

# Church Offices

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## Section One

### Introduction

In the early days of the Church Age believers in Jesus Christ began to gather into groups in various cities for worship and instruction. These local assemblies became known as “churches”. Initially they would meet in homes and other places of assembly. One of the necessities that arose was a need for leadership in order that what was done would be orderly and honoring to God. The New Testament gives us a description of what these early churches were like and what leadership developed. This study relates to a practical application of the New Testament description of church leadership.

There were three groups and two offices seen in the early church:

**Philippians 1:1 Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons:**

This is an instructive verse since Paul distinguishes the individuals in a specific local church:

- The “**saints**” include all of the believers in the assembly to whom Paul was writing. Distinguished from the overall assembly were:
  - The **overseers** (*episkopos*), those in leadership in the local church. They are also known by the term “elder” as will be seen. These men were always referred to as plural in each church. This group will be discussed in Sections Two and Three.
  - The **deacons** (*diaconos*), those in a position of service in the local church. This office will be discussed in Sections Four and Five.

This verse is an outline for a local church. The saints of an assembly are those from whom the leadership comes and have the responsibility of testing what their leadership is teaching and doing. The **overseers** or **elders** are the ones in the position of leadership. The **deacons** serve to meet the needs of the individuals within the assembly. When all of these are acting through the direction of the Holy Spirit, this is an ideal arrangement for the work of the local church to be accomplished with efficiency and proper spiritual attitudes.

There are many ways that Biblical churches are organized today. No one of these ways can be judged right or wrong but some do seem to be more consistent with the New Testament description. We will see later that the New Testament organization was altered very early after the completion of the writings of the Apostles. For practical purposes the presence of a strong single leader (*episcopos* or Bishop) developed quickly to squelch disunity. That does not seem to be what the New Testament writers intended but it was a practical solution to a difficult situation.

There are two obvious church leaders described in the Book of Acts and in the writings of Paul:

1. **Elders** (*presbuteros*) which are the same as **Overseers** (*episcopos*, translated **Bishop** in the King James Version). These individuals were the leaders in the early churches. Elders/overseers function have responsibilities with regard to:
  - Doctrine.
  - Organizational decisions.
  - Financial decisions.

The office of Elder/Overseer was restricted to men because of the authority and decision making which was required. Paul made it clear that it was inappropriate for women to have authority over men in the structure of church politics. There was also a position of a “special elder” who is one in full time service, receiving his remuneration from his oversight of the local assembly.

2. **Deacons** (*diaconos*) were in a position of service that was under elder direction. This position was not restricted to men since there was no authority problem. These individuals provided for areas of service having oversight from the elders. Some practical situations where such people can function today might include such things as:
  - Committee positions to assist the elder in carrying out needs of those in the church. A committee may function under the oversight of an elder but he cannot do all the work alone. Deacons are indispensable in carrying out the practical needs of an assembly.
  - Women in this position can play a major role in meeting the needs of other women in the church. There are things which men simply are not very good in doing which women handle with no difficulty.
  - Etc., Etc., Etc. There is never a lack of things to do in a busy local church.

It was not until the local churches began to proliferate in the early days of the church that organization such as the above took place. In the very earliest days it became obvious that men had to take responsibility in order that needs be met:

**Acts 6:1** In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Grecian Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. **2** So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, "It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. **3** Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them **4** and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word."

In Jerusalem, as the church rapidly grew in numbers of believers, it was obvious that the Apostles could not do everything that was required to meet the needs of various individuals. In the above example there were two groups of Jews, those who were primarily of the Hebrew culture and

those who were of the Greek culture. The Greek Jews thought that their widows were being neglected so the Apostles had to find others to carry out the daily necessities otherwise they could not continue to preach the gospel. Someone had to look after those already saved so the Apostles could reach more.

These men were neither “overseers” nor “deacons” since such technical terms had not yet been used. They were functioning as helpers of the Apostles. It is interesting to see the characteristics of the ones chosen to take such responsibility:

1. They were to be filled with the Holy Spirit, thus they were men with the love needed to drive them to serve, joy in the things that they were doing, and peace of mind in being of service rather than being served.
2. They were to have wisdom, the ability to use the Word of God and apply it to situations in which they found themselves. Such people are stable and able to meet the needs of others

**James 3:17** But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.

Thus, right at the beginning of the church it was necessary to have many at work so that the needs of all could be met. As the years went on the organization became more specific so that churches could function in a Christ honoring way without irritation and dissension.

GREEK WORD	SCRIPTURE
<i>episkopos</i> (overseer)	Acts 20:28 Philippians 1:1 I Timothy 3:2 Titus 1:7 I Peter 2:25
<i>episkope</i> (office of overseer) (Bishop)	Acts 1:20 I Timothy 3:1
<i>presbuteros</i>	<u>Older men:</u> Mark 7:3,5 Hebrews 11:2 <u>Jewish leadership:</u> Matthew 16:21 Matthew 21:23 Acts 6:12 <u>Local church office:</u> Acts 11:30 14:23 15:2,4,22 16:4 20:17 21:18 I Timothy 5:17 Titus 1:5 James 5:14 I Peter 5:1 II John 1 III John 1

## SECTION TWO THE OFFICE OF ELDER OR OVERSEER IN THE LOCAL CHURCH

There are two Greek words that are interchangeable in the New Testament, *episkopos* (**overseer**) and *presbuteros* (**elder**) both referring the same local church leaders. By observing the use of these two words we can derive a meaning and purpose for the office.

It should be noted that *episkopos* was translated “Bishop” in the King James Version, a translation which gives the word no meaning. We will translate the word with the meaning that it had in the original Greek, namely, one who is an **overseer**.

### THE DEFINITION OF THE OFFICE OF ELDER/ OVERSEER.

Paul met with the leaders of the Church of Ephesus asking them to come a few miles south where he was stopping over in Miletus. He was going to Jerusalem and was concerned that the elders of Ephesus needed some instruction since it was possible that Paul would never see them again:

**Acts 20:17 From Miletus, Paul sent to Ephesus for the elders (*presbuteros*) of the church. 21 I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus. 22 "And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there.**

While meeting with the Ephesian church leadership Paul made clear their responsibility to the local flock:

**Acts 20:28 Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers (*episkopos*). Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. 29 I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. 30 Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them.**

It is important to observe the use of the words of Paul that describe the meaning and responsibility of the church leaders. **Elder** and **overseer** are one and the same:

1. The **POSITION** in the church = **ELDER** (*presbuteros*) – verse 17. This word describes who the person is, that is, what he is called. The use of this word infers someone who is more senior in age and so experienced and able to lead. No specific age requirements are stated in the Bible but the word itself infers maturity.
2. The **FUNCTION** of the office = **OVERSEER** (*episkopos*) – verse 28. This word describes what an elder does. To have oversight of a church is to be certain that the needs of each individual is met, that the church is stable in doctrine and behavior, and that there are not dangerous people leading others astray.
3. The **RESPONSIBILITY** of the office = **SHEPHERD THE CHURCH** (verse 28). This is the job description. Oversight is carried out by gentle guiding and leading,

remembering how a shepherd worked in Bible days. A shepherd went out ahead of the flock and they followed him because they trusted him. He did not stand behind the flock yelling at them and frightening them into certain directions as a modern shepherd might do. There were no dogs barking at the herds to push them around. A shepherd in those times, and in the Middle East today, never “herded” his sheep, he quietly and carefully **led** his sheep to the places that will benefit them, never to dangerous places. The shepherd always went on ahead.

4. The **SOURCE** of the office = **THE HOLY SPIRIT** (verse 28). This is not a position one should seek for ego or personal gain. It is undertaken because one has a true Spirit-led desire to help guide a church to glorify Christ, to bring unbelievers to Him, and to bring growth in the believers already present.

Paul summoned the **elders** who were the leadership of the Ephesian church to give them instructions. Paul defined their role as **overseers**. They were **to shepherd the church**. The Holy Spirit chose the leadership, it was not an issue of elections based upon human preference and personalities. It was God acting through the Spirit to meet the needs of the Ephesian church. There is no reason that God cannot do things the same way today if we are willing to trust him.

If there were no other references to the office of elder/overseer in the Bible this passage in Acts would serve to define the office. These men were to look after the local flock that Jesus Christ had purchased with his blood.

