



The Good News

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New Testament Eldership

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We live in a society where the terms "elder, bishop, pastor" are used with an extreme degree of differing definition. Often we may come across certain faiths which feature Elder John Doe who is unmarried and 17 years old. There are some faiths that incorporate Pastor Jane Doe, but she doesn't serve as an elder, rather a better description for her would be "minister". Some faiths incorporate men as bishops, but as a rule, they are not allowed to marry. Yet, when we look into God's word, we find concrete, definite teaching regarding "elders, bishops, and pastors".

I. They are all the same thing!

- 1) **Bishops** – “*an overseer*”. We find this in numerous passages including **I Tim. 3:1** and **Titus 1:7** where Paul brings out the qualifications of men who would hold such an office.
- 2) **Elders** – “*used to indicate maturity, character of one who holds the office of a bishop*”. We find this term used throughout the New Testament and in numerous ways, but is directly linked to the term “*bishop*” in **Acts 20:17** (elder), **28** (bishop) and **Titus 1:5** (elder), **7** (bishop). We see then that elders are the same as bishops.
- 3) **Pastors** – “*a shepherd, one who tends flocks*”. We find this particular term in **Eph. 4:11** with regards to the different “roles” that certain individuals filled in the NT church. We also find the concept of this term in **Acts 20:28** (“...*shepherd the church of God...*”), and in **I Pet. 5:2** (“*Shepherd the flock of God...*”). Both of these contexts are with

regard to the aforementioned elders and bishops.

II. **Why is it important to make such a big deal about all three terms referring to the same thing?** Because all three terms depend upon the same qualifications and represent three different aspects of the same office! In **I Tim. 3** and **Titus 1**, we have the qualifications of these individuals. Consider just a few:

- 1) They must be men! No women are authorized!
- 2) They must be married!
- 3) They must not be novices! (Must not be new to the Gospel)
- 4) They must exhibit the characteristics that Paul describes! “Young” men (either in age or faith) would not be able to fulfill these in the manner or consistency that Paul demands
- 5) There must always be more than one! **Titus 1:5, Acts 20:17**

We must always remember that God's way is the only way. When man changes God's word or takes liberties with God's authority, he brings wrath upon himself. So the next time someone mentions their “Pastor Jane Doe” or a teen-something introduces himself as “Elder John Doe”, perhaps we will take the opportunity to teach what God's word says. Either they will have a mindset that seeks truth and be willing to study with you, or they will be like so many others in this world that are content in believing a lie. The choice is theirs...the only responsibility we have is to present the truth to them.