over charisma[[12]](#footnote-12).

In 1 Peter 5:3, Peter warns the elders (as an elder who has seen the sufferings of Christ) that they are not to be motivated by a love of human praise (people pleasing) or of power. They are to assume the lowly role of example as their Saviour (Luke 22:24-30; John 13:1-20), believing that glory will follow, not from men but from Christ, not a fading human glory but an unfading one. When elders are assured of this unfading glory, they necessarily forsake worldly motives and eagerly do their overseeing as humble, Christ-like examples to the flock.

That Christ himself is the proper pattern for the elder/overseer is seen clearly not only from the allusion to his earthly teaching in 1 Pet 5:3, but also from 1 Peter 2:25. There Peter says, “You were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the shepherd and overseer (*episkapon*) of your souls.” Christ is the “chief shepherd” as 1 Pet 5:4 says, but also the “chief overseer/elder” (2:25) The *highest thing about eldership* in the church is a summons from Christ to do his work under him in his likeness and for his sake.

Jesus is the pattern of all shepherding because: [

1. he knows the sheep by name (John 10:3,14,15)
2. he is heeded by the sheep (John 10:3,27)
3. he leads the sheep (John 10:3 –4, 27)
4. the sheep follow him (John 10:4 –50
5. he feeds the sheep (John 10:9)
6. he gives life to the sheep (John 10:10,28)
7. he gives his life for the sheep (John 10:11,15,17 –18, Matt 26:31)
8. he protects the sheep (John 10:12- 13, 28 –29)
9. he unites the sheep (John 10:16)
10. he enlarges the flock (John 10:16)
11. he goes after lost sheep (Luke15: - 7)
12. he is the final judge (Matt 25:31 –46)]

**The History of Eldership**

To approach eldership in a consistently Christ-centred way, I want not to begin with the treatments of elders in 1, 2 Timothy and Titus, but by starting with the vision of the 24 elders in Revelation (4:4. 10; 5:5-6, 8,11; 7:11, 13; 11:16; 14:3; 19:4). Whilst these elders are likely a council of angelic beings leading from heaven the rest of creation in praise and worship[[13]](#footnote-13), the main point to be drawn from this scene is that the holy Lamb of God, slain “from before the foundation of the world (Rev 13:8), has *always* established elders to represent his government over the universe.

In the Old Testament the council of God is where the LORD makes decisions in concert with angels and elders in heaven, *and in communion with prophets on earth*. This is how the Lord holds court (1 Ki 22:19-23; Job 1-2; Psalms 82; 89; Isa 6; Jer 23:18-22; Zech 3:1-7). Whilst under the old covenant God’s sovereign decisions were shared with angels and prophets (Gen 18; Isa 6; Jer 23:18-22; Zech 3:1-7), the new covenant with Christ shifts everything.

The glorification of humanity through the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus has brought about a radical transformation in the status of *all* God’s people. The Lord is our Father and our God in a new way through Christ (John 20:17). The whole Church’s being seated with Christ in the heavenly places (Eph 2:6) brings rest and rule over the world[[14]](#footnote-14), for Jesus has drawn us into his heavenly council (Luke 24 Acts 1). [From this exalted angle, the “priesthood of all believers” (Luther), can also be seen as a “prophethood of all believers etc.” for we all hold “the testimony of Jesus, the Spirit of prophecy” (Rev 19:10).] According to Hebrews, the Church has “come to” the heavenly Mount Zion, we are a Church centred on the blood of the cross in the midst of jubilant angelic powers (Heb 12:18-24 cf. Gal 4:26ff.). With minds “set on things above not on things that are on earth.…with lives hid with Christ in God” (Col 3:1-4), we are being renewed in our thinking (Rom 12:1-2; Phil 2:5) to realise that the new community/e*kklesia* of God, is sharing together the new creation life of Christ[[15]](#footnote-15). The current deficit in the contemporary Western Church of heavenly thinking about our identity (cf. Phil 3:20-21) makes sub-biblical forms and functions of eldership almost inevitable.