There was a **specific responsibility** given to them by Paul. They needed to **watch for wolves coming in among the flock** just as a shepherd had to watch his sheep to protect them from predators. In our churches such predators are those who teach false truths to draw individuals to themselves. In other words they come with their own personal agenda based upon a lack of understanding of the Word of God, preying upon those who cannot discern false attitudes and teaching. This is a key responsibility of the elders, but not the only one.

**There was not a single elder/overseer in Ephesus, instead there were multiple men in that position** (Acts 20:17). This is often a point of much discussion among fundamental churches. Many consider the Pastor of a local church as the overseer and shepherd. However, in the early churches at the time that the Book of Acts was written there were multiple elders leading the churches. These men shared the responsibility for the local body of believers. Having a specific man as a pastor is also Biblical, as we will see later, that man having a special position among the elders. He is an elder who is in full time service and is paid for his responsibilities.

## ELDERS WERE APPOINTED IN EVERY CHURCH:

**Acts 14:23 Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust.**

Every church needs individuals in a position of responsibility to provide order in the assembly. Leaders were appointed in every church as the gospel began to spread across the Roman Empire. The Apostles and other early leaders appointed these individuals initially, while today God is continuing to do so through the leading of the Holy Spirit. Note that in this verse there was not a single elder appointed in each church, but multiple elders.

## PETER'S DESCRIPTION OF THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF ELDERS AND THE ULTIMATE REWARD.

**1 Peter 5:1 To the elders (*presbuteros*) among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ's sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed:**

- 2. Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers (*episkopos*)-- not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve;**
- 3. not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.**
- 4. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.**

### Peter's description of his own position:

- He considered himself a **fellow elder**, not one who is superior. All leaders in local churches have a similar responsibility.
- He was unique among elders in that he was a **witness to the suffering** of Christ by being one of Jesus' original disciples.
- He planned to **share in the glory of Jesus Christ** that was to be revealed in the future. This glory will be in heaven for each of us and in the future when Jesus comes to establish his earthly kingdom.

### The responsibilities as Peter saw them:

- An elder is to **shepherd the flock**. This command is identical to that given by Paul to the Ephesian elders. Peter would not have to explain this term since a shepherd leads his flock to appropriate places of pasture, guards against predators, and prevents scattering of the flock. A shepherd also had to be certain that his flock had adequate food, an elder needs to be certain that the assembly is being fed proper spiritual information. A shepherd is concerned about each sheep, seeing the value of each individual. To be an elder is not to have authority over, but to have responsibility toward the flock.
- An elder should **desire to serve**, not be under pressure to serve. God's desire is that those who serve him do so because they want to, not because they have to. We should serve God because of what He has done for us already, not because we want something more. A shepherd of God's flock should be **eager** to serve God in such a capacity. We should not be pressuring men to serve as elders. They should do so because they desire to serve God in that way. It is not reasonable to appoint

men to be elders who have no real desire. Sometimes churches force men to be elders because they need a certain number based upon bylaws. This is inappropriate. It is better to have fewer but to have them desire to be such a leader in their service to Jesus Christ. If a church is trusting God for leadership they will not have to search for leaders, God will place those he desires in such positions. Since it is God's rules we find in the New Testament then God is responsible to see that we can do it his way.

- **Service**, not personal gain must be the whole motivation. Money or prestige have to be set aside as issues. If one is looking for either one to come out of being an elder then he is looking in the wrong place.
- **An elder cannot succeed with an authoritarian attitude** (verse 3). He is look to how he can benefit the church and glorify Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. A "bully" has no place as an elder. An elder's responsibility is over what belongs to God, God is the only one with real authority. Elders have the responsibility to carry out God's will, not their own will.
- An elder is to be a **pattern** to the rest of the congregation (verse 3). This is an awesome responsibility since an elder is open to observation of his personal and church life. He is to lead by example not by coercion. If his life style is not consistent with the directions of the Bible he will not be an appropriate example to others. An elder is to be constantly searching his own life for those things that could be a bad example to others. This kind of life style looks for ways to help others, not for self-promotion.
- **An elder needs to see his position as being in service to the Chief Shepherd, Jesus Christ.** An elder serves under Christ, not over the congregation. This kind of attitude should keep one's leadership position in proper perspective.
- **An elder does not look for reward** in the present time but anticipates a crown waiting when Christ comes. At the coming of Jesus to receive the church to himself, there will be crowns distributed at the Judgment Seat of Christ when Jesus rewards believers for those worthwhile things done in the service of Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit.

An elder of a local church needs to understand that his responsibility is to help direct the flock to follow the shepherd who **owns** the flock. An elder needs to look to the leading of the Holy Spirit to take the flock in the direction that the Chief Shepherd desires. It is not the elder's flock, it is Jesus Christ's flock. We are undershepherds assisting Him. We are never to take our eyes off of the one who is truly responsible for each believer. That one is Jesus himself:

**1 Peter 2:25 For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.**

In each of our lives we are to see Jesus as our shepherd and overseer. This kind of attitude will leave no room for interpersonal conflicts and self-indulgence. Every member and every leader of a local church has to be wary of personal

interests setting aside the real issue, namely, the glorification of Jesus Christ.

AN EXAMPLE OF THE LEADERSHIP ACTIVITIES AND DISTINCTIONS IN THE EARLIEST ESTABLISHED CHURCH IN JERUSALEM.

False teaching began to occur early in the Church Age and a major problem was the application of Jewish customs and traditions to Gentile believers. Men came to Antioch where Paul and Barnabas were ministering at the time. These men were teaching Jewish traditions:

**Acts 15:1 Some men came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the brothers: "Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved."**

Paul and Barnabas had to deal with the issue so it was decided to go to the church in Jerusalem from which this misleading teaching was coming:

**Acts 15:2 This brought Paul and Barnabas into sharp dispute and debate with them. So Paul and Barnabas were appointed, along with some other believers, to go up to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders about this question.**

There were two levels of leadership in the Jerusalem church, Apostles and Elders. Doctrine in the new age had to develop and gifted men were given insight as the Holy Spirit directed. Since there was not yet written authority it was the Apostles, and those under the teaching of the Apostles, that were to communicate God's will. Thus the Apostles and Elders in Jerusalem were deciding doctrinal issues. Many of the Apostles may still have been in Jerusalem as yet so that this church was acting with authority over churches outside of Israel in these decisions. The Jerusalem church was still a focal point in the earliest days. The church welcomed Paul and Barnabas to the assembly:

**Acts 15:4 When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and elders, to whom they reported everything God had done through them.**

There were arguments presented on both sides of the issue with the legalists from the more rigid Jewish group arguing for application of Jewish tradition:

**Acts 15:5 Then some of the believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees stood up and said, "The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to obey the law of Moses." 6 The apostles and elders met to consider this question.**

Peter was the major leader among the Apostles and spoke to the issue, that the keeping of Jewish tradition was impossible for the majority of the Jewish people so why ask the Gentiles to do what the Jews could not be do:

**Acts 15:7 After much discussion, Peter got up and addressed them: "Brothers, you know that some time ago God made a choice among you that the Gentiles might hear from my lips the message of the gospel and believe. 8 God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us. 9 He made no distinction between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith. 10 Now then,**

**why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of the disciples a yoke that neither we nor our fathers have been able to bear? 11 No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are."**

Paul and Barnabas then presented their observations concerning what God was doing among the Gentiles:

**Acts 15:12 The whole assembly became silent as they listened to Barnabas and Paul telling about the miraculous signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through them.**

James, who was not one of the Apostles, but seemed to be the chairman of the group, summarized what they had heard:

**Acts 15:13 When they finished, James spoke up: "Brothers, listen to me. 14 Simon has described to us how God at first showed his concern by taking from the Gentiles a people for himself. 15 The words of the prophets are in agreement with this, as it is written: 16 "'After this I will return and rebuild David's fallen tent. Its ruins I will rebuild, and I will restore it, 17 that the remnant of men may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who bear my name, says the Lord, who does these things' 18 that have been known for ages. 19 "It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God. 20 Instead we should write to them, telling them to abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood. 21 For Moses has been preached in every city from the earliest times and is read in the synagogues on every Sabbath."**

James saw to reason to impose Jewish tradition upon the Gentiles but was still concerned that the Gentiles not deliberately do things that would be offensive to their Jewish fellow believers. Such things as eating food sacrificed in the Heathen temples and meats that the Jews would consider "non-kosher" fit into the traditional issues about which Jewish people felt so strongly. To ask the Gentiles to avoid sexual immorality would seem like common sense but in the heathen culture of the day immorality was the norm. Immorality was part of the heathen worship at many temples so it was not unreasonable to remind Gentiles of this.

