

**Demystifying
The
New
Testament
Pastor**

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Table of Contents

Preface	3
Introduction	4
Biblical Term of a Pastor	6
Biblical Characters who are Elders	8
Church Business and Elders	9
Qualifications of Elders	14
Remunerations of Elders	20
Church Members and Elders	22
Church Led by Elders	24

Ever consider why so many Bible believing churches are headed by a pastor? Some churches even have Senior Pastors that were unheard of in the past. In fact, the office “Senior Pastor” is never mentioned in the New Testament. Were the New Testament visible local churches during the time of the New Testament really headed by a pastor or a group of pastors? Who is a pastor and what is the task of a pastor? Is the word “pastor” a title to be mentioned before someone’s name? How are pastors involved in the running of the churches? What does the New Testament have to reveal about church offices? Are there any qualifications before someone can become an officer in a church? What are the official titles of those who hold office in churches? These are some of the questions foremost in the mind of some Christians seeking to learn how churches should be run and who are the office holders in the church according to the New Testament. Bible believing Christians who seek to honour God and His words will surely want to know how the church should be run and who should be their leaders and what titles they are called. Otherwise, many man made traditions will creep into the church bringing unscriptural practices along to undermine the effective and efficient working of the church.

And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: (Ephesians 4:11&12)

Traditionally, the pastor is viewed as the head of the visible local church on earth. Of course, the pastor and the church always claim that Christ is the Head of the church but in practice, the pastor runs the church with almost absolute authority that is not subject to question from members of the church. The pastor will decide how the church is run and officers involved in the church will usually rubber stamp the pastor's recommendations.

Members of the church expect the pastor to preach week after the week. They expect him to marry the young and bury the dead. They expect him to be the first to visit the sick in the hospital. They expect him to counsel them on matters pertaining to the faith and things in this life on earth. They expect him to do something for them in times of crisis. The world esteems the pastor as someone important and a letter of recommendation from the pastor carries much weight as he is viewed as a man in robe.

This man called the pastor from the verse in Ephesians 4:11 is a gift from God for the Church, the Body of Christ. God gives gifts to the church for the perfecting of the saints and edifying of the body of Christ. One such category of people is the pastor. Unfortunately, there is this preoccupation for a church to have a pastor but teachers who are also gifts from God are conveniently ignored or forgotten. Perhaps, the church simply finds some female Sunday school teachers to teach children to fill the gap and fit this verse. What about evangelists? No body is interested in evangelists as though they are not important to the perfecting of the saints. Why is that so? Have they become extinct?

Men like to give title to church leaders calling them Pastor So and So but you do not find them giving titles to those who are teachers by calling them Teacher So and So. A pastor in the church is often likened to a CEO of an organisation. But is this setup biblical? Do we find any support in the New Testament for such a setup where the pastor is the head of a church?

So it is very fashionable for churches to have pastors and members look up to them and address them as Pastor So and So. It is so catchy nowadays that we will find other derivative form of pastors where some distinguish themselves as the Senior Pastor. But is there such a title or person in the New Testament called the Senior Pastor? The Catholic Church invented the Archbishop to be more senior than the bishops and nowadays; it is very popular to have Senior Pastor who is placed above the normal pastors. We will also find people called themselves Youth Pastors and Lay Pastors. In fact, there is such an organization called the Lay Pastor Society. If we check the Internet, we will find some have categorized pastors into twelve different kinds. We have the businessmen pastors, vocational pastors, political pastors, ministry pastors, technology pastors and so on. Why is there this preoccupation with the word “pastor” within and without the church? Do we find anyone in the New Testament addressing someone as the Pastor or Pastor So and So?

