

# NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH LEADERSHIP IN THE LOCAL CHURCH

James W. Garrett

Being cognizant of the fact that many who are attending the conclave in this present era were not present at the earlier conclaves, and that some have not read the papers presented in those earlier years, the 2009 Planning Committee asked Jim Garrett to revise the first paper presented at the first conclave in 1987 and present it in the 2009 Conclave. Because that paper, *What is a New Testament Church*, was warmly received at the 2009 Conclave and seemed to meet a current need, the committee asked Jim to coalesce some of the earliest papers dealing with New Testament Church leadership for presentation at the 2010 Conclave. The following document is the result of that endeavor.

Four topics will be explored in this paper:

1. What was the local church government in the New Testament Church?
2. What are the scripturally assigned duties of New Testament Church leaders?
3. What is the governmental style of leaders in the New Testament Church?
4. What are the scriptural qualifications for leadership in a New Testament Church?

Because the Conclave is a gathering of leaders who are seeking to implement the New Testament Church model in the present generation, these studies are not merely matters of academic interest. These topics are relevant to our efforts to build, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, our contemporary New Testament Churches.

Two forms of church leadership are displayed in the New Testament. One form is that which is appropriate for **church planting ventures and special mission activities**. The other form of leadership is that which prevails in an **established church**. In order to avoid any confusion between the two, we delay the study of New Testament leadership in the local church until after we have noted the style of leadership in missionary endeavor and church planting teams. The failure to note the difference between the leadership styles of church planting teams on the one hand and local church leadership on the other has brought about some misunderstanding of how local church leaders should fulfill their roles.

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## PART ONE

### Church Planting Transitions: From Team to Council

In the early 1970's, the missiologist, Dr. Ralph Winter, began using two terms to describe the redemptive structures found in the New Testament.<sup>1</sup> The two terms, borrowed from Roman Catholicism, are *sodality* and *modality*.

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<sup>1</sup>*The Two Structures of God's Redemptive Mission*, an address given by Dr. Winter at the All-Asia Mission Consultation, Seoul '73, Korea, August 27 - Sept. 1, 1973. Winter defines **modality** as a structured fellowship in which old and young, male and female, gather together as normal biological families in aggregate. A modality is led by a council. Synagogues and local churches are examples of modalities. **Sodalities**, on the other hand, are defined by Winter as structured fellowships in which membership involves an adult decision beyond modality membership and is limited by either age or marital status. Sodalities

For the purpose of our discussion, we will appropriate these terms and give to them the following definitions:

1. SODALITY describes a structured fellowship with a visionary leader, existing to accomplish a single goal.
2. MODALITY describes a structured fellowship with plural leadership, existing as an extended family or community. All fully established churches, as pictured in the New Testament, were modalities.

In this section we will study church-planting sodalities.

## NEW TESTAMENT SODALITIES

The apostolic teams that Paul led were sodalities. Note the following characteristics of these teams:

1. They were sent out (at the instigation of the Holy Spirit)
2. They were a team
3. They had a visionary leader
4. They were on their own
5. They were economically self-sufficient, but were not opposed to receiving financial help from time to time
6. They had a clear goal

### I. THEY WERE SENT OUT

At the time of his conversion, Paul received a clear commission from the Lord (Acts 9:15-16; 22:13-15; 26:15-18). It was not until some years later, however, that the Lord released Paul to fulfill that commission. The leadership of the church at Antioch was the instrument used by the Lord to implement that release.

At the instruction of the Holy Spirit, the Antioch leaders **sent Barnabas and Saul on their first mission** (Acts 13:1-4). Paul (formerly Saul) and Barnabas returned to Antioch at the conclusion of their church-planting mission. They remained at Antioch for a lengthy period of time, reporting on their experiences (Acts 14:26-28). Evidently, Paul and Barnabas considered Antioch to be their *sending church* and felt the need to be accountable.

Some time later, Paul was stirred to take another missionary journey. He chose Silas from Antioch as his co-laborer. The brethren from Antioch **sent Paul and Silas forth with their blessing** (Acts 15:40). Early in the trip, at Lystra, Paul recruited Timothy (Acts 16:1-3). Following this extensive and fruitful trip, Paul once again returned to Antioch (Acts 18:22-23).

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would function as teams with a leader. Paul's apostolic team and most missionary bands are examples of sodalities.

## II. THEY WERE A TEAM

An important point that must be grasped is that *sodality* is not the same thing as *solo*. Teams rather than solo ministries dominate the New Testament record. There are exceptions, of course. Four exceptions that come to mind immediately are Philip (Acts 8), Peter's tour of Judaea (Acts 9:32ff), Apollos (Acts 18:27), and Paul's time at Athens and Corinth (Acts 17:15-18:4).

For obvious reasons, none of these exceptions could be models for the type of ministry undertaken by Paul and his companions:

1. Neither Peter nor Apollos, as cited above, were going out in pioneering work. Both were touring and ministering among existing churches. They were working with congregations that already had leadership in place.
2. Philip's excursion was one of those sovereign events that cannot be construed as a pattern.
3. Paul's time alone in Athens and Corinth was not one of choice. It was a time of expedient flight for his life. During this time, he eagerly waited for his team to join him (Acts 17:15-16; 18:5).

Although solo ministry may be appropriate when it is conducted in cooperation with leadership in existing churches, solo ministry is not the biblical norm for church planting nor is it the biblical pattern for deliberate evangelism in virgin territory.

## III. THEY HAD A VISIONARY LEADER

Our third point, *The team has a visionary leader*, is modeled well by Paul's apostolic teams. It was a true team; every member was a contributing member. One important aspect of team ministry is the team's ownership of the vision and goal. It wasn't just Paul's ministry; it was the team's ministry. Even so, the vision for direction of the team usually was Paul's.<sup>2</sup>

Some have argued that Paul really was not the leader, but that the team moved by consensus. From the descriptive narrative, however, it is apparent that Paul clearly was the dominate leader of the teams. Consider the following evidence:

### *The first journey*

Although the first missionary journey seems to have begun with Barnabas as the leader of the team, leadership quickly seems to have shifted to Paul.<sup>3</sup>

1. Acts 13:8-12 Paul became the aggressive actor in the Elymas encounter.
2. Acts 13:13 The team was called, *Paul and his company*.
3. Acts 13:16 Paul took the lead in ministry in Antioch of Pisidia.

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<sup>2</sup>Acts 16:6-12

<sup>3</sup>There are hints that Barnabas, being the older man, continued in at least a titular leadership role. Note that Barnabas is listed first when the team is described as, *apostles*, (14:14). After the stoning at Lystra, Paul departed *with Barnabas* to Derbe (15:20); the implication of the language is that Barnabas took Paul to Derbe. At Lystra, Barnabas was mistaken for Jupiter, the father of the gods, while Paul was thought to be Mercury, the messenger and sometimes servant of the gods (14:11-12). We are informed that Paul was called, *Mercury*, because he was the chief spokesman. We would assume that Barnabas was called, *Jupiter*, because of his dignified authority. So, although Paul became the activist leader, and the story of the journey became the story of Paul's ministry, and the traveling group became *Paul and his company*, Barnabas seems never to have lost his role as the elder statesman of the team.

4. Acts 13:13ff Beginning with the episode in Pisidia, Paul's name is listed first in the record, except in the Acts 14:14 report of the drama in Lystra.
5. Acts 14:8-12 Paul is the miracle worker at Lystra whose ministry stirred the people.
6. Acts 14:19 Paul, not Barnabas, was stoned by the Antioch/Iconium/Lystra crowd.

### *The second journey*

The second missionary journey presents a clearer picture of Paul's leadership.

1. Acts 15:36 Paul introduced the idea of the trip.
2. Acts 15:37 Barnabas, assuming the role of leader, began to put the team together, but Paul objected to Barnabas' plan to have John Mark on the team.
3. Acts 15:40 Paul recruited his own team.
4. Acts 15:41ff Even though the team consisted of two men (initially), the record focuses on Paul. The singular pronoun, *he*, is used rather than the plural pronoun, *they*. At this point, it clearly is Paul's ministry, with Silas as his companion.
5. Acts 16:1-3 Paul recruited Timothy as a third member of the team.
6. Acts 16:9-10 Although we are not told how the Spirit forbade them from ministry in Asia and Bithynia, we are told that it was through a vision given to Paul that the team was directed to Macedonia (Luke joined the team at Troas. Note the transition from *they* to *we* in vs. 8-10).
7. Acts 16:14 At Philippi, it was Paul's preaching that opened the heart of the first convert.
8. Acts 16:17 Luke described the team as *Paul and us*.
9. Acts 16:16-18 Even though all of the team members over a period of time had opportunity to address the spirit of divination, none did so until Paul took the initiative. We wonder if they felt free to take such action without Paul's leadership.
10. Acts 16:26-28 Although Paul and Silas both were witnesses to the earthquake and the opening of the prison doors, it was Paul who was the spokesman to the jailor.
11. Acts 16:29-34 Both Paul and Silas participated in presenting the Gospel to the jailor and his family, but the jailor recognized Paul's leadership (vs 36-37).
12. Acts 17:1-4 Paul was the spokesman in Thessalonica, with Silas as his team member.
13. Acts 17:13 Paul was the primary spokesman at Berea.
14. Acts 17:13-14 The hostility that Thessalonian Jews stirred up at Berea was directed at Paul, forcing him to leave. Silas and Timothy were able to remain in the city.
15. Acts 17:15 Paul sent a *command*<sup>4</sup> to Silas and Timothy to come to him.
16. Acts 18:5-11 After Silas and Timothy joined Paul in Corinth, it was Paul who became the actor in the ensuing drama. The singular pronouns, *he* and *I*, rather than, *they* and *we*, are used in the record.
17. Acts 18:9-10 It was Paul who received the encouraging night time vision.
18. Acts 18:12-13 Again, the hostility was directed against Paul.

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<sup>4</sup>Greek-*entole* (ἐντολή)

### *The third journey*

Acts 18:23, introducing the third journey, intimates that this was a solo journey:

*And having spent some time there, he departed and passed successively through the Galatian region and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples.*

Since this was not a pioneering trip, but a trip of encouragement to existing churches, we would not be surprised if this trip were solo. However, the account describes a developing team with Paul as the leader, i.e. *those who ministered to him <Paul>* - 19:22; *Paul's traveling companions* - 19:29; *he was accompanied by...*- 20:4.

#### **IV. THEY WERE ON THEIR OWN**

A feature of a sodality, as exemplified by Paul's team, is the team's sense of being on its own. The team had to provide for itself and make decisions on its own. It was not directed by Antioch, but was released<sup>5</sup> by Antioch to go out and do what it was called to do - evangelize and plant churches.

#### **V. THEY WERE ECONOMICALLY SELF-SUFFICIENT**

The team was on its own to the point of providing for its own finances. At times, even the team leader, Paul, was the one who worked to provide the income.<sup>6</sup> The team had a goal and did what was necessary to achieve the goal, as directed by God. There were times when the team received financial assistance from existing churches.<sup>7</sup>

#### **VI. THEY HAD A CLEAR GOAL**

It is important to realize that the sodality existed as a means to an end. It was not the end in itself. Its purpose was to see in every city a fully established church. A church was not considered to be fully established until plural leadership had been put in place (which in some cases may have been city elders, presiding over several small assemblies). Examples of such activity may be seen in Paul's leaving Titus in Crete and Timothy at Ephesus.<sup>8</sup>

The fact that the team formed to achieve a goal leads us to conclude that sodalities have a temporary existence. When the goal is accomplished, the sodality disbands. Each of Paul's teams disbanded at the conclusion of each missionary journey.

### **Sodalities in Contemporary Church-planting**

How does the understanding of sodalities apply to contemporary Christianity?

Several years ago, Roland Allen wrote a book with a very intriguing title, *Missionary Methods: St Paul's Or Ours?*<sup>9</sup> Whether or not one agrees with Roland Allen's conclusions about Paul's methods, the question posed by the title is one that the church of this century needs to face. The apostle's modeling of the sodality remains as the best plan for planting churches.

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<sup>5</sup> The Greek term, *apelusan* (ἀπέλυσαν), meaning, *they released*, or *they dismissed*, implies a releasing of the team to go fulfill its mission

<sup>6</sup> Acts 18:3; I Cor. 4:12; 9:14ff; II Cor. 11:7; 12:13; I Thess. 2:9; 4:11; II Thessalonians 3:8

<sup>7</sup> Philippians 4:14ff

<sup>8</sup> Titus 1:5; I Timothy 3; I Timothy 5:17-22 (esp v22)

<sup>9</sup> Roland Allen, *Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours* (Chicago, Moody Press), 1956.

My own experience in church-planting has proven this to be true. For about fifteen years, I was a part of a team that existed to plant new churches in Northeastern Oklahoma. During that time, we were instrumental in planting thirteen churches, both in major cities and smaller towns. Although we did not by design follow the sodality patterns of the New Testament, looking back upon our work it is obvious that the Holy Spirit orchestrated these patterns into our work.

A key to the success of every venture was the presence of an aggressive visionary leader who knew how to pray. Each time that we undertook the planting of a church we recruited a team leader with these traits. We provided the finances for his support, enabling him to assemble a team and undertake the venture.

We should be praying for the Holy Spirit to form sodalities, called to plant churches in unevangelized communities. Church planting teams, with a visionary leader, sent out by existing churches would do much to enlarge the kingdom. Such a responsible church-planting scheme would have accountability, as contrasted with the independent entrepreneur style that is often seen. In our city, Tulsa, it seems that a church is started every week and one dies every week. This is the result of individuals who, on their own, for various reasons, inaugurate a church without any spiritual accountability.<sup>10</sup>

Those on the team should understand the goal and commit themselves to it. The goal becomes the reason for the group's existence.

When a church is launched, the sodality must provide the initial leadership. All or a part of the team must remain in the newly planted church to lead it until the Holy Spirit raises up elders.<sup>11</sup> There are times when the sodality or a part of the sodality will settle in the community and become a permanent part of the congregation. There are other situations in which the members of the team move on to plant another church, or return to the congregation which sent them out.

The sodality must not be in a hurry to abrogate its leadership. In some rare situations, the Holy Spirit has raised up elders rather quickly.<sup>12</sup> However, the usual pattern is for the development of elders to take a long time (the subject of elders and other local church leaders will be the focus of the other sections of this paper). A common mistake made by team leaders

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<sup>10</sup>This does not deny the fact that there are times when God sovereignly calls forth a body of believers through some other plan. Neither does this deny that there are times when a church split may occur, producing a second congregation. This is the least desirable result, but there are times when it seems inevitable. When this happens, it is important that the new congregation, in its embryonic days, seek spiritual covering and counsel from a healthy church. Satan often is the only winner when a congregation is launched without such accountability.

<sup>11</sup>This was the consistent pattern of Paul's team, except on the first missionary journey. The account of the first missionary journey, beginning in Acts 13:1 and continuing to the end of Chapter 14, contains the following statement in 14:23: *and when they had appointed for them elders in every church.* The striking thing about this is that Paul and Barnabas had left each of the churches in haste, because of threats on their lives. On their return home, passing back through each city, they ordained elders. No member of the apostolic team had remained to lead the churches in the interim. We wish that we had more information about what happened in the intervening months between the time of the apostles' departure and the appointment of elders.

<sup>12</sup> Acts 14:23

of church-planting sodalities is to become hasty in appointing elders. Haste usually results in future tragedy.

An opposite, and probably more common problem, is the tendency of the team leader of a sodality to drag his feet in releasing leadership to the elders. This especially is true when the leader remains a part of the congregation and becomes *the pastor*. Having been the visionary leader whom God used to plant the church, it is difficult for him to trust God's direction for the church through elders.

This more common problem is heightened by the current professional view of ministry. In that view, a man is called to *ministry*. His next step is to obtain whatever schooling is necessary to make him qualified in the eyes of the church; he then looks for some place in which to exercise his profession. He hopes that some existing congregation will call him to the *pastorate*. If that doesn't happen, he may decide to start his own church.

Such a perspective is not found in the New Testament. Paul is a good example. Here is a man who had the best ministerial education available in his day.<sup>13</sup> At the time of his conversion, he had a divine encounter with the Glorified Lord, containing a clear call to ministry.<sup>14</sup> In his usual zealous fashion, he immediately launched into a vigorous preaching ministry in Damascus, which was aborted by a plot on his life.<sup>15</sup> At some point, he spent time in Arabia,<sup>16</sup> where, it seems, the Glorified Lord instructed him in the Gospel.<sup>17</sup> He went to Jerusalem three years later, but was not readily accepted by the church there. He spent time with Peter and James, then was sent by the Jerusalem church back to his home town of Tarsus.<sup>18</sup> There he waited until Barnabas sought him out and took him to Antioch, where Barnabas apprenticed him for a year.<sup>19</sup> It was after this that the Holy Spirit called Barnabas and Saul (later Paul) to become an apostolic sodality.<sup>20</sup>

The above account does not present the picture of a man who was trying to find some place to *practice his profession*. Instead, it is the story of a man who was not self-conscious about who he was or whether or not he had a place of ministry. He just did what came naturally. It was not until he was recruited by Barnabas and interned by Barnabas that the Holy Spirit commissioned Saul to accompany Barnabas on apostolic trips.

