

DISCIPLESHIP LESSON 34

1	PRAYER
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Pray for God’s guidance through his Spirit, for awareness of his presence and for listening to his voice. Dedicate this lesson about disciple making to the Lord.

2	SHARING (20 minutes)	[QUIET TIMES] NUMBERS 11:1 – 14:45
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Take turns and *share* (or *read* from your notes) in short what you have learned from one of your quiet times out of the assigned Bible passages (Numbers 11:1 – 14:45).

Listen to the person sharing, take him serious and accept him. Do not discuss what he shares.

3	MEMORISATION (20 minutes)	[THE GOSPEL] (5) JOHN 1:12
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A. MEDITATION

Read John 1:9-13. “The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world. He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognise him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God - children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God.”

(5)

Write the following memory verse on a white or black board as follows:

Salvation by faith John 1:12
Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.
John 1:12

Write the Bible reference on the back of your card.

1. Salvation is not universal.

Jesus Christ is “the true light that gives light to every man”. This does not mean that he enlightens everyone so that they are saved. John 1:9 and 1 Timothy 2:4, 1 Timothy 4:10, Titus 2:11 and 2 Peter 3:9 do not teach universal salvation! It does mean that Jesus Christ gives enough spiritual illumination to every person (through the general revelation) (Romans 1:19-20; Romans 2:14) that they will be held accountable for the choice they make.

A great number of people do not respond positively to the gospel they hear. In this context we read that “the world” (which opposes Christ)¹ does not *recognize, acknowledge or know* Jesus Christ. The world does not *welcome, receive or accept* Jesus Christ (John 1:10-11). Many people do receive a measure of understanding of the gospel, but still prefer the darkness above the light. They see the light, but do *not come to* the light (John 3:19-21). People, who have once been *illuminated* (enlightened) once and afterwards fall away, cannot be brought back to repentance (by any human means) (Hebrews 6:4-8; Mark 10:27)².

2. Salvation must be believed, that is, received.

(1) “Receive” means: to actively take hold and make it your possession (John 1:5).

The darkness of the world did not “take hold of”³ the light, did not “make the light its possession” (John 1:5); cf. Philippians 3:12). Some translations: did “not understand” the light, Jesus Christ (John 1:5).

The world did not “acknowledge”⁴ (that she belonged to the Light), did “not choose” Jesus Christ (the Light) (John 1:10; cf. Matthew 7:23). Some translations: “not know”.

¹ “The evil world” is *the realm that is hostile to God, Christ and Christians* (John 7:7; 8:23; 12:31; 14:17,30,31; 15:18; 17:9,14-16,25; 1 John 5:19). (cf. DOTA manual 5, lesson 4, Bible Study question 4).

² In Hebrews 6:4 the words: “once been enlightened” refer to Christian baptism with water. The words “tasted the heavenly gift” refer to the Lord’s Supper. The words “shared in the Holy Spirit” refer to receiving a share in the work of the Holy Spirit (e.g. preaching of the Word of God and the love of Christians). These people were outwardly visible members of the Church, but have never been born again, because they “only produced thorns and thistles” (Hebrews 6:8; cf. John 16:6).

³ Greek: κατελαβεν < καταλαμβάνω

⁴ Greek: εγνω < γινωσκω

His own people, Israel, did “not accept or receive”⁵ him *with approval* (John 1:11; cf. Colossians 2:6). Some translations: “not welcomed”.

However, to all who “welcomed (received)”⁶ Jesus Christ, (that is, to all who believed “in his Name” and thus believe in him as he had revealed himself), he gave the right (the ability)⁷ to become the children of God (John 1:12).

Salvation is completely bound to Jesus Christ (John 14:6; Acts 4:12; 1 John 5:11). In order to be saved, one must acknowledge Jesus Christ in his divine authority as the Saviour and Lord and receive Jesus Christ into his heart and life. He must actively take hold of Jesus Christ, prefer him and with approval accept his death and resurrection in his place. This is what “faith or believing” in Jesus Christ means. Believing is not merely an intellectual acknowledgement, but an existential experience!

(2) Receive means: by whosoever.

John 1:12 literally says, “To all who received him, ... he gave the ability (power, right) to become children of God.” While the world and the Jews as a nation did not receive Jesus Christ (the Messiah), individuals from both the Jews and the Gentiles accepted him. They all became children of God. The word “all” in John 1:12 has the same meaning as the expression “whosoever” in John 3:16. It does not matter whether a person was a Jew or a Gentile before. All people who receive (accept, welcome) Jesus Christ are saved irrespective of their nationality or physical descent.

3. Salvation makes one a child of God.

(1) The meaning of the word “power” or “right”.

The Greek word may be translated by “power” or “right” (privilege), but is best translated with “ability”. The Jews thought that they (Jews) only were “the children of Abraham” and boasted about it (John 8:33). The Jews and Nicodemus believed that they possessed a special privileged position with God due to their physical or biological descent. But the Bible clearly teaches that no-one becomes a child of God by birth or natural descent (Romans 9:6-9). No one is born “a Christian”! One can only become a Christian by rebirth. “You should not be surprised at my saying, ‘You must be born again’ (John 3:7). According to John 1:12-13 this happens by acknowledging the authority of Jesus Christ, by believing in him as he has revealed himself and by actively receiving (accepting) him (with empty hands) in your mind, heart and life.