In fact, the word “pastor” in the singular form does not even appear one time in the New Testament let alone senior pastor. Moreover, the word “pastor” does not even appear anywhere in the entire Bible except one time when referring Jeremiah himself: **Behold, they say unto me, Where is the word of the LORD? let it come now. As for me, I have not hastened from being a pastor to follow thee: neither have I desired the woeful day; thou knowest: that which came out of my lips was right before thee. (Jeremiah 17:15&16)**

Actually, the Lord does not have many good things to say about pastors in the Old Testament: **The priests said not, Where is the LORD? and they that handle the law knew me not: the pastors also transgressed against me, and the prophets prophesied by Baal, and walked after things that do not profit. For the pastors are become brutish, and have not sought the LORD: therefore they shall not prosper, and all their flocks shall be scattered. Many pastors have destroyed my vineyard, they have trodden my portion under foot, they have made my pleasant portion a desolate wilderness. (Jeremiah 2:8, 10:21, 12:10)**

Jeremiah was a good pastor in contrast with the rest of the pastor whom God condemned. However, God promised to give them pastors, but not one pastor in the singular form, according to His heart: **And I will give you pastors according to mine heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding. (Jeremiah 3:15)**

So in the Old Testament, the pastors were supposed to feed God’s people and they did very badly. They failed miserably and attracted condemnation from Jehovah God. In the New Testament, pastors are mentioned in the plural form and never in the singular form where one man is exalted to become the head of the visible church. Such a one-man head setup exposes the church to leadership crisis from time to time. Churches all over the world over face leadership crisis when the pastorate becomes vacant for one reason or another. Sometime the pastor fell ill or died and they have to look for another man. Sometime the pastor ran away with the secretary, they have to search for another man. So what most churches do is that they setup what they called a Pulpit Committee. This committee functions like the Human Resource team looking for a man willing to fill the pulpit. When they think they have finally found the man, they will present him to the congregation and they vote for him. If the congregation likes him, they will vote to have him to be their pastor. If they do not like him for whatever

reason, the committee will look for someone else. So the process is repeated until they have got the man so that the church can continue to operate with sermons, funerals, weddings and any other activities deem fit.

But nowhere in the New Testament suggests that the church has to look for a pastor not to mention a pastor from outside the church. In fact, there will be no leadership crisis in the church if the practice of the church is biblical in the first place. According to the text in Ephesians 4:11&12, evangelists, pastors and teachers are gifts from God and not appointment by men. They are people who possess certain qualities and skills to get a job done.

A pastor is simply a shepherd and his job is to feed the church and not a special title to be mentioned before someone's name. No one would introduce himself as electrician Lim or mechanic Tan or plumber Goh and so on. It is just a name of an occupation that serves a certain function within the church. Instead, the titles of church office holders where clear qualifications are given are elders or bishops and deacons.

The elder unto the elect lady and her children, whom I love in the truth; and not I only, but also all they that have known the truth; The elder unto the wellbeloved Gaius, whom I love in the truth. (2 John 1:1 & 3 John 1:1) So the apostle John was an elder. He was ordained and appointed by the Lord and not by men. He did not call himself a pastor though he did feed God's people.

Peter was told to feed Christ's sheep and lambs when the Lord asked him whether he loved the Lord three times. Peter replied that he would even with tears. Here is what Peter called himself: **The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: (1 Peter 5:1)** Peter also called himself an elder and not a pastor even though he was called to feed the Lord's sheep and lambs. When Peter wrote to the leaders of the church, he wrote to the elders and not to a pastor as an individual or a group of pastors.

So a pastor is not a title. It is just a name of an occupation like a teacher, a banker, an accountant, a taxi driver and so on. Unfortunately, many Christians are foolish enough to follow the crowd and have been looking for a perfect but elusive pastor ever since. The Lord is the Head of the Church but unfortunately on earth, the Lord is in some ways replaced by the Pastor or Senior Pastor of the church. So often times, instead of looking unto the Author and Finisher of our faith, church members look to a one-man Pastor or Senior Pastor as the head of the church. As such, there are even pastors boldly trumpeting pastoral authority seeking to lord over the Lord's sheep in the church.

According to the New Testament, the church conducts business via the elders of the church. We can see relief effort organized during times of need. This kind of works was handled by the elders of the church. **And in these days came prophets from Jerusalem unto Antioch. And there stood up one of them named Agabus, and signified by the Spirit that there should be great dearth throughout all the world: which came to pass in the days of Claudius Caesar. Then the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judaea: Which also they did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul. (Acts 11:27-30)** Such donations were sent to the elders of the church in Jerusalem and not to a pastor of a church. An elder is more than just being a pastor and a pastor needs not be an elder just like a teacher needs not be an elder. The elders of the church who received the donations were responsible for the equitable distribution to those in need in the church.

