

## LOOKING AT ELDERS FROM THE GREEK

The reason for this study is that the New Testament contains information that should be used in the choosing of elders. It also contains information that elders can use to guide their ministry.

Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations in this study are taken from The New King James Version of the Holy Bible, published by the Thomas Nelson Company, Inc.

### Acts 14:23

(Acts 14:23 NKJV) **“So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.”**

The apostle Paul and his companion, Barnabas, converted people and started churches in Asia Minor. They did not want to leave the fledgling churches unattended. So they *“appointed”* (cheirotoneesantes) certain men to be *“elders”* (presbuteros) of the individual congregations. The Greek word for *“appointed”* is *“cheirotoneo.”* It means *“I stretch out the hand to”* (or toward) someone in order to choose that person (or to appoint that person) to an office (or function).

Although the Greek word for *“elders”* (presbuteroi) literally means *“elderly men,”* it refers in this context, to the elderly men of a local congregation whose responsibility it is to guide the affairs of the local church. The text says that Paul and Barnabas appointed elders *“in every church”* (kat’ ekkleesian, literally, church by church).

After Paul and Barnabas had prayed with fasting, they *“commended”* (parethento) the newly appointed elders to the Lord. The Greek word *“paratitheemi”* (of which *“parethento”* is an aorist middle form) presents the picture of a person setting something down beside someone else. Which is a way of saying that Paul and Barnabas turned the newly appointed elders over to the Lord.

### Acts 20:17

(Acts 20:17 NKJV) **“From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called for the elders of the church.”**

On a journey to Palestine by boat, the apostle Paul disembarked at a place called Miletus, not far from Ephesus. He invited the elders of the Ephesian church to meet him at Miletus so that he could consult with them.

This suggests that the elders of the Ephesian church were robust enough to make the journey from Ephesus to Miletus on short notice, which may indicate that they were not (all) old and decrepit men.

In this verse (Acts 20:17) the leaders of the Ephesian church are identified as “*elders*” (presbuteroi). In Acts 20:28 they are instructed “*to shepherd*” (poimainein) the church of God. *Elders* are referred to in the New Testament as *shepherds* because they shepherd the flock of God.

### Acts 20:27-31

(Acts 20:27 NKJV) **“For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God. (28) Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.”**

In the words before us (Acts 20:28), the apostle Paul charged the elders from Ephesus to “*take heed*” (prosechete) to themselves and to the flock.

Anyone who travels in Greece today will see this word “prosechete” on traffic signs along the streets. It is a warning. It means that the driver of an automobile should pay attention.

Paul admonished the elders to pay attention to themselves (as to how they lived) and to the whole flock. They were not told to pay attention to every flock. They were told to pay attention to the flock in which they had been made *overseers* (episkopous).

This was a wise admonition, because the elders of the church in such a prominent city as Ephesus might be tempted to think that their sway extended far and wide, especially in view of the fact that the gospel had spread from Ephesus to other places (Acts 19:10). The apostle Paul did not lay responsibility on the Ephesian elders for all the churches in their area. Instead, he gave them a more limited commission. He told them to pay attention to the flock in which the Holy Spirit had placed them.

Even though it was a human that had appointed the Ephesian elders (overseers), it was the Holy Spirit that had set them in office. The NKJV says, “*the Holy Spirit has made (etheto) you overseers.*” The Greek word “etheto” is from “tiheemi” and means “I place,” “I put,” or “I set” something (or someone) in a certain place. It would have been a mistake for the apostle

Paul to have said that these men had been made overseers (elders) by the Holy Spirit, if they had not been selected according to the guidelines that the Holy Spirit gave. These guidelines are found in 1 Timothy chapter three and Titus chapter one.

Notice where the Holy Spirit placed the overseers (elders). He placed the INSIDE (“*among whom*”) the flock to which they belonged. The Holy Spirit did not set them OVER many flocks.

The Ephesian elders (Acts 20:17) were to function as “overseers” (episkopoi). The Greek word “episkopos” has been corrupted into English as “bishop.” It may sound strange to our modern ears to hear that the Ephesian church had two or more bishops (overseers) in it, but it was so. Today, people are accustomed to hearing that a bishop is in charge of several churches, but it was not so in Bible times.

“Elders” are the older (and presumably more reliable) men of the congregation, whose work it is to oversee the flock. Since God intends that there be more than one overseer (elder) in a church-flock, the overseers (elders) must cooperate with each other. They must learn to work together as a unit.

Not only are elders supposed to pay attention to the flock and to oversee it, but they are also “*to shepherd*” (poinmainei) it. “Poinmainein” is an infinitive that shows HOW elders are supposed to oversee the church-flock: They are to do it by shepherding. The flock is identified in this passage as “the church of God” (teen ekkleesian tou theou), and elders (overseers) are supposed to treat the people of the church as a good shepherd treats his sheep. The comparison of a congregation to a flock is an apt comparison, for shepherding sheep is an ongoing task, with very little time off. It involves protecting, guiding, teaching, leading, correcting, and looking after the sheep in both spiritual and material ways. Notice that the elders (overseers) are supposed to be the ones who pastor the flock, not some preacher.

All three of these designations (“elders,” “overseers,” and “shepherds”) refer to the same group of men. They are referred to in the New Testament with three designations because they have a three-fold ministry to perform.

This passage (Acts 20:28) teaches us that God paid a high price for the church. He gave “*His own blood*” (tou haimatos tou idiou) for it. We understand, of course, that Paul was referring to the blood of Jesus. Judging by the high price that God paid for the church, we should not be surprised that the church is very dear to Him.