[The ascended heavenly Lord appoints apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers/elders, to fill “all things”, the world of life and culture, with his own fulness of divine glory (Eph 4:10)[[16]](#footnote-16).] Given that the Church is called to reveal “the unsearchable riches of Christ, 9 and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God…10 so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.” (Eph 3:8-10); our ongoing spiritual conflict is with these evil “*rulers*” in “the heavenly places.” (Eph 6:12) not with earthly political powers! This is why those appointed to eldership will be particularly targeted by demonic forces and why their “fall from grace” (Heb 12:15) especially painful[[17]](#footnote-17).

[Whilst the Church represents a peak of God’s plan in the present time,] some form of eldership seems always to have existed in human cultures[[18]](#footnote-18). [In ancient Israel[[19]](#footnote-19) ‘the elders” is a collective title[[20]](#footnote-20). Around the time of Jesus, the Jewish ruling council in Jerusalem, the Sanhedrin, is called “the council of elders”[[21]](#footnote-21). The elders of the local Jewish community often led in prayer or took readings, but had no official ministerial function. This was taken by the *archisunagogos* (Matt 5:46; Luke 13:14; Acts 13:15; 18:8, 17) whose role was to supervise the congregation at worship. “Elder’ denoted not so much office as prestige. Elders also existed in Graeco-Roman society[[22]](#footnote-22).] Whilst this background has some significance, we must turn to the New Testament for a Christian understanding of elders. Our story begins in Acts, immediately after the Day of Pentecost.

**Elders in Acts**

Since the first Christians met in homes (Acts 2:46; 5:42 cf. 4:31; 8:3; 12:12; 17:5; 20:7ff; 20:20; 21:16; 28:30), their leadership has a household structure. Luke introduces Christian elders without explanatory comment (Acts 11:30; 14:23; 15:2ff; 20:17). They seem to function as a communal council representing the church in their locality, rather than as titled office bearers. The appointment of elders by Paul and Barnabas on the First Missionary Journey, “And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed.” (Acts 14:23), is best understood within the dynamic charismatic climate of the early church[[23]](#footnote-23),[[24]](#footnote-24). Appointment through “the laying on of hands’ (*cheipotonein*) seems to be the impartation of a blessing, accompanied by prayer for God’s grace cf. Acts 13:3. Like other elders in wider society these people had *emerged* rather than been appointed within a hierarchy, and were recognized in virtue of their seniority, status, and contribution to the church. [The apostles repeated what had happened to them as they were entrusted with the work of God (Acts 13:1-3[[25]](#footnote-25) cf. Acts 20:32)[[26]](#footnote-26).] The only other reference in Acts to elders is found in Acts 20:17 where the Ephesian elders gather with Paul and are charged to function as overseers/*episkopoi* (Acts 20:28) over the flock. In this passage “elder” describes the person and “oversight” the action. There is no evidence in Acts that the elders took the dominant role when the local church met together, in the manner of present day “ministers”.

**Paul’s Letters**

In his earliest writings no one is called an “elder”. Leaders must have been the head of a household recognised in the culture of the time as having oversight of the new house-church.[[27]](#footnote-27),[[28]](#footnote-28). In 1 Thessalonians 5:12 cf. Rom 12:8 Paul refers to those “who labour among you and are over you in the Lord and who admonish you”. These are leaders who preside and admonish; but nothing suggests an exclusive function. [Paul’s use of the *proistanai* “have charge over” is a verbal form of the noun *prostates*, which means “patron”. An informal brotherly relation seems to be in mind[[29]](#footnote-29).] In 1 Corinthians 16:15 –18 the apostle appeals for respect to be shown to heads of certain households[[30]](#footnote-30). The terms “bishops/overseers and deacons” appear without introduction in Philippians 1:1, these seem to be recognised and permanent leaders. “Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons” (Phil 1:1). The *episkopoi*/overseers are best thought of as hosts of home churches and the *diakonoi/deacons* as those who assisted them in the care of church members.[[31]](#footnote-31) Given that the church at Philippi had been in existence for about ten years when Paul wrote this letter, we may assume that the number of people meeting in the atrium of the house had increased[[32]](#footnote-32), with a corresponding need for a division of labour. [It was practical to be able to recognise and distinguish the householder by a general title such as “overseer”. No one however would think of calling such a person an “elder”, for these were not singular office holders but members of a collective group who together represented a wider community.] With the death of the apostle (pending?) and the threat of factionalism[[33]](#footnote-33), the linking of separate house – churches by “elders” would emerge in a natural way. In the early stages of the evangelisation of the Roman Empire, Paul writes into the churches in terms of his “work”, rather than one preoccupied with church order[[34]](#footnote-34). He thinks of people as fellow workers, brothers and servants of God, rather than as elders of the community. Despite all the difficulties in these early churches, none of the letters are addressed to the leaders *alone*, nor are they given charge to set the church in order or to withstand error.

