Elders In Every Church

Intro: Luke writes, Acts 14:23 “And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed.” Elder (πρεσβύτερος—presbuteros) means “to being relatively advanced in age, older, old.” We also get presbyter by transliterating the Greek term into English. First in our study let us consider simply the word.

I. Uses Of Elder
   A. As was mentioned it denotes an aged person.
      1. 1 Pet. 5:5 “Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.”
         a. Here Peter uses it for someone who is older.
         b. It is set in contrast to someone who is younger.
      2. Tit. 2:2, 6 “That the aged men be sober, grave, temperate, sound in faith, in charity, in patience…. “Young men likewise exhort to be sober minded.”
      3. It can be used regarding women also; Tit 2:3-4 “The aged women likewise, that they be in behaviour as becometh holiness, not false accusers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things; “That they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children,”
      4. John calls himself an elder.
         a. 2 John 1 “The elder unto the elect lady and her children, whom I love in the truth; and not I only, but also all they that have known the truth;”
         b. 3 John 1 “The elder unto the wellbeloved Gaius, whom I love in the truth.”
   B. There is an official use of the word.
      1. Acts 14:23 “And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed.”
      2. 1 Pet. 5:1-4 “The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: 2Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; 3Neither as being lords over God’s heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. 4And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.”
      3. Acts 20:17 “And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the church.”

II. Elders Of The Church At Jerusalem
   A. We have no record as to when or how they were appointed.
   B. Yet, we read of the elders there:
      1. Regarding the church at Antioch sending relief to the church at Jerusalem; Acts 11:30 “Which also they did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.”
      2. At the Jerusalem conference; Acts 15:2, 6, 22 “When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question…. 6And the apostles and elders came together for to consider of this matter…. 22Then pleased it the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas; namely, Judas surnamed Barsabas, and Silas, chief men among the brethren.”
      3. Acts 16:4 “And as they went through the cities, they delivered them the decrees for to keep, that were ordained of the apostles and elders which were at Jerusalem.”
C. Apostles and elders:
1. While there were apostles in the church at Jerusalem, there was also the need for elders.
2. The office of apostleship was only a temporary office while elders were permanent.
3. Apostles were God’s representatives here on earth; elders were to oversee the local congregation.

III. Elders Of The Church At Ephesus
A. Acts 20:17-35
B. Acts 20:28 “Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.”
1. They are called elders (πρεσβύτερος—presbuteros) in Acts 20:17 “And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the church.”
2. Paul addressed them as shepherds of the flock.
   a. They were to take heed to all the flock.
   b. They were to feed (Greek ποιμαίνω—poimaino) which is to shepherd.
      (1) This involves making sure the congregation (flock) is properly fed.
      (2) It also involves caring for, guiding, guarding the flock.
3. They were bishops (Greek ἐπίσκοπος—episkopos).
   a. Bishops are “overseers, superintendents, supervisors.”
   b. They are “one who has the responsibility of safeguarding or seeing to it that something is done correctly.
   c. They are the ones who in expedient matters make the decisions as to how to best carry out God’s commands.
4. They were made elders, bishops, or pastors by the Holy Spirit.
   a. This is not a direct operation upon them.
   b. How the Holy Spirit makes them elders.
      (1) The Holy Spirit has given the qualifications.
      (2) When a man meets the God-given qualifications and then is appointed to the work, then the Holy Spirit has made them elders.

IV. Titus Appointed Elders In Every City
A. Tit. 1:5 “For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee:"
B. Important words:
   1. Appointed is from the Greek διατάσσω (diatasso) and means “to make orderly arrangements or to cause someone to do something that advances one’s objective, frequently of an official nature.... to give (detailed) instructions as to what must be done, order” (BDAG).
   2. Ordain is from the Greek καθίστημι (kathistemi) meaning “to set, place” (Zodhiates), “appoint, cause to be” (Louw-Nida).
   3. Paul left Titus in Crete to give instructions as to what needed to be done and appoint elders.
V. Elders Of The Church At Philippi

A. Phi. 1:1 “Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons.”

B. Paul sets forth the Scriptural organization of the church.
1. The elders overseeing the work.
2. Deacons serving in the area of work to which they are assigned.
3. All the saints.

VI. Qualifications

A. Listed for us:
1. 1 Tim. 3:1-7 “This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work. 2 A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach; 3 Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous; 4 One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; 5 (For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?) 6 Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil. 7 Moreover he must have a good report of them which are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.”
2. Tit. 1:6-11 “If any be blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of riot or unruly. 7 For a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God; not selfwilled, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre; 8 But a lover of hospitality, a lover of good men, sober, just, holy, temperate; 9 Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers. 10 For there are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, specially they of the circumcision: 11 Whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre’s sake.”

B. Negative qualifications
1. Not given to wine (they do not “tarry at wine”)
2. No striker (someone who is ready to fight, a hitter, a brawler)
3. Not greedy of filthy lucre (base gain, would also include an over interest in making or having money)
4. Not a brawler (not quarrelsome or contentious)
5. Not covetous (love of money and things, someone miserly)
6. Not self willed (dominated by self interest; self pleasing, inconsiderate of others, asserting his own will, arrogant)
7. Not soon angry (someone who is quick tempered with his anger lasting; could even seek revenge)

C. Positive qualifications
1. Blameless (above reproach, nothing laid to his charge)
2. Vigilant (watchful, alert, cautious and observant)
3. Sober (of sound mind and reason)
4. Of good behavior (well disciplined, orderly)
5. Given to hospitality (love of strangers)
6. Apt to teach—hold fast the faithful word (knows the Bible and is capable or skilful in teaching it)
7. Patient (forbearing, longsuffering)
8. Of good report of them without
9. Steward of God (manages the affairs of a house)
10. Lover of good (men or things)
11. Just (right conduct, upright in his dealings with all, fair, equitable in his decisions)
12. Holy (religiously right, pious, devout)
13. Temperate (self control, curbs his desires and impulses)

D. Special qualifications
1. Desire the office or work (aspires to the work, craves it to the extent he prepares for it)
2. Husband of one wife (literally “a one woman man”)
3. Children in subjection—faithful children
4. Ruleth well his own house
5. Wives must be:
   a. Grave (serious, it combines gravity and dignity, self-respect)
   b. Not slanderers (one who falsely accuses others)
   c. Sober (sound mind and reason, self-controlled)
   d. Faithful in all things (one who is trustworthy)
6. Not a novice (experienced, spiritually mature)

Conclusion: When one meets these qualifications and is appointed to the work of a bishop, the Holy Spirit makes him an elder in the Lord's church. He then, along with the eldership as a whole, makes decisions regarding the expediting of God's commands. It is the duty of the members to honor and respect him for the work he does. Members must also obey those decisions made by the eldership.