## CONCLUSIONS

In the light of these reflections, we reach the following conclusions:

1. The sodality, as defined above, is the best instrument for responsible church-planting ventures.

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<sup>13</sup>Acts 22:3

<sup>14</sup>Acts 9:1-16

<sup>15</sup>Acts 9:19-25

<sup>16</sup>Galatians 1:15-18 It is very probable that Paul went into Arabia shortly after his conversion, then returned to Damascus to preach.

<sup>17</sup>Galatians 1:11-12

<sup>18</sup>This seems to be the best manner of harmonizing the material in Acts 9:25-30 with Galatians 1:11-19. The ministry referred to in Galatians 1:22-24 would describe the ministry of Paul after Acts 13.

<sup>19</sup>Acts 11:19-26

<sup>20</sup>Acts 13:1ff

2. The sodality must remain in leadership of the new church until the Holy Spirit raises up elders.
3. When elders are raised up, the sodality must surrender the leadership of the church to the council of elders.
4. After elders are in place, the sodality may disband and serve as a part of the local church, or the sodality may remain intact and move on to establish another congregation, or the sodality may disband and its members go their separate ways.

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## PART TWO

### Local Church Government in the Early Church

During the Apostolic Era, Church government and ministry leadership evolved from a Church led by the Twelve, to local churches led by a council of elders. In addition to local church leadership, trans-local ministries also were active and present. In this study we will examine leadership in the local church and leave the study of trans-local ministries for another time.

#### Pre-Pentecostal Apostolic Government

Following the ascension of Jesus, the eleven Apostles returned to Jerusalem to wait for the promised *immersion in the Holy Spirit*.<sup>21</sup> They were joined in their prayerful vigil by approximately one hundred twenty of Jesus' disciples. There was one item of business that the group had to take care of - the selection of a replacement for Judas. In accomplishing this goal, the group functioned congregationally.

*And at this time Peter stood up in the midst of the brethren (a gathering of about one hundred and twenty persons was there together), and said, "Brethren, the Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit foretold by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus. For he was counted among us, and received his portion in this ministry... For it is written in the book of Psalms,*

*'Let his homestead be made desolate,  
and let no man dwell in it; and,  
His office let another man take.'*

*It is therefore necessary that of the men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us - beginning with the immersion of John, until the day that He was taken up from us - one of these should become a witness with us of His resurrection.*

*And they put forward two men, Joseph called Barsabas (who was also called Justus), and Matthias. And they prayed, and said "Thou, Lord who knowest the hearts of all men, show which one of these two Thou hast chosen to occupy this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place.*

*And they drew lots for them, and the lot fell to Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles.*<sup>22</sup>

Here, prior to Pentecost and the reception of the Holy Spirit, the group manifested a congregational government with *Peter's functioning as president*. The casting of lots is

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<sup>21</sup> Acts 1:4-8

<sup>22</sup> Acts 1:15-17, 20-26



reminiscent of the Urim and Thummim of the Old Testament priest (Ex. 28:30; Nu. 27:21; 1 Sam. 28:6). This is the only New Testament record of a congregational form of government.<sup>23</sup>

### **Post-Pentecostal Apostolic Government**

In the months immediately following Pentecost, the Apostolic Council functioned as the government of the Church. No other governmental roles are mentioned in the early post-Pentecostal chapters of *Acts*. The apostles oversaw every aspect of the church, including the treasury (Acts 2:43; 4:32-37; 5:2). The Apostolic Council continued to lead the Church for a period of twelve to eighteen months.<sup>24</sup>

#### **The First Managerial Addition To The Church<sup>25</sup>**

*Now at this time, while the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic Jews against the native Hebrews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving of food. And the twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples and said "It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables. But select from among you, brethren, seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task. But we will devote ourselves to prayer, and to the ministry of the word."*

*And the statement found approval with the whole congregation; and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicola, a proselyte from Antioch. And these they brought before the apostles; and after praying, they laid their hands on them. (Acts 6:1-6 NAS)*

The Church had grown to the point that the Apostles no longer were able to manage and oversee every detail of the Church's affairs. Because of this reality, seven men were chosen to be the administrators of the benevolent funds.

NOTE: Here is a clear example of the principle, *leaders may delegate a portion of their responsibility and authority to others, who will function in the leaders' stead*. The apostles installed the seven in their new roles by the laying on of hands.<sup>26</sup> These seven men were to

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<sup>23</sup> The same *style* is found in Acts 6, but not the same *type*. In the instance before us, Peter clearly is the president. In Acts 6, the government is a council of apostles.

<sup>24</sup> The arrival in Judea of Festus provides a peg for those who seek to arrange a chronology of *Acts*. This event is well established in Roman history as occurring in 60 AD. Paul was arrested in Jerusalem on Pentecost, two years prior to Festus' arrival (Acts 20:16; 24:27; etc.). J. W. McGarvey, using this peg, attempts to move backward through *Acts* and Paul's letters in order to establish a chronology (J. W. McGarvey, *Acts of the Apostles* [Cincinnati, Standard Publishing Co. 1892] Using this method, McGarvey arrives at Pentecost 34 AD as the birthday of the Church. He does state that much of his conclusions are speculative. This date contradicts the conclusion that is reached when one considers the date of the death of Herod (4 BC) and the fact that Jesus was born before Herod's death. Jesus began His public ministry when he was about thirty years of age and his public ministry lasted about three and one-half years. Thus, 30 AD is more certain for the birth of the Church, rather than 34 AD, as McGarvey and others contend.

<sup>25</sup> As contrasted with ruling

<sup>26</sup> The implication of the Acts record is that after Pentecost only the apostles worked miracles (Acts 2:43; 5:12). With the launching of the ministry of the Seven, this changed. At least two of the Seven (Stephen

function as servants. They were given managerial, rather than governmental or ruling roles. They were to oversee one distinct aspect of the life of the Church.

Evidence of the esteem for the servants in a church is seen in Paul's salutation to the Philippian church, beginning his epistle by giving special greeting to the *overseers and servants*. (Philippians 1:1)

One of the reasons for writing the *Epistle to the Romans* seems to have been to provide a church letter for Phoebe who was a *servant of the church which is at Cenchrea...* (Romans 16:1-2)

### Governmental Transition To Elders

The first record of a governmental change occurs in Acts Chapter Eleven. In the opening verse of the chapter, the Church is described as *Apostles and brethren*. *Brethren* is the general term that Luke used in *Acts* to describe believers.<sup>27</sup> The first mention of *elders* is found in the last verse of Chapter Eleven.

*And in the proportion that any of the disciples had means, each of them determined to send a contribution for the relief of the brethren living in Judea. And this they did, sending it in charge of Barnabas and Saul to the elders.* (Acts 11:29-30)

As we already have noted, up this point the Apostles had handled the treasury. In verse 30, without any explanation of their origin, we are introduced to a council of elders. We are not told when or how the Holy Spirit brought forth these men. However, from this point onward, until the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D., the Jerusalem Church was led by a council, consisting of the Apostles and elders.

The Jerusalem Council, in which Paul and Barnabas defended their ministry among Gentiles, consisted of Apostles and elders. The Apostles and elders functioned together in an equal relationship.<sup>28</sup> Five times in this account, they are mentioned in this manner.<sup>29</sup>

In time, the Twelve left the scene, and the Church was led by the elders and James (Jesus' half-brother who was called an *apostle*).<sup>30</sup> When Paul visited Jerusalem several years later, he reported to James and *all the elders*.<sup>31</sup> Thus, Acts records the evolution of the Jerusalem Church leadership from an inaugural apostle-led church to an established elder-led congregation.

and Philip – Acts 6:8; 8:6) *performed great signs and wonders among the people*. It could be textually inferred, though not proven, that Stephen and Philip received the anointing to perform signs and wonders at the laying on of the Apostles' hands. It also is noteworthy that both of these performed signs and wonders to credential their evangelistic activity, in conformity with the statement in Mark 16:20.

<sup>27</sup> Acts 1: 15; 6:3; etc.

<sup>28</sup> Note the interesting manner in which this council functioned in Acts 15:

- Both sides of the debate presented their case before the council of apostles and elders, with the congregation as witness;
- The apostles and elders had a discussion;
- One of the council members, James, delivered the consensus;
- The entire church confirmed the decision.

<sup>29</sup> Acts 15:2,4,6,22,23

<sup>30</sup> Galatians 1:19

<sup>31</sup> Acts 21:17-18

## Church Government In Paul's Church Planting Ministry

When the Church spread beyond Jerusalem, the governmental pattern that was displayed in each place was a council of elders.<sup>32</sup> For example, when Paul and Barnabas had reached the end of their first missionary journey, they retraced their steps, revisiting each church that they had planted. In each city, they installed elders as the government of the local church.

*And after they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying, "Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God." And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed (Acts 14:21-23)*

This became Paul's consistent pattern. Either he personally installed elders, or he left behind an apostolic delegate to lead the new church until elders had been installed. One example of such action is the work of Titus in Crete.

*...to Titus, my true child in a common faith: Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior. For this reason I left you in Crete, that you might set in order what remains, and appoint elders in every city as I directed you. (Titus 1:4-5)*

Timothy was another delegate whom Paul left behind to complete the development of a council of elders (see I Timothy 3).

## There Was Only One Governmental Body In The Local New Testament Church

From the following Scriptures, we see that in the New Testament Church three terms: *overseers* [bishops], *shepherds* [pastors], *elders* are used to describe a single group of men, rather than three different groups.<sup>33</sup>

### Acts 20:17-18, 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.*

Paul and his traveling companions were sailing to Jerusalem, hoping to arrive in time for Pentecost. Enroute, they had to change ships at Miletus, a port-city about thirty miles from Ephesus. The travelers had to wait in Miletus for the winds to be right before the ship could leave for Jerusalem. The passengers had to be ready to board on short notice. Paul wanted to meet with the elders of the Ephesian Church, but he did not dare leave Miletus; the ship might depart while he was in Ephesus. So, he called for the Ephesian elders to come to Miletus. If the

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<sup>32</sup> This, of course, refers to those where any information is given concerning the local church government. No such description exists for some churches, but when information is given, the pattern is consistent. We therefore conclude that eventually a council of elders became the pattern in every church. This pattern also is displayed in the immediate post-New Testament literature.

<sup>33</sup> The KJV uses the Middle English term, *bishop*, to render the Greek, ἐπίσκοπος, meaning, *overseer*; and the Middle English term, *pastor*, to render the Greek, ποιμήν, meaning, *shepherd*.

ship set sail before the elders arrived, they would suffer only the inconvenience of the short journey. They did arrive before Paul's ship departed. Paul's charge to them is one of the most important passages of Scripture relating to elders.

The three terms pertinent to our study are found in Paul's exhortation.

1. *The Elders* (πρεσβύτερος - *presbuteros*) of Ephesus were called to meet Paul at Miletus. v17
2. Paul stated that the Holy Spirit has made them **overseers** (bishops, ἐπίσκοπος - *episkopos*)v28
3. He instructed them to **shepherd** (to pastor, ποιμαίνω - *poimaino*) the church.v28

Thus, we see that the work of the elders of Ephesus was to oversee (bishop) the church and to shepherd (pastor) the church.<sup>34</sup> There was not one group of men responsible for *elding*, another group responsible for *shepherding*, and another group, *overseeing*. There was a single group of men to whom all three of these terms and activities applied.

### I Peter 5:1-4

*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 among you, **exercising oversight** not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God,- and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge but proving to be examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.*

Peter wrote this epistle to a broad audience, most of whom were far distant from him (I Peter 1:1). He probably had not met most of those who were the audience of this letter. So, the instructions can be taken to be very appropriate for all of the churches. In this passage, Peter uses the same terms for leadership that Paul had used in his exhortation to the Ephesian leaders.

1. Peter addressed **elders** (*presbuteros*) v 1
2. He instructed them to **shepherd** (pastor, *poimaino*) the flock. v2
3. He instructed them to exercise **oversight** (bishop, *episkopeo*) from the right motive. v2

Again, we see one group of men, elders, charged with the work of shepherding and overseeing (*pastoring* and *bishoping*) the church. There were not three different groups of men given these different functions or titles.

### Titus 1:5-7

*For this reason I left you in Crete that you might set in order what remains and appoint **elders** in every city as I directed you, namely, if a man be 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...*

Two things in this passage are relevant for our study:

1. Paul left Titus in Crete to ordain **elders** (*presbuteros*) in every city. v5
2. He used the term **overseers** (bishop, *episkopos*) to describe **elders** vs5,7

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<sup>34</sup> Because these terms (*pastor* and *bishop*) have taken on improper ecclesiastical significance, it would be better if their use in the church were discontinued. It would be best to use the translation of the Greek terms, *shepherd*, and *overseer*.

From these passages, it is clear that both Paul and Peter considered there to be one governmental group in the New Testament. The most common term used to describe these men is *elder*; (*presbuteros*). The work that they do is shepherding and overseeing the church.

### Summary of terms

The term, *shepherd* (*or pastor*), is used as a noun only once in the New Testament to describe the leaders of the church.<sup>35</sup> On all other occasions, it is a verb, *to shepherd* (*or pastor*), describing what church leaders (*elders*) do. Even in the passage where it is used as a noun, the term is a job description, rather than a title.

*And He gave some as... shepherds and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service... (Ephesians 4:11)*

The term, *overseer* (bishop), is used three times to describe the leaders of the local church.

- We already have noted Titus 1, in which elders and overseers are equated as being the same men.
- A second occurrence is I Timothy 3, in which Paul's description of qualifications for those who are selected to be overseers almost parallels what he wrote to Titus.
- The third occurrence is in the salutation of Philippians 1:1, in which Paul greets the two classes in leadership, overseers and deacons.

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

Since it is apparent from the other passages that Paul considered the elders to be the overseers of the church, both I Timothy 3:1ff and Philippians 1:1 would refer to the elders. It is natural to call one who does overseeing, an *overseer*.

Thus, in *Acts* and the epistles, the term most commonly used as the descriptive term for local church leadership is *elder*. The work that elders do is shepherding, and overseeing. These latter two terms (*shepherds* [one instance<sup>36</sup>] and *overseers* [three instances<sup>37</sup>]), recognize the function of elders, in essence are job titles<sup>38</sup>.

### The Principle Of Plurality

After the initial planting of a church, the leadership of each congregation always consisted of a plural group, rather than an individual leader. We find no record of anyone who was *the elder*, or *the shepherd*, or *the overseer*. In III John, Diotrephes who wanted to be *the leader*, is condemned for his desire to have the pre-eminence in the church.

*I wrote something to the church; but Diotrephes, who loves to be the first among them, does not accept what we say. For this reason, when I come I will call attention to his deeds... (III John 9-10)*

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<sup>35</sup> Ephesians 4:11

<sup>36</sup> Ephesians 4:11

<sup>37</sup> Philippians 1: 1; Titus 1:7; I Timothy 3:2 (Note: In most versions, the translation of I Timothy 3:1 does not convey, accurately, the sense of the Greek. The language used here implies one who aspires to the work of overseeing, not the office of overseer. It is the work that is to be desired, not the office).

<sup>38</sup> Even as one who builds houses is called a *builder*; so one who oversees is called an *overseer*.

Note that in all of the passages that we have examined, the terminology always is plural.

### SUMMARY

1. The biblical record is consistent. After the initial years in Jerusalem, the consistent pattern in each church was for the Holy Spirit to raise up a group of men to serve as elders.
2. There always was a plurality, a council of elders.
3. The work of elders was shepherding (pastoring) and overseeing (bishops) every aspect of the life of the church.
4. The elders delegated responsibility and authority to men and women in the church, who had the oversight and implementation of specific ministries in the local body.

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### **Excursus: The Emergence of *The Bishop***

As long as the apostles and those associated with them were alive and active in the Church, doctrinal and procedural disputes were settled by apostolic authority. The apostles left behind two means of preserving orthodoxy (correct doctrine) and orthopraxy (correct procedure). These were Scripture and leaders whom they had instructed and trained.

The scriptural canon, as we have it today, was slow in developing. It is surprising how extensive and widespread was the distribution of apostolic writings, but it took time for every apostolic document to be present in every geographical region of the Church. This is quite understandable in that every copy of an autograph or manuscript had to be copied by hand. Copying an uncial Greek manuscript was not done in a day, especially a lengthy document, and many of the apostolic writings are lengthy. Thus, distribution was not swift and thorough. To tell someone to “get into the Word,” as we are prone to do today, would have made no sense to early Christians. The only time that most Christians ever heard the reading of Scripture was in the Sunday meeting, and each local church could only read aloud whatever documents that congregation possessed.

Some documents that are in our canon were popular and well-known in some regions but were unknown in others – or known only by reputation. There also was some disagreement as to which writings were apostolic, and thus belonged in the canon, as contrasted with those which were valuable, but not authoritative. For example, some of the documents written by early non-apostolic leaders were promoted as Scripture in some quarters.

Because of this lack of thorough distribution of all of the apostolic writings, aberrant teachings arose which could have been squelched if the entire canon had been present in every region.

The second arm of defense against error, as already noted, was the leadership that the apostles trained and installed. As the years progressed and these men became fewer and fewer, the remaining ones became increasingly valuable to the church. When contradictory and innovative doctrines began to circulate, the local church looked to the elder who had the strongest apostolic connection. In essence, he began to occupy the role of the apostles in his local church, in so far as being the doctrinal arbiter. When various writings appeared, he also was the one who, in the local setting, recognized or rejected a document as Scripture. In time, this man came to be elevated in authority over the other elders in the local church and the title of *episcopos* (overseer) increasingly came to be applied to him. Thus, the practice grew of having local church leadership consist of three groups:

- The Overseer (an individual)
- The Elders (a council)
- The Deacons (individuals who served in various leadership capacities).