Moreover, when office holders are ordained, they are never called pastors in the New Testament: **And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed. (Acts 14:23)** Here elders were ordained by the apostle Paul and Barnabas during their missionary trip planting churches everywhere as they travelled across Asia Minor and Europe. They only ordained elders and they did not ordain pastors. So pastors are never official titles and they are not even a name of an office.

Doctrinal matters arose during those days concerning the issue of circumcision. Some contended that the Gentile Christians had to keep the practice of circumcision. When there was disagreement from the Gentile churches, this matter was brought before the apostles and elders at the church in Jerusalem. **And certain men which came down from Judaea taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved. When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question. (Acts 15:1&2)**

So the delegation from the church in Antioch approached the apostles and elders at the church in Jerusalem to trash out this doctrinal issue. Today, we have no more apostles around and so elders of the church must be well

versed in the word of God to deal with doctrinal issues pertaining to the faith. Notice that no pastors were consulted in the meeting let alone senior pastors?

And when they were come to Jerusalem, they were received of the church, and of the apostles and elders, and they declared all things that God had done with them. And the apostles and elders came together for to consider of this matter. (Acts 15:14&6) We could see here that church business was conducted via the apostles and elders of the church. Today, we are left only with elders and elders are representatives of the church to determine doctrinal matters in extending the right hand of fellowship to other churches. The elders are to discuss and decide for the church on any matter pertaining to the faith and practice of the church. Again, not a single pastor was consulted.

And after they had held their peace, James answered, saying, Men and brethren, hearken unto me: Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name. (Acts 15:13&14) Here James was the spokesman who spoke his mind at the end of the meeting. This James here was not an apostle for the apostle James, the brother of John, was put to death by Herod back in Acts 12. James was one of the elders Paul and Barnabas approached as revealed in verse 2. While the apostle Peter and others were present, the indication here is that the elders of the church are the overseers of the church. This shows us that the apostles are not a permanent feature within the visible church while the elders are the pillars of the church here on earth. The same applies to the apostle Paul who was an apostle but he was sent out as a missionary from the church in Antioch being subject to the elders there in Acts 13. In fact, the biblical term for a missionary is an evangelist.

Then pleased it the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas; namely, Judas surnamed Barsabas, and Silas, chief men among the brethren: And they wrote letters by them after this manner; The apostles and elders and brethren send greeting unto the brethren which are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia: (Acts 15:22&23) So when the discussion came to an end, the church with the elders concluded the doctrinal matter in writing. They sent brethren to the church in Antioch to inform them on the settlement of the doctrinal matter and exhort them to continue in the faith where circumcision was not required

for the Gentile Christians. A letter from the church in Jerusalem was sent to the church in Antioch to confirm this doctrinal matter.

And as they went through the cities, they delivered them the decrees for to keep, that were ordained of the apostles and elders which were at Jerusalem. And so were the churches established in the faith, and increased in number daily. (Acts 16:4&5) Here the apostle Paul confirmed the doctrinal stance concerning circumcision ordained by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem. So next to the apostles are the elders and today in the absence of the apostles, the elders of the church are the caretakers of the church. They are supposed to be overseers of the church.

In addition, when there was a need to convey an important message, elders would be summoned and not the pastor or pastors: **And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the church. (Acts 20:17)** Here the apostle Paul called the elders of the church in Ephesus to deliver them a very important message. Again, when there is business concerning the church, the elders are called and not the pastors. The purpose of calling the elders is to deliver them an important warning and a charge.

Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. (Acts 20:28-30)

We are told that elders are overseers of the church. These elders are to feed the church of God. They have a responsibility to protect the church from wolves arising from within the church speaking perverse things to draw disciples after them. So why are there church splits? The cause is not from without the church. It is always from within the church. In fact, when there is trouble from outside the church, it would strengthen the church and bring Christians closer to the Lord and closer to one another. It is always trouble that starts from within the church that causes the church to split. The elders are responsible to prevent such wolves in sheep' clothing from harming the sheep.

