

ELDERS DEACONS PREACHERS SAINTS

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1. Introduction to Leadership Roles

In order to reach its full potential, each congregation of the Lord's church needs to cultivate and have good leadership. No group or organization be it business, military or the church can rise above its own leadership. Jesus said,

A disciple is not above his master. It is enough for the disciple that he become like his teacher, and the slave like his master.
- Matthew 10:24-25

On the subject of leadership Jesus is saying two things:

- In context He is referring to Himself as the teacher and master that we are to strive to be like.
- In principle He is saying that in the church we are not in competition with our leaders, we are striving to be like them.

In this way the growth and quality of each congregation can be measured by the growth and quality of its leaders. This is why church growth is tied to leadership. When leaders grow, the church grows. If you want the church to grow, you must first help the leaders to grow. Seeing leaders pursuing growth is one of the factors that stimulates growth among the followers/disciples.

Most of us want the church to grow so we can honor God, confess Christ and build up the kingdom by winning souls.

This book about elders, deacons, preachers and saints will describe the work and responsibilities for each of these roles in the Lord's body. Hopefully, this will help those already serving to become more fruitful in their service, and motivate others to strive to new levels of commitment and leadership in the church.

ROLES IN MINISTRY

¹⁰ He who descended is Himself also He who ascended far above all the heavens, so that He might fill all things.) ¹¹ And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, ¹² for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ;
- Ephesians 4:10-12

This passage mentions every specific role in the church except that of deacons.

Verse 10 – This refers to the divinity and therefore authority of Christ; He descends from heaven to earth (incarnation). He ascended to heaven after his death and resurrection. What He did to fulfill all is contained in the following verses.

Verse 11 – He gave, meaning Jesus set into place, referring to verse 8 (gave gifts); Jesus sets into place or gives to the churches certain gifts. The gifts are the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers that Jesus gives or sets into place in the church along with the grace to carry out their ministries. Note that not everyone in the church has these ministries, just some. Also, each has a different ministry according to the grace given by the Lord, but all serve one purpose.

Verse 12 – They all serve the purpose of equipping the saints with skills that will enable them to build up the body of Christ, the church.

Here are some roles mentioned and information about each:

- **Apostles** – Messengers, one who is sent, like an ambassador. These were the original witnesses of the baptism, ministry,

death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus (Acts 1:22). Their original ministry was to testify to the resurrection of Jesus and confirm their witness with signs and miracles (Acts 3:14-15).

- **Prophets** – They foretell future events, speak God’s word. Their original ministry was to serve as living Bibles in the early church (I Corinthians 14:3-5).

With the completion and distribution of the Apostles’ witness and teaching preserved in written form, these two ministries were replaced by the Bible itself. It is not that these two roles ceased to exist, they merely exist in a new form, the written word of God (Jude 3).

- **Preacher or Evangelist** – These words means “to proclaim.” The preacher’s role is to announce or make public (as the word suggests) God’s word. Another task of the preacher is to establish and organize the church (Titus 1:5). This is the natural outgrowth of what follows the proclamation of the word. The word produces the church, and by the word the church is sustained.

This ministry continues today, only the methods have changed. Modern communication systems and a change in social and cultural habits see the word proclaimed in new and different ways. However, even in the modern age, the church needs to be set according to the New Testament pattern and that is the work of the preacher.

- **Pastors and Teachers** – These are not two separate categories but only one. Pastor, elder and bishop are all terms describing the same person, and this person does his work by teaching (Acts 20:17; 28). Pastor and shepherd refer to a manner of work; bishop and overseer refer to responsibility; elder and older refer to maturity. You could say that pastors are elders who oversee the church, or that elders are overseers who pastor the church.

This ministry saw people providing wise and experienced leadership to the church through accurate teaching and holy

living. You can be a teacher without being an elder, but you cannot be an elder without being a teacher.

This role also exists today, and is exercised within the context of our modern age. However, no social or technological change nullifies the need for wise and holy leadership (Acts 20:28).

- **Deacons** – The role of deacon is not mentioned here but can be found in other places (I Timothy 3:8-13). The word deacon means servant or slave, and was used in connection with Jesus (Romans 15:8), the Apostles (I Corinthians 3:5), as well as certain people in the church who rendered special service to the body such as benevolence, maintenance, etc. This role also exists in today's church.

We will examine these various roles in more depth in the chapters to come.

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN AN ELDER, PREACHER, DEACON AND A REGULAR MEMBER?

This question always comes up when we discuss these matters. First of all, we need to note that the difference is not power.

⁴² Calling them to Himself, Jesus said to them, "You know that those who are recognized as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them; and their great men exercise authority over them. ⁴³ But it is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant; ⁴⁴ and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all. ⁴⁵ For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

- Mark 10:42-45

Many churches follow the organizational charts of human organizations, and assign power to various levels of church hierarchy. The New Testament church is a body and the hand is not more important than the foot. Each member has a place to serve, and all are directed by the head: Christ.

Ephesians 4:10-13 says that God gave certain people certain gifts and roles to fill in order to help the body serve itself and grow until it reaches a maturity level equal to the head, which is Christ.

There is a difference, however, because if it were not so, the Holy Spirit would not have specified a variety of roles within the church. All would be “saints” and no distinction would have been drawn. So there are differences that we can determine.

RESPONSIBILITY

One difference has to do with responsibility. The different roles do not represent power, they represent levels of responsibility.

All are called to serve but some have the task of mobilizing, organizing and directing that service as well as serving in a special capacity. In Acts 6:3 the Apostles had the church select certain qualified men who could be “put in charge” of the task of feeding the poor. These deacons were given special responsibility.

All are called to share their faith in the normal course of their lives, but some have the unique task of proclaiming the gospel as the central point of their lives. Some say that we are all evangelists. That is true in the sense that others must see Christ and hear Christ in all we say and do, but it is also true that some abandon their careers in medicine, business, factories, etc. and give themselves entirely to the work of proclaiming and spreading the gospel. All Christians must be evangelistic, but only some Christians become evangelists.

The same is true for pastors/teachers. We must all teach and encourage one another, and all are responsible to learn the word.

Therefore encourage one another and build up one another,
just as you also are doing.
- 1 Thessalonians 5:11

But to the older, more experienced, more enlightened Christian men goes the responsibility of leadership, and this is done not by power but by teaching and example.

And so, we see that the difference between the various roles in the church is the degree of responsibility attached to each. Deacons direct tasks, evangelists spread the gospel and organize, and elders direct and nurture the body.

APTITUDE

The second difference is one of aptitude. Different people have different gifts from God, or combination of gifts.

⁴ For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, ⁵ so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. ⁶ Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith; ⁷ if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching; ⁸ or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.

- Romans 12:4-8

This passage demonstrates that the different roles are marked by the different gifts given to each. One who has no ability to teach cannot lead because this is the task of leadership. One who is poor does not have the means to sustain the church financially (he can be generous in his own way, but not liberal). One who has no organizational or administrative ability will not be responsible for the bookkeeping, although he may be well suited for other ministry.

In Timothy and Titus there are passages that describe the qualities possessed by pastors, evangelists, and deacons. I think these are guides to help direct us into our roles, and help us discover our gifts. Timothy and Titus also provide much information concerning the evangelist and his role, and we will be studying these in the following chapters.

Everyone is a saint, everyone is a member, everyone is a servant, but certain ones have particular gifts that give them a particular responsibility within the body.

APPOINTMENT

The third difference is that elders, evangelists, and deacons are appointed to their tasks.

- Acts 6 – The special servants were chosen for their task based on their qualifications. It was not just volunteerism.
- Acts 13:3; I Timothy 4:14 – Evangelists were separated and commended to their tasks.
- Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5 – Elders were chosen (the method depended on the circumstances).

People are not elected to their positions based on popularity, they do not just volunteer to be elders. These people are chosen from among the brethren to be responsible for certain tasks of evangelism, service or leadership because of clearly demonstrated qualifications. If there is no appointing, there is no anointing.

SUMMARY

A church cannot grow unless it has good leadership, and you cannot have good leadership unless you have biblical leadership.

The next few chapters will see us explore biblical leadership as it is exercised in the roles of elders, deacons and preachers, outlining the work, the qualifications and how the three work together.

We will also discuss the special role of the wives of these men, and spend some time in describing the response of the church as well as our role as saints in the body of Christ.

In the end let us hope that leaders will be renewed, and have a clearer vision of their responsibility and also that these lessons will plant the desire to lead in the hearts of many who need to take on more responsibility, but have not yet stepped forward.

2. Church Leadership

In the first chapter in this series on elders, deacons, preachers, and saints we examined the differences between these roles in the church. These are the only specific roles that the New Testament mentions (Ephesians 4:10-12), and their purpose was to build up the church by training it to serve itself and the world.

Those that have been given these roles have a specific function in the church based on their:

- Responsibilities: each role has a specific task.
- Aptitudes: the persons who function in these roles do so because they are qualified in specific ways.
- Appointment: the Bible demonstrates that the men who serve as elders, preachers and deacons are always appointed to their task by the church.

In this chapter we will look at the role of elders.

Leadership in the world takes on many forms and exercises authority in many ways. Some leadership is cruel and cunning with leaders who will sacrifice their own people to retain personal power. Others are self-serving and proud. Still others are demonic (Manson) or benevolent (Gandhi). Regardless of the style, so long as there is some form of leadership there is a measure of order and growth.

The church, as an organization, is no different. It also has leadership, and without it the church cannot function and grow very well. The leadership structure and style for the church is found in the New Testament and basically is as follows:

The head or leader is Jesus Christ

He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything.

- Colossians 1:18

He is the only head of the church and shares leadership with no one else in heaven or on earth.

There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling;

- Ephesians 4:4

He has all authority.

And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.

- Matthew 28:18

HE EXERCISES LEADERSHIP IN TWO WAYS:

1. His word: it is final and the basis for judgment.

He who rejects Me and does not receive My sayings, has one who judges him; the word I spoke is what will judge him at the last day.

- John 12:48

It is effective to teach, correct and rebuke us.

¹⁵ and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶ All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness;
- II Timothy 3:15-16

His word is able to save and help us grow.

2. His spirit: it is when we receive the Holy Spirit at baptism that we become His disciples.

Peter said to them, “Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.
- Acts 2:38

Among other things, Christ’s Holy Spirit leads our ministries,

They passed through the Phrygian and Galatian region, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia;
- Acts 16:6

our prayers,

In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words;
- Romans 8:26

and our resurrection.

¹⁰ If Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness. ¹¹ But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.
- Romans 8:10-11

The Holy Spirit works all things in the world and in our personal lives for the good of the church of which Christ is the only head. Through the Word and the Spirit, Jesus exercises leadership in the church.

The responsibility to exercise the leadership of the Lord in the local assembly belongs to the elders.

On his first missionary journey Paul established churches in Lystra and Iconium. Upon his return to these places he appointed elders in each church. Luke writes that:

When they had appointed elders for them in every church, having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.
- Acts 14:23

The word “commended” means to “place alongside.” These men were placed along side of Jesus in order to exercise the leadership that He expresses in the New Testament.

This procedure is repeated in Titus 1:15 where Paul instructs the evangelist to appoint elders in the churches in Crete.

For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city as I directed you,

Even the words used to describe this role in the New Testament suggest the exercising of leadership:

- **Pastor/Shepherd** (Acts 20:25) – The shepherd leads and is responsible for the flock.
- **Bishop/Overseer** (Acts 20:28) – The word originally meant to overshadow in reference to the bright cloud at transfiguration.

- **Elder/Presbyter** (Acts 20:17) – Meant older, wise, and referred to the patriarchs in the Old Testament, leaders in the Sanhedrin (Matthew 16:21).

The Holy Spirit says that the church must appreciate and know them,

¹² But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction, ¹³ and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Live in peace with one another.

- I Thessalonians 5:12-13

and obey them.

Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.

- Hebrews 13:17

Suffice to say that the New Testament teaches us that Jesus is the leader and authority in the church, and His leadership is embodied in the word and the Holy Spirit, but it is expressed in human form through the eldership.

EMPHASIS ON LEADERSHIP

The Bible itself teaches that the responsibility of leadership in the church rests with the elders. All the scriptures that relate to them, whether it is describing their work qualifications or simply referring to them in a narrative, always puts them in the leadership role.

