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# Biblical Eldership, Part 1a

## Shepherd the Flock of God Among You

Message by John PiperTopic: Biblical Eldership

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### 1. Preface

"We as a church exist to spread a passion for  
the supremacy of God in all things for the joy of all peoples."

In subscribing to a mission that holds a supreme view of God, it is our goal, as the people of Bethlehem Baptist Church, to maintain the centrality of God in all that we do. He is to be heralded in our worship, in our preaching and teaching, in our evangelism, missions and outreach efforts, in our praying, and even in our church governance. Our motivation? To glorify God by seeking – literally, "stoking" – our joy in him. How? Through the earnest belief that the chief end of man is to glorify God by enjoying him forever. God's supreme worth is magnified manifoldly when our deep and lasting joy is in him. Our ongoing aim as a people is to exalt Christ, to cherish Christ, to love Christ, to honor Christ, and to desire Christ above all else, thereby ensuring that God's great glory and the most exquisite pleasure of his people are inextricably intertwined. Thus, the under-shepherds of the church should be those people whose satisfaction in God is so contagious that they naturally draw others into that enjoyment of God through teaching and preaching and ministry and care.

The material presented here is based, in large part, on a paper presented to the church in 1987 by Pastor John Piper. The underlying convictions which led to its presentation at that time included a desire to implement a more Biblically-informed system of governance based upon the clear teachings of the New Testament and also a pastoral concern to release many committed committee members to do the actual work of ministry. It was discussed and debated and ultimately adopted in 1991 and has been the sure foundation upon which the current system of governance – a plurality of

elders comprising both lay and vocational leaders – is grounded. The vision and mission of the church is shaped and shared by members of the pastoral staff and by aspiring laymen; so too, are the joys of ministry, the fulfillment of calling, and the corresponding responsibilities to "shepherd the flock of God . . . eagerly."

The ensuing decade has been both tumultuous and triumphant. The leadership of Bethlehem, and especially the Council of Elders, has carried the responsibility for oversight through seasons of both unspeakable joy and excruciating pain. Having attended Bethlehem with my family for the past six years, I have carefully observed the visible outworkings of this form of spiritual leadership within the local church and asked, not just "Does this work?" but "Is this Scriptural?" What about these elders? Are these leaders godly? Honest? Biblical? What have they said and done to merit our trust? How about their families? Their wives? Their children? Are they content? Happy? Loved? It is to our lasting delight that we have observed a marked Godwardness in congregational proceedings, and it has been my greater delight to serve for the past 18 months as a lay elder.

The process through which I was affirmed began with a simple query from a friend, Tim, as to whether church eldership was an office to which I aspired. After several months of prayerful consideration, the study of some relevant written materials and an ongoing discussion with my wife, Liz, I ventured that perhaps the Lord was leading me to consider eldership. As I worked through the implications of such a call, I struggled with such temporal insecurities as my fitness to shepherd a flock of theologically astute, Bible-memorizing, missions-minded, outreach-oriented believers. Wasn't I a sinner who had merely dabbled in theology? (Just what is "hermeneutics"?) Hadn't I struggled through spiritually barren seasons of life? Didn't I wrangle and wrestle for countless hours to memorize just a couple of verses of Scripture? Hadn't I wondered why in the world others were so passionate about missions? Had any of the folks with whom I had shared Christ really been born again? And then, I came across the wonderful, liberating words of the Apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians:

"Therefore, since we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we do not lose heart. But we have renounced the things of shame, not walking in craftiness nor handling the Word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them. For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your bondservants for Jesus' sake. For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us." (2 Corinthians 4:1-7, NKJV)

I saw that the ministry of eldership is not at all about this "earthen vessel" but about the greatness of God, about his mercy, his gospel, his glory and his power!

The next steps in the process of pursuing an affirming call on my life were a written testimony submitted to the council, a formal interview with three elders, and finally a verbal testimony before our congregation in which, with dry throat and knocking knees, I simply spoke of the trajectory my life had taken, the incredible joys I had savored as I sought to offer myself to God as a living sacrifice, and my goal of expanding and multiplying that joy by drawing others into wholehearted satisfaction in Him. My tenure as elder has been a season of watching and learning and ministering and failing and simply trying again. But my heart has been encouraged again and again to see God at work in our local church through the faithful, available, servant-shepherds ("earthen vessels"?) he has called to oversee his people. There is a collegiality and camaraderie and a heartfelt effort at mutual upbuilding among the Elder Council members that is sweet and satisfying and, I believe, God-honoring. More importantly, there is a strong desire to shepherd the flock of God with joy, knowing that one day we will be called upon to give an account to the Shepherd of our souls (Hebrews 13:17). For "when the Chief Shepherd appears, we all [lay and vocational elders alike] will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away" (1 Peter 5:4).

What unfolds in the succeeding pages is an engagement with the relevant New Testament texts and a God-glorifying pursuit of their contextual, Biblical meaning. The outcome is not merely doctrinaire abstraction, not merely culture-confronting complementarianism, not merely a re-thinking of the inherited, historical norms and traditions, but a practical, non-cumbersome outworking of church governance which aligns with Scripture and aims at meeting the myriad needs of the local expression of the body of Christ.

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Minneapolis, MN

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## 2. What Does "Church" Refer to in the New Testament?

### The Word "Church"

"Church" comes from the Anglo Saxon "circe" (Kirk) which, in turn, comes from the Greek kyriakon which means "belonging to the Lord." So one could think of "church" as the people or the building "belonging to the Lord." But in the English New Testament, the word "church" translates the Greek ekklesia which means "assembly" or "congregation" and never refers to a building. Therefore, the "church" is the people who belong to the Lord Jesus.

### The Universal Church of All Believers of All Time

#### Ephesians 1:22

And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church.

### All the Believers in an Area

#### Acts 9:31

So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria enjoyed peace, being built up; and going on in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it continued to increase.

### All the Believers in a City

#### Acts 8:1

And on that day a great persecution began against the church in Jerusalem.

### The Believers Gathered in a House-Congregation

#### 1 Corinthians 16:19

Aquila and Prisca greet you heartily in the Lord, with the church that is in their house.