The Apostles and elders, along with the consensus of the entire church, agreed and desired to send spokesman back with Paul and Barnabas to confirm their decision and make clear that there was no disagreement with the Church of Antioch:

**Acts 15:22 Then the apostles and elders, with the whole church, decided to choose (*eklegomai*, to select or choose) some of their own men and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They chose Judas (called Barsabbas) and Silas, two men who were leaders (*hegeomai*, to lead) among the brothers. 23 With them they sent the following letter: The apostles and elders, your brothers, To the Gentile believers in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia: Greetings. 24 We have heard that some went out from us without our authorization and disturbed you, troubling your minds by what they said. 25 So we all agreed to**

**choose some men and send them to you with our dear friends Barnabas and Paul—26 men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. 27 Therefore we are sending Judas and Silas to confirm by word of mouth what we are writing. 28 It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements: 29 You are to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality. You will do well to avoid these things. Farewell.**

Notice the individuals named in this letter:

- The **Apostles** were a unique group of men who had a special position of true authority in the church. This was not continued after the death of the initial generation of Apostles. They were men who were eyewitnesses to the resurrection of Jesus.
- The **Elders** were leaders in the early church as we are discussing in this section.
- The **whole church** agreed with the conclusions of this first church council.
- The **chosen or leading individuals** were those outside the Apostles and Elders but with important roles within the church. These people were trusted with responsibility to carry out the work of the assembly that the Apostles and Elders could not do directly. Every church requires individuals outside of the leadership group to get the work done. That group may not hold official office within the church but there is a need for many workers outside of, but under the authority of, the elders. We can observe several things about such people:
  - They had a place of special reputation in the church and could be counted upon for special needs. They were **chosen** to accomplish a particular task.
  - They had demonstrated leadership qualities so could be trusted with special jobs. They had already taken a strong stand for Christ and had **risked their lives** under persecution. These qualities allowed them to be chosen for this important duty.
  - They were willing servants, an important key to understanding why they were chosen. Every church needs such people if the gospel is going to continue.

In every local church there will be those individuals, both men and women, who are not elders or deacons but are always available to serve others based upon the nature of their spiritual gifts. All believers have spiritual gifts but not all are equally willing to serve others with those gifts. Examples of such chosen and leading people are women who are always there to meet the needs of families who are suffering grief or needs of various sorts, men and women available to teach our Sunday School classes to the many age groups, individuals who meet the physical needs of the church in repair and building, or those who are always there will a handshake and a smile to visitors.

There was a united spirit within the church assembly in Jerusalem concerning this difficult issue. Once the issue was settled the assembly agreed with their leadership. When a

leadership is Spirit-directed and oriented to the good of the local church, then there will be a unity present. When the elders are out of touch with the assembly then only disunity will ensue.

When the news was heard back at Antioch there was excitement with the good news that the Jewish traditions held no necessity for the Gentile believers. The leading/chosen men then demonstrated that spiritual gifts caused them to be productive, not just an official position in the church:

**Acts 15:30 The men were sent off and went down to Antioch, where they gathered the church together and delivered the letter. 31 The people read it and were glad for its encouraging message. 32 Judas and Silas, who themselves were prophets, said much to encourage and strengthen the brothers. 33 After spending some time there, they were sent off by the brothers with the blessing of peace to return to those who had sent them.**

There is room for work to be accomplished by all that participate in a local church. It cannot all be left up to the Elders of a church to get the job done.

THERE ARE SPECIAL ELDERS, THOSE WORTHY OF FINANCIAL SUPPORT, BECAUSE THEY ARE OCCUPIED PRIMARILY WITH THE WORK OF THE CHURCH.

**1 Timothy 5:17 The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching. 18 For the Scripture says, "Do not muzzle the ox while it is treading out the grain," and "The worker deserves his wages."**

“Double honor” is a Greek phrase used for compensating someone for a service. It was used in the original language for the honorarium paid to a physician. Such an individual warrants special respect and reward for full time service to the local church. Such a one deserves to be paid for his efforts because he would have no time to earn a living and serve the church full time. Churches pay one or more individuals to labor in preaching and teaching the Word. This is the one we generally refer to as the Pastor of a church. He is dedicated to the work of the local church as his full time occupation, interacting with those in need, and making sure that the direction of the church is on course.

AN ELDER DESERVES TO BE PROTECTED BY THE CHURCH AGAINST FALSE ACCUSATIONS.

**1 Timothy 5:19 Do not entertain an accusation against an elder unless it is brought by two or three witnesses.**

Because an elder is very much in the eyes of the congregation based upon his position, he needs protection from those who might resent his position and bring false accusations. There has to be more than just the word of one person if one is going to deal with an elder, there has to be substantiation of any accusation that is brought.

## SUMMARY

1. An elder and an overseer (Bishop in the King James Version) are the same person.
2. **Elder** is the name of the office, **overseer** is the term for the function of the office. The responsibility of an elder is to shepherd the assembly.
3. It is Biblical to have more than one elder in a local church.
4. There are five categories of individuals seen in a local church:
  - The members of believers in the church.
  - The elders/overseers.
  - The deacons (discussed in Section Four).
  - The chosen or leading men among the assembly.
  - The elder or elders worthy of being paid as full time pastors.
5. The Elders/Overseers are to:
  - Be in a position leadership in the local church.
  - Make decisions relative to doctrine and direction in the local church.
  - Be responsible for voluntary oversight with no view to personal gain, leading the church in a gentle manner as a shepherd leads his flock.
  - Lead by being a model to the remainder of the church.
  - See themselves as servants of Jesus Christ who is the ultimate chief shepherd.
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**SECTION THREE  
QUALIFICATION OF ELDERS/OVERSEERS**

THE QUALIFICATIONS AS LISTED IN I TIMOTHY.

**1 Timothy 3:1** Here is a trustworthy saying: If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task.

**2. Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach,**

**3. not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money.**

**4. He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect.**

**5. (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?)**

**6. He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil.**

**7. He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap.**

1. **An Elder should desire the office, his heart should be set on it** (verse 1). The original language means to stretch out oneself or reach out one's hand to get something. An elder should be fully convinced that the Lord is directing in his life to take on such a responsibility. It should never be done for such reasons as "no one else will do it" or "the church is insisting but I do not really want to". Such reasons to be an elder are doomed to failure. The Holy Spirit is capable of calling adequate numbers of men in every church to meet its leadership needs. To desire to be an elder is considered by Paul to be a **noble task**, something done for the sake of others, not for one's own benefit.

2. **An elder must be above reproach** (verse 2) with nothing in his life which might bring an accusation of something contrary to Christian behavior. It is how others within the church and outside of the church see a man that is important. If there is something in a man's past life which others could continue to criticize, then that individual should consider himself disqualified for hold the office of elder. Remember that being in a position of leadership opens an individual up to observation and criticism. The next qualifications further define what it is to be above reproach.

3. **An elder is to be the husband of one wife** (verse 2) (can be literally translated a "one woman man"). The discussion over this verse questions whether this means only one wife ever or one wife at a time (as opposed to polygamy). The latter explanation is not a consideration since at no time did the church ever condone multiple wives, and it was not part of the culture of the Roman Empire or of Judaism. There are two reasonable meanings here:

- An elder should not have been divorced. This is not to infer that divorce is not a forgivable situation since God forgives all sins and errors in a believer's life. It is simply that divorce is a

public issue and would be placed among those things that could invite criticism of a church officer.

- An elder should not be an adulterer. It was common to have mistresses and to participate in extramarital encounters. In the same way nothing is more common in bringing about the fall of church leaders than extramarital affairs. Upon confession God and the church can forgive such events but such a one should never be in a position of leadership. To be an elder with a known history of adultery is certainly to open the church to criticism and could never be considered a proper model. An elder is to be totally devoted to his wife and family.