(2) The meaning of the word “child of God”.

A believer becomes “spiritually a child of God” by regeneration (John 1:13; cf. Romans 8:16) and “spiritually a son of God” by adoption (Ephesians 1:5; cf. Romans 8:15). For the apostles John and Paul, one does not become a Christian by being born from Christian parents or by belonging to and participating in the Christian Church (a religion), but only by spiritual regeneration and renewal by the Holy Spirit (John 3:3-8; Titus 3:4-8). God the Holy Spirit gives believers the new life and transforms them more and more into the likeness of God.

(3) Being or becoming a child of God?

A person does not become a child of God by blood, that is, by natural or physical descent. He only becomes a child of God by God’s sovereign promise (Romans 9:6-9).

A person does not become a child of God by the will of the flesh, that is, by the rational choice, decision or free will of the natural or depraved man (Romans 8:7-8). He only becomes a child of God by God’s sovereign mercy and grace (Romans 9:14-18).

A person does not become a child of God by his religious works (keeping the law) or good works (Ephesians 2:8-9). He only becomes a child of God by God’s sovereign election (Romans 9:10-13).

A person does not become a child of God by the will of a man, that is, by the physical, sexual or procreative urge of a male. He only becomes a child of God by God’s sovereign spiritual regeneration (John 1:13; cf. 3:3-8).

A person is a child of God from the very moment he believes in Jesus Christ! From the very moment the new life enters his soul (that is, his body and spirit), he is born-again, is a child of God and has entered the kingdom of God!

When John 1:12 says that the believer is given the right “to become” a child of God, he is not referring to becoming a child of God in the future, but to the event that begins at regeneration and continues throughout his life until its perfection (Philippians 1:6) when the believer has become a child of God in its fullest sense, that is, with a completely sanctified spirit (personality, character)(1 John 3:1-3) and a completely imperishable and transformed (renewed) body (Philippians 3:21; 1 Corinthians 15:42-44).

Salvation is thus not merely “a point”, but “a line”. Salvation is not a single event at the beginning of the Christian’s life, but a continual process until the second coming of Christ! Salvation begins when a person begins to believe. But salvation is only completed when the last enemy, death, has been conquered in the resurrection from the dead (1 Corinthians 15:26). Throughout his whole life, a Christian becomes more and more Christ like, that is, he becomes

⁵ Greek: παρελαβον < παραλαμβανω

⁶ Greek: ελαβον < λαμβανω

⁷ Greek: εξουσια

more and more what he in principle already is! The believer is declared perfectly justified (Romans 4:5) and therefore offers himself in slavery to continuously live more righteous and holy (Romans 6:19).

Conclusion.

“Becoming a child of God” is at the same time an event (a point of beginning) and a gradual process (a continuous line). Believers become children of God at the moment the life of God enters their lives, that is, when the Holy Spirit comes to live in them (Romans 8:9-10).

However, this transformation is only completed in the future when we shall see Christ face to face at his second coming. That is why the apostle John uses the words “to *become* children of God” instead of “to *be* the children of God”.

B. MEMORISATION AND REVIEW

- 1. Write.** Write the Bible verse on a blank card or on one page of your small notebook.
- 2. Memorise.** Memorise the Bible verse in the right way. (5) Salvation by faith. John 1:12-13.
- 3. Review.** Divide into twos and check one another’s last memorised Bible verse.

4	BIBLE STUDY (70 minutes) [THE CHURCH] (5) THE LEADERSHIP OF THE CHURCH: 1 PETER 5:1-7
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Make use of the five steps method of Bible study and study 1 Peter 5:1-7 together.

The intention of this Bible study is to deepen understanding of what the New Testament teaches about leadership in the worldwide Church and in the local congregation.

Definitions.

Because some translations of the Bible do not translate the Greek words for several leaders correctly, the original Greek words are consistently translated with the same English words in this study.

(1) The Greek words “presbuteros” (singular) and “presbuteroi” (plural) are consistently translated with the English words: “elder” and “elders”. This Greek word denotes the office of leadership of the local congregation. They are not translated with the words: “priest” (“priests”) or “pastor” (“pastors”), which denote a position of power in the modern traditional congregations.

(2) The Greek words “episkopos” (singular) and “episkopoi” (plural) are consistently translated with the English words: “overseer” and “overseers”. This Greek word refers to one of the functions (tasks, responsibilities) of the elders and not to any other office than elder in the Church! These Greek words are not translated with the words: “bishop” (“bishops”), which denote an even higher position of power in modern Episcopal congregations.

The Greek verb “episkopeō” (1 Peter 5:2) is translated with the English word: “to oversee”. This is the function of an overseer (thus: elder).

