

**BIBLICAL ELDERS (2) (cont'd)**  
**NEW TESTAMENT TEACHING**  
Covenant Fellowship Church  
Wednesday, 12 March 2025  
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## **General Epistles**

### James 5:14–15

**Text:** “Is anyone among you sick? 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 will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.”

**Context:** James provides practical instructions for Christian living, including how to respond to illness within the community.

**Role/Duties:**

Elders are spiritual leaders responsible for pastoral care, specifically praying for the sick and anointing them with oil—a ritual symbolizing healing and consecration.

Their prayers are linked to both physical healing and forgiveness of sins, indicating a role in mediating God’s grace and fostering communal restoration.

### 1 Peter 5:1–4

**Text:** “So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.”

**Context:** Peter, writing to persecuted Christians in Asia Minor, addresses elders directly, identifying himself as a “fellow elder” and urging them to lead well in light of Christ’s return.

**Role/Duties:**

Elders are to “shepherd the flock,” a metaphor for *nurturing*, *guiding*, and *protecting* the church, with “oversight” (*episkopeō*) reinforcing their supervisory role.

Their leadership must be *voluntary*, *selfless* (not for personal gain), and *humble* (not domineering), setting a *moral and spiritual example*.

The promise of an “unfading crown of glory” suggests *accountability to Christ*, the “chief Shepherd,” and a future *reward* for faithful service.

### 2 John 1

**Text:** “The elder to the elect lady and her children, whom I love in truth, and not only I, but also all who know the truth...”

*over, please*

**Context:** The author, traditionally identified as the apostle John, opens his letter by calling himself “the elder,” addressing a church (symbolized as “the elect lady”) or possibly a specific Christian household.

**Role/Duties:**

The title “elder” here may indicate John’s authority as a senior leader with pastoral responsibility over multiple communities.

His role involves teaching and reinforcing “the truth,” suggesting elders *uphold doctrinal purity and provide spiritual encouragement*.

3 John 1

**Text:** “The elder to the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth.”

**Context:** Similar to 2 John, the author identifies as “the elder,” writing to an individual, Gaius, likely a church leader or host, to commend his hospitality and address issues with Diotrephes, a problematic figure.

**Role/Duties:**

The elder exercises authority to commend faithful service (Gaius’ support of missionaries) and correct disruptive behavior (Diotrephes’ arrogance), indicating a role in oversight and conflict resolution.

This suggests elders *maintain relational and moral order within the church*.

**Revelation**

Revelation 4:4, 10–11; 5:5–6, 8, 11, 14; 7:11, 13; 11:16; 14:3; 19:4

**Text:** Multiple references to “twenty-four elders” (e.g., 4:4: “Around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and seated on the thrones were twenty-four elders, clothed in white garments, with golden crowns on their heads”).

**Context:** In John’s apocalyptic vision, the “twenty-four elders” appear repeatedly in heaven, surrounding God’s throne, worshiping, and occasionally interacting with the unfolding events (e.g., one elder speaks to John in 7:13).

**Role/Duties:**

These elders are symbolic rather than historical church leaders, often interpreted as representing the redeemed people of God (e.g., 12 tribes of Israel + 12 apostles) or angelic beings.

Their primary function is worship, offering praise and adoration to God and the Lamb, and presenting the prayers of the saints (5:8).

While not directly applicable to church elders, their depiction reinforces the concept of *elders as authoritative, representative figures in a divine context*.

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## Synthesis of Roles, Functions, and Duties

From these passages, the role of elders in the New Testament (outside the Pastoral Epistles) emerges as multifaceted:

1. **Spiritual Oversight:** Elders shepherd and protect the flock (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:1–2), guarding against false teaching and ensuring doctrinal integrity (Acts 20:29–31; 2 John 1; 3 John 1).
2. **Pastoral Care:** They pray for the sick, mediate healing and forgiveness (James 5:14–15), and nurture the community's spiritual well-being.
3. **Administrative Leadership:** Elders manage resources (Acts 11:29–30) and are appointed to govern local churches (Acts 14:23; Acts 15).
4. **Decision-Making Authority:** They collaborate in resolving disputes and establishing church policy (Acts 15:6, 22), exercising collective leadership.
5. **Moral Example:** Elders lead humbly and willingly, serving as models for the flock (1 Peter 5:3).
6. **Worship and Representation:** Symbolically, the elders in Revelation highlight a role in representing God's people before Him.

## Observations

1. The term *presbyteros* (elder) often overlaps with *episkopos* (overseer), as seen in Acts 20:28 and 1 Peter 5:1–2, suggesting these roles were fluid or synonymous in the early church.
2. Elders operate in *plurality* (e.g., “elders” in every church, Acts 14:23; “all the elders,” Acts 21:18), emphasizing *shared leadership* rather than a single hierarchical figure.
3. Their duties blend *practical administration* with *spiritual responsibility*, reflecting the holistic needs of early Christian communities.