## 3. The Importance and Preciousness and Purpose of the Church of Jesus Christ in the World

### The Bride of Christ

#### Ephesians 5:25-29

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the Word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless. So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself; for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the church.

### The Body of Christ (Universal)

#### Colossians 1:18-24

He is also head of the body, the church. . . . Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body, which is the church, in filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions.

### The Body of Christ (Local)

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The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." On the contrary, the parts of the body which seem to be weaker are indispensable. . . . But God has so composed the body . . . that there may be no discord in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.

#### The Household and Dwelling of God

##### Ephesians 2:19-22

So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.

#### The Pillar and Support of the Truth

##### 1 Timothy 3:15

[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.

#### To Display His Glory

##### 1 Peter 2:9

You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who has called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

#### To Display the Manifold Wisdom of God to the Spiritual Powers of Heaven

##### Ephesians 3:6-10

The Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel. . . . To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ, and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things; so that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places.

#### To Show the Authority and Power of Christ

##### Matthew 16:18

I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it.

### 4. All New Testament Churches Had Elders

#### Elders in All the Churches that Paul Founded

##### Acts 14:23

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.

#### Elders in the Church at Jerusalem

##### Acts 15:2

And when Paul and Barnabas had great dissension and debate with them, the brethren determined that Paul and Barnabas and some others of them

Acts 20:17

From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church.

Elders in All the Churches of Crete

Titus 1:5

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.

Elders in All the Churches of the Dispersion of the Roman Empire

James 1:1; 5:14

James, a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad: Greetings. . . . 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.

Elders in All the Churches in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia

1 Peter 1:1; 5:1

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who are chosen. . . . 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, shepherd the flock of God.

## 5. Eleven Biblical Principles of Local Church Governance

### Principle One

The Local Church is governed by Christ (Matthew 16:18). This governance was mediated through the authority of the apostles and their close associates (Ephesians 2:20; 1 Corinthians 2:12-13; 7:17; 14:37-38; 2 Thessalonians 3:14). Today Christ still rules through the words of his apostles as they are preserved for us in the inspired writings of the New Testament. Therefore, every effort will be made to conform the structure and procedures and spirit of church governance as closely as possible to New Testament guidelines, with a constant eye to promoting the glory of God and the advancement of faith (1 Corinthians 10:31; Philippians 1:25).

Matthew 16:18

I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it.

Ephesians 2:19-20

So then you are . . . the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone.

1 Corinthians 2:12-13

Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is from God, that we might understand the gifts bestowed on us by God. And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who possess the Spirit.

1 Corinthians 7:17

Only, let every one lead the life which the Lord has assigned to him, and in which God has called him. This is my rule in all the churches.

1 Corinthians 14:37-38

If anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritual, let him recognize that the things which I write to you are the Lord's commandment. But if anyone does

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#### 2 Thessalonians 3:14

If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of that person and do not associate with him, so that he will be put to shame.

#### 1 Corinthians 10:31

Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

#### Philippians 1:25

Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy in the faith.

#### Principle Two

The ministry of the church is primarily the work of the members in the activity of worship toward God, nurture toward each other and witness toward the world. Internal structures for church governance are not the main ministry of the church, but are the necessary equipping and mobilizing of the saints for the work of ministry.

#### Ephesians 4:11-12

And [Christ] gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ.

#### Principle Three

Governance structures should be lean and efficient to this end, not aiming to include as many people as possible in office-holding, but to free and fit as many people as possible for ministry (implied in the preceding principle).

#### Principle Four

Christ is the head of the church and, spiritually, all his disciples are on a level ground before him, each having direct access to him and responsibility to intercede for the good of all as a community of priests.

#### Ephesians 4:15

Speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ.

#### Matthew 23:8-11

But do not be called Rabbi; for One is your Teacher, and you are all brothers. Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven. Do not be called leaders; for One is your Leader, that is, Christ. But the greatest among you shall be your servant.

#### 1 Timothy 2:5

For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.

#### Revelation 1:6

[Christ] has made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father —to Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.

#### Galatians 6:1-2

Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ.

#### Hebrews 3:13

## Principle Five

Not inconsistent with this equality, God has ordained the existence of officers in the church, some of whom are charged under Christ with the leadership of the church.

### 1 Timothy 5:17

The elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching.

### 1 Thessalonians 5:12

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.

### Hebrews 13:7

Remember those who led you, who spoke the Word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith.

### Hebrews 13:17

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.

### Acts 20:28

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.

## Principle Six

Under Christ and his Word, the decisive court of appeal in the local church in deciding matters of disagreement is the gathered church assembly. (This is implied, first, in the fact that the leaders are not to lead by coercion, but by persuasion and free consent [1 Peter 5:3], second, in the fact that elders may be censured [1 Timothy 5:19], and third, in the fact that Matthew 18:15-20 and 1 Corinthians 5:4 depict the gathered church assembly as the decisive court of appeal in matters of discipline).

### 1 Peter 5:1-3

Therefore, I exhort the elders among you. . . shepherd the flock of God among you. . . not as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock.

### 1 Timothy 5:19-20

Do not receive an accusation against an elder except on the basis of two or three witnesses. Those who continue in sin, rebuke in the presence of all, so that the rest also will be fearful of sinning.

### Matthew 18:15-17

If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.

### 1 Corinthians 5:4-5

In the name of our Lord Jesus, when you are assembled, and I with you in spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus, [you are to] deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

The local congregation therefore should call and dismiss its own leaders (implied in the preceding principle).

#### Principle Eight

The leaders of the church should be people who are spiritually mature and exemplary (1 Timothy 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9), gifted for the ministry given to them (Romans 12:6-8), have a sense of divine urging (Acts 20:28), and are in harmony with the duly established leadership of the church (Philippians 2:2).

##### 1 Timothy 3:1-13

It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do. An overseer, then, must be above reproach, etc [15 qualifications are listed].

##### Titus 1:5-9

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, namely, if any man is above reproach, etc. [18 qualifications follow].

##### Romans 12:6-8

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; if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching; or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.