(Acts 20:29 NKJV) **“For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock.”**

The apostle Paul warned that “*wolves*” (loikoi) would arise FROM THEIR OWN NUMBER. For that reason, elders (overseers) should be aware of the danger inherent in their own authority. Seen from a historical perspective, it is too bad that Paul’s warning was not more closely heeded, because self-exalting leaders in later centuries brought most of the congregations of the Lord’s church under the influence of the church in Rome. This happened when the Roman emperor Constantine declared Christianity to be the religion of the state. The same type of leaders that brought the church under Roman authority kept the churches there for many centuries.

Since such a danger was imminent, Paul warned in Acts 20:31, “Watch” (griegoreite). The word “griegoreo” (I watch) is often used as a military term, meaning to stand guard or to be a watchman.

### **1 Timothy 3:1-7**

(1 Tim 3:1) **“This is a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work.”**

The apostle Paul was well aware that churches need good leadership. His letters to Timothy and Titus show that he was counting on Timothy and Titus to select and appoint good leaders in the churches. He sent Timothy and Titus lists of the characteristics they should look for in the men whom they would consider appointing.

Both the King James Version and the New King James Version use the word “*bishop*” in 1 Timothy 3:1-2 and Titus 1:7. The word “*bishop*” is misleading today, because it implies a church hierarchy, in which a bishop has several (or many) congregations under his oversight. The noun that is translated in the KJV as “*the office of a bishop*” and as “*the position of a bishop*” in the NKJB is “*episkopees*,” which simply means “the oversight.”

It is a high honor and a great privilege for a man to be counted among the overseers (elders) of a congregation of the Lord’s church. The apostle Paul calls it a “*good work*” (kalou ergou). The adjective “*kalos*” means both “good” and “beautiful.” It is perfectly acceptable for a man to desire to be included among overseers (elders) provided his motive is to serve the Lord and his brethren in this capacity.

(1 Timothy 3:2 NKJV) **“A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach;”**

For a man to be considered for participation in the oversight of a congregation he must be *“blameless”* (anepileempton). “Anepileempton” comes from “epilambano” which means “I take hold of” someone, perhaps even to arrest him. The Greek negative prefix “a” on this word shows that a man chosen should not be one who could be ‘taken hold of’ for some wrong. He is, thus, irreproachable, unassailable.

He should also be *“the husband of one wife”* (mias gunaikos andra). This passage shows that an “overseer” (elder) should be married. It also shows that he should have only one wife.

Before a man is to be considered for the leadership, it should be ascertained whether or not he is a *“temperate”* man. The Greek word that is here translated *“temperate”* is “neephalion,” which means that he should be sober, that is, he should be free from alcohol-induced intoxication. A sober soldier makes a good watchman, but a drunken soldier makes a bad one.

An overseer should also be *“sober-minded.”* The Greek word here is “sophrona.” Whereas “neephalion” (the word above) has to do with what one drinks, “sophrona” has to do with the way one thinks. “Sophrona” means that an elder should be sober in the sense of having a balanced mind.

An overseer should be *“of good behavior”* (kosmion), which means that he should be orderly, in the sense that his actions are decorative and pleasant to behold.

An overseer should be *“hospitable”* (phioxenon), which means that he should love strangers (i.e. guests).

An overseer should be *“able to teach.”* The Greek word is “didaktikon,” from which the English word “didactic” is derived. The meaning is that he should not only be able to teach, but also that he should be inclined toward teaching. That is, he should be a person that is instructive of others.

(1 Timothy 3:3 NKJV) **“not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous;”**

An overseer should not be *“given to wine”* (mee paroinon). The word “paroinon” is composed of “para” (which can mean “of,” “with,” “near,” or “by”) and “oinos” (which means “wine”). This does not specifically say that an elder should never ‘touch a drop,’ but it does warn of the danger of

drinking. Adam Clarke's Commentary defines "mee paroinon" as "not inordinately attached to wine." Barnes' Notes say that he should not be "one who is in the HABIT of drinking wine, or one who is accustomed to sit with those who indulge with it." It is clear that a person should not be chosen to be among the elders (overseers) if he has an alcohol problem.

He should also not be "*violent*" (mee pleekteen). That is, he should not be a striker (someone who hits people). He should not get involved in fistfights, which would likely occur if he were a drinker.

On the contrary, he should be "*gentle*" (epieikee), mild-mannered.

He should not be "*quarrelsome*" (amachon), literally, he should not be a fighter, that is, not belligerent or contentious.

He should not be "*a lover of money*" (aphilarguron). Literally, he should not be a lover of silver (silver coins, that is).

**(1 Timothy 3:4 NKJV) "one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence."**

He must be "*one who rules* (proistamenon) *his own house well.*" The Greek word here translated "*house*" is "oikos," which means "house" or "household." An "oikos" (house) may include anyone living in a family unit, whether relatives, guests, slaves, hired hands, or whomever. A proposed candidate for overseer (elder) of a congregation must first show that he can "*rule well*" (kalos proistamenon) his own family (or house). "Kalos proistamenon" means one who stands at the head of, or represents his family (or house) in a good way.

The text implies that he must have children, for it says that his children must be "*in submission*" (en hupotagee). This does not mean they should be forced into submission, for the expression "*with all reverence*" (semnoteetos) refers, I think, to the way that a man handles his children. Trench's "Synonyms of the New Testament" (p.346) says that the person who is "semnos" (from which 'semnoteetos' comes) is "one who inspires not respect only, but reverence and worship." So the type of man that Timothy should be looking for is one who disciplines his children but who does it in a manner that maintains their respect.

**(1 Timothy 3:5 NKJV) "for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?"**

If a man is not able to teach his children to respect him, it shows that he does not know how to “*rule*” (prosteenai) his house properly, that is, he does not know how ‘to head up’ his household properly. “Prosteenai” is a form of the verb “proistamai,” which means “I am a leader of,” “I have authority over” or “I manage.” Any of these expressions would be better here than the word “*rule*.”

