

Church of Christ

...Heart to Heart...

The next few articles will be dealing with elders and their work. We need more teaching and understanding, especially for those converted from different backgrounds. It seems some are unfamiliar with the role of elders in the Lord's church.

What does the Bible say about elders? Who are they? What role do they play in Christ's church? Elders are spiritual men that lead and have oversight of God's people (Acts 20:28). Elders must remember they are not masters but servants. They have been entrusted to oversee Christ's blood bought people. The church is not theirs – it belongs to Christ (I Pet. 5:1-4). Elders must answer to Christ! Elders are shepherds and not a board of directors. "...nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge." (I Pet. 5:3) Elders are to defend the truth of God's word (Titus 1:9) and Christ's church, not their eldership. They love their Lord and His church!

There are three Greek words for elders with six English words used to translate: (1) *Presbuteros*. It is translated elder and presbyter. (2) *Episkipos*. It is translated bishop and overseer. (3) *Poimen*. It is translated as pastor and shepherd. It is these words that give us insight to the Scriptural concept of elders and their work.

The word *elder* comes from the Greek word "*presbuteros*". It was used in two ways. First, it simply means "one who is older." This was the general sense referring to anyone who was older. It was also used in a specific sense of a position held in Christ's church. It appears 18 times in the New Testament in the context of men holding that role in the church. The word "*presbyter*" or "*presbytery*" occurs only once (I Tim. 4:14). In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word for *elder* is "*zaqen*." It means "old, aged and bearded." Israel was instructed to respect these older men for their wisdom. These Old Testament *elders*, older men, were put in charge over a tribe and they exercised authority over the people (Deut. 27:1). God speaks with Moses to go to the king of Egypt along with the *elders* of Israel. The *elders* of Israel anointed David as king. (II Sam. 5:3). There are many more examples than space will allow. What do we learn about the *elders* from days gone by? They were older men, respected and honored by the people.

The Jewish Sanhedrin court (Matt. 16:21) was composed of elders, scribes and chief priests. They were men of age and wisdom, not youth. A centurion sent Jewish elders to Jesus for His help (Luke 7:2-3).

The *elders* of the Old Testament times were men that were known for wisdom and insight. Since the word "*presbuteros*" refers to an older man, it is no surprise that the eldership of the Lord's church would be comprised of such. When the church was established, Acts 2, the church relied on the apostles' teachings. *Elders* in the Lord's church would soon be needed. We will look at more next week. Think about it!!!