##### Acts 20:28

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.

##### Philippians 2:2

Make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose.

#### Principle Nine

Spiritual qualifications should never be sacrificed to technical expertise. For example, deacons or trustees or financial and property administrators should be men or women with hearts for God even more importantly than they have heads for finance, and best of all, both. (Implied in the preceding principle.)

#### Principle Ten

The selection process should provide for the necessary assessment of possible leaders by a group able to discern the qualifications mentioned in #8; and that the process provide for the final approval by the congregation of all officers. (Implied in principles 6 and 7.)

#### Principle Eleven

Terms of active service should not be dictated by the desire to include as many different people as possible in leadership (see #3 above), but by the careful balance between the need, on the one hand, to have the most qualified leaders and, on the other hand, to guard against burn out and stagnation.

### 6. Other Names For Elders in the New Testament

#### Bishop/Overseer



There are at least four reasons to consider this term (bishop/overseer) as equivalent to "elder" in the New Testament church.

Reason One: [Titus 1:5 compared to 1:7](#)

[Titus 1:5-7](#)

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, namely, if any man is above reproach, the husband of one wife, having children who believe, not accused of dissipation or rebellion. 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.

Compare [Titus 1:5](#) with [1:7](#), where "bishop/overseer" and "elder" are apparently interchangeable terms. Paul begins by saying that Titus should appoint elders (presbuteros) in every town (verse 5). Then he gives some qualifications that they must meet (verse 6), and continues without a break in verse 7 by saying, "For a bishop (episkopon), as God's steward must be blameless." Virtually all commentators agree that the same office is in view in these two terms: "elder" describing the man with reference to his dignity and standing (older); "bishop" describing the man with reference to his function and duty (oversight).

Reason Two: [Acts 20:17 compared to 20:28](#)

[Acts 20:17, 28](#)

From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church. . . . 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.

In [Acts 20:17](#), Paul calls the "elders" to come down from Ephesus. Then he says to them in verse 28 that God has made them "guardians" (= "overseers/bishops"; episkopous) among the flock. So the "elders" are the "bishops/overseers" in Ephesus.

Reason Three: [1 Timothy 3:1ff compared to 5:17](#)

[1 Timothy 3:1](#)

If anyone aspires to the office of bishop/overseer, he desires a noble task.

[1 Timothy 5:17](#)

The elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching.

In [1 Timothy 3:1](#), Paul says, "If anyone aspires to the office of bishop/overseer, he desires a noble task." Then he gives the qualifications for the overseer/bishop in verses 2-7. Unlike the deacons, the overseer must be "able to teach" (verse 2), and in verse 5, he is said to be one whose management of his own household fits him to care for God's church. These two functions are ascribed to elders in the fifth chapter of this same book ([1 Timothy 5:17](#)) -teaching and governing. So it is very likely that in Paul's mind the bishops/overseers of [1 Timothy 3:1-7](#) are the same as the elders of [5:17](#).

Reason Four: [Philippians 1:1 compared to 1 Timothy 3:1ff and Acts 14:23](#)

In [Philippians 1:1](#) Paul writes, "To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons." These, then, seem to be the two offices of the church just as in [1 Timothy 3:1-13](#) the qualifications are given only for these two. But Paul appointed "elders" in all the churches ([Acts 14:23](#)), and so it is very likely that the elders of the church at Philippi were the bishops/overseers referred to in [Philippians 1:1](#).

We conclude that the office of bishop/overseer is the same as the office of elder in the New Testament. It is listed beside the office of deacon ([Philippians 1:1](#); [1 Timothy 3:1-13](#)) in such a way as to show that these two were the main offices by which the ongoing life of the church was to be managed.

Pastor

The term "pastor" (poimen) occurs in the New Testament only once ([Ephesians 4:11](#) "He gave some . . . as pastors and teachers"). But there is a verb

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## Reason One

Ephesians 4:11 treats pastors and teachers as one group and thus suggests that the chief role of the pastor is feeding the flock through teaching, a role clearly assigned to bishops/overseers in 1 Timothy 3:2 ("An elder must be . . . apt to teach") and to elders in Titus 1:9 ("He will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict"). This suggests that "pastor" is another name for "elder" and "overseer."

## Reason Two

In Acts 20:28, the "elders" of Ephesus are encouraged in their "pastoral" duties, thus showing that Paul saw the elders as the shepherds or pastors. (Acts 20:28 "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.")

## Reason Three

In 1 Peter 5:1-2, the "elders" are told to "tend the flock of God" that is in their charge. In other words, Peter saw the elders as, essentially, pastors or shepherds. (1 Peter 5:1-2, "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, shepherd the flock of God among you.")

## Conclusion

The New Testament only refers to the office of pastor one time (Ephesians 4:11). It is a functional description of the role of elder stressing the care and feeding of the church as God's flock, just as "bishop/overseer" is a functional description of the role of elder stressing the governing or oversight of the church. We may conclude therefore that "pastor" and "elder" and "bishop/overseer" refer in the New Testament to the same office. This office stands alongside "deacon" in Philippians 1:1 and 1 Timothy 3:1-13 in such a way as to show that the two abiding officers instituted by the New Testament are elder and deacon.

## 7. The Function Of Elders in the New Testament: Governing And Teaching

The responsibilities of elders are summed up under two heads: governing and teaching.

## Governing

## 1 Timothy 5:17

Let the elders who rule (= govern, proestotes) well be considered worthy of double honor especially those who labor in preaching (logo) and teaching (didaskalia).

## 1 Timothy 3:4-5

He must manage (proistamenon) his own household well, keeping his children submissive and respectful in every way; for if a man does not know how to manage (prostenai) his own household, how can he care for God's church?

## Acts 20:28

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.

## 1 Peter 5:2

Therefore, I exhort the elders among you . . . shepherd the flock of God.

The duty of elders to "oversee" or "shepherd" the flock implies a governing or leading function.

## 1 Thessalonians 5:12

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There is no reference to "elders" here, but the function of the leaders is governing, and the natural assumption is that the leaders are elders that Paul had appointed according to Acts 14:23.