(3) The Greek word “poimén” (singular) and “poimenes” (plural) are consistently translated with the English words: “shepherd” and “shepherds”. This Greek word refers to a second function (task, responsibility) of the elders and not to any other office than elder in the Church! These Greek words are not translated with the words: “pastor” (“pastors”), which denote a position of power in modern traditional congregations.

The Greek verb “poimainó” (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:2) is translated with the English word: “to shepherd”. This is a function (task, responsibility) of the shepherd (thus: elder).

(4) The offices. “An office” is an appointed or entrusted service. It has responsibilities (tasks) attached to it and authority in the areas of the responsibilities delegated to it.

The offices of leadership. According to the Bible, the only office of leadership in the congregation is that of the elders in a counsel of elders (Acts 11:30; 14:23; 20:17; 1 Timothy 5:17; Titus 1:5; James 5:14; 1 Peter 5:1)! Biblical leadership is always shared leadership⁸ and servant leadership⁹ 1 Peter 5:1-3).

There was no hierarchy of leaders in the Christian Church of the New Testament! A local congregation in the New Testament was led, not by one leader (pastor or priest), but by a group of men, who were called “a body of elders” or a council of elders (Greek: presbuterion) (1 Timothy 4:14). Their tasks or responsibilities are described as the work of “shepherds or pastors” and of “overseers” (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:2). Leadership is thus not the privilege of merely one person.

The offices of service are the following: missionaries (apostles), preachers (prophets), evangelists, shepherds and teachers (Ephesians 5:11-12), deacons (Acts 6:1-7), group leaders, youth leaders, etc. The offices of service are

⁸ Plural number of elders.

⁹ A function, not a position of power that lords it over others!

appointed by the elders with specific responsibilities and corresponding authority, but they are always accountable to the council of elders. Nevertheless, “leadership” in the Bible is also “a task of service” and never “a position of power” (Matthew 20:25-28; 1 Peter 5:2-3)!

Because a congregation should never be led by just one leader (elder, pastor, priest), several house fellowships (house churches) should form one congregation under the leadership of “a body of elders”. Practically and depending on the situation, a congregation should consist of between three to eight house fellowships (house churches) and should have a body of elders consisting of at least three elders. A team of at least three new elders and a number of house fellowships (house churches) may form a new congregation. In this way all congregations remain manageably small and yet possess biblical leadership.

STEP 1. READ.

GOD’S WORD

Read. LET US READ 1 Peter 5:1-7 together.

Let us take turns to read one verse each until we have completed the reading.

STEP 2. DISCOVER.

OBSERVATIONS

Consider. WHICH TRUTH IN THIS PASSAGE IS IMPORTANT FOR YOU?

Or WHICH TRUTH IN THIS PASSAGE TOUCHES YOUR MIND OR HEART?

Record. Discover one or two truths that you understand. Think about them and write your thoughts in your notebook.

Share. (After the group members have had about two minutes to think and write, take turns to share).

Let us take turns to share with one another what each of us has discovered.

(The following are examples of people sharing what they have discovered. Remember: In every small group, the group members will share different things, not necessarily these things)

5:2-3

Discovery 1. The office of leader is called by different names.

Elders are also called by their functions (tasks). That is why the office of leadership is called by different names in the New Testament:

- “Elder” (Greek: presbuteros)(Acts 20:17; 1 Timothy 5:17; Titus 1:5; 1 Peter 5:1)
- “Shepherd” (Greek: poimén < poimainó)(Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:2)
- “Bishop” or “supervisor” (Greek: episkopos < episkopeó)(Acts 20:28; Titus 1:7; 1 Peter 5:2).
- “Leader in the front” (Greek: prohistamenos)(1 Thessalonians 5:12).
- “Leader” or “guide” (Greek: hégoumenos < hégeomai)(Hebrews 13:7,17).

Although the word “elder” (Greek: presbuteros) in ancient Greek referred to a man who was older in age and more experienced and wise in the community, in both the Old Testament and the New Testament the word may not be restricted to refer only to “an old man”. The word “elder” in the Old Testament refers above all to the office of leader in God’s Old Testament people, Israel and not to old men (Exodus 18:13-26; Numbers 11:16-17; Deuteronomy 1:9-18). And the word “elder” in the New Testament refers above all to the office of leader in God’s New Testament people, the Church, and also not to old men (Acts 11:30; Acts 14:23; Acts 20:17,28; 1 Timothy 5:17, Titus 1:5-6; 1 Peter 5:1-4).

Nowhere is a particular *age* a prerequisite. Both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament these elders had specific qualifications and responsibilities and they had to serve the people. Today, if a young man qualifies according to what the Bible requires, he may be chosen in the office of “an elder” in the sense of a church leader (Acts 14:21-23; 1 Timothy 3:6-7; 4:12)! Thus the word “elder” does not necessarily refer to an older man in age, but rather to a man who is spiritually mature and qualified to stand in a position of leadership in the congregation.

5:1

Discovery 2. The apostle Peter called himself “an elder”.

The apostles of Christ¹⁰ were a unique group of people with a unique task in the universal or worldwide Church. They were the eyewitnesses and ear-witnesses of Jesus Christ (his life, death, resurrection and teachings); they completed the New Testament revelation and planted the first local churches among the Jews, the Samaritans and the Gentiles.

