

*I am truly grateful for men of GOD in my past who have help mold me into who I am today. This material is adapted from a workbook developed by Dr. Truman Scott back in the late 1990 's. Br. Scott has served as an Elder and preacher in the churches of Christ and as an instructor with the Sunset School of Biblical Teaching. His mentoring me in the late 90's along with several other members of the church have been invaluable to me as I have pursued a desire to help develop "leadership skills" in the lives of brethren. I am grateful for the guidance and prayers of Dr. Ian Fair; Dr. Lynn Anderson, Dr. Ruble Shelly, Bro. Charles Hodge; Bro. Marvin Phillips; Bro. Al Goff and Bro. Bill Hairston all of whom have had a profound contribution to my understanding and convictions about Biblical leadership. Please read with prayerful hearts and a deep desire to serve God.*

*Prayerfully Jeff*

## **BIBLE TERMS, QUALITIES/QUALIFICATIONS FOR ELDERS**

**PRIORITIES OF THE CHURCH CLARIFY THE SHEPHERDS AIM:**

Priorities are primary activates. They are activities or practiced beliefs by which a people want to be known or identified to all others. The usual list (traditional) list of identifying priorities, though valid to test our faithfulness in the body, often differs from list determined by Christ.

- **JOHN 13:34-35** Jesus designated mutual love as a priority identification of believers. The "upper room" model of love spoke of friendship, affection, service, sacrifice and loyalty. The newness of this priority was seen as its intensity, model and purpose and generally seen in opposition to establish Jewish religious practice. (**1 Cor. 13**)
- **JOHN 15:8** Jesus singled out wholeness, issuing from a life relationship with Himself, as a primary concern of the church. Mature, whole, intact people in a life-sustaining relationship with Jesus assures fruitfulness as an evidence of discipleship. (*become perfect as I am...* **Matt. 5:48; Col. 4:12**).
- **JOHN 17:21-23** Jesus designated oneness as a priority of His followers – a oneness of relationship, resources and purpose that characterizes the Father and Son. (**Eph. 4:1-6**).

Leaders and the congregation must see that Jesus made **love, life, and loyalty** (*newness, wholeness, and fullness*) as the priorities of the leadership in the faithful and growing church.

Among churches of Christ is has customarily been the practice, when referring to those qualities describing church leaders, to call them "qualifications." Under normal circumstances the two texts most commonly referenced are **1 Tim. 3:1-7** and **Titus 1:5-9**. Both of these texts have a profound impact on church leaders. It needs to be acknowledged there was a world of difference between the cultures of Ephesus and Crete, not to mention the geographical distance between the two cities.

Looking at the comparative chart of **1 Tim. 3 & Titus 1** the emphasis needs to be placed upon "qualities" and not as "qualifications:", as the later term has a sense of finality and exclusiveness which seems to go beyond what Paul had in mind as he wrote to Timothy and Titus. There are several reasons for this.

1. There are other scriptures that are as important to the credentials and character of shepherds. Scriptures such as **1 Peter 5:1-4**; **Heb. 13:7**; **John 13:1-17** all speak to leaders of the church and should be of equal importance.
2. When Paul wrote to Timothy, Timothy knew nothing of the instructions to Titus. To combine these texts into one comprehensive list of qualifications for the universal church is not sound exegetical or theological practice. A close study of the two passages indicates a lot of similarities and also a lot of differences.

The text in both is sufficient to stand alone as an expression of the quality of person undertaking such a high responsibility in the Family of God. The list was formulated to address the unique need of each specific congregation that it was addressed to.

When God spoke of his relationship with His people or of the appointed leader's relationship with God's people in the Old Testament He frequently spoke with pastoral language: shepherds, sheep, pasture, fold, etc. Probably for two reasons:

1. His people were a nomadic people with a long and rich pastoral history or lived in pastoral cultures.
2. A shepherd's care of the known need of the sheep was so characteristic and picturesque of God's care of Israel and His expectations of His appointed leaders.

Jesus continued the "shepherd language" to describe His own work. The New Testament writers continued the same descriptive use as they spoke of and described the work of church leaders. It is a picture in which the more mature are leading the less mature to Christ likeness, and to the accomplishment of the mission and ministry of the church. Since this is the case the qualities/qualifications for church leadership naturally relate to spiritual maturity. **Galatians 5:22-26** gives a good measuring stick for spiritual growth and maturity. Those who are to lead the church should show evidence of growth and continuing growth of these fruit in their lives. Jesus admonished in this way **"by their fruit you will recognize them"**. **Matthew 7:16**. The admonition from the apostles in **Acts 6:3** is still the only Biblical example that we have of selecting leadership from among the congregation. These men are to be those who are **"...known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom"**.