In modern parlance, the overseer was the bishop. Very shortly, the bishop became a *magisterial bishop*, (a ruling bishop). Several decades passed before any bishops exercised authority over other bishops. In the early stages, a bishop's role was only in the local church.

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## PART THREE

### The Elders' Job Description

The second phrase of Hebrews 13:17, *for they keep watch over your souls, as those who will give account*, haunts the heart of every God-ordained elder. Not only must elders answer to God for their own individual lives, but they also must give account for their stewardship of the lives under their charge. How are elders to function in this stewardship for which they will give account? What are God's expectations?

The terms *overseer* and *shepherd* are so comprehensive that it is not surprising to find a wide range of activities mentioned in the New Testament as the work of elders. Through the complimentary gifts of the individual elders, a broad variety of ministry is provided to the local church. In this study, we will survey the job description of elders as it is presented in *Acts of the Apostles* and in the epistles of the New Testament.

Two passages of Scripture use the figure of a shepherd to describe the elders' responsibility. These are found in Paul's exhortation to the Ephesian elders (Acts 20:28ff) and Peter's instructions to the elders in the Church at large (I Peter 5:1ff).

A primary rule of Bible interpretation is that figures cannot be used to *determine* doctrine or truth. Figures are used to *illustrate* doctrine or truth. Therefore, when a figure is used, the Bible student must ask "In this passage, what is the truth being illustrated by this figure?" The answer to this question usually lies in the context. This exegetical rule often is ignored.<sup>39</sup>

One of the most destructive outcomes of ignoring this rule was the shepherding/discipling movement of the 1970's. The blossoming Charismatic Movement of the 1970's was dominated by gifted itinerant teachers who ignored this rule and taught that since sheep are absolutely dependent upon a shepherd, then elders are essential to the personal life of every believer. Five of the most dominant teachers taught that every Christian was to be a part of a spiritual pyramid in which each believer was subject to a discipler who was absolute authority in the believer's life. These five men were at the top of the pyramid. Some disciplers even insisted that in a marriage the husband was not the primary authority in his home or over his wife – the discipler occupied that role. Those of us who lived through that era could recite countless tales of lives destroyed by this teaching – all of which resulted from the failure to observe the exegetical rule relating to figures of speech. The bottom line error of this teaching was that it trained people to depend on an elder rather than Christ.

In an effort to comprehend what the Holy Spirit requires of elders under the figure of the shepherd, we will examine the only two passages in which this figure is used and note what the figure illustrates in each passage.

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<sup>39</sup> One example of the importance of context is Scripture's figurative use of leaven. In some instances it is used to represent good (Matthew 13:33) and in some instances it is used to represent evil (Matthew 16:6ff).

### Acts 20:28-31

*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. I know that after my departure savage wolves will come among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore, be on the alert...*

What point is Paul making by his use of the shepherd/flock figure? Clearly, he uses the figure to alert the elders to the need to watch out for "wolves." This is seen by the manner in which he begins his exhortation, *be on guard for yourselves and all the flock*, and then the warning about "wolves." This is the extent of Paul's use of the figure of "shepherd" in this passage.

One of the most painful situations that an eldership can face occurs when one of the elders becomes a wolf, drawing people after himself. Although such a thing seems unthinkable, anyone who has much experience in church leadership can cite numerous examples of this tragedy.<sup>40</sup>

Thus, Paul used the shepherd/flock figure to exhort the Ephesian elders to stand against false teachers who bring heresy into the flock or who use their gifts and talents to divide the congregation. Note that nothing in Paul's use of the shepherd/flock figure in this exhortation refers to ministry to individuals. The single exhortation is to guard the flock.

### I Peter 1:1ff

*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 among you, exercising oversight ... nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge but proving to be examples to the flock.*

In this passage, Peter equates shepherding with oversight. The concept of oversight of the flock is consistent with the pattern of apostolic leadership in the earliest days of the Jerusalem Church, i.e., they were overseers of everything in the Church. Thus, the use of this term implies that the elders are the overseers of every aspect of the life of the local church. This does not mean that the elders will do everything. Overseers supervise, rather than hands-on functioning in every ministry. However, it does mean that of the elders it can be said, "the buck stops here."

The one statement concerning specific shepherding activity in this passage is *be examples to the flock*. Peter urged elders to shepherd the flock by displaying God-approved character and behaviour. Thus, the flock will see modeled in the elders before them what the Chief Shepherd desires each disciple to become.

Peter uses a phrase in verse 3 that catches our attention. Note how the phrase is rendered in some of the more popular English versions.

KJV *Neither as being lords over **God's heritage**, but being ensamples to the flock.*

NAS *nor yet as lording it over **those allotted to your charge**, but proving to be examples to the flock.*

NIV *not lording it over **those entrusted to you**, but being examples to the flock.*

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<sup>40</sup> A very common excruciating situation in which wolfish behaviour occurs is encountered when a retired elder, one who no longer functions in leadership, remains in the church. Having difficulty in surrendering the reins to younger men, he draws people to himself and thus causes disunity. Because of his ego needs, he destroys the flock that he has spent years helping to develop.



NLT *Don't lord it over **the people assigned to your care**, but lead them by your own good example*

There is no manuscript difference between the Majority Text used by the King James translators (*God's heritage*) and the varied texts used by the other versions (*those allotted to your charge*, etc). The diversity of these renderings reveals that those who produced these versions interpreted rather than translated. Each translation committee added English words to the phrase in an effort to clarify what they understood to be Peter's intention. For those seeking to understand Peter's intention, it is worthwhile to examine the text. The Greek text, κατακυριεύοντες τῶν κλήρων (*katakurieuontes ton kleron*), literally translates as "lording over the allotments."

The term that catches our attention is *kleron* (κλήρων), the genitive plural of the noun, *kleros* (κλήρος). *Kleros* is the term used to indicate something given to a specific individual.

1. In classical Greek, it often is used to describe a public allotment of land. These allotments were distributed to the citizens by the civic authorities. Very often the distribution was made by drawing lots for the tracts that were available for distribution.
2. The term also is used for dice or small stick used in casting lots -it is the individual's *lot*. The term is used in this manner in Matthew 27:25, which describes the soldiers beneath the cross threw dice (*kleroi*) to see who would get the seamless robe of Jesus.
3. The term also is used for an office, role, or duty that is assigned by lot. The term is so used in Acts 1:26, describing the casting of lots to determine who would take Judas' place among the apostles.
4. The term is used to describe an inheritance allotted to someone. It is used in Colossians 1:12, to describe the inheritance of the saints.

Of special note is the fact that this term means that the allotment, whatever it might be, is not earned by any merit, but is allotted to the recipient. Thus, both the role of elder and those whom he oversees are allotted to him by God.

Since this letter is sent to the church scattered throughout Asia Minor, rather than to any individual church, it could be argued that Peter was referring to individual councils of elders and the particular congregation overseen by each particular council (each elders council had a congregation allotted to it). Greek lexicographers contend that this would be an unusual use of the term, *kleros*. The implication of the term is that Peter assumed that each local congregation would be divided into portions with an elder responsible for his assigned portion.<sup>41</sup> Thus, each elder is to live an exemplary life of humility before his assigned portion of the flock. He would be relationally involved with his allotment to the degree that they would know his quality of life. Thus, the shepherding focus in this passage is on oversight and example.

### **Specific Tasks Assigned to Elders**

With the above discussion as background, and being somewhat redundant, we now list the specific tasks that Scripture assigns to elders.

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<sup>41</sup> Bauer, Walter, *A Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* trans. William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1957) p.436, notation (2) on κλη~ρον. Thayer, Joseph, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Nashville, Broadman Press 1977) entry 2819, note (2).

### *Equipping the Saints*

Ephesians 4:12 states that Christ gave to the Church, *apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor/teachers* (the so-called, four-fold ministry). Why did Christ give these ascension gift men to the Church?<sup>42</sup> *for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ;*

The term, *katartizo* (καταρτίζω), translated *equipping* (NAS), *perfecting* (KJV) *to prepare* (NIV), reveals the function of *ascension gift men*. The goal of their activity is *building up of the Body of Christ*. In classical Greek *katartizo* carried the idea of putting things in order or repairing something in a manner that involved some sort of order. Thus, it was the term used for refitting a ship for a new or different service. Prior to the New Testament era, it was used as a medical term, describing the setting of a broken bone.

The word is used in a variety of New Testament settings, all consistent with the classical Greek meaning. Here are some illustrative examples:

1. Hebrews 11:3 - describes the creation, in which the worlds *were framed* by the Word of God;
2. Matthew 4:21 & Mark 1:19 - the term is used for *mending* nets.
3. Romans 9:22 - Paul uses the term for those who are *fitted for destruction*.
4. Galatians 6:1 - the church is urged to *restore* (or put back in place) a brother who has fallen into sin.

Both in classical and New Testament Greek, the word has many uses, all of which reflect an underlying concept of orderly arrangement. Thus, the task of the *ascension gift men*, especially the elder's council, is to make certain that each believer is in his place in the Church and is functioning harmoniously within the Body. This *katartismos* work has three aspects:

1. Functional growth - helping each member to grow in his ability to hear from God and to minister in the grace that God has bestowed.
2. Character development - overseeing the discipling of each member in Godly living.
3. Putting in order - attempting to place every person where he will function best in the Body of Christ.

Charismatic churches have tended toward emphasis of the first aspect, but tended to neglect the second. The Church at large, historically, has committed the opposite error, emphasizing character but giving less attention to hearing from God and ministering in that grace. Almost all churches have tended to neglect the third aspect, helping people to find their place in the Body.

The task of guiding people into their functional place in the church is one of the major tasks ascribed to leadership. The work of an orchestra conductor is an illustration of this dimension of *katartismos*. Before a concert begins, in order to warm up and tune up, each musician plays randomly on his instrument. Anyone who has attended a symphony concert cannot forget this disordered cacophony. However, as soon as the conductor ascends the podium and raises his baton, there is order. Through his direction, beautiful music is produced.

In similar fashion, the varied gifts of the church members come together in the local body. One of the tasks of *ascension gift men*, especially elders, is to help each member of the flock to find

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<sup>42</sup> Elsewhere we have written extensively on the topic of ascension gift men and the fact that the Greek text indicates four, rather than five ascension gifts. In this paper we are focusing on the leadership in the local church, which is the elders, the pastor/teachers.

his place of ministry in the church; then, like the orchestra conductor, oversee the harmonious interplay between the gifts resident in the members. Before leaders can do a good job of *katartismos*, they must become acquainted with the members of the congregation. Only then can each member be helped to find his functional place in the body.

*Katartismos* is *discipleship* in the true sense of the term. The goal is to see every member fulfill his potential and to fill the sphere that God has ordained for him. Elders are not called to be concerned about building big churches or institutionally strong churches. Instead, they are to be concerned about building the lives and ministry of each individual member of the body. This emphasis will produce the kind of church that God desires, whether large or small.

### **Teaching**

Teaching the Word of God to the local church achieves two things:

1. grounding the church in truth
2. feeding the spirits of individual believers.

The *katartismos* task of grounding the people firmly upon the truth is implicit in Ephesians 4:13-15:

*until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ,*

One of the frustrating conditions in the contemporary church is the constant need for elders to battle heresy, after the fact. Thousands of people, including preachers, seem to be *carried about with every wind of doctrine*. There is an obsession with looking for some new thing, or the cutting edge of what God is doing, etc. More often than not, this unhealthy obsession is a reflection of the failure on the part of ascension gift men, especially the pastor/teachers. Failure to develop both the mind and the spirit through a steady diet of sound doctrine has left the sheep vulnerable to error and heresy.

A frequent theme in New Testament letters is the importance of repeating to people *what they already know*.<sup>43</sup> On the other hand, it is difficult to find references urging leadership to stir people toward anything new.<sup>44</sup> Ephesians 4:15 exhorts believers to concern themselves with correct doctrine:

*but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ*

This verse, taken out of context, has been the basis for the expression, "speaking into one another's lives" (meaning that we are to spend a lot of energy correcting one another). A contextual reading of Ephesians 4:15 demonstrates that this verse has nothing to do with

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<sup>43</sup>I Timothy 4:6; Jude 5, 17; 2 Peter 1:12; II Timothy 2:14; I Corinthians 4:7; 2 Peter 3:1,2; 2 Peter 1:13,15; Luke 22:19; Acts 11:16; 2 Thessalonians 2:5; Acts 20:35; etc.

<sup>44</sup>I John 2:7-8 uses a play on words by calling the command to love one another a *new command*. John immediately points out that this really is not a new command, but an old one that they had heard from the beginning. In one of the most marvelous passages in the Bible (II Peter 3:10-18) Peter stated that the *new thing* toward which we look is the *new heavens and the new earth*.

"speaking into one another's lives." The concern of this verse is the correction of false doctrine. Paul is stating that as a result of the ministry of ascension gift men, individual believers will have correct doctrine in their dialogue and their relationships will be characterized by love. If false doctrine is being spoken by someone, those around him are to correct his doctrine and to do it lovingly. An example of such activity would be the correction of Apollos by Aquila and Priscilla (Acts 18:24-28).

Closely related to the above function is the act of teaching in order to strengthen the spiritual lives of individual members. When Satan challenged a hungry Jesus to turn stones into bread, Our Lord quoted Deuteronomy 8:3, *It is written, man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.*<sup>45</sup> Imparting the Word, rehearsing the Word, reminding the church of the Word, should be a high priority for elders. This function cannot be separated from the goal of equipping the saints for service.

Thus, one of the qualifications for an overseer is that he be able to teach (I Timothy 3:2). Teaching is the concern of every elder. However, it may not be the dominant activity of every elder. This is seen in Paul's instructions to Timothy concerning the financial support of elders in which special mention is made of those elders who *work in word and teaching*.<sup>46</sup> The implication is that some elders do not work in word and teaching.

What is meant by the expression, "those who work in word"? The Greek term translated, "word" is *logos* (λόγος). This term has a dual use in Greek, one which relates to speaking and one which relates to thinking.<sup>47</sup> When used in the sense of speaking, *logos* signifies a word or saying that embodies a concept or idea. The focus is on the *concept or idea* spoken, rather than on the act of speaking. We use the same sort of expression in English by saying, "May I have a word with you," meaning, "May I tell you something?"

In recent years, the tendency has been to translate this phrase as, *Those who work hard at preaching and teaching* (NAS) or *those whose work is preaching and teaching* (NIV). In our culture, "preaching and teaching" probably is the best rendering of these terms, although the preaching referred to probably would not include preaching to the lost. Either *euangelizo* (ἐὐαγγελίζω) "evangelize" or *kerusso* (κηρύσσω) "proclaim" would be the expected terms used for presenting the Gospel to the lost. Certainly, the term would encompass the Sunday morning sermon that has become a tradition in most churches since the Reformation.

### ***Ruling the Flock***

Ruling the flock is another element in the elders' job description. Paul wrote, *Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor...*(I Timothy 5:17)

The Greek word translated, "rule," in this verse is *proistemi* (προΐστημι). Literally, the term means, "to stand before," and generally is understood to mean, "to manage, to direct, to lead." This term is consistent with the work of the shepherd, who manages, directs, and leads the flock by being before them. This understanding is consistent with the I Peter 5:3 injunction to elders, *proving to be examples to the flock*.

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<sup>45</sup> Matthew 4:4; Luke 4:4 (KJV)

<sup>46</sup> (I Timothy 5:17- literal translation)

<sup>47</sup> The Greek term, ῥῆμα emphasizes something that is communicated, or spoken. All of Scripture is both λόγος and ῥῆμα since it is factual, propositional truth (λόγος) and it has been communicated to us (ῥῆμα) through the written Word (λόγος).

This concept of leadership also is in keeping with two exhortations to the flock found in Hebrews:

*Remember the ones leading you, who spoke to you the word of God, considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith.* (Hebrews 13:7- literal translation)

*Obey the ones leading you and submit to them...* (Hebrews 13:17- literal translation)

In both of these verses, the word translated, *leading*, is, *hegeomai* (ἡγεομαι), meaning, "to lead the way." This implies the same leadership style as that which is exercised by a shepherd; he leads the flock and the flock follows.

The elder does not lead or rule from the position of the autocrat<sup>48</sup> (Matthew 20:25), but leads by standing or going before the flock as an example. A shepherd walks before the flock and shares every experience with the sheep.

This does not imply passive leadership. The shepherd does have authority over his flock. The elders, in council, must rule on various matters and make decisions that relate to the church. Acts 15 is an example of a special council, in which the apostles and elders ruled on the Jerusalem Church's acceptance of Paul and Barnabas and their work among the Gentiles. The Acts 13 record of prophets and teachers in Antioch, meeting together for fasting and worship, is a picture of how elders should meet and lead the church. It was in this setting that they heard from the Holy Spirit. Elders should meet together before the Lord to receive guidance for decisions relating to the flock.

### ***Anointing with Oil and Praying for the Sick***

Anointing with oil and praying for the sick is a task of elders.

*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; and the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him. Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much* (James 5:14-16).

Anointing with oil had various liturgical uses under the Mosaic Covenant. In the New Covenant, however, anointing with oil is mentioned only here, as something done by elders as a prelude to praying for the sick. This is an aorist participle (past tense), in the Greek text, *having anointed*. So, anointing with oil occurs first, as a prelude to prayer.

