

The Church of Christ **(The SECT everywhere spoken against, Part Three)**

by

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“But we want to hear what your views are, for we know that people everywhere are talking against this sect” (Acts 28:22)

In continuing our investigation of this sect everywhere spoken against, we come to seek out its polity and officers. As we do this, remember, if we want an unbiased view, God’s view, we must keep the curtain pulled, blocking out all outside prejudices and their philosophical reasoning. We are looking for what the Apostles say are the officers of this sect everywhere spoken against, not modern men.

Let us, then, inquire into the officers of this sect everywhere spoken against. To learn the truth on this subject, we must go to their creed—which we have discovered to be the New Testament Scriptures!

Elders and Bishops

1. The term “elder,” in its first century use and meaning meant a person of age and experience, and it is used as the word to describe the character of the leadership of local assemblies of Christians. It is the Greek word “presbuteros,” of which there were many in each local Church of Christ.

2. The term “bishop,” in its first century use and meaning meant the title of an office. This is the word the Greek speaking world at the time of Christ used to describe the office of one who “oversees” a group of people. Example: A “foreman” is an “overseer,” a “bishop” of the those he is in charge of. It is the Greek word, “episkopos,” which is used to describe the office of the “elders” of the Church of Christ.

3. Putting 1 and 2 together, we find that the “presbuteros” held the office of an “episkopos,” or to put into our American English: “The ‘elders’ held the office of an ‘overseer’.”

Now, let us proceed to prove this fact from the “creed” of this sect everywhere spoken against. We go to Paul, the one who is known as a “ringleader,” and the one who was chosen to be the “Apostle” to the Gentiles by the risen Savior Himself. We now ask Paul how he applied these Greek terms.

“From Miletus, Paul sent to Ephesus for the ELDERS of the Church. When they arrived, he said to them: ‘... I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole counsel of God. Guard yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you OVERSEERS. Be shepherds of the Church of God, which He bought with His own blood.’” (Acts 20:17, 27–28).

Now understand, the word which is here rendered “**overseer**” is “**episkopos**,” which is the same that is rendered “**bishop**” wherever the term “**bishop**” occurs in their Creed—the New Testament Scriptures!

We also have to notice that Paul uses another word to describe the office of “**bishop—overseer**”—the word “**shepherds**,” which in other places is rendered as “**pastors**.” We have a very similar expression used by the Apostle Peter: “To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder ... Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, ...” (1 Peter 5:1–2). Here we have Peter using the words “**presbuteros—elder**,” and the word “**shepherds**,” which Paul used in the plural also to describe the office of the “**episkopos—overseer—bishop**.” Both Peter and Paul are in complete agreement that the word “**presbuteros—elder**” describes the character of the one who is an “**episkopos—overseer—bishop**.” Here, then, are two instances in which the “**elders**” are commanded to do the work of an “**overseer**,” which shows that when the teachers in that sect everywhere spoken against used the term “**elder**” as an official title, they always applied it to the “**bishops**” or “**overseers**” of the local Church of Christ.

In further consideration and evidence of this position, and which Peter and Paul both agreed upon, read Titus 1:5–7. Paul is writing to explain: “*The reason I left you in Crete was that you might straighten out what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town, as I directed you. An elder must be blameless, the husband of but one wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient. Since an overseer is entrusted with God’s work, he must be blameless, not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to much wine, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain.*”

Why must elders be of the character here described? The answer is because a **bishop must be blameless, having only one wife and children who are believers!** Thus are the terms “**elder—presbuteros**” and “**bishops—overseers—episkopos**” employed to express the same office and to describe the character of the ones desiring it.

The work which pertained to this office, according to the CREED of this sect everywhere spoken against, was to oversee and feed the church, to provide for the spiritual wants of the flock of God, to rule and teach well, to keep things in order, and thus exercise a general oversight over the church, watching for the good of their lives (souls), as they that must give account. See Acts 20:28, 1 Peter 5:2, 1 Thessalonians 5:12, 1 Timothy 5:17, and Hebrews 13:7 and 17.

In every individual congregation belonging to this body—the sect of which we are investigating, wherever the proper character could be found, they had a plurality, yes, many of these bishops or overseers. It is also true, that congregations existed for a time without such chosen men to act as shepherds. Hence, Titus was left in Crete, to appoint elders in every city, which shows that there were churches in those cities, but, there was something lacking; they did not have the proper overseers, and, therefore, Tutus was left with them for the purpose of supplying this lack by appointing elders with the qualifications Paul told him to look for!

This same fact appears in the fourteenth chapter of the Book of Acts. In it we have an account of what Paul and Barnabas did when they went back for their second visit to the cities in which they had proclaimed the Good News of Christ. “*Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed*” (Acts 14:23). I have quoted this

Scripture verse to show that, first, the Good News was proclaimed, second, that as individuals grew in the knowledge of the Lord, and, that when Paul had come back to confirm this, he chose those who had matured in the faith to be elders or shepherds of the congregations of saints. I also quote this verse to show that churches existed when they were first formed, without elders, but it also proves that when the proper characters could be found, **they had a plurality of elders in each and every church or individual, local congregation.** Here we have the church in the singular, and the elders in the plural. One church, many elders! This same form of expression is found in Acts 20:17, where Paul “*Sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the church*—“church” is singular; “elders” are plural; ONE church, MANY elders!