#### Hebrews 13:17

Obeys your leaders and submit to them; for they are keeping watch over your souls, as men who will have to give account.

Obedience and submission imply a role of leadership and governance and, again, the reference is probably to the elders, though the leaders are not described explicitly as elders.

#### Teaching

#### Ephesians 4:11-12

And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ.

Pastors and teachers are pictured as one office, so that the pastor (whom we have identified as an elder) has the responsibility of teaching.

#### 1 Timothy 3:2

An overseer, then, must be . . . able to teach.

The overseer must be "able to teach." And we have seen that the overseer and elder are the same office. This qualification is not included in the list of qualifications for deacons.

#### 1 Timothy 5:17

Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching.

All have to be able to teach, but some "labor," that is, they devote more time and energy to it, perhaps earning their living by it. Each elder is vested with the right to teach and exercise authority in the church and so must have the qualifications for it.

#### Titus 1:9

He must hold firm to the sure Word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to confute those who contradict it.

Not all elders need to be able to do public preaching. The requirement is not for a preaching gift, but for a solid grasp of doctrine and ability to spot and correct errors and explain Biblical truth plainly.

#### Conclusion

The function of elders may be summed up under two heads: teaching and governing. They are the doctrinal guardians of the flock and the overseers of the life of the church responsible to God for the feeding and care and ministry of the people.

### 8. Biblical Qualifications for Elders

Note: The issue of whether elders should be men or women or both is covered in the book, *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, edited by Wayne Grudem and John Piper (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1991). We will not take it up in detail here. The position of Bethlehem Baptist Church, expressed in our constitution, is that elders will be spiritual men who aim not to lord it over anyone, but to be servants of the people of God for their upbuilding in the joy of faith. The main text relating to this issue is [1 Timothy 2:11-13](#).

#### Qualifications of Elders According to 1 Timothy 3:1-7

### Aspiration (oregetai/ epithumei)

At least one way for a man to attain the role of elder/bishop was to aspire to it. In fact, since it is the duty of elders to do their work with gladness and not under constraint or for love of money (1 Peter 5:1-3), this should be thought of as one of the elders' qualifications. This need not exclude the possibility that a man may be sought out and urged to become an elder. But no pressure should be used that would result in an unwilling, half-hearted service.

3:2 "Therefore it is necessary for the bishop [=elder] to be irreproachable."

### Irreproachability (anepilempton)

The word is used elsewhere in the New Testament only in 5:7 (where widows are to be without reproach by putting their hope in God and not living luxuriously or sumptuously or self-indulgently) and 6:14 (where Timothy is to keep the commandment irreproachable until Jesus comes).

The word seems to be a general word for living in a way that gives no cause for others to think badly of the church or the faith or the Lord. This tells us nothing about the sort of thing that would bring reproach on the church or the Lord. But, coming at the head of the list it puts a tremendous emphasis on what a person's reputation is. The focus here is not a person's relationship to the Lord, but how others see him. It seems, therefore, that right from the outset, the public nature of the office is in view with its peculiar demands.

3:2 "... one woman's husband. . ."

### One Woman's Husband (mias gunaikas andras)

The word order emphasizes the word "one". So it is not likely that Paul meant to say that the elders have to be married. There are other words for "married" he could have used. He probably would have put "husband" in the prominent place if that were his intention. Moreover, Paul was not married (1 Corinthians 9:5; 7:7) and he thought singleness was an excellent way to be freer for ministry (1 Corinthians 7:32).

In verse 4, Paul gets to the issue of how well a man manages his household. So the point here probably is not the man's competence as a husband. The point, coming right after irreproachable, is probably one of notoriety. What is this man's reputation with regard to whether he has had one wife or not. It appears that the public standard will be high.

Does this standard mean that an elder

1. May not be a polygamist?
2. May not remarry after the death of his wife?
3. May not be remarried after a divorce?

The main argument against #1 is the use of the parallel phrase in 1 Timothy 5:9 in reference to widows whom the church was enrolling in a welfare and service order. She must be "one man's wife" (henos andros gune). Since polyandry (a woman having several husbands at once) was simply not a practice, this very probably means that the woman had not divorced and remarried.

Moreover the phrase in 5:9 surely did not mean that the widow was excluded from the order if she had remarried when her first husband died. For in 5:14 the younger widows were encouraged to remarry, and it is unlikely that, having said this, Paul would then later exclude them from the widows' order because they had followed his advice.

So #2 is not likely either, in view of what we just saw about the similar phrase in 1 Timothy 5:9 concerning widows whom Paul encouraged to remarry. Moreover, it would be strange if he rejected widowers who had married after the death of their wives in view of Paul's complete endorsement of remarrying after the death of a spouse (Romans 7:3; 1 Corinthians 7:39).

Therefore, the most likely meaning for the standard of "one woman's husband" is that the eldership should be composed of men who have never been remarried after divorce.

3:2 "... temperate. . ."

This word is used two other times in the New Testament – in 3:11 of the women (wives of?) deacons; and in [Titus 2:2](#) about older men in general.

It is odd that it is used here, even though in verse 3 the elders must not be addicted to wine (me paroinon). Perhaps here the point is more general – namely, that his temperance extends over other things besides wine. Or perhaps the repetition comes because in verse 3 there begins a list of things which the elder is not supposed to be, and Paul felt obliged to include the problem of wine in the negative list as well as the positive. The standard here is one of self-control and mastery of his appetites. Wine would surely not be the only drink or food that a person can misuse.

3:2 "... sensible ..."

Sensible, Prudent, Reasonable (sophrona)

The word is used only here and in [Titus 1:8](#) of elders, and 2:2 of older men and 2:5 of younger women.

It is related to sophroneo which means to be of a sound mind – like the demoniac after he was healed ([Mark 5:15](#)). The basic idea seems to be having good judgment, which implies seeing things as they really are, knowing yourself well, and understanding people and how they respond. We might say "being in touch with your feelings" or being in touch with reality so that there are no great gaps between what you see in yourself and what others see in you.

3:2 "... dignified ..."

