

QUALITIES & QUALIFICATIONS FOR ELDERS AND DEACONS

The phrase “serving the purpose” conveys two essential elements of eldership and deaconry: purpose and servant-hood. It is important, in our study of eldership, that we understand why elders serve.

THE PURPOSE OF SERVANT HOOD

It is hard to imagine anything more important in religion than servant-hood. The Christian heart is essentially the heart of the servant. Anything that promotes servant-hood is good. Anything that diminishes servant-hood is bad. These are true statements. However, it is hard to imagine also that servant-hood could be valuable and important for its own sake. Surely it must have a purpose, and that purpose is what makes servant-hood essential.

Would we really appreciate the selfless servant-hood of Jesus, “*who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made himself of no reputation, taking the form of a servant,*” if there were no point or purpose in it? (**Phil 2:5-8**). We honor his acts, because his purpose in being “*obedient to the point of death, even death on the cross,*” was that he might provide us with the means of salvation, which we could not provide for ourselves. He served with a purpose. He served as Savior. That made his service noble (**1 Pet. 2:21-25**).

PURPOSE OF ELDERS AND DEACONS

Elders and deacons are servants with a purpose. The church needs people in charge. Without people in charge the church lacks direction, it is frustrated by confusion.

The church in Jerusalem needed deacons (servants) to take charge of the ministry (service) to its poor widows (**Acts 6:1-7**).

- When that necessary leadership was neglected, “there arose a murmuring.”
- When that necessary leadership was respected, “the word of God spread and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly.”

The church in Ephesus needed elders “*to shepherd the church of God.*” These shepherds were charged to “*take heed to yourselves and to all the flock over which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers.*” (**Acts 20:17, 28-32**).

- When that necessary leadership was neglected, “savage wolves” came in “not sparing the flock”.
- When that necessary leadership was respected, they were built up by the word of God’s grace and given “an inheritance among all those who are sanctified”.

PURPOSING TO SERVE

In **1 Peter 5:3**, we find three “*not this but that*” statements by which Peter characterizes the nature of the church shepherd:

- **Not serving by compulsion but voluntarily.** A man should desire the office of a bishop, and serve from that desire, not merely out of a reluctant sense of duty. The man who is needed to serve should want to serve.
- **Not after dishonest gain but eagerly.** Elders should be so eager to serve that they don't look to the financial (or any other material/promotional) support as the reason for their service, but simply as the means of making more service possible.
- **Not as lords but as examples.** Elders are not masters who order their slaves around. They are shepherds who nurture and guide, not kings who have dominion over their subjects.

The overseer is a servant. Peter prefaces his three characterizations with the term “*serving as overseers*”. Here is the concept of the servant-leader. The good elder is ten times the servant that he is the overseer. In other words, his emphasis is in ministry not in oversight. Or to put it a better way, his oversight is characterized by ministry. He is a servant first, and an overseer second. This provides us with a simple formula for choosing good elders and deacons. Find a servant first, then, see if he is qualified in other ways to be an elder or deacon.

- Who, in the congregation, serves well?
- Who serves without having to be asked or pushed?
- Who serves whether they get properly paid for it or not?
- Who serves as a leader by example rather than by enforcing burdensome rules?

This find-a-servant-first procedure greatly simplifies and expedites the business of selecting and appointing elders.

PURPOSE OF QUALIFICATIONS

God has regulated the appointment of elders and deacons (**1 Timothy 3, Titus 1**) not to prevent them being appointed, but to make the appointments effective for their purpose. We must approach the scriptural qualifications/qualities for elders and deacons in the light of that purpose. If we lose sight of the purpose, qualities, we get bogged down in the qualifications for their own sake. Sometimes the qualifications for elders and deacons are interpreted and applied in a way that seems to lose sight of their qualities/purpose. Consider the following illustration.

VEGETARIAN RESTAURANT

Imagine you are a strict vegetarian. You are hungry, and you see the sign on a café proclaiming “VEGETARIAN MEALS”. When you read the menu, indeed there is a delightful array of vegetarian meals some of which make your mouth water. However, at the bottom of the menu, you see a section labeled “Non-vegetarian Dishes.” You could storm away from the restaurant angry, muttering, “It claims to be a vegetarian restaurant yet it has the nerve to serve up fried chicken!” But you sit down to eat thinking, “This restaurant will serve my purpose very well.”

BALD TIRES

On the other hand, imagine that the tires on your motor car do not have sufficient tread. All four tires are getting bald. If you braked hard on the wet roads, perhaps the grip would not be sufficient. If a police inspection caught you in its net, perhaps your vehicle would be declared un-roadworthy. How many tires would you want to be safe and roadworthy? All of them of course. Nothing less would serve the purpose of making the car safe and legal.

TAKE SPECIAL NOTE→ Certain qualifications of elders and deacons are sometimes treated in the manner of the bald tires rather than in the manner of the vegetarian restaurant. In our study we will look (for example) at the qualification/quality that an elder must have faithful children. How will we

apply this? Will we insist that all his children be faithful like we insist that all tires be roadworthy? Or will we say that not all his children have to be faithful just like not all the restaurant meals had to be vegetarian? Obviously the issue is decided according to purpose. When we discover the purpose for an elder having faithful children, then we will know whether all of them must be faithful. The same principle of purpose helps us decide other qualification/quality issues as well.

GOD'S PURPOSE

On the day of Pentecost, Peter said that Christ was delivered up *"by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God"* for crucifixion (**Acts 2:23**). Paul speaks of *"the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus"* (**Eph 3:11**). Paul goes on in this vein to speak of the surpassing *"love of Christ"* and then concludes, *"to God be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever"* (**Eph 3:11-21**).

Churches of Christ, whether in New Testament times or USA today, are instruments of God's purpose in Christ. Everything the church does is centered upon and reflects that purpose of God. As Christ served us at Calvary, so we serve him. The service of elders and deacons is identified with God's great purpose in Jesus Christ. So long as we remember that, we will be more likely to appoint the eldership and deacons God wants.

The Lord has laid down certain qualifications/qualities for elders and deacons. These requirements must be met. We say "must" because that word appears in both **1 Timothy 3:2** and **Titus 1:7**, where the qualifications are laid down.

For the technically minded, in the Greek, we find the impersonal verb *dei*, which means "it is required". The qualifications/qualities of elders and deacons given by God are not just suggestions or guidelines (in the looser sense). They are requirements. Anyone who is appointed as an elder or deacon must meet these requirements.

In one way, the Lord's requirements simplify our selection task. We can immediately eliminate many men from the list of candidates. For example, unmarried or childless men should not be considered for appointment because those appointed "must" be husbands and fathers (**1 Tim. 3:2, 4:12**).

QUALIFICATIONS/QUALITIES: WHAT IS A MUST?

