



Two offices (elders/bishops and deacons) and two orders of elders (preaching/teaching elders and ruling elders): A New Testament study

Jesus Christ is Lord and Head of the church which is his body. He rules over the church by his Word and Spirit. Through the work of the Spirit he gives to his church men as officers to equip believers for service, that the church may more faithfully serve Christ in maturity and love (Eph. 4:11ff). Through his Word, the Bible, he specifies the qualifications and duties of those men, that his people may recognize, elect, and appoint such men and acknowledge Christ's rule in and through them (1 Tim. 3; Tit. 1). In this way, God's Word, the Scriptures, provides the description of the offices (or officers) that Christ gives his church, and serves as the only infallible guide for the church in recognizing those offices and those who serve in them.

The Scriptures not only lays down the qualifications of such servants, but also gives them descriptive titles or designations and indicates the functions that they are to fulfil in the church. In so designating these offices by specific titles or designations, and also by differentiated functions, the Scripture provides for the church the answer to the question: What offices does Christ continue to give to the church and how many are there?

The answer to this question has varied in the history of the Christian Church and also more particularly in that manifestation of the church called Presbyterian. Among the latter, the answers have tended to gravitate to one of two conclusions:

- 1) a three-office view, that is, clergy distinguished from lay ruling officers (elders) and deacons (lay serving officers); and
- 2) a two-office view, that is, elders (teaching and ruling, clergy and lay), and deacons (lay serving officers).

Proponents of each view have been vigorous in their advocacy, and extreme polarizations have resulted. On the one hand, some three-office advocates have stated that the references to elders or bishops in the New Testament apply only to ministers and not to "ruling elders" at all, who are then found only in the reference to "helps" and/or "administrations" (or "governments") in 1 Corinthians 12:28, and that their responsibility is limited to ruling or administrations and does not include any form of teaching. On the other hand, some two-office advocates have stated that there is no distinction within the office of elder at all, such as is commonly designated by teaching elder and ruling elder, or by minister and ruling elder.

The basis for these two answers in the pages of the New Testament is not hard to find. It is that the New Testament uses two titles only to describe or designate the officers (cf. Phil. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:1, 2, 8, and 12) and also describes these officers by using three functions, that is, teaching, ruling, and serving (cf. 1 Tim. 3:2 [teaching], 5 [ruling or caring] and 13 [serving]). The result of this fact is that the elder is spoken of not as having one function, but two, namely, teaching and ruling. The two-office advocates have emphasized the fact that the offices may be designated by two titles only, elders (or bishops) and deacons. The three-office advocates have emphasized the fact that the functions are three-fold and that the office should correspond to this fact, namely, teachers (ministers), rulers (ruling "elders") and those who serve (deacons).

It is the thesis of this study, attempting to compare Scripture with Scripture and to harmonize all Scripture truths, that the solution to the seeming dilemma or impasse is to be found in a mutual and complementary recognition of the facts that there are indeed two titles or designations, elders (or bishops) and deacons, but also that within the office of elders there are two functions and that one of those functions, teaching, may be given in a heightened way or as a special gift to some but not to all the elders. Therefore, a distinction may be made within the office of elder designating some as teachers (or ministers) as the New Testament does. This is specially noteworthy in Ephesians 4:11 where within the larger circle of elders, all of whom are undershepherds or pastors, some are further designated as teachers. The study that follows seeks to unfold the biblical truths and to demonstrate that the thesis proposed is indeed the truth of Scripture. The first portion of the study will unfold the two offices in Scripture, that is, elders (or bishops) and deacons and emphasize that the term elders (or bishops) is used in the plural and embraces all the governors or rulers in the church. The second half of the study will then direct attention to the distinction within the one office of elder and will indicate that there are some who labour in the Word and teaching. Before focusing on these two aspects, a preliminary paragraph will distinguish the continuing office from those extraordinary and non-continuing offices of apostles and prophets.