The apostle Paul confirmed that the church office holders are the elders and deacons when he wrote to the Philippians. **Paul and Timotheus,**

the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons: (Philippians 1:1) This letter was addressed to office holders in the church at Philippi. There were more than one bishop and one deacon. This was a healthy church in which the apostle Paul had very little negative thing to say about them. In fact, never had any letters in the New Testament sent and addressed to a single pastor or a group of pastors.

James gave us an idea how elders in the church are deployed in times of need. **Is any sick among you? 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: And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him. Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. (James 5:14-16)**

We are told to call the elders and not the pastor or pastors when there is a personal crisis. Here elders are called to resolve a problem and in this instant, an illness. An elder is a prayerful man. He must be a righteous man. Notwithstanding, elders are not necessarily perfect. As such, they are also told to confess their faults one to another and pray for one another. This is to prevent their prayers being hindered in helping someone in need. Problem solving in the church is part of the duty and responsibility of elders.

Peter also wrote to exhort elders in the church. **The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away. (1 Peter 5:1-4)**

So Peter though an apostle called himself an elder and not a pastor even though his works include feeding the Lord's sheep and lambs. The work of an elder includes feeding the flock of God. Taking the oversight of the church is the primary duty of an elder. But he has to do it willingly and not by constraint. He cannot do it because he has no choice and being forced

upon him to take charge of the church of God. He must not do it for money or gain. He must do it with a ready mind, always willing and always ready. He must not lord over God's flock and bully the members. Elders must be examples to the church. Their rewards will come from the Lord who is the Chief Shepherd. When Christ comes for the Church, He will give these faithful elders a crown of glory.

To Titus, mine own son after the common faith: Grace, mercy, and peace, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ our Saviour. For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee: If any be blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of riot or unruly. For a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God; not selfwilled, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre; But a lover of hospitality, a lover of good men, sober, just, holy, temperate; Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers. For there are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, specially they of the circumcision: (Titus 1:4-10)

The reason why Paul left Titus in Crete was to ordain elders and not pastors. The official title of an elder in verse 5 is called a bishop in verse 7. Elder refers to the person and the title of his office is a bishop. Though it might sound funny to call someone a bishop, it is the title given in the New Testament. But some may not like to call anyone a bishop because it sounds so Catholic and Anglican. Then why are they not fearful of calling someone a pastor when it could be very ecumenical? We must however note that there is no such office called the archbishop in the New Testament. It is an invention by men to subjugate other bishops in the church. So many churches nowadays who have pastors as heads of the church also invented the title of senior pastor to rule over other junior pastors.

So what do we have here for those churches that have a pastor as the head of the church? The pastor is the king, his wife the queen and the two bishops next to them like the arrangement you find on the chessboard. Is this the way the church is supposed to be organized? God gave pastors and teachers but people are so obsessed about calling someone Pastor So and So and not Teacher So and So. Why are the teachers and evangelists always left out? Of course calling someone teacher may sound very low class and that is why no one likes to wear that tile. But the fact is that a pastor or a teacher is a name given for an occupation and not an office title. No one seems to care anyway whether it is biblical to do so or not. An elder is just a person but the title of his office is a bishop. Nevertheless, there are stringent requirements before a man is fit to be an elder.

An elder is a representative of the church so it is not a matter to be taken lightly. We surely would not want an ungodly man, a wife beater, a drunkard to represent us as an elder of the church. Moreover we have to count on him to help us and pray for us in times of need and crisis. The fervent and effectual prayer of a righteous man availeth much. We surely do not want a faithless and an ungodly man to pray for us when his prayers would not rise above the ceiling of the room.

According to verse 5, an elder is to set things in order in a church. It is very common for things that are not in order in the church because we are dealing with fallen men notwithstanding the fact that they are saved by the precious blood of Christ. Of course an elder should be grieved when members could not be bothered about the things of Jesus Christ. That is why Paul told Titus to ordain elders in the church to set things in order. Some people must be held responsible and somebody must get the job done and in this case, the elders are ordained to take care of the church by taking the oversight thereof. When things are not in order, elders have to be partly responsible when they could resolve certain issues in the very beginning and not let troubles get out of hand.