Before we even begin this discussion please understand that nowhere in the scriptures/biblical text concerning the selection of Elders or Deacons is the word "qualification" found. It is an assumed word that conveys an understanding, somewhat limited because of culture and context. However the word "qualify" is used in the context of these roles and conveys a more accurate understanding of what God requires for the leaders of His church. In the process of elimination, we should be very careful not to make more of a "must" of any requirement than God himself has made of it. Some have made so many "musts" that it is all but impossible to find men qualified. When the criteria are made so strict that men cannot be found who meet them, then the appointment of elders and deacons becomes an ideal instead of a practical proposition. This is not a technique for ensuring a scriptural eldership. It is a technique for preventing and obstructing eldership.

In a church's newsletter I saw a very sensible and succinct statement...

"...members are being unrealistic and unreasonable if they demand perfection of the men willing to serve as elders. For example, all men who are willing to take the oversight must be able to teach sound doctrine (1 Tim.3:2) but some may have more ability to preach and teach than others (1 Tim 5:17). Don't demand that all elders must be "perfect" preachers and teachers. Leave room for the appointed men to grow "on the job". Similarly, the

qualities of temperament listed in the Scriptural requirements for elders will differ in degree and expression between different men. Don't demand "perfection" and "uniformity" in these. There will always be room for men to continue being "built up", after appointment, by continuing to commit themselves to God and to the word of his grace (Acts 20:32).

THE RIGHT BALANCE

The Holy Spirit's directions are quite attainable by Christians, generally, and we should not impose a higher standard than has been divinely set. The general thrust is revealed by the question: "Can he take care of the church of God?"

There is a balance to be observed:

- On one hand, we should treat the "scriptural qualifications" as divine requirements. We have no right to meddle with them or to treat them as mere guidelines.
- On the other hand, we should not interpret these qualifications so strictly and unreasonably that we defeat their very purpose, which is to enable the selection and appointment of elders and deacons in the local congregation.

A BISHOP MUST BE BLAMELESS

"A bishop then must be blameless" (1Tim 3:2)

While it is right for a man to desire the office of a bishop (overseer), and right for the congregation to respect that desire, it is also necessary for the man to qualify for the office he desires. The general requirement is that he be "blameless". That means when his life and habits are scrutinized, he is not caught in any sin, and you may take both ways: He is not caught in sin in the sense that he is discovered or apprehended in some sinful situation or act, nor is he caught in sin in the sense that it has taken hold of him and has him in its grip.

This characteristic should be distinguished from...

- (A) being blameless in the sense that all Christians are blameless, having been forgiven all trespasses through the atonement of Jesus Christ (**Colossians 2:13 & Romans 3:24-25**).
- (B) being blameless in the absolute sense in which Jesus Christ was blameless (**1Peter 1:19**).

On the other hand these different senses in which one may be blameless are connected. The person who is forgiven in baptism goes on to strive to be more Christ like. He admires the perfect example set by our Lord, and diligently applies that example to his life, being conformed to it and transformed by it (**Romans 6:4,6 Romans 8:29; Romans 12:2; 2Peter 1:5-10**).

The overseers should be chosen from among those who have come a long way in this process, and whose lives consistently demonstrate and exemplify the wonderful change wrought in the life of one who has Jesus in his heart. Such a man is not perfect, but he can be respected for his holiness and godliness, and trusted not to lead astray those who follow his lead. He is a man who through an ongoing development shows the qualities of Christ growing within himself. He is such a man that those who follow him will in fact follow Christ, because he himself follows Christ.

TAKE SPECIAL NOTE→ Not every man who is blameless is qualified for eldership, and not every man who is disqualified from eldership is under blame. Disqualification does not necessarily suggest fault or failure on the part of the man found unqualified. For example...

- He might have exercised a legitimate choice, for example to remain unmarried.

- He might have his disqualification imposed upon him by circumstance, for example being childless through infertility.
- He might simply not have had time to mature sufficiently and may be growing well toward eldership but not yet ready for it.

In such cases, there is a lack, but it is a lack without fault. The person still, does not meet the requirements. Although it is no fault of his, he does not have what he “must” have to be appointed a deacon or an elder.

FALSE ACCUSATIONS

It is in the nature of things, that a good man may be falsely accused. Wagging tongues may say he is immoral, a liar, legalistic, self-seeking, or some such unfounded judgment. When people in his congregation hear such rumors and take insufficient steps to set the record straight, they allow the good man’s reputation, and the brotherhood’s respect for him, to be damaged. This leaves him blamed rather than blameless. (the consequences of gossip)

When the scriptures say “blameless” or “not accused” with regard to an elder’s life style, surely they do not refer to unfair blame, false accusations, or mischief, humbug and gossip. Were that the case, Jesus himself would be disqualified!

When the scripture says, “*A bishop must be blameless*”, it does not mean only that he must be a good man, but also that those who falsely accuse him be exposed and silenced. Until that is done, the man is not blameless, however good he might be, and God will certainly be angry with those who do nothing about it. Part of the process of selecting an eldership, might have to include an honest and open enquiry into, and exposure of, any rumor mongering. The people’s attitude may be, “*It’s his problem not mine, and I don’t want to get involved.*” The man, however, is not in a position to defend himself and so he is unjustly disqualified from eldership. The people therefore deprive themselves of an elder.

EXPOSING HUMBUG AND GOSSIP

The Lord says, “*Do not receive an accusation against an elder except from two or three witnesses*” (1 Tim 5:19). This is not a special privilege for an elder. It does not imply that we may treat accusations against non-elders, or prospective elders, more loosely.

If it is good enough for a man who is an elder, it is good enough for a man who is being scrutinized for eldership. And the words, “*do not receive*” are not to be interpreted as “*do nothing about*”. If the members of a man’s congregation cannot find the loyalty in their hearts to clear his name of unjust blame, and thus render him blameless, then he cannot serve them as a shepherd, and that is a shameful thing in the eyes of the Lord.

When we compare the lists in **Titus 1:6-9** and **1 Tim 3:2-14**, we find basically three categories of things that are required in elders and deacons:

- Good character and reputation
- Teaching ability
- Family leadership

We have already discussed the first item when we looked at “a bishop must be blameless”.

MEN OF CHARACTER

We find Paul to be entirely consistent in the kind of man he describes to Timothy, and the kind of man he describes to Titus. The two descriptions don’t match word-for-word, because they are not intended to be complete and exacting descriptions, but merely sufficient to indicate the nature and character

(QUALITIES) of the right man. He is a man who is free from the common bad habits, such as losing one's temper, drug abuse, greed for money, arrogance and insensitively, silly and irresponsible behavior etc.

TAKE SPECIAL NOTE→ It would be foolish to become legalistic about these things, since they are written by Paul as a sort of thumbnail sketch. We are expected to use our brains and good sense, and to exercise judgment. For example, a man might be “not given to wine” but may have an addiction to tobacco or marijuana. We could hardly say that he qualifies for eldership because he is “not given to wine”. Paul may have specified wine, but surely we should make a general application to any addiction that demonstrates intemperance and lack of self-control. Another example is that of being “*not quick tempered or violent*”. Now some men are anything but quick tempered, quarrelsome, or violent. Instead they are sullen, sulky, and incommunicative. You don't get a bloody nose or a black eye from them, but you certainly get hurt feelings and become demoralized. Would we be so foolish to say that because Paul specifies the hot-tempered individual as unsuitable, but fails to mention the other extreme, the stone cold individual, therefore we can make the latter sort of man an elder or deacon? If a man has any serious fault or flaw in his character, that should disqualify him as an elder or deacon whether Paul actually mentions that particular thing or not. For example a man might be obsessive/addictive about stamp collecting, and spends an inordinate amount of time on it, time which he could use to do something more useful. Paul makes no mention of obsessions. Yet common sense should tell us that this type of man is not a suitable person, although by a legalistic interpretation of “the qualifications” he may “qualify”.