The answer to the question, which we naturally ask, "What offices does Christ continue to give to his church and how many are there?" should recognize that Christ does not continually give to the church those special and extraordinary offices of apostles and prophets. The apostles of Jesus Christ are those personally and directly chosen by him (Mark 3:14; Luke 6:13; Gal. 1:1), who were eyewitnesses of his resurrection (Acts 1:22; 1 Cor. 15:8-10); and with the prophets are the special recipients of revelation (Eph. 3:5) and thus form the non-repeatable foundation of the church (Eph. 2:20). These two offices, since they have accomplished their unique and non-repeatable functions and tasks, occur only during the foundation days of the church, the New Testament age, and are not now found in the growing and continuing superstructure of the church.

1. Two offices (elders/bishops and deacons)

When we move beyond the apostles and prophets, we find that the offices which Christ continues to give his church are sometimes referred to without a specific name or title but simply by their functions and activities (cf. Heb. 13:7 and 17; 1 Thess. 5:12,13), and sometimes by different words (elders, pastors and teachers, bishops [or overseers]). But in the midst of this variegated usage, we find two terms (elders or bishops) being used throughout the New Testament, In Acts (11:30; 14:23; 15:2, 4, 6, 22, 23; 16:4; 20:17, 28) and by Paul (Phil. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:1 and 2; 5:17; Tit. 1:5, 7), Peter (1 Pet. 5:1) and James (5:14), that serve to overarch and include the other terms and descriptions of functions that relate to oversight. On two occasions we find the term deacons used alongside of this pervasive use of elders/bishops (Phil. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:12). We thus find three terms used in a more or less technical sense to describe offices. They are elders (*presbyteroi*), bishops (*episkopoi*), and deacons (*diakonoi*). The first two refer to the same group of men and thus are different words for the same office. We can therefore speak of the New Testament as referring to elders or bishops on the one hand and deacons on the other, and thereby grouping the offices into these two categories or functions.

That the two words "elders" and "bishops" refer to the same office is manifest from the following passages (Acts 20:17 and 28; Tit. 1:5 and 7; and a comparison of 1 Tim. 3:1ff and 1 Tim. 5:17). In Acts 20:17 the elders are called from Ephesus to meet with Paul. In Acts 20:28 he designates that same group of elders as bishops or overseers (*episkopoi*). Paul directs Titus to appoint elders in every city (Tit. 1:5) and then goes on to describe those same officers by the term bishops or overseers (Tit. 1:7). In 1 Timothy 3:2 Paul uses the term "bishop" to speak of the office of those who teach and rule the church (1 Tim. 3:2 and 5), but then when he returns to the question of remuneration for those who rule and also spend their full time in the occupation of teaching the church, he calls them elders or presbyters (1 Tim. 5:17). In the light of this evidence, we see that with these two terms, elders and bishops, we have two words to designate one and the same group of offices in the church. The one term, elder or presbyter, reflecting particularly the Old Testament background and usage, designates them in reference to their maturity and authority. The other term, bishop or overseer, more common to the Greek-speaking world, designates them in terms of their particular responsibility of having the oversight and care of the church.

These two terms, elders and bishops, serve as the terms which encompass the other designations found in the New Testament for the same activities or functions. This is most evident in 1 Peter 5:1 where even the Apostle Peter is willing to speak of himself as a fellow elder in view of the fact that he shares with the elders the responsibility for the oversight of the people of God. And this truth is specifically apparent in Acts 15 when the decision is rendered by the apostles and elders acting together and sharing the oversight (15:2, 4, 6, 22, 23; 16:4). Likewise, the ordination or laying on of hands is said to be the presbytery (1 Tim. 4:14, that is, the elders considered as a group), and that includes the Apostle Paul (2 Tim. 1:6), and furthermore, in Acts 13:1-3 the men who lay on hands are more specifically designated as prophets and teachers.

The officers in the church at Ephesus are referred to as elders or bishops in Acts 20:17, 28 and 1 Timothy 3:1 and 5:17 and as evangelists and pastors and teachers in Ephesians 4:11. Both because of what we have seen in the preceding statements, that is, apostles are fellow elders, and prophets and teachers perform the action of presbytery by laying on hands and because Acts, 1 Timothy, and Ephesians refer to the same church and the same officers, we may properly infer as a good and necessary consequence that evangelists and pastors and teachers are elders. Certainly the Ephesians passage regards them as leaders who equip the church, a task recognized elsewhere as the particular responsibility of elders (cf. among others, Acts 20:28; 1 Tim. 3:4, 5 and 5:17).

