

“What is the Purpose of Elders?”

I knew of judges, prophets and kings during the Old Testament times, but before this class I had never considered that there were elders prior to the establishment of the New Testament church. After what was brought up during last week’s observations and the scriptures shared about the role of elders in the Old Testament, I wanted to study further what an elder’s purpose was before and after Christ’s death.

My study brought me to **Job 12:20**. This is where Job is speaking about the power of God: “**...He deprives the trusted ones of speech, and takes away the discernment of the elders.**” This implies that “discernment” was the quality that elders, (whether in respect to age or authority), were best known for.

The Dictionary defines a DISCERNER as: “*A clear-sighted observer; one who knows and judges*”. If making judgments was an elder’s main purpose during a period covering thousands of years, I wondered why the first church in the New Testament would even need a list of qualifications and expectations. Why not just assume that these men could just continue under the same protocol of deciding disputes and settling spiritual questions? What changed?

Colossians 2:16,17 speaks of the changes in regard to old spiritual traditions as, “**things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ.**”

In **Hebrews 8:13** in regards to Christ and the old laws, “**When He said, ‘A new covenant,’ He has made the first obsolete. But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to disappear.**” Continuing through chapter 9, there is great detail on how the new covenant under Christ makes the old traditions obsolete.

An example of these changes also came in regard to the tradition of the priesthood as seen in **Hebrews 8:4- 6**, as those, “**who serve as a copy and shadow of the heavenly things.**”

So when looking at the qualities of an elder in **Titus 1: 7-9**, which lists the Christ-like “traits” that he should have; it becomes apparent that these are not merely the outward works of one who judges, as it was in the Old Testament times. But now, of most importance, it should be the *kind* of man that he is.

1 Peter 5:3 tells us that elders are to “**... not lord over those allotted to their charge...**” In **Luke 22:24-27** and **Matthew 20:24-29** Jesus speaks to the inherent dangers that can come with authority and charges his disciples with the alternative mind-set of service.

In the second half of **1 Peter 5:3** it reads, “**...but proving to be examples to the flock.**” The metaphor that a flock should not have a shepherd who expects to lead merely by the authority of his title, seems to draw the conclusion for “the purpose” of instituting elders under our new covenant in Jesus, which is--*that elders are to prove to be Christ-like examples which their fellow Christians will want to follow.*

~Ellen Dodson