



How Many Churches Can Be Under One Eldership? by [John T Polk II](#)

*All Scriptures and comments are based on the **New King James Version**, unless otherwise noted.*

Question: How many churches may be under the oversight of a local eldership?

Answer: According to the Bible, the answer is "one."

The Example of Ephesus

In Ephesus, Paul had:

- Established the church (**Acts 19:1-20:1**);
- Warned the elders of apostasy from within the eldership (**Acts 20:28-29**); and
- Written an inspired book to them (**Ephesians 1-6**).

But by the time they had left their first love (**Revelation 2:1-7**), Jesus held no one accountable for their digression except themselves!

Though Paul's journey to Ephesus began in Antioch of Syria, where disciples were first called "Christians" (**Acts 11:26; 18:22-23**), the church in Ephesus was completely and only under their own elders' "oversight."

Paul had committed their future to the elders and God's word:

So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified (**Acts 20:32**).

If another eldership had "oversight" in Ephesus, why didn't Jesus hold them accountable for faith's failure and write to them as "the angel" of Ephesus?

Only an apostle ever claimed that "what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches" (**2 Corinthians 11:28**). No Eldership or group of "sound" preachers oversaw "all the churches" in the New Testament.

The Example of Antioch

Though Paul's journeys began from Antioch in Syria (**Acts 13:1-4; 14:26-28; Acts 15:30-40; 18:22-23**), after establishing churches with the gospel of Jesus Christ:

[Paul and Barnabas] appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed (**Acts 14:23**).

Nothing is ever said to indicate that the Antioch eldership maintained "oversight" over any of the churches established by the gospel and now with their own elders. Why did Paul set each church on its own, directly under "the Lord in whom they had believed," and not under the Antioch eldership?

Mission Efforts Today

Mission efforts seem to have become more sectarian than scriptural, possibly out of good intentions. New Christians may need "milk" and not "meat" (**Hebrews 5:12-14**), but no one grows without having "senses exercised to discern both good and evil." If new Christians seek advice, surely no eldership would withhold their wisdom, but no other church, board of churches, or area elders are given direct "oversight" in any but their own local church.

Though "Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, [wrote] To the pilgrims of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia," he, as a "fellow elder" exhorted

The elders who are among you ... Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers (**1 Peter 1:1; 5:1-2**).

The "elders" among the "Dispersion" in various locations were to have "oversight" over "the flock of God which is among you." Unless one advocates the position of the Roman Catholics that an eldership oversees "the flock" regardless of local lines, Scripture admits of only one set of elders overseeing "the flock" that chose them as elders according to **1 Timothy 3:1-7**.

For Titus to "set in order the things that are lacking," Paul commanded that he "appoint elders in every city" (**Titus 1:5**). Qualifications are then listed (**Titus 1:6-9**), so that the local Christians would make their decisions, following the pattern set in **Acts 6:1-6**. This would complete their organization that Paul could not do personally as an apostle (**Acts 14:26**).

Roman Catholic Pattern

The Roman Catholic Church developed from a local eldership maintaining control over more than one local church, thus perverting the gospel arrangement which the apostles approved (**Acts 6**), Peter taught (**1 Peter 5**), Paul followed (**Acts 14**), and Paul commanded as law (**Titus 1**). There is absolutely NO authority for an eldership to take the oversight of more than one congregation.

Now that some churches are having more than one "congregation" worshiping at different times in the same building (contemporary and traditional; congregational and cells; English and Spanish/ other language; Youth/ Children and Adults; inner-city and outer-city; *ad nauseum*), this doctrine must be re-examined, re-taught, and re-emphasized. Each church of Christ must be ordered by the word of God and directly under Jesus Christ as its Head, or else it is moving away from the body of Christ (**Colossians 1:18-23**).

-- John T Polk II

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