Once we have observed that for the New Testament the terms "elders" and "bishops" serve as the embracing designation of one particular group of men or office and that another term (*diakonos*) has become a technical term for the ones who specifically have the task of service in the church, that is, the deacons, we are impressed by the fact that the New Testament refers to the offices in the church under only these two heads or two offices (Phil. 1:1, 1 Tim. 3:1, 2 and 12; cf. Acts 6:1-6). When the Apostle Paul desires to address the officers of the church of Philippi, he does so using two terms and addresses two groups of officers — "the bishops (overseers) and deacons" (Phil. 1:1). In his letter especially written to order the life and government of the church, namely 1 Timothy (see 1 Tim. 3:13), a letter written near the end of his life when church government is evidently settled and fixed, the apostle again speaks of only two groups under these two words, bishops and deacons (1 Tim. 3:1 and 2, and 12). Similarly, when the divisions of labour and of functions were accomplished in the early church at Jerusalem in Acts 6:16, we find the same twofold division. The apostles (fellow elders) continue in the oversight functions of ruling and teaching (Acts 6:2 and 4), while the seven are given the function of service (*diakonein*) at tables (Acts 6:2 and 3). In summary, we see the New Testament speaking of two offices, bishops (or elders) and deacons (Phil. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:1 and 2, and 12), and the church of Jesus Christ today should follow that authoritative norm and pattern.

When we inquire as to the distinction between these two offices, we find that the terms used in themselves serve to describe that difference. The elders/bishops (overseers) are those who have the spiritual oversight (cf. 1 Pet. 5:2 *episkopountes*), which is specifically said to be ruling and teaching (1 Tim. 3:2 and 5; 5:17; Tit. 1:9ff). Such ruling and teaching is not specified for the deacons (*diakonoï*) in 1 Timothy 3 in a list which in other ways is almost parallel to that for the bishops, but these two functions are clearly omitted (see 1 Tim. 3:8ff). We deduce from Acts 6:1-6 that the deacons should continue the practice of those first deacons, the seven, which was to care for the poor and needy and to perform other service ministries for the church under the oversight of the elders (cf. Acts 11:30). When a congregation is first being formed, deacons may be omitted from the officers elected, and their functions will be carried on by the elders until that work is too heavy and men are chosen for such diaconal services (Acts 14:23; Tit. 1:5ff; cf. Acts 6:1-6).

The perspective of the New Testament that there are only two permanent and ordinary offices that continue in the church, elders/bishops and deacons, is borne out then not only by the fact that these two terms are used to designate all the permanent offices in the New Testament church and thereby place them in only two offices, but also by an awareness of the fact that the elders/bishops are always considered as a group of men who share together those two responsibilities involved in oversight, namely, teaching and ruling. The references to a plurality of elders in every church preclude these references from referring only to those whom we call ministers or preachers today and clearly include those whom we call ruling, as well as teaching, elders. The evidence for this affirmation is set forth in the following paragraphs.

The first churches established by Paul on his missionary journey, small and persecuted as they may have been, each have a plurality of elders appointed for them (Acts 14:23, "*appointed elders for them in*