In the first congregation of Jerusalem the apostles (the disciples of Jesus) also functioned as “elders” (Acts 6:2-6). Later they appointed the first elders of new congregations (Acts 14:23; cf. Titus 1:5).

Although Peter was “an apostle”, he functioned as “an elder” whenever he visited a local congregation. He submitted himself to the teaching concerning elders that he gave to the congregations. He did not “lord it over” any of the congregations or over any of the other elders! Peter was certainly no “pope”! Also the apostle John calls himself “the elder” and the congregation “the chosen lady” and the Christians “her children” (2 John 1).

¹⁰ Not “the apostles of the churches” (Acts 14:14; Romans 16:7; 2 Corinthians 8:23; Galatians 1:19; Philippians 2:25). The apostles of the churches were delegates, representatives of the churches, sent out by the churches to accomplish a special task.

STEP 3. QUESTION.**EXPLANATIONS**

Consider. WHICH QUESTION ABOUT ANYTHING IN THIS PASSAGE WOULD YOU LIKE TO ASK TO THIS GROUP?

Let us try to understand all the truths in 1 Peter 5:1-7 and ask questions about the things we still do not understand.

Record. Formulate your question as clearly as possible. Then write your question in your notebook.

Share. (After the group members have had about two minutes to think and write, let each person first share his question.) *Discuss.* (Then, choose a few of these questions and try to answer them by discussing them together in your group.)

(The following are examples of questions the students might ask and some notes about the discussion of the questions.)

5:4**Question 1. (Christ) Who is the absolute leader of the Church?**

Read Matthew 16:18; Ephesians 1:22; 1 Peter 2:25; 1 Peter 5:4

In Matthew 16:18, Jesus says, “I tell you, you are Peter (Greek: petros) and on this rock (Greek: petra) I will build my Church, and the gates of Hades (hell) will not overcome it.”

(1) Jesus is the Owner of the Church.

He says, “It is my Church”. The world-wide Church and every individual congregation (the Roman Catholic Church uses the term: “parish”) in the world do not belong to any particular denomination, nor to its leaders, and also not to its members, but to Jesus Christ alone. He bought the Church with his own blood (death on the cross) (Acts 20:28). Note also the expression: “God’s flock” (1 Peter 5:2).

(2) Jesus is the Builder of the Church.

Moreover Jesus says, “I build my Church.” Missionaries, leaders of congregations or anyone else do not build the Church of Christ. Jesus Christ (God) builds every congregation and uses people as his servants (1 Corinthians 3:5-11). Without Jesus Christ, we can do nothing that has eternal value (John 15:5)!

(3) Jesus is the Head of the Church.

In Ephesians 1:22, God appointed Jesus Christ to be the Head over everything in creation as well as the Head of the worldwide Church. No human being on earth may take this position! No human may be “a pope”¹¹, “a cardinal”¹², “a patriarch”¹³, “a metropolitan”¹⁴, or “an archbishop”¹⁵, because only Jesus Christ may bear this title! Jesus Christ alone is “the Everlasting Father” (Isaiah 9:6; cf. John 10:30), “the Shepherd and Overseer (Greek: bishop)”¹⁶ of your souls” (1 Peter 2:25). Jesus Christ is “the Chief Shepherd (Pastor)”¹⁷ above all elders (called “priests” in the Roman Catholic Church) (1 Peter 5:4). Jesus Christ only is “the apostle (Greek: apostolos) and high priest (Greek: archiereus) of the (Christian) Faith we confess” (Hebrews 3:1)¹⁸.

Thus, Jesus Christ is the Builder, Owner and Head of the world-wide Church and of every individual congregation in the world, now and forever! He alone is the absolute and eternal Leader of the worldwide Church and every local congregation.

5:1**Question 2. (Apostles) Who are the original leaders of the Church?**

Read Ephesians 2:20 (Revelation 21:14); 1 Peter 5:1.

(1) The apostles of Jesus Christ were the founders of the historical Church.

The apostles of Jesus Christ preached the gospel to the Jews and established the first congregation among the Jews (Acts 2:14,37-42). The apostles were indispensable when the first congregation among the half-Jews (Samaritans) was established (Acts 8:14-17; cf. 9:31). Finally, the apostles preached the gospel to the non-Jews (Gentiles) and the first congregations among the Gentiles were established (in Caesarea, Acts chapters 10-11; and during the first missionary journey of Paul to Cyprus and Turkey, Acts chapters 13-14).

(2) The apostles of Jesus Christ were the original leaders (the historic foundation) of the Church.

The Bible says that the Church is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets (Ephesians 2:20). These apostles were the 11 disciples of Jesus Christ during his stay on earth and Paul. They were not chosen, called and appointed by

¹¹ Pope or “papa” means “bishop” within the Byzantine Greek Church and is the highest office in the Roman Catholic Church.

¹² Cardinal means “most prominent” and is the title for the highest office under the pope in the Roman Catholic Church.