Another point to note is that the elders do not seek out the sick person, but the sick person is to *call for the elders*. This action denotes humility, dependency, and faith on the part of the sick person.

Auricular confession, either to the elders or to a fellow believer, also is to be a part of this ministry. Thus it would seem that in conjunction with anointing with oil and prayer, the elders should be available to hear the confession of any spiritual condition in the sick person that might interfere with his healing and continued health.

Note that the laying on of hands is not mentioned in this formula, even though Mark 16:18 states that believers shall *lay hands on the sick and they will recover*. It could be argued, therefore, that

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<sup>48</sup>Greek - *archon*, ἀρχὼν

laying on of hands for healing is a ministry activity of all believers, but anointing with oil for healing is reserved for elders.

### ***Financial Oversight of the Flock***

Financial oversight of the flock originally was a responsibility of the apostles,<sup>49</sup> but with the establishment of elders, this became a responsibility of the eldership.<sup>50</sup> This is in keeping with the general oversight of the flock. This does not mean that elders are to be shackled with all of the financial details of the church. The apostles, burdened with the total administrative responsibility in the early church, delegated to a council of seven men the vital ministry of caring for the widows (Acts 6). Through delegation, the Apostles faithfully discharged their financial responsibility for widows. In a church, deacons may handle the finances, but ultimately, as overseers, the elders are responsible.

### ***Guarding Against Wolves***

Guarding against wolves is a very necessary but unpleasant task of elders. We earlier noted Paul's charge to the Ephesian elders:

*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. I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore, be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears.*<sup>51</sup>

Wolves have only self-interest as their motive. They desire position and prestige. They distort the truth in order to capture the loyalty of a portion of the flock.

Note that Paul exhorted these elders to *take heed to yourselves...of your own selves shall men arise... to draw away disciples after them*. This was not just a warning. Paul spoke this as a predictive prophecy! It is a statement similar to one that Jesus made to His disciples, *Have I not chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil*<sup>52</sup>. The emergence of a *Diotrephes, who loves to be first among them*<sup>53</sup>, is one of the enemy's favorite maneuvers. Paul's words echo the words of Jesus recorded as a part of the Sermon on the Mount:

*Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes, nor figs from thistles, are they?...So then, you will know them by their fruits. Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven. Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; Depart from Me you who practice lawlessness.'*<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>49</sup>Acts 4:36-37; 5:1-2; 6:1-2; etc.

<sup>50</sup>Acts 11:30

<sup>51</sup>Acts 20:28-31

<sup>52</sup>John 6:70 (KJV)

<sup>53</sup>III John 9

<sup>54</sup>Matthew 7:15-16, 20-23

Matthew uses the Greek enclitic, *ge* (γε), in verse 20 of this passage. Thus, the sense of this verse becomes, *at least by their fruits, if by no other means, you shall know them.*<sup>55</sup> This implies that it is difficult to identify a false prophet. He has so much to show and to say for himself - devils cast out, souls saved, miracles done, all in Jesus' Name. What better fruit could one have?

Is doctrine or a moral life the test? Is the false prophet always a false teacher or an immoral man? Often, but not always so. However, he always is a self-seeking man.

Even so, doctrinal purity also must be a concern. In Titus 1:9-11, Paul states that one of the qualifications for eldership is to know and hold fast to the truth. By so doing, elders can refute false teachers, many of whom practice their profession in order to get money.

*He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it. For there are many rebellious people, mere talkers, and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision group. They must be silenced, because they are ruining whole households by teaching things they ought not to teach - and that for the sake of dishonest gain.*<sup>56</sup>

Few sins are more serious than causing division in a church. Paul, using very ominous language, warned the Corinthians about the gravity of this destructive sin.

*Do you not know that you are a temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If any man destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him, for the temple of God is holy, and that is what you are.*<sup>57</sup>

Each council of elders must take heed to itself. The elders must feel the responsibility to help one another overcome character flaws that would be damaging to the flock. This "guarding" can create some unpleasant moments, but this mutual openness and concern usually produces greater intimacy among them.

Not only among elders, but wolves also may arise in the flock. This, of course, amounts to sedition, as certain ones seek to draw sheep away from the elders.<sup>58</sup>

There always will be wolves who come from outside the flock. The itinerant teachers who seduced the Galatian Church would be such.<sup>59</sup> Today, teachers outside of or beyond a local church maintain their popularity by discovering "new truths." More often than not, their teachings are subtle distortions of the truth. Sadly, these extra-local teachers often become "gurus" to whom sheep give more loyalty and authority than they give to their local elders.

The task of protecting the flock from itinerant wolves is very difficult because those who have become enamored with the wolves will accuse the elders of "just being jealous," or "resisting the work of God," or of trying to protect their personal kingdom. Paul faced similar charges when

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<sup>55</sup>Bruce, Alexander Balmain, "The Synoptic Gospels," in *The Expositors Greek New Testament*, Volume I, (Grand Rapids, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company) 1976, p. 134

<sup>56</sup>Titus 1:9-11 NIV

<sup>57</sup>I Corinthians 3:16-17

<sup>58</sup>Romans 16:17-18; II Timothy 3:5-8; etc.

<sup>59</sup>Galatians 1:6-9; 3:1; 5:7-12

he came against seducers of the sheep.<sup>60</sup> These accusations must not deter the elders from their task. Of course, the elders must be certain that none of these accusations of jealousy and personal protection are true. A right spirit must prevail in the elders' hearts, when defending the flock.

### ***Church Discipline***

The painful task of church discipline also rests upon the shoulders of the elders. When the efforts of the Matthew 18:15-17 formula fail to restore a broken relationship, it must be the elders who are charged with the task of declaring the recalcitrant member to be disfellowshipped. Similarly, a member of the congregation who persists in sinful behavior, as Paul details in I Corinthians 5, must be expelled from the congregation. Quite naturally, the elders are left with the responsibility of pronouncing the expulsion and ordering the congregation to shun the expelled member.<sup>61</sup> Even though elders put themselves at great personal risk when exercising church discipline, they cannot avoid the responsibility.

### ***Admonition***

*And if anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of that man and do not associate with him, so that he may be put to shame. And yet do not regard him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.*<sup>62</sup>

The elders must be alert to admonish any member of the flock who is straying into dangerous paths. Faithful and loving admonition, hopefully, will prevent the need for church discipline. Admonition and correction must be done in a gentle and humble spirit:

*Brethren, even if a man is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and thus fulfill the law of Christ. For if anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. But let each one examine his own work, and then he will have reason for boasting in regard to himself alone, and not in regard to another. For each one shall bear his own load.*<sup>63</sup>

### **Appropriate Ministry to Individuals**

Since elders are "overseers," hands-on ministry to individuals often will be delegated to others. It is impossible for elders to give quality personal attention to every believer. Any Christian, especially elders, should be concerned about the hurting. Although Ezekiel 34:1-4 is not addressed to the Church but to the Kings of Judah, the passage provides a theological construct helpful in discussing appropriate ministry to individual sheep.

*Then the word of the LORD came to me saying, "Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel. Prophesy and say to those shepherds, 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "Woe, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flock?" "You eat the fat*

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<sup>60</sup> This especially was true in Corinth, where itinerant teachers came to the church and denied Paul's apostleship. One of the driving motivations for Paul's authoring that epistle was to expose these men and to defend his God-given role in that church. This is especially evident from Chapter 13 onward

<sup>61</sup> It should be remembered that the goal of such discipline always must be the restoration (remedial, i.e. redemptive) of the shunned member.

<sup>62</sup> II Thessalonians 3:14-15

<sup>63</sup> Galatians 6:1-5



*and clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fat sheep without feeding the flock. Those who are sickly you have not strengthened, the diseased you have not healed, the broken you have not bound up, the scattered you have not brought back, nor have you sought for the lost; but with force and with severity you have dominated them.*

This rebuke matches what we already have encountered above, i.e., self-seeking shepherds have not cared for the sheep, but have used the sheep for their own benefit. The value of this passage to our study is the distinction that it makes between different conditions among the sheep and the particular care appropriate for each condition. Four conditions needing attention are described:

- the diseased
- the sick
- the broken
- the scattered

First listed are the *diseased*. Kiel and Delitzsch point out the difference between the Hebrew terms translated, "diseased," and "sick."<sup>64</sup> The diseased, are weak in themselves, whereas the sick are weak because of an illness. There are some sheep that are inherently weak; they never can be as strong as the other sheep. These have inherent weaknesses that will require some degree of lifetime care. This does not mean that progress is impossible, but these sheep never will be able to cope with life without some help. Believers in this category may be born with some sort of mental disorder or lifetime dysfunctional condition. Perhaps years of drug abuse or alcoholism has robbed them of certain faculties. Short of a genuine miracle, progress for these dear people is limited. In the world, they experience rejection and ridicule. The constant message to them is that they are of little worth. It must be otherwise in the Church. A true shepherd will love these inherently weak sheep and view them as what they truly are - beings made in the image of God.

The *sick* have a condition that requires curative ministry. Goals can be set for sick sheep. The goal is to bring them back to health. The sick need personal attention in order to diagnose the illness and give appropriate care. What is appropriate for one will not be appropriate for others. Temperament, life experience, and other factors will enter into the treatment process. Prayer, counseling, accountability, and prescribed disciplines may be a part of the treatment.

The *broken* are those sheep who normally are strong, but through some accident or circumstance, they have broken a leg. The responsibility of the shepherd is to set the bone, and perhaps even to carry, temporarily, the broken sheep. Time will be the healer, if someone properly sets the break, applies a splint, and relieves the sheep of the need to put weight on the broken limb. Perhaps a recent death of a loved one; perhaps a severe wound has been received in spiritual warfare; perhaps the individual is in a time of "burn out." The broken need a lifting of burdens and time to heal. Although there may be some temporary, "carrying," these usually are best left alone to heal. Affirmation and a sabbatical may be the best therapy. The elder may need to find someone to assume some of the responsibilities that the broken Christian normally carries.

The *scattered* are those who for some reason have strayed from the flock. They may have been drawn away by some succulent forage; something may have startled them and they fled. Whatever the reason for their absence, they are lost and need to be returned to the fold. Scripture

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<sup>64</sup>Keil, C.F. and F. Delitzsch, "Ezekiel," Volume 9 in *Commentary on the Old Testament* (Peabody, Mass., Hendrickson Publishers) 1989 p.84

is clear that any Christian who habitually absents himself from church meetings is in spiritual danger:

*...let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more, as you see the day drawing near. For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain terrifying expectation of judgment...*<sup>65</sup>

Elders should make an effort to determine why someone is an habitual absentee. Having determined that, he will know whether continual pursuit, rebuke, or secret prayer, is the best means of bringing this one back into the church gatherings.

In caring for needy sheep, elders must ask "Am I creating a dependency upon elders, or am I moving this person toward dependency upon Christ?" The goal of all pastoral care should be healthy, fully functioning church members whose lives are founded upon Christ. Inappropriate pastoral care often produces the opposite result. Elders, by their merciful "always on call" attitude, can contribute to a believer's remaining in an infantile spiritual condition. Elders unintentionally can become enablers. For example, when the sick are treated like the diseased, rarely is progress made toward healing. Some elders gain a sense of self-worth from occupying an essential role in people's lives. When this condition exists, symbiotic relationships develop that are far from healthy.

### **Conclusion**

If one were to prioritize an elder/shepherd's activities on the basis of biblical emphasis, it would seem that the first responsibility and most routine activity is teaching the Word, with a view toward grounding believers in sound doctrine. In some order following this would be listed the various things that fall under the umbrella of "oversight":

1. Discipling members toward spiritual and functional maturity in the Body
2. Guiding each member into his place of function
3. Leading by example
4. In council, making decisions for the local church
5. Anointing with oil and praying for the sick
6. Financial oversight of the local church
7. Guarding against wolves
8. Church discipline
9. Admonition
10. Encouraging through sound doctrine
11. Refuting those who oppose sound doctrine

In addition to these listed responsibilities, any other task essential for the health and well-being of the flock is the concern of the elders. With changing times and cultures, needs may arise that were not present in the First Century. Either through their own involvement or through delegation, the elders must see that such responsibilities are met.

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<sup>65</sup>Hebrews 10:24-27a

## PART FOUR

### The Role of Deacons in the New Testament Church

Because there has been significant debate concerning the role of deacons in the New Testament Church, we will invest several pages discussing the topic.

#### Relevant Terms

The English term, "deacon," is an Anglicization of the Greek term, *diakonos* (διάκονος). The verbal form of the word is *diakoneo* (διακονέω), and is one of several Greek verbs used in the New Testament to describe the act of serving. Each of the Greek verbs words meaning, *to serve*, has a particular emphasis:

*douleuo* (δουλέω) indicates that the one serving is in subjection to the one being served

*therapeuo* (θεραπέω) emphasizes the servant's willingness to serve

*latreuo* (λατρεύω) indicates that the motive for serving is the expectation of wages or a reward

*leitourgeo* (λειτουργέω) refers to service rendered to a community without remuneration

*diakoneo* (διακονέω) implies a personal relationship between the server and the one served

One source of confusion in ecclesiology and practical theology has been the practice of Anglicizing controversial Greek terms, rather than translating them. England was in turmoil when King James ascended to the throne. One of the problems was religious division. Contributing to the religious division was the presence of several English versions of the Scriptures, each one containing footnotes that expressed the theology of its translator. A counselor to the king suggested that one way that he could diminish the religious division was to authorize the production of a non-controversial translation of the Scriptures. In response to that suggestion, King James assembled a team of scholars and commissioned them to have as their goal the production of a non-controversial English version of the Bible. According to anecdotal information, the committee Anglicized certain terms which, if translated, would have caused strife or challenged the current hierarchy. The translators thus produced a Bible that they hoped would be acceptable to all groups.

The Greek term, *diakonos*, was one of the terms that posed a problem for the translators.

- There was an ecclesiastical office of *Deacon* in the Church of England. The translators had to produce a version that accomodated this Anglical ecclesiastical office.
- On the other hand, the term, *diakonos*, often is used in Scripture to refer to servants in general. For example, in John 2, this is the term used for the servants who filled the water pots at the wedding feast in Cana.
- The KJV translators attempted to walk the fine line between translation and interpretation. Instead of translating the term consistently, they sought to determine when the word, *diakonos*, was used in a general sense and when it was used in an ecclesiastical sense. When they considered the passage to be referring to an ecclesiastical office, they either used the Latin term, *minister*, or Anglicized the term as *deacon*. At other times, they translated the term with the English, *servant*.

The practice of selectively Anglicizing, rather than consistently either translating or Anglicizing a particular term, requires the translation team to interpret Scripture, rather than to translate Scripture. Although to some degree interpretation is required in translation (especially in idiomatic expressions peculiar to a single culture), inconsistency and selectivity in how this is done makes it very difficult for the average Bible reader to exegete accurately the Word of God.

For example, the reader of the KJV is led to believe that an ecclesiastical office is described in those passages containing the terms, *minister*, and *deacon*. Interestingly, in many modern churches, these two terms, *minister* and *deacon*, refer to two different ecclesiastical offices. *Minister* tends to be used for clergy; *deacon* tends to be used for a non-clerical office in Protestant churches. Through the use of these terms, the English language reader is led to believe that different terms are used in the Greek, when only the simple term for servant is used in each instance.

Furthermore, the sense of servant is lost to the English reader. For example, in certain Baptist groups, deacons are a ruling class. They are the church board, hiring and firing the preacher. The Roman Catholic Church looks upon deacons as the second order of clergy, who with the Bishop's permission, may baptize and preach. The Anglican Church allows deacons to perform all the duties of clergy except to pronounce absolution and to consecrate the elements. Some Presbyterian groups merge this office with that of ruling elder. Some groups consider preachers to be deacons.

The struggle to define *deacon* would be lessened if the term were discarded and the term were translated consistently by its English equivalent, *servant*. For the balance of this chapter, we follow this practice. Here are some examples of the term's varied uses in the New Testament:

- In the Greek of Acts 6 there is an interesting play on words. The term is used for *servicing tables* (v2) and for *servicing the Word* (v4). Both of these are in the sense of serving food (physical food - v2; spiritual food - v4).<sup>66</sup>
- In I Peter 4:10, the term is used for the Christian's functioning in the *charismata*, thus serving his fellow believers through the exercise of spiritual gifts.
- In II Corinthians 5:18, the term is used to denote the service of apostles and evangelists in reconciling God and man.
- The Received Text (KJV) uses the term in I Thessalonians 3:2 to describe Timothy's service to the lost, through preaching the Gospel.
- In John 2:5, 9 the term is used in the narrow sense of serving tables.
- Hebrews 1:14 uses the term to describe the intimate service that angels provide for believers.

The list of examples could go on and on, but in the abundant use of the term, there is the underlying sense of performing a personal service for someone, with Godly love as the frequent motive. This is true whether referring to preaching, delivering money to the poor, giving food and shelter, or visiting the sick and imprisoned. This understanding of the basic meaning of *diakonos* must color any conclusion reached in this study.