every church"). Elders (plural) are called from Ephesus to Miletus and all of them are called overseers (*episkopoi*) and are given the task of shepherding or pastoring (*poimainein*, Acts 20:28) the church of God and defending it (Acts 20:30, 31). Like the church at Ephesus, the church at Philippi has a plurality of elders/bishops (Phil. 1:1; 1 Tim. 5:17). As in the case at Ephesus, so also the new congregations on the island of Crete are to have a plurality of elders in every city (that is, church, Tit. 1:5, cf. again Acts 14:23). And, again, like the elders at Ephesus, these elders have their unified oversight function described in the two tasks of teaching and ruling (Tit 1:9-11 and 13). James similarly speaks of calling a group of men designated elders to minister to a particular need in the congregation (Jas. 5:14). Peter also refers to elders in the plural (1 Pet. 5:1; notice also all the plural references in verses 2-4) in each of the congregations addressed by his letter (cf. 1 Pet. 1:1, and speaks of them as shepherding (*poimante*) the particular flock among them (1 Pet. 5:2). In 1 Thessalonians 5 and in Hebrews 13 the officers are not referred to by the designations elders or bishops, but are referred to in both cases in the plural as a group which has the unified and shared responsibility of teaching and ruling (1 Thess. 5:12, 13; Heb. 13:7 and 17).

In all these references to the elders in the plural there is also an emphasis on the fact that they share together as a group the unified and shared responsibility of teaching and ruling, of shepherding and exercising the oversight. So these two truths belong inseparably together. The oversight or shepherding of the church belongs to a plurality of elders and to the plurality of elders belongs the responsibility of oversight and shepherding. That plurality of elders encompasses all the elders known to the New Testament, which can be referred to as teaching elders and ruling elders.

Thus a uniform picture emerges from the New Testament. From the earliest days of the New Testament church to the last letter written by Paul (from Acts 11:30 and 14:23 to 1 Tim. 3:1ff, 5:17 and Tit. 1:9) and with a unified testimony from the various writers (Luke in Acts, Paul, Peter, James, the writer of Hebrews), there is agreement that there is one group of men who have the oversight, usually but not always, called elders or bishops, and that this oversight includes both teaching and ruling. Such evidence is an overwhelming testimony to the fact that the oversight of the church is committed into the hands of a group of men called by the New Testament elders/bishops and that their task or function includes both teaching and ruling as one unified and shared responsibility.

2. Two orders of elders (preaching/teaching elders and ruling elders)

To this clear evidence for the two offices of elders/ bishops and deacons should be joined the emphasis upon one function for some, namely, teaching, that 1 Timothy 5:17 introduces among those who serve in the office of elders. With this passage we have returned to the two functions found in the one office of elder, namely, ruling and teaching, and to the fact that sometimes, as here, the one function of teaching receives particular emphasis.

Although all elders are to be able to teach (1 Tim. 32) and thus to instruct the people of God and to communicate with those who oppose biblical teaching (Tit. 1:9ff), the 1 Timothy 5:17 passage recognizes that among the elders, all of whom are to be able to teach, there are those so gifted by God with the ability to teach the Word that they are called by God to give their life in such a calling or occupation and deserve therefore to be remunerated for such a calling and occupation the relation between the elder especially gifted to teach and all the other elders who are to be able to teach is analogous to but not identical with that of the heightened ability of all the elders compared to that of all believers who are called on to teach one another (Col. 3:16 and Eph. 5:19). That ability to labour in the Word and teaching is described in 2 Timothy 4:1-7 as the ministry which is specifically designated by the phrase "*preach the Word.*" Those elders especially gifted to teach and who labour or work hard at their ministry (1 Tim. 5:17) like ordinary labourers deserve their wages from such labour. Although any elders who devotes his time to ruling of the church so that it becomes his calling and occupation is worthy not only of the honour of respect but also the "double honour" of the honorarium or wages, the one whom we designate the teaching elder or the teacher among the elders is especially in view in this passage because the text says "*especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching*" (NASB) and because such responsibility demands full-time service in this calling and occupation.¹

Once it is recognized that within the office of elder there is a heightened or specialized function of teaching and preaching the Word, the insight has been provided to integrate other passages into our study, especially those which refer to teachers. Although all the references to teachers in the letters of

the New Testament do not necessarily refer to those in an office in the church, those that do are most helpful. We have already seen teachers acting as elders in Acts 13:1-3 in laying hands on Paul and Barnabas (cf. 1 Tim. 4:14). Paul in two passages distinguishes the functions of authoritatively announcing the good news (preacher or herald), of being the authoritative eyewitness and spokesman (apostle), and of instructing in the truth (teacher). By separating and distinguishing the functions which he fulfilled as a minister of Jesus Christ, he highlighted each aspect of his unified ministry and calling.