Respectable, Honorable, (kosmios)

The idea seems to be one of not offending against propriety – a person who comports himself in situations so as not to step on toes unnecessarily.

3:2 "... hospitable ..."

Hospitable (philoxenon)

An elder should be who loves strangers – that is, who is given to being kind to newcomers and makes them feel at home - a person whose home is open for ministry and who does not shrink back from having guests, not a secretive person.

3:2 "... an apt teacher. ..."

Skilled in Teaching (didaktikon)

This need not mean that the person is very good in front of a group, since not all elders devote all their time to formal teaching or preaching ([1 Timothy 5:17](#)). Rather, as [Titus 1:9](#) says, "He must hold firm to the sure Word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to confute those who contradict it."

In other words, he must know Biblical doctrine well and be able to explain it to people. He must be astute enough theologically that he can spot serious error and show a person why it is wrong and harmful.

3:3 "... no drunkard. ..."

Not Addicted to Wine (me paroinon)

The general qualification here would be like the one above under temperance, namely, self-control – not addicted to anything harmful or debilitating or worldly. Freedom from enslavements should be so highly prized that no bondage is yielded to.

3:3 "... not violent. ..."

Not Pugnacious or Belligerent (me plekten)

The point here is that the temper should be under control. He must not be given to quarreling or fighting. There should be a conciliatory bent. His feelings should not be worn on the sleeve. He should not carry resentments or be hypercritical.

## Gentle (epieke)

This is the opposite of pugnacious or belligerent. He should not be harsh or mean-spirited. He should be inclined to tenderness and resort to toughness only when the circumstances commend this form of love. His words should not be acid or divisive but helpful and encouraging.

3:3 "... not quarrelsome. . ."

## Peaceable (amachon)

This seems almost identical with "not pugnacious or belligerent". In fact, the last three seem to go together as a unit that stresses peacemaking rather than factiousness or troublemaking. This would have great implications about the way he uses his tongue.

3:3 "... not loving money. . ."

## Not a Lover of Money (aphilarguron)

He should be putting the kingdom first in all he does. His lifestyle should not reflect a love of luxury. He should be a generous giver. He should not be anxious about his financial future. He should not be so money-oriented that ministry decisions revolve around this issue.

3:4-5 "He must manage his own household well, keeping his children submissive and respectful in every way; for if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how can he care for God's church?"

## Leader of a Well-ordered Household (kalos proistamenon)

The home is a proving ground for ministry. He should have submissive children. This does not mean perfect, but it does mean well-disciplined, so that they do not blatantly and regularly disregard the instructions of their parents. The children should revere the father (meta pases semnotetos). He should be a loving and responsible spiritual leader in the home. His wife should be respected and tenderly loved. Their relationship should be openly admirable.

3:6 "He must not be a recent convert, or he may be puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil."

## A Mature Believer, Not a New Convert (me neophuton)

The "condemnation of the devil" seems to be the condemnation that the devil is under because of his being puffed up. So the new believer, given too much responsibility too soon, may easily swell with pride. The implication is that part of Christian seasoning is a humbling process and a growing protection against pride. We should see evidences in his life that humility is a fixed virtue and not easily overturned.

3:7 "moreover he must be well thought of by outsiders, or he may fall into reproach and the snare of the devil."

## Good Reputation with Outsiders (Marturian kalen)

This is similar to "irreproachability" in verse 2. But here it is made explicit that the outside unbelieving world is in view. This doesn't mean the world sets the standards, since Jesus himself was rejected by some. What it seems to mean is that a Christian leader should at least meet the standards of the world for decency and respectability, for the standards of the church should be higher.

The snare of the devil is referred to in 2 Timothy 2:26. It seems to involve deception and sin, since to be rescued from it is to repent and come to a knowledge of the truth. How does not being well thought of by outsiders cause you to fall into reproach and the snare of the devil? Could it be that the reproaches of the world would cause a person to try to hide his faults in the church and thus fall into lying or duplicity?

## Qualifications Of Elders (Continued) According to Titus 1:5-9

1:6 "If any man is blameless. . ."

## Blamelessness (anegkletos)

See above, One Woman's Husband.

1:6 "...and his children believers, not open to the charge of being profligate or insubordinate."

Honest and Orderly Children (pista, me in kategoria asotias e anupotakta)

The meaning is probably the same as 1 Timothy 3:4-5 and the well-ordered house. There, the children are to be "in subjection with all reverence" (en hupotage meta pases semnotatetos).

Here, the focus is not just on the relationship of the children to the father, but on their behavior in general. They are not to be guilty of the accusation of "wild living" or uncontrolled behavior. And they are not to be "insubordinate."

Does pista mean "believing" (with RSV) or "faithful" in the sense of honest and trustworthy? In favor of the latter would be the use of the word in 1 Timothy 3:11, where women (deaconesses or wives of deacons) are to be pistas en pasin, faithful in all things. Other places in the pastoral epistles where the word seems to have this meaning are 1 Timothy 1:12, 15; 3:1; 4:9; 2 Timothy 2:11; 2:13; Titus 1:9; 3:8.

So the idea seems to be of children who are well bred, orderly, generally obedient, responsible, and reliable.

1:7 "...blameless..."

See above on Titus 1:6, Blamelessness.

1:7 "...not arrogant..."

Humility (me authade)

This is the assumption behind his not being a new believer, lest he be puffed up. He should be lowly in his demeanor, not speaking much of himself or his achievements. He should count others better than himself and be quick to serve. He should sincerely give God the credit and honor for any accomplishments.

1:7 "...not quick-tempered..."

See above on 1 Timothy 3:3, Gentle and Peaceable.

1:7 "...not a drunkard..."

See above on 1 Timothy 3:3, Not Addicted to Wine.

1:7 "...not violent..."

See above on 1 Timothy 3:3, Not Pugnacious Or Belligerent.

1:7 "...not greedy for gain..."

See above on 1 Timothy 3:3, Not a Lover of Money.

1:8 "...hospitable..."

See above on 1 Timothy 3:2, Hospitable.

1:8 "...a lover of goodness..."