TEDIOUS DEFINITIONS

Occasionally some well-meaning author will take us laboriously through scholarly word studies of the elder and deacon qualifications, item by item. For example, we will be told that “temperate” translates *enkratees* from *kratos* meaning strength or rule, prefixed with the preposition *en* meaning in, and therefore signifying inner strength or self-control. Then some “boffin” will be cited just to show that the person benefiting us with this exquisite insight is in fine scholarly company, and isn't talking through his hat. However, does Paul expect us to grind away thus at every word? That would be like me sending you a snapshot of myself so that you could recognize me at the airport, and you examining every grain of the print under a microscope. Paul is sketching a picture sufficient to let us easily recognize the type of man who makes a good elder or deacon. With that guidance we can use our brains not to dissect words and accomplish nothing, but rather to find good shepherds for God's church.

MEN OF THE WORD

The second basic requirement of elders and deacons. **1 Timothy 3:2** says simply, “*Able to teach.*”

We would all realize that this does not mean able to teach arithmetic, or how to play baseball, but able to teach the gospel by which the church lives. We notice that the requirement “able to teach” (**1Tim 3:2**) is given a more detailed description in **1 Timothy 3:9 & Titus 1:9**. There Paul says, “*Holding to the mystery of the faith...holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, that he may be able both to exhort in sound doctrine, and to refute those who contradict.*”

NOTE The terms Paul uses, namely, “mystery, faith, word, doctrine”, belong to a set of relatively interchangeable terms referring to the gospel of Christ. See for example **Romans 16:25-26**.

This requirement for elders and deacons, that they be men of the word, has four aspects...

1. Being examples of the word in daily conduct
2. Defenders of the word refuting those who contradict
3. Wise in applying the word to the local circumstances
4. Skilled at imparting their understanding of the word to others

DEACONS AS TEACHERS

It stands to reason that deacons do not need to be able to teach to the same degree as do elders or evangelists. From **Acts 6:3-4** we can see that the primary task of the deacons was to take charge of a matter that was distracting others from “the ministry of the word”. So it follows that the ministry of the word is not the deacon’s primary task. However, if we look closely at (**Acts 6**), we can see that deacons do need some ability to teach.

According to **Acts 6**, the appointment of deacons was precipitated when “*there arose a murmuring*” because some were being “*neglected*” and this had a Jews-versus-Greeks element to it (**Acts 6:1**). The deacons had to deal with that situation. What sort of situation was it? Was it a practical problem, a spiritual problem, or a combination? Obviously it was a combination. We should not imagine that the deacons rectified the situation just by sitting behind a table handing out coins, or running around serving soup to ladies.

Certainly, they would ensure this task was done properly, but they would also need to correct the bad attitudes that had contributed to the problem in the first place. In short, as they served and took charge, they would need to give people sound teaching on such things as family responsibility, Jew-Gentile relationships, contentment, tolerance, helpfulness, humility, and so forth.

That’s why the congregation chose, for example, “*Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit*” (**Acts 6:5**). Further down we read that some opponents of the church “*were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which Stephen spoke*” (**Acts 6:8**). Stephen gave his life for the gospel he taught. This deacon became a great Christian hero. Another of the deacons was Philip. Of him we read, “*Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ to them*” (**Acts 8:5**). So, you can see, these deacons were men of the word and able to teach, and that was one of the reasons they were chosen.

MEN OF MATURITY

Paul makes it clear that no man should be appointed who is “*a novice*” (**1 Tim 3:6**). We certainly must not rush men into leadership who don’t have the maturity and experience to handle it. Of course, no man will be perfect, however those chosen as elders and deacons should have attained “*a good degree, and great confidence in the faith*” (**1 Tim 3:13**). On the other hand, room must be allowed for growth and improvement, noting that Paul says, “*Having served*” they obtain this good degree in the faith. Men will gain strength from the experience of serving, so we should not require perfection, nor even the height of excellence, as a prerequisite.

Just as there is a danger of appointing novices if we don’t take the qualifications seriously, so there is the opposite danger of treating as novices men of long standing and commendable faithfulness. They may not be Africa’s top teachers and preachers, but they may have a good measure of the four aspects listed earlier: they are good examples, defenders of the faith, wise for applying God’s word, skilled at imparting the word. This should be recognized by the congregation. If church shepherds and servants had to be perfect in every point, Jesus would be the only church shepherd rather than the Chief Shepherd of many shepherds.

THE GIANTS

Stephen and Philip were not just men of the Word, they were giants. The Jerusalem congregation had thousands of members, so it was understandable that men of a very high standard would emerge from the selection process. In a small flock, we cannot expect the same standard, and we have to understand that qualified men are not all equally qualified. We must look for a reasonable degree of maturity, not for an impossible degree. Men who are “*able to teach*” are not equally able. Some will be more able than others. We should encourage our elders and deacons to emulate men like Stephen. However we should not require a man to be Stephen’s equal before we appoint him as a deacon or

elder. The point we have made may be summarized thus: **Let our elders and deacons be men of character, men of the word, men of maturity, and let us be reasonable and realistic when judging men as such.**

The third item in that list. Paul says that an elder must have “*faithful children not accused of dissipation or insubordination*” (**Tit 1:5-6**). Writing to Timothy, Paul states this requirement as follows: “*One who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity*” (**1 Tim 3:4-5**). He indicates the same requirements for deacons, “*good managers of their children and their own households*” (**1 Tim 3:12**).

MUST ELDERS AND DEACONS HAVE CHILDREN?

The aspect we look at first, is whether the requirement to have faithful children would disqualify a man with no children at all. We begin with a statement that seems almost ridiculously obvious: If a job advertisement says that applicants must have reliable transport, it’s no use applying for that job if you don’t have a vehicle at all. Likewise, if an elder or deacon must have faithful children, then it’s no use nominating a man for the job who has no children at all. That sounds good and logical, but let me be the devil’s advocate and give you another analogy, this time with a twist.

THE DOG IN THE PARK

Imagine that a man comes to the gate of a park, and desires to go inside for a walk. However, there is a notice, which states, “Persons Entering This Park Must Have Their Dogs On a Leash”. “Well that’s great”, thinks the man. “Here I am, just about to enjoy a walk in the park, and I have not got a dog anywhere, let alone a leash to put him on. Since I cannot obey this rule, I am prohibited from walking in this park!” Common sense tells you that this man is not thinking straight. Any sensible person can see that the man does not need to have a dog. He is allowed to walk in the park dog less. The sign just means that if he happens to have any dogs with him, then they must be on leash. This man, who has no dog, is nevertheless qualified to walk in the park.