Similarly, when the apostle is considering the manifold gifts of the Holy Spirit in 1 Corinthians 12, he distinguishes various gifts or functions relating to offices of the church alongside of and intermingled with other gifts which do not have an office in the church in view (1 Cor. 12:28-31; cf. vs. 4ff, especially vs. 7). Apostles and prophets are at one end of the spectrum and refer to offices. Tongues are the other end of the spectrum and are regarded as a gift without reference to office.

In this list which moves from an official office at one end to an example of an unofficial gift at the other, we find two gifts mentioned which relate to the office of elder, namely, "teachers," and "administrations" (*kuberneseis*, "governments" KJV, 1 Cor. 12:28, NASB). The reference to "helps" (*antileimpseis*) probably is to be related primarily to the deacons whom we see in the seven of Acts 6 performing helpful deeds in serving and caring for widows (Acts 6:1-6). Here the two-fold functions of teaching and ruling are now distinguished and emphasized. And the distinction is given emphasis by referring to the one gift as "teachers" rather than as teaching and by numbering it as third, which puts it only after apostles and prophets. Of the other gift, "administrations" (NIV renders as *"those with gifts of administration"*), the Greek lexicon of Bauer-Arndt-Gingrich-Danker states that *"the plural indicated proofs of ability to hold a leading position in the church"* (p. 456).

These observations should not be surprising because these facts are quite in accord with 1 Timothy 5:17. There we noticed that among the elders, all of whom are to rule, are some *"who work hard at preaching and teaching"* (NASB). Paul in 1 Corinthians acknowledges the need for the gift of "administrations" or "governments" for the rule and oversight of the church. Alongside of that gift he recognizes some with the word "teachers" who also labour in the Word and teaching (again cf. 1 Tim. 5:17). The word "teachers" must not be regarded as an exclusive reference that separates them from those who have the gift of administrations because we have already seen that Paul can refer to himself as being not only an apostle but also a preacher and teacher. Since therefore at least two of the gifts in the list in 1 Corinthians 12:28-31 can refer to one person, we must not let the fact that the gifts of teachers and administrations are distinguished lead us to think of them erroneously as separate offices. The evidence of the New Testament already considered has demonstrated the unity of the office of elder and the fact that it involves both functions, that is, that of teaching and of ruling (cf. again the passages cited in previous paragraphs of this study). On the other hand, we must give adequate weight to the fact that these functions can be distinguished and emphasized in both 1 Timothy 5:17 and now in 1 Corinthians 12:28-31, and particularly, the function of teaching. To do justice to such distinction and emphasis we may say, as R. L. Dabney has already done, that within the one office or class of elders there are embraced two orders, that of the preaching or teaching elders and that of the ruling elders. Ephesians 4:11 provides in principle further insights into the proper correlation that this distinction brings.

Ephesians 4:11 says, *"And he gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers"* (NASB). The first two groups, apostles and prophets, are the extraordinary and non-repeatable foundation offices, as we have shown earlier. The term "evangelists" is used only three times in the New Testament. In addition to its occurrence here, Philip, who had been one of the seven of Acts 6, is designated an evangelist (Acts 21:8), and Timothy is urged to do the work of an evangelist (2 Tim. 4:5). The term "evangelist" itself provides the best definition of the work or task of the one in view, namely, that he is one who proclaims the evangel, the gospel. This is a function which may be distinguished from that of the pastors and teachers (Eph. 4:11) and seen as a specialized ministry (cf. Philip, Acts 21:8), but at the same time it is also a function which should mark the ministry and proclamation of all those who like Timothy are called to preach the Word (cf. 1 Tim. 3:15). In view of the fact that the gift of proclaiming the gospel and planting churches is necessary in the church until the end of the age, this ministry is permanent and not confined to the apostolic period. And because evangelists in Ephesians 4:11 are in the list of these offices which are distinguished from the saints or believers in general (Eph. 4:12), we may properly regard them as a specialized manifestation of that

office whose task is elsewhere described in similar terms to those used her, that of edifying and equipping the saints, namely, the office of elder (Eph. 4:11, 12).