Lover of Goodness (philagothon)

He should love to see good done and love to be involved in doing good. This is more than doing good. This is a bent and love to see it done. A kind of expansive person.

See above on 1 Timothy 3:2, Sensible, Prudent, Reasonable.

1:8 "... upright. . ."

Just (dikaion)

He should care about whether people are treated fairly and should want to see justice in the world at all levels.

1:8 "... holy. . ."

Devout, Holy (hosion)

He should be a person of devotion to Christ with a life of prayer and meditation. He should love worship and have a deep personal relationship with the Lord.

1:8 "... self-controlled. . ."

Self-Control (egkrate)

The focus here is especially on sexual self-control. He should not be in the grip of lust. He should not toy with pornography. He should be utterly faithful to his wife.

1:9 "He must hold firm to the sure Word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to confute those who contradict it."

See above on 1 Timothy 3:2, Skilled in Teaching.

Here the stress is laid on the doctrinal proficiency of the elders.

1. First is stressed his firm hold on the truth. This refers to the subjective relation he bears to the truth. Is it loved (2 Thessalonians 2:10)? Is the person solid and unshakable in his grasp of the truth? Has the truth taken hold of him? The opposite would be a person who is never quite sure of where he stands or a person who thinks that doctrinal definition is generally unimportant or a person who has his learning mainly second-hand from books and teachers and not from the Bible itself, so that his hold is weak.
2. Second is stressed the nature of the word he holds – it is sure and accords with the (apostolic) teaching. This would mean a good grasp of Biblical truth, especially the doctrine of the apostles. The Bible, not other books, must be the foundation of doctrinal knowledge, though other books are very helpful and inspirational.
3. Third is stressed the positive role of teaching this healthy doctrine to others. A person who says, "I know what it means but I can't explain it so others can understand it" would probably not make a suitable elder. The church is in great need of being led by men who not only know, but can explain, Biblical doctrine. They are responsible for the spread of the truth in the church and from the church.
4. Finally is stressed the negative role of confuting doctrinal error. So the elders must be fairly incisive observers of the thought-world of the day. They need to be able to spot the encroachments of secular principles and assumptions. And they need to be able to correct opponents and straying saints (2 Timothy 2:24-26; James 5:19-20).

These Lists of Qualifications Are Not Exhaustive

These lists in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9 are not intended to be exhaustive. We can tell that from the fact that they are not the same. Titus mentions piety (hosion) and justice (dikaion) and sexual self-control (egkrate), but 1 Timothy does not mention these in particular. On the other hand, 1 Timothy mentions that the elder must not be a new convert (neophuton), and that he must be respectable (kosmion) which Titus does not mention specifically.

Neither mentions specifically prayer. Neither forbids the elders explicitly from being robbers or liars or gossips, etc. The point is that the lists are not exhaustive. Paul takes numerous virtues for granted and gives these as examples. There may be other expectations implied in the ones listed. We

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## Appendix 1: Baptist Church Government Illustrated From Historic Baptist Confessions

The purpose of this historical survey is to show that, from their earliest beginnings Baptists, have held to the view that the two ongoing church offices presented in the New Testament are elders and deacons, and that only in more modern developments has the eldership largely disappeared from Baptist churches.

A Short confession of Faith in Twenty Articles by John Smyth, 1609

### Article 16

The ministers of the church are, not only bishops (episcopos), to whom the power is given of dispensing both the Word and the sacraments, but also deacons, men and widows, who attend to the affairs of the poor and sick brethren.

A Declaration of Faith of English People Remaining at Amsterdam, 1611

### Article 20

That the Officers of every Church or congregation are either Elders, who by their office do especially feed the flock concerning their souls, Acts 20:28, 1 Peter 5:2, 3, or Deacons, Men and Women, who by their office relieve the necessities of the poor and impotent brethren concerning their bodies, Acts 6:1-4

Propositions and Conclusions Concerning True Christian Religion, 1612-1614

### Proposition 76

That Christ hath set in His outward church two sorts of ministers: viz., some who are called pastors, teachers or elders, who administer the Word and sacraments, and others who are called Deacons, men and women: whose ministry is, to serve tables and wash the saints' feet (Acts 6:2-4; Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:2, 3, 8, 11; and chap.5).

The London Confession, 1644

### Article 36

That being thus joyned, every Church has power given them from Christ for their better well-being, to choose to themselves meet persons into the office of Pastors,\* Teachers,\* Elders, Deacons, being qualified according to the Word, as those which Christ has appointed in his Testament, for the feeding, governing, serving, and building up of his Church, and that none other have power to impose them, either these or any other.

\* "Pastors" and "Teachers" are omitted in later editions.

Second London Confession, 1677 and 1688

### Article 26, paragraph 8

A particular Church gathered, and completely Organized, according to the mind of Christ, consists of Officers, and Members; And the Officers appointed by Christ to be chosen and set apart by the Church (so called and gathered) for the peculiar Administration of Ordinances, and Execution of power, or Duty which he entrusts them with, or calls them to, to be continued to the end of the World, are Bishops or Elders and Deacons.

Articles of the Baptist Bible Union of America, 1923

### Article 13

We believe that a church of Christ is a congregation of baptized believers . . . that its officers of ordination are pastors, elders and deacons, whose qualifications, claims and duties are clearly defined in the Scriptures.

## Article 6

This church is an autonomous body, operating through democratic processes under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. In such a congregation members are equally responsible. Its Scriptural officers are pastors and deacons.

## A Comment on Tradition

Of course our only infallible rule for faith and practice is not tradition, either old or new, but rather, is the Word of God. Nevertheless, we believe that humility and wisdom commend the careful consideration of what our fathers in the faith have taught and practiced. We are not the sole possessors of truth. And we are very prone to be blind at the very points where perhaps they saw clearly. The least we can say from this historical survey of Baptist Confessions is that it is false to say that the eldership is unbaptistic. On the contrary, the eldership is more baptistic than its absence, and its disappearance is a modern phenomenon that parallels other developments in doctrine that make its disappearance questionable at best.