¹³ Patriarch means “father+first/highest/most prominent” and is the highest office in the Orthodox Churches. In the Roman Catholic Church it is an office that follows the pope and cardinals in rank.

¹⁴ Metropolitan means “mother+city” and is the archbishop or head of an important church province in the Roman Catholic Church.

¹⁵ Archbishop means “first/highest/most prominent+bishop” and is the bishop of the capital of a church province in the Roman Catholic Church. He manages a bishopric and has authority over all other bishops.

¹⁶ Greek: τον ποιμενα και επισκοπον των ψυχων υμων

¹⁷ Greek: αρχιποιμενος (1 Peter 5:4) + πρεσβυτεροι (1 Peter 5:1)

¹⁸ Greek: τον αποστολον και αρχιερα της ομολογιας ημων Ιησου

any denomination, Council of cardinals or Synod of delegated church leaders, but by Jesus Christ himself (Mark 3:13-15; John 17:18; John 20:21). They were eyewitnesses and ear-witnesses of his life, his teachings and deeds, his death and resurrection (Luke 24:45-48; Acts 1:21-22; Acts 26:16,23).

While an invitation may be refused, a calling cannot be refused without disobedience. A calling by Jesus Christ himself must be obeyed (Acts 9:15; Acts 22:14-15; Acts 26:16-18; Romans 1:14; 1 Corinthians 9:1,16; Galatians 2:7-9). The apostles of Jesus Christ planted the first congregations in history among the three main groups of people in the world (Acts 1:8): the Jews, the Half-Jews (Samaritans) and the non-Jews (Gentiles) (Acts 9:31; Acts 10:24-25; Acts 11:14-18).

The “prophets” or “inspired preachers and encouragers” like Barnabas, Timothy, Titus and Silas, helped the apostles (Acts 15:32). These apostles and their helpers appointed the first “elders” as “inducted (instituted) leaders” in the local congregations among the Gentiles (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5).

These apostles have no successors as later bishops, patriarchs and popes, because according to Acts 1:21-22 nobody would qualify as successor! Thus, the eleven disciples of Jesus Christ and Paul were the original leaders of the Historic Church (Matthew 16:18-19; Matthew 18:18; Ephesians 2:20; Revelation 21:14). They established the first congregations in history among the major people groups of the Bible: the Jews (from the old southern kingdom of Judah), the Samaritans (the mixed descendents from the old northern kingdom of Israel) and the Gentiles (from the large area beyond the Old Testament people of God)(Acts 1:8).

(3) The apostles of Jesus functioned during their lives as elders within the congregations.

In 1 Peter 5:1, the apostle Peter calls himself “a fellow elder” of the churches in the provinces of Asia Minor (Turkey). When Peter preached the gospel to non-Christians, planted the first congregations among the Jews, the Samaritans and the Gentiles and wrote some books of the New Testament, he functioned as “an apostle” (an eyewitness and ear-witness of Christ sent out into the world) (Matthew 16:18; John 16:13-15). However, when Peter lived or worked in a local congregation, he functioned as one of the elders of that congregation (1 Peter 5:1).

The other apostles also functioned as elders (Acts 6:4; 2 John 1; 3 John 1). But because their main task and calling was to make disciples in other nations and to plant more congregations, they soon appointed local men to become “the elders” of their own congregations (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5). Thereafter they never “lorded it over” these councils of elders!

5:1-2

Question 3. (Elders) Who were the instituted (inducted) leaders of the Church?

Read Acts 14:21-23; 1 Timothy 4:14; Titus 1:5; 1 Peter 5:1-2.

(1) The elders in the Jewish congregations.

In the Bible we read about the appointment of apostles (Mark 3:13-19) and the appointment of deacons (Acts 6:1-7), but not about the appointment of elders in the congregations among the Jews. The elders in the congregation of Jerusalem are first mentioned in Acts 11:30 and then in Acts 15:2, but their appointment is nowhere mentioned.

This was because “an elder” was the only important and permanent office in Israel. The elders were already the official leaders of God’s people during the Old Testament period. The Jewish elders were usually the heads of the families or the men of regard in the Jewish society and were chosen by the people themselves (Exodus 3:16; Exodus 18:13-26; Numbers 11:16-17; Deuteronomy 1:9-18).

When the apostles of Jesus Christ during the New Testament period established the first congregations among the Jews, the office of elder was retained as an institution among the Jews without any formal appointment. That is why the Book of Acts does not mention the formal appointment (induction) of elders in the church of Jerusalem or in the other Jewish churches.

(2) The elders in the Gentile congregations.

The appointment of elders among the Gentile congregations is distinctly mentioned, because the Gentiles did not have the institution of elders. Thus, the apostles or their co-workers, who founded these congregations “appointed elders for them “in each church” (Acts 14:23) and “in every town” (Titus 1:5).

The word “appointed” literally means “to choose by raising hands” (Greek: cheirotoneó), but this cannot be its meaning here, because Paul and Barnabas (and not all the people in the congregation) are its subjects. The word simply means “to elect”, “appoint” or “induct” without indicating the mode of election or the form of ordination. We may therefore assume that the method of selection and appointment of elders was the same as the appointment of deacons:

- the ordinary Christians chose them
- the apostles appointed (inducted) them (Acts 6:5-6).