¹ Some men came down from Judea and began teaching the brethren, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.” ² And when Paul and Barnabas had great dissension and debate with them, the brethren determined that Paul and Barnabas and some others

of them should go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders concerning this issue. ³ Therefore, being sent on their way by the church, they were passing through both Phoenicia and Samaria, describing in detail the conversion of the Gentiles, and were bringing great joy to all the brethren. ⁴ When they arrived at Jerusalem, they were received by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they reported all that God had done with them. ⁵ But some of the sect of the Pharisees who had believed stood up, saying, "It is necessary to circumcise them and to direct them to observe the Law of Moses." ⁶ The apostles and the elders came together to look into this matter.
- Acts 15:1-6

The debate over circumcision saw the Apostles and the elders discussing what needed to be done. Note the conclusion in verse 22:

Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men from among them to send to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas—Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas, leading men among the brethren,

It is important to understand that God's word establishes the elders as the leaders in the local assembly (this is not tradition or self-service).

Another reason to emphasize the elders' leadership role is to guard against the errors of denominationalism. Paul warned the elders from Ephesus that there would be division and apostasy (Acts 20). The New Testament church has had to battle against man-made ideas concerning its doctrine and its organization from the beginning.

One such organizational change has been the shift from an elder-centered church to a preacher-centered church. Originally, the elders led through teaching, example, devotion and ministry to the unfaithful and the ill.

¹⁴ Is anyone among you sick? Then he must call for the elders of the church and they are to pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; ¹⁵ and the prayer offered in

faith will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him.

- James 5:14-15

In most denominations, and unfortunately even in some Churches of Christ, we have left this model for one that sees the preacher as the main teacher, leader, minister, and the elders as a governing board of decision makers. The most often used phrase is, "We'll have to run it by the elders."

The church can grow using man-made methods (instruments, gimmicks, charismatic preacher centered church) but our call is not to be a big church. Our mission is to be the church of the Bible. God is more pleased with purity than numbers.

The church of the Bible has elders as the focal point of leadership, ministry, teaching, nurturing and counseling, not the pulpit minister, not the youth minister, not the deacons or any committee.

More specifically the leadership aspect of the elders because it will challenge three groups:

- Elders themselves will recognize more emphatically the importance and scope of their role.
- Congregations will realize who God has put in place to lead, and when there is rebelling or murmuring against elders, it is done against God's will.
- Those who need to consider serving as elders. It is important to identify and cultivate men to serve as elders now and into the future. According to church studies there should be one elder for every forty adults. Elders do not last forever, churches need to be ready to replace the ones who will eventually retire.

Hopefully some will hear God's call to surrender their lives to Him in service through the eldership, knowing none are worthy but some may be willing to serve. You do not have to feel worthy, just be willing.

3. Elders: Character Profile

In our previous chapters on the subject of elders, deacons, preachers, and saints a few core ideas have been established:

1. These are specific roles that are based on responsibility, aptitude and appointment. Men serve as elders, preachers and deacons because they have certain abilities, they are appointed to their tasks by the church, and the main difference between them and the rest of the church is their responsibility.
2. Church leadership rests with Christ, is embodied by the word and the Holy Spirit, and is exercised by the elders. Our goal should be to move away from the denominational model of the preacher-centered church where the pulpit preacher is the main pastor, manager, minister and caregiver, to the more biblical model of the elder-centered church where the elders are the true leaders in teaching, ministering and shepherding the church.
3. This book is not simply an academic exercise. I am writing it with the hope that it will motivate existing elders, preachers, deacons and saints, and will also stimulate others who are not yet serving to step forward into these roles.

GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS

Before we look at and explain the very specific requirements for qualification as elders, let us examine some broader characteristics that are necessary when trying to recognize whom among us should serve in this capacity.

There are specific qualifications for elders found in the epistles to Timothy and Titus, but there are also some generic qualifications that help us identify what kind of man is truly eldership material:

This man accepts the Bible as God's word as the only standard within the church.

¹⁵ but in case I am delayed, I write so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth. ¹⁶ By common confession, great is the mystery of godliness: He who was revealed in the flesh, Was vindicated in the Spirit, Seen by angels, Proclaimed among the nations, Believed on in the world, Taken up in glory.
- I Timothy 3:15-16

A person who is not yet convinced of this or who cannot defend this idea lacks the fundamental component for successful leadership in Christ's church.

The major tool for the elder is the word. If he does not know it or does not believe that it is God's word, or if he does not go to it for direction and counsel, he will lead God's people into apostasy.

This man loves the church.

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her,
- Ephesians 5:25

Christ loved the church and died for it. Christ's elders should be mature enough to see the church with all of its faults and still love it. Like the parent who loves his rebellious child, the elder loves the church regardless of its failures because if he does not, no other human will.

This man knows how to worship God in every context of life.

¹ Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.² And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

- Romans 12:1-2

Paul equates service and purity as our everyday worship as opposed to our public corporate worship that consists of songs, prayers, communion, teaching and giving.

The leaders of the church are able to lead in both types of worship. They can pray, teach and sing during "corporate" worship, and they know how to worship God the rest of the week as well by leading lives that are pure and full of service.

Too many times we choose only the ones who are good at leading "long prayers" without examining what kind of "spiritual service of worship" they may be offering during the rest of the week.

This man works well with others.

⁵ What then is Apollos? And what is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, even as the Lord gave opportunity to each one. ⁶ I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth. ⁷ So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth. ⁸ Now he who plants and he who waters are one; but each will receive

his own reward according to his own labor. ⁹ For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building.
- I Corinthians 3:5-9

The work of the elder is a "people" job. Not only does the elder work with the congregation through teaching and counseling, but he must also work with other elders, preachers, and deacons.

In this passage Paul diffuses a potentially divisive situation by giving God the glory for the harvest and distributing credit for the work to everyone.

God's leader is recognized for his ability to foster unity and peace, not for his ability to get his own way. Elders do not confuse leadership with self-will.

This man knows how to make decisions.

⁴ When they arrived at Jerusalem, they were received by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they reported all that God had done with them. ⁵ But some of the sect of the Pharisees who had believed stood up, saying, "It is necessary to circumcise them and to direct them to observe the Law of Moses."

⁶ The apostles and the elders came together to look into this matter.
- Acts 15:4-6

²² Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men from among them to send to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas—Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas, leading men among the brethren, ²³ and they sent this letter by them,
"The apostles and the brethren who are elders, to the brethren in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia who are from the Gentiles, greetings.
- Acts 15:22-23

The thing that elders do the most is make decisions; that is what leadership is for. Elders do not make all the decisions, that would be “lording” over the church, but they do make important decisions. They make decisions as teachers and guardians of the faith. They decide what will be taught and if what is taught is biblical when there is a dispute (Acts 15).

Elders teach the church. By their choice of material and teachers they are, in effect, influencing the entire church in the work of different teachers.

They make decisions about discipline (I Corinthians 5:1-8); Paul tells the Corinthians to decide in the matter of disciplining sinful members.

They make decisions about who will serve where, and how they will serve. In Acts 6, the new deacons were commended by the Apostles and leaders. In I Timothy 4:14, preachers were appointed by elders.

Elders are men who understand that they must make decisions, they understand how to make decisions (prayer, fasting, study), and they are able to continue serving even when the final decision made by the elders as a group does not go their way.

Elders are men who understand indecision is worse than wrong decision, and consequently are not afraid of making the tough or unpopular decision when it comes.

So then we pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another.

- Romans 14:19

This man is dependable.

James tells us that those who are unstable will not have their prayers answered (James 1:8). It may not be flashy or controversial but stability, reliability and durability are comforting and necessary traits for one who leads God’s people.

There are so many fads and fashions in religion; so many wars and rumors of wars in the world; so many false Christs who try to influence the Lord's people. God's shepherds need to be men who are able to ride these waves and face the winds of change without overturning the boat by their own foolish fear.

Elders are men who can be depended upon to say the right thing, do the right thing, be where they need to be and do these things year in and year out. Someone said, "Even if we are only two left, I will be here..." Elders are like that, no matter what happens, they will be there.

This man can share his feelings.

³⁶ When he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all. ³⁷ And they began to weep aloud and embraced Paul, and repeatedly kissed him, ³⁸ grieving especially over the word which he had spoken, that they would not see his face again. And they were accompanying him to the ship.

- Acts 20:36-38

Elders are limited in being able to "fix" things. They are not usually trained to counsel those with psychological, family or abuse problems. They are not financially able to eliminate all debt problems, and most are not medically trained to heal diseases.

Their job is not to "fix" but rather to "feed" and "feel." Their task is to nourish the church with the word of God so that it will be spiritually strong, regardless of the physical, financial or emotional issues facing the members. Elders need to empathize with the church in times of joy, as well as those periods when it is mourning and in sadness.

Their ability to feel with members the happiness of a new baby or the pain of separation helps the church understand that God cares and God knows how we feel. Elders are God's instruments to reassure His children that He notices every sparrow's falling, He feels the sadness at the demise of each saint and He rejoices at the return of every sinner.

4. Elders: Specific Qualifications

We are reviewing the different roles in the church that carry specific responsibilities. We have begun by focusing on the role of the elders and said that they exercise the leadership of Christ in the local assembly. We have looked at some general characteristics concerning elders found throughout the New Testament:

- Elders accept only the Bible as God's word.
- They love the church.
- They know how to worship publicly as well as privately.
- Elders work well with others.
- They understand decision-making.
- They are dependable.
- Elders are able to share their feelings with the congregation.

These were some of the general things about the kind of men who should be encouraged to serve as elders.

In this chapter I want to look at some of the more specific qualifications required for this leadership role.

ETERNAL AND CULTURAL

When discussing the specifics of the eldership it is helpful to differentiate between what is cultural and what is eternal in the Bible. Some things that the Bible describes were done because of culture: the way they dressed and spoke, certain customs like the washing of a guest's feet and the wearing of veils.

The Bible comments on these, and we see people experiencing these things, but they were part of their cultural setting and not commandments that needed to be perpetuated beyond their cultural context.

For example, foot washing - hospitality: it was customary for a host to have a guest's feet washed upon arrival. This was necessary in that time since the roads were dusty and people wore sandals. So long as this custom was significant culturally it needed to be done as a sign of courtesy and mutual service. It is no longer relevant in our society; today we offer a beverage or take one's coat to hang as a welcome gesture. A sign of mutual service could be the offer to cook a meal for someone who is ill, etc.

Other things are eternal however, they may have been part of the Jewish culture or begun during that time but through teaching, command and example have become perpetual things in the Christian faith.

For example, baptism was something used by both Jews and pagans, but Jesus took it and made it a necessary part of the Christian faith (Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 2:38).

The different roles for men and women in the church are another example of things that have an eternal nature and are not subject to the changes in custom or culture. Many argue that male spiritual leadership in the church and in the home was a cultural thing unique to first century times. They say that in the modern era these biblical models of wives being submissive to their husbands and women not being allowed to serve in leadership roles in the church are outdated and culturally irrelevant. But the Bible teaches that this is an eternal model established

in Genesis and reinforced throughout the New Testament (I Corinthians 11:2-77; Ephesians 5:22).

Some things were cultural and the Bible mentions them, and other things the Bible takes and makes permanent through teaching and example.

The reason I am saying all of this is because the argument to have women as preachers or pastors today is based on the idea that having only men as the leaders in the church was a cultural thing in Jewish society and should be abolished.

The answer to this, of course, is that in the New Testament every command, every teaching, every example and every reference to the leadership of the church refers to men.

- The word elder means older man.
- The person needs to be a husband, a father.
- All references where elders are the subject in the New Testament describes men.

The point here is that if this was only a cultural thing, the Bible would have left the door open for change, but it does not!

For example, it was the Jewish custom that women did not have the freedom to choose whom they wished to marry, but the New Testament, by not commenting on this, allowed the custom to die on its own and permitted women this freedom without religious interference. Paul comments on this custom in I Corinthians 7 but he does not command that the custom be perpetuated. With elders, however, it is different.

There are clear and specific instructions for men to form the leadership in the church, not women. We conclude from the specific nature of this teaching that this was one area that was eternal and not cultural.

Remember, the basic rule for accurate Bible interpretation is that we speak, teach and insist where the Bible does, and are silent when it does

not. When it comes to elders it does speak and command and explain as follows.

SPECIFIC QUALIFICATIONS

There are two places in the New Testament where Paul specifically talks about elders and their qualifications.

I TIMOTHY 3:1-7

Paul is giving instructions to Timothy about the church in general and how people should conduct themselves as part of that church, and in chapter three he lists some specific qualifications of those who would be church leaders.

¹ It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do.

The desire to serve as an elder is a good thing, and not to be interpreted negatively by others. It is not a sign of pride.

He also states that this is a man's role and that it is a specific task or "office." The original Greek does not have a word for "office" here. Another way of saying this would be, "... if any man desire the overseership, eldership, pastorate..."