Note: The story of the presence and then gradual disappearance of multiple elders from the Congregational churches of New England in the 17th and 18th century is told briefly by Iain Murray in Jonathan Edwards, A New Biography, pp. 344-6.

But in the end, the issue is whether the Bible itself teaches a form of church governance including elders and deacons as the two abiding officers of the church.

## Appendix 2: Deacons

## What Did Deacons Do?

The word "deacon" comes from the Greek word diakonos. It usually has the general meaning, "servant," in a broad range of contexts.

For example:

The servants at the wedding who carried the water containers.

John 2:5, 9

His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you."

Christ is called servant to the circumcision.

Romans 15:8

Christ became a servant to the circumcision to show God's truthfulness.

Paul calls himself a servant (=minister) of the new covenant.

2 Corinthians 3:6

God has qualified us to be ministers of a new covenant.

. . .and of the Gospel

Colossians 1:23

Do not shift from the hope of the Gospel. . . of which I Paul became a minister.

. . .and of the church.

Colossians 1:24

See also 1 Corinthians 3:5.

Tychicus is called a faithful servant in the Lord.

Ephesians 6:21

Tychicus the beloved brother and faithful minister of the Lord will tell you everything.

Timothy is called God's servant.

1 Thessalonians 3:2

We sent Timothy, our brother and God's servant in the Gospel of Christ.

The disciples are told that if they would be great they must be servants.

Matthew 20:26

Whoever would be great among you must be your servant.

The Greek noun that describes what a diakonos does is diakonia and has meanings just as broad.

Martha is concerned with too much serving (Luke 10:40).

The widows of the Hellenists were being overlooked in the daily distribution (Acts 6:1).

But three verses later (Acts 6:4) Luke refers to the task of the apostles as the ministry of the Word (see Acts 1:17, 25).

The raising of money for the poor saint was called a ministry (Acts 11:29; 12:25; Romans 15:31; 2 Corinthians 8:4; 9:1, 12, 13).

Paul calls his own assignment from the Lord a ministry (Acts 20:24; 21:19; Romans 11:13; 2 Corinthians 4:1; 5:18).

It is listed in the gifts between prophecy and teaching in Romans 12:7. And "various ministries" is listed between "various gifts" and "various workings" in 1 Corinthians 12:5.

The old covenant is called a ministry of death and condemnation as compared to the new covenant which is called a ministry of the Spirit (2 Corinthians 3:7, 8, 9).

Pastor/teachers are to equip the saints to do the work of the ministry (Ephesians 4:12).

Angels are sent for ministry to saints (Hebrews 1:4).

The verb form of this Greek word is diakoneo. It can also have the broad general meaning of "serve."

Jesus came to serve not be served (Matthew 20:28).

Therefore he taught that a good leader is one who serves (Luke 22:26).

Jesus said that if anyone serves him, the Father would honor him (John 12:26).

Timothy and Erastus are described as those who serve Paul (Acts 19:22).

But there is a strong tendency of this verb (diakoneo) to refer to the kind of serving that involves very practical acts of supplying material needs, and literally table-service.

Angels came to serve Jesus in the wilderness, that is, to tend to his needs (Matthew 4:11).

Peter's mother-in-law rose from her sick bed to serve her guests (Matthew 8:15).

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Martha served from the kitchen (Luke 10:40; John 12:2).

Paul's carrying money to Jerusalem is doing service (Romans 15:25; 2 Corinthians 8:19).

The serving of Onesiphorus was refreshing to Paul. It was mentioned in connection with his not being ashamed of Paul's chains. This probably implies that he visited him in prison (2 Timothy 1:16-18). In the same vein, Paul wants to keep Onesimus, the converted slave, with him so he can serve him in prison (Philemon 13).

The saints of Hebrews are described as serving the saints in love (6:10), and later they are described as visiting saints in prison (10:32-34).

Speaking and serving are treated separately by Peter (1 Peter 4:10-11), as though there may have been a word ministry (perhaps the teaching of elders) and a non-word-serving ministry (perhaps the service of deacons).

Matthew 25:44 may be the best summary in the New Testament of the kinds of activities done by one who "serves."

Then they also will answer, "Lord, when did we see thee hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not serve thee?"

### Summary

The basic meaning of the diakon-word group is apparently practical, active, helping with respect to the basic necessities of life.

From Matthew 25:44, we could include dire needs arising from hunger, thirst, alienation, nakedness, sickness, imprisonment. That would imply that the basic notion of "serving" in the sense of being a deacon is to help meet needs for:

- Food
- Water
- Welcome (acceptance and hospitality)
- Clothing
- Health
- Whatever needs arise from emergencies and unusual pressures and stress (like imprisonment)

Probably the term is applied to ministries of the Word and apostleship and Christ's own ministry to show that they are to be done humbly and in compassion and for the benefit of others. But when Jesus says in Luke 22:26 that the leader should become as one who serves (as he did!), he does not mean that there are no differences between a leader and a non-leader. He means that the lowliness that is natural for a table waiter should also characterize those in positions of leadership. So even though the highest offices (apostle, for example) are called "ministry" or "service," this does not mean that there is no office in the church with a special focus on practical and more material needs.

It appears that the deacons in 1 Timothy 3:8-13 and Philippians 1:1 were that kind of officers.

### Were Women Deacons?

Probably yes. There are four observations that incline me to think that this office was held by both men and women.

1. The Greek word for deacon can be masculine or feminine in the same form. So the word itself does not settle the issue.
2. In the middle of the qualifications for deacons in 1 Timothy 3:8-13 Paul says, "The women likewise must be serious, no slanderers, but temperate, faithful in all things." This could be the wives of the deacons, but could also be the women deacons. The latter is suggested by the fact that no reference to women is made in 3:1-7. Since women were not candidates for the eldership in the New Testament (1 Timothy 2:12-13) because of its authoritative function in teaching and oversight, the absence of the reference to women in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 would be expected. But this confirms the probability that the reference to women in 3:11 is to women deacons, not merely to wives of deacons.
3. The deacons were distinguished from the elders in that they were not the governing body in the church nor were they charged with the

4. In Romans 16:1, Phoebe is very probably called a deacon. "I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon(ess) of the church at Cenchreae, that you may receive her in the Lord as befits the saints, and help her in whatever she may require from you, for she has been a helper of many and of myself as well."