A man who cannot lead his own household will not be able “*to take care of* (epimeleesetai) *the church of God.*” “Epimeleesetai” is a form of “epimeleomai,” which means “I take care of” or “I look after” someone or something.

**(1 Timothy 3:6 NKJV) “not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the same condemnation as the devil.”**

No one should be chosen to serve among the overseers (elders) who is a “*novice*” (neophuton), a “*neophyte*.” That is, he should not be a “*recent convert*,” as some translations say. If he is a recent convert, he might get “*puffed up*” (tuphotheis), as though some kind of a vapor (tuphos) had gotten into him. The word “*pride*” is not in the text, but it is implied. The danger for such a man is that he might fall into “*judgement*” (krima). The word “krima” implies a guilty verdict. The NKJV says that a novice might fall into “*the same condemnation as the devil.*” The words “*the same condemnation as*” are not in the Greek text. The Greek text says that a novice should not be chosen to be an overseer (elder) lest he get puffed up and fall into “*condemnation of the devil,*” which could possible mean that he might fall into some condemnation of the devil’s causing.

**(1 Timothy 3:7 NKJV) “Moreover he must have a good testimony among those who are outside, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.”**

Only men who have a “*good testimony*” (marturian kaleen) from outsiders should be chosen lest they fall into “*reproach*” (oneidismo). The word “oneidismos” means “*shame*” or “*disgrace*.” The devil tries to lay a “*snare*” (pagida) in which to trap overseers (elders) of congregations.

### **1 Timothy 5:1**

**(1 Timothy 5:1 NKJV) “Do not rebuke an older man harshly, but exhort him as if he were your father. Treat younger men as brothers,”**

No one should “*rebuke*” (epipleexees) an older man in a threatening way. The word “epipleesso” means “I reprimand” or “I rebuke.” It is a compound word, composed of the preposition “epi” (which means “upon”) and “pleesso” (which means “I strike”). No one should think that the official elders (overseers) of a congregation are ‘free game’ as regards criticism. Younger members should be respectful when approaching the elders (overseers). Indeed, no older man should be railed at, or spoken to with an upraised or threatening hand. Elderly men should be exhorted as fathers.

### 1 Timothy 5:17-22

(1 Timothy 5:17 NKJV) **“Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine.”**

The King James Version of the Bible and the New King James Version both speak in this verse of “*elders*” (presbuteroi) that “*rule well.*” The word “*rule,*” however, is too strong. The Greek expression “hoi proestotes” (translated those “*who rule*”) refers to the men who stand forth from the congregation to represent it. “Proestotes” is a perfect participle of the word “proisteemi” (or “proistamai”) which means “I am a leader of,” “I have authority over,” or “I manage.” The English word “*rule*” suggests a time in the past when bishops and priests actually ruled as overlords over the church and its property. The New International Version has a milder reading, in that it speaks of those “*who direct the affairs of the church.*” Yet this translation is not very exact, for if a translator uses the words “*to direct,*” he must supply some such words as “*the affairs of the church,*” which are not in the Greek text, to complete the meaning. A better translation would be, “the elders who lead well.”

Such men should be “*counted worthy* (axiousthosan) *of double honor*” (diplees timees). “Axiousthosan” is the imperative passive form of the verb “axioo,” which means “I consider (someone) to be worthy.” The church is, therefore, instructed (commanded) to count such men as being worthy of double honor.

The Greek noun that is used in this passage for “*honor*” is “timee.” It has two meanings. It refers not only to an “*honor,*” but also to a price. For example, the apostle Paul said in another place, “*You are bought with a price* (timees)” (1 Corinthians 6:20). I found, by checking “timee” in a Greek concordance, that there are about ten verses in the New Testament where “timee” means “price.” In about 32 other verses, however, it means



“honor.” Since the word “timee” has these two meanings, a “*double*” portion of it would seem to include both money and honor.

Paul’s instruction that certain elders should be considered worthy of “*double honor*” suggests that there can be different talents and different functions within an eldership.

The apostle Paul did not actually say, however, that the churches should pay certain elders. What he said was that certain men should be considered “*worthy*” of such honor. That is to say, if the congregation is able to support such men financially, and if they need and desire financial aid, it would be appropriate to support them. This is especially important for those elders “*who labor in the word (en logo) and doctrine (didaskalia).*” The word “didaskalia” means “teaching,” and the Greek word for “*labor*” is “kopiontes,” which means “working hard.”

I spent most of one morning writing the above comments on 1 Timothy 5:17. Afterwards, I remarked to my wife that I had found no suitable explanation for why the apostle Paul designated the elders who labor in word and doctrine as being especially “*worthy of double honor.*” My wife (a very knowledgeable person and one who has read the Bible through each year for the past 37 years) suggested that perhaps Paul made that recommendation, because these men need time away from making a living in order to study and prepare their Bible lessons. Her astute comment caused it to dawn on me that the expression “*in word*” may refer to the studying of God’s word. Those elders who came to Christ from the Gentile world would have needed more time in the word than their brethren of Jewish background, who were already acquainted with the Old Testament.

**(1 Timothy 5:18 NKJV) “For the Scripture says, ‘You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain,’ and, ‘The laborer is worthy of his wages.’”**

The apostle Paul cited the Old Testament here to backup his suggestion that certain elders (overseers) could be helped financially (1 Timothy 5:18).

**(1 Timothy 5:19 NKJV) “Do not receive an accusation against an elder except from two or three witnesses.”**

The apostle Paul told Timothy that he (Timothy) was not to “*accept*” (mee paradechou) an “*accusation*” (kateegorian) against an elder unless there were two or three witnesses (1 Timothy 5:19). The expression “mee

paradechou” (do not accept) is a negative command in the second person singular. Its singular number shows that Paul was not writing to several individuals but to Timothy personally. Paul urged Timothy not to accept unfounded accusations against a man, presumably, when he (Timothy) was in the process of considering a man for service among the elders (overseers).