Paul says this is a good work and the key word is "work." This is not an honor bestowed on a person, it is a task, a job, a ministry. It is a good one but at its base it is work.

The man aspires (or reaches for it) because he desires (or wants) to do it. He is not drafted, sold or pushed, he reaches for this work because he has a desire to do it.

² An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, ³ not addicted to wine or pugnacious, but gentle, peaceable, free from the love of money. ⁴ He must be one who

manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity ⁵ (but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?), ⁶ and not a new convert, so that he will not become conceited and fall into the condemnation incurred by the devil. ⁷ And he must have a good reputation with those outside the church, so that he will not fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.

Paul lists a variety of qualifications.

- Above reproach. A blameless character, nothing that is charged against him openly.
- The husband of one wife or as it is put in the Greek, “one wife’s husband.” This is the only reference to the sexual conduct in these qualifications so Paul is saying two things about this man in this area:
 - He is saying that this person is a “one woman” man. He is not sexually promiscuous as were many of the Gentile converts from paganism. Many had sex with temple prostitutes and slaves but were married.
 - He is barring polygamists from the eldership. There was the practice of cultural polygamy in those days and some of it overlapped in the early church before it died away. Paul was holding the leaders to the ideal monogamous form of marriage.

My argument here is based on Paul’s previous statement that those who aspire to be elders should be above reproach. This is a reference to character, and so the following verses expand on what type of character traits this person should have. “Husband of one wife,” therefore, refers to a man’s character and not simply his legal status (i.e. married only once, divorced and remarried, widower, widowed and remarried).

- Temperate. Moderate, not an extremist.
- Prudent. Careful in words and actions.
- Respectable. Dignified and orderly.
- Hospitable. “Loves strangers,” not just people in his house.
- Not addicted to wine. Not someone who loves strong drink, a drinker.
- Pugnacious. Someone with a quick temper, a chip on their shoulder.
- Gentle and not contentious. Yielding, not argumentative but peace loving.
- Free from the love of money. Greedy and materialistic.
- Manages household well. Knows how to meet the needs of his family (emotionally, physically, spiritually), and lead it.
- Not a new convert. A man of experience in the church, in the struggle with sin.
- Good reputation. Well thought of by all and worthy to represent the church.

TITUS 1:5-9

Paul repeats some of the same ideas using different words and adds a few other qualifications in his letter to Titus:

⁵ For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city as I directed you,

Note that Titus appoints (raises up) the local elders, where there are no elders.

⁶ namely, if any man is above reproach, the husband of one wife, having children who believe, not accused of dissipation or rebellion. ⁷ For the overseer must be above reproach as

God's steward, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not addicted to wine, not pugnacious, not fond of sordid gain,⁸ but hospitable, loving what is good, sensible, just, devout, self-controlled,⁹ holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict.

Above reproach and husband of one wife, same as I Timothy. Children who believe and are not accused of dissipation or rebellion. This all refers to the man's children. Do not select a man whose children are non-believers or who are living pagan lives or rebelling against their fathers.

This explains further the passage about ruling well over one's own household. While the children are with you and you have responsibility, if they live like pagans and rebel against you in your home, you are not a good candidate for the eldership.

Above reproach as God's steward. Faithful in the things of the church. Not Self-willed, quick-tempered, addicted to wine, pugnacious, fond of sordid gain, hospitable; these are all the same as I Timothy.

- Loving what is good. Loves righteousness.
- Sensible. Temperate, prudent.
- Just. Fair.
- Devout. Devoted, pious, gives importance to spiritual things.
- Self-controlled. Self-governed, not swayed.
- Holding fast the word. Faithful in maintaining the Bible as God's word and able to use it to build and defend the church.

Many qualifications usually discourage present elders, and make others feels completely unworthy of even trying to lead God's people. Remember a few things about these qualifications.

1. They are eternal (meaning that in every generation God wants people like this) but they are not impossible. These are all human qualities that people possess to a greater or lesser

degree. The church needs men who see these in themselves and are willing to serve.

2. They are mostly subjective in nature. Except for being a man and being married with believing children, these qualifications are not absolutes. Just how hospitable, devout, sensible, temperate do you have to be to be an elder? Who measures?

God knows that we cannot be these things to a perfect degree, but should be qualified to a positive degree. In other words, these qualifications should be present to the degree that they can at least be recognized by others as positive things in us. We may not feel “good” enough or “just” enough, but if others in the church see these things in us it means they do exist to the degree that enables us to serve others as elders. That is why God has organized it in such a way that others select us and not we ourselves.

3. These qualifications provide a framework for growth. There are many adjectives that describe how the Christian needs to be that are not mentioned in this list: zealous, kind, hopeful. These specific things are mentioned because the nature of the specific task of the elders requires that they possess and cultivate specific qualities if they are to succeed in the work of the elder, and avoid certain accusations that are especially easy for them to be subject to.

Elders need a blueprint for their own personal growth and the Lord provides it here in I Timothy and Titus.

5.

The Work of the Elder

So far, we have said some very specific things about elders:

1. They exercise the leadership of Christ in human form in the local church.
2. They are men.
3. They have both general and specific qualities and qualifications found throughout the New Testament and concentrated especially in I Timothy and Titus.

When measuring themselves against these qualifications elders should remember:

1. They are eternal in nature (necessary for every generation) but not impossible. They are very human qualities attainable by normal people.
2. They are subjective in nature and we should determine if a man possesses these qualifications and qualities to a positive (or recognizable) degree and not a perfect degree.
3. They provide a blueprint for the kind of man we want, and the kind of Christian the elder wants to become as he grows in Christ.

Let us now examine the work of the elder in the local assembly.

We, in the churches of Christ, hold to the idea that the Bible teaches us through direct command, example and necessary inference. In other

words, when we want to find out what the Bible says about something we examine what it commands about that thing; what examples are there concerning this thing; are there any conclusions or suggestions that are implied by words, situations or actions that can guide us.

When determining the work of the elder this is a good system to use because all the information about this subject is not located in one place.

DIRECT COMMAND

There are two places in the New Testament where the Apostles are giving direct commands and instructions to elders about their role.

ACTS 20:28-35

Paul's charge to elders from Ephesus and Miletus.

²⁸ Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.
²⁹ I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; ³⁰ and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. ³¹ Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears.

Guard the flock and selves. The way to attack the flock is to attack the shepherd of the flock. This is why Paul says that no accusation should be received against an elder except in front of two to three witnesses (I Timothy 5:9).

Paul uses the imagery of a shepherd who fed, led and protected the flock. Elders are to guard against false teaching and teachers whose purpose is to gather disciples after themselves. Some people are happy if they can have influence over one or two people; they do not want to lead, they just enjoy exercising power. Being alert means to watch the teaching and the teachers ensuring that they both be pure, sound and sincere.

³² And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.

Stay close to (aligned with) the word. Personal study and teaching leads to growth.

³³ I have coveted no one's silver or gold or clothes.

³⁴ You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my own needs and to the men who were with me. ³⁵ In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"

Be an example of hard work, encouragement, generosity and leadership. Paul showed them how to lead by these methods, now they must teach others to lead by these methods. Paul says that the main work of the elders is threefold.

1. Protect against false teaching and teachers.
2. Promote sound teaching.
3. Provide an example of leadership.

I PETER 5:1-5

Peter's exhortation to the elders.

¹ Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, ² shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; ³ nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock.

Peter repeats Paul's charge of providing leadership but gives some insight as to what should motivate:

- Lead according to God's will (word).
- Lead voluntarily (eagerly), not "have to."
- Lead with eagerness but not eagerness to get personal gain, eagerness to serve.
- Lead through example, not through the exercise of power. "Let me show you the way."

⁴ And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.

This passage refers to the reward for elders, a crown of glory. The Old Testament refers to their crown as the Lord Himself (Isaiah 28:5).

- Incorruptible crowns (I Corinthians 9:25)
- Crown of rejoicing (I Thessalonians 2:19)
- Crown of righteousness (II Timothy 4:8)
- Crown of life (James 1:12)
- Crown of twelve stars (Revelation 12:1)
- Golden crown (Revelation 14:14)

I do not know if these refer to the same or different things, but I do know that the term crown of glory is only used in connection with elders. You know if the Lord gives it, it is going to be worth it.

⁵ You younger men, likewise, be subject to your elders; and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble.

A final admonition to the younger men to be humble and express that humility through obedience to the elders. Young men tend to be

headstrong in every generation so Peter teaches them how they should respond to the elders (if they want to please the Lord).

Peter repeats and expands on the idea that the work of the elders is to lead: lead by teaching and enthusiastic example.

EXAMPLE

Peter and Paul are the only two that speak directly with instructions to elders. The New Testament does have passages where elders are seen doing their work and so we can use these passages to define more clearly the New Testament pattern for the work of the elder.

- They oversaw the collection of funds for the poor in the church (Acts 11:29).
- They, in concert with the Apostles, decided how to resolve a dispute over the issue of circumcision of Gentiles (Acts 15:2). There was an argument over how the gospel was to be applied and they decided this with the Apostles.
- They advised Paul on how to resolve a dispute with Jewish Christians over his work with Gentiles (Acts 21:18).
- They appointed preachers to their ministry (I Timothy 4:14).
- They teach because Paul says that this is one of their qualifications and later says that they should be honored if they work hard at this task (I Timothy 3:2; 5:17).
- They comfort, pray for the sick and the weak (James 5:14).

The picture that emerges from the examples we have in the New Testament is that of a group that:

- Teaches.
- Encourages and oversees the good works of the church.
- Helps resolve issues that threaten the unity of the church, especially when related to the application and understanding of the word.

- They develop, appoint and guide the work of the preacher.
- Provide counseling, support for those who are weak physically, emotionally and spiritually.

Note that in the last chapter we looked at the requirements of the job, in this chapter we are seeing the job description itself.

NECESSARY INFERENCE

A necessary inference is a conclusion that is required by a set of facts or examples but may not be necessarily stated.

For example, the Apostles had received John's baptism. The Bible does not say that they did but all those who believed were commanded to do so at that time, even Jesus received it. All the disciples were baptized. The inference or unstated conclusion is that the Apostles had received it also.

When it comes to the elders there are other details about their work and relationship to the church that are discovered through this process of reasonable deduction:

They served congregations in groups of at least two men per church (Acts 14:23).

Every reference to the selection of the leaders sees them being chosen and serving as a group.

The practice of having one man as the pastor or minister with a different title (bishop, cardinal, etc.) in charge of several churches, and then a committee in charge of all the churches was a model based on the Roman Empire and begun in the third to fourth century.

The New Testament church described in the Bible had two or more elders leading an individual congregation with no further responsibility or authority for other congregations. We infer or conclude from the information provided that the New Testament church had a plurality of elders and no authority beyond their own local congregation.

They were appointed by the Apostles and in some cases by the preachers (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5).

We do not see them doing this here but we do see Paul telling Titus to do it and talking about having done it. There are no examples of self-appointed elders or elders elected by voting in the New Testament.

In the next chapter we will look at how elders are chosen and established today, and will end this section on elders with a profile of an elder's wife.

SUMMARY

Elders are older men who are chosen to serve as leaders of individual congregations based on their mature spiritual character, their ability to teach, and their successful marriages and family life.

It is a humbling and demanding task and not all men are able to aspire to the eldership, but thankfully some are!

6.

Appointing Elders

Let's review the material we have covered so far:

1. Different people have specific roles to which they are appointed based on ability and character. In the post apostolic period these roles are elders, deacons and preachers.
2. In the discussion about elders we have said the following:
 - a. Jesus is the only head of the church but His leadership is exercised in the local congregation through the eldership.
 - b. Elders are men who possess general and specific qualifications, described in the Bible, to a degree where these are recognizable by others.
 - c. The Bible says that the main work of elders is threefold:
 - i. Protect against false teachings and teachers.
 - ii. Promote and direct sound teaching, good works, unity and peace.
 - iii. Provide an example of leadership as mature Christians.

In this chapter I would like to finish the section on elders by looking at the different ways elders are selected, and review some ideas about the wives of elders.

Most of the Scripture references in the New Testament referring to elders describe their character, their work or a situation where they are already serving in this capacity. There are only two passages that deal with how a man becomes an elder: one passage is an example, the other is a command.

The first is when Paul and Barnabas were on their first missionary journey through Lystra, Iconium and Antioch. The Bible says that they appointed elders in every church.

When they had appointed elders for them in every church, having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.
- Acts 14:23

The second passage is in Titus 1:5 where Paul instructs Titus to appoint (raise up) elders in each city according to Paul's teachings (probably the information contained in I Timothy).