You can see, no doubt, where that is leading: Some would say that the requirement to have faithful children applies to men who have children. When a man has no children, the question of children’s faithfulness does not arise. The lack of children does not prohibit a man from being an elder, any more than the lack of a dog prohibited the man from walking in the park.

THE FALLACY EXPLAINED

The conflicting analogy of the dog in the park creates a fallacy in our thinking, because we have not asked what the requirement contributes to the task. Are people with dog’s better park-walkers than people without? Are people ill equipped to walk in a park if they lack a dog? Not at all. People with dogs just need to ensure that the dogs are under control.

Now, what is Paul thinking?

- (A) That children might be a problem for elders and deacons, so he will eliminate from eldership and deaconry any men with children unless the children are under control (just as the park notice eliminated people with dogs unless they were under control **OR**
- (B) That having faithful children contributes a benefit to the task of eldership and deaconry without which benefit a man would be ill equipped to do the task (like having reliable transport equips one to do the advertised job)

Obviously Paul is thinking along the lines of (B) not (A). So the dog in the park story is not analogous to a situation where a requirement is a qualification for the task and contributes to a person’s worthiness for the task.

WHY HAVE FAITHFUL CHILDREN?

Why does Paul make it a particular requirement to have faithful children? How does it contribute to their suitability? The answer ought to be obvious. However, Paul makes sure we do not miss the point: *“if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?” (1 Tim 3:5)*. That’s why an elder is to have faithful children.

We observe three clear facts:

- 1) A man demonstrates that he would be a good elder in the church family, by demonstrating that he can lead his own family, particularly the children.
- 2) If a man’s children are unfaithful with a reputation for dissipation and rebellion, then that man is not capable of taking charge of the church.
- 3) A man who has no children cannot provide the church with that kind of evidence and experience. He cannot produce the necessary qualification/qualities in a sufficient degree.

JOB EXPERIENCE

Imagine that a man applies for a position as a salesperson. The interviewer asks, “Have you had any experience of selling in this field?” The answer is no. “Have you a sales record in some other field perhaps?” The answer is yes. “In that case we can consider you for the position.” The man’s selling record gives the prospective employer a good indication of how this man would do as a salesperson in the new field. Furthermore, that previous experience may be considered as preparing the man, in part, for the new position. In the same way, a man’s leadership experience as a husband, father, and head of a household, qualifies him for leadership in the church.

IS ONE CHILD SUFFICIENT?

We found no basis for appointing a man without children as an elder or deacon, but now, we ask another question, just one step up from that: What about one child? This question concerns what some call “the plurality of children.” We have established that a man must have children. But would a man with only one child come under that category?

THE CASE FOR “NO”

One line of argument says no, he would not qualify, because the scripture says “children” (plural) and not “child” (singular). This statement may be used as ammunition for an argument which runs something like this: *Paul told Titus to appoint “elders” (plural) in every church (Titus 1:5). Paul and Barnabas appointed “elders” (plural) in every church (Acts 14:23)*. This has always been taken to indicate a plurality of elders in each church, not as accommodative language which would include one-elder churches. Why then, when we read that an elder must have “faithful children” (plural) do we use a different rule, and say that the term accommodates a one-child elder? Shouldn’t we be consistent in both cases? Such an argument is known as *a priori*, an **“if-this-then-that”** argument. To be fair and reasonable, an if-this-then-that argument must link things that are similar in all critical points. For example, Paul’s argument **“if a bad father then a bad elder”** is a fair and reasonable *a priori* argument, because in the critical factors the two roles are similar. They do have differences of course. For example the children are ruled by one father but the church is ruled by an eldership team. Yet that is not a critical difference. It does not invalidate the demonstration of leadership in the household as a prior basis for recommending the man for leadership in the church.

The argument, “If elders (plural) does not accommodate the singular, nor does children (plural)”, is a valid argument provided the two cases agree in all critical points. The argument for NO rests on that. The argument for NO also uses the “safe side” principle. If there is any doubt as to whether having one

faithful child is sufficient to qualify, then let's be on the safe side (says the NO argument) and insist on a plurality of faithful children. Then we know we are right.

THE CASE FOR "YES"

Some would point out that **Titus 1:6 & 1 Timothy 3:4** (which have the term "children") are the only passages available on the subject of plurality of elder's children. There is no other material which enables us to qualify, modify, or clarify the word "children" in these verses. Therefore it accommodates the singular. On the other hand "elders in every church" does not accommodate the singular because several passages are available to show otherwise. That is a critical difference. So one is not an *a priori* argument for the other. **Let me put that more simply:** Suppose you ask a man, "Do you have children?" and he replies, "Yes, one..."—there is nothing odd about that, is there? You have both understood the term "children" as accommodative of the singular. You have understood the word "children" in context as meaning "one or more children." In the same manner (the argument for YES says) we should take the term "faithful children" as accommodating the singular, because we have no evidence to the contrary. It was different in the case of "elders in every church" because there is plenty of evidence to the contrary. **As for being on the safe side,** the YES argument points out that "the safe side" is a two-edged sword. How can it be "safe" to run the risk of disobeying God's will by refusing to appoint elders and deacons? How can it be "safe" to leave lacking what God wishes fulfilled? To permit a debatable grammatical technicality to lie as an obstacle between the commandment of God and our compliance, may well be regarded as dangerous rather than safe!

The YES argument would agree that a man with ten faithful children certainly provides abundant indication of his suitability, whereas the man with only one child provides the least. The real question is whether the least is sufficient. That is a matter of judgment.

MUST ALL THE CHILDREN BE FAITHFUL:

People not only question whether an elder must have children at all, or whether he must have more than one child. They also quite properly question whether all the children he has must be faithful.

THE CASE FOR "NO"

Imagine a good father. Of his three children, two were faithful children. One child however strayed, and became a drug addict. Should this father have been judged a failure or a success in terms of having faithful children? Would he have been qualified for eldership because he had two faithful children? Or would he have been disqualified because he had one unfaithful child? The case for "NO" appeals to the court of common sense. Obviously, this father did not have a perfect record in terms of his children being faithful. However, he did not have a bad record either. Why would it be unscriptural for him to be appointed an elder, if, on balance, people gave him credit for the faithfulness of two children, and did not hold his other child's unfaithfulness against him as any fault of his? Common sense (says the case for NO) tells us that, where people respect a man for the way in which he rears his children, in spite of the fact they know of a black sheep in the family, then such a man may be regarded as "*having faithful children*" to a sufficient degree to be qualified for eldership.

The case for "NO" adds this thought: A man might be weak, irresponsible, and a poor influence upon his children. Fortunately however, the mother might exert a good influence and discipline so that in spite of the weak father, the children are all faithful. They might all obey their mother who tells them, "Do as your father says!" In a legalistic and literal sense, this man has faithful children. Yet our own common sense tells us that we could not righteously regard this man as "*having faithful children*" in the spirit of Paul's requirement, because the man cannot take credit for the faithfulness of his children. It would make more sense to appoint his wife as an elder than it would to appoint him! The case for NO cites the instance of a man who might "*know how to rule his own household*" but not all his children respect that, and some may rebel. Their father is not incapable of ruling them. They simply refuse to place

themselves under his control. Surely that is their fault, not his. The age of the children also becomes a questionable point. And if it is not his fault, then why (asks the case for NO) should he be disqualified from eldership because of it?