(1 Timothy 5:20-21 NKJV) **“Those who are sinning rebuke in the presence of all, that the rest also may fear. (21) I charge you before God and the Lord Jesus Christ and the elect angels that you observe these things without prejudice, doing nothing with partiality.”**

The apostle Paul told Timothy to “*rebuke*” (elengche) those that were sinning (tous harmartanontas). Timothy was to do this in the presence of all. The verb “harmartanontas” is a present participle and it suggests that some were sinning as Paul wrote. The verb “elengcho” means “I rebuke” someone in such a way so as to convince that person that he or she is doing wrong. “Elengcho” does not mean ‘to blast’ someone. Rather, it means to convince a person by instruction of his or her fault.

I do not suppose that the apostle Paul was thinking that Timothy should rebuke only elders (overseers) that sin.

(1 Timothy 5:22 NKJV) **“Do not lay hands on anyone hastily, nor share in other people’s sins; keep yourself pure.”**

The apostle Paul admonished Timothy not “*to lay hands on anyone hastily.*” The expression “to lay hands on” can have different meanings, but in this context it seems to mean to install someone as an elder (overseer). An elder (overseer) should not be installed “*hastily*” (tacheos). The word “tacheos” means “quickly.”

### **Titus 1:5-9**

(Titus 1:5 NKJV) **“For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you –”**

When the apostle Paul said that he “*left*” (apelipon) Titus in Crete, it seems to imply that Paul had been in Crete and that he “*left*” Titus there with the intention that Titus should “*set*” things “*in order*” (epidiorthosee). The verb “orthoo” means, “I set (something) right” (or “in order”). Paul gave

two prefixes to this word. The preposition “epi” (which means “upon”) suggests that Titus’ work in installing elders would be on top of whatever else had already been done. The other preposition “dia” (“through”) shows that Titus should set things in order in a thorough way.

In the beginning of his letter the apostle Paul got right to the point. He urged Titus to “*appoint* (katasteesees) *elders in every city.*” The word “katasteesees” (*appoint*) is from “kathisteemi.” It is composed of the preposition “kata” (which means “down”) and the verb “histeemi” (which means “I make (something) stand” at a certain place). This is not the word “cheirotoneo,” which is used in Acts 14:23 for appointing elders. In Acts 14:23 the emphasis is on choosing. Here, in Titus 1:5, the emphasis is on installing.

The apostle Paul had previously instructed (diatassameen) Titus to appoint elders. The word “diatassameen” is composed of the preposition “dia” (which means “through”) and the verb “tasso” (which means “I place,” “I set,” or “I appoint”). Paul’s use of the word “diatasso” in this connection shows that he wanted Titus to follow through on appointing elders. This implies that Paul felt that the appointment of elders was very important and that his and Titus’ work as evangelists would not be completed until it was done.

The men whom Titus was told “*to appoint*” in Crete are called “*elders*” (presbuteroi). The word “presbuteroi” means “elderly men.” The function of “*elders*” is the same as that of “*overseers*” (or bishops), who are mentioned in 1 Timothy 3:1. The designations “*elders,*” “*bishops,*” and “*pastors*” all refer to the same men. See the comments on Acts 20:17, 28.

Note that elders were to be appointed “*in every city*” (kata polin), city by city. The implication is that Titus should go to each city where there were congregations of Christians and personally appoint elders in each of these places.

**(Titus 1:6 NKJV) “if a man is blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of dissipation or insubordination.”**

Paul instructed Titus to select men that were “*blameless*” (anengkleetos), that is, men against whom no complaint had been lodged. If complaints had been brought against a man, that fact alone would cast a shadow over a man’s candidacy.

This is similar to but slightly different from the requirement in 1 Timothy 3:2, where the NKJV also says that an overseer (elder) should be “*blameless.*” In 1 Timothy 3:2 the Greek word is “anepilempton,” which

means that a man should not have done anything that could be used against him. It concerns the man's character. (See Trench's "Synonyms of the New Testament," p. 381.) Here, in Titus 1:6, the word "blameless" (anekleetos) concerns how a man is perceived by the members of the local church.

An elder should be the "*husband of one wife*" (mias gunaikos aneer), literally, a "man of one woman." A similar expression is found in 1 Timothy 3:2. The word "woman" in this connection means a wife. It is interesting that being the "*husband of one wife*" is placed near the top of both lists. This placement near the top shows how important it is that the marital situation of an elder be in order.

Almost equally important is that an elder should have children and that his children should be "faithful" (pista). Some English versions of the New Testament say that an elder's children should be "believers." The adjective "pistos" is (properly) translated in the NKJV as "faithful," but the word "pistos" is sometimes used in the New Testament in a special sense, as in Acts 10:45, to indicate people who are believers (in Christ).

A man should not be chosen if his children are "*accused* (en kategoria) *of dissipation*" (asotias). The expression "en kategoria" (accused) means to have been charged with having done something wrong. "Asotias" (dissipation) refers to someone who wastes his resources. The wasting of resources often leads, of course, to dissipation of all sorts. If a man's children are justly charged with "*dissipation*," he should not be chosen for the leadership.

Nor should a man be chosen if his children are "*accused*" (en kategoria) of "*insubordination*" (anupotakta). The word "anupotakta" is composed of the letter "a" (a negative) with the letter "n" (which is used to make the word easier to pronounce) plus "hupo" (a preposition meaning "under") and "tasso" (a verb meaning "I set"). "Anupotakta" refers, in this case, to children who have not been brought under any authority. In Modern Greek the word "anupotakta" means someone who is unmanageable, as a soldier that does not respond to orders.

