

ELDERS / Acts 14:23

Near the end of their first missionary journey, Paul and Barnabas went back through the cities where they had ministered and “appointed elders in every church . . . turning them over to the care of the Lord” (14:23). What does the New Testament teach about the office of elder?

Meaning of term	The Greek term is <i>presbyteros</i> , meaning, literally, “an older person.”
Function/role	To rule the church (Titus 1:7; 1 Peter 5:2-3); to watch over/shepherd God’s flock (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:2; Hebrews 13:17); to teach the truths of God (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:9) to the people of God.
Qualifications	To be one “whose life cannot be spoken against. He must be faithful to his wife. He must exhibit self-control, live wisely, and have a good reputation. He must enjoy having guests in his home and must be able to teach. He must not be a heavy drinker or be violent. He must be gentle, peace loving, and not one who loves money. He must manage his own family well, with children who respect and obey him. For if a man cannot manage his own household, how can he take care of God’s church? . . . not be a new Christian, because he might be proud of being chosen so soon, and the Devil will use that pride to make him fall. Also, people outside the church must speak well of him so that he will not fall into the Devil’s trap and be disgraced (1 Timothy 3:2-7; see similar list in Titus 1:6-9).
Number of elders	A plurality of elders is described, if not prescribed, in the New Testament (Acts 14:23; Philippians 1:1; Titus 1:5). Nowhere is a certain number mandated, however.
Length of term	The New Testament does not specify a precise term of eldership.
How elected?	Those meeting the qualifications seem to be appointed or chosen by those already functioning as elders (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5). Ordination to the office involved a ceremony that included laying on of hands, prayer, and fasting (Acts 14:23).
Proper response to	Obedience and submission (Hebrews 13:17); respect (1 Corinthians 16:16; 1 Thessalonians 5:12).
Discipline of elders	Accusations or criticisms against an elder should be received according to 1 Timothy 5:19-21. If the elder is guilty of an offense, he is to be counseled by fellow elders with a view toward restoration (Galatians 6:1-2). If the sinning elder refuses to repent, he is to be removed from office and disciplined according to Matthew 18:15-17.