

## 7) LESSONS FROM 1. EPISTLE TO TIMOTHY

### I.

#### *Introduction*

In previous sermons I dealt with subject of a bishop in the local church and discussed qualifications set by Holy Spirit that any Christian man must fulfill in order that he may desire to do the work of bishop.

As I already mentioned the expression “the office/position of a bishop”, comes from Greek word episkope that is defined as inspection /*dohled*/ (for relief); by implication /*nepřimo*/, superintendence /*dozor*/; specially, the Christian "episcopate":--the office of a "bishop", bishoprick /*biskupství*/, visitation /*navštívení*/.

I would like to remind again that the office/position of a bishop is a role of a special servant of the Word of God who cares for spiritual welfare – salvation - of others. It is a role appointed by God for local assemblies – churches - of his people. When speaking about work of bishop, the word “role” seems to be more appropriate than “office” which is associated with authority or power over others, or “position” which is associated with elevated rank above other people.

Bishop (in Greek: episkopos) is the person who does the actual work and bears the responsibility.

Last time we also saw that bishops are identified with elders.

Today I would like to deal with a question, how many bishops a local church may have – one, two, more? Also where is the sphere of their work? One congregation or more congregations?

### II.

#### *How many bishops can a local church have?*

#### *Where is the sphere of their work? One congregation or more congregations?*

#### *Bishops - Bishop*

Let's consider following verses from NT:

Bishops:

Ac 20:28 Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you **overseers (épiskópous)**, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. (KJV)

28 Dávejte pozor na sebe i na celé stádo, ve kterém si vás Duch svatý ustanovil za **strážce**, abyste byli pastýři Boží církve, kterou si Bůh získal krví vlastního Syna. (EB)

28 Dbejte tedy na sebe i na celé stádo, nad nímž vás Duch Svatý ustanovil **biskupy**, abyste pásli Boží církev, kterou získal svou vlastní krví. (NBK)

28 Dbejte tedy na sebe i na celé stádo, jehož **správci** vás Duch Svatý ustanovil, abyste pásli Boží církev, kterou vykoupil svou vlastní krví. (NBK2006)

Php 1:1 ¶ Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the **bishops (épískópois)** and deacons (diakonois): (KJV)

Filipským 1:1 Pavel a Timoteus, služebníci Krista Ježíše, všem bratřím v Kristu Ježíši, kteří jsou ve Filipech, i **biskupům** a jáhnům: (EB)

Filipským 1:1 Pavel a Timoteus, služebníci Ježíše Krista, všem svatým v Kristu Ježíši, kteří jsou ve Filipech, se správci a služebníky: (NBK2006)

Bishop:

1Ti 3:2 **A bishop (épískopon)** then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach; {of good...: or, modest} (KJV)

1 Timoteovi 3:2 Nuže, **biskup** má být bezúhonný, jen jednou ženatý, střídmy, rozvážný, řádný, pohostinný, schopný učit, (EB)

Tit 1:7 For **a bishop (épískopon)**, as God's steward, must be blameless; he must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, (KJV)

Titovi 1:7 Neboť **biskup** má být bezúhonný jako správce Božího domu. Nemá být nadutý, zlostný, pijan, rváč, ziskuchtivý. (EB)

Titovi 1:7 **Představený** musí být jakožto Boží správce bezúhonný: nesmí být samolibý, vznětlivý, opilec, hrubián ani prospěcháč, (NBK2006)

1Pe 2:25 For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and **Guardian (épískopon)** of your souls. (KJV)

1 Petrův 2:25 'Jeho rány vás uzdravily.' Vždyť jste 'bloudili jako ovce', ale nyní jste byli obráceni k pastýři a **strážci** svých duší. (EB)

For instance, The Power Bible software in all these verses uses only one form of the Greek word – episkopos. The reason may be to make it more simple, but it sure looks strange when one Greek word – episkopos is translated into English or Czech by several words, sometimes in plural, other times in singular - overseers, bishops, a bishop, Guardian. Closer look at Westcott-Hort Greek text of NT, shows different Greek forms occurring in these verses.

As we have seen, only two verses in NT use plural form of the Greek word episkopos: Ac 20:28, Php 1:1. Let's read:

Ac 20:17 ¶ And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called the elders (presbutérous) of the church (ékklesías).

Ac 20:28 Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you **overseers (épískopous)**, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. (KJV)

In Acts 20 apostle Paul called for the elders of the church in Ephesus and he charged them to take care of the Christian flock in Ephesus over which Holy Spirit had made them bishops. Here the reference is made to one church that was in Ephesus and plurality of the elders/bishops in that church. Once again the bishops are identified with elders.