For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city as I directed you,

No other passage gives us any information about this matter, and so based on what we have, here are some conclusions and directions regarding our own selection of elders:

1. Elders are not voted on or volunteered by the congregation. It is not a democratic exercise of the church selecting a man by majority vote.
2. Elders are chosen, appointed (raised up), or ordained (means to set alongside) by the existing leadership that has itself been appointed.

In a church where there are no elders, the preachers raise up elders (Titus 1:5). In a church where there are elders, the elders who appoint preachers (I Timothy 4:14) can also seek out and appoint other elders. (Note the cycle: elders raise up and appoint preachers who in turn appoint and raise up elders.)

Of course, the new elders are established according to the qualifications and guidelines already set forth in the New Testament.

- a. Leaders are responsible to seek out, train and appoint other leaders.
- b. Those who aspire to be elders, even though they may have refused in the past or feel they are too young or doubt their qualifications, need to express this desire to the elders nevertheless.

When qualified men seek the eldership and express their desire to the preacher or the eldership, it is the first step in the process of adding elders to God's church.

THE WIFE OF THE ELDER

I think that many elders will tell you that a good part of the success in the work of eldering belongs to the wife of that elder. Many men do not aspire to this great task because their wives are either not suited to the demands of this ministry or are not spiritually mature enough to work with a husband who is an elder.

The Bible does not deal specifically with elders' wives at any great length. There are the general ideas that if the elder is sober-minded and a good husband, etc. his wife should be of like character.

There is also a specific reference in I Timothy 3:11 about women:

Women must likewise be dignified, not malicious gossips, but temperate, faithful in all things.

This passage is sandwiched between instructions regarding elders and deacons, so the conclusion is that the wives (in the Greek the word is wives) refers to elders' and deacons' wives. This passage is repeated and amplified in the book of Titus where Paul gives greater detail about the necessary character of older women in the church, characteristics and responsibilities that should be part of the elder's wife.

Older women likewise are to be reverent in their behavior, not malicious gossips nor enslaved to much wine, teaching what is good, so that they may encourage the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be sensible, pure, workers at home, kind, being subject to their own husbands,
- Titus 2:3-5a

Paul says three major things about the "elder women."

Their conduct is reverent

Their behavior should be such as befits those who lead holy (reverent) lives.

This passage makes us think of the Old Testament priests. The priest offered sacrifices before God in the temple, the Holy Place. Since he came before God, his conduct among the people reflected his duties before the Lord. The idea was that the conduct should not contradict office.

All Christians are priests before God offering their praise and service each day in Christ (Romans 12:1-2; Revelation 1:6).

A mature woman's conduct should have the same spirit as this. Her conduct should reflect her responsibilities as an elder's wife, a priest of God.

He then mentions two things you will not see in her behavior:

Not malicious gossips

Gossip is usually the revelation of others' faults with the intention to ridicule, cause problems or frustrate. The Greek word used is "diabolos"

meaning devil. Gossip is the devil's work for he accuses us before God night and day. Christ is our defender with his blood.

Gossip divides, destroys and displeases God. We should realize that the faults of others are covered by the blood of Christ, as are our own. When we gossip, we refuse the blood of Christ for another, we become the devil's workers and we are uncovering what Christ has covered.

Not addicted to much wine

Wine was a common drink of the people at that time. A godly woman is neither addicted to wine nor any other thing. Godly women are in control of themselves, and nothing controls them except Christ.

TEACH WHAT IS GOOD (EXCELLENT)

Paul now mentions what you do see in their lives.

When she speaks it is not to gossip or complain but to teach what is good and noble. A godly woman is able and busy teaching the younger women, not the men.

Paul also describes the things that these women know, practice and now teach the younger women. Older women are teaching how to:

1. Love husbands and children.

Not just the fact that they should, but how. Teaching those things that will help a younger woman to more love her husband and children.

The older woman who has succeeded in maintaining a happy marriage, satisfied husband, well brought up children should be preparing younger women to do the same (even those who fail have something valuable to share through experience).

2. Sensible and pure.

Balanced thinking, not frivolous, or foolish, but sober minded (II Timothy 3:16). Not carried away by false teaching, temptation to impurity, infidelity.

3. Workers at home.

The Bible is not against women working outside the home. The point here is that women are not sluggish about the work that has to be done at home. The responsibility for the home (not the housework) is the woman's. Older women are to encourage the younger women to this task, teach the things necessary to fulfill this ministry properly.

Women who love their children and husbands will maintain a proper home whether it is a one or twenty room house. This is a first priority, everything else is extra. Do not do the extra if this part is not done.

4. Good and kind.

First to husband and children (it is easy to do good to everyone else and leave these for last). People remember a woman's goodness and kindness long after they have forgotten her success or failure in the world. Eleanor Roosevelt was the president's wife, but she is remembered for her kindness. Older women teach by example here.

5. Submitted to husbands.

A woman submitted to Christ is submitted to her husband first, before her parents, job, friends, etc. Of course, this is easier when her husband is a faithful Christian.

In the final verse Paul says that this kind of behavior and teaching will honor God

^{5b} so that the word of God will not be dishonored.

The world judges the church by the character that the gospel produces in its people. Paul reveals the character of a godly, reverent, older woman and how she has become this way as well as what she is doing with her life. There should be no confusion about what older women ought to be doing with their time.

God has given the leadership role in the church to the men who lead as elders. He has described the kind of woman who can complement that leader in doing a good job in serving the church and honoring Him.

- A woman who respects God and lives honorably, discretely and soberly.
- A woman who is not afraid to go against the grain of the world to retain her central position in the home and her special position next to her husband and children.
- A woman who can teach other women how to serve God, family and community.

I pray for all elder's wives that they might continue in their good work and example, and I pray that God will move other women to grow and follow their husbands into a greater life of service for the Lord. The elder's wife can be the greatest single encouragement or obstacle in her husband's ministry.

7.

The Role and Work of Deacons – Part 1

So far we have talked about elders and their wives, and the great responsibility they have in their respective roles:

- The elders protect against false teaching, promote good teaching and good works, and provide an example of faithfulness as mature Christian leaders to the congregation.
- The elder's wife supports her husband with servant-heart behavior, and instruction to younger women concerning good conduct, good home management and service to the church and community.

Blessed is the church that has such elders. Hopefully those that do will not make the job unpleasant for them but support and encourage them with their obedience and prayers.

DEACONS: WORD AND MEANING

Twenty-five percent of the English language is from the Greek language in which the New Testament was originally written. When translated into English, some Greek words were not translated but merely anglicized or transliterated. The word deacon was such a word. The original Greek word was *diakonos* and was transliterated into the English as the word "deacon." The word meant servant.

In the Greek world there were many slaves, and so there were many words used to describe this class of people. For example:

Bondslaves were slaves considered as property. They were the lowest class of slaves.

For He has had regard for the humble state of His bondslave;
For behold, from this time on all generations will count me
blessed.

- Luke 1:48

Boyslaves were like family. The centurion whose slave was sick, and sent for Jesus to heal him used this term for slave (Luke 7:2-10). They served as domestics.

No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the
one and love the other, or else he will be devoted to one and
despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.”

- Luke 16:13

Subordinate officials served kings and high officials.

Some began to spit at Him, and to blindfold Him, and to beat
Him with their fists, and to say to Him, “Prophecy!” And the
officers received Him with slaps in the face.

- Mark 14:65

The word deacon, however, did not refer to a bondslave, boyslave or official. The word described a servant who was a waiter, an attendant or courier. For example, in Luke 10:40 Martha complained that she had to “serve” the guests alone. In other words she had to “waiter” alone. This passage uses the word *diakonos*.

In Acts 6, when they chose men to serve the food to the widows, the word for the work of serving food was *diakonos*, to waiter the food.

In Romans 13:4 the word is used in its courier sense: the authority of government is the messenger or courier of God (*diakonos* of God).

for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil.

- Romans 13:4

In Romans 16:1 Phoebe is referred to as a *diakonos* because she brings a message. The word is used in its courier sense here as well.

I commend to you our sister Phoebe, who is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea;

- Romans 16:1

The Holy Spirit selects this particular word that describes a servant who serves as a personal attendant or messenger and uses it in a Christian context of ministry within the church.

The point is that before Christianity, the word simply referred to a particular type of servant who had particular duties that involved serving food and running errands.

The New Testament writers, however, began using this word to refer to a particular person in the church who did a particular work. Since the word referred to a servant and his relationship to a task, it was well suited to describe the role we now refer to as “deacon.”

THE FIRST DEACONS

There are only three places in the New Testament where deacons are referred to and what we know about their qualifications and work are drawn from these.

¹ Now at this time while the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic Jews against the native Hebrews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving of food. ² So the twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples and said, “It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve

tables. ³ Therefore, brethren, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task. ⁴ But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.” ⁵ The statement found approval with the whole congregation; and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch. ⁶ And these they brought before the apostles; and after praying, they laid their hands on them.

- Acts 6:1-6

Here the term deacon is not used, but the verb describing their work and where this name would come from is used.

At that time the church was growing quickly and along with it the responsibility for benevolence. Some felt neglected in the distribution of food for widows, and thus a complaint that threatened the unity of the church arose. The Apostles settled the matter by calling for “diakonos,” serving or waiting, a task that was not part of their calling. Their job was to teach and pray, not distribute food. In order to meet this need the Apostles established a role and qualifications for those who would serve in this way:

They establish a limited number.

I do not know why this particular number was needed, other than seven was a significant number in Jewish numerology. It could also be that this many men were required for the task at hand.

They were selected by the congregation from the congregation.

Unlike elders who are selected by an evangelist or other leaders.

They were to be men, not women.

Peter specifies males, yet there were women who qualified as far as being full of the Spirit and wisdom.

They were to have charge or be appointed over the task.

Before, the Apostles carried out this task but could no longer do so. After the deacons were selected, they gave charge for this work to them.

The mistake we make in the church today is that we give the work to the deacons but not the charge over the work. Once the guidelines were established, the work was in the hands of the deacons, not the Apostles.

The task was singular.

These men were chosen for this task, and not to be the Apostles' assistants at large (if this would have been the case they would have had twelve deacons not seven). Deacons were the servants of the church and assisted the church, not the Apostles. This is why they were chosen by the brethren from among the brethren.

They had specific qualifications.

- **Good reputation.** Speaks for itself.
- **Full of spirit.** All Christians have the Holy Spirit but some demonstrate more "fruit" of the Spirit as they are growing in Christ.
- **Full of wisdom.** As deacons they also needed particular wisdom or understanding in practical ways. In the Old Testament God filled men with wisdom as artisans, painters or builders etc. to build the temple. In the New Testament He still gives men gifts and wisdom to carry out the work of the church in various areas (building, administration, service, giving, etc.).
- **People who can take charge.** If you are given charge you have to be one who can take charge and get things done. There were no further complaints about food, meaning that these seven were able to take care of this problem.

They can be different kinds of men.

The list of deacons includes Stephen, a Jew; and Nicolas, a Gentile convert to Judaism who became a Jew.

They were ordained or commended.

People say that everybody is a deacon, or what makes it a special service or role? The fact that one is chosen by one's peers based on specific qualifications, and then approved by a leadership is what makes a role or service separate and apart. Deacons are a special and separate role from elders, preachers, and saints by virtue of their qualifications, selection and commendation.

The second passage that mentions deacons and the first that actually refers to them as such is in Philippians 1:1:

Paul and Timothy, bond-servants of Christ Jesus,
To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including
the overseers and deacons:

Here Paul greets the entire church as a whole (saints) and then a special word to those who have a special role of responsibility and service within that body (elders and deacons).

SUMMARY

There are not many references to deacons in the New Testament, but in the first two that we have looked at we can conclude several things about them:

1. They are men who are spiritually mature and use their particular talents in special service to the church. The ministry or service of the word is that of elders and preachers, however the work of deacons permits elders and preachers to concentrate on their ministry. This does not mean deacons cannot teach or preach (Stephen, a deacon, was very eloquent), but they are chosen as deacons for the other services they render.

2. They are selected by the congregation from the congregation for service to the congregation, and commended or ordained by the leaders (elders).
3. Their leadership or authority is connected to the accomplishing of their task. They have charge over their ministry once it is defined by the elders.
4. There are no deacons without specific tasks. Since the word and context describing their role refer to the one who does a specific job, when there is no job, there is no deacon. However, a deacon can be given charge over a small task and still be a deacon (i.e. counting the collection or cleaning a specific area). What determines if a man can serve in this office are his qualifications and the fact that he has a job to do. It is acceptable to have many deacons so long as they qualify and are assigned various tasks.
5. They have no authority as individuals or as a group within the church. They are not a committee or a lobby; they are servants with specific tasks. We do not hear them speak in the New Testament when matters are discussed (Acts 15:1-77).