By the time of the writing of the Pastoral epistles, 1-2 Timothy and Titus, the spiritual dynamic has intensified. The Pastorals are not an attempt to lay down a normative structure of church offices but focus on the practical implications of the gospel in the absence of the personal presence of apostles. Tradition rather than office is the emphasis, it is fitness of the person that is the focus, not set roles. The Pastorals shows great concern not to attract adverse publicity from a hostile and alien society[[35]](#footnote-35). The context remains that of the house – church (1 Tim 3:15; 2 Tim 2:20; Tit 1:7), so that the structure of the congregation is modelled on that of the household, Christians relate to one another as members of households. By this stage of the growth of the church (60’s A.D), the need for clear lines of authority had emerged.

In all cases leadership was plural, “elder*s*” (1 Tim 5:17; Tit 1:5).[[36]](#footnote-36) The elders’ called “overseers” are responsible for teaching (1 Tim 3:3; 5:17; Tit 1:9), and as a group they were to “manage/care for” the local church (1 Tim 3:4-5; 5:17). The Pastoral letters [are not “church manuals”[[37]](#footnote-37), but] put in place measures to deal with false teaching from within the churches (1 Tim 1:3; 3:15; Acts 20:30). This means that they are concerned with appointing good elders and deacons who will defend the faith and behave in an appropriate way. Internal disorder explains why Paul does not write *directly* to the church in Ephesus (where Timothy resided), but through his long-time trusted companion, Timothy. These letters are “on the spot”/ad hoc responses that reflect what was going on in the fourth decade of church life with its theological and behavioural abuses. Timothy and Titus are not model resident pastors but itinerant apostolic delegates. They were to learn the “ways” of Christ by following the apostolic model they had seen in Paul himself (cf. 1 Thess 1:6; 2:14; 1 Cor 4:16; 11:1). [They were to teach, exhort and rebuke, the function taken up after the apostolic co-workers had left; these were first of all apostolic functions.]

Paul tells Titus to appoint qualified leaders to replace the “unqualified leaders” who are destroying congregations. That these previous elders were unqualified is clear once we look at how they have been teaching and behaving (1:10ff.), and it is plain from the qualification list in 1:5-9[[38]](#footnote-38) that there is a serious ethical and moral problem with some of the elders in these churches.

Titus 1:5 – 9 speaks of elders “in all the cities”. [Titus did not need to appoint leaders of the various house churches as they had been there from the beginning. The expression “appoint elders in every city” does not mean “appoint one of the elders in every city to be *the* elder i.e. overseer for that city”. It seems the situation in Titus parallels that in Acts 14:23 where Paul and Barnabas do not appoint elders until their return visit.] A group of senior people is emerging in leadership, some whom are active in teaching whilst others are not. Titus has the task of formalising what is happening because of the rise of heresy (Tit 1:9).

**Other New Testament Writings**

1 Peter 5:1 – 5 speaks of elders who are responsible for the “flock” (*poimnion*); they give oversight (*episkopein*) (cf. Acts 20:28; Eph 4:11). It is likely particular elders had charge of a particular house - church, while for certain purposes they met in council. Age seems to have been an important factor in their status (1 Pet 5:5).

Elders are to be called for the sick in James 5:14. They may be the leaders of various house – churches who assemble to minister to a serious life threat; they all live in the same town. No liturgical or specific teaching duties are mentioned[[39]](#footnote-39).