“The elders” (Greek: presbuteroi) are thus the appointed and inducted leaders of the Church (Titus 1:5) and “the council of elders” (Greek: presbuterion) is the officially constituted or appointed leadership body or leadership team of the local congregation (1 Timothy 4:14).

(3) The elders in the teaching of the Bible.

God appoints the elders of a congregation by means of the Holy Spirit and determines their job description (responsibilities). The apostle Paul sent to Ephesus for the elders (Greek: presbuteroi)¹⁹ of the congregation (Acts 20:17) and said to them: “Keep watch (Greek: prosechó) over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers (Greek: episkopoi). Be shepherds (Greek: poimainó) of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood (Acts 20:28)”.

And the apostle Peter wrote to the elders of the congregations in Asia Minor (Turkey)(1 Peter 1:1): “Be shepherds (Greek: poimainó) of God’s flock that is under your care, serving as overseers (Greek: episkopeó), - not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve” (1 Peter 5:2)”.

Thus both the apostle Paul and the apostle Peter clearly teach that the “elders” are the leaders of the local church (Acts 11:1; 15:2,4,6,22; 14:23; 20:17; 1 Timothy 4:14; 5:17; Titus 1:5; 1 Peter 5:1) and their tasks are “to be overseers and “shepherds of the church of God” (Acts 20:28; 1 Timothy 3:11; Peter 5:2). This clearly shows that with regard to terminology, the words “elders”, “shepherds” and “overseers” are used interchangeably in the New Testament.

The traditional and modern English words “priests”, “bishops” and “pastors” are not good translations of the Greek words, because these translations from the Greek and Latin words in the Bible for “elders”, “overseers” and “shepherds” express positions of power instead of an office of service! In the New Testament time these terms only denoted the office of an elder and his two functions! But already in the second and third centuries A.D. in Church History these terms began to denote two hierarchical positions of power!

See DOTA manual 4, supplement 19: *Leadership*: “Development of leadership in Church History”.

In the New Testament Church there was no hierarchy of leaders! There was only a group of elders who formed “the body of elders” in each local congregation (church) and shared the leadership responsibility with one another. The term “elder” expresses the leader’s spiritual maturity and experience as well as the greater respect he commands. The terms “overseer” and “shepherd” describe the nature of the elder’s tasks. Thus, all the elders of the congregation should be the overseers and shepherds (pastors)²⁰ of their congregation. All the elders have pastoral, teaching and managerial functions in their congregation. All elders of the local congregation together ought to carry out the tasks of overseeing and shepherding in the congregation.

5:2-3

Question 4. (Umbrella organisation) Were there any other leaders above the elders during the New Testament period?

Read Acts 15:1-2,4,6,22; Acts 20:17,28.

(1) The elders had equal authority, but different tasks.

Some elders “directed the affairs of the congregation”²¹, while other elders “preached and taught”²² (1 Timothy 5:17). Although their tasks within the congregation were different, nevertheless together they formed *a body or council of elders*. One elder was not higher or more important than another elder.

The modern distinction between leaders of a congregation that are trained in a Bible School or Theological Seminary and other lay elders of a congregation did not exist during the New Testament period! The modern distinction between ordained pastors and lay elders also did not exist. All the elders were men that were made disciples of Jesus Christ, were equipped by training on the job and thereafter *appointed (put in charge, installed)* (Greek: cheirotoneó) (Acts 14:21-23) (Greek: kathistémi) (Titus 1:5) as elders of the congregation.

(2) The elders within the body or council of elders supervised one another.

The apostle Paul commanded the elders (Greek: presbuteroi) of the congregation at Ephesus not only to watch over (care for, pay attention to) (Greek: prosechó) the flock (the church members), but also to watch over one another (Acts 20:17,28)!

Therefore, not a single elder of the body of elders had a position of authority over the other elders! The expression “primus inter pares” (first among equals) used for modern ministers/priests/pastors is a contradiction in terms! The elders supervised one another. There is no evidence in the New Testament of any other leaders above the elders of the Church. The modern distinction that “a bishop” supervises all the other church leaders did NOT exist in the New Testament! The function of “overseer” (Greek: episkopeó<episkopos) was the task of all the elders and not the task of a single so-called “bishop”.

¹⁹ NOT “pastors” as some translations wrongly translate the word “presbuteroi”. “Presbuteroi” means “elders”!

²⁰ NOT “bishops” and “pastors”, (hierarchical positions of power in the Church!

²¹ Greek: “prohistémi”, be at the head, manage

²² Greek: “en logó” is serving in preaching the Word, “en didaskalia” is serving in the act of teaching or giving instruction

(3) The meeting at Jerusalem was NOT a Council or Synod (an umbrella organisation) above the body of elders.