**(Titus 1:7 NKJV) "For a bishop must be blameless, as a steward of God, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money,"**

Now we find the apostle Paul using the word "*bishop*" (episkopos) in his letter to Titus. The English word "bishop" is a corruption of the Greek word "episkopos." "Episkopos" is compounded from the preposition "epi," which means "over," and "skopeo," which means "I look" or "I watch." So

the word “overseer” is a good translation for “episkopos.” It is someone who oversees the flock. The apostle Paul had already referred to the leadership of a congregation in Titus 1:5 as “elders” (presbuteroi). Therefore, since both “presbuteroi” (elders) and “episkopos” (overseer) are used in same passage and in the same context, it leads one to think that both terms refer to the same men.

The apostle Paul said (again) in this verse that an overseer should be “*blameless*” (anengkleetos). This time, Paul emphasizes that an “*overseer*” should be blameless in his oversight. That is, he is expected to be blameless as a “*steward*” (oikonomos). In the word “oikonomos” we see the word “oikos” (house) and the word “nomos” (law). A “steward” (oikonomos) is a person who is in charge of a house (hold) or an estate.

An elder (overseer) must not be “*self-willed*” (mee authadee), meaning he should not be a person who always insists on having his own way. The Greek word “autos” (self) can be seen in “authadee.”

An elder (overseer) must not be “*quick-tempered*” (mee orgilos). “Orgilos” seems to refer not only to a man that ‘flies off the handle’ but also to one who has a mean disposition. “Orgilos” has come into Modern Greek meaning “angry.”

An elder (overseer) should not be “*given to wine*” (mee paroinon). See comments on 1 Timothy 3:3, which has the same expression as here.

An elder (overseer) should not be “*violent*” (mee pleekteen). This is the same as in 1 Timothy 3:3. See the comments there.

He should not be “*greedy for money*” (mee aischrokerdee). The Greek word “aischrokerdees” is composed of “aischros,” which means “shameful,” and “kerdos,” which refers to financial gain. The translation of this verse in the King James Version would be acceptable when it says, “not given to filthy lucre,” except for the fact that word “lucre” is not commonly used today. The NKJV is weak when it says “*not greedy for money*,” because it leaves out the idea that money under certain circumstances could be tainted. It is difficult to tell, however, whether the apostle Paul was referring to money gotten in some dishonest way or whether he was referring to money that might be gotten by a man who becomes an elder (overseer) for the sake of material gain.

(Titus 1:8 NKJV) **“but hospitable, a lover of what is good, sober-minded, just, holy, self-controlled,”**

A man under consideration to be appointed to be an elder (overseer) should be “*hospitable*” (philoxenon). The word “philoxenon” occurs also in 1 Timothy 3:2. See the comments there.

He should be “*a lover of what is good*” (philagathon). The Greek word “philagathon” is made up of two words: “philos,” which means a “lover” and “agathos,” which means “good.”

He should be “*sober-minded*” (sophrona). This expression occurs also in 1 Timothy 3:2. See the comments there.

He should be “*just*” (dikaion). The word “dikaios” can be translated as “righteous” or as “*just*.” Both ideas are contained in the word “dikaios.”

According to the NKJV, an elder (overseer) should also be “*holy*” (hosion). I would suggest the word “*devout*,” however, as a better translation of the word “hosios” than “*holy*,” because “hosios” is not the word that is normally used in the Greek New Testament for holiness. That word is “hagios.”

An elder (overseer) should also be “*self-controlled*” (engkratee). “Self-control” (engkratia) is one of the things that the apostle Paul reasoned with Felix about (Acts 24:25). It is a fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23). It is also a personal attribute that a person must add to his character in order to make progress from knowledge to patience (2 Peter 1:6). There are two main things involved in “engkratia. A person must be able (1) to restrain himself in certain matters and he must also be able (2) to abstain from certain things.

**(Titus 1:9 NKJV) “holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict.”**

After having described the qualities that Titus should seek in prospective elders (overseers), the apostle Paul turned to a discussion of some of the things that an elder (overseer) would be expected to do.

An elder (overseer) should be one who is “*holding fast*” (antechomenon) to the “*faithful word*.” The word “antechomenon” is from “antechomai,” which is composed of “anti” (against) and “echo” (I have or I hold). That “antechomenon” is in the middle voice suggests that an elder (overseer) should hold the “*faithful word*” (pistou logou) as his own. The adjective “pistos,” which normally means “faithful,” likely means “reliable” or “trustworthy” in this place. An elder (overseer) should hold to the word just “*as he has been taught*” (kata teen didacheen), literally, “according to

the teaching.” Whether or not a person should hold to what he has been taught, however, depends on the contents of what has been taught.

The reason why an elder (overseer) should hold fast to the trustworthy word is so that “*he may be able*” (hina dunatos ee) “*to exhort*” (parakalein) others. The word “*able*” is translated from the adjective “dunatos,” which means to be “powerful,” suggesting that without “*the faithful word*” an elder (overseer) is not powerful. “Parakalein” (to exhort) is composed of the preposition “para,” which means (among other things) “along side of,” and the verb “kaleo,” which means, “I call.” So elders (overseers) call out encouragement to people. They are not entirely unlike a cheering section at a football game.

Another of their functions is to use the “*sound doctrine*” (tee didaskalia tee hugiainousee) “*to convict* (elengchein) *those who contradict* (tous antilegontas).” Regarding this, let me say that the verb “elengchein” can, indeed, mean “*to convict*,” but it can also have other meanings as well, such as “to convince” a person of the error of his ways. Since the convicting (or convincing) is to be done with “*sound doctrine*,” teaching and instruction are implied. At any rate, an elder’s (overseer’s) job is not simply to prove someone wrong but to lead that person, if possible, to a better way of thinking and acting. “*Sound doctrine*” is healthy doctrine. You can see the English word “hygienic” in the Greek word “hugiaino.”