It appears then that the role of deacon is of such a nature that nothing stands in the way of women's full participation in it. Within the deaconate itself, the way the men and women relate to each other would be guided by the sense of appropriateness, growing out of the Biblical teaching of male and female complementarity.

#### Qualifications of Deacons (1 Timothy 3:8-13)

3:8 "Deacons likewise must be serious. . ."

Serious, Earnest, Honorable (semnous)

The idea of "serious" by itself seems inadequate. This would be an unsatisfactory translation of Philippians 4:8: "Think on these things . . . whatever is true, whatever is honorable. . . " "Serious" is morally neutral. But this word isn't. The person should not be flippant, but earnest about life.

3:8 ". . . not double-tongued. . ."

Genuine, Authentic (me dilogous)

"Double-tongued" implies saying one thing to be true here and another thing to be true there, according to what people would think. So it implies a lack of love for truth and a fear of human disapproval and a general instability.

3:8 ". . . not addicted to much wine. . ."

Temperate (me oino pollo prosechontas)

Prosechontas implies "to concern oneself with" or "to give attention to" or "to turn one's mind toward." So there should be a freedom from drink, and presumably from all substances that would be harmful if taken too freely.

The picture is of a person under control, not carried along 1) by the opinions of others (genuine, authentic) or 2) by his appetites (temperate) or 3) by levity (serious, honorable).

3:8 ". . . not greedy for gain. . ."

Content with simplicity (me aischrokerdeis)

This word is used in Titus 1:7 of elders and in adverb form of elders in 1 Peter 5:2. It corresponds to aphilargon (not a lover of money) in 1 Timothy 3:3.

It seems to be a fourth dimension of freedom (see "temperate" above for the first three), freedom from the pull of money. Other motives should drive him. There should be a contentment in God and a heavenly mindedness.

3:9 "...having the mystery of the faith in a clean conscience."

#### Deep Convictions Concerning The Faith

The issue of conscience does not appear to be the general issue as in 1:5; 4:2; 2 Timothy 1:3; Titus 1:15. But 1:19 is a very close connection: "holding faith and a good conscience."

It seems that the conscience bears directly on the "faith in good conscience." This inclines me to think that the issue is the sincerity of the faith. Do the deacons really have faith rooted in their hearts or are there sneaking doubts? Are their consciences clear when they make a public profession of their faith?

The test is not specified, but it is to precede the work as deacons. The test would be two-fold: the life they have lived and the assessment of it by those who know them and by some appropriate body of the church.

This would surely apply to all the leaders including elders and deacons.

I see three usual steps in the testing and selection of leaders.

1. The elders would take responsibility to see that the testing and approval is done in accord with Biblical criteria since they are responsible for the general oversight of the church and for the doctrinal purity of the leadership.

2. They may need to involve representatives of the congregation who have a wider knowledge of some people than they do.

3. The congregation itself would be the final test of approval, as they are the last court of appeal in matters of church discipline (Matthew 18:17; 1 Corinthians 5:4). Therefore, all would be approved by the church as the final step of "testing" and "approval."

3:10 ". . . then if they prove themselves blameless let them serve as deacons."

Blameless (anegkleton)

Blameless in the sense that no blame is discovered that has not been settled in a Biblical way. It does not mean perfect, but free from ongoing guilt for some unsettled wrong.

3:11 We will come back to this verse.

3:12 "Let the deacons be the husband of one wife. . ."

One Woman's Husband

(See section on 1 Timothy 3:2)

3:12 ". . . and let them manage their children and their households well."

This would seem to imply some measure of administrative ability, but note well, unlike the case with the elders in 3:5, it does not say, "for if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how can he care for God's church?" General oversight does not appear to be in view as with the "overseers" of 3:1-7.

Rather, the point is probably the general truth that much of a man's true character and gifts come out in the way he leads his family. Something is significantly wrong if the man appears religious and able at church but has a disorderly home.

Again the home is the proving ground for all fitness for leadership in the church.

3:13 "For those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith which is in Christ Jesus."

This is not a qualification but a promise of what comes with the faithful execution of the diaconate.

A good standing for themselves may mean a respectable place in the Christian community or a safe place in the last Day of Judgment as in 6:19.

And great confidence is the subjective boldness that rises with the faithful performance of duty.

(Now back to 3:11 and the question of the women.)

3:11 "Likewise the women. . ."

Is this a reference to the wives of the deacons or a reference to women who were deaconesses? See pages 56-57 for a slightly fuller treatment of this issue.

In Favor of "Deaconesses":

2. The women are not mentioned in verses 1-7 where overseers are being discussed. If wives are in view, you would expect that they would be. But if women as a distinct order are in view, you would not, because the elders are given responsibilities which Paul says women should not assume. So the absence of women among the overseers and the presence of the women among the deacons suggests an order, not wives.
3. Phoebe in [Romans 16:1-2](#) appears to be a deaconess.
4. The deacons are not charged with any duties that in themselves would contradict what Paul says is appropriate for women to do in the church.

In Favor of "Wives":

1. You would expect that they would be called "deaconesses" instead of women or wives.
2. Paul returns to the qualifications of deacons in the next verse, which seems strange if he had begun to discuss a new order.

It seems that the decision will not be made with confidence simply from this text alone but will be made on the basis of the wider considerations of what is appropriate for women to do according to all the New Testament teachings.

3:11 ". . . must be serious. . ."

See above on 3:8, Serious, Earnest, Honorable.

3:11 ". . . no slanderers. . ."

Not Slanderers, Gossips (me diabolous)

A woman who has itchy ears and a loose tongue will not be a good deaconess. Her words must build up. She must keep confidences and not be addicted to scuttlebutt.

3:11 ". . .temperate. . ."

See above on 3:2, Temperate.

3:11 ". . . faithful in all things."

Honest, Trustworthy, Reliable, Loyal (pistas in pasin)

See above on [Titus 1:6](#), Honest.



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