The meeting at Jerusalem (Acts 15:1-35) was a consultation between a delegation of believers from the Gentile congregation of Antioch in Syria and the elders of the Jewish congregation of Jerusalem in Judea together with the apostles of Christ. The purpose of this consultation was to settle the problem of keeping the Jewish ceremonial law (circumcision). Some Jewish converts in the Jerusalem congregation tried to convince non-Jewish (Gentile) converts that circumcision was absolutely necessary for salvation (that Gentiles had to become Jews before they could become Christians!) (Acts 15:1; Galatians 1:6-9; 4:9-10,17; 5:1-12; 6:12-16). The Jerusalem meeting was NOT a meeting of representatives of all the existing congregations and made no claim to authority over all existing churches!

“The decisions” (Greek: dogmata kekrimata) (court terminology) reached at this meeting and were passed on to other congregations, were not enforceable decisions, but advice from the apostles which one may receive with approval or disapproval. What all Christians had to obey was the abstention from sins: they had to abstain from idolatry and sexual immorality (Acts 16:4). And what all Christians had to avoid was to offend Jews by their free conduct. Christians must love their weaker brothers (the Jewish believers) by avoiding “the necessary things” (Greek: epanagkes), namely, eating blood, meat of strangled animals and food sacrificed to idols (Acts 15:28-29; cf. Romans 14:1-6). This was not a question of “law”, but a question of “love”.

There is no evidence in the Bible of any representative Council or Synod or Conference of any Church denomination or even of the worldwide Church as an umbrella organisation above the council of elders that supervises all the councils of elders in any particular area!

5:2-3

Question 5. (Shepherds, overseers) What is the first task of the body of elders?

Read 1 Peter 5:2-4; Acts 20:17,28.

The first task of the elders is to be *shepherds (pastors)* and *overseers* of God’s flock.

- The elders are “appointed to be pastors and overseers of the church of God” (Acts 20:28).
- The elders must “*shepherd* God’s flock under their care, serving as *overseers*” (1 Peter 5:2).

There should not be just one “pastor or priest” in a local congregation, but rather “a body or council of elders”! Everyone of the body of elders should be a shepherd or have pastoral responsibilities in the congregation. As shepherds, the elders should “oversee” the congregation just as Jesus, the Good Shepherd, oversees the world-wide Church (1 Peter 2:25). The elders should feed, protect, care and guide the members of the congregation with a view to their spiritual growth and well-being. The elders as shepherds should exercise their task, not as a matter of assuming a position, but rather as a duty to serve and to lead by example (1 Peter 5:3-4).

Every elder should keep watch over the other elders as well as over the members of the congregation (Acts 20:28). In this way, both members as well as elders stand in an accountability relationship to somebody else. The elders should be wide-awake against false teachers – people who twist the truth of the Bible and try to win the members for themselves (Acts 20:28-31). The elders should also show concern and loving care to the really needy members of the congregation, like orphans, widows and new believers. Elders should visit and pray for the sick (James 5:14).

Question 6. (Stewards) What is the second task of the body of elders?

Read 1 Timothy 3:4-5; 5:17; Titus 1:7.

The second task of the elders is to be “stewards of God’s household”. They must “lead by going in front” and “manage (direct) (Greek: prohistémi) the affairs of their own families and of the congregation well (1 Timothy 3:5; 5:17). They give direction to the congregation by their good example. They are to be God’s “(house)-stewards, managers or administrators” (Greek: oikonomoi) (Titus 1:7). They manage the members of the congregation in all their activities and the possessions of the church. For example, they manage the functioning of the meetings, evangelism, discipleship, training programmes and other ministries of the congregation. If an elder does not manage his own family well and his wife or children need more attention, then he should resign from his leadership position in order to give his family the attention they need (1 Timothy 3:4-5).

Question 7. (Teachers) What is the third task of the body of elders?

Read 1 Timothy 3:2; 5:17; Titus 1:9.

The third task of the elders is to be “teachers of God’s Word”. They “teach” and “preach” the Word of God. Elders must “be skilful in teaching” (Greek: didaktikos) (1 Timothy 3:2) and “active in preaching and in teaching” (Greek: en logo kai didaskalia) the truth of the Bible (1 Timothy 5:17). They must “hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught”, so that they can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it (Titus 1:9).

This task of the elders includes every task that involves the Bible. As teachers, the elders should use the Bible to instruct the members of the congregation in “the whole will of God” (Acts 20:27) and in “anything that would be helpful” (Acts 20:20). They should “not go beyond what has been written” in the Bible (1 Corinthians 4:6)! They should “teach the

members to obey” all that Jesus Christ has commanded (Matthew 28:19). They should *preach* God’s Word to non-Christians and Christians alike. They should *teach, correct, rebuke (warn)* and *encourage* the members of the congregation (2 Timothy 4:2). They should *discuss and decide doctrinal issues* and *refute* false teachings, etc. (1 Timothy 1:9-11; Titus 1:9).

5:2-3

Question 8. (Servants) What is the fourth task of the body of elders?

Read 1 Peter 5:2-3; Matthew 20:25-28.