In verse 6 we are told: **If any be blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of riot or unruly.** This verse tells us the basic requirement for a person to be an elder. He must be a married man and have children. He must have a family before he can qualify to be an elder. However, we cannot be legalistic that an elder must be a husband of one wife all the time. If his wife dies, must he then step down? Must he quickly remarry to fill the gap to meet this requirement? We cannot be legalistic about elders having children as well. Some may not be able to have children. Some may have only one child. Would this disqualify himself from the office? Must such a man quickly adopt one more child to be qualified as an elder? The context on this requirement is on how this man raises his family where the children must be trained up in the way of the Lord. This condition is given to prevent those who are having more than one wife to be elders of the church because such a man would be too busy.

We also cannot simply find people no matter how successful they are in the world and think that this will qualify him to be an elder of the church. In fact most of the time, those who are very successful in the world are those who are most unqualified to be elders in the church as they will be too busy and having to compromise on many areas to accommodate the world. The

elders in the New Testament were fishermen and lowly people. An elder must be blameless and a family man having his household in order otherwise he cannot be an example to the church. That is also why he must not be accused of riot or unruly.

In verse 7, more conditions are given: **For a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God; not selfwilled, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre;** An elder must be a man who is blameless and this is why his family background is very important. A person with questionable background cannot be entrusted to be a steward of God as far as the church is concerned. He cannot be selfwilled and get angry easily, for such is the hallmark of an impatient man. Getting angry is not a sin but getting angry easily is something else. He must not have a quick temper.

An elder must not be given to wine, which is obvious. Drunkenness and nakedness are wonderful companions. We would not want a man who might get drunk and talk nonsense and cause God's name to be blasphemed. Can we imagine when we are in need of help and prayer support but the elder is addicted to the bottle? Is he sober enough to pray for us? We want someone filled with the Holy Spirit to help us and not someone filled with the wrong spirit. The Nazarites in the Old Testament were also forbidden to drink wine. In fact Samson's mother was even forbidden to consume anything from the vine tree during her pregnancy.

It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine; nor for princes strong drink: Lest they drink, and forget the law, and pervert the judgment of any of the afflicted. (Proverbs 30:4&5) This is good advice for kings and princes and obviously good advice for elders of the church as well. God takes His sanctified servants seriously and they are not allowed to get drunk. A man who cannot abstain from wine is disqualified from the office of an elder.

An elder must not be a striker. We are not talking about those strikers playing in the forward positions scoring goals for their soccer teams. These are strikers that score their own goals for being violent prone such as a wife beater. An elder must not be a violent man and resorts to violence. Wife beaters are not suitable candidates for such a high office. He must not be given to filthy lucre; meaning, he must not love the office for the purpose of

gain in any form whether monetary or otherwise. Having given a list of what an elder must not be, here is a list of quality he must possess.

But a lover of hospitality, a lover of good men, sober, just, holy, temperate; Verse 8 shows the qualities an elder must possess. Firstly, he must be a lover of hospitality. He must be a hospitable man. Being hospitable does not always means material things. Being a rich man, what is a little money to him? He might easily give some money but to him, they are just loose change and not much damage done. Personal hospitality services cannot be outsourced. Hospitality could include your time and effort spent in helping and accommodating others.

He must be a lover of good men, as he is supposed to be a good man himself. A man who does not love a good man is very likely he himself is not one of them. He must be sober, that is why he must not be given to wine. He must be just, holy, temperate; and such qualities are obviously necessary as even Christians are told to be holy because God is holy what more for elders of the church!

Verse 9 tells us that an elder must be willing to be taught so that he can in turn teach others. **Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers.** The reason why he must be taught is given in verse 10. **For there are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, specially they of the circumcision:** An elder must study the word of God to shew himself approved unto God. If he is not doctrinally sound, how can he protect the church and convince gainsayers? A parallel passage concerning the qualifications of a bishop is given in 1 Timothy 3.

This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work. A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach; Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous; One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; (For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?) Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover he must have a good report of them which are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil. (1 Timothy 3:1-7)

Contrary to many who think that an elder is a calling, here we are told such an office could be desired. So everyone who is a Christian man is open to such an office subject to the man meeting the requirements set down by scripture. The additional requirements or qualifications not discussed in Titus are now given here.