4. **An elder is to be "temperate" to be well-balanced, watchful or careful in behavior, or clearheaded** (verse 2). The original word had to do with being "unmixed with wine", the idea being that thinking is clouded by something, be it wine or other events which lead to being preoccupied and unable to devote careful attention to being an elder. An elder must refrain from any excesses that would dull his ability to lead.

5. **An elder must be self-controlled** (verse 2). Such a one attempts to do the right thing regardless of the circumstances. He does not "fly off the handle" at the slightest provocation. Nothing can hurt a reputation faster than an unwarranted bad reaction to someone or something.

6. **An elder is to be respectable** (verse 2), referring to an orderly life, not a life based upon confusion and disorganization. This is to have discipline in one's life and to have the ability to set proper priorities, especially to have room for spiritual things.

7. **An elder is to be hospitable** (verse 2), one who is willing to help others through personal fellowship. Such a one is open to people and interested in their problems. One who does not like to be around people and who has no time for others has no business in the office of elder.

8. **An elder is to be able to teach** (verse 2), so he is able to communicate the truths of the Word of God, whether one-on-one, in small groups, or in classroom settings.

9. **An elder is not subject to drunkenness** (verse 3), today we would call this an alcoholic. This also infers a personality that becomes quarrelsome or unruly when he drinks.

10. **An elder is not to be violent** (verse 3), someone who is a bully, quarrelsome, ready to hit someone when crossed.

11. **An elder is not a lover of money** (verse 3), someone who spends his time figuring out how to make more and more regardless of how it might affect his spiritual life. This kind of attitude also carries the risk that such a man might use the church for his own self-gain.



12. **An elder is to be gentle** (verse 3), someone who yields to others' needs with a spirit of kindness. To understand the needs and reactions of others is crucial in Christian leadership at any level.
13. **An elder is not to be quarrelsome** (verse 3), someone who has a chip on his shoulder, looking for trouble from others. Christians have no business engaging in shouting matches and need to do everything possible to avoid such a confrontation.
14. **An elder must manage his own family well, his children having respect for him** (verse 4-5). Such a man heads his house without being a dictator or slave driver. It is to be done with love and patience, loving his wife as Christ loved the church, that is, with complete ignoring of his own needs but instead seeing that his wife's needs are met. If a man is a bully at home and lacks respect of his own children, he will be a bully in the church and lack respect from those to whom he is attempting to minister. Mutual love and understanding is necessary for an orderly home and if that is not present then there is a spiritual problem. A Christian father is to be respected, not feared. If a man cannot command respect in his home, he cannot expect to have it at church.
15. **An elder must not be a recent convert** (verse 6). It takes time to understand the Christian life and interpersonal relationships as they exist in the church. He needs to learn the Word of God and learn to handle difficult spiritual situations. Being placed too soon into a position of leadership can result in pride because of having too much responsibility with too little experience. There is a tendency to push young converts into positions of leadership before they are ready. As a result very difficult situations can arise which they are not equipped to handle. All of us need time to develop and mature in our Christian lives. The sin that caused Satan to fall was pride and every one of us is susceptible to such actions. We need a time of testing and growth before we become leaders. There should be an adequate time of proving one's self before being thrust into leadership roles.
16. **An elder must have a good reputation among outsiders** (verse 7). This includes such things as integrity, attitudes toward people, and respect in his job and relationships. To bring a bad reputation on the outside into a leadership position in the church is guaranteed to drive unbelievers away. If one is in of leadership he should not be in a position where Satan can use him to discredit Christ. It is bad enough if a Christian carries a bad reputation, it is worse if he is a Christian leader.

## THE QUALIFICATIONS OF ELDERS AS LISTED IN TITUS.

### Titus 1:5-11

5. **The reason I left you in Crete was that you might straighten out what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town, as I directed you.**
6. **An elder must be blameless, the husband of but one wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient.**
7. **Since an overseer is entrusted with God's work, he must be blameless-- not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain.**
8. **Rather he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined.**
9. **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.**
10. **For there are many rebellious people, mere talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision group.**
11. **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.**

Paul on his last missionary journey after his two-year imprisonment in Rome recorded at the end of the Book of Acts, spent time helping new churches. He was not finished on the island of Crete when he left so Titus was left there to appoint elders in each of the towns to lead the Christians that were there. He did not appoint a single elder but multiple elders in each church to share the responsibilities. Elders in the New Testament are always referred to in the plural.

### THE REQUIRED CHARACTERISTICS.

1. **An elder must blameless** (verse 6), referring to nothing in his life which could bring embarrassment to the church. This is a different word than Paul used in the passage in 1 Timothy but it carries a very similar meaning.
2. **An elder is to the husband of one wife** (verse 6).
3. **An elder's children believe and do not have the reputation of being wild and disobedient** (verse 6). Undisciplined children (not little kids who are rambunctious and full of energy) who are old enough to know better and carry out publicly embarrassing actions would seem to be the subject here. Such a situation would not allow a father to have time and energy to function in church leadership. That does not mean that an elder's children will not go through a time of rebellion or that one's children have to be perfect. This is related to a pattern of a household being conducted with Christian standards.
4. **An elder is to be blameless in his stewardship responsibility** (verse 7) with no questionable practices in exercising his office in the church. If a man becomes an elder and does not handle the situation well he should remove himself. The characteristics of this blameless condition are included in the conditions that follow:

- **As elder is not to be overbearing** (verse 7), someone who is stubborn and arrogant. He cannot be interested in what benefits himself but in what is of help to others. One is not an elder in order to “get his own way” while excluding the needs of others. It is necessary to put aside personal desires for the good of the church.
- **An elder is not to be quick tempered** (verse 7).
- **An elder to not to be addicted to alcohol** (verse 7).
- **An elder cannot be violent** (verse 7).
- **An elder cannot pursue dishonest gain** (verse 8), he must be honest in all of his financial dealings within and outside of the church.
- **An elder must be hospitable** (verse 8).
- **An elder must love what is good** (verse 8), preferring the company of good people, not bad, good things, not bad.
- **An elder must be self-controlled** (verse 8), knowing to do and say the right things even under difficult circumstances. Self-control is a characteristic of one who is under the control of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23).
- **An elder must be upright** (verse 8), one who treats others in a just and fair manner.
- **An elder is to be “holy”** (verse 8). This is not the word “holy” as referring to God which is *hagios*. It is the word *hosios* referring to a way of life free of crime, one who fulfills his duties properly, and one who carries out his obligations.
- **An elder must be disciplined** (verse 8). He must keep his emotions and instincts under control if he is to succeed as a leader and model in the church.
- **En elder must hold solidly to the Word of God** (verse 9) so that he can:
  - Encourage those who need help.
  - Stand up to those who would oppose the truth. There are many that would like to disrupt and discredit the church and it is necessary to oppose such people. An elder has to recognize and deal with false doctrine so the church will not be led down a path of falsehood.

perfect in all of these areas but whether there are obvious defects which would disqualify him. The other important issue is that men may have some of these faults and learn through the Holy Spirit to correct them. Thus it is not at all impossible to find men who will fit these qualifications. God will provide leadership to every church if that church is willing to look to Him. If a church holds to these standards, then God must send the appropriate people. The Holy Spirit gives these qualifications through the Apostle Paul and we are to leave the filling of the office of elder in the Holy Spirit’s hands.

### SUMMARY

Every local church is to have elders who are responsible to the members of that church. They are to direct the church and to instruct in and protect the doctrines of the Word of God. Paul made clear that the leaders of local churches should have life-styles and personalities consistent with a Spirit-directed life. This is necessary so that the local churches have proper spiritual direction in order to glorify Christ in love and peace.

From a practical viewpoint one could ask the question as to whether any one could meet these standards. Obviously, no man is perfect. The question is not whether someone is

## SECTION FOUR DEACONS IN THE LOCAL CHURCH

We can only learn the full meaning of this word by searching the Bible passages where it is located. The Greek word *diakonos* refers to one who is a servant and who ministers to others. Putting the passages together give us the full meaning of what a “deacon” is in the New Testament Church.