### **Scriptural Evidence for the Existence of Designated Servants**

With such frequent and varied use of the term in the New Testament, we must ask, "Is the term also used as a definitive label for a particular group of leaders in the New Testament?"<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> διακονεῖν τραπέζαις – to wait tables; τῆ διακονίᾳ τοῦ λόγου – the serving of the word

<sup>67</sup>. For representatives of various degrees of seeing "deacons" in Scripture we would refer to the following sources:

- a. A source that tends to see deacons mentioned often - Kevin J. Conner, *The Church in the New Testament*; Bible Temple Publishing, Portland, Oregon, 1989.
- b. A source that rejects most of the possible occurrences - John MacArthur Jr., *Answering Key Questions about Deacons*, The Master's Communication, Panorama City, Cal., 1985.

In the secular world, the word certainly is used in this fashion. People in general may serve one another, but there are those whose vocation is that of *servant*. This is their job and their job title. The same is true in the New Testament.

### ***I Timothy 3***

This chapter lays out qualifications for overseers and servants. The manner of presentation would be absurd if the terms employed did not refer to a specific category of leaders. Even John MacArthur, who sees little evidence in Scripture for the official title, *servant*, admits that this passage (v8ff) "can definitely be said to refer to that office."<sup>68</sup>

### ***Philippians 1:1***

Paul's salutation to the Philippian Church, includes *all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with overseers and deacons* (NIV).

John MacArthur doubts that the *servants* (deacons) referred to in this salutation were a designated group of official servants. He states that Philippians 1:1, "could refer to officers in the church, but again, the context does not seem to warrant such an interpretation."<sup>69</sup> In order to do justice to MacArthur's position, we quote his argument in full:

"The word in this verse translated, overseers (*episkopos*), isn't the word normally used to identify elders (*presbuteros*). The most natural interpretation of this verse is that Paul was addressing in general the leaders and workers in the church, or writing his letter to the whole church. He seems to be saying, 'I write to the whole church, including the leadership and those who follow or serve.'"

There are three flaws in MacArthur's argument:

1. The two terms, *episkopos* and *presbuteros*, are used interchangeably in verses that describe elders and their duties (Acts 20:28; Titus 1:5, 7; I Peter 5:1-2).
2. The terminology of I Timothy 3 (*episkopos* and *diakonos*) is identical with that of Philippians 1:1. If, as MacArthur contends, I Timothy 3:8, "...can definitely be said to refer to that office," then why doesn't the same terminology in Philippians 1:1 refer to that office?
3. Note carefully how MacArthur understands Philippians 1:1. He interprets the verse as saying that Paul sends greetings to the whole church, and included in the church are the leaders and followers. To paraphrase MacArthur, *I write to the whole church, which consists of leaders and followers*.

The Greek of Philippians 1:1 does not lend itself to this understanding. The key is the Greek term, *sun* (σύν). Philippians 1:1 speaks of "saints...with (*sun*) overseers and servants." The placing of the term, *sun* between two nouns or objects, indicates that two separate entities are together. It does not indicate a comprehensive entity and its components. Instead of *sun*, the preposition, *meta* (μετά), would have been used to convey the understanding expressed by

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c. Two sources that walk a line between the two extremes, thus presenting the more traditional view - J. W. McGarvey, *New Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, The Standard Press, Cincinnati, Ohio, 1893 (although published in the last century, this is one of the finest commentaries on Acts ever published); W. Robertson Nicoll, *The Expositors Greek New Testament*, Vols. II,III,IV, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Mich., 1976.

<sup>68</sup>. MacArthur, p 16

<sup>69</sup> MacArthur, p 9

MacArthur<sup>70</sup>. The use of *sun* compels us to conclude<sup>71</sup> that Paul is sending greetings to the saints (the members of the church) along with their leaders (overseers and servants).

Therefore, we must disallow MacArthur's statement:

"To say that Phil. 1:1 refers to the office of deacon might be correct, but it's an arbitrary choice. There isn't enough evidence to be dogmatic about what Paul is saying."<sup>72</sup>

On the contrary, the weight of all evidence points to the conclusion that Paul, in Philippians 1:1, does refer to a specific category of leaders defined by the term, *diakonos*.

Beyond the two passages cited above, there are several that may or may not refer to those officially designated, "servants." We now will examine the ones most often cited.

## Acts 6

*And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration. Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables. Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word. And the saying pleased the whole multitude: and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas a proselyte of Antioch: Whom they set before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them.*<sup>73</sup>

Most students of the subject consider the seven to be the first to occupy the official role of servant. A minority holds an opposing view. MacArthur represents this minority and so we will spend a few pages examining his arguments (rather than dealing with extensive quotes, I take the liberty of summarizing MacArthur).<sup>74</sup>

- The term, *diakonia* is used for the work of the apostles themselves (v 4), as well as the work of serving tables (v 2).
- Only two of the seven are referred to elsewhere in Scripture and neither are called servants.
- The role of servant is not mentioned elsewhere in Acts.
- The Seven were chosen for a specific task, rather than a permanent office. This was in an effort to care for a temporary crisis.
- Later, in Acts 11:30, the offering sent to care for the Jerusalem Church in a time of famine was sent to the elders, not to the servants. Therefore, servants did not exist in the re-constituted Jerusalem Church.
- Two of the seven, Philip and Stephen, were powerful preachers, therefore, they were not servants.

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<sup>70</sup>Kittel, op. cit., Vol. VII, p 767 "On the Use of σύν and μετά with the Genitive."

<sup>71</sup>The NAS translators' use of the term, *including*, in Philippians 1:1, is an effort to convey the sense of the Greek, i.e., that Paul's greetings included saints, overseers, and deacons, not that overseers and deacons were included in the term, "saints."

<sup>72</sup> MacArthur p 10

<sup>73</sup> Acts 6:1-6 (KJV)

<sup>74</sup> MacArthur pgs 10-16

- They were men full of faith, etc., and two of them produced signs and wonders. Thus, they were more like apostles than servants.

From these considerations, MacArthur concludes that the seven probably were primitive elders, rather than primitive servants. Thus, according MacArthur, Acts 6 records the origin of the Jerusalem elders. MacArthur has presented some excellent arguments.

- First, we consider the terminology. The use of the terms *diakoneo* and *diakonia* (the act of serving), describe the responsibility that was being imposed upon the Seven. In essence, the apostles were saying, "You seven men serve physical food as it is needed; we will serve spiritual food." The terminology (vs. 1, 2, 4) is a very effective play on words. That the men were given the described task of serving, then installed into that responsibility through the laying on of apostolic hands, would seem to indicate that they were installed as servants. How else could the passage be understood? This is one of those times in which the Anglicization of the Greek, producing the ecclesiastical title of *deacon*, has given us a problem. If we view these men as being installed as servants, many problems are removed.
- MacArthur then raises the question of subsequent history. Stephen's history ends abruptly with his death, immediately following his installation as a servant. Philip is the only member of the Seven who has a subsequent history in Scripture. Philip continued in the role assigned to him until *they were all scattered abroad, throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles* (Acts 8:1). No longer was there either the need or the opportunity for Philip to continue his service to the Jerusalem widows; everyone left town.
- MacArthur's contention that these men were chosen for a specific task to take care of a temporary problem is only half true.<sup>75</sup> How temporary was the need to take care of widows? Paul gave Timothy instructions concerning the Church's ongoing responsibility for widows (I Timothy 5:3-10). The temporary problem that the seven were chosen to solve probably was not viewed as being temporary by the Jerusalem Church. From the first, the practice of the Jerusalem Church had been to have a common treasury, from which the needs of all were met.<sup>76</sup> On the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2), many Hellenistic Jews, in Jerusalem for the holy festival, accepted Christ.<sup>77</sup> They remained in Jerusalem as a part of the Church, rather than returning to their homes. Thus, there was a need for a communal existence.<sup>78</sup> The daily distribution of food had been a practice from the beginning. The assignment of the seven was a new style of administration of an old program. The assignment was permanent and it dissolved when the congregation dissolved.
- That Steven and Philip functioned as evangelists, in no way argues against their being designated, servants. God expects the employment of every talent that He has committed

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<sup>75</sup> MacArthur is correct in his opposition to the idea that the New Testament contains evidence of an *office of servant* with some sort of plenary role, as is seen in many denominations (Southern Baptists, for example).

<sup>76</sup> Acts 2:44-45; 4:32, 37; 5:2

<sup>77</sup> Acts 2:5-11

<sup>78</sup> There is no evidence that a communal existence was practiced by any other church in the New Testament. The Jerusalem situation was a special one and required a special solution.

to us, when appropriate opportunities present themselves. Elders and evangelists aren't the only ones who can preach when preaching opportunities arise. Steven, a servant, soon found himself standing in the front rank of proclaimers and defenders of the faith. Philip soon became a church planter. Neither Steven's preaching nor Philip's church planting negate the fact that they filled the ministry of servant in Jerusalem *circa* 36 A.D.

- The scattering of the Jerusalem Church had taken place thirty years before the label, *evangelist* was applied to Philip (Acts 21:8). It was natural to give him that label, since he engaged in well-known evangelistic activity after he left Jerusalem. His preaching in Samaria, his witness to the Ethiopian Eunuch, his evangelization and church planting work in Caesarea, certainly earned him that title. As far as we know, he never was set apart as an evangelist, but he was set apart to wait on tables in Jerusalem, thirty years earlier.
- The absence of the mention of servants elsewhere in Acts is a point to be considered. If there were servants in the reconstituted Church of Jerusalem, why did the Antioch Church send its Jerusalem famine offering to the elders (Acts 11:30)? One obvious explanation is that the elders are overseers of all aspects of church life. Elders cannot escape this. As to whether or not the elders gave the money to servants for their distribution is another question - one that cannot be answered. Frankly, we do not know whether or not the role of servant was functioning in the re-constituted Jerusalem Church.
- The other instances in Acts where only elders are mentioned are situations in which one would not expect servants to be mentioned.

#### ***Acts 14:23***

Paul and Barnabas are described as ordaining elders in every church. That they are not described as ordaining servants is not surprising. Their task was to put in place the ruling council of each church. That council would be the one to establish the identity and the work of servants in each local setting.

#### ***Acts 20:17-36***

Paul called for the Ephesian elders to meet him at Miletus. Here, he gave them instructions concerning their role as protectors of the Ephesian flock. His concern was not in those areas that related to the servants. The absence of servants from this meeting does not mean that servants were unknown in Ephesus. This is evident from the fact that it was to Timothy, residing in Ephesus, that Paul wrote instructions concerning the qualifications for the role of servant (I Timothy 3).

Thus, the post-Chapter 6 silence of Acts on the subject of servants, does not reflect one way or the other on the question of the role of the Seven.

As we have emphasized throughout these studies, the New Testament focuses more on function than title. Indeed, New Testament titles either grow out of function or describe function. New Testament titles are job descriptions. With this understanding, we must conclude that the seven were fulfilling the role of servant<sup>79</sup> and that Acts 6 describes the first occurrence in the Church of the role of designated servant.

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<sup>79</sup> They served tables; they were set apart for this work by the laying on of hands; what more, other than the label, would it take to make them *servants*?



We will not give space to extra-biblical material except to note that the earliest documents of Christianity refer to *diakonoi*. Both Ignatius and Polycarp, writing in the first quarter of the Second Century, prominently mention deacons.<sup>80</sup> The impression given is that these were men of some authority in the local churches. What authority and to what extent, we can only surmise.

### **The question of designated female servants**

#### **Romans 16:1**

*I commend unto you Phoebe our sister, which is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea:*

This is a hotly disputed verse. The question arises, "Was Phoebe a woman who served the Church in a general sense, as did Dorcas (Acts 9:36ff) and the approved widows of Ephesus (I Timothy 5), or is the term, *diakonos*, used here to denote an official role?"<sup>81</sup>

Paul used the term *diakonos* twenty-two times in his writings. In almost every instance it clearly is used to denote one who occupies some ecclesiastical role, not one who just has a servant's heart. He frequently applies the term to himself and his companions - *servants of God*, *servants of Christ*, etc. but in such instances the term is applied to those with some official role in the Church.

Note that Paul did not write that Phoebe *served the church*, terminology which would be vague as to her place and activity. Nor does he say that she was a *servant of the saints*, which could imply no more than her ministry to individuals (which it is clear was her practice). Paul calls her *a servant of the church*. This seems to be definitive terminology. Certainly, these reasonings are not conclusive, but the weight of evidence seems to fall on the side of her being an officially designated servant of the church.

This opens the door to the consideration of women in the role of designated servants. If we have interpreted correctly the data concerning Phoebe, then such a designation did exist in the New Testament Church. For that matter, early Church History is replete with references to female servants of the Church. At the heart of the question of designated female servants in the Church is I Timothy 3:11

#### **I Timothy 3:11**

*Even so must their wives be grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things. (KJV)*

There are three possible renderings of this verse:

1. *Their wives* likewise must be serious, not slanderous, etc....
2. *Women* likewise must be serious, not slanderous, etc....
3. *Wives* likewise must be serious, not slanderous, etc....

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<sup>80</sup> Both Ignatius and Polycarp, who wrote in the first quarter of the Second Century, mention *diakonoi* prominently in their writings. Polycarp, in *The Epistle of Polycarp to the Ephesians*, Chapter V., even exhorts the church to be obedient to both the elders and the deacons. For the Greek text, see Lightfoot, op. cit., Volume 3; Ignatius: *To Mary*, pg.149; *To the Trallians*, pg.151; *To the Magnesians*, pg. 169; *To the Philadelphians* pg. 214; *To the Symrnaeans* pg. 223. Polycarp: *To the Ephesians* pg. 330sq.

<sup>81</sup> The same form of the word, *diakonos*, is used for both male and female servants. The only way to determine the gender of the word in each passage is through the definite article and pronouns used in relationship with the word. The feminine form of the word did not occur until after the close of the First Century.

**Translation # 1** is an interpretation rather than a translation. The interpretation is derived from the context. Since it is thrust into the middle of qualifications for male servants, the conclusion is reached that it must in some way refer to the male servants under consideration. This verbiage is employed by the King James Version, Living Bible, New International Version, Today's English Version, New English Bible, New King James Version, the New Living Translation, plus the private translations of Phillips, Moffat, and Laubach.<sup>82</sup>

**Translation # 2** is literal in that it recognizes the predominate meaning of the term, γυνή (*guné*) in the New Testament is *woman* (for a fuller discussion of this issue, see PART SEVEN, qualifications for Elders, which is in the next section). This language is found in the American Standard Version, Revised Standard Version, and New American Standard Version.

**Translation # 3** concludes that Greek word, *gune* (γυνή), which usually is translated, *woman*, should be rendered here as *wives*. The weakness in this conclusion is that the passage is not discussing husbands and wives, *per se*, but qualifications for those who are officially designated servants. This wording is rare, usually found in private translations that seek to be literal and non-conformist. This rendering is an interpretation, rather than a translation.

Another argument in favor of the term, *women*, is the use of the term, *osautos* (ὁσαύτως) in verses 8 & 11. This term usually is used to introduce succeeding items in a list. Under normal circumstances, translators would consider the use of the term to indicate the introduction of a new item in the discourse. If the usual use of the term is employed here, then this is what the passage looks like:

**Verses 1-7** presents the qualifications required of overseers.

**Verse 8** *osautos*, introduces the discussion of male servants.

**Verse 11** *osautos*, introduces the discussion of females.

**Verse 12** continues with a general discussion of qualifications for all designated servants, with special emphasis on the role of males who are to be the head of their households.

Verse 11 clearly refers to some category of women, not just women in general. In the middle of his presentation of qualifications for leadership it would be most unreasonable for Paul to inject some statement about women in general. If the correct translation is *women*, then this verse must refer to female servants. Newport J.D. White has written, "If the wives of the deacons or clergy were meant, as A.V. (KJV), it would be natural to have it unambiguously expressed, e.g. by the addition of *autos* (αὐτός)."<sup>83 84</sup> *Their*, is added in italics by the KJV family of translators, but this is an arbitrary act, having no authority in the text for the addition.

Of course, Roman Catholic scholars choose *woman* as preferred over *wives* because of their ecclesiology (celibate clergy and nuns).

Since grammar favors one rendering and context the other, the question must be asked, "Does context or grammar carry the greatest weight in verse 11?" How one answers that question will depend on one's ecclesiology more than on objective exegesis, since objective exegesis is not able to produce an unquestionable conclusion.

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<sup>82</sup> Beck translates the verse, "the wives...", thus treading a middle path. *The New Testament in the Language of Today*, translated by William F. Beck (St. Louis, Concordia Publishing House) 1964 edition.

<sup>83</sup> αὐτός = *their*

<sup>84</sup> White, Newport J.D., *The First and Second Epistles to Timothy*, in *The Expositors Greek New Testament*, ed. Robertson Nicoll (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1976) pg.116

It should be noted that early church documents mention an order of women servants in the church.<sup>85</sup> One of the most interesting documents from the early Second Century (112 A.D.) is a report of Pliny the Younger, Roman Governor of Bithynia, in which he describes his investigation of Christianity. He states that he arrested and interrogated the leaders of the Bithynian Church, two women servants (Latin *-ministrae* ).<sup>86</sup> Both Clement of Alexandria and Origin (c200 A.D) considered Paul's comments in Romans 16:1 and I Timothy 3:11 to refer to women in the *office of servant*.<sup>87</sup>

Thus there is much to influence us to conclude that I Timothy 3:11 speaks of women in the role of servant, even though the location of the discussion is rather awkward.

In summary, let it be noted that there is no prohibition in Scripture that would prevent a church from ordaining women to this role. Even those who maintain a hard line, barring women from authoritative roles in the church, should have no problem with women as "servants."