An elder must be vigilant; that is, he must be alert and be always ready to protect the sheep from the wiles of the devil. He must be a man of good behaviour. A man who constantly misbehaves cannot be an elder as he will bring reproach to the church of the living God.

An elder must be apt to teach. Apt to teach does not mean apt to preach. Teaching and preaching are two different functions though they may sometime overlap in the expression of the act of teaching and preaching. Some may feel that he is not qualified to be an elder because he does not think he is apt to teach. However, being apt to teach does not mean he must have the gift of the gab although good oral and delivery skills are useful in teaching but these are not necessarily true. A man with charisma could turn out to be a false teacher. A man who could speak well may be very good at deceiving others. Moses could not speak well and God gave him Aaron to be his spokesman too.

Moreover, teaching does not necessarily mean teaching a large or a small group of people. Teaching can be conducted one on one. Some are not apt to teach because they are simply impatient and highminded. The best teachers are those who teach by their examples and by their manners of life for they speak louder than words. That is why elders must be examples in the church.

An elder must not be not covetous, which is beyond material possession as far as money is concerned. He could be covetous of someone's gifts, talents, success, servants, wife and so on. Covetousness is idolatry according to Colossians 3:5.

Verses 4 and 5 reinforce the basic requirements for a man to be an elder: **One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; (For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?)** Here is the reason why his household must be in order. If his children misbehave and he condones them, he cannot take care of the house of God.

According to verse 6, only a man with vast biblical spiritual experience can be an elder: **Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil.** This man cannot be a novice but someone proven in the spiritual warfare having been found faithful to Christ. A young and inexperienced man could easily be lifted up in pride and cause his downfall and trouble the church.

An elder also must be someone with a good reputation in the world according to verse 7: **Moreover he must have a good report of them which are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.** A man with a bad report will always have a problem with his testimony. If his is known to be a liar, a cheater and a scammer, he will bring reproach to the church. Unbelievers will not come to hear the word of God preached and despise the church of the living God.

Though elders must not come into the office for money but that does not mean he cannot receive wages. Some insist that Paul was a tentmaker and he did not receive a salary so elders cannot be paid either. Is this true? This kind of question is nothing new. Paul told the carnal Christians off in no uncertain terms on this matter.

Who goeth a warfare any time at his own charges? who planteth a vineyard, and eateth not of the fruit thereof? or who feedeth a flock, and eateth not of the milk of the flock? Say I these things as a man? or saith not the law the same also? For it is written in the law of Moses, Thou shalt not muzzle the mouth of the ox that treadeth out the corn. Doth God take care for oxen? If we have sown unto you spiritual things, is it a great thing if we shall reap your carnal things? Do ye not know that they which minister about holy things live of the things of the temple? and they which wait at the altar are partakers with the altar? Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel. (1 Corinthians 9:7-14)

This stinging rebuke from the apostle Paul is rather clear and straightforward. No one would be mistaken that those who labour for the Lord are to be remunerated. The church indeed should take care of them. Just when we think that this was the end of the matter, Paul further scolded them again in the second letter on this matter: **Have I committed an offence in abasing myself that ye might be exalted, because I have preached to you the gospel of God freely? I robbed other churches, taking wages of them, to do you service. (2 Corinthians 11:7:8)** This is rather embarrassing to say the least. Paul chastised them and accusing them of such misconduct that was really unforgivable. Paul was so brutally blunt that he told them he was robbing other churches to do them service. What shame! The apostle Paul must be furious with them for their attitude on this issue. What a bunch of freeloaders!

In fact, Paul even blamed the church at Philippi for not supplying his need: **Because for the work of Christ he was nigh unto death, not regarding his life, to supply your lack of service toward me. (Philippians 2:30)** So now at least we know Paul did not recommend that an elder could not receive wages. He gave his recommendation to Timothy and taught him how elders were to be remunerated for their service to the church.