PAUL USED THIS TERM TO REFER TO HIS OWN POSITION AS A SERVANT TO THE CHURCH:

Even great leaders such as Paul and Apollos considered themselves but servants to the church, those through whom others come to faith. God gives each of us a task to do based upon our spiritual gifts:

**1 Corinthians 3:5** What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants (*diakonos*), through whom you came to believe-- as the Lord has assigned to each his task.

Any competency that we have to serve the local church comes from God. The Holy Spirit provides the spiritual gifts that are needed and provides the power to use those gifts:

**2 Corinthians 3:6** He has made us competent as ministers (*diakonos*) of a new covenant-- not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

The grace of God provides the ability to serve the church. God desires that each of us come to the point in our lives where we are willing to be used through the power of God to serve the church and others:

**Ephesians 3:7** I became a servant (*diakonos*) of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power.

Paul had a special commission to present the gospel to the Gentiles but each of us has a commission also. This commission is the sum total of the gifts which God has given to us to reach others with the gospel:

**Colossians 1:25** I have become its servant (*diakonos*) by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness--

If we have the correct attitude toward serving the Lord in our lives we will all consider ourselves servants to the church and those within it. Our service will vary depending upon our spiritual gifts but all of us need to have a “servant” mentality.

There were also others in the New Testament referred to as “servants” of God:

1. Timothy – 1 Thessalonians 3:2.
2. Epaphras – Colossians 1:7.
3. Tychicus – Ephesians 6:21, Colossians 4:7.

The above examples are the generic use of the term *diakonos*, used for one serving the church, not in technical sense referring to an office in the churches.

## THE OFFICE OF DEACON CAME TO BE RECOGNIZED AS A SPECIFIC OFFICE IN LOCAL CHURCHES.

Paul specifically addressed this group along the overseers: **Philippians 1:1** Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers (*episkopos*) and deacons (*diakonos*):

As local churches came into being there was a need for organization. Particular needs had to be met and individuals were appointed to serve. The word *diakonos* itself infers a service situation as opposed to the overseer which was a leadership position. The elders were the leadership the deacons were in a position of service in a particular area of need.

We can define this office in the following way:

1. **Office** = deacon.
2. **Function** = service.

There are numerous areas of service in which a deacon can serve the local assembly of Christians. Certain needs are met as men and women are willing to serve in a particular area of responsibility.

Being a “diakonos” was not restricted to men:

**Romans 16:1** I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant (*diakonos*) of the church in Cenchrea. **2** I ask you to receive her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints and to give her any help she may need from you, for she has been a great help to many people, including me.

This should not be surprising or cause controversy. A deacon is NOT in a position of leadership, it is a position of service. Therefore it would not be necessary for a woman to have authority over a man in the assembly which would create a problem with 1 Timothy 2:11-12 forbidding such a thing. It is clear that throughout the history of the church much of the ministry and effort of the church has been carried out by spiritual women.

### SUMMARY

1. The office of deacon arose from the need for individuals to serve in various ministries in local assemblies. It became a technical term for one who has a particular area of service in the church.
2. The deacon/servant functioned under the direction of the elders who held the leadership position.
3. Deacon is the **name** of the office, service is the **function** of the office.
4. To be a deacon is to serve in a voluntary capacity toward others in a Holy Spirit directed way, serving others in love.

### THE QUALITIES NEEDED IN DEACONS

Just as Paul listed the qualities to be sought in elders, so also he listed qualities to be found in deacons:

**1 Timothy 3:8** Deacons, likewise, are to be men worthy of respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine, and not pursuing dishonest gain.

**9** They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience.

**10** They must first be tested; and then if there is nothing against them, let them serve as deacons.

**12** A deacon must be the husband of but one wife and must manage his children and his household well.

**13** Those who have served well gain an excellent standing and great assurance in their faith in Christ Jesus.

1. **Worthy of respect** (verse 8) is at the top of the list. If there is some quality which people do not respect then having an office in a church would be inappropriate because it would reflect upon the entire church.
2. **Sincere** (verse 8) refers to one who is straightforward in his dealing with others, he is not double-tongued, saying one thing and doing another.
3. **Not indulging in much wine** (verse 8) refers to one who lets alcohol color his judgment while it is likely also a refers to an addiction to wine, what we call an alcoholic.
4. **Not one who obtains dishonest money** (verse 8) assuming that one has a job and works for what he has.
5. **Must hold to the deep truth of the faith** (verse 9) so he can understand and defend the scriptures. This is not just a superficial acceptance of the Word of God but a deep understanding of what he believes and why. This would seem to indicate someone who has been a believer long enough to grow in his understanding of Biblical truth.
6. **He should be tested** (verse 10) so it is necessary to know someone well before placing them into a position of service in the church. To appoint someone a deacon before the church knows him or her can lead to finding out about personality problems or behavioral problems too late.
7. **He should be the husband of one wife** (verse 12) seeming to refer to a man without a divorce.
8. **He should be in control of his own home** (verse 12). If one cannot manage his own home and family in an orderly fashion then he does not deserve to be asked to serve the local church family.

THE REWARD FOR SERVING AS A DEACON is to receive an “**excellent standing**”, that is, a position of respect from others for the job which they do. When we serve Jesus Christ through the local church we also gain confidence in our own faith, we become “**assured**” of our position in Jesus Christ. This relates to growth in the Christian life as we serve others through the church.

The next section involves only one verse but is the most controversial subject. Up to now the verses are all self-explanatory but it would be nice to have Paul present to ask him exactly what he means in I Timothy 3:11. Consider a few of the various translations of the verse:

**1 Timothy 3:11** In the same way, *their wives* are to be women worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything. (New International Version)

**1 Timothy 3:11** Likewise *their wives* must be reverent, not slanderers, temperate, faithful in all things. (New King James)

**1 Timothy 3:11** *Women* {must} likewise {be} dignified, not malicious gossips, but temperate, faithful in all things. (New American Standard)

**1 Timothy 3:11** Their *wives* must be thoughtful, not heavy drinkers, not gossipers, but faithful in everything they do. (The Living Bible)

**1 Timothy 3:11** The *women* likewise must be serious, no slanderers, but temperate, faithful in all things. (Revised Standard Version)

There is a question in this verse as to whether “wives of the deacons” or “women” in general are being referred to. There are two approaches to this verse:

- That the women mentioned in the verse are those who, like the men, have been chosen to be **deacons** to carry out a specific service in the church. At Skiff Lake Bible Church this is the approach we have chosen to take based upon reasons which will be considered.
- That the women mentioned in the verse refer specifically to the **wives of the deacons**, being included in the characteristics of male deacons because their wives have to have lives consistent with their own.

The difficulty in being certain of the meaning of the verse is also demonstrated in the following quotes from various commentaries:

From Robertson's Word Pictures in the New Testament:  
Apparently "women as deacons" (Rom. 16:1 about Phoebe) and not women in general or just "wives of deacons."

From The Wycliffe Commentary:  
The context makes this most naturally refer to women who are acting in the capacity of deacons, as deaconesses.

From Barnes' Notes:  
The reason assigned for supposing that it does not refer to the wives of deacons, as such, is, that nothing is said of the qualifications of the wives of bishops-- a matter of as much importance as that of the character of the wife of a deacon; and that it cannot be supposed that the apostle would specify the one without some allusion to the other. But that the common interpretation, which makes it refer to the wives of deacons, as such, is to be adhered to, seems to me to be clear. Because:

- (1) it is the obvious and natural interpretation.
- (2) the word here used-- "wives"-- is never used of itself to denote deaconesses.
- (3) if the apostle had meant deaconesses, it would have been easy to express it without ambiguity;
- (4) what is here mentioned is important, whether the same thing is mentioned of bishops or not.