Congregational leadership cannot be created by election or appointment, it is the product of the Holy Spirit working in lives (**Acts 20:28**). The lists in **1 Timothy 3 & Titus 1** should be understood as guidelines to the congregation so that she may select Spiritual leaders who actively serve their people and set a worthy example for them to follow (**1 Peter 5:1-3**). To appoint unqualified men and allow them to grow into the position is like appointing a polygamist with ten wives and waiting for nine of them to die!

Our society has become more diverse in occupation and leadership expectations. Yet, shepherding is still sufficiently known and still clearly describes the continuing expectations God has of His shepherd leaders. The descriptive fullness of shepherding is so great in the history of shepherd leaders that I believe it would serve us best to overarch our discussion of all spiritual matters with an image of a shepherd. Especially, since "bishop", "pastor", and even "elder" have been so religiously abused so as to hinder accurate understanding of the words and their usage.

## GENERAL OVERVIEW OF THE WORD “SHEPHERD”

The Old Testament Hebrew word *raah* (shepherd) was a primary term for feeding, pasturing, keeping the flock together with a view of providing the best care of the sheep. It was used to validate the rule of kings as they readily and capably cared for their people (**2 Sam. 5:2**). Biblical leaders (prophets, priests, and kings) were considered good shepherds when they fed the flock of God with God’s truth. God was considered the ultimate provider of the flock of Israel. With this in consideration, we must look at the term “shepherd” as **ELDERS, OVERSEERS, RULERS, AND LEADERS** in light of its history and contextual use. These designations contain a simple and yet far-reaching message and leadership mandate. Shepherds are to be wise, trustworthy men who are present and watchful among their flock. They are to proceed the sheep in love, life and loyalty and validate their leadership in caring for the needs of each sheep of the fold.

### **ELDER** (presbuteros)

Of the 67 new testament usage’s, 16 specific references are made to “elders” in the church. The word is prominent in a word family that includes ambassador, legate etc. Therefore, more than age is to be valued, but what age has produced in a person. Age is required to produce knowledgeable, competent, whole and committed leaders. Their long, faithful and fruitful life experiences among the flock of god have prepared them to achieve shepherd results. (**Acts 11:30; 14:23; 15:2-16; 20:17; 21:18; 1 Tim. 5:19; Titus 1:5; James 5:14; 1 Peter 5:1**)

### **OVERSEER** (episcopos)

Aside from ecclesiastical minded translations the word better describes the nearness, watchful, protectiveness and readiness to know and care for seen and less seen needs of the members. It perfectly describes the attentiveness and involvement of the shepherd (**Acts 20:28; Phil. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:7; 1 Peter 2:25; cf. also 1 Tim. 3:1; Acts 3:1; 1 Pet 5:2; Heb. 12:15**)

### **MODELS** (proistamai)

Beyond the usual translations “rule over”, “manage”, “to take the lead”, the word means: “one who stands before”, therefore leadership is seen in a readiness to stand before in protection, in example, in instruction, in encouragement, and proceeding. An emphasis is on “upfront” visibility and exemplary modeling – a willingness to expose oneself transparently and risk the hurts of that vulnerability shepherding overarches all those conditions and events. (**1 Thess. 5:12; 1 Tim. 5:17; 1 Tim. 3:4-5; Rom. 12:8; cf also Rom. 16:2ff**)

### **LEADERS** (hagoumenos)

The word designated governors, rulers, and chief men with the core meaning being leading and guiding. The emphasis is on going ahead, leading, showing the way. It is not by automatic rule (**1 Pet. 5:2-3**), but a leadership that fosters and calls for voluntary, sensitive, respectful and affectionate submission of the flock. (**Heb. 13:7, 17; 12:24**)

Shepherds today are chosen men, who, by reason of years profitably spent growing and serving among the flock, have gained spiritual maturity and deep insights to the spiritual needs of the sheep. Due to such maturity, they stay close to the flock, always ready to help, to protect and meet the spiritual needs of each member in feeding each on the living Word of God.

## TEXTUAL DISCUSSION OF SCRIPTURE RELATING TO ELDERS

The following passages will be discussed in context **1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9; 1 Peter 5:1-4; Hebrews 13:7,17; 1 Thessalonians 5:12; 1 Timothy 5:17; Acts 20:17-30**. As with any passage of scripture, prior to looking at each word separately, and detached from the context, it is imperative that the passage be considered in context. The context of **1 Timothy & Titus** has already been dealt with.

