
The New Testament prescribes two offices that oversee and serve the church: elders and deacons.

**1 Timothy 3:1-13 (ESV)**

1. The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God’s church? He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.

2. Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain. They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless. Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things. Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well. For those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.

Elders oversee the spiritual affairs of the church.
Deacons serve the temporal needs of the church.

- Elders are given many different names:
  1. Presbyters (also translated “elders”)
  2. Bishops (also translated “overseers”)
  3. Pastor (also translated “Shepherds”)

**Titus 1:5-9 (ESV)** This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you— if anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife, and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination. For an overseer, as God’s steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined. He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.

**Acts 20:17 (ESV)** Now from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the church to come to him.

**Acts 20:28 (ESV)** Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.
3 Titles for Elders:

- **Elder (Presbuteros)**
  The title elder can be found throughout the New Testament. When Paul and Barnabas circled back to the churches they had established during their first missionary journey, they "appointed elders for them in every church" (Acts 14:23). Multiple elders were set apart in each of the infant churches of Asia Minor so that they might be nurtured and protected - clearly establishing the pattern of plural eldership.

- **Overseer (Episkopos)**
  Coupled with elders are both overseers (bishops) and pastors. The overseer seer (Greek, episkopos), like plural elders, was common during the early church times. The Greeks used the term to define an office that had superintending functions, whether in political or religious circles. 'It conveyed the idea of "to look upon, to consider, to have regard to, something or someone."' Hence it implied caring for or watching over others, particularly those in need.'

- **Pastor (Poimen)**
  Although the term pastor (poimen) was translated only once in its noun form, the title joins those of elder and overseer in deepening the kinds of this church office (Eph. 4:11). The word literally means "shepherd," and is translated thus throughout the Gospels and in two of the Epistles (e.g., Matt 9:36; 25:32; 26:31; John 10:2, 11-12, 16; Heb. 13:20; 1 Peter 2:25, with most referring to Christ as the Shepherd of His flock).

The wisdom of the New Testament pattern of plural eldership:

- No one man possesses all the gifts necessary for leading a congregation.
- Leadership by a plurality of godly men, accountable to one another, reduces the temptation for one man to wield excessive authority in the church or to use the church to satisfy his ego.