From John F. MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary*, (Chicago: Moody Press) 1983:

Whether the **women** in view here are deacons' wives or a separate order of female deacons has been much disputed. The following points show that women in general, not necessarily deacons' wives are in view here. First, the use of **likewise** (cf. 1 Tim. 2:9; 3:8; Titus 2:3, 6) argues strongly for seeing a third and distinct group here in addition to elders and deacons. Second, there is no possessive pronoun or definite article connecting these **women** with deacons. Third, Paul gave no qualifications for elders' wives. Why would he do so for deacons' wives? Fourth, Paul did not use the word "deaconesses" because there was no such word in the Greek language; the masculine form of diakonos was used of both men and women (cf. Rom. 16:1). A different term, *diakonissa*, was used for "deaconess" in postbiblical Greek (Marvin R. Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1946], 3:176). Using the term **women** was the only way Paul could distinguish them from the male deacons. Finally, their qualifications parallel those of the male deacons.

From John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Scripture Press Publications, Inc.) 1983, 1985.

**3:11.** Similarly the *gynaikas* ("women" or **wives**) **are to be worthy of respect**, that is, dignified (the same word, *semnas*, is used of deacons in v. 8), not slanderers (*diabolous*, from *diaballo* "to slander"; from this verb comes the noun "devil," the chief slanderer) of others, **but temperate** ("well-balanced;" cf. v. 2; Titus 2:2), **and trustworthy** (lit., "faithful") **in everything**. Who are these women Paul addressed? They were almost certainly not the women of the congregation generally. They were most likely either the wives of the deacons or a group of female deacons (cf. Phoebe, Rom. 16:1). A case can be made for either of these two options, with a slim advantage falling to the first. But being dogmatic about either view is unwarranted by the exegetical data.

From Roy B. Zuck, and Darrell L. Bock, *A Biblical Theology of the New Testament*, (Chicago: Moody Press)

"For a certain group of women, 1 Timothy 3:11 interjects a list of qualifications almost identical to those of the deacons. Some writers interpret "women" (*gynaikas*) as a reference to the office of deaconess, whereas others say it refers to deacons' wives. In the Pastorals Paul used the noun *gynēu* for both women (1 Tim. 2:9–12, 14) and wives (1 Tim. 3:2, 12; 5:9; Titus 1:6). The fact that in 1 Timothy 3:2 and 10 the word refers to the wives of elders and deacons respectively seems to argue for that option as the best interpretation for verse 11. Furthermore, the qualifications of these women are treated separately from the men who serve as deacons. This would thus argue against seeing them as identical in role. Discussing them along with the deacons, however, suggests the women did serve in some capacity. This then called for their having four characteristics: being "worthy of respect" (*semnas*), "not malicious talkers" (*meu diabolous*), "temperate" (*neuphaliou*), and "trustworthy in everything" (*pistas in pasin*). Their involvement in serving with their husbands requires a commensurate maturity. Regardless of

how one interprets 1 Timothy 3:11, it is interesting to note Paul's respect for Phoebe, who is called a servant (*diakonon*) of the church (Rom. 16:1). This might argue for a more formal capacity of service for women within the early church. In addition, the early church soon established an office for deaconesses. These passages must have served some justification for such a practice."

It is obvious from the above commentaries, some old and some new, that there will never be agreement about the absolute meaning that Paul had in mind. Therefore, either approach can be considered usable and not in conflict with the scripture itself. As mentioned above Skiff Lake Bible Church has chosen to have deacons who are women to serve in certain capacities in our local church. We feel that this is justified based upon the following reasons:

1. There is no conflict with **1 Timothy 2:11-12: A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. 12 I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent.**

Since a deacon is a position of service, not authority. A female deacon serves under the direction of an elder just as a male deacon does. There is no authority over a male in this context. The culture of the early church could not allow an authority problem to develop but still had great respect for what women accomplished as Paul's reference to Phoebe:

**Romans 16:1 I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant (diakonon) of the church in Cenchrea. 2 I ask you to receive her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints and to give her any help she may need from you, for she has been a great help to many people, including me.**

Paul would not likely have used this term loosely in the context of a reference to a local church, Cenchrea. When used in such a way it appears to be a technical term for a church office.

2. It is obvious that women served the local churches apart from being a wife of a deacon. Paul refers to Phoebe as a *diakonon*, not a wife of a *diakonon*. It is necessary to define the characteristics that one would look for in such a person as Paul does in:

**1 Timothy 3:11 In the same way, their wives (or women) are to be women worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything.** (New International Version)

Obviously the translators of the New International Version chose to translate the word "women" as "wives of deacons". The phrase "in the same way" seems more natural to consider that female deacons are required to have similar characteristics as male deacons that Paul had been describing.

**Women who serve the local church as deacons**, either by themselves or in association with their husbands, also have characteristics listed which should be required:

1. A woman is to be worthy of respect, the same word used first in the order of description of men. This is a self-explanatory word, referring to someone others look up to.

2. A woman is not to be one who talks maliciously about others, someone intent upon hurting the reputation of someone else.
3. A woman is to be temperate (*nephalious*), a word that can be used both of temperance with regard to wine or also refers to being reasonable or sensible.
4. To be trustworthy (*pistos*) usually describes someone who is faithful, someone who depends upon God, looking to the Holy Spirit for direction and not dependent upon personal emotion. It is used in Matthew 24:25, for instance, to refer to a faithful and wise servant.

Recent tradition is very strong to have only male deacons in Protestant churches but that appears to be based upon deacons making up the board of a church while there is only one overseer (*presbuteros/episkopos*), the pastor or minister of the church. Since the Biblical pattern appears to be that each church had multiple elders under whom the deacons served, then it seems reasonable that women should serve in this capacity.

One point to make is that there is no reason to “feminize” the word deacon to designate a woman. Both can be servants and so both are deacons.

#### **SUMMARY**

Just as elders are required to meet certain qualifications, so also the deacons as well. These qualifications for deacons are very similar to those listed for the elders but there are fewer. That does not infer in any way that any deacon is of less importance than any elder but the office of elder may be more open to criticism so Paul chose to carry the description of elders a little further. The area of leadership should have a broader range of credentials than an office of service under that leader.

The above does not mean that a deacon lacks any qualifications of an elder but he may simply not desire to be in a leadership position.

## **SECTION FIVE THE QUALITIES NEEDED IN DEACONS**

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8. **He should be in control of his own home** (verse 12). If one cannot manage his own home and family in an orderly fashion then he does not deserve to be asked to serve the local church family.

THE REWARD FOR SERVING AS A DEACON is to receive an “**excellent standing**”, that is, a position of respect from others for the job which they do. When we serve Jesus Christ through the local church we also gain confidence in our own faith, we become “**assured**” of our position in Jesus Christ. This relates to growth in the Christian life as we serve others through the church.

The next section involves only one verse but is the most controversial subject. Up to now the verses are all self-explanatory but it would be nice to have Paul present to ask him exactly what he means in I Timothy 3:11. Consider a few of the various translations of the verse:

**1 Timothy 3:11 In the same way, their wives are to be women worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything.** (New International Version)

**1 Timothy 3:11 Likewise their wives must be reverent, not slanderers, temperate, faithful in all things.**(New King James)

**1 Timothy 3:11 Women {must} likewise {be} dignified, not malicious gossips, but temperate, faithful in all things.** (New American Standard)

**1 Timothy 3:11 Their wives must be thoughtful, not heavy drinkers, not gossipers, but faithful in everything they do.** (The Living Bible)

**1 Timothy 3:11 The women likewise must be serious, no slanderers, but temperate, faithful in all things.** (Revised Standard Version)

There is a question in this verse as to whether “wives of the deacons” or “women” in general are being referred to. There are two approaches to this verse:

- That the women mentioned in the verse are those who, like the men, have been chosen to be **deacons** to carry out a specific service in the church. At Skiff Lake Bible Church this is the approach we have chosen to take based upon reasons which will be considered.
- That the women mentioned in the verse refer specifically to the **wives of the deacons**, being included in the characteristics of male deacons because their wives have to have lives consistent with their own.

The difficulty in being certain of the meaning of the verse is also demonstrated in the following quotes from various commentaries:

From Robertson's Word Pictures in the New Testament:

Apparently "women as deacons" (<Rom. 16:1> about Phoebe) and not women in general or just "wives of deacons."

From The Wycliffe Commentary:

The context makes this most naturally refer to women who are acting in the capacity of deacons, as deaconesses.