### **Function of the Servant (Deacon)**

What is the Scriptural function of servants? The discussion above, concerning the definition of terms, gives us a basis for determining that function. To summarize, we can say that these servants perform a service to meet the needs of members of the church. The needs so met are of broad definition. Since Scripture is vague in this job description, it would seem that each congregation in each age is free to designate what those needs might be.

If we search for models to guide us in the job description, the only scriptural model is in Acts 6. There were two reasons for appointing the Seven:

1. To allow the apostles to spend their time in the activities which were primary to their commission.
2. To insure the fair distribution of food to the widows.

Since the apostles were functioning in the role that elders later came to occupy, we may conclude that their action can be taken as a pattern. Elders may call forth qualified men or women to take responsibility for meeting specific needs of the flock. The elders then are freed for the ministry of teaching and other things that are more central to their role.

In a well reasoned volume, Alexander Strauch interprets the *diakono*i as referring to an office that has as its primary role the ministry of mercy. Brother Strauch states the following:

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<sup>85</sup> The Syrian *Didascalia*, from the first half of the Third Century is of interest here. It recognized the office of female servant and described their ministry as visiting believing women in pagan households where a male deacon would be unacceptable. To them belonged the duties of visiting the sick, bathing those recovering from illness, and ministering to the needy. They assisted in the baptism of women and instructed newly converted women in purity and holiness. They served communion to women who were sick and unable to attend the church service. Of course, this document came from a period in which a hierarchy unknown in the New Testament had come to exist. However, it is interesting to note the existence of the office and the parameters placed upon it (For an overview of this material in the *Didascalia*, see Karen Torjesen, "The Early Controversies over Female Leadership," *Christian History Journal*, Volume VII, No.1, Issue 17, p.21-22.

<sup>86</sup> Catherine Kroeger, "The Neglected History of Women in the Early Church," *Christian History Journal*, Volume VII, No. 1, Issue 17 p. 8.

<sup>87</sup> Kroeger, p.11

"Through the deacons, the local church's charitable activities are effectively organized and centralized. The deacons are collectors of funds, distributors of relief, and agents of mercy. They help the poor, the jobless, the sick, the widowed, the elderly, the homeless, the shut-in, the refugees, and the disabled. They counsel and guide people. They visit people in their homes. They relieve suffering. They comfort, protect, and encourage people, and help to meet their needs. In contemporary language, they are the congregation's social workers."<sup>88</sup>

This concept of servants being ministers of mercy is in harmony with the underlying sense of the verb, *diakoneo*, which, as we already have noted emphasizes personal service and the relationship between the server and the one being served.

My own view, however, would allow the servants a somewhat broader role than that described by Strauch. The primary reason that the Acts 6 Seven were chosen for their task was the fact that administrative responsibilities kept the apostles from fulfilling their calling of shepherding and evangelizing. The apostles had to choose between one or the other; they could not do both well. Thus, they chose seven men to take on the administrative task.

At Tulsa Christian Fellowship we have inaugurated a system of councils, individuals to whom the elders have delegated responsibility and authority for certain aspects of church life.<sup>89</sup> In reality, the members of these councils are *servants*, given the authority and responsibility to carry forward the delegated area of ministry. The elders oversee the blending of the work of the various councils.

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## PART FIVE

### The Leadership and Ministry Style of New Testament Elders

By way of introducing the topic of ministry style, we give our attention to two relevant passages, I Peter 5:1-5 and John 10:11-13.

We earlier have quoted portions of Peter's exhortation to the elders of the churches in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia;<sup>90</sup> here we examine the entire passage.

#### I Peter 5:1-5

*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 among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness;*

*nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.*

*You younger men, likewise, be subject to your elders; and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble. (I Peter 5:1-5)*

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<sup>88</sup>Strauch, Alexander, *The New Testament Deacon, the Church's Minister of Mercy*, (Littleton, Colorado, Lewis & Roth, 1992) pg. 156

<sup>89</sup>For a further discussion of councils at TCF, see Chapter Twelve.

<sup>90</sup>I Peter 1:1

Peter addresses the elders as a "fellow elder." He then describes himself as one who witnessed the sufferings of Christ and a partaker of the glory that is to be revealed. If anyone had reason to be called a "senior elder," or a "chief elder," it was Peter. Yet, he used collegial language, a "fellow elder."

Peter also addressed the "elders among you." He did not address the "elders who are over you" (Note that Paul used the same terminology, "among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers" - Acts 20:28). Elders are on the same level as anyone else in the flock. Taking oversight, as urged by Peter, does not mean elevation, or even separation. Shepherding, according to both Paul and Peter, is something that is done from within the Body as a part of the Body. Three cautions are given by Peter:

1. The first is the need for a willing heart. Shepherding is to be done willingly, not because one is forced to do the work. We are reminded of Paul's statement that giving is not to be done, "grudgingly or under compulsion; for God loves a cheerful giver" (I Cor. 9:7). A cheerful, willing heart, is characteristic of a true elder. A man who constantly complains about the work is not the sort of shepherd that God would choose.
2. The second caution is that elders should not shepherd in order to receive a salary. This does not negate Paul's statement that elders should receive financial support so that they can have time to do the work of ministry (I Timothy 5:17-18). However, a true elder will do the work of shepherding whether he is remunerated or not.
3. The third caution speaks to the style of leadership that God accepts in His flock. Jesus said, *You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. It is not so among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, and who ever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave.*<sup>91</sup>

An important point to be made is this - *God is not looking for leaders who will be servants; God is looking for servants who will serve as leaders.* In harmony with Jesus' standards, Peter urges the shepherds not to do their work as "lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock...God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble." Peter continues to urge the elders to view themselves as among the flock, not above it. He emphasizes this by being somewhat redundant, exhorting the "elders who are among you" to "shepherd the flock of God among you."

When the elder's behaviour expresses, "I am eager to be your servant; I serve you willingly, it is the passion of my life; even though I have authority, you and I look at one another horizontally, not vertically," then the believer views himself as important and loved both by God and God's undershepherd.

### **John 10:11-13**

*I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. He who is a hireling, and not a shepherd, who is not the owner of the sheep, beholds the wolf coming, and leaves the sheep, and flees, and the wolf snatches them, and scatters them. He flees because he is a hireling, and is not concerned about the sheep.*

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<sup>91</sup>Matthew 20:25-27

Even though Jesus did not have elders in mind when he made these statements, they are relevant to all who have the responsibility of caring for God's flock. Jesus, of course, was speaking of Himself and making a particular point. True shepherds have a sense of ownership responsibility. This harks back to the I Peter 5:3 reference to "those allotted to you."

The hireling does not care for the sheep, but is the same self-seeking person whom we have met in our previous discussions. He is called a "wolf" by Paul (Acts 20:28ff), and a "false prophet," by Jesus (Matthew 7:15ff). Exactly how a shepherd lays down his life for the sheep will vary. Whatever the specifics of the case may be, no true shepherd is a self-seeking person, but he puts the welfare of the flock above his own welfare. In Jesus' case, this was done by going to the cross to achieve the flock's salvation. An elder may sacrifice his reputation or place of comfort to protect and save the sheep from marauders.

### **Specific Traits and Style of Elders' Leadership**

#### ***All ministry is performed with a sense of dependency upon the Holy Spirit***

Here is a key passage for church leadership:

*As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. Whoever speaks, let him speak, as it were, the utterances of God; whoever serves, let him do so as by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs glory and dominion forever and ever. (1 Peter 4:10-11)*

In verse 11, Peter makes three important statements concerning the appropriate nature of oral and active ministry:

1. *Whoever speaks, let him speak, as it were, the utterances of God;*
2. *whoever serves, let him do so as by the strength which God supplies;*
3. *so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs glory and dominion forever and ever.*

The desire of every true servant of God is that He, the Lord God, be the one glorified, not the human minister. When God is the acknowledged source of the ministry being executed, then God is glorified. We briefly examine the first two of these phrases, the exhortations.

The Greek term, *logia theou* (λόγια θεοῦ), is translated, *utterances of God* in the NAS. The KJV renders the term, *as the oracles of God*. This expression is used three times in the New Testament to refer to Old Testament Scripture (Acts 7:38; Romans 3:2; Hebrews 5:12). In the Septuagint, *logia* is used as a translation of the Hebrew word, *neum*.<sup>92</sup> An interesting Septuagint example of these terms is in Numbers 24:2-4, in which Balaam is described as one who speaks as God gives revelation. He is not able to speak what he chooses to speak, but can speak only that which God gives.

It is in this sense that leaders are to speak as *oracles*. Leaders in the N.T. church should endeavor to speak what God has revealed. Consistent with the New Testament's use of the term, *logia theou*, cited above, Scripture is such revelation. Consistent with the Septuagint's rendering in Numbers 24:2-4, prophetic utterance also is in view, but care must be exercised to make certain that the prophetic utterance truly is an utterance from God.

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The second phrase of I Peter 4:11 is an amplification and elaboration of the first phrase, *Whoever serves, let him do so as by the strength (Greek: ischus – ισχύς) which God supplies;* Such dependency upon the Holy Spirit is necessary, *so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever.* This is an important point. Teaching and ministry that is out of our own strength, ability, or learning, glorifies us. That which is done at the revelation and in the strength of the Holy Spirit, glorifies God, since He is the sole source.

We live in a day in which, if he had enough money, a church leader could go to some sort of seminar or conference every week. One wonders what would happen if all of these expensive and time consuming gatherings would be canceled; every leader would spend as much time on his knees as he would spend in a conference; and church leadership would begin to function in on the assumption that God responds to the sincere seeking of his servants by giving them direction and wisdom.

This does not mean that study and training are useless. They are important. The Twelve went through a very intensive three year training and schooling. One's mind is not to be disconnected when he enters into a relationship with Christ. Our Lord declared that the first and great commandment is,

*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.*<sup>93</sup>

The New Testament contains many comments concerning the mind. The important point, however, is that the Holy Spirit must be paramount, with the elements of learning, experience, and reason in submission to the Spirit's leadership.

### ***New Testament Church elders lead in an attitude of prayer.***

Almost every glimpse that we have of the First Century local church includes a prayer meeting somewhere in the picture, obvious or remote. Acts describes normal church life as being a life of corporate prayer. Note the following flow of prayer in the early days of the Church:

1. The Church was born in a prayer meeting.(Acts 1:14 - 2:4)
2. The Church was continually devoted to prayer. (Acts 2:42)
3. On every occasion of triumph or concern, the Church prayed:
  - When Peter & John were released from prison (Acts 4:23ff)
  - When the first non-Jewish converts were received into the Church and their acceptability to God was credentialed by the reception of the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:15-17)
  - Upon Peter's imprisonment, the Church began an uninterrupted prayer meeting until his release (Acts 12:5-12)
  - Upon the bidding farewell to traveling trans-local ministries (Acts 20:36; 21:5)
4. The inception of new ministries always was accompanied by prayer.
  - When the first deacons were chosen (Acts 6:1-6)
  - When the first apostolic team was launched (Acts 13:1ff)
  - When the first elders were installed in Gentile churches (Acts 14:23)
5. The Apostles considered prayer and teaching to be their main priorities. (Acts 6:2-4)

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<sup>93</sup> Matthew 22:37

6. Prayer was the means whereby healing was ministered. (Acts 9:40; 28:8; see James 5:13ff)
7. Daily prayer was the practice of apostolic teams. (Acts 10:9; 16:16; 16:25)

A reading of the Epistles would reveal even further examples.

To the New Testament Church, prayer is like breathing. Life cannot be experienced without it. Through prayer, things are changed and the Church hears from God. Satan will do everything that he can to keep the Church from going to its knees in prayer.

Most elders meetings are business meetings, not prayer meetings. If there is not enough time in the meeting to both pray and discuss business, prayer usually is sacrificed. This, of course, reflects American society. We are "doers." One has to wonder what would happen to the church in America if elders meetings became prayer meetings, with the business decisions growing out of prayer, rather than discussion. Prayerfully seeking the mind of God, even in the smallest of matters, is the New Testament leadership style. Some elders councils, recognizing this need, are scheduling two meetings each week: one for prayer and one for business. Even with this arrangement, it must be remembered that the business meeting should be couched in prayer. We could cite a sad list of churches whose problems might not have existed, had leadership led the church in humble prayer. It is no coincidence that the message being spoken on every continent, today, is "God is calling His Church to prayer."

It is worth noting that when God called out the first missionaries, He came to a leadership group that was "ministering" to the Lord and fasting. We are not given details as to how the Lord imparted the message, "Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul..." but the important point for us is that the word came when the group was together, fasting and ministering unto the Lord. What an elders meeting that must have been!

### ***Elders lead the church with an attitude of humble service***

*You know that those who are recognized as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them; and their great men exercise authority over them. But it is not so among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant; and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve...* (Mark 10:42b-45)

These words of Jesus need to be memorized as the guiding motto of New Testament leadership:

It is important to realize that the church does not exist for the benefit of the leaders. The leaders exist for the church which they serve (In Roman Catholicism, the "Church" consists of the hierarchy. This is a reversal of the New Testament picture in which the gathered believers in a locality constitute the Church). As stated earlier, Our Lord is not looking for leaders who will be servants; He is looking for servants who are willing to take up the burden of leadership.

Here are other Scriptures that need to be in an elders' guidance system (some have been presented earlier):

*For through the grace given to me I say to every man among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith.* (Romans 12:3)



*You yourselves know from the first day that I set foot in Asia, how I was with you the whole time, serving the Lord with humility and with tears... (Acts 20:18b-19a)*

*shepherd the flock of God...not lording it over those allotted to you charge...and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for "God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble." Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time. (1 Peter 5:2a, 3a, 5b-6)*

*For who regards you as superior? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it? (I Corinthians 4:7)*

*Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bondservant, and being made in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. (Philippians 2:5-8)*

The "super star" ministry style so prevalent in contemporary Church culture is in sharp contrast to Our Lord's prescribed leadership style. The example of Jesus, Himself, stands as judgment against such exaltation. It is difficult to imagine much approval in heaven's courts of the life size oil paintings of *The Pastor* that greet those entering many of America's worship palaces. When the Corinthian Church began exalting various gifted leaders, Paul brought rebuke:

*For when one says, "I am of Paul," and another, "I am of Apollos," are you not mere men? What then is Apollos? And what is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, even as the Lord gave opportunity to each one. I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth. So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth. (1 Corinthians 3:4-7)*

When Paul performed a miracle of healing on a lame man in Lystra, the people of the city began calling Barnabas, *Zeus*, and Paul, *Hermes*. The heathen priests and the people began bringing garlands and wanted to perform a sacrifice to Paul and Barnabas. The two apostles responded in shocked horror,

*But when the apostles, Baranabas and Paul, heard of it, they tore their robes and rushed out into the crowd, crying out and saying, "Men, why are you doing these things? We are also men of the same nature as you... (Acts 14:14-15)*

Satan is very skilled in stirring pride in the holiest of men. One of the challenges faced by church leaders is maintaining deafness to the compliments of church members. This is a special challenge for those who are gifted preachers. The ability to control a crowd through preaching can become very seductive. My mother used an old Cherokee idiom to describe someone who thought highly of himself, "He thinks he's something on a stick." Successful church leaders all too often have such a sense of elevation. Paul's rebuke in I Corinthians 4:7, quoted above, should be a matter of constant awareness for all who are gifted in public speaking.

### ***New Testament elders lead in an attitude of love***

One of the most popular books ever written is Henry Drummond's forty-five page, *The Greatest Thing in the World*. This Christian classic, written more than a hundred years ago, is an exposition of 1 Corinthians 13. The author began his book with this question,

"Everyone has asked himself the great question of antiquity as of the modern world: What is the *summum bonum* - the supreme good? You have life before you. Once only you can live it. what is the noblest object of desire, the supreme gift to covet?"

Drummond then answered the question with the apostles own words, *The greatest of these is love*. Peter wrote, *Above all things, have fervent love among yourselves.*<sup>94</sup> John wrote, *God is love.*<sup>95</sup>

If there is a *summum bonum* for church leaders, this is it: *love*. Any action of leadership must have love at its core. This is true whether it is in discipline or benevolence. Note that the expulsion of the incestuous man by the Corinthian church was to be done for two reasons (1) purity of the church; (2) that the man may repent and be saved.<sup>96</sup> Unfortunately, church discipline often is executed in a vindictive spirit or a spirit of judgment and justice.

Ministry by some leaders is carried out grudgingly, as a responsibility or a duty, rather than coming from a well-spring of love.

Again, we hear the words of Peter and Paul

*...shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness, (1 Peter 5:2)*

*...the Lord's bond servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth... (2 Timothy 2:24-25)*

While giving themselves to these matters, elders always will be compassionate caring brothers who demonstrate Romans 12:15, I Thessalonians 5:14, and Acts 20:35:

*Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep (Romans 12:15)*

*We urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with everyone (I Thessalonians 5:14)*

*In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35)*

### ***New Testament elders lead by delegation and assignment***

Although it may seem redundant to address this subject, after having spent some time on the work of deacons, there is a great need to do so because many elder councils fail in this important area.