You will recall when discussing “**The Purpose of Qualifications**” there was an illustration about a vegetarian restaurant that also served some meat dishes yet served the purpose for a hungry vegetarian. The case for “NO” uses this analogy. Not all the dishes in the restaurant had to be vegetarian for the restaurant to serve the purpose. Likewise, not all the children of an elder or deacon need to be faithful for him to serve his purpose.

THE CASE FOR “YES”

You will also recall the analogy of the bald tires. For a vehicle to serve its purpose of safe and legal transport, how many of its tires must be roadworthy? All of them. In the same way (according to the YES case) all the children of an elder or deacon must be faithful. The case for YES will also employ the “safe side” argument. If there is any doubt whether all the children must be faithful, then let’s stay on the safe side and say yes they must. Both the case for YES and the case for NO have to take into account what God wants when he seeks a man “*having faithful children*”. As we have previously seen, God has not left us in doubt. The scripture gives the reason for seeking a man whose children are under his rule. “*For if a man does not know how to rule his own household, how shall he take care of the church of God?*” (1 Tim 3:4-5).

The requirement is that “*a man knows how to rule his own household.*” The evidence for that is seen in the character and behavior of his children: they are “*faithful children not accused of riot or unruly*” (Tit 1:6). The same picture is made of the deacon. He is a man who rules his own children and household well (1 Tim 3:12). The Titus passage itself makes the same point, if we treat “*not accused of wild behavior and disobedience*” as a comment on the faithful children, rather than as a separate characteristic of the elder. So we know why God wants men with faithful children. It demonstrates his ability to rule well. Is this demonstrated only when all his children are faithful? That is a matter of judgment, but I think it’s fair to say that when a man is nominated for office, there is an onus to examine and prove that any unfaithfulness and rebellion among his children is not a reflection on his ability to rule his household well. A man’s time of conversion may also influence your decision – he may have only been converted in mid-life when his children were already almost out of the home and had little opportunity to influence their spiritual life and yet they are good productive, law abiding citizens.

WHAT IS MEANT BY “FAITHFUL”?

This discussion is about a quality for elders that requires them to have “faithful children”. What does that mean? Some translations render the Greek *pistos* in Titus 1:6 as “believing” rather than “faithful”. From these two words, there arise three distinct possibilities regarding the children in Titus 1:6. They could be...

- 1) Children who have believed and been baptized and become faithful members of the church. The word is used in this sense, for example, in Paul’s first letter to Timothy (1 Tim 4:3, 12; 5:16: 6:2).
- 2) Children not old enough to be baptized, but like “*these little ones who believe in me*” whom Jesus referred to in Matthew 18:1-6. Jesus was talking about little children, not older children.
- 3) Children who are faithful in the sense that two of the stewards in the parable of the talents were faithful (Matt 25:21, 23). In this sense it would refer to children who are obedient and under their father’s control, as well as trustworthy and a credit to their father.

The discussion will be in three parts. First the affirmative will be taken by those who hold that faithful children are baptized believers. In the second and third parts, the affirmative will be taken by those who take the second and third views above.

1) CHILDREN WHO ARE BAPTIZED BELIEVERS?

Proposition: Faithful children are only those who are baptized believers.

THE AFFIRMATIVE CASE

In several instances of *pistos*, it is clear from the context that the people described as “believers” or “believing” are in fact baptized believers, that is to say, Christians and members of the church. Here are some examples...

- “those of the circumcision who believe” (**Acts 10:45**)
- “a certain Jewish woman who believed” (**Acts 16:1**)
- “what part has a believer with an infidel?” (**2 Cor. 6:15**)
- “those who believe and know the truth” (**1 Tim 4:3**)
- “be an example to the believers” (**1 Tim 4:12**)
- “any believing man or woman” (**1 Tim 5:16**)
- “those who have believing masters” (**1 Tim 6:2**)

It is the most accepted view among churches of Christ that the word *pistos* in **Titus 1:6** means faithful Christians, baptized believers, just as it does in the above examples.

A distinction should be observed between the qualities for a deacon and the qualities for an elder with regard to their children. An elder must have believing children, that is to say his children must be baptized believers. A deacon’s children, on the other hand, need only to be under control because “believing” is not specified in (**2 Tim 3:12**).

NEGATIVE

- (1) What Paul required for the elders, he required “likewise” for the deacons (**1 Tim 1:8**). Reading the qualities for an elder “*One who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence*” (**1 Tim 3:4**), and then reading the qualities for deacons, “*Ruling their children and their own houses well*” (**1 Tim 3:12**), Timothy would hardly be likely to detect a difference and think that Paul required something of an elder’s children that was not required of a deacon’s children. The emphasis is on the quality of the fathers attitude.
- (2) We would expect the instructions given to Titus regarding an elder’s children to match those given Timothy. The standard interpretation “compares scripture with scripture” so one passage clarifies the other. However it does so in a manner of filling in gaps rather than eliminating differences. That would mean Timothy and Titus each had inadequate lists of qualities, so each would need to read the other’s list to get the full story.
- (3) Paul did not use the word *pistos* in the qualifications he gave Timothy. There is nothing in the qualifications Paul gave Timothy that would tell Timothy that an elder’s children had to be baptized believers.

POSITIVE

- (1) The word “likewise” does not mean exactly and altogether identical. It just means “in a similar way”.
- (2) The list given to Titus says nothing of deacons, because Titus was to “*appoint elders in every city*” in Crete (**Titus 1:5**). He was not asked to appoint any deacons, so there was no need for directions. Furthermore, there seems to be an assumption that Timothy and Titus had never discussed the role of elders and deacons with Paul, and that all they each knew about the matter was what Paul wrote to them individually in the letters we have. This is a most unnatural assumption.

- (3) Although Paul did not use the word “believing” or “faithful” in his letter to Timothy, he did require “reverence” of the children. An elder was to be “*one who rules his own house well, have his children in submission with all reverence*”. (1 Tim 3:4). The word reverence necessarily implies baptized believers and necessarily excludes the un-baptized child, since “reverence” is religious worship of the sort that only baptized persons are capable of. This is emphasized by the requirement for “all reverence”. Even if little children are capable of some degree of reverence that is not good enough. The verse requires “all reverence”, the full measure of religious worship. Only mature children who have been added to the church are capable of this. Timothy, being aware of these things, would have excluded men from the eldership whose children are not baptized believers.

In relation to the term “reverence”...

The phrase “with all reverence” refers to the manner in which the father keeps his children in submission so the reverence should not be attributed to the children but to the father. Again a further indication of the “attitudes” in the spotlight.