From Barnes' Notes:

The reason assigned for supposing that it does not refer to the wives of deacons, as such, is, that nothing is said of the qualifications of the wives of bishops-- a matter of as much importance as that of the character of the wife of a deacon; and that it cannot be supposed that the apostle would specify the one without some allusion to the other. But that the common interpretation, which makes it refer to the wives of deacons, as such, is to be adhered to, seems to me to be clear. Because:

- (1) it is the obvious and natural interpretation.

(2) the word here used-- "wives"-- is never used of itself to denote deaconesses.

(3) if the apostle had meant deaconesses, it would have been easy to express it without ambiguity;.

(4) what is here mentioned is important, whether the same thing is mentioned of bishops or not.

From Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary:

(Their) wives]-- rather, `women; ' i. e., deaconesses. For there is no reason that special rules should be laid down as to wives of deacons, and not also as to wives of bishops. Moreover, if wives of deacons were meant, there seems no reason for the omission of "their." Also [hoosautoos "even so" ("likewise," <1 Tim. 3:8>; "in like manner," <1 Tim. 2:9>)] denotes a transition to another class of persons. Also the omission of domestic duties in their case, though they are specified in the man <1 Tim. 3:12>. There were doubtless deaconesses at Ephesus, such as Phebe was at Cenchræ (<Rom. 16:1>, "servant;" Greek, deaconess), yet no mention is made of them in this letter, if not here; whereas, if they be meant, <1 Tim. 3> embraces in due proportion all offices of the church. Naturally, after specifying the deacon's qualifications, Paul passes to those of the deaconess. "Grave" is said of both. "Not slanderers" answers to "not double tongued" in deacons; so <Titus 2:3>. "Sober" answers to "not given to much wine" in the deacons <1 Tim. 3:8>. Thus, he requires the same qualifications in deaconesses as in deacons.

From John F. MacArthur, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary, (Chicago: Moody Press) 1983:

Whether the **women** in view here are deacons' wives or a separate order of female deacons has been much disputed. The following points show that women in general, not necessarily deacons' wives are in view here. First, the use of **likewise** (cf. 1 Tim. 2:9; 3:8; Titus 2:3, 6) argues strongly for seeing a third and distinct group here in addition to elders and deacons. Second, there is no possessive pronoun or definite article connecting these **women** with deacons. Third, Paul gave no qualifications for elders' wives. Why would he do so for deacons' wives? Fourth, Paul did not use the word "deaconesses" because there was no such word in the Greek language; the masculine form of *diakonos* was used of both men and women (cf. Rom. 16:1). A different term, *diakonissa*, was used for "deaconess" in postbiblical Greek (Marvin R. Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1946], 3:176). Using the term **women** was the only way Paul could distinguish them from the male deacons. Finally, their qualifications parallel those of the male deacons.

From John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, The Bible Knowledge Commentary, (Wheaton, Illinois: Scripture Press Publications, Inc.) 1983, 1985.

**3:11.** Similarly the *gynaikas* ("women" or **wives**) are to be **worthy of respect**, that is, dignified (the same word, *semnas*, is used of deacons in v. 8), not slanderers (*diabolous*, from *diaballo* "to slander"; from this verb comes the noun "devil," the chief slanderer) of others, **but temperate** (*neuphalious*, "well-balanced;" cf. v. 2; Titus 2:2), **and trustworthy** (lit., "faithful") **in everything**. Who

are these *gynaikas* Paul addressed? They were almost certainly not the women of the congregation generally. They were most likely either the wives of the deacons or a group of female deacons (cf. Phoebe, Rom. 16:1). A case can be made for either of these two options, with a slim advantage falling to the first. But being dogmatic about either view is unwarranted by the exegetical data.

From Roy B. Zuck, and Darrell L. Bock, *A Biblical Theology of the New Testament*. (Chicago.: Moody Press)

For a certain group of women, 1 Timothy 3:11 interjects a list of qualifications almost identical to those of the deacons. Some writers interpret “women” (*gynaikas*) as a reference to the office of deaconess, whereas others say it refers to deacons’ wives. In the Pastorals Paul used the noun *gyneue* for both women (1 Tim. 2:9–12, 14) and wives (1 Tim. 3:2, 12; 5:9; Titus 1:6). The fact that in 1 Timothy 3:2 and 10 the word refers to the wives of elders and deacons respectively seems to argue for that option as the best interpretation for verse 11. Furthermore, the qualifications of these women are treated separately from the men who serve as deacons. This would thus argue against seeing them as identical in role. Discussing them along with the deacons, however, suggests the women did serve in some capacity. This then called for their having four characteristics: being “worthy of respect” (*semnas*) , “not malicious talkers” (*meu diabolous*) , “temperate” (*nephaliou*) , and “trustworthy in everything” (*pistas in pasin*) . Their involvement in serving with their husbands requires a commensurate maturity. Regardless of how one interprets 1 Timothy 3:11, it is interesting to note Paul’s respect for Phoebe, who is called a servant (*diakonon*) of the church (Rom. 16:1). This might argue for a more formal capacity of service for women within the early church. In addition, the early church soon established an office for deaconesses. These passages must have served some justification for such a practice.

It is obvious from the above commentaries, some old and some new, that there will never be agreement about the absolute meaning that Paul had in mind. Therefore, either approach can be considered usable and not in conflict with the scripture itself. As mentioned above Skiff Lake Bible Church has chosen to have deacons who are women to serve in certain capacities in our local church. We feel that this is justified based upon the following reasons:

1. There is no conflict with **1 Timothy 2:11-12**:  
**11. A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. 12 I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent.**  
 since a deacon is a position of service, not authority. A female deacon serves under the direction of an elder just as a male deacon does. There is no authority over a male in this context. The culture of the early church could not allow an authority problem to develop but still had great respect for what women accomplished as Paul’s reference to Pheobe:  
**Romans 16:1 I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant (*diakonos*) of the church in Cenchrea. 2 I ask you to receive her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints and to give her any help she may need from you, for she has been a great help to many people, including me.**

Paul would not likely have used this term loosely in the context of a reference to a local church, Cenchrea. When used in such a way it appears to be a technical term for a church office.

2. It is obvious that women served the local churches apart from being a wife of a deacon. Paul refers to Phoebe as a *diakonos*, not a wife of a *diakonos*. It is necessary to define the characteristics that one would look for in such a person as Paul does in:  
**1 Timothy 3:11 In the same way, their wives (or women) are to be women worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything.** (New International Version)

Obviously the translators of the New International Version chose to translate the word “women” as “wives of deacons”. The phrase “in the same way” seems more natural to consider that female deacons are required to have similar characteristics as male deacons that Paul had been describing.

**Women who serve the local church as deacons**, either by themselves or in association with their husbands, also have characteristics listed which should be required:

1. A woman is to be worthy of respect, the same word used first in the order of description of men. This is a self-explanatory word, referring to someone others look up to.
2. A woman is not to be one who talks maliciously about others, someone intent upon hurting the reputation of someone else.
3. A woman is to be temperate (*nephaliou*), a word that can be used both of temperance with regard to wine or also refers to being reasonable or sensible.
4. To be trustworthy (*pistos*) usually describes someone who is faithful, someone who depends upon God, looking to the Holy Spirit for direction and not dependent upon personal emotion. It is used in Matthew 24:25, for instance, to refer to a faithful and wise servant.

Recent tradition is very strong to have only male deacons in Protestant churches but that appears to be based upon deacons making up the board of a church while there is only one overseer (*presbuteros/episkopos*), the pastor or minister of the church. Since the Biblical pattern appears to be that each church had multiple elders under whom the deacons served, then it seems reasonable that women should serve in this capacity.

One point to make is that there is no reason to “feminize” the word deacon to designate a woman. Both can be servants and so both are deacons.

### **SUMMARY**

Just as elders are required to meet certain qualifications, so also the deacons as well. These qualifications for deacons are very similar to those listed for the elders but there are fewer. That does not infer in any way that any deacon is of



less importance than any elder but the office of elder may be more open to criticism so Paul chose to carry the description of elders a little further. The area of leadership should have a broader range of credentials than an office of service under that leader.

The above does not mean that a deacon lacks any qualifications of an elder but he may simply not desire to be in a leadership position.