8.

The Role and Work of Deacons – Part 2

In the previous chapter I said that in New Testament society deacons were table attendants and messengers. They were “willing” servants as opposed to bondslaves or forced labor.

The writers of the New Testament chose this word to describe the role of a particular servant of the church. The description and qualifications for this role is limited to three places in the Bible, and from two of these we have been able to put together a profile of these people and their work:

1. They were men who were selected by the congregation from among themselves.
2. They were chosen primarily for their spiritual maturity and skill in various areas of service.
3. They were approved by the leaders and given charge over their work. Once confirmed by the Apostles, they were responsible for their own particular work. They were in charge of the task and making sure that it was carried out well.
4. As deacons they held no authority as a group. They were chosen from the church, by the church in order to serve the church in some way, but were not responsible for its direction.
5. You could have many deacons doing small tasks so long as they were qualified and appointed.

In this chapter I will examine the final passage of Scripture regarding deacons.

I TIMOTHY 3:8-13

Acts 6:1-6 reveals the work and spiritual maturity of the servants of the church and how they were selected. Philippians 1:1 confirms the fact that they were recognized as having a specific role within the church, apart from elders and preachers. I Timothy 3:8-13 gives us some insight as to the basic qualifications necessary to be considered for this role, as well as their standing in the body, and how they were chosen.

¹ It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do. ² An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, ³ not addicted to wine or pugnacious, but gentle, peaceable, free from the love of money. ⁴ He must be one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity ⁵ (but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?), ⁶ and not a new convert, so that he will not become conceited and fall into the condemnation incurred by the devil. ⁷ And he must have a good reputation with those outside the church, so that he will not fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.

Paul outlined the basic qualifications for elders in the Lord's church. He immediately follows this with qualifications for deacons.

⁸ Deacons likewise must be men of dignity, not double-tongued, or addicted to much wine or fond of sordid gain.

Insofar as character, deacons are to resemble the elders: "likewise." The term "must" means that there is no question about the need to be strict in requiring these qualifications for this role.

- **Men of dignity or “grave.”** Signifies a man who is respected, not flippant or coarse.
- **Double-tongued.** Refers to one who is a hypocrite, insincere, talking behind other people’s back.
- **Not given to much wine.** Sober, not a drunkard. Moderation in the use of wine as it was consumed in that time:
 - Mixed water with wine.
 - Drank low alcohol content.
 - Moderate drinking would not produce drunkenness.
 - These were not moderate “social drinkers:” they drank wine as their primary drink and had to be careful not to let it lead to drunkenness.
- **Fond of sordid gain.** In the original context this expression meant a person who earned a living in a sordid or unclean way:
 - Questionable business practices.
 - Gambling.
 - Prostitution.
 - Stealing or cheating.
 - Any way which is shameful as a Christian.
 - Also people who liked this type of living.

⁹ but holding to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience.

The mystery of the faith is the gospel. The way people were to be saved was a mystery that no one knew until Christ came and revealed it (Romans 16:25-26). Deacons were to be men who were able to believe and practice their faith with a clear conscience (not undignified, hypocritical, drunken, impure, or greedy) not simply pretending to be faithful.

Some believe the mystery but do not act like they do. Deacons believe and their actions demonstrate this.

¹⁰ These men must also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons if they are beyond reproach.

Deacons are to have proven that they are qualified before they are appointed. The church will choose a man they see doing the work, living a good Christian life, etc. long before he is appointed as deacon.

I Timothy 5:22 warns against being too quick in appointing elders or deacons lest in their failure the evangelist/elders bear the burden of blame.

In saying “also,” Paul is saying that this period of testing is required for elders as well.

Men who are not already providing leadership, service, and holy lives should not be appointed as elders or deacons. A common error to avoid is to offer the role to encourage someone to “start” serving.

¹¹ Women must likewise be dignified, not malicious gossips, but temperate, faithful in all things.

This verse has been used to suggest that women should also be appointed to be deacons (deaconesses) in the church. The arguments for this are as follows:

1. The term women can mean “wives” as in wives of deacons or “women” as in deaconesses or servants of the church.
2. In Romans 16:1 Paul commands Phoebe, a servant or *diakonos* of the church.
3. There are some early writings that suggest that women served in this capacity, but these were non-inspired writers long after the apostolic age.

The arguments against are as follows:

1. Paul does not use the term deaconess here but just a word that means wives or can be interpreted as women.
2. The context of this passage is a list of qualifications for men as deacons, and this reference to wives would seem natural as instructions to the wives of not only deacons but the elders as well. The wives would be involved in this work with their husbands so their character and conduct had to be above reproach as well. Paul lists elders and deacons, and then the women/wives of these men.
3. The only biblical examples that we have of deacons doing the work shows that men are the ones doing it. Acts 1:1-6 sees the Apostles specifying that men are to be selected. Here we have two opportunities by two different Apostles to establish women in this role, but in each case Peter and Paul specify men for this position.

What we do see, however, in the New Testament are women serving, “dialeonosing” (waitering) in a variety of ways:

- Women supporting Jesus’ ministry (Luke 8:3).
- Women praying in the upper room (Acts 1).
- Dorcas making clothing for the poor (Acts 9).
- Mary, the mother of Mark, offering her home as a meeting place for the Apostles (Acts 12).
- Lydia offering her house to Paul (Acts 16).
- Pricilla offering her house to Paul, and along with her husband, having a Bible study with the Apostles (Acts 18).
- Phoebe delivering a letter (Romans) to Paul. Here the Greek word diakonos used in its “messenger” sense (Romans 16).

However, they are not among those chosen by the church and set before the leadership in order to be appointed as deacons. On the other hand, there are many men who serve in a variety of ways at different times also, but not all of them are set forth as deacons either.

The point is this: all Christians, men and women, serve. They all waiter, take messages, work on behalf of the body. However, only some of the men who are qualified are chosen by the church and appointed by the elders to be responsible for certain tasks.

In the verse we are considering (verse 11), I believe Paul refers to the wives of deacons and he says that as wives of deacons they also must:

- Be dignified (same as deacons).
- Not malicious gossips. It is never ok to be a gossip, but a deacon's wife must especially have a handle on this problem since she, through her husband, is involved with many areas of the work and people in the church.
- Temperate, sober, sober minded, not easily carried away by emotions, arguments and strife.
- Faithful as a general rule in the faith, in service, in marriage, friendship, etc.

¹² Deacons must be husbands of only one wife, and good managers of their children and their own households.

¹³ For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a high standing and great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.

We return to the issue of the married state of this person. Notice he specifies men here, not women.

There have been a variety of ways to interpret this passage:

1. It may mean that the man has only ever had one wife in his life.

2. It may mean a man who may have had more than one wife (widowed, divorced, practiced polygamy) but he now has only one wife, the one he is currently married to, and he is faithful to her (not a runaround).

There are all kinds of arguments to support positions in between these two:

- Widowers are ok, divorcees are not.
- Widowers and divorcees ok, polygamists not, etc.

The one position that is absolutely sure and biblical that no one will dispute is the man who has been married to the same woman all his life. He definitely does qualify. In choosing this man the elders are sure of the biblical soundness of their choice.

Paul finishes the qualifications of the deacons by stating that part of the testing they must pass is the fact that they manage their homes and families well. If a man cannot take proper care of his house and personal affairs, can he better care for the meeting place and the affairs of the family of God?

In the final verse he talks about the deacons' reward and standing. I will discuss this as well as the idea of "the laying on of hands" in the next chapter.

SUMMARY

For now, let us summarize several key ideas as far as deacons are concerned:

1. Deacons are servants chosen by their congregation according to specific qualifications that they have, and appointed by the elders to carry out specific tasks.
2. Although women served in specific ways and still do, there is no teaching or clear example in the New Testament to suggest that they were appointed by elders to serve in the role of deacons as men do.

3. The New Testament does not prohibit men (or women) who have been married before from being members of the church, participating in worship and serving the body, but in order to be selected as an elder or deacon the man must be the husband of only one wife. That is not condemning to others; it merely creates a standard that will protect elders and deacons from criticism and division (should there be a question over a person's previous marriage).

We should not impose this view on other congregations, but accept the decision on this matter for our own congregations by our elders.

INVITATION

Thanks be to God, however, that the requirements for membership in the Lord's church are a sincere repentant heart, a belief that Jesus is the Son of God and a willingness to obey Him in baptism. These are requirements that rule no one out from salvation.

9.

The Laying on of Hands

In the first eight chapters of this book, we have dealt with the qualifications and responsibilities of elders and deacons. Elders were mature Christian men chosen by preachers or other elders according to specific qualifications. Their task was to provide leadership through teaching, prayer, example and shepherding. Deacons were Christian men, mature in the faith, chosen by the congregation according to certain qualifications and confirmed by the elders to carry out certain tasks.

We dealt with the two main controversial issues concerning elders and deacons:

1. That the passage “husband of one wife” has been interpreted to mean many things, but the interpretation that teaches that this expression refers to a man who has only been married once in his life is certainly correct, and to choose these types of men would guarantee that this person is biblically qualified.
2. That there is some evidence in non-biblical literature to suggest that there may have been women serving as deacons in ancient times. However, the passages that describe the qualifications required to be a deacon overwhelmingly support the teaching that only men were appointed as deacons, and we are biblically correct to select only men for this role in the church. (If the only source we look at is the Bible.)

I do not suggest that those who see these two issues in other ways are heretics and going to hell but rather, after verifying the evidence and carefully considering the teachings, I feel that the prudent, biblical and most edifying interpretation is the one that supports male spiritual leadership in the church.

Hands, especially the right hand, in Hebrew thought had great meaning: the right hand symbolized power and authority. (One carried the sword in the right hand.) The image of hands was often used to signify various ideas. For example:

Dropping the hands was used as a sign of weakness or lack of resolution, and to hold them up was the remedy.

¹⁰ Joshua did as Moses told him, and fought against Amalek; and Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill.

¹¹ So it came about when Moses held his hand up, that Israel prevailed, and when he let his hand down, Amalek prevailed.

¹² But Moses' hands were heavy. Then they took a stone and put it under him, and he sat on it; and Aaron and Hur supported his hands, one on one side and one on the other. Thus his hands were steady until the sun set. ¹³ So Joshua overwhelmed Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword.

- Exodus 17:10-13

Lifting the hands signified violence or, in other contexts, supplication in prayer.

Placing the hand under the thigh was a way to ratify an agreement. Abraham's servant did this as a promise to find Isaac a wife from Abraham's own people (Genesis 24:9). This gesture was like raising your hand when you give an oath in court today.

Washing the hands often signified innocence (Deuteronomy 21:6).

The hands were used to execute a transfer from one state to another. Sometimes both hands were used or laid upon something or someone

else to signify a transfer from one person to the other as Jacob did in transferring a blessing to his sons (Genesis 48).

Levites were ordained as representatives of the people before God by the placing of the hands of the people upon them. The people transferred themselves to the Levites by the laying on of hands (Numbers 8:10).

The worshipers would place hands on an animal to be offered as a guilt sacrifice signifying that they were transferring their guilt to the animal, and the animal's death would carry their guilt away (Leviticus 1:4).

By the time of the New Testament the symbolism of the hand, and especially the laying on of hands, was a well-established idea. Jesus used this gesture, and so did the Apostles in special situations and with various meanings:

1. **Healing.** Jesus laid hands on people to heal them (Mark 6:5) and so did His Apostles and early disciples (Acts 9:12- Ananias; Acts 28:8- Paul).
2. **Blessing.** Jesus blessed the children by laying His hands upon them (Matthew 19:13), but we do not see this practice carried on by the Apostles or disciples.
3. **Praying.** The Jewish custom was to raise one's hands in prayer, and it seemed that this gesture was still being practiced by Christians because Paul refers to it in I Timothy 2:8.
4. **Miracles.** In the book of Acts we see the Apostles laying their hands on different disciples in order to give them the ability to do various miracles (tongues, healings, etc.). Sometimes this ability was conferred without the laying on of hands by anyone (i.e. the Apostles themselves, Cornelius) but when it was given by the laying on of hands, it was always the Apostles' hands.

In other words, you could receive the ability to do miracles directly from God or through the laying on of hands of the Apostles, but if you were not an Apostle, you could not transfer this to someone else.