### 1 TIMOTHY 3:1-7

1. The first requirement is that the bishop (episkopos – *an overseer, guardian*), should **ASPIRE TO, OR HAVE A PASSION** (orego – *to stretch, to reach out, aspire*) for the ministry of overseeing a congregation. The function cannot be justly understood to mean the role similar to a foreman or boss on an assembly line. The word literally means “to see over, to watch over, or to watch out for.” Peter adds that this work must not be done under constraint, nor for personal gain, but willingly (**1 Peter 5:2**).
2. **MUST BE ABOVE REPROACH** - - the preface of this expression with the impersonal verb **DEI** adds strong weight to the fact that this is a necessity. Above reproach (anepileptos – *irreproachable conduct, blameless*) does not imply sinlessness, this would rule out the possibility of a human serving in this capacity. The expression has reference to one who is well respected in the local congregation and community. Due to the grammatical structure of the text all of the following statements in verse 2- from “*the husband of one wife*” through “*not be a recent convert*” in **verse 6** modify the initial expression “*above reproach*”. They explain in what manner the bishop should be above reproach.
  - A. (mias yunaikos audra – literally, “*a one-wife man*”). The first modifying statement. The term in no way indicates whether the man has been married before. The best literal translation is that the **MAN MUST BE THE HUSBAND OF ONE WIFE**. The grammar and syntax confirm that this is referring to a present situation and has nothing to do with the past tense. The best and maybe only way this can be translated is **THE MAN MUST BE THE HUSBAND OF ONE WIFE** (the emphasis is that the husband has been and still is faithful to his own wife). Bishops/Elders must be faithful to their wives if they are to be above reproach, especially in the community.
  - B. (nephalios – *sober, temperate*) The Bishop is to be “**CONTROLLED**” in his use of wine. The expression is followed by the word *sophronos* which means moderate, self-controlled. It is imperative that the Bishop be clear thinking, prudent, and able to control himself well under the pressure of ministry. The qualifying aspect of this text places emphasis upon a character that is dignified, respected and “well put together” in his behavior.
  - C. (philoxenos – *hospitality*) The word is built from two words (philos – friend and xenos- stranger). No person should be a stranger to the church if the Bishops are fulfilling their ministry.
  - D. (didakitos – *didactic, skillful in teaching*) **APT TO TEACH**. This gets to the heart of the ministry of the Bishop/Elder. **Eph. 4:11 & Heb. 13:7** demonstrate that teaching is possibly the primary responsibility of the

Elder/Shepherd/Bishop. He must know the truth to be able to teach the truth and defend the truth if called upon to do so. The text gives no indication as to where, when, and how the Bishop is to teach, but to teach he must!

- E. (*paronis – given to much wine, one who lingers around wine, one addicted to wine*). This characteristic relates to that which was discussed in B. The point of the statement is that the Elder/Bishop not to be a drunkard, addicted to wine.
- F. (*plektes – pugnacious, bully. Amachos- peaceable, one who dislikes strife, not contentious*) The Bishop is **NOT TO BE VIOLENT, BUT GENTLE – NOT QUARRELSOME**. He is a peacemaker, who does not manipulate or bully people. He is one who deals graciously with people.
- G. (*aphilarguros – not greedy*) The Bishop is **NOT A LOVER OF MONEY**. See also Paul's clarification of this in **Titus 1:7** and Peters comments in **1 Peter 5:2**. The Bishop is not in ministry to get what he can personally gain out of the service that he tenders to others. (It was the practice of the early Church to pay their Bishop).
- H. (*prohistemi – lead, direct, care for, give aid to*) In order to prove his ability to lead and care for God's church, the Bishop must be **ABLE TO MANAGE** (*prohistemi*) his own household. The word literally means to stand in front of, to give aid. The word is used with regard to Elders in **1 Tim. 5:17 & 1 Thess. 5:12**, but it also appears in **Rom.12:8** not in context to Elders. **1 Tim. 3:12** it is used in regard to deacons, in **Titus 3:8** it is used in regard to Christians. The term must gain its meaning from the context in which is it used, but at the same time its primary meaning must always be related to its meaning, lead, direct, care for, give aid to. To translate the word simply as to "rule" loses sight of the total picture of ministry. The control of the children has reference only to those who are in his home, while the influence obviously continues when the child leaves the home. (*hupotage – in subjection, obedient, under control*). The Bishop cannot afford to have disobedient, uncontrolled and unruly children. The number of children has caused debate, **Titus 1:6** says "his children are believers". The word for children is "tekna", which is generic plural (cf. **Matt 22:24; Mk. 10:29; Eph. 6:4; 1 Tim. 5:4 et.al.**) The primary concern is that the abilities of the Bishop are such that he is able to lead, control his own household.
- I. (*neophutos – recent convert*) Due to the nature of the responsibilities the ministry is no place for a recent convert how has not had the time to solidify his own faith. It takes time to grow and become strong.