**Pastors and Elders[[40]](#footnote-40)**

Given that the word for “pastor” appears only as a noun only once (Eph 4:11) and as a verbal description (“to act as a shepherd”) of a role only twice (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet 5:2), and that the teaching role of pastors seems to be one with that of elders/overseers (1 Pet 5:2), it is likely that pastors and elders are the same people *in scripture*. “Pastor” was not intended to be as much a title, as it was an adjective to describe what the person *does*. An old saying, “pastors come and go but the elders remain forever” implies a mindset that implies lack of intercommunion in the body of Christ, and it can lead to eventual division in the community.

**The Scope of Eldership**

An elder is thoroughly embedded in the life of the local church. (“I want to die with these people.” George S.) No celebrity status but corporate identity in a mutuality of love.

**Who Appoints Elders?**

Self-appointment is a biblically impossible idea, because the elders are a representation of the local Christian community. Speaking personally about my own appointment as an elder, after being rejected in my approach for ordination by two very different dioceses[[41]](#footnote-41), divine intervention led to ordination in a rural diocese I knew almost nothing about. [(This was at the recommendation of a visiting UK theologian who saw me as someone with the ability to teach and rule[[42]](#footnote-42)). At the opposite end of the story,] many years later we found ourselves in a small independent local Evangelical congregation whose three elders had all been appointed by the previous husband and wife pastoral team prior to them leaving Perth. After numerous ongoing efforts to communicate with this group, without any responses, certainly no Bible based ones, I sadly concluded they were not elders at all. This was a plain failure of spiritual discernment[[43]](#footnote-43) by the previous leadership[[44]](#footnote-44). Not long afterwards, that church closed, [sold its building, and passed the money on to other Christian groups.]

**The Preparation of Elders[[45]](#footnote-45)**

In modern times “theological education” has been seen as a prerequisite for ministry, [but overall, the more years of seminary study the less effective in terms of church growth. Whilst I will always recommend a college to anyone who asks], but in the end it must be the Spirit of Jesus working through the complexities of life who forms a shepherd after God’s own heart[[46]](#footnote-46)[[47]](#footnote-47).

**Application and Conclusion**

Models of sole pastoring lead to carrying an overwhelming weight of responsibility. I have friends who are most definitely apostolic. In one case whenever I see one man exhausted by his many obligations, I recall my exhortations to him that he needs elders around him to help carry the load of Christ (cf. Gal 6:2)[[48]](#footnote-48). [This is *not* the same as being the leader of a network of independent pastors.]

[There is an old saying: “Leaders are the problem, leaders are the solution.”] An experienced Christian leader, Lesslie Newbigin[[49]](#footnote-49), once said, “A true Christian pastor [elder] will be one who can dare to say to his [or her] people: ‘Follow me, as I am following Jesus.’” “To be a Christian pastor one should be intelligent enough to interpret the world’s dilemma; compassionate enough to be involved in its pains; pure enough to become an agent of redemption, and courageous enough to make the necessary sacrifices.” This explains the failure of pastors/priests/ elders to make disciples today, very few can say with Paul, “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.” (1 Cor 11:1). Hence many find it necessary to subvert the message of the gospel, drifting either into a legalistic Bible-based fundamentalism or a Bible-denying liberalism. All to avoid living out the scandal of the cross (1 Cor 1:23).

By faith we can believe God’s Spirit to raise up for the service of his holy Church a mature group of people who by relying on the testimony of the Word can function as a sort of spiritual tribunal to effectively deal with the trials, tribulations and pastoral needs of the local assembly of the Lord.

As Christ has commanded us to serve each other (Luke 22:26; John 13:15-17), we must all identify ourselves as servants of God (Acts 20:19; Rom 12:11; 1 Peter 2:16; Rev 1:1), and *all* acts of service as authentic acts of ministry (Acts 6:1, 4; 19:22; 20:24; 1 Cor 16:15; 2 Cor 4:5; Phm 13).