If any man or woman that believeth have widows, let them relieve them, and let not the church be charged; that it may relieve them that are widows indeed. Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine. (1 Timothy 5:16&17)

So the church is supposed to take care of those who are really in need. An elder is no exception. Elders are supposed to be rulers in the church not in the sense of lording over God's flock. Those elders who rule well are to be counted worthy of double honour as far as receiving helps like widows are concerned. This is especially true for those who labour in the word and doctrine. This also shows that not all elders are labouring in word and in doctrine. They are the church's overseers watching over the church in prayers and other aspect of running of the church. Those who insist that an elder cannot receive wages are selfish, dishonest and hypocritical. Are they willing to work on a pro bono basis all their life at the expense of their own family?

We are told in no uncertain term that an elder can receive wages: **For the scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. And, The labourer is worthy of his reward. (1 Timothy 5:18)** Such an unbiblical position to put elders in a straightjacket with no material rewards must be exposed for there are freeloaders even during Paul's days who would bind heavy burdens upon the office holders when they would not lift them up with one of their fingers.

Just when elders are given specific role in the church with their qualifications clearly laid out, members are also admonished to relate with them in a biblical manner. **Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation. (Hebrews 13:7)**

Members of the church are to remember their elders for their work and not to take them for granted. It is so easy to assume that the elders are to do their work but members often forget that their work entails a lot of work and effort in the spiritual warfare watching over the church. This requires tremendous personal sacrifices that members of the church do not understand and fully appreciate. These elders are to speak the word of God and teach and exhort God's people in the church. They are faithful men and their faiths do follow their works. Faith must be evidenced by those who speak the word of God. Of course no one will take a faithless person seriously. When faith does not follow those words of God spoken, we can safely ignore them.

Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you. (Hebrews 13:17) Here is another commandment with reasons given. Members are not only to remember the elders but obey them as well. Of course it is understood their obligation is only to obey them when their exhortations are biblical. Elders are godly men who watch over the souls of members of the church. Moreover, they must give an account to God for their work. The least members could do are not to cause them grief so that they may do their work with joy. If they cannot do a proper work due to constant disobedience from members of the church, they will be grieved and this is not profitable to us.

How can members grieve the elders? By coming to church late habitually. Using handphone during church service. Sloppily and immodestly dress to church. Exhibiting ungodliness and indifference. As elders exhort Christians to be godly and serve the Lord in sincerity, they are often grieved when members choose to live according to the dictates of the flesh and put on a wrong attitude on spiritual things concerning Christ.

Overseers are not only supposed to see with their natural eyes but oversee and watch over the members of the church. When overseers are

constantly grieved over the behaviour of members they are watching over, they become spiritually lethargic. When they are so afflicted spiritually, they become spiritually myopic. When they cannot oversee anymore, they quit overseeing. When the overseers move out, the undertakers move in and we are doomed and Satan rejoices.

A healthy church must have spiritually healthy elders to take care of the church. An elder can be an evangelist, a pastor or a teacher like in time past an elder could even be an apostle. God gave instruction on ordination of elders and not pastors to serve the church. During the New Testament time, Timothy and Titus were among those told to ordain elders in churches to set things in order. This principle and pattern are passed down to elders who in turn ordain others into the office.

There must be self-renewal as office holders are mortal beings having an expiry date on their natural life. Do we believe the Lord who loves the Church and gave Himself for the Church expects the visible church on earth to suffer from leadership crisis? If there has been constant renewal by training the men to become leaders, and should any leader be gone, the church carries on business as usual. Having discussed about elders and members of the church, we all ought to take heed of the most important verse concerning office holders in a church: **For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls. (1 Peter 2:25)**

The Lord Jesus Christ is also a Bishop. The Lord Jesus Christ is not given the title of archbishop and yet men on earth are so audacious as to promote bishops to archbishops. Those churches that have pastors likewise follow such unscriptural practice by promoting a pastor to become a senior pastor over other pastors. There is no internal promotion among the ranks of the church office holders in the New Testament. Worldly wisdom has crept into the church to cause some office holders to become puff up in their own egos. Such unscriptural practice of promoting bishops to become archbishops and pastors to senior pastors runs contrary to scriptural teachings of humility for those who are greatest among the disciples: **And there was also a strife among them, which of them should be accounted the greatest. And he said unto them, The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors. But ye shall not be so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve. (Luke 22:24-26) But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant. (Matthew 23:11)**