- The word for “reverence” in Greek, is the noun *semnotees*. It appears only three times in the New Testament. Its cousin, the adjective *semnos*, appears only four times. These two words are derived from the verb *sebomai*. This occurs only ten times. This is too small a sample from which to make a critical or conclusive word study. So there is no proof that “reverence” means religious worship.
- One occurrence of *semnos* attributes it to “things” (Phil 4:8). “*Whatsoever things are noble...*” The word for “noble” or “honorable” is *semnos*. Things can be honorable, noble, venerable, worthy of reverence and respect. But things cannot be religiously worshipped. That would be idolatry. Thus, the argument that *semnotees* must mean “religious worship” is false.
- Even allowing that reverence means religious worship, little children are just as capable of religious worship as they are of love. A child’s love is immature, yet a child can be all loving. A child’s joy is immature, yet a child can be truly happy. A child’s curiosity is immature, yet a child can be consumed by curiosity. A child’s determination is immature, yet we all know how extremely determined a child can be. Likewise, a child’s worship is immature, yet when a little child prays to the heavenly Father at bedtime, or joins in the family worship listening to Bible stories and singing religious songs, surely God accepts that worship as “all reverence” from the child.

2) LITTLE ONES WHO BELIEVE IN JESUS?

The proposition: Faithful children include little ones who believe in Jesus.

THE AFFIRMATIVE CASE

Jesus spoke of “these little ones who believe in me” (Matt 18:6). These were little children not yet grown up (Matt 18:1-6). If a man’s children are “little ones who believe” surely he has “believing children”. If we insist that “faithful children” can refer only to baptized believers, then we are saying that little children who believe in Jesus are unfaithful.

Faith is a process. It starts with a child-like faith. It develops as a growing recognition of sin and a maturing consideration of the gospel. In the fullness of time it culminates in the obedience of faith. To find a man with “believing children” we simply look for children who appear to be developing well along that path of faith. We look for a man who is bringing up his children “*in the nurture and admonition of the Lord*” (Eph. 6:1-4).

When a child has an unquestioning belief in Jesus, that belief is a credit to someone, usually the parents. To instill such a belief in a child's mind is a good work unequalled. This has a corollary. If anyone takes away that belief from a child, "*it were better for that person if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were drowned in the depth of the seas*" (**Matt 18:6**). If we can understand (**Matt. 18:6**) as covering children not yet old enough for baptism, why can we not do the same with **Titus 1:6 & 1 Timothy 3:4**?

THE NEGATIVE REPLIES

Whilst little children being brought up in a Christian household are invariably believers in Jesus and safe in his arms, there is going to be a time when someone will cause them to stumble, and they enter into sin. What status do they have at that stage? Are they little ones who believe or condemned sinners needing to obey the gospel? Surely they are the latter. Of course we would not say that "little children who believe" are unfaithful. However it is next to certain they are going to become so. When they do, you can hardly describe that as part of the process of developing faith! It is becoming unfaithful. These children have become like the prodigal son. Now if we appoint an elder on the basis that he has little ones who believe, what happens when, later, they become sinners? Do we stand the elder down from office until his children are baptized? This hiatus is truly a hole in the argument for taking "faithful children" to mean "little children who believe".

3) CHILDREN WHO ARE OBEDIENT, TRUSTWORTHY?

The proposition: Faithful children are those who respect and obey their father.

THE AFFIRMATIVE CASE

A few verses down from the phrase "*faithful children*" (**Tit 1:6**), we find the phrase "*the faithful word*" (**Tit 1:9**). This is the same Greek word (*pistos*) and it obviously means trustworthy and reliable in **v. 9**, why not in **v. 6**? Now our opponents may reply that "*the faithful word*" means the Christian word, therefore "*faithful children*" must mean Christian children. This sounds all right, but the two things are not parallel. A Christian child is a baptized and believing child. But the Christian word is not a baptized and believing word. Obviously, the word "Christian" has subtly different senses, confounding instead of clarifying the matter.

In the parable of the talents, two of the slaves were called "faithful" (**Matt 25:21**) meaning obedient, trustworthy, respectful. Calling the elder's children faithful in this sense makes the qualities given to Titus and Timothy consistent.

THE NEGATIVE REPLIES

- In an attempt to find men qualified for eldership, we should not weaken the qualifications God has laid down.
- At the outset of this discussion, we listed several scriptures where the word "faithful" refers to baptized believers. We remain unconvinced that it should mean anything less in **Titus 1:6**.
- The affirmative's watered down version of "faithful children" is at odds with the alternative translation that requires an elder to have "believing children".
- The parable of the talents may use the term "faithful" to mean obedient etc., however the parable illustrates a person's relationship with Christ. Our opponents want to apply the meaning of one isolated word in the parable to the elder's children. We want to apply the meaning of the whole parable. If an elder's children are not obedient to Christ, then he should not be an elder.

- An elder in the church is a shepherd of souls (**Heb 13:17**). His charge is to guard and guide them to eternal life. Unless he has done this already for the children of his own household, he is not qualified to do it for God's household. Merely having his children obedient to himself doesn't constitute grounds for making him an elder. He needs to have led his children to be obedient to Christ. After all, that is the kind of leadership that he will exercise in the church.

ONE WOMAN'S MAN

This discussion will include the passages that indicate that an elder or deacon must ... **1 Tim 3:2**
"husband of one wife"

The Greek New Testament does not have a special word for husband and wife. The word for man and for husband is the same word. The word for woman and for wife is the same word. So the scripture is telling us that the man of the quality to be a church shepherd should be **"Imias gunaikos aneer"**
Note – literally "one woman's man."

Now we have to use some common sense here. Any good man will not be one woman's man. He will be his mother's man. He will be his daughter's man. He will be his sister's man. He will be his boss's man, his friend's man, his neighbor's man, and so forth. To any woman with whom he has some special relationship and toward whom he is responsible and supportive, he will be her man and rightly so. A woman says, "My lawns need mowing, I must ring up my man to come and do them". We know she just means the man she gets to do her gardening. Lots of other customers call him their man in the same sense. But we all know that there is a special sense in which only one woman in all the world can claim him as her man. That woman is his wife. If he is a devoted husband to her, and in that special relationship is absolutely and exclusively hers, then he is truly "one woman's man" and it is this husband-wife relationship that Paul plainly has in mind.

Before any man is made a shepherd of the church, he must have shown himself to be a good husband to his wife. Some men are not good husbands. Some men don't give their woman sufficient companionship. Some men don't share their lives with their wives as a partnership. Some men are more devoted to their career than to their wives. Some men pay more attention to other women than to their wives. Some men don't give their wives freedom to be themselves or credit when they succeed. Some men spoil their wives. Some men dominate their wives. Some men forsake their wives. Some men abuse and demoralize their wives. Some men treat their wives as a chattel instead of as a valuable being.

In fact, some men are just plain disgusting husbands, and quite a few of them I dare say may claim to be Christians. Such a man is not "one woman's man" in any sense that matters. Such a man does not possess the qualities to be an elder.