There were plenty of people in the early days that were contradicting (antilegontas) the gospel. The verb “antilego” is composed of “anti” (against) and “lego” (I speak). Elders (overseers) were called upon, then as now, to uphold the truth in spite of some people speaking against it.

### Hebrews 13:7

(Hebrews 13:7-8 NKJV) **“Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.”**

Every Christian can look back on someone in his or her life that has had a decisive impact on him or her. The admonition here is not to forget such people. Likely, it was the elders of a congregation who did the teaching, but it may have been other teachers as well.

The NKJV speaks here of “*those who rule* (heegoumenon) *over you*.” The word “rule” is an acceptable translation of “hegeomai,” but so strong a

word is not necessary. Better words would be “lead” or “guide.” The NIV says, “Remember your leaders,” which is a good translation of this phrase.

The persons to be remembered are those who “*have spoken*” (elaleesan) the word of God. “Elaleesan” is in the aorist tense, which suggests that the people to be remembered are the ones who first led the recipients of the Hebrew letter to belief in Jesus. That these people are still in the leadership suggests that the congregations may not have been in existence for very long.

If the “*outcome of*” the leaders’ “*conduct*” is to be considered, then leaders need to be careful how they finish up their Christian lives. Church members are told to “*follow*” (mimeisthe) their faith. I feel there is a hint of possible persecution here. “Mimeisthe” is from “mimeomai,” in which the word “mimic” can be seen.

### Hebrews 13:17

(Hebrews 13:17 NKJV) **“Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.”**

To say, as many translations do, that the members of a congregation should “*obey*” their leaders is a bit too strong. The Greek word that stands here for “*obey*” is “peithesthe.” (This is not “hupakouo,” which is a stronger expression for “*obey*.” The word “peitho,” which is used here, gives the idea of willing compliance rather than forced obedience. “Peitho” means I convince someone by persuasion. In the passive form, as here, “peitho” implies that a person does someone’s wishes as a result of having been persuaded.

Here again, both the King James and the New King James Versions are too strong when they refer to the leaders of the congregation as “*those who rule over you*.” Such a translation harks back to the time (in England and elsewhere) when church leaders were government officials and had not only ecclesiastical but also civil authority. The Greek word that stands for “*those who rule over you*” is the participle “heegoumenois,” which comes from the verb “heegeomai.” “Heegeomai” can mean “I esteem” or “I lead.”

The apostle Paul used the word “heegeomai” in Philippians 2:3 when he said, “*let each esteem others better than himself*.” The form of “heegeomai” that is used in here Hebrews 13:17 is “heegoumenois,” which is passive, signifying that those who lead the church are highly esteemed by



the members. So elders are “leaders” not “rulers.” They lead with the consent of the people.

The leaders of whom the author of the letter to the Hebrews spoke may or may not have been (ordained) elders. The author seems to have allowed for the contingency that there were little churches here and there, which did not have ordained elders. We know that such churches existed in Crete, for example, before Titus got around to appointing elders (overseers) for them.

Even in the absence of elders, there has to be some kind of leadership so that a congregation can function well. The NKJV says in this passage that members of the church should be “*submissive*” (hupeikete) to their leaders. A better reading might be that they should “*yield*” or “*defer*” to their leaders.

The leaders of a congregation are those who “*watch out* (agrupnousin) *for your souls.*” The Greek word here for “*watch*” is “agrupneo,” which means “to keep oneself awake.” It is very important for a soldier standing watch to be able to stay awake. The New International Version has “*watch over,*” which suggests a father watching over a sick child. It is often literally true that the leaders of a congregation miss sleep in watching over the flock. They watch diligently because they know that they will “*give* (apodosontes) *account* (logon)” for those committed to their charge. The word “apodosontes” is in the future tense, which suggests that giving account is coming up in the future.

The reason given here as to why the members of a congregation should defer to their leaders is so that the leaders might do their work with joy and not with “*grief*” (mee stenazontes), literally “without groaning.” It would be “*unprofitable*” (alusiteles), “of no utility,” to make the leaders groan. It would be disadvantageous for a church if the members conduct themselves in a way that makes their leaders groan in doing their work.

### **James 5:13-16**

**(James 5:13 NKJV) “Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms.”**

James exhorted suffering people to pray. The word “*suffering*” (kakopatheo) does not refer exclusively to sick people, but to people who may be suffering in any way. James spoke earlier in his letter (in James 5:10) of the prophets as being examples of patience in “*suffering*” (kakopathia).

Just as prayer is appropriate in time of “*suffering*,” so is singing appropriate when one “*is cheerful*” (euthumei). The word “euthumei” (“*is cheerful*”) is a form of “euthumeo,” which is compounded of “eu” (well) and “thumeo” (I have passion). The resultant meaning is that someone is in a good frame of mind.

The word that is here translated “*Let him sing psalms*” is “psalleteo.” “Psalleteo” originally meant “I sing (while plucking a harp).” By the time the New Testament was written, however, it had lost its connection with the harp. It meant simply “I sing.” No word for “psalms” is found in the Greek text in this verse.

**(James 5:14 NKJV) “Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.”**

James said that if “*anyone among you*” is “*sick*,” he should “*call for the elders of the church*.” How sick must a person be before he calls for the elders of the church? The word that is here translated “*sick*” is “asthenei.” “Astheneo” means “I am weak.” So, apparently, “asthenei” refers to a person that is too weak to leave home.

What James described here is definitely not a modern so called “healing service,” at which any sick person in the audience is urged to raise his or her hand or come forward to be healed. James was speaking of members of the church that are sick at home, not those gathered in an assembly. What is described here is something that takes place privately. The expression “*let him call*” (proskalesastho) is from “proskaleomai.” “Proskaleomai” is composed of the preposition “pros,” which means “to” or “toward,” and the verb “kaleo,” which means “I call.” A person that is too sick to leave home may “*call*” (invite) the elders of the church to come to him. Notice that the sick person is to initiate the proceedings.