¹⁴ Now when the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent them Peter and John, ¹⁵ who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. ¹⁶ For He had not yet fallen upon any of them; they had simply been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. ¹⁷ Then they began laying their hands on them, and they were receiving the Holy Spirit.
- Acts 8:14-17

After the Apostles, Cornelius and Paul, there were no other examples of people receiving the power to do miracles directly from God, only through the Apostles. After the Apostles died you see less people able to do miracles since they were the only ones God used to transfer this power.

5. **Ordination.** This word means to appoint or to make stand, and is used in the New Testament to describe a situation where one person is appointed to a role or task. The laying on of hands symbolizes the transfer of authority and agreement to another's new role or task by one in authority (Acts 6 - deacons; Acts 13 - missionaries; II Timothy 1:6 - preachers).

The question is, "Do we lay hands today?" I believe that we should when the situation calls for it. If the Apostles did it, then we can and should when it is scriptural:

1. **Healing.** We no longer have the miraculous power to heal and so we do not lay hands symbolically for this. We touch in order to encourage and show affection, but not to heal.
2. **Blessing.** We are all brothers without authority over each other so we can pray for each other, but I cannot give you a blessing like Jesus could. Note that there is no further mention of this after Jesus is gone.
3. **Praying.** There are all kinds of positions used to pray, and if one wants to lift hands, he or she is free to do so. The New Testament says that at that time people were still doing this so

there is no reason why we cannot if we really want to. This is a personal choice to express and be perceived as reverent.

4. **Miracles.** Again, we no longer can do miracles, and so we can no longer transfer this power as well.
5. **Ordination.** We still commend and appoint men to preach, to serve as deacons, to go on missions, and so I think we can and should use this symbol to signify our approval and appointment of people into ministry.

SUMMARY

Each congregation needs to make an effort to progress, an effort to create the environment for growth. God causes the growth but we are responsible for creating the environment for growth by developing each area of ministry. We plant and water but God causes growth. There is no growth without planting and watering. The laying on of hands is usually a sign that a church is growing because different people are stepping into greater roles of ministry, and the laying on of hands marks the transfer point from step to step in that development.

10.

The Selection Process

In this chapter we will discuss the selection process for elders and deacons. I mentioned before that these lessons were not solely academic exercises, but rather a preparation for churches to actually choose and put forth those who could possibly serve in these roles.

So let us review some of the qualifications required, and various ways to select elders and deacons.

DEACONS

I want to start with deacons because we have a clearer picture in the New Testament concerning their tasks, selection and qualifications.

QUALIFICATIONS

As far as qualifications we said that:

- They were to be men.
- They were to have “charge” or responsibility over certain tasks (once defined by elders, deacons were to take over).
- They were to be men who:
 - Had a good reputation.
 - Were spiritual in nature.
 - Were talented in various areas.

- Were respectable, honest, sober, not greedy, faithful to the word.
- They also were to be men who had experience in church work, not novices.
- Married only once, and managing their own homes well.

I also said that we looked for these qualifications in these people to be present to a positive degree, not a perfect degree. In other words, we realize that no one is perfectly honest, faithful, etc. but we want someone who exhibits these qualities to a positive degree, where we can see that they are actually there.

SELECTION

The New Testament provides us with a clear example of how to deacons were chosen in Acts 6.

- The congregation looked among themselves for men who were qualified and put these names forward.
- These people were then approved by the Apostles (leadership).
- They were commended/ordained into service by praying and the laying on of hands by the Apostles.

We know that this system was perpetuated because Paul gives further qualifications for deacons to Timothy in I Timothy.

This means that today, in our time, we can follow this pattern for selecting deacons. Let us imagine that we are doing this now in our own congregation:

1. Look among the congregation for men who are qualified to serve in this role. Provide worksheets so members can review the qualifications and keep track of names.
 - a. Explanation of worksheet: A check mark means that you know this about them, and, in your opinion, they

qualify. A question mark means that you are not sure or have no knowledge in this area. X means that you know that they do not qualify.

b. *Worksheet samples are available at the end of this chapter or download at:*
bibletalk.tv/selection-sheets

2. A list of those put forward by the congregation is then made and presented to the elders for their approval.
3. Those approved would be given their charge and commended to service by prayer and the laying on of hands by our elders once the process is complete.

So, to review, you would use the sheets on the deacon side to make your selection and return them to the elders for their consideration and approval. Remember that an X in one area or so does not automatically disqualify a person. Let the elders decide this when they interview the candidate. Also, make sure to fill in all the boxes with either a check mark, a question mark or an X.

ELDERS

The selection process of elders is not as straightforward as that of deacons, and we will deal with that in a moment.

QUALIFICATIONS

As far as qualifications, we said:

- Elders are men.
- They exercise the leadership of Christ in the local assembly.
- They love the church, they work well with others, they can make decisions, they are dependable and can share their love with the church.

- They are married only once, manage their households well, and their children (whatever number they have) are believers.
- They are able to teach, and are faithful to the word themselves.
- Paul mentions a number of other qualifications in I Timothy and Titus that refers to their character:
 - Moderate, prudent, sober, and gentle.
 - Respectable, hospitable, good reputation.
 - Not argumentative, violent or greedy.
 - Someone who is just, devout, a lover of what is good and right.

Of course the idea of possessing these qualities to a positive degree and not a perfect degree is the same here as with deacons.

THE WORK OF ELDERS

Deacons' work changes, but elders' work stays the same. The work of elders is threefold:

1. They protect the congregation against false teaching and false teachers. This is why we have elders in various classes, and elders who oversee the children and adult education programs.
2. They promote and direct sound teaching, good works, unity and peace.
3. They provide leadership and example for sound teaching and good works.

The difference between elders and deacons is that elders are charged with shepherding the flock by ministering the word to them and by providing examples of leadership and mature Christian living. Deacons are charged with carrying out works of service towards the church and the community.

ELECTING ELDERS

There are several ways and thinking that have developed in the church about the selection of elders. Here are the three major views and why they are held.

1. Only the evangelist/preacher selects the elders.

The Boston, Discipleship or International movement uses this method. The argument is that in the only examples where elders are appointed, the Apostles or evangelists are doing the selecting. If we were to use this process in my congregation for instance, I (the preacher) would select men and appoint them to the eldership as Timothy and Titus did.

2. The church selects the men, and the elders approve their choice.

Many churches do this by having a committee select names and submitting them to the elders. The argument for this procedure is based on two things:

1. The word “appoint” in Acts 14:23 sometimes translated “ordained,” comes from a Greek word that meant holding up or stretching out one’s hand as in to vote or signify with the raising of one’s hand a choice or approval. Some scholars say that this shows that congregations approved of elders by holding up their hands, and the choice was made in this manner.
2. Some early writings from the second and third centuries describe churches selecting and rejecting elders by vote. This was a usual pattern in Jewish synagogues and, it is assumed, was continued in the Christian church.

If we were to use this method, you would do the same procedure as that for deacons; select men according to qualifications and submit them to the elders for approval.

3. The elders and evangelist select a man who desires to serve as an elder, and the congregation confirms his selection by affirming that he does indeed qualify according to scripture.

Here are the arguments for this procedure:

1. It follows the New Testament example for selection. In Acts 14:23 the Apostles, who served as elders in the beginning, selected. In Titus the preacher selects. There is no example, command or inference that shows that the congregation chose, but we have two examples where the leaders and evangelist select.
2. It includes the congregation in the process according to I Timothy 3:2. Being above reproach and hospitable, able to teach etc. can only be determined by the people he has contact with, the congregation. Sheep do not choose their shepherd, but they can choose if they will follow or not.
3. It bases the selection process only on Scripture, not on commentaries, traditions or historical writings.

The third procedure is the one that I recommend to follow so that when men will come forward and are selected to serve as elders, their names would be put before the congregation and the members would have a worksheet to help confirm if these men are biblically qualified. If they are, they will be commended to service through prayer and the laying on of hands.

FASTING?

Fasting is optional because it was optional in the New Testament. Sometimes they did not (Acts 6:6 - deacons; I Timothy - Timothy, elder), and sometimes they did (Acts 13:3 - missionaries; Acts 14:23 - elders), and sometimes we do not know (Titus 1:5 - elders). What we do know is that they prayed, laid hands to commend and sometimes some of them fasted. Our elders are free to choose if they wish to fast before they appoint new elders by prayer and the laying on of hands.

We would use the same type of worksheet to evaluate the qualifications of those men put forth for consideration.

SUMMARY

In order to minister to a growing congregation everyone needs to dedicate themselves to finding ways to serve the church: men and women, young and old, experience and inexperienced.

The church needs godly men who are willing to sacrifice themselves on the altar of service by taking on the responsibilities of elders and deacons, and the church needs to know how to select and appoint these men to roles of leadership and service.

Our elder and deacon selection sheets are available as a free digital download:

<https://bibletalk.tv/selection-sheets>

ELDER SELECTION WORKSHEET

NAMES OF MEN SUBMITTED

Please study I Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9 carefully and prayerfully; then use the following checklist to confirm if the following persons may be qualified to serve as an elder.

MUST BE:

Without Reproach: Blameless					
Husband of Only One Wife					
Ruler of His Own House					
Father of Believing Children, and are Subject to Him					
Given to Hospitality					
A Lover of Good Men					
Apt to Teach: Able to Exhort and Convict					
Temperate: Self-Controlled					
Sober-Minded					
Orderly					
Just					
Holy					
Faithful to the Word					
Gentle					
Good Reputation					

MUST NOT BE:

A Brawler					
A Striker: Soon Angry					
Contentious: Self-Willed					
A Lover of Money: Greedy of Worldly or Dishonest Gain					
A Novice (Without Experience)					

Put A ✓ If He Qualifies

Put A ? If You Don't Know

Put An X If He Does Not Qualify

YOUR NAME: _____

DEACON SELECTION WORKSHEET

NAMES OF MEN SUBMITTED

Please study I Timothy 3:8-11 carefully and prayerfully; then use this checklist to suggest who might be qualified to serve as a deacon.

MUST BE:

Man of Dignity (Grave, Serious-Minded)									
Not Double Tongued (Two-Faced or Deceitful)									
Not Addicted to Much Wine									
Not Fond of Sordid Gain (Not Greedy of Base Gain)									
Possessing a Faith with a Clear Conscience									
One who has been Tested (By time, Activities, and God's Word)									
Beyond Reproach (Doctrine, Morals and Character)									
Husband of Only One Wife									
Good Manager, Both of Household and Children									
Wife who is Dignified, Temperate, Faithful and not a Gossip									

Put A If He Qualifies

Put A ? If You Don't Know

Put An X If He Does Not Qualify

YOUR NAME: _____

11.

The Role of the Preacher

So far, we have looked at the qualifications, responsibilities and selection process for elders and deacons. In this chapter we will look at the role of the preacher, sometimes referred to as evangelist or minister.

PREACHER MODELS

In an article that appeared in the Christian Chronicle, Dr. Bill Jones described some of the different roles or models that preachers have taken on throughout the years.

Pulpiteer

The classic “pulpit” preacher, who “preached” whenever he taught a class, did counseling or whatever. Congregational life revolved around the pulpit and the pulpit preacher.

Educator

Congregations became aware of the great need for education and began developing educational programs. Preachers became teachers and when they preached, they also explained and taught.

Program Director

The preacher becomes like the director of the YMCA, making sure everyone is involved and busy. Pulpits become a tool for promoting activities and involvement with some teaching.

Activist

The 1960's brought an awareness of the need for social change and improvements. The preacher becomes the focal point for addressing the ills of society and motivation for the solution of the "big" problems in society (i.e. African American preachers became activists).

Manager/CEO

Reaching the un-churched becomes a big thing in the eighties and nineties. Church growth seminars and experts abound, and preachers become "goal setters" and "program managers."

Resident Theologian

Ask the preacher! More battles between churches ensue because preachers shape doctrine and lead the fight to have their views imposed on others.

Pastor

I could add to this list the preacher as a pastor or elder with responsibilities for counseling, shepherding and defending the faith.

There is an element of faith in each of these roles because preachers are involved, to a certain degree, in every one of these areas. But like elders and deacons, the Bible should determine who and what a preacher is and does rather than tradition or human invention.

TERMS

There are several terms that refer to the preacher.

Minister

The Old Testament used this word, and it meant to serve in any capacity, but especially service in the area of worship.

The New Testament used this word in the same way but it became the term for someone who served in a particular capacity in the church.

But that you also may know about my circumstances, how I am doing, Tychicus, the beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord, will make everything known to you.
- Ephesians 6:21

Today it is used to refer to someone who usually serves the church in a paid role.

Preacher

The Old Testament usage came from a word that originally meant to gather together as an assembly; then the word developed to refer to the one who actually called the groups together. Eventually this word referred to the one who spoke or the speech given at the assembly.