The internal fighting among the disciples was put down by the Lord. However, such lust for power and recognition by office holders does not disappear even when the entire Holy Bible is given. The apostle John also

wrote about one man who thought he was somebody when he was not: **I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not. (3 John 1:9)** So fighting to have the preeminence among the disciples is nothing new. Only the Lord is worthy of the preeminence due to Him: **And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence. (Colossians 1:18)**

As it can be seen, we are all lost sheep and the true and real Shepherd and Bishop of our soul is the Lord Jesus Christ. If we take heed to His words laid down concerning church office holders, we will not have to face leadership crisis situation in the first place. Why a church having been in existence for 20 years remain stagnant for so long? Do we think the church office holders have eternal mortal life and would not die? Why is there no growth in the church in number and numbers office holders? Is it because none of the members has grown in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ and none is qualified to become office holders? Is there a systemic failure that no other men have been trained to become overseers all these years?

We should not get so hang up over the term “pastor” and use it in a non-biblical way. This book is not to castigate those churches having faithful pastors doing good work for the Lord. If the setup up is not biblical, leadership crisis has to be dealt with from time to time. Leadership crisis is the norm for churches the world over because the practice of the church is not biblical. If there is constant self-renewal, then the church can operate smoothly. Elders are supposed to be proactive troubleshooters before trouble starts to raise its ugly head. Ministering the word of God is a shared burden and responsibility and not a one-man show.

The children of Israel wanted a king to rule over them like other nations round about them. Ignorant Christians in churches want one man called a pastor to preach to them like the other churches around them. If we want to continue the same way looking for a man to run the show, we are looking for a next victim. Members expect the pastor to be a superman, always ready to meet the needs of the members, preach every Sunday, bury the dead, marry the young and run to the hospital whenever anyone calls. Is this really God’s way for His church to operate?

And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: (Ephesians 4:11&12) These people are gifts from God to perfect and edify the saints. We must never abuse these people when they have a work to do for the Lord. These people whether pastors or teachers are to function according to God's purpose for them within the church. There is no Scriptural evidence to suggest that a single man called a pastor is to head the visible church and he is exalted above the office of a bishop.

A pastor is not an office title. A pastor, an evangelist or a teacher is just one of the subsets within the office of a bishop to get the job done. We should not force one man to become the head and do all the work while we fold our hands to be entertained every Sunday.

The Lord is the Head of the Church the Body of Christ. On the earth, the visible church is to be taken care of by elders who are overseers and not by just one man. If we continue to have this perception that the visible church is run by one man called the pastor, we will always face leadership crisis from time to time. We are placing too much burden on this one man to shoulder and he will surely burn out.

Being an office holder does not mean appearing once a week on Sunday to say a prayer. It takes more than that. There are more responsibilities in overseeing the church affairs than appearing once a week on Sunday. Elders have to be more proactive and involved in the running of the church. The church ministries ought to grow and not remain as only a Sunday performance affair. We owe it to the young people growing up in our midst to show them a good example what a good Christian really is. We must not stumble them and cause them to turn away from Christ when they grow up. Their blood will be on our hands if we remain indifferent and take the things of Christ lightly. Failing them as good examples is not an option.

We must remember that the Lord Jesus Christ is the true Head of the true Church of all the saved members. The elders in plural are the overseers of the local visible church. May the office holders take ownership of their offices! May members of the church be supportive and be a blessing to one another! May the church grow spiritually according to the bible! With the Lord's help, may the office holders take the church to greater heights in serving our Lord and waiting for His soon coming! The Lord will surely

bles the church that follows the guidelines given from the Holy Scriptures with regard to running of the church. If we take heed to the principle and pattern laid down for us concerning church office holders, leadership crisis will never take place in the church. The Lord loves the church too much to allow her to be taken hostage by such crisis. May the Lord help His people to be governed according to God's will and God's words for the church!

If you have been blessed with the reading of this book and you wish to contact the author, you may write to him at charles@kjp-asia.com.