Whom should a sick person call? There is no suggestion of calling “a priest.” The Bible teaches that all Christians are priests (Revelations 1:6). According to this passage, a sick person should call “*the (official) elders of the church*” (tous presbuteros tes ekkleesias). When the elders come to a sick person that has “called” them, they should “*pray*” (proseuxasthosan) over that person (ep’ auton). The verb “proseuxasthosan” (*let them pray*) is in the imperative mood, which suggests that it is a command. The elders are the ones that should do the praying.

James wrote in a manner that indicates that the “*anointing*” (aleipsantes) of a patient with “*oil*” (elaio) was to be done prior to the

praying. I base this on the fact that “aleipsantes” (anointing) is an aorist participle. A participle in the aorist tense indicates action prior to the action of the main verb in a sentence. The main verb in this sentence is “proseuxasthosan” (*let them pray*). If the anointing is to be done prior to the praying, this suggests that the anointing does not have ‘magical’ powers of its own to effect a cure. It is the praying (petitioning of the Father) that can bring about a cure. The word for “oil” is “elaion,” meaning olive oil.

The participle “aleipsantes” (*anointing*) agrees with the “them” in “*let them pray*” (proseuxasthosan), which suggests that the elders should do the anointing as well as the praying.

That the anointing should be done “*in the name of the Lord*” (en to onomati tou kuriou) is not surprising, for the apostle Paul said, “*Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus*” (Colossians 3:17).

**(James 5:15 NKJV) “And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.”**

James made the assertion that “*the prayer of faith will save (sosei) the sick (ton kamnonta).*” Here we have the Greek verb “kamno,” which means “to be sick.” This word suggests that someone is ‘all worn out.’ The reference books generally say that the sick person in James 5:15 is terminally ill. That may be true. The fact that James used the word “*save*” (sosei) in this verse suggests as much. “Sosei” is from the verb “sozo” and means “I save.” “Sozo” likely means here to save the person from death, because the passage says, “*and the Lord will raise him up,*” presumably from the sickbed. Notice that it is the Lord who will raise him up. It is not the elders, nor the prayer, nor the oil, but the Lord.

James’ assertion that “*the prayer of faith*” would save the sick is reminiscent of the words of Jesus: “*Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them*” (Mark 11:24).

Even if James were referring to someone that is terminally ill, he was not prescribing what could be called “the last rites” for that person. I say this because the purpose of calling for the elders was not to prepare a sick person for dying but to pray that that person would get well.

The cause for a sick person’s illness may be that he has “*committed (pepoieekos) sins (hamartias).*” The word here for sins is “hamartias,” which originally meant to miss the mark in some way. In the New

Testament the word “harmartias” can refer to all kinds of infractions or wrongs. The sins that a person has committed may, in some cases, be directly responsible for that person’s illness, but it is hypothetical that sins are the cause here. For the text says “*if (k’an) he has committed (ee pepoieekos) sins.*” “K’an” is a contraction of “kai ean.” The use of “ean” with a verb (“eimi”) in the subjunctive mode shows that it is not certain that the person involved is sick as a result of sins. He or she may be sick from no discernable reason. The possibility, however, of the sick person’s having committed sins that caused his or her illness is not excluded here. If sins are present, they will “*be forgiven*” (aphetheesetai).

It is up to the Lord, however, to decide whether or not the prayers of the elders will bring a sick person back to health, because prayer for the sick is basically a request. Prayer is not a magical formula. For that reason people should pray, as Jesus did, “*not as I will, but as You will*” (Matthew 26:39).

**(James 5:16 NKJV) “Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.”**

The sick bed is just as a good a place from which to confess “*trespasses*” (hamartias) as any another place. The proximity of verse 15 (in which praying for the sick is discussed) to verse 16 (in which the confessing of sins is also discussed) makes one think that praying and confessing go hand in hand.

The sick bed is not the only place, however, from which confessions of sins are appropriate, because James said, “*Confess*” (exomologeisthe) to “*one another*” (alleelois). The Greek word for “*confess*” (exomologeisthe) is composed of “ek,” which means “out,” and “homo,” which means “the same,” and “lego,” which means, “I speak.” The resultant meaning is that a Christian should give verbal agreement to whatever justifiable charge is brought against him, whether the charge is brought by his own conscience or by someone else.

James’ use of the word “alleelois” (to one another) suggests that members of the church should be confessing their sins to one another at all (appropriate) times and in all (appropriate) places. The confession of fault does not need to be restricted to the presence of elders, however.

Christians should be continually praying for each other. James said, “*and pray (proseuchesthe) for one another (alleelon).*” “Proseuchesthe” is from “proseuchomai” which means “I pray.” Everyone is greatly blessed

who has a “*righteous*” person praying for him (or her), because “*the effective, fervent prayer* (deesis) *of a righteous* (dikaios) *man avails* (energoumene) *much.*” There is only one word in the Greek text behind the words “*the effective, fervent prayer,*” which appear in some English texts. It is the noun “deesis.” It refers to “a request” that is made of God. It is from the verb “deomai,” which means, “I beseech” someone. The translators who prepared the KJ and the NKJ versions of the Bible may have felt that if they said that prayer avails much, that would be too weak; so they added the words “*effective, fervent.*” But the words “*effective, fervent*” in the translation sound over drawn and can be misleading; for, although the request of a righteous man is effective, its effectiveness does not depend primarily on the passion with which the request is prayed. James was emphasizing how effective the request of a righteous man can be. He said it is “*polu ischuei*” (very strong) in its working (energoumene). Righteousness may, therefore, be more important in prayer than is fervor.

All of the above is a strong argument for having Biblical elders to lead a congregation. The prayers of such men are worth more than gold.