Another point that should be spelled out is this: “Do not entertain an accusation against an elder UNLESS it is brought by two or three witnesses. Those who sin are to be rebuked publicly, so that the others may take warning” (1 Timothy 5:19–20).

Timothy was an evangelist—one who was sent to proclaim the “evangel—the Good News” (See 2 Timothy 4:5), as was Titus. When Paul sent them into a city to appoint or ordain elders, that was a work of an evangelist. They were to look for the ones who, as Paul said, “desired the office of a bishop/episkopos” (See 1 Timothy 3:1). Paul laid out the requirement they must meet, and if they measured up, Timothy could appoint or ordain them to the office of bishop or overseer just as Titus was ordered to do. But, Paul warned Timothy that “*The time will come when some men will not put up with sound teachings. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths*” (See 2 Timothy 4:3–4).

Readers, don’t cheat yourself. Don’t take a peak, or look behind the curtain which we have pulled to cover all outside bias’ and theories. Let them remain out of view as much as is possible, at least until we have finished our investigation for a description of this sect everywhere spoken against. Let’s let Paul tell us what he said is the Church of Christ, as he is the one to whom it was revealed by Jesus himself: “*I want you to know, brothers, that the gospel I preached is not something that man made up. I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ*” (Galatians 1:11, and read Galatians, chapters 1 and 2!).

Another revelation Paul reveals, in reference to the office of “bishop—overseer,” is in order. Their official work was confined to the individual congregation to which they belonged. We never find in their Creed of the “*Bishop of the churches,*” but of the “*Bishops of the church!*” (See Philippians 1:1.) We never read of one bishop to many churches, but only of many bishops to ONE church. Bishops, plural; church, singular!

Again, don’t peek behind that curtain we pulled to shut off outside views. We are not looking to back up what is taught in today’s sects, but the sect everywhere spoken against in the first century! We want God’s revealed truth instead of man’s opinions or theories from speculation. If TRADITIONS contradict what is taught by the New Testament Scriptures, then those traditions are unbiblical.

As we read the Creed of this sect under investigation, we find that Paul, the one whom we are asking, **has listed** the qualification a man must have to seek the office of bishop. Let's look at these qualification more closely:

1. A bishop must be the husband of one wife.
2. His children must believe and be obedient to him.
3. He must hold firmly to the Gospel message.
4. He must have sound moral teachings.
- 5 He must be honest and above reproach in his work.
6. He must be self-controlled and disciplined.
7. He must be temperate.
8. He must be hospitable to all saints.
9. He must have an ability to teach the Word.
10. He must be above reproach among outsiders.
11. He must not put money above his work.
12. He must not be a drunkard nor given to drinking a lot.
13. He must not use unlawful methods to earn a living.
14. He must have his own household managed rightly.
15. He must not be a new convert to Christianity.
16. He must not force his opinions upon others because of the office he holds, i.e., overbearing.

(See 1 Timothy 3:1–7 and Titus 1:5–9; comparing them with the above 16 points spelled out.)

17. He must be able to correct and rebuke according to the Scriptures—with great patience and instruction. (See 2 Timothy 4:2).

A man, to be a bishop, must have the characteristics listed above. The Apostle Paul said that the office of a bishop is one of trust. There are no higher nor greater titles given than to one who is to be an “overseer” of the Church of God. *“This is a true saying: If any man desires the office of a bishop, he desires to do a good work”* (1 Timothy 3:1). Paul goes on to then list the qualities a man **MUST** possess to receive the title.

The Apostle Paul makes it very clear and important that a bishop be married! **STOP!** Don't peek behind the curtain and let outside views corrupt what Paul is saying. Let modern practices and man-made commands remain behind the curtain. We are seeking truth as is revealed in God's inspired Word. Yes, Paul said that a bishop **MUST** be married and, *“He should rule well his own household, keeping his children under control and perfectly respectful. For if a man cannot rule his own household, how is he to take care of the church of God”* (1 Timothy 3:4–5). The Greek is even more explicit than the Latin Vulgate version just quoted. *“He **MUST** rule well ... his children in **SUBJECTATION** will **ALL SERIOUSNESS** ... But, if he **DOES NOT KNOW HOW** to rule his own household ... how will he care for a church of God?”* Notice the reason Paul states for a bishop to be married. He puts a great deal of emphasis on this status.

But to the rest, Paul says: *“Now we ask you, brothers, to respect those who work hard among you and who have taken to leading you in the Lord and who admonish you.*

Hold them in high regard in love because of the work they do” (1 Thessalonians 5:12–13).

It will thusly be seen, in all the Scriptures of this sect spoken against, that all ministers under Christ were to receive the esteem of those they served because of their faithfulness in the important work they were chosen to do. All the authority bishops have comes from the Head of the Church—Christ, the Head of the Body, which is the Church. It must be borne in mind that all members of Christ’s Body, the Church, without regard to office, are made “kings and priests unto God,” “Children of God,” “Heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ.” (We will investigate this together when we ask Paul: “What about the priests of this sect spoken against?”).

The next part will continue, by looking into the offices of “deacon, evangelist, Apostle, and priest.” Remember, we must keep the curtain pulled to shut off all outside views if we want to get a true and unbiased look at the officers of this sect under our investigation. Our next part of this investigation will be very educational for all who are truly seeking the truth as shown by the holy Spirit who moved men to write the Scriptures, not of their own thoughts and opinions, but of what God wanted them to write down and reveal to us (See 1 Peter 1:10–12, 2 Peter 1:3–4 and 16–21.)

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