TAKE SPECIAL NOTE→ When considering the qualifications, "the husband of one wife" we seem to focus on the "one wife" part and think nothing of the "husband" part. The man needs to be a real husband and a real man. A real man looks after his wife and devotes himself to her just as the husbandman looks after the vineyard. This aspect of the relationship is at least as important as the arithmetic in the qualification.

We are all familiar with the Lord's word about this subject. A husband is to love his wife as himself, and with the same character of love with which Christ loved the church and sacrificed himself for her.

(Ephesians 5:25-31). A husband is to live with his wife in an understanding way, and to treat her as a fellow heir of the grace of life **(1 Peter 3:7)**. That is the kind of man any sensible woman looks for as a husband. And that's the kind of man the Lord looks for as an elder: **One woman's man**.

Now let's look at the terms of this qualification negatively. Let's consider a few things which this qualification has been said to mean, but which are nowhere said in the quality itself.

“MARRIED ONLY ONCE”?

When we look at what Paul wrote in Greek for *“husband of one wife”*, we find that he did not use the Greek word for married, nor the word for only, nor the word for once. He used the word for one, the word for woman’s, and the word for man. If Paul meant “married only once” there is no reason why he could not have written exactly that.

There is no support in the Greek for translating what Paul wrote as “married only once”. A man does not have to be “married only once” to qualify as “the husband of one wife.” I am the owner of only one car, yet have owned several cars, at one time I even owned as many as four (old ones) at a time.

Imagine there was a new tax levied on car owners. However, the regulations for this new tax state that any person being “the owner of one car” may claim an exemption. I would be claiming the exemption, wouldn’t I? I qualify as “the owner of one car”.

Consider this hypothetical case. A man might be a very good husband to his first wife, yet she may take ill and die. Such a man may be described as “married only once”. Yet he cannot be described as “the husband of one wife” because he no longer has a wife. If you asked this man, “Are you, sir, the husband of one wife?” he would have to say no he is not. He is not the husband of any wife. Yet if you changed your terminology and asked, “Are you, sir, a man married only once?” he would answer, yes he is certainly a man married only once. This demonstrates that being “the husband of one wife” and being “married only once” are not the same thing, because you can be one while not being the other. Let’s take that a step further. If the same man later married another wife, how many wives would he be the husband of then? Would he be “the husband of two wives”? No, he lost his first wife. He is no longer the husband of her. He is the husband of one wife, the wife of his second marriage, and he belongs to no other wife but her. If we asked this man, “Are you, sir married only once?” he would have to say no he is a man twice married.

These answers are quite the opposite of what he said before, but the point remains the same exactly. Being “the husband of one wife” and being “married only once” are not the same thing, because you can be one while at the same time you are not the other.

“NEVER DIVORCED”?

Along similar lines, Paul does not mention divorce with regard to the qualities of elders. If he was wanting to exclude divorced men from the eldership, he could have plainly said so. A man might be a very good husband to his wife, yet she might reject and divorce him and marry another man. If that divorced man remarried, he would not be the husband of two wives, since his first wife is no longer married to him. He would be the husband of one wife. He would be her man and nobody else’s. She would be his second wife, the wife of his second marriage, but she would be the only wife he has. If we asked this man, “Are you, sir, the husband of one wife?” he would have to affirm that yes he is. But if we asked him, “Are you, sir, a man never divorced?” he would have to say no, he cannot claim to be that. So the two things are different, aren’t they? They must be different, because you can claim to be one when you cannot claim to be the other.

CHANGING GOD’S WORD

I have demonstrated that being “the husband of one wife” is not the same thing as being “married only once” or “never divorced”. We should stick with what the scripture says and not substitute words which change its meaning to something different. Look at this from the practical viewpoint. Had Paul written “married only once”, or “never divorced” he would have excluded from the eldership good men like those in the above examples, who each through no fault of his own lost his first wife, then with every right and reason to do so married another.

“NOT A POLYGAMIST”?

When a man who has several wives is converted to Christ, he is usually expected to undertake three things:

- (1) Not to marry any more wives,
- (2) The restoration to his primary wife of that exclusive and special relationship which is her right,
- (3) To love and nurture his other wives in his own household, making them as it were his sisters and daughters, and giving them the same privileges and honor as he would his sisters and daughters.

A man who lives up to those expectations well, is a good man, and rather than disqualify himself from eldership he may demonstrate extraordinary ability in the very qualities needed of a church shepherd. If we asked such a man, “Are you, sir, the husband of one wife?” he would reply, “it depends what you mean. In one sense I am the husband of several wives, but in another sense I have become the husband of one wife.” That is a very reasonable answer, which we can all understand. Paul did not use the words “not a polygamist”. He could easily have done so, if that is what he meant. But then Paul would have excluded good men who have corrected their ways and become exclusively the husband of one wife.

“NOT A WIDOWER”?

From a simplistic viewpoint, it is clear that a widower is the husband of no wife, since his wife has died. If he is the husband of no wife, how can he qualify as “the husband of one wife?”

It is suggested that one should apply the so called law of exclusion to Paul’s term, “the husband of one wife.” The law of exclusion words are very simply. If you send your child to the store with this instruction, “Get me five pounds of cooking apples”—what do you expect the child to bring home? Five pounds of cooking apples, no more, no less. You don’t have to list all the items that you do not want the child to buy. They are excluded by the terms that describe what the child is told to buy. In the same way, some would argue, “husband of one wife” excludes the husband of no wife, or the husband of two wives. However, if you asked any widower, “Are you, sir, the husband of one wife?” his answer might not be so simple. He might say, “I have been the husband of one wife for many years. Alas, she died recently.” Admittedly, he is saying no, but on the other hand, there is still a lot of yes in his answer. I have heard it said that the Greek verb carries the idea of “having been...” That may be true, but it has no implication of the cessation of what has been. Take for example the phrase, “It is the Sabbath” in **John 5:10**. Here the Greek verb takes the same form as in **Titus 1:6**. The meaning is, “It has been the Sabbath and continues to be the Sabbath.” There is no implication that it has ceased to be the Sabbath. In saying “the husband of one wife” Paul has said nothing about widowers. We include widowers in, or exclude widowers from, Paul’s term only by our own reasoning on a matter which is by no means as clear cut as some might imagine it to be. In the final analysis, whom we consider to be “**the husband of one wife**” will be based not on what Paul did NOT say although that has occupied us at some length in this study. It will be based on what Paul DID say, and we looked at that at the beginning of this discussion.

IMPLEMENTING GOD’S PLAN

In New Testament times and places, it appears that most congregations had Elders and Deacons. When Paul and Barnabas visited churches of Christ, “*they appointed elders for them in every church*” (**Acts 14:23**). When Paul left Titus on the island of Crete, it was “*to set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city*” (**Tit 1:5**).

Churches of Christ today plead for a restoration “of the New Testament order.” In some cases however, they themselves may well need to be “set in order” if they are not complying with the New Testament pattern regarding elders and deacons. It is possible, of course, to be genuinely unable to

conform to God's scheme of church government. However, it is quite another thing to be unwilling or neglectful.