The New Testament word refers to one who proclaims the message of the gospel.

Today, the term preacher refers to the one who gives the sermon on Sunday.

Evangelist

This is a New Testament word not found in the Old Testament. It is made up of two words, “good” and “to announce.” It means one who announces good news or who proclaims the gospel. It is also another word used to refer to the preacher.

Today, the term sometimes applies to one who does gospel meetings, and is not involved in local work.

Suffice to say that all these terms refer to the preacher:

- **Minister** - referring to him as one who serves the Lord and His people.

- **Preacher** - referring to the kind of ministry he performs as opposed to elders and deacons.
- **Evangelist** - referring to the tool of his ministry, and that is the gospel of Jesus Christ, the good news of salvation.

QUALIFICATIONS

Unlike elders and deacons there are no neat passages that list the qualifications of preachers, and so we need to examine the preachers themselves in the New Testament to help us determine their role and qualifications.

In the beginning the Apostles fulfilled all the roles of elders, deacons and preachers. With time they developed men who would carry on these tasks as individuals.

Elders and deacons have lists of qualifications to guide us; preachers have models. In the New Testament we have many who did this work:

- The unknown brethren who scattered from Jerusalem and went everywhere preaching the word (Acts 8:4).
- Philip who began as a deacon and then developed into preaching. He performed signs (Acts 8:12-17); preached in many places to many people (Acts 8:26); was married with children (Acts 21:9).
- Barnabas who travelled and preached with Paul on his first missionary journey (Acts 13:1).
- Timothy who Paul discipled and trained for the ministry (Acts 16:2).
- Titus who was trained by Paul as well (Titus 1:1).
- Apollos who was converted by Aquila and Pricilla but did great work in developing the faith and strengthening the church (Acts 18:28; I Corinthians 3:6).

- Then there are the other preachers referred to or named in Paul's letters for whom we have no details.

When we do examine the models, we see a diversity of men: young (Timothy) and older (Barnabas), married and single, well educated (Apollos) and trained through discipleship and tutoring (Titus). All were preachers and shared some common experiences

They felt called

In the Old Testament the calling of God was done in special ways through signs and wonders of God's appearance (Moses and Isaiah). In the times of Jesus and the Apostles a call to ministry was still done with a sign (like Paul being blinded and the Lord speaking to him) or through the reception of special gifts, but there were still ordinary ways men were "called" into the ministry:

- Philip was chosen by the church as a deacon and developed into a preacher.
- Barnabas, moved to generosity by the need of the church, was then selected to help the church in Antioch, and this eventually led to his choice to go on a mission journey.
- Timothy and Titus both chosen and trained in the ministry by Paul.
- Apollos encouraged by Paul to strengthen the church at Corinth.

Each had obeyed the gospel and was serving in some way when they were called to serve through the ministry of the word.

There is very little that these men shared in common other than the fact that they felt "called" to go into preaching and were encouraged in their desire by someone in the church. From what I see in the New Testament, as well as my own experience and that of others, there comes a need to do this that will not be satisfied by something else. This desire is then followed by the encouragement of a teacher, parent, preacher, elder, etc.

The way they were trained

In each case there was a period of formal and informal training.

- Philip served as a deacon.
- Barnabas worked with Paul and different churches before going out on a missionary journey.
- Timothy and Titus were trained by Paul.
- Apollos had formal training in Alexandria, and was taught more fully by Aquilla and Pricilla.

Each spent time in some way developing their faith and their skills.

Today we have Bible schools and Christian universities but we should be aware that the local congregation is still the best place to train preachers.

They were commended

The preachers in the New Testament were commended by Apostles or elders:

- Philip by the Apostles (Acts 6).
- Barnabas by the prophets and teachers (Acts 13).
- Timothy by Paul and the elders (I Timothy 4:14).
- Titus by Paul (Titus).
- Apollos by Paul (I Corinthians 3:5).

The call to preach is followed by training in the Word. The trainee's work should then be confirmed by church leadership. (The fact that this man has a call and is competent in the Word). This needs to be done in order to legitimize the call and the training.

Some think that just wanting to preach is enough, or going to college is enough, or somebody giving you a job is enough, but being a preacher involves a process that includes the three elements mentioned: calling, training and confirming in the ministry. I might add that a preacher remains qualified so long as his life and doctrine remain pure.

THE WORK OF A PREACHER

The work of the preacher falls into these broad categories:

Preach the gospel

preach the word; be ready in season and out of season;
reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction.
- II Timothy 4:2

This is the responsibility for proclaiming the word of God to the world. The methods and audience changes from culture and time but the objective remains the same: bringing human beings face to face with the message of the gospel.

Filmstrips, personal work, TV evangelism, pulpit preaching, missions, books, videos, radio, internet; each preacher has a variety of ways and abilities to reach out to as many as possible with God's word. This is his primary work, and we do the church harm when we do not provide the time and resources to do this.

Set the church in order

For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order
what remains and appoint elders in every city as I directed
you,
- Titus 1:5

The reason Titus had to appoint elders is because in New Testament times the elders were the main teachers, leaders and ministers, and it

was necessary to select and appoint them because this is what the church needed to grow.

In many churches elders serve as a kind of supervisory board overseeing the work of the evangelist. This system is out of balance and not according to the New Testament. (One reason why churches do not grow.) The preacher's job is to establish and organize the church according to the New Testament pattern so that elders can elder, deacons can deacon and preachers can preach.

Minister the word

But as for you, speak the things which are fitting for sound doctrine.

- Titus 2:1

Paul's instructions to both Timothy and Titus include information that help these preachers minister to the spiritual needs of the brethren. Whether it be in the form of teaching, encouragement, rebuke, correction, the work of the preacher is to help the congregation accurately apply God's word to every situation in their lives. The key to the success of the preacher's work is the response of the congregation:

- The church needs to respond to the call to share the gospel and support its preaching through financial giving and involvement.
- The church needs to agree that it will submit to the word, not the preacher, insofar as the way it should function is concerned.
- A submissive church responds to the message of the preacher when called upon to repent, give, grow, share, rise up, etc.

The establishment or restoration of a New Testament church begins with the proper calling, training, ordination and work of a New Testament preacher. No preacher, no growth.

12.

The Role of Women in Ministry

In the general discussion about “saints” I think it would be helpful to review an issue that is creating turmoil in the church, and that is the role of women in ministry in the church.

I am thankful for a helpful booklet by brother James Meadows who has summarized well some of the many arguments over the role of women in the church.

AN OLD PROBLEM

If you read certain articles about this subject, you would think that the debate over the role of women in the church began in the 1980's and 90's. In actual fact the stress and strain over the appropriate role for women to play in church life, especially in the area of public worship, is as old as the church itself.

Paul was already addressing this issue in the Corinthian church with instructions about women praying and teaching. Examples can be found in I Corinthians, chapters 11 and 14.

As far back as 1892 we read in the Christian Evangelist, a magazine published by churches of Christ, about debates by preachers of that day over the propriety of allowing women to preach in church.

In 1974 two congregations of the church sponsored a seminar entitled, "Women in Christ Today," where women were the keynote speakers, and the issue being promoted was the right of women to be elders, preachers and deacons.

In the late 80's and early 90's several churches in Alabama and Texas appointed female deacons with the stipulation that they would read Scripture, lead prayer and serve communion.

We already have a major congregation in Oklahoma City that allows women to lead singing, and recently a young woman took part in leading a devotion on Sunday morning.

The role of women in ministry, therefore, is a question that has always been with the church, and continues to be with us today.

What is the Problem?

I believe that the first step in addressing this issue is to identify where the disagreement and the problems lie, and then offer biblical teaching in order to provide some direction in this matter.

The key question is, "What role can women exercise in ministry?" There are two answers to this question that are usually put forth. One says that women can practice **full ministry** in the church. This means that all roles are open to them including preaching and teaching to both men and women, and leadership roles as elders/pastors. The other answer is that women can have only **limited ministry** roles. In most cases this would mean that the ministry of preaching and the eldership are not open to women in the church.

FULL MINISTRY

This is not a group but rather an idea shared by many different people. Basically a full ministry supporter would say that women should have the right to minister in any way that a man does (preacher, deacon, shepherd).

There are various levels of full ministry supporters:

- Can serve in every ministry and every role
- Can only serve as deacons
- Can serve as deacons or preachers, but not as elders

These supporters are usually younger people and women.

LIMITED MINISTRY

This has been the traditional position. It says that only the men can be appointed as deacons, preachers and shepherds. Also, that only men should lead in public worship.

This position has been held by the majority throughout history. Obviously, those who support each side have arguments to promote their ideas.

FULL MINISTRY

1. Cultural Argument

The primary argument for full ministry is the one that says, "...God created men and women equal but that the Old Testament and New Testament teachings on women in ministry were the result of rabbinical interpretations and the prejudices of a patriarchal social structure."

In other words, it was the custom of the Jewish culture that women were subordinate to the men, and this custom was reflected in their religion, and has carried on until today. Since this custom has changed, and is no longer the rule in our society, it should, therefore, also change in the church as well.

2. Phoebe Argument

¹ I commend to you our sister Phoebe, who is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea; ² that you receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and that you help her in

whatever matter she may have need of you; for she herself has also been a helper of many, and of myself as well.

- Romans 16:1-2

Phoebe is referred to as a deaconess in Romans 16:1-2 and thus proves that women held this position in the early church. If women could be deacons in the church, at the very least they should also be allowed to lead in public prayer, teach mixed groups (men and women), and do the things that some deacons did (i.e. Philip, the deacon, also taught and performed miracles - Acts 6:8-10).

3. Equal Argument

For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.

- Galatians 3:26

This passage teaches that we are all equal in Christ. If slaves and free men as well as Jew and Greek are put on the same footing, then the idea that men and women are equal should mean that each have access to the same ministry roles as well.

4. Example Argument

The Old Testament has many examples of women who ministered as prophets and leaders (Miriam, Deborah, Anna) so they should be allowed to minister fully in the church today. God used women in dynamic ways in the past and can still use them today, but it is men, and not God, who deny them their potential role in ministry.

LIMITED MINISTRY

I personally believe and support the notion that there is a limited ministry role for women in the church, and give the reasons why this is so by responding to the arguments made by the Full Ministry supporters.

1. Cultural Argument

What is written in the Bible is the product of inspiration, not culture (II Timothy 3:16). It is written by people in a cultural context, but its instruction and commands are inspired from God not social customs.

For example, the New Testament instructions that limit a woman's ministry in the area of public worship and leadership in the church is based on a "creation" principle not "cultural" one. When I say a creation principle I mean that the idea presented is sourced in the initial creation of man. For example, I believe that homosexual practice is wrong because human sexuality is based on the principles initially established at creation by God. Men were created to partner with women; this is in the basic DNA of human sexuality. One can change this and act differently (what I refer to as a cultural change) for various reasons but the essence of human sexuality is the creation model of one man and woman interacting in sexual intimacy. With this in mind I pose the following questions:

- Is it cultural when Paul says, "the head of woman is man" in I Corinthians 11:3? What about the statement in the same verse that says, "the head of Christ is God" - is that culture or creation?
- Paul says that women "are to be under obedience, as also says the Law" in I Corinthians 14:34 - is that culture or creation?
- He also says in Ephesians 5:23, "the husband is the head of the wife" is this just cultural? If it is, then how do we explain his comparison in the same verse where he says, "even as Christ is the head of the church." Then later he writes in the same context, "children, obey your parents in the Lord" (Ephesians 6:1) - is this cultural too? If so, then it means that what he says about Christ is also cultural and subject to the changing times as well.
- In I Timothy 2:12-13 he says, "women are not to teach or exercise authority over the man... for Adam was first formed, then Eve."

- In this verse he explains the basis for the order that God has established in the home as well as in the church. It is this order that provides the context for interpreting many other verses in the Bible regarding the role or ministry of women in the home and in the church.
- Jesus did the same thing when questioned about divorce. He went back to the creation to establish the model that we are to follow for marriage. Paul does the same to establish the model for the role of women in the home and church.

There are pressures today to change the rules and style of traditional marriage that is based on the model found in the Bible. It is the same for the role of women in the family and in the church. There are many changes in society (which may be legitimate) but for the house and church we are bound by the biblical model in every era. Jesus didn't legislate for the role of women in society, only the home and church.

2. Phoebe Argument

The word deacon used to describe her is a common word used to describe any servant. It is the same Greek word used to describe the ones who filled the water pots at the wedding at Cana (John 2:5). It is even used to describe the Emperor Nero in Rome. It was also used to refer to specific servants in church.