It remains for us to consider the statement *"and some as pastors and teachers"* (*tous de poimenas kai didaskalous*). We are aided tremendously in our understanding of the offices referred to in this passage by recognizing that the pastors and teachers in the church at Ephesus are referred to in two other places in the New Testament, namely, Acts 20:17-35 and 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and 5:17. It is this triple perspective which throws light on the two terms, pastors (*poimenas*) and teachers (*didaskalous*).

Let us consider the first word "pastors." The Greek term means literally "shepherd" and is used in this literal sense in the New Testament of the shepherds to whom Jesus' birth is announced. Because the people of God are figuratively regarded as sheep, the one who tends, feeds, and exercises oversight over them is called the shepherd in a figurative sense. This figurative usage in reference to the religious leaders was already evident in the Old Testament (cf. Jer. 2:8 [see the Hebrew text]; 15; Ezek. 34:2). The figurative usage in reference to religious leaders in the letters of the New Testament is found only here in Ephesians 4:11. Hebrews 13:20 and 1 Peter 2:25 refer to Jesus, and the Gospels use it figuratively of Jesus. The solution to the question of what group is in view in the term "pastors" is to be found by recognizing that the shepherding or pastoring responsibility is given to all the elders/bishops in Acts 20:28: *"Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock (poimnio), among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd (to feed, KJV) (poimainein) the church of God which he purchased with his own blood"* (NASB). The verb used in Acts 20:28 "to shepherd," "to pastor" (*poimainein*, also translated "to feed") is the verbal form of the concept and term we are considering in Ephesians 4:11, that is, "pastors" (*poimenas*). The Acts passage indicates by its usage that all the elders/bishops have a shepherding or pastoral responsibility and may be designated pastors. When we ask of the Ephesians 4:11 passage, who are the pastors, we may answer from Acts 20:28 and context that they are the elders/bishops. This answer is borne out also by the passage in 1 Peter 5:1-4 which speaks of the task of elders. Here again the task of elders in their collective capacity is described in shepherding or pastoring terms: *"shepherd (poimante) the flock (poimnion) among you"* (1 Peter 5:2, cf. vs. 3, "the flock"). So we may deduce from the Apostle Peter as well as from the Apostle Paul in Luke's account in Acts that pastors equal elders/bishops. And finally, this insight is borne out by the other reference to the elders in Ephesus in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and 5:17. To take care of the church (1 Tim. 3:5) and to rule the church (1 Tim. 5:17) is another way of saying shepherd or pastor the church, and taking care of and ruling the church is presented in 1 Timothy 3:5 and 5:17 as the task of bishops/elders as a whole. We may conclude that the pastors in view in Ephesians 4:11 are all the elders/bishops.

We must now turn our attention to the term "teachers" and its relationship to pastors in Ephesians 4:11. In the grammatical construction of the entire statement of Ephesians 4:11 each of the positions named has the definite article "the" before it, except for the term teachers. This list would read in a literal translation as follows: *"And he gave **the** apostles, and **the** prophets and **the** evangelists, and **the** pastors and teachers."* The effect of omitting the definite article "the" before teachers is that it groups pastors and teachers together in one class or category. (In Greek grammars this is called the Greenville Sharp rule). Rather than reading "the pastors, and the teachers," the statement reads "the pastors-and-teachers." In effect, we may say that the apostle regards the teachers as belonging to the class or category of pastors. But at the same time, and especially in the light of 1 Corinthians 12:28-31, the teachers are a specialized and emphasized order within that larger class. And this is exactly how he has spoken of elders in 1 Timothy 5:17. 1 Timothy 5:17 states that among that larger group of elders, all of whom rule, there are those who labour in the Word and teaching. What the Apostle Paul has said in 1 Timothy 5:17 is now said in Ephesians 4:11 by the expression "the pastors and teachers." All elders are pastors. Among the elders, all of whom have a pastoral or shepherding responsibility, there are some who labour in the Word and teaching whom the New Testament calls teachers as here, or as those who preach elsewhere. The teacher is thus a preaching-or-teaching pastor/elder. Here again, to use Dabney's terms, we have two orders within the one class of office. The one class or office is that of pastor/elder/bishop. The two orders within that one class are teaching or preaching pastors/elders on the one hand and ruling pastors/elders on the other hand. The non-repeated definite article "the" tightly joins the two orders together as one class or office. The word "teachers" added to that of "pastors" indicates a specialized ministry among that of the pastors/ elders.