The fourth task of the elders is to be “servants of God and people”. Jesus called them together and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. *Not so with you.* Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your *servant*, and whoever wants to be first must be your *slave* - just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:25-28). As servants of God and of people, the elders should carry out tasks for the benefit of others.

This task summarises the *leadership style* of the elders. The leadership style of leaders in the congregation should be completely different from the leadership style of leaders in the world! The elders should serve willingly, freely and eagerly. They may not lord it over those entrusted to them (1 Peter 5:3)! They should be examples to the believers. Rather than leading by commands, they should lead by example. Rather than being served, they should serve the members.

5:5-6

Question 9. What should the Christian’s attitude be towards elders?

(1) Elders have limited authority.

God delegates authority (Romans 13:1-2), but the authority of all offices is limited (Acts 4:19-20; 5:29). All elders stand under the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ, which means:

- The elders stand under the authority of the Bible (correctly interpreted)(1 Corinthians 4:6)
- The elders stand under the authority of the Spirit of Christ who will never say anything against the Bible (Matthew 28:19; John 16:13-15; cf. 1 Peter 1:10-12).
- Each elder stands under the authority of the council of elders (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:5) which may never go beyond what is written in the Bible (1 Corinthians 4:6).

The elders have authority in the areas of their assigned biblical tasks. The church members must submit themselves to the elders when they exercise their biblical tasks within the congregation. “Respect those who work hard among you, who *are over you* (Greek: *prohistémi*) in the Lord and who admonish you. Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work” (1 Thessalonians 5:12-13). “Obey your leaders (Greek: *hégoumenoi*) and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them, so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you” (Hebrews 13:17).

But someone in a leadership position who does not speak the Word of God to you and does not set an example of obedience to the Word, may not be regarded as a leader! “Remember your leaders (Greek: *hégoumenoi*) who spoke the Word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith” (Hebrews 13:7; cf. Acts 20:17-18; 1 Timothy 4:12-16)!

Nevertheless, the elders have no authority to save people (Luke 19:10), to baptise people with the Spirit (Mark 1:8), to guide as the Holy Spirit does (John 16:13-15), to give gifts of the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 4:7), to transform people by means of the fruit of the Spirit (2 Corinthians 3:14-17), to call to a specific ministry (Acts 26:15-18), or to assign a specific task (Mark 13:34). These tasks belong exclusively to the Lord Jesus Christ and his Spirit and not to the elders (the leaders of the church)! The members of the church are not the possession or the subjects of the elders.

(2) Also the elders must subject themselves.

The apostle Peter teaches: “Young men, in the same way (likewise), be submissive to those who are older. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility towards one another, because: God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble” (1 Peter 5:5). The Greek word “*presbuteroi*” refers first of all to “the older men”, because it is contrasted with the “*neóteroi*” (the younger men). But at the same time it refers also to “the elders” who are the leaders of the congregation, because the context (1 Peter 5:1-4) speaks of the elders!

The correct attitude towards the older men as well as to the elders of the congregation is submission (1 Peter 5:5-6). However, the younger men must “likewise” be submissive, that is, in the same way as the older men (including the elders) are submissive to the younger men (in everything that is taught by the Word of God). Thus, the only correct Christian attitude is mutual submission (cf. Ephesians 5:21)! “Submission”: not to the arbitrary decisions of an authoritarian leader or of a traditional umbrella organisation as a Council or Synod, but submission to Jesus Christ, to the Bible correctly interpreted, to the Spirit of Christ who will never go against the Bible (Ephesians 6:17) and to the council of elders that may never go beyond what is written in the Bible (1 Corinthians 4:6).

God's people and use them to accomplish our goals. I should care for people, encourage them and motivate them by my personal example.

STEP 5. PRAY.

RESPONSE

LET US TAKE TURNS TO PRAY ABOUT ONE TRUTH THAT GOD HAS TAUGHT US in 1 Peter 5:1-7.

(Respond in your prayer to what you have learned during this Bible study. Practise to pray only in one or two sentences. Remember that people in every group will pray about different issues.)

5

PRAYER (8 minutes)

**[INTERCESSION]
PRAY FOR OTHERS**

Continue to pray in groups of two's or three's. Pray for one another and for the people in the world (Romans 15:30; Colossians 4:12).

6

PREPARATION (2 minutes)

**[ASSIGNMENT]
FOR NEXT LESSON**

(Group leader. Give the group members this preparation for at home in writing or let them copy it down).

1. Commitment. Be committed to make disciples.
Preach, teach or study the Bible study of 1 Peter 5:1-7 together with another person or group of people.
2. Personal time with God. Have a quiet time each day from **Deuteronomy 11:13-21; 13:1-5; 16:18-20; 17:14-20; 18:9-13; 18:14-22.** Make use of the questions method of quiet time. Make notes.
3. Memorisation. (5) Salvation by faith. **John 1:12.** Daily review the last 5 memorised Bible verses.
4. Prayer. Pray for someone or something specific this week and see what God is doing (Psalm 5:3).
5. Update your notebook on making disciples. Include the notes on your personal time with God, memorisation notes, Bible study notes and this preparation.