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<sup>94</sup>1 Peter 4:8

<sup>95</sup>1 John 4:8

<sup>96</sup>1 Corinthians 5:5-8

When Moses father-in-law, Jethro, visited Moses in the wilderness, he observed Moses' efforts to fulfill an impossible task:

*It came about the next day that Moses sat to judge the people, and the people stood about Moses from the morning until the evening. Now when Moses' father-in-law saw all that he was doing for the people, he said, "What is this thing that you are doing for the people? Why do you alone sit as judge and all the people stand about you from morning until evening?"*

*Moses said to his father-in-law, "Because the people come to me to inquire of God. When they have a dispute, it comes to me, and I judge between a man and his neighbor and make known the statutes of God and His laws."*

*Moses' father-in-law said to him, "The thing that you are doing is not good. You will surely wear out, both yourself and these people who are with you, for the task is too heavy for you; you cannot do it alone. Now listen to me: I will give you counsel, and God be with you. You be the people's representative before God, and you bring the disputes to God, then teach them the statutes and the laws, and make known to them the way in which they are to walk and the work they are to do. Furthermore, you shall select out of all the people able men who fear God, men of truth, those who hate dishonest gain; and you shall place these over them as leaders of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties and of tens. Let them judge the people at all times; and let it be that every major dispute they will bring to you, but every minor dispute they themselves will judge. So it will be easier for you, and they will bear the burden with you. If you do this thing and God so commands you, then you will be able to endure, and all these people also will go to their place in peace."*

*So Moses listened to his father-in-law and did all that he had said. Moses chose able men out of all Israel and made them heads over the people, leaders of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties and of tens. They judged the people at all times; the difficult dispute they would bring to Moses, but every minor dispute they themselves would judge. (Exodus 18:13-26)*

Moses, like many leaders in every generation had taken up each leadership responsibility as it arose. He became so busy being "the man" that he had little time to do anything other than attempt to meet the needs that forced themselves upon him. He was practicing crisis management. There were four negatives that this produced:

1. The people were unable to get decisions in a timely manner;
2. Moses was reaching a point of exhaustion;
3. Being consumed with many details, Moses was not able to provide true spiritual leadership. He was not fulfilling his primary role of teaching the statutes of God to the people;
4. Others to whom God had given leadership abilities were not given a place to serve.

It was no coincidence that Jethro came to visit Moses at this time. The Hand of God clearly is seen in this episode. The closing words of Jethro's counsel are key, "If you do this thing and God so command you..." (v23). It would have been a mistake for Moses to delegate this responsibility if God had not said, "Yes."

Later, when the people were complaining that all that they had to eat was manna, Moses, in his exhaustion, told God, "I just can't do this any more." God responded by authorizing the establishment of a council of seventy elders to join Moses in leading the people. God gave to

these seventy men a degree of Moses' spiritual anointing.<sup>97</sup> This is an important point. Since the seventy and Moses were functioning in the same Spirit, they would lead in harmony with one another. The trust was not in the man, but in the Spirit that functioned through them.

Note that in one instance, there was a delegation of jurisprudence. In the other instance, there was a delegation of leadership responsibility. Moses' experience is mirrored in the apostles' delegating to servants the care of widows.

Delegation clearly was a part of Paul's apostolic pattern. As his church planting ministry grew, Paul increasingly practiced delegation. He began the practice of leaving one or two of his team members in a church where they would carry on the work. Two men, Timothy and Titus, especially fit the description, "Paul's delegates." To Titus, he wrote,

*For this reason, I left you in Crete, that you might set in order what remains... (Titus 1:5a)*

When Paul sent Timothy to Corinth, He wrote the Corinthians,

*For this reason I have sent to you Timothy, who is my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, and he will remind you of my ways which are in Christ, just as I teach everywhere in every church...Now if Timothy comes, see that he is with you without cause to be afraid; for he is doing the Lord's work, as I also am. Let no one despise him. (1 Cor. 4:17; 16:10-11a)*

On another occasion, Paul left Timothy in Ephesus to carry on the work of establishing the church:

*to Timothy, my true child in the faith: Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. As I urged you upon my departure for Macedonia, remain on in Ephesus, in order that you may instruct certain men not to teach strange doctrines... (1 Tim. 1:2-3)*

Some elders find it difficult to surrender control of any area of church life. Not only do they find it difficult to delegate, but if and when they delegate, they still want to tell their delegates how to do everything. They just aren't able to take their hands off of certain things so that they can give their attention to higher priorities. The negative results of such a leadership style are the same as those experienced by Moses:

1. Elders meetings become so full of details about every aspect of church life that the elders fall behind in their schedule of making important decisions. When decisions are not made in a timely fashion, the church staff and volunteers become frustrated, things are not done when they should be done, and church life suffers.
2. The dominant sounds coming from elders are groans and sighs. The schedule and responsibilities of church leadership become unbearable;
3. The primary role of being communicators of the Word of God is forfeited when administrative responsibilities and other routines rule the elders' lives;
4. Because the elders do everything, the members of the body are not trained and given experience in ministry. Thus, the body does not grow in health and strength.

Since one of the tasks of elders is to guide people into the ministries for which they are equipped, delegation of responsibility becomes a very important part of their leadership style. Elders constantly should ask themselves, "Is there someone else in the local church who should be doing what I am doing?" If so, that other person probably should be doing it.

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<sup>97</sup>This does not mean that Moses anointing diminished. The anointing was like fire, which spreads, but does not diminish when a portion of it is moved to ignite something else.

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## PART SIX

### Scriptural Qualifications for Elders

Experience has verified the proposition that a congregation will rise no higher, spiritually, than the spiritual level of its leadership. This well established axiom of church-life must have been one thing that motivated Paul to provide Timothy and Titus with detailed descriptions of those qualified to become elders. The qualificationS for elders and deacons are consistent with the job descriptions that we already have studied.

The two lists describing the qualities that make one fit to be an elder (I Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9), demonstrate that Paul was more concerned with character and temperament than he was with ability. Only two of the twenty listed traits refer to ability; all of the rest are character and temperament traits.

Temperament is an inborn quality and remains unchanged during a person's lifetime.<sup>98</sup> There is no heirarchy of temperaments, i.e., some are better than others. Rather, temperaments cause individuals to be different from one another, but not better or worse than one another. A person's temperament may make him highly qualified for one role, but a total misfit in another role. Paul clearly recognized this when he cited temperament qualities appropriate for those chosen to be elders. Character is another matter. There is good character and bad character, regardless of what one's temperament might be.

Sadly in our result-oriented culture, a person's gifts, talents, and abilities often are of more importance than his character. I personally know of a very talented musician who was on the worship team of a Tulsa megachurch. This man left his wife and children and moved in with his paramour, but the church did not remove him from the worship team. He was a talented musician and was doing a good job and so there didn't seem to be any concern about who he really was. I know of more than one situation in which the moral character of a successful "pastor" was less important to those around him than his ability to get results. As already stated, Paul's list of qualifications for eldership makes it apparent that he was more concerned with character and temperament than he was with ability

Some of the terms in Paul's lists are common to both I Timothy and Titus. There are other terms that are not identical, but are synonymous. Then, there are some terms that are distinct to each list.<sup>99</sup> We will begin with an examination of Timothy then turn to Titus, in an effort to understand those qualities that must be present in men chosen to be elders.

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<sup>98</sup> In, *Spirit Controlled Temperament*, Tim LaHaye presents an excellent study of temperament, character, personality, and the Holy Spirit's actions on each of these dimensonS.

<sup>99</sup> The terms peculiar to each list might be the result of Paul's intimate knowledge of the two cultures. Knowing the tendencies present in Crete, for instance, Paul would use terms that directly or subtly addressed the Cretan proclivities. One wonders how Paul would fare in today's politically correct culture if he openly wrote the following, *One of themselves, a prophet of their own, said, Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons. This testimony is true.* Whatever might be the cause for the differing terms, we are the beneficiaries of those differences. The result is a fuller description of the qualities that must be present in those chosen to be elders.

## I Timothy 3:1-7

***It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do.*** (v1)

Jesus clearly stated that ambition for position and prestige disqualifies one for leadership in His Kingdom.<sup>100</sup> Therefore, we must reject the view that Paul speaks approvingly of those who *aspire to the office of overseer*. How then are we to understand Paul's statement? One of the problems is the manner in which most versions render the Greek text. In an effort to produce more readable English, the translators have obscured Paul's emphasis upon function rather than position. Literally, the Greek says, *If anyone aspires to oversight*. This is quite different from *one who aspires to the office of overseer*.<sup>101</sup> The phrase describes a person who finds fulfillment in the work of oversight. The focus is on the act of overseeing, rather than on being an overseer. It is a *work* to which one is drawn, rather than a *position*.

Even if one concludes that an office is more in view, as is done in most translations (KJV, NAS, NIV), then Paul is making a play on words, *If anyone aspires to the **office** of overseer, let me emphasize that it is a fine **work** he desires to do*. In both portions of the phrase, Paul is emphasizing function.

One would expect the Holy Spirit to put into a future elder a yearning for the type of activity that constitutes the work of elders. Ambition for a position, however, disqualifies, rather than qualifies one for church leadership. It is unfortunate that the rendering of the Greek text by most versions has caused confusion on this issue.

***An overseer, then must be*** (v2)

The qualifications listed are not goals, nor an ideal, but traits that must be present in those who are to become elders.

***Above reproach*** (v2)

The term, *anepileptos*, (ἀνεπίληπτος) literally means, "cannot be laid hold of." A similar term, *anekletos*, (ἀνέγκλετος) meaning, "cannot be called to account," or "beyond accusation," is used twice in the Titus catalogue (Titus 1:6-7) Should Satan draw a moral grappling hook through the stream of the man's life, no debris would be snagged.

***The husband of one wife*** (v2)

This expression has produced more controversy than any of the other qualifications. Both Timothy and Titus contain the same Greek terminology, *mias gunaikos andra* (μιᾶς γυναικὸς ἄνδρα). The expression literally means, "a man of one woman," or "a one-woman man." The Greeks used these terms in the same manner that certain cultures in America use them ("She is my woman," meaning "She is my wife," or "She is my girlfriend").

Note how some of the popular English versions render this phrase:

ESV, KJV, NAS, RSV: the husband of one wife

NIV: the husband of but one wife

NRSV: married only once

NLT: He must be faithful to his wife

<sup>100</sup> Matthew 20:25-28

<sup>101</sup> Ἐπισκοπή (*episkope*)- oversight, rather than ἐπίσκοπος (*episkopos*)- overseer

The word, *gune*, occurs 221 times in the New Testament. In 161 of these occurrences it is translated, "woman," by those of the KJV stream. In the other sixty occurrences, it is translated, *wife*. It is translated as *wife* one or two times fewer in other streams. It is apparent that the translators of all of the more popular versions consider the term to mean, *woman*, unless there is a reason to translate it, *wife*. Thus, *gune* is translated, *wife*, only when attendant terms or context make it apparent that the writer intended to communicate *wife*, rather than, *woman*.

- In most of the instances in which the term is translated, *wife*, the personal pronouns, *his*, *your*, etc., are used in conjunction with *gune*. For example, in Matthew 1:20 we read, *Take unto thee Mary thy wife* (Matt. 1:20).
- In other instances, the sense of what is being said requires the use of the term, *wife*. For example, Mark 10:29 reads, *No man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake....* Another example is I Cor. 5:11 - *Let not the husband put away wife* (*His* is not in the Greek, but is added in most versions for clarity in the translation).

Although the immediate assumption is that Paul was describing a man's marital state, he could have been speaking of a man's character, rather than his marital state.

There is a Greek term referring to the marital state that is not ambiguous. This term, *γαμῆν* (*gamein*), "to marry," or the noun form, *γάμος* (*gamos*), "marriage," or "wedding," was available to Paul if he had wanted to emphasize that an elder must be married and only once. He could have written, *ἅπαξ*<sup>102</sup> *γαμηθῆναι*<sup>103</sup> *ἄνδρα* (*apachs gamethenai andra*) "a one time to be married man". Since these qualifications are conditions that "must be," we would expect Paul to use clear language when laying down these qualifications. His choice of ambiguous terminology causes many people to doubt that Paul speaks here of the marital state of an elder candidate.

We can be certain, however, that an elder must be a *one-woman man*. This is a character trait which, in the context of marriage, would result in his being the faithful husband of one wife. We can be certain that neither a polygamist nor a flirtatious man is qualified to be an elder. Neither of these would be a one-woman man.

Some groups that insist that Paul here refers to one's marital state do not allow a remarried widower to be an elder. Such a view violates the first rule of hermeneutics, *Each verse of Scripture must be interpreted in the light of all other Scripture*. The comprehensive view of Scripture is that at the death of a spouse a person is free to remarry.<sup>104</sup> In some instances he is exhorted to do so.<sup>105</sup>

A more intense point of controversy is the subject of remarried divorcees. Is a remarried divorcee qualified to be an elder? If a man has only one wife at a time, does that qualify him as a one-woman man? A church's theology on divorce and remarriage will influence how this question is answered. Many would not allow a remarried divorcee to be an elder under any circumstances.

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<sup>102</sup> *ἅπαξ* an adverb - *once*

<sup>103</sup> *γαμηθῆναι* a verb – infinitive aorist passive, indicating a single act of becoming married.

<sup>104</sup> Romans 7:1-3, for example

<sup>105</sup> I Timothy 5:14

Others would place the prohibition at certain points on the scale, rather than make a blanket prohibition. For example, some consider a pre-conversion divorce and remarriage to be past history. According to this view, one is accountable only for what happens after he is baptized into Christ. The basis for this view is found in the terminology of Romans 6, which describes the pre-baptism state as being one in which a person is a *slave to sin*, and a post-baptized person as a *slave to righteousness*. Those who hold this view would not bar from eldership those who had a pre-baptism divorce and remarriage, if they have lived faithfully with one wife since conversion. Before conversion, he was not a one-woman man; since conversion, he has been a one woman man.

Churches that permit divorcees to remarry if the divorce were the result of unfaithfulness on the part of the other spouse, also would tend to allow such to be elders - if through many years of faithfulness to his present wife, he has demonstrated that he is a one-woman man.

Another question that arises from this qualification is, "must an elder be a married man; does he have to have one wife?" If the Greek is understood to refer to an elders' married state, then the *mias gunaikos andra* would be understood as saying that he must have one wife. The best and more certain answer to this question is found in verse 4 of the present passage and Titus 1:6, where close scrutiny of a man's performance as a husband and father determines his qualification to be an elder. In these verses, a family man clearly is pictured (more on these verses later).

### ***Temperate*** (v2)

The Greek term is *nephalios* (νηφάλιος). Originally, this adjective referred to cultic sacrifices which did not contain wine. Some sacrifices did and some did not. Literally, the term means, *not holding wine*. However, by New Testament times, the adjective had lost its original meaning. In the New Testament era, the term was used figuratively, signifying one who "had a clear mind," or "to be alert."<sup>106</sup> The term describes someone whose mind is not muddled by any emotion, intoxicating experience, attachment, obsession, or influence. Being free from such controlling elements, elders are to be objective in their thinking. They must be stable men of sober thought, in order to handle the pressures that they face in the fulfillment of their God-given responsibilities. This is a temperament trait, rather than a character trait.

### ***Prudent*** (v2)

*Sophron* (σόφρον), describes one who "curbs his desires or impulses." Titus 1:8 contains the same term. Both this term and the preceding one describe men who temperamentally are not excitable or impulsive, but rather men who are thoughtfully deliberate in their actions. Such men would not do something because they just got carried away and thus, are not responsible for their actions.

### ***Respectable*** (v2)

*Kosmios* (κόσμιος), describes a "well arranged" or "a well ordered" life. This term presents the picture of one who is the opposite of the colloquial expression, "running around like a chicken with his head cut off."

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<sup>106</sup>Kittel, Gerhard, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley, (Grand Rapids, Mich., Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1967) Vol. IV p 939; Vincent, Marvin R., *Word Studies in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich., Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1976) Vol IV p.229



This trilogy, *temperate*, *prudent*, and *respectable*, describe a particular type of temperament that is appropriate for eldership. The type of person described is more of a "faithful plodder" than a "flamboyant leader."

The safety of the local church demands that such a stable temperament be present in the controlling core. Evangelists excitedly may stir the church to rush into the latest campaign; prophets may enthrall the church with their visions; others may always be pushing church members to jump on some current political bandwagon; proponents of the latest seminar or spiritual fad may seek to "keep the church on the cutting edge;" but elders must be men with their feet on the ground who deal with spiritual reality. Elders never will lose consciousness of the purpose of the Church and will not allow the local church to be carried away into any extreme by the impulses of various members.

An elder's role is similar to the father of a large family at a picnic. The children run about enjoying all of the playground equipment, climbing trees, rolling down a grassy knoll. The father sits and watches, pleased that each child is finding a way to express himself, finding fulfillment, developing strength, and learning personal limitations. His role is to make certain that none of them move into an area of danger. With such a father, the children are secure and safe in their frolic, certain of his watchful eye.

Members of the congregation are free to pursue what for them is spiritually fulfilling. They feel secure in these pursuits because they know that the temperamentally stable men at the core of the local church will walk only down those solid paths that God has prepared for the Eternal Church.

I have heard flamboyant Church leaders say, "I would rather have wildfire in a church than no fire." Such an irresponsible attitude on the part of leadership is shocking. Wildfire destroys. I cannot believe that God is pleased with any leader who yearns for experience to the degree that he would tolerate uncontrolled wildfire in his King's Vineyard. Elders who possess the temperament described in this section, would be men who would not be caught up in any wildfire experience.<sup>107</sup>

At this present time, when there is so much emphasis on outward spiritual manifestations, there is a great need for elders to be steady plodders.