Here are some conclusions that can be drawn from James 5:13-16: One of them is that James was not speaking about a “healing service” in an assembly of the church. Rather, he was describing what might take place privately in a home, if a patient requests it.

James was also not speaking about “extreme unction,” in which a priest prays for a dying person and anoints that person to absolve him or her from sins in order to prepare him or her for dying. Instead, James was speaking about what might be done to restore a person’s health.

Another conclusion that can be drawn is that elders are to play an active role in the lives of the members of their congregation.

What role that the anointing of oil plays is difficult to decide. Some people think of the oil mentioned here as medicine, but a difficulty with such an idea is that, although people in the first century knew that oil was good for some ailments, they certainly also knew it was not good for all ailments.

Other people think that the oil mentioned here worked miraculously. They point to the fact that the apostles anointed sick people with oil and healed them (Mark 6:13). But against the idea that oil worked miraculously is the fact that probably not all elders in the first century were endowed with miraculous healing powers, and James would not have enjoined all elders to exercise powers that only some of them possessed.

Another way to think about the anointing is to look at it as an act of obedience. If the Holy Spirit said (through James) that elders should

“*anoint*” and “*pray*,” that is the thing for them to do. They can let God decide what He thinks about it and wants to do about it.

### **1 Peter 5:1-7**

**(1 Peter 5:1 NKJV) “The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed:”**

The admonition contained in 1 Peter 5:1-7 is addressed to the official elders of a congregation, not just to elderly men in general. This is shown by the fact that the apostle Peter spoke in 1 Peter 5:3 of people having been “*entrusted*” to the elders. Peter identified himself with other elders as being a “*fellow elder*.”

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

The apostle Peter commanded his fellow elders to “*shepherd* (poimante) *the flock of God*.” He also reminded them that the flock does not belong to them. He called it the “*flock of God*” (1 Peter 5:2).

“Poimante” (shepherd) is in the command form. Shepherding involves a lot of things: It involves protecting the flock, leading it and providing pasture and water for it. It also involves helping the flock when one of them is sick or hurt. In addition, it involves seeking a sheep that is lost.

The command to “*shepherd*” extends only to the flock “*which is among* (to en humin) *you*.” It does not extend to flocks in other places. This is a very important point, for it was the failure of the leaders of the church in Rome to heed this point that led them to extend their authority all around the world. Elders of mission-minded churches need to pay special attention to this point.

The expression “*serving as overseers*” (1 Peter 5:2) is not found in all of the ancient manuscripts of this passage. It may have been added later by some scribe in order to form a better sentence. There are, however, other passages that refer to elders as “*overseers*.”

Elders should not serve by “*constraint*” (mee anangkastos). “Anangkazo” means “I force” or “I compel” someone to do something. Some ancient manuscripts add that the elder’s service should be done “kata

theon” (according to God). This indicates that elders (overseers) serve with reference to Him.

The apostle Peter used two adverbs to describe the attitude that elders ought to have toward the service they render. They should do it “*willingly*” (hekousios) and “*eagerly*” (prothumos). The first of these suggests a commitment of the mind to their work while the second suggests a commitment of the heart.

The fact that elders were told not to serve for the money suggests that some elders may have been paid for their work. Money is here referred to as “*dishonest gain*” (NKJV). The Greek text has “*aischrokerdos*,” which is “*shameful gain*.” “*Aischrokerdos*” is similar to the word used in Titus 1:7. If money should be an elder’s primary motivation for serving, then it becomes “*shameful gain*.”

**(1Peter 5:3 KJV) “Neither as being lords over God’s heritage, but being ensamples to the flock.”**

The apostle Peter laid a very large and important restriction upon the elders (overseers). They should not serve “*as being lords over God’s heritage*” (1 Peter 5:3). I have quoted here from the King James Version because it more nearly matches “*meed’ hos katakurieuontes*,” which means not ruling over people so as to press them down.

The King James Version (in 1 Peter 5:3) also calls the people that are entrusted to the elders, “*God’s heritage*” (ton kleeron). The Greek word “*kleeros*” means a “*lot*.” As you will recall, lots were sometimes cast in making decisions. The Land of Canaan, for example, was divided out to the different tribes by casting lots (Joshua 14:2). The sections of the land that were apportioned by lots were then passed down as an inheritance through subsequent generations.

The “*lot*” (or portion) that God received was the children of Israel themselves (Deuteronomy 32:9). As a result, they became also His “*inheritance*” (Isaiah 19:25). The apostle Peter reminded elders that they are not to “*lord it over*” the people of the church for the people are “*God’s heritage*.”

Elders (overseers) are to be “*examples to the flock*” (tupoi tou poimniou) (1 Peter 5:3). They should pattern themselves after the “*Chief Shepherd*” (archipoimenos); so that when the “*Chief Shepherd*” appears, He will reward them with “*a crown of glory that does not fade away*” (1 Peter 5:4).

(1 Peter 5:5-6 NKJV) **“Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for ‘God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble.’ (6) Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time,”**

Younger members of the church should be submissive to elderly members, especially to those who are the official overseers of the congregation. Younger members should not look upon their being submissive as a grievous burden, for all Christians are to be submissive to each other. Even elders (overseers) are to be submissive, in certain ways, both to their fellow elders (overseers) and to the members of the congregation as a whole.

The elders (overseers) are to *“be clothed (engkombosasthe) with humility”* (1 Peter 5:5). The Greek word that is translated *“be clothed with”* portrays the elders as tying an apron around the mid-rift in order to be ready to serve. Elders should be humble because *“God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble”* (1 Peter 5:5).

(1 Peter 5:7 NKJV) **“casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.”**

It would be a mistake for elders to think that they bear the burden of their work alone. They can be assured that God cares for them just as much as He does for the flock. Since God is a caring God, elders can cast their *“care upon Him”* (1 Peter 5:7).