**Appendix 1** **What About Covering[[50]](#footnote-50)**

I was in a meeting recently with someone who is very well known in their own country and has a genuine global ministry. In relation to an upcoming event, he was insistent that it needed a city-wide “covering”. I made a remark to the effect that the language of covering is not at all biblical but merely a rather antiquated Pentecostal way of talking about what the scriptures call “oversight”. The problem with “covering theology” is that it opens the door to the sins of envy and selfish ambition (James 3:14, 16). I remember being in an Anglican deanery meeting and being shocked when the facilitator talked about his future “career”. Rather than the call of God on his life. Relationship rather than leadership is primary.

1. For a through biblical approach to this topic see, https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/biblical-eldership-session-1 . ; https://eccelmira.org/articles/the-roles-of-elders-deacons-and-members/this does not imply I affirm all their conclusions. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Beyond the obedience of faith in Jesus which makes one a disciple (Matt 28:18-20; Rom 1:5; 16:26). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Cf. “In Essentials Unity, In Non-Essentials Liberty, In All Things Charity/Love” cf. https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/essentials-unity-non-essentials-liberty-all-things . The doctrine of inessentials, or adiaphora, is best known form Lutheran reformation thought. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. A very early example seems to be the disorder that led to 3 John, with Diotrephes as the “first monarchical bishop” [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. https://www.episcopalchurch.org/glossary/esse-bene-esse-plene-esse/ [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Or, as the Lutherans would put it, Jesus in the gospel and sacraments, http://www.worship.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Essay-212-Esse-Bene-Esse-and-Plene-Esse.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Cf. Jesus contains in himself the fullness of the new covenant ministries. He is the apostle (Heb 3:1), prophet (Luke 13:33), evangelist (Mark 1:15), pastor (John 10:11; 1 Pet 2:25; 5:4; Heb 13:20) and teacher (Mark 1:27; John 13:13). Likewise he is called ‘slave’ (Phil.2:7), ‘deacon’ (Luke 22:27; Rom 15:8 etc), ‘priest’ (Heb 2:17; 5:5; 8:1) and ‘overseer/bishop’ (1 Peter 2:25; 5:4). This means that all New Testament ministries are essentially of the same order, that is, as sharing in the ministry of Christ they are non - hierarchical. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Especially given that the Church is essentially a heavenly reality (see below). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Including the false teachers in Galatians etc. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. E.g. Colossians. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Phil 1:21; Col 3:3 etc. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. As free unconditional gifts of grace. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. https://derekdemars.com/2020/09/22/who-are-the-elders-and-living-creatures-in-revelation-4/ [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. https://www.goodnewsarticles.com/Nov08-1.htm; https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/still-on-the-throne [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. It would be best to translate the Greek word *ekklesia* as ‘community’ rather than as ‘church’. This more accurately conveys that the *ekklesia* involves more than congregating (in a building) and can refer to the whole Christian community, the Christian community in a particular location, or to the community as it meets together. Each local church is an earthly manifestation of the eternal and heavenly church which gathers around Christ. There is one community of God that can be expressed in many ways: in a household, in a city, in a region, or all believers on earth. Believers are the *ekklesia* of God because they share together the life of Christ [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Given that this will be the fulness of a marriage between Christ and the Church (Rev 19:6-10; 21:2), and that this is presently prophetically image by human matrimony (Eph 5:32), we should anticipate special intense spiritual warfare on the marriages of Christian leaders. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Gen Daniel Morgan to revolutionary soldiers, “aim for the epaulets”, this strategy of concentrating on killing officers proved victorious. https://www.nps.gov/cowp/learn/education/unit6thebattleofcowpens.htm [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. A function of common grace and general providence. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. In the most common uses elders appear as recognised representatives, of Moses (Num 11:16), of tribes (Deut 31:38 etc.), of their city (Josh 10:4 etc.), of a nation (Num 22:4,7). They act on behalf of others or decide for them in political or religious matters (Ex 3:16; 4:29;12:21; 1 Sam 8:4 etc.) [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Recognition as an elder was an informally conferred status that came with age and maturity and on the grounds of respect. Old Testament eldership is a matter of honour rather than power, it is based on existing relationships rather than election or ordination. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. By the first century A.D. the term elder was restricted to lay members of the council, in distinction to the priests and scribes (Matt 16:21; Mark 11:27, 14:43 etc.), the Sanhedrin elders were a group of communal leaders who gained their position by venerability; especially through being well versed in the Law. They had no role in the temple or office in the synagogue. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Such leaders owed their position in society to the power of their family, and their position in their family to their relative seniority. They were not often called *hoi presbuteroi*, where this is used it refers to leaders within one’s own family, clan or acquaintance. Recognition is based on respect. This is a well-known reality in Indigenous cultures. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. The movement of the Spirit from Pentecost onwards e.g. Acts 13:1-3. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Nothing in the text suggests that the elders were titled or official office bearers, rather than a communal leadership in the city that needed to be put in place when the original house – churches had multiplied. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. This seems to be the spiritual truth behind what has become known as “apostolic succession”. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Apostolic\_succession [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. This is a preferable, because more dynamic interpretation, than understanding *cheipotonein* as raising of the hands in voting. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. A combination of social standing, close association with the apostle who founded the church and sought his assistance, and being one of the first converts would assure this. See, for example, 1 Cor 1:16; 16:15-18. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. At this early stage, there was no need for specialised language to do with leadership, there is no apostle speaking into the group from the outside and no other leaders. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. “Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; 7 if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; 8 the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the *one who leads*, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.” (Rom 12:6-8) [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Other house church leaders can be identified for Corinth (1 Cor 1:14- 16; Rom 16;23; Acts 18:1ff,8). [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. One piece of later evidence to support this is the qualification of hospitality for the role of overseer (1 Tim 3:2; Tit 1:8). [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. https://depts.washington.edu/hrome/Authors/laured/RomanAtriumStyleHousing/pub\_zbarticle\_view\_printable.html [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Like what had occurred in Corinth (1 Cor 1 etc.). [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. For this emphasis see, The Normal Christian Church Life, Watchman Nee, https://usr.helps7.com/RL/HCRL0024/index.html [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. This may partly explain the greater attention to church order and the comments on the role of women. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. “elder” may be a covering term for both overseers and deacons. In any case the grammar of Tit 1:5, 7 indicates “elder” and “overseer” are interchangeable terms cf. Acts 20:17, 28. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Which has led to all manner of denominations appealing to them to support their form of government. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. These are Sexually/maritally faithful, Good manager of household, Humble, Gentle Peaceable Reasonable Sober-minded Financially responsible Hospitable Self-controlled Upright in character Above reproach Spiritually mature Respectable Exemplary in Christian living. https://www.9marks.org/article/10-brief-reflections-on-an-elders-character/ [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. The Johannine letters are unique in that the author of 2 and 3 John introduces himself as “the elder”. This appears to be a title for a single person without parallel in the New Testament and rare in the Greek literature of the period. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. https://www.spiritualtheology.net/dont-title-people-pastor-if-they-arent-an-elder/ for a useful way to picture the relationships between the viverse biblical vocabulary. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Cosmopolitan and churchmanship/theology mixed Melbourne, and conservative Evangelical-biblical Armidale. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/ordinary-elders-part-2 [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Contrary to the biblical expectation, “they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us. 20 But you have been anointed by the Holy One, and you all have knowledge….I write these things to you about those who are trying to deceive you. 27 But the anointing that you received from him abides in you, and you have no need that anyone should teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about everything, and is true, and is no lie—just as it has taught you, abide in him.” (1 John 2:19-20, 26-27). [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. And a sign of the judgment of God, as the church was in the process of being stripped of vitality and members. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. The footnote immediately above contains sound advice. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. I am referring to David (1 Sam 13:14), whose life journey was not an easy one, but who always sought the Lord and worshipped him ceaselessly. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. “One becomes a theologian by living, by dying, and by being damned, not by understanding, reading, and speculation.” (Luther) [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. And tell him exhaustion is one of Satan’s best strategies. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Primarily a missions educator, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lesslie\_Newbigin [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. https://missionalmovements.org/blogs/ [↑](#footnote-ref-50)