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<sup>107</sup> In the late 1960's and early 1970's, when churches all across the world began experiencing various manifestations of the Holy Spirit, I was the minister of a local church in Tulsa. Many exciting things were happening in our city. Some of them were very bizarre. Some were from God and some were not. As the members of our local church were running from this seminar to that one, from one great meeting to another, chasing after experience, as well as new revelation, I felt no release from God to participate in such activity. Certainly I yearned for all that God seemed to be releasing into our society. However, I knew that if I started down any path many would follow me. Should that path prove to be a false one, I would find my way back to solid ground, but I knew that some who followed me down that false path would not find their way back. They would be lost, either into heresy or despair and disappointment. So, out of accountability to God for His sheep, I functioned as a stodgy plodder, calling the flock to join me in Bible study, skeptically testing each teaching and experience. As a result of that stance, we came to know what we believed and why. The sheep had their beliefs founded upon the secure Word of God. All of us did come to know God through the Holy Spirit in a more intimate way.

**Hospitable** (v2)

*Philoxenos* (φιλόξενος), literally means, "one who loves strangers." Titus 1:8 contains the same term. This is a quality that all Christians are to manifest,<sup>108</sup> but it especially is important for elder/overseers; a portion of their responsibility is the church's relationship with traveling ministries.

**Able to teach** (v2)

*Didaktikos* (διδασκτικός), describes one who is, "skillful in teaching." Titus 1:9 expands this qualification, *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.*

Titus 1:9 describes one who is committed without any reservation to Scripture. Not only is he to be skillful in teaching facts, but he has the ability to use Scripture to motivate believers and to refute disputers of the truth.

There are two dimensions to teaching: imparting information and explaining the significance of the information. Every elder should be able to do both of these with excellence.

**Not addicted to wine** (v3)

*Me paroinon* (μὴ πάροινον), literally means, "not one who sits long at his wine." Titus 1:7 uses the same terminology. This is not a prohibition against drinking wine, but a prohibition against its abuse, as well as any other mind altering substance. In some contemporary cultures, abstaining from alcoholic beverages is considered to be a mark of a Christian. Nowhere in the New Testament, however, is this view presented.

There are many reasons why an elder may decide to be an abstainer. He may be one who is unable to enjoy wine without being tempted to overindulgence. Perhaps he is in the company of those who have a conscience about the matter and so, in accordance with Romans 14, he decides to not tempt them to violate their consciences. Perhaps his ministry is among those who cannot drink without over indulgence and he does not want to tempt them to sinful behaviour. The culture in which he ministers may have a bias against alcohol (in Muslim countries, for example) and his influence and witness would be destroyed by his drinking wine. For these reasons and others, an elder may choose to be an abstainer.

However, the decision to enjoy food and drink with thanksgiving, rather than following cultural legalism and asceticism may indicate that he is more qualified to be an elder/overseer than if he were an abstainer for the wrong reasons.<sup>109</sup> Legalistic taboos, for example, are called a *doctrine of demons* by Paul.<sup>110</sup>

However, Paul's point must not be missed – overindulgence in alcohol disqualifies one from eldership.

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<sup>108</sup>Romans 12:13; Hebrews 13:2; Titus 1:8; I Peter 4:9

<sup>109</sup>I Timothy 4:1-5; 5:23; Colossians 2:20-23

<sup>110</sup>I Timothy 4:1-2

***Not pugnacious* (v3)**

*Me plektev* (μὴ πλῆκτην), indicates, "one who is not ready to strike out." Paul included the same terms in Titus 1:7. Those who are full of anger and ready to strike out would be violent with the sheep. These terms picture a man who can suffer attacks upon himself without the need to defend himself. We are reminded of Jesus words in the Sermon on the Mount,

*Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven.*<sup>111</sup>

***Gentle* (v3)**

*Epieikes* (ἐπιεικής), meaning, "One who is reasonable and equitable." This term describes a person with whom we can disagree, talk things over, and come to a fair conclusion.

Elders who take the point of view that their word must be accepted without question, that no one can approach them with an opposing point of view, do not measure up to this qualification.

There are situations in which elders, as a council, have to say, "We have made a decision; that's it, you have to live with our decision." However, such situations hopefully are rare. The norm for elders should be that they are approachable and willing to reason with those in disagreement.

Being reasonable does not mean that the elders always will compromise or accept the position being expressed by their opponents. It does mean that they are willing to talk things over. When elders are not inclined to be reasonable, it usually is an indication of their insecurity.

***Uncontentious* (v3)**

*Amachon* (ἄμαχον) refers to a person who is "not a fighter." Unfortunately, many Christians seem to love the thrill of battle. Debates and *bashing* have become a way of life in the contemporary church; competition between church leaders is the norm. The unbelieving world has had good reason to mock the witness of a Church that often has been better known for its in-fighting than its love. This does not negate the need to defend the sheep and to defend the truth. However, it does mean that a man who is fulfilled by being in a good fight is not fit to be an elder.

This quality differs from *pugnacious* (above) in that the *pugnacious* person is one who in frustration and anger strikes out in self defense.

In his second letter to Timothy, Paul described the type of behaviour pictured in the three traits just listed, *not pugnacious*, *gentle*, and *uncontentious*:

*And the Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, and they come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will.*<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Matthew 5:10-13, 44-45a (KJV)

<sup>112</sup>II Timothy 2:24-26

### ***Free from the love of money*** (v3)

*Aphilarguros* (ἀφιλόργυρος) resonates from Paul's statement that *the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith, and pierced themselves with many a pang.*<sup>113</sup> Titus 1:7 says that an elder must be one who is, *not fond of sordid gain.* *Sordid gain* refers to things obtained by elder through misuse of his position. Eli's corrupt priestly sons<sup>114</sup> and the religious merchandisers in the Temple,<sup>115</sup> are examples of those who were guilty of *sordid gain*.

Peter describes the heart attitude that is present in a godly elder,

*...Shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness;...*<sup>116</sup>

This does not negate the principle that elders may receive financial support from the Church.<sup>117</sup> However, an elder does not work because of a salary. Elders do their work because of the call of God. A true elder would do this work without pay, if need be. The salary provided for an elder merely allows him to give his full time to overseeing the flock.

***He must be one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity (but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the Church of God?)*** (Vs.4-5)

The term used for "manage" is *proistemi* (προΐστημι), the same term used in I Timothy 5:17 for governing the local church. The same type of leadership is required for both governing the home and governing the church. Note that an elder must have the ability to keep his children under control while *maintaining dignity* (σεμνότης) *semnotes*, meaning *reverence, dignity, seriousness, respectfulness, holiness*. There is no place in the eldership for a man who controls his children through angry display.

Titus 1:6 focuses on the spiritual condition of an elders' children. They are to be *children who believe, not accused of dissipation or rebellion*. This particular qualification refers both to the elders' character and ability. It is one of only two abilities listed (the other being skillful in teaching). This test is considered by many to be the most important on the list.

The Greek word translated "children" is *teknon* (τέκνον). This is a general term that refers to a parental relationship. The term reveals nothing about the age or sex of the children. However, the two negative terms, *asotias* (ασωτίας) – [dissipation, debauchery, profligacy] and *anupotaka* (ανυπότακτα) – [rebellion, independent, not under authority], describe behaviour that implies children who are at least in their teen years.

The question arises about one whose children have become adults and have left the home. Is one removed from consideration for eldership if his adult children who have established their own homes do not live Godly lives?

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<sup>113</sup>I Timothy 6:10

<sup>114</sup>II Samuel 2:12-17

<sup>115</sup>Matthew 21:12-13

<sup>116</sup>I Peter 5:2

<sup>117</sup>I Timothy 5:17; I Corinthians 9:1-14

It would hardly seem so. The reference is to how one manages his own household. Those who are not in that household are not under his management.<sup>118</sup>

There is, however, another point of view espoused. This view states that if a man were a believer when his children were small, and if they grew up in his home, then he should have been able to build their relationship with God to the point that they never would stray. If such success were not achieved, then the man is not fit for consideration for eldership.

The resolution of this question is not easy to achieve. There are many things that influence the development of faith and behaviour. Fixing blame or giving credit for success is a very inexact process. Perhaps it is best to stay within the solid ground of the text. This would limit the consideration to what happens within the household overseen by the prospective elder.

***And not a new convert, lest he become conceited and fall into the condemnation incurred by the devil.*** (v6)

Satan was conceited. He was impressed with himself. If new converts and younger Christians were placed in the authoritative role of elder/overseer, they might find it difficult to avoid the trap of conceit.

This raises the question of age. Is there a minimum age for elder candidates? Scripture makes no explicit statement on this subject. The term, *elder*, implying, "one who is older," is a relative term. Some congregations, for instance, are composed of young adults. Some feel that a minimum age is thirty, since that is the age of Jesus when He began His ministry and when one normally embarked on his profession in biblical cultures.

Some contend that an elder candidate must have children who are at least in their teen years. They point out that many men who appear to be eminently qualified when their children are young, become an embarrassment to the eldership when the children become teenagers and young adults.

From my own sixty years of experience in church leadership, I have come to the conclusion that authority can be vested safely only in those who are *broken vessels*. Such brokenness comes from pulverizing experiences of life and that does take time. Those whom God has ordained for leadership, invariably experience harsh seasons prior to being given authority from God. The degree of harshness required to produce the desired brokenness will vary from person to person. Usually, those who have a stronger nature require a greater degree and length of harshness to be brought to a state of brokenness. Biblical examples that immediately come to mind are Joseph, Moses, Jeremiah, Paul, and according to Scripture, even Jesus.<sup>119</sup> Some experience this brokenness early in life, others only in the sunset years. Some never are truly broken.

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<sup>118</sup>In a personal letter, Clay Sterrett made the following comment on this issue: "The emphasis in this passage is on a leader's being responsible in his own home. In the same time period, both Eli, the priest, and Samuel, the priest, are said to have had ungodly sons (I Samuel 2:22-25; 8:3). Eli was rebuked severely and Samuel was not. Why? Eli failed to restrain his sons (I Samuel 3:13) and, although Scripture does not say so, we can assume that Samuel was not negligent. The issue is a man's being responsible in his home. Near the end of his ministry, Samuel was found blameless (I Samuel 12:1-5). He was considered to be one of Israel's greatest leaders along with Moses (Jeremiah 15:1; Psalm 99:6)"

<sup>119</sup>Hebrews 5:7-9

***And he must have a good reputation with those outside the church, so that he may not fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.*** (v7)

The elder candidate must not be one kind of man in the church and another kind of man in the world. The person who puts on a pious show on Sunday is a *hypocrite*. The world expects Christians to live by higher standards than the rest of society. The world also eagerly watches for Christians to stumble. It is easy to see how Satan sets a snare for those living a double life.

### **Additional Qualifications Given in Titus 1:5-9**

#### ***Not self-willed*** (v7)

*authade* (αὐθάδη) has the meaning of "stubborn," "arrogant," or "self-willed." An arrogant, self-willed elder, determined to have his way, would be very destructive to any council of elders. In studying successfully functioning elders councils, I have made this observation: a frequent trait of successful elder councils is an eagerness on the part of individual elders to give in to one another.

#### ***Not quick tempered*** (v7)

*Orgilon* (ὀργίλον) is not so much a prohibition against feeling angry and frustrated, as it is against unleashing that anger at only slight provocation. There is, however a deeper significance to the term. The word describes an angry person. Someone who has an underlying anger in his spirit or emotions will be a danger to himself and the sheep if he is given the role of elder/shepherd.

#### ***Loving what is good*** (v8)

*Philagathon* (φιλόγαθον), literally means, "one who loves good." Some feel that this speaks of good deeds. Certainly it does, but the term seems to be more encompassing, including anything that is good, not merely deeds. The term also can mean "loving good men or good people." We are reminded of the injunction in Romans 12:9, *Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good.*

#### ***Just*** (v8)

*Dikaion* (δίκαιον), also can be translated, "righteous." The term is used for one who keeps the laws both of God and of society, and is fair in the application of these. The congregation needs to know that fairness and equanimity will be present in any judgments made by elders.

#### ***Devout*** (v8)

*Osion* (ὄσιον), is a common Greek term, used to describe someone who has an inner motivation to meet every moral and religious obligation. Jeremiah prophesied concerning the moral quality of the citizens of the Messianic Kingdom,

*"But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days," declares the Lord, "I will put My law within them, and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people."*<sup>120</sup>

In the New Testament, *Hebrews* twice applies this promise to Christians (8:10; 10:16). This is a person who is so transformed that his instinctive response to life is to act according to God's will. His behaviour is not the result of any external law. It is his natural response. This is one of the traits that an elder candidate should manifest.

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<sup>120</sup>Jeremiah 31:33

***Self controlled*** (v8)

*Egkrate* (ἐγκρατῆ), one who is master of his sensual appetites. Spirit-empowered will-power is described in this qualification. Sensual appetites are not evil. God is their source. However, an elder should have these appetites in rein so that he unleashes them or holds them in check.

The spiritually healthy believer will enjoy sensual pleasure to its fullness in God ordained activity (sex within marriage, for example). Sensuality, however, is not the focus of a Godly person's life. A distinction must be made between the healthy enjoyment of pleasure and hedonism.

Neither the man who is fearful of his sensual appetites, nor the man who is driven to fulfill them, is master of these appetites.

**Summary**

In summary, the emphasis in these qualifications is on character and temperament. Only two of the qualities relate to ability. It should be noted that in temperament types, there is not a bad and a good. The temperament type required for eldership probably is not the best temperament type for the evangelist. Character, however, is bad or good. The good character traits required of elders are those character traits that should be desired in all believers. Temperament, however, is a quality that will vary among all who are of good character.

One of the criticisms sometimes leveled at traditional seminaries has been the absence of discipleship programs that are devoted to the development of character; the emphasis is on intellectual development with little attention given to character. On the other hand it could be said that the same distorted emphasis also is exemplified in many Charismatic Movement churches. "Calling," ability, talent, or "gifting," often propel individuals forward into leadership. Character follows behind; sometimes, far behind. The result is tumult and trouble in the Kingdom.

Both character and knowledge are important. Certainly knowledge is assumed in Titus 1:9 *holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict*, but in Paul's letters to Timothy and Titus the concern for character outweighs his concern for knowledge.

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## **PART SEVEN**

**Qualifications for servants (deacons)**

It is significant that the only two leadership roles for which Paul gives an ordered list of qualifications are elders and servants (deacons). The fact that these lists are given in such detail, affirms our earlier conclusion that Paul assumed that these two ministries would be present in every New Testament Church.

Accepting Acts 6 as the first occurrence of servants, we are drawn to the general statement of qualifications contained in that record (Acts 6:3):

Men of good reputation (character)

Full of the Spirit (anointing)

Full of wisdom (ability)

The more specific and detailed list in I Timothy 3:8-12 contains elements that fit into each of these general headings.

**Grave** (v8)

*semnos* (σεμνός) - The Greek word indicates dignity and one whom people instinctively respect.

**Not double tongued** (v8)

*me dilogous* (μη διλόγους) - This may be a special temptation for managers, who may speak one way to those under their administration and another way to those who are their supervisors. Of course, being consistent in one's speech would apply to all situations.

**Not addicted to wine** (v8)

*me oino pollo prosexontas* (μη οἴνω πολλῶ προσέχοντα) - As with the elders, not a prohibition against imbibing, but against habitual over-indulgence.

**Not fond of base gain** (v8)

*me aisxrokerdeis* (μη αἰσχροκερδεῖς) - The gain becomes *base* when the reason for performing ministry is money, instead of for God's glory.

**Having the mystery of faith with a clean conscience** (v9)

*kathara suneidesei* (καθαρῶ συνειδήσει) - The servant is not called upon to be a teacher of the faith (although he very well may be a teacher), but to comprehend it and to hold it in the right kind of heart.

**Let them first be proved** (v9)

*dokimazesthosan proton* (δοκιμαζέσθωσαν πρῶτον) - In a normal church setting these men would be well known. Having a reputation for faithfulness in small matters is a demonstration of the quality needed for this role (Luke 16:10-11).

**One-woman men** (v12)

*mias gunaikos andres* (μιᾶς γυναικὸς ἄνδρες) - We have given extensive treatment of this expression and the matter of obedient children in the section on elders' qualifications.

*In exploring the question of female servants (deaconesses) we gave extensive space to verse 11. However, we gave no attention to the qualifications specific for female servants. These are three:*

**Grave**

*semnos* (σεμνός) – This is the same term as is used for male servants in verse 8. The Greek word indicates dignity and one whom people instinctively respect.

**Not slanderers**

*me diabolous* (μη διαβόλους) In addition to this verse, the term also is found in I Timothy 3:11; II Timothy 3:3; Titus 2:3. Little comment is needed on this qualifier, it is obvious

**One who has a clear mind**

*nephalious* (νηφαλίους) for a discussion of this term, see the section on elders' qualifications.



## CONCLUSION

In these studies, we have seen

1. The scriptural design for church planting ventures, i.e., a team with a common goal led by a visionary leader.
2. The scriptural design for leadership in an established church
3. The job descriptions for local church leadership
4. The style of leadership appropriate for those who lead local churches
5. The qualifications for the two leadership groups, elders and servants

In these studies we have seen a clear plan for the church as it existed during the period in which the church was led by the apostles and those whom the apostles installed in leadership roles.

Those who are committed to developing New Testament churches in our present era are fortunate to have such a detailed template to guide them in their pursuit.