

Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly;" 1 Peter 5:2

The Eldership

Notice that Peter addressed the **"elders"** (v. 1) because one elder has no authority to oversee even one congregation. He cannot make decisions *solo*, and is abusing his authority when he does. An eldership that works *scripturally*, works together, *always*. Divine wisdom had a reason for designing it that way, and men need to respect it . . . **especially elders!**

Furthermore, some get the idea that when elders work together, they **must** be in complete agreement on everything. However, there is wisdom in an eldership discussing matters and letting the *majority's decision* have the final say in matters of judgment. Those who argue against this position, in effect, allow **one elder** to run the church by simply disagreeing with the rest! Thus, you have *minority rule* in the eldership, and a *dictatorial* elder becomes a Diotrephes! God did not so intend it to work in that manner.

One Flock

The **"elders"** were addressed by the apostle Peter and reminded to feed the **"flock"** (SINGULAR) of God which is **"among them."** While this seems rather simple and obvious, it has been ignored, rejected, and despised by various elders *historically*.

It is a known fact that the **first apostasy** from the first century church came from the eldership. The apostle Paul intimates as much in Acts 20 when he warned, *"Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves"* (v. 30). Paul had already warned of outsiders coming in as *"savage wolves"* to destroy the flock. Now he warns of apostasy from **within** the eldership!

George P. Fisher noted in his book on church history that "After we cross the limit of the first century we find that with each board of elders there is a person to whom the name 'bishop' is especially applied..." (*History of the Christian Church*, p. 51]. This "bishop" was superior to the other elders.

Furthermore, elders were often sent to rural churches to minister to their needs, and came to be known as **"country bishops"** and "held a middle rank between bishops and presbyters" (Mosheim, I:175].

By 343 A.D., the "bishop" of the chief city of each province came to be known as the **"metropolitan"** (Fisher, p. 104). He held sway over a region, as opposed to a local congregation. From the four metropolitans of Rome, Antioch, Alexandria and Constantinople eventually came the first pope. All because elders did not operate as an *eldership* and did not *limit themselves* to the oversight of a **single** congregation, as God intended.

In recent decades, elderships of larger congregations have taken the oversight of additional smaller congregations near their area. When objections were raised, the elders simply declared that these smaller churches **gave** the oversight to them! We know this is unscriptural.

Furthermore, within the past century numerous congregations in the larger cities were known to have **combined** their efforts in evangelism in order to reach a wider audience. A large auditorium was rented, a well-known, capable preacher was brought in to do the preaching, and the city had an area-wide evangelistic effort. In time, brethren came to realize that this was an *unscriptural* arrangement and ceased the practice!

Lastly, some elderships became the overseers of the **sponsoring church arrangement** where numerous churches sent funds to the one church in order to combine their evangelistic efforts in radio and television. One church could not finance the operation, so they pooled their resources . . . in violation of the limit of elders' authority!

Yes brethren, we must reiterate constantly the importance of doing God's work in God's way.