We know the Lord wants more than mere lip-service to apostolic doctrine. He wants obedience and submission to it. This is true of all things pertaining to our faith and its practice, including the appointment of elders and deacons to take charge of the church of God. If anyone resists the implementation of God's plan, isn't that person like the Pharisees who "resisted God's purpose for themselves" (**Luke 7:30**)?

OUR RESPONSIBILITIES REGARDING ELDERS AND DEACONS

- (1) Recognize them. *"We urge you brethren to recognize those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake"* (**1 Thess 5:12-13**). If anyone says, "We do not have qualified men," perhaps that person is refusing to give due recognition to God's men and is unwilling to entrust them with the charge of God's church. The right men will already be serving as deacons and elders to a large degree. Their work should be recognized for what it is. The lack of recognition does not dishonor the men so much as it dishonors God whose will is being rejected.
- (2) Appoint them. *"Brethren select from among you seven men of reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business"* (**Acts 6:3**). *"For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders..."* (**Tit 1:5**). What reason is there to delay appointing deacons and elders, once we have recognized their work and character and suitability? No more reason than there is to delay baptizing people once we have recognized their belief and repentance. Delay, in such cases, is disobedience to God. It is critical that we view these roles in the spiritual context of being in a spiritual Kingdom that functions in a physical realm.
- (3) Submit to them. *"Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you"* (**Heb 13:17**). Submission to the leadership of elders and deacons is not for their benefit, but for the benefit of the flock who follows them. Someone may say, "I follow only Jesus, not men." That is commendable. But a refusal to submit to elders appointed at the Lord's command, is rebellion against the Lord, and is not following him at all. He has decreed that certain men be recognized, appointed, and obeyed, and he should not be contradicted.
- (4) For deeper appreciation of the roles of these men consider the qualities listed in (**1 Tim.3 & Titus 1**) in light of the fundamental teaching about the attitudes of "all children of God" **2 Cor.5:17**. This has to be considered in light of the transformational power of the Holy Spirit working within our lives. Consider the gifts of the Holy Spirit (**Gal.5:22-23; 1 Pet.4:10; Ephesians 4**) as they relate to the personalities and attitudes of Spiritual men set apart for Spiritual functions.

TERMS AND TITLES

ELDERS

There are four Greek words rendered by seven English words:-

GREEK	ENGLISH	STRONG	EXAMPLES
ἐπισκοπος <i>episkopos</i>	overseer (bishop)	1985 Cf. 1983-4	Tit 1:7, Phil 1:1, Acts 20:28
ποιμην <i>poimeen</i>	shepherd (pastor)	4166 Cf. 4165-8	Eph. 4:11, 1 Peter 2:25 1 Peter 5:1-4, Acts 20:28
πρεσβυτερος <i>presbuteros</i>	elder (presbyter)	4245 cf 4243-7	1 Peter 5:1, Tit 1:5a Acts 20:17 1 Tim. 4:14
προιστημι <i>proisteemi</i>	VERB to rule	4291	1 Thess. 5:12, 1 Tim 5:17

In the above table, the Greek/English equivalents are given. Some translators, instead of the simpler English, use the words in brackets. Personally, I think the bracketed words (bishop, pastor, presbyter) are cultural less suitable for general use in the church in the USA, because they need too much explaining and can be misleading because of erroneous religious usage.

A comparison of these passages will show that the terms overseer, bishop, shepherd, pastor, elder, presbyter, and ruler, are synonymous and interchangeable. They are simply different words for the same thing. Notice in particular the following points:

- A. Whom Paul calls elders in **Titus 1:5**, he calls overseers/bishops in **1:7**.
- B. **Acts 20:17, 28** and **1 Peter 5:1-4** call elders shepherds/pastors.
- C. According to **1 Timothy 5:17**, elders are to rule.

DEACONS

There is one Greek word rendered by two English words:-

GREEK	ENGLISH	EXAMPLES
<i>diakonos</i>	servant (deacon)	1 Timothy 3:8 Phil 1:1

The word “deacon” is really just the Greek word *diakonos* turned into an English word. As such it is rather meaningless to those who do not know Greek. The word *diakonos*, if actually translated (rather than merely transliterated) means servant. Most of the time it is rendered as servant, and it is questionable whether the use of “deacon” in the few instances is necessary or helpful.

These terms are not titles, as in, “May I introduce Elder McDonald” or “Pastor Smith” or “Deacon Jones”. The words are simply descriptive nouns, as in, “Meet Albert Smith, one of our ministers.” So we may have a minister named Smith, but we should not have a Smith called Minister. We may have a deacon named Jones, but we should not have a Jones called Deacon. Someone will say, “But it’s just like saying ‘Farmer Jones’”. Well if it is just like that, and understood that way, that’s fine. However, the point remains that the terms should not be used as titles of rank.

The terms we have studied are descriptive of services rendered to honor God. We will now look at what those services are. What do elder and deacons do? What is their special service or ministry? What is their role in the church and why do we need them?

THE WORK OF ELDERS

The elders' work may be outlined as follows:

- Shepherd the sheep (**1 Peter 5:1-4**).
- Teach sound doctrine (**Titus 1:9, Hebrew 13:7**)
- Encourage and warn (**1 Thess 5:12-15**)
- Guard (**Heb 13:17, Acts 20:28-32**)
- Nurture to maturity (**Eph 4:12-16**)
- Govern diligently (**Romans 12:8**)

The real charge of elders is simply stated in **Hebrews 13:17**. *"They watch over your souls."* Deacons are responsible for practical matters, but the elders are responsible for spiritual matters. The welfare of our souls is their responsibility (of course it is our own responsibility too!).

The elders set and maintain the spiritual environment of the congregation. They keep an eye on what is taught and how that teaching is exemplified and obeyed. They see that no member is allowed to wander from the truth or lead others away, whether by omission or commission. Of course, elders are not lords or dictators. They don't make church laws, control the budget or building or lay down membership qualifications (other than what the scriptures lay down). They don't decide who will be their fellow elders, evangelists, deacons, and members. The congregation does that using God's directives as the criterion. But elders give the church direction so that it will progress along fruitful lines.

THE WORK OF THE DEACONS

Deacons are simply special servants appointed to take charge of particular works of the church. The church is to be involved in good works both distributive and corporately, that is on a personal level and on a congregational level. To be successful, any worthwhile project needs somebody in charge to whom all the participants can look for leadership and direction. Deacons are able to "help the helpers" to work together harmoniously and efficiently. The first church of Christ sets us an example. The Jerusalem church provided a daily ministry of assistance to its poor widows. This important work fell afoul of the common problem: nobody was in charge. So, the apostles told the congregation to select seven suitable men who could take charge of the tables where the widows were served each day (**Acts 6:1-7**). The Greek words for "daily distribution" in verse 1, and for "serving tables" in verse 2, are *diakoneo* and *diakonia*. These are related to the word for servant, *diakonos* from which the term "deacon" is derived. Deacons are therefore simply servants of the church specially appointed to take charge of certain practical tasks and functions. Other members may, of course, participate and help in various tasks, but when the church appoints deacons, it puts them in charge of those tasks.