### TITUS 1:5-9

The situation in Crete, spiritually, was similar to that in Ephesus. The list that Paul gives here, like that in **1 Tim. 3**, lists the desirable qualities for elders shaped by the unique cultural nature and situation of the Cretan churches and community. Part of the problem was false teaching, predominantly of a circumcision party and presumably Jewish in origin. This text clearly links the role of Bishop (*episkopos – overseer, guardian*) and Elder (*presbuteros – an older person, person of great dignity*) There is little need to address the concepts that are the same or similar but only those that are new will be addressed.

- A. **Titus 1:6** elders children (generic plural) **MUST BE BELIEVERS** (pistos – *trustworthy, faithful, dependable*). In the context and in harmony with the use of this word in scripture and strong indication is that the believing children refers to those who are “baptized” members of the Kingdom of God. The Elder must prove his ability by being able to lead his own children(child) of Christ. The question remains: “Is this required of all his children?” It is possible that some may be too young for baptism but the bishop has already proven his ability if at least one is converted and the others are “NOT PROFLIGATE OR INSUBORDINATE” (asotia – *debauched*) implies uncontrolled behavior. Debauchery is a good synonym and definition of “profligate”. Insubordinate (anupotaktos – *undisciplined, disobedient, rebellious*) adds to the definition of unacceptable behavior. The children of a bishop must validate the orderliness of his household, while under his roof.
- B. Furthermore the qualities of a bishop are further revealed as one who has consistent balance in his life. A study of the aspects that were not mentioned in **1 Tim. 3** reveals a stable dignified character.

### 1 PETER 5:1-4

Peter addresses elders (presbuteros) as a fellow elder and apostle. The primary responsibility of both elder and apostle are the same: to teach, preach and lead the flock. A primary difference is that the apostle was required to do this on a global basis and the elder within the circle of a local congregation.

Elders are to tend (poimaino – *herd, pasture, lead, guide, protect, care for, nurture, shepherd*) the flock of God that is their responsibility, charge (en humin – *in you, among you*). Peter resorts to familiar language of God’s people and refers to them as a flock and their leaders as shepherds. It is this passage that gives discussion to local congregation autonomy. Elders shepherd the congregation that has appointed them. These Elders are admonished to fulfill their responsibilities by following in the steps of the Chief Shepherd Jesus (**1 Peter 5:4; 2:25**).

### HEBREWS 13:7, 17

There is no certainty that this passage refers to elders however the language supports the possibility. The leaders (hegeomai – *to guide, to rule*) are those who spoke the Word of God to them; and they (we) are exhorted to consider their lives and imitate their faith. Parallel uses of this word are found in **Acts 14:12 & Acts 15:22**.

v. **17** the readers are encouraged to OBEY (peitho – *follow, be persuaded by someone, take someone’s advice*) their leaders and SUBMIT (hupeiko – *to yield to someone*) to them. This is done because they are KEEPING WATCH (agrupneo – *to guard, to care for*) over your souls, as men who will have to give account.

From these passages we learn that leaders (possibly elders) must be teachers of the Word of God, they must lead an exemplary life, and have a great faith that can be seen and imitated by their followers.

## 1 THESSALONIANS 5:12

The encouragement here is that we RESPECT those who are over us in the LORD and ADMONISH (noutheteo – *warn, instruct*) us. Again the clear indication is that LEADERSHIP is characterized as a teaching ministry. As in **Heb.13:7** we see that leaders are to be capable men with abilities to teach, admonish and care for the followers of Christ in love.

## 1 TIMOTHY 5:17

Let the elders who RULE (prohistemi – *to lead, guide, care for, give aid*) well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching....”. Again the net result is that elders are shown in a teaching or preaching ministry.

## ACTS 20:17-30

This is the only place in the New Testament where all three terms for congregational leaders is used in the same context (elder **20:17**; bishop or overseer **20:28**; pastor or shepherd **20:28**). The instruction is to these men with the emphasis that they must have the spirit of a shepherd if they are to lead and care for the flock of God.

As one examines closely the qualities of the leaders of Gods people they cluster around three vital areas.

1. The responsibly of an elder. He is to be respected, dignified and above reproach both in the congregation and community.
2. He must have established a life and faith worthy of imitation by his followers. This comes with a proven ability to lead others to Christ and to lead the Church. This ability is seen in how he leads his family in his own home.
3. He must be a capable teacher of the God’s Word. This would enable him to provide a steady diet of spiritual food for the flock.

Whatever the qualities/qualifications may be they indicate the elder is able to lead the church in the spirit of Christ because he possess the spirit of Christ (**Rom. 8:5-9**; **Gal. 5:16-24**) and manifests these gifts in his life.