If this was only one verse in whole NT, it would be sufficient to establish Bible authority for teaching that:

1] bishops = elders

2] bishops/elders take care of one particular local congregation of Christians where they were appointed as bishops/elders

Plurality not only of bishops, but also deacons is further confirmed in Php 1:1.

Singular form of the word bishop used in 1Ti 3:2, Tit 1:7 does not deal with number of bishops in a local congregation, but with a role and qualifications of a bishop.

Singular form of the word bishop used in 1Pe 2:25 refers to Christ as to the Shepherd and **Guardian (épiskopon)** of our souls.

### *Elders - Elder*

Compare to term bishops, elders is more traditional term. Throughout their history, Jews and other nations as well had elders who were not only elderly persons, but as well leaders in the nation. It was natural that this traditional term made its way into Christianity to denote the leaders of the local congregation. As we have noticed bishops and elders are used in NT interchangeably. Since words elders – elder are much more frequent in NT, I will focus only on few of the verses to find answers to the questions: How many bishops can a local church have? Where is the sphere of their work? One congregation or more congregations?

Let's consider following verses from NT:

Elders:

Ac 14:23 And when they had ordained them **elders (presbutérous)** in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed. (KJV)

Here we have read about plurality of elders in every church.

Ac 15:2 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 (presbutérous)** about this question.

Ac 15:4 And when they were come to Jerusalem, they were received of the church, and of the apostles and elders (presbutéroun), and they declared all things that God had done with them.

Ac 15:6 ¶ And the apostles and **elders (presbúteroi)** came together for to consider of this matter.

Ac 15:22 ¶ Then pleased it the apostles and **elders (presbutérois)**, 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:

Ac 15:23 And they wrote letters by them after this manner; The apostles and **elders (presbúteroi)** and brethren send greeting unto the brethren which are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia:

Ac 16:4 And as they went through the cities, they delivered them the decrees for to keep, that were ordained of the apostles and **elders (presbutéron)** which were at Jerusalem. (KJV)

Here we have read about plurality of elders in church in Jerusalem.

Tit 1:5 ¶ For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain **elders (presbutérous)** in every city, as I had appointed thee: {wanting: or, left undone} (KJV) - presbuteros

Here Paul charged Timothy to ordain plurality of elders in every city.

Jas 5:14 Is any sick among you? let him call for the **elders (presbutérous) of the church**; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: (KJV) - presbuteros

Here plurality of elders of the church is charged to pray over the sick.

Elder:

1Ti 5:1 ¶ Rebuke not an **elder (presbutéro)**, but intreat him as a father; and the younger men as brethren; (KJV)

1Ti 5:19 Against an **elder (presbutérou)** receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses. {before: or, under} (KJV)

These verses do not deal with the number of elders in a local congregation.

Even in this case The Power Bible software in all these verses uses only one form of the Greek word – presbuteros, although it is translated into English or Czech sometimes in plural, other times in singular form – elders – elder. Once again closer look at Westcott-Hort Greek text of NT, shows different Greek forms occurring in these verses.

### ***III. Conclusion***

There is abundant evidence, that there is Bible authority for plurality of the bishops/elders in the local congregation. Plurality means more than two. There is no maximum. This is not bound, but it is clear that it should be a reasonable number adequate to the amount of Christians and work.

Plurality of bishops/elders means natural competition (in positive sense) of plurality of opinions and ideas that can be tested in the light of the Word of God and that which is good and profitable can be kept and the rest rejected. It corresponds with natural plurality of opinions and ideas that individual Christians have in a local congregation. Yet, based on the Word of God, it is possible for all these people to be united in Christ, when they follow Him.

Not, only God instructs plurality of bishop in the local church, but limits their bishop role only to one particular local congregation.

However, early after local churches were established in the 1. century AD, God's idea of plurality of bishops in one congregation was replaced by human idea of one bishop in the local church in a position of a ruler and later one bishop as the ruler over all believers. It is possible that the aim was to keep unity among Christian. The result was uniformity of believers who followed teaching of one fallible human head, instead of unity in following teaching of Christ. Catholic church ruled by such fallible humans head for centuries with all its excesses and terrible consequences for many human souls is the example where such human experiment can lead to.

Thus it is apparent that not only the role of bishops/elders is important for local congregation, but also their number. Both of these can be clearly determined from the NT if one puts forth the desire to follow the Word of God.

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