Why then was the term "evangelist" separated from that of pastors and teachers? Because the activity of evangelists, as important as it is to the work of the church and the eldership, is not so intrinsically a

part of the work of the eldership in reference to its role as pastors of the flock that it should be given as an aspect of pastoring as teaching was. To be an elder in reference to the flock is by definition to be one of the pastors of the flock. And pastoring the flock involves of necessity that some at least must labour in the Word and teaching and be teachers. But pastoring the flock does not intrinsically involve evangelists. Evangelists are gaining lost sheep, not caring for saved and gathered ones. So the apostle has placed that aspect of the teaching eldership, evangelists, in a separate category and recognizes that some have special gifts for that task.

The New Testament makes a distinction within the one office of elders of some who labour in teaching the Word (and of some who are evangelists). The church through the ages has been faithful to the New Testament when it has done the same. When we inquire further about the duties and responsibilities of those among the elders who are labouring in the Word and teaching, the teaching or preaching elders, we must not only return to the passages about elders and bishops in general but also consider those passages referring to Timothy and to Paul who were involved in this particular aspect as fellow elders who were labouring in the Word and teaching in the capacity of teaching or preaching elders (cf. 1 Cor. 9; 2 Cor. 3, 4, 5; 1 Tim. 4:6-16; 6:11-16; 2 Tim. 1:3-14; 2; 3:10-4:8).

Therefore, the church which seeks to be faithful to the New Testament will seek to keep in perspective and balance the unity of the office of elders/ bishops, and also the distinguishing function given to some among the elders by means of a particular gift of teaching and a corresponding activity. This will mean that all the elders rule together and are together responsible for the teaching of the church. It will also mean that of that plurality some will be more gifted by God to teach than the others and therefore, in distinction from those others will make that ministry their vocation, whereas the other possessing the same authority will remain in other vocations while they share the oversight. The unity and parity within the one office of elder helps to foster the mutual submission to one another, which in turn helps to preserve the humble servant quality of the eldership, and, at the same time, the unique Lordship of Christ. The recognition of differing manifestations of gifts, especially in that of teaching, t=within the unified eldership exalts the sovereignty of Christ's Lordship, who gives gifts as he will for the good of his church, and helps to ensure that that most needed gift of teaching Christ's Word will have full emphasis and free course in his church. By this, his Word of instruction and the enabling of his Spirit, Christ orders and edifies his people, the church, the body of Christ.

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¹ If one renders the Greek word *malista*, which is commonly translated "especially," by the phrase "that is" in 1 Timothy 5:17, our understanding of the passage would not be changed but it would be more focused. With the translation "especially" those who work hard at preaching and teaching are the particular group among the elders who should be considered worthy of double honour but not necessarily the only group. With the translation "that is" the text reads: "let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honour, *that is*, those who work hard at preaching and teaching." With the translation "that is" those who work hard at preaching and teaching are explicitly specified to be the group who should be considered worthy of double honour in this passage. The suggestion of "that is" as the meaning for *malista* in a few, but not all, passages where it occurs in the New Testament has been made and fairly well demonstrated by T.C. Skeat in the *Journal of the Theological Studies*, new series, XXX, 1979, 173- 177, by showing that this meaning is found elsewhere in Greek literature and that it is a legitimate, indeed perhaps preferable, meaning for several places in the New Testament (cf., for example, the great significance this would have in 1 Timothy 4:10). The designation of some among the elders as "those who work hard at preaching and teaching" as a distinguishable group among the elders still remains as the teaching of the passage on either understanding of *malista*.