The use of this word to describe Phoebe simply means that she was a good and trusted servant or messenger; which all Christians should be. There is no reference or example in the New Testament of a woman serving as a deacon. The first deaconess only appears in writings that were made hundreds of years after the end of the New Testament period. In the Bible we have direct commands, lengthy teaching and examples of men being singled out to be deacons, but none of these for women serving in this role. Good Bible interpretation requires that when we have a clear teaching, we go with what is written in the Bible and not with church history notations long after the Apostolic period.

It is not prejudice or chauvinistic to say that there is nothing in the New Testament to support the role of women as deacons. It is simply a matter of record (inspired record) that we are all subject to obey as Christians. Romans 16:1 could refer to Phoebe as an official deacon or a trusted servant - all other passages point to her being a trusted servant and we are to go with that. In the study of the Bible, it is better to go with the many pieces of evidence that point to a logical conclusion than the one obscure notation that can be interpreted in a variety of ways.

3. Equal Argument

The Bible taught and promoted the idea that men and women were equal, contrary to the social custom of New Testament times. Christianity was the religion that promoted the equal value of women to men long before it was a modern social issue.

The distinction the Bible makes however is that men and women have different roles. Some roles are different because of nature (giving birth) and some are different because of assignment by God (role in family and church).

Men and women are equally saved when they are united to Christ through baptism but they do not discard their natural or assigned roles. You're still a female even after baptism.

The Bible makes clear that "submission" to the husband or "in submission" while learning in church does not mean inferiority. The role assigned by God is one that must be accepted freely in order to be legitimate. Men must accept freely to provide holy and loving leadership in the home and in the church. Women must accept freely to place themselves in submission to their husbands in the home, and to the elders in the church (as men must do also).

God has created man and woman equal in value and in human potential for good. In certain contexts both men and women can exercise their talents and abilities freely and without restraint (business, sports). God has ordained however that in the family and in the church each sex will play a specific role, and not necessarily one that comes easily or naturally to them. For example:

- For some men, leadership does not come easily or naturally.
- For some women, submission goes against their nature.

God supplies the grace and strength to mold our individual personalities to His will in order to honor Him. I'm sure that it did not come easily to Jesus to submit to a disgraceful public execution either.

God requires for the sake of order, peace and edification that equal people take on specific roles, and we honor Him when we do so freely and joyfully.

4. Example Argument

The idea that there are many examples of women ministers in leadership roles in the Bible is simply inaccurate. In his book "All the Women of the Bible" Dr. Herbert Lockyer says that in the 260 references where women are named or referred to in the Bible there is not one single case where a woman was in a leadership role in the worship to Jehovah.

There are some specific cases like Anna who prophesied in the temple but there was a partition that separated the men from the women in the temple, and so she may have done so to the women in a regular way. Deborah, a woman described as a prophetess in the Old Testament (Judges 4:4,5:7), gave judgment over Israel as "...a mother in Israel" always maintaining a maternal imagery.

In I Corinthians Paul talks about women praying and prophesying, and gives instruction about how they are to do this.

³³ For God is not a God of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints. ³⁴The women are to keep silent in the churches; for they are not permitted to speak, but are to subject themselves, just as the Law also says. ³⁵ If they desire to learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is improper for a woman to speak in church.

- I Corinthians 14:33-35

⁸ Therefore I want the men in every place to pray, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and dissension. ⁹ Likewise, I want women to adorn themselves with proper clothing, modestly and discreetly, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly garments, ¹⁰ but rather by means of good works, as is proper for women making a claim to godliness.

¹¹ A woman must quietly receive instruction with entire submissiveness. ¹² But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet. ¹³ For it was Adam who was first created, and then Eve. ¹⁴ And it was not Adam who was deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression. ¹⁵ But women will be preserved through the bearing of children if they continue in faith and love and sanctity with self-restraint.

- I Timothy 2:8-15

Paul says that women are not to speak, teach or have authority over a man in church. Did he contradict himself?

The full ministry people seem to think so but a more simple explanation is to conclude that in the first century church, like in the synagogues and like we do today, the women edified each other, and when this happened those who prayed and prophesied at those occasions wore a veil to demonstrate their on-going submissive attitudes despite the demonstration of gifts and leadership among the women.

Today we don't use the veil in our society but women who exercise their talents and gifts for leadership in our children's programs, women's Bible studies, and various benevolence and service projects demonstrate their submissive attitudes in the way they act and by working under the oversight of the church's elders. The oversight of the elders provides the cover of the veil for Christian women of today. This is why even the preachers and deacons ask them to review their work and plans before they go ahead - a sign of submission.

SUMMARY

So much time and energy are spent discussing the few areas where God, not man, has limited woman in the area of ministry. There are so many other important ministry roles where women can serve equally if not more effectively than men. Here are just a few for example:

1. Ministry to the ill, elderly and alone
2. Ministry of teaching to children, women
3. Ministry of mentoring younger women and especially younger wives and mothers
4. Ministry as wives of elders, deacons, preachers and the responsibilities that go with this
5. Ministry of evangelism (Priscilla and Aquila, missions)
6. Ministry of hospitality (greeters)
7. Ministry of service

Here are three appeals I have for the church:

1. That women accept their biblical role in ministry with grace and humility, and honor God in doing so.
2. That women exercise the opportunities for ministry that do exist and are sufficient to satisfy, edify and glorify.
3. That all women realize that, like men, their #1 ministry is the saving of their own souls.

13.

Who are the Saints?

We have reviewed the role and qualifications of each appointed position in the church and have also focused on the special role of women in ministry. I have left the role of “saint” for this last chapter because the word saint is a generic term that refers to all Christians.

QUALIFICATIONS

Like the other roles we have been talking about, the word helps define what a “saint” is. When I was a child growing up in the Catholic Church I used to think that a saint was an extremely religious clergyman, or a person who could do miracles or through whom miracles had been done.

A good example of this was Brother André who was a kind of deacon in the Catholic Church in the 1920’s, and who served as a doorkeeper in one of the seminary for boys located in Montreal, Quebec where I grew up. He was a kind and religious man who was well known in Catholic religious circles at the time.

After his death, people claimed that miraculous healings occurred when they prayed on behalf of the sick using his name. As a result, a huge cathedral and shrine were built across the street from the seminary where he lived and worked. It was called St. Joseph’s Oratory in honor of the earthly father of Jesus, but it was really a testament to Brother André’s life and work.

Each year hundreds of thousands of people visit his tomb located in the cathedral itself, and tour the museum showing where he lived and worked. There is even a glass case containing his actual heart on exhibit! The Roman Catholic Church canonized (officially made him a saint) in 2010. He is now Saint André.

If we live long enough we will probably see the same thing happen to Mother Teresa (for the moment she is referred to as “blessed” Mother Teresa, one step lower than sainthood). A person needs two miracles credited to them (i.e. a miracle done by her or attributed to her through prayer). As of the writing of this book she only has one miracle credited to her.

These were the kind of people that the Catholic Church pointed to as “saints.” They were special individuals of extreme piety through whom miraculous works were performed. They were quite rare, and only named as saints after decades of investigation by Catholic Church officials.

If we look at the Bible however, we see that the word saint means something quite different. In the Old Testament the word referred to something that was pronounced clean ceremonially or morally. In other words, it was the word used to refer to the thing (sacrifice), place (sanctuary), or person (saint) as clean or pure. Something was impure, and because of some pronouncement or action by God, it was made pure. When it became pure, this is the word that was used to refer to it. A good example of its use is in Leviticus 10:10

¹⁰ and so as to make a distinction between the holy and the profane, and between the unclean and the clean

In the New Testament part of the Bible the word in the original Greek language meant the same thing as it did in the Old Testament part of the Bible: someone holy, pure or morally upright. In the New Testament it was usually used in the plural form, and it always referred to believers or those who were members of the church.

For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem.
- Romans 15:26

Note that the only distinction was that they were poor, not that they could do miracles.

To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling, with all who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours:
- II Corinthians 1:2

In this passage Paul says four things, but he is referring to the same people. This is like when you say your dad is your mom's only husband, the father of your brother, brother of your uncle and coach of the soccer team; four different things about the same person.

Paul talks to these men and women in Corinth and refers to them in four different ways. Ways that help define what and who a saint really is.

They were the church of God at Corinth.

The word church means "the called out." It was a political term at one time referring to those who were "called out" to be the elders of the city or leaders of a tribe. Jesus used this term to refer to His followers as a group. They were the "called out" by God, called out of the world by the gospel.

They were sanctified in Christ Jesus.

The word sanctified means to make holy or to purify. It is the action of taking something and purifying it in some manner. Jesus is the one who sanctifies or purifies His disciples. It is through Him that they go from being impure and unacceptable to being pure, holy and clean (I Corinthians 6:9-11).

They were saints by calling.

The term “saints” refers to their condition now that they have been washed and purified. They did not do this on their own, by their own strength or goodness. They were called to become this way when they obeyed the gospel (repented and were baptized for the forgiveness of sins, Acts 2:37-38). The day Jesus washed away their sins in baptism they became saints (purified, clean, sanctified).

They were united by faith in Christ.

Every person called out by the gospel and washed clean in baptism is a saint, a member of the church and part of the worldwide body of believers who call upon Jesus for salvation. Saints are not holy hermits who do miracles, the term refers to any person who has been washed clean of their sins in baptism, and consequently belongs to Christ’s church.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF SAINTS

Elders, deacons and preachers have certain roles within the church, and the Bible makes special provisions for women and their role in ministry. However, every saint has a particular role to play in the church regardless of age, education, talent or level of maturity. Each saint has two main responsibilities:

1. All saints are to be faithful

Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, so that you will be tested, and you will have tribulation for ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.

- Revelation 2:10

Jesus tells the saints at Smyrna that if they are faithful until death, they will receive the crown of life.

Someone says, “What are my responsibilities?” I say, “You have to make the effort to be faithful.” Being faithful for a lifetime requires effort.

- Hearing and obeying the word.
- Resisting temptation over and over again. Trying even after we fail.
- Faithful to the church in worship and service.
- Faithful in our complete trust that God can and will save us even when we are completely discouraged.

We may not be elders, deacons or preachers, but as saints we are responsible, “to work out your salvation in fear and trembling.” (Philippians 2:12)

2. All saints are to be holy

but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior;
- I Peter 1:15

Holy means separate, different, dedicated. You buy a wedding dress, and it is a holy thing because this particular dress has been set-aside for a particular day and purpose.

Saints are holy and set aside by God for a particular day and a particular purpose. The purpose is to glorify and honor Him. The purpose of a Christian’s life is to live in such a way that his or her life brings honor to God. What is done, said, thought, accomplished, or tried brings honor to God in some way.

The “day” that saints have been set aside for is the “day” when Jesus returns. On that day the great wedding between Christ and His church will take place. The greatest honor saints bring to God is that they will honor and receive Christ on the day He returns. When He came the first time He was rejected and crucified by His own people. When He comes a second time His people will be ready and joyful at his coming.

In a practical sense holiness often requires us to go against the grain in this life, and that becomes hard work. For example:

- Honoring God through regular worship each week goes against the grain of leisure activities, overtime at work and inconvenience.
- Honoring God through purity goes against the grain of bad language, sexually explicit movies and books, temptation to being involved sexually outside of marriage.
- Honoring God through giving goes against the grain of materialism, selfishness, worldliness and longing for the goods of this world. We want to keep our money for ourselves, giving it to God to use for the poor or to preach the gospel to people we don't know seems foolish.

Going back to the example of the wedding dress: the value of the bride's dress is not only its design and cloth but the fact that all of this effort and expense has been exclusively devoted to one single wearing of this dress on one single day.

What makes the life of the saint holy is that he only has one life, and it is exclusively devoted to God in preparation for that day when Jesus comes.

SUMMARY

Most people in our society define themselves by what they do: accountant, in the military, homemaker, etc. Who they are is defined by what they do. As Christians we approach this issue in the opposite way: what we do is defined by who we are. We are saints, and that status influences everything we do.

As I wrap up this series, two questions need to be answered by everyone:

1. **Are we saints?** You cannot become a saint by performing miracles or doing good. You can only become a saint by being washed clean of sin in the waters of Jesus' baptism (Acts 22:16).

2. **Are we acting like saints?** If someone were examining your life would they say that faithfulness and holiness were the main qualities of it? When Jesus comes for His saints, this is what He will be looking for in order to identify them (II Peter 3:10-14).

My hope and prayer is that every reader of this book will honestly answer these two questions, and if the answer is no to either one of these, then please do what is necessary to become a saint of God, or be renewed in holy and faithful living.

God bless you.

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