## SECTION SIX A PRACTICAL AND SPIRIT-LED APPROACH FOR PROVIDING ELDERS AND DEACONS IN A LOCAL CHURCH

### OUTLINE

- I. **Who should be an elder?**
- II. **Who can be a deacon?**
- III. **What if one desires to serve as an elder or deacon but does not meet all of the qualifications?**
- IV. **A practical plan.**

#### **I. Who should be an elder?**

**An elder has to be someone who desires to serve in the office.** There should be no coercion. This is a way to serve Jesus Christ among many other ways. Not all Spirit-directed men will desire such an overseer office and may be involved in other aspects of local church activities. God will provide those individuals needed to lead local churches and we need to leave it in his hands. Therefore certain principles are necessary to take this approach to voluntary church leadership:

**One who desires to be an elder must examine himself carefully as to possible disqualifications.** As seen in prior sections Paul is specific as to qualifications. If there is a problem with qualifications an individual either needs a life style change or should seek other areas of service. **Some may not be willing to face up to obvious disqualifications and desire to serve as a elder.** It is not unusual that others may recognize negative personality characteristics that we ourselves are not willing to admit exist. In such a case the elder board must be willing to question an individual relative to scriptural aspects of eldership. If this is not done then the voluntary Spirit-directed approach to elder board membership will not work. A local church cannot be soft about this. If the qualifications for elder were not important then Paul would not have listed them.

**If a man sees nothing to prevent his seeking such an office and he desires to serve in this way, then he should make himself available.** Some might see this as a step of arrogance to nominate one's self but that is no more true than it would be arrogant to desire to be a pastor or missionary. This is a necessary office for the organization of a local church. God may have placed you into a particular church just to serve in this way. If you desire to be an elder and do not have disqualifications, then volunteer.

**A local church must educate its members as to qualifications for eldership to avoid problems.** When it is time for a local church to accept members to the Elder Board, there should be an educational process so that there is no misunderstanding as to what an elder is and what his qualifications are. This can avoid the danger of men presenting themselves for this office who have obvious disqualification but simply do not know it. If a man is not willing to attend an educational session, then he is not good elder material anyway. In addition each man should be asked to personally review the qualifications in detail before submitting his name for eldership.

**Deacons should be sought out by the elder board to assist in various areas of work in the church.** When a need arises the board can approach an individual or a couple and ask them to serve as deacons. This should be done in a private manner so there is an opportunity to say no. They might know of some reason that they cannot serve or they might not feel ready for such a responsibility.

### **III. What if one desires to serve as an elder or deacon but does not meet all of the qualifications?**

It is possible that a man or woman could have a problem in their past lives with regard to the qualifications for church offices as listed in the scripture. These things may even have happened before they were believers (such as divorce or problems with the law). Does that mean that they contribute to service in a local church? No, it only means that they cannot hold an official office. When we confess our sins God forgives them completely. The church needs to forget about past mistakes also. However, if those are public mistakes (divorce, problems with the law, etc.), even though they are forgiven by God and others, they can still reflect upon the church if an office is held.

### **IV. A practical plan for a local church to allow the Holy Spirit to direct its ministry.**

**Be certain that the members of the church understand the process of obtaining elders and deacons.** It is necessary that all who participate in such a New Testament church understand the reasons for what is being done. It is also important that the local church understand the basic qualifications for church officers as given in the New Testament. This does not have to be a detailed review which can become monotonous if done on a yearly basis, but there should be at least a church government overview presented yearly (usually one hour each year).

**There should be a time each year when the elder board is open to new members and when prior board members can step down if they so desire.** This gives an opportunity for men to think about their church ministry and to ask themselves the question as to whether they might desire to minister at the elder level. In addition being an elder does not have to be “for life” and a man might desire to leave the board for various reasons and this is a convenient time.

**There should be a special teaching session each year for any men that are interested in being elders in order to go over qualifications in detail.** It is appropriate for an individual’s wife to attend such a training session since spouses often can judge one more clearly than we ourselves are able to do. This can be done in a one-hour session and can avoid any misunderstandings, allowing time for personal questions to be asked. This gives such an individual time to evaluate his own life and desires with regard to being an elder. This should be done yearly even if there is only one man interested.

**After attending the special session for possible new elder board members, there should be a period of two weeks to**

**allow a man to consider his desires and qualifications and submit his name and area of interest to the pastor of the church.** This should be done non-publicly in case a problem does exist. No one’s name is to be submitted by someone else; the man interested must do it himself. This is not a political event where individuals are nominated.

As a practical matter men considering being elders sometimes let the elders know and desire to be asked to function as a deacon for a year to test their interest in a specific area of ministry while working with an elder. This is a good way for a man to decide whether he really wants to function as an elder and can avoid significant problems later.

### **The present elder board must consider each man who desires the office of elder as to whether there might be a qualification problem.**

1. If there is no problem the new name or names will be submitted to the entire church membership for approval as part of the new slate of elders, including the pastor as the “head elder” or chairman of the board, along with men who desire to remain elders from the prior year.
2. If there is a problem then the board has the difficult but necessary responsibility to meet with such men to discuss the scriptural basis for questioning one’s qualifications. If such an individual is not willing to discuss such matters with the board, or becomes upset by such a process, then he is not a good candidate anyway. If he is willing to discuss problem areas in his life then it can be a growing process spiritually.

### **Once the elder board is in place each year then the needs of the church can be evaluated and deacons sought to meet the needs in various areas of service to the church.**

1. As areas of service are identified there are usually logical persons who are interested in those areas. These individuals can be asked to serve as deacons if there are no obvious disqualifying personal situations. A position of deacon should exist because there is an area of ministry that needs attention.
2. **When individuals are asked to be deacons there should be an orientation meeting** so each one can understand what their role in ministry ought to be. This also allows an opportunity to go over qualifications and a job description allowing someone to back out if he or she so desires. This should be able to be accomplished during a meeting of about one hour.

### **With such an arrangement board meetings are carried out on a regular basis in the following way:**

1. The elders and deacons meet together to discuss issues and problems in an open meeting. This allows free exchange of information and discussion as to continuing ministry needs in the church, the reports of various committees need to be considered, and organization of the church calendar should take place.
2. After the open meeting the deacons are excused allowing the elders to deal with sensitive issues,

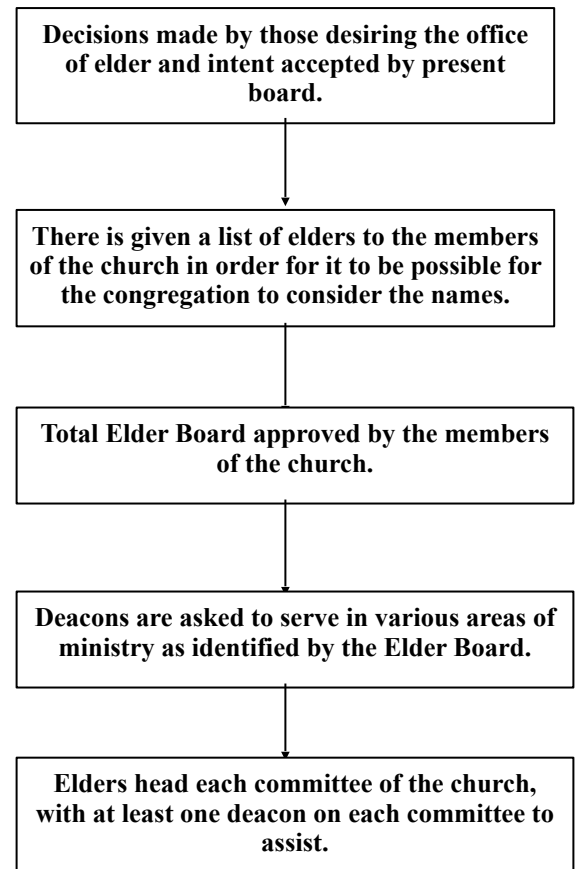
issues that need elder decisions (such as financial issues), and a discussion of the general directions that the church is going. Final decisions on problem areas are made during this session.

It is important that the congregation have an opportunity to consider the names submitted before approving the board. Members of the church have a right to express themselves if a potential elder has a problem of which they are aware. That can be discussed with the Pastor, or another of the prior elders, so the problem can be dealt with in a timely fashion before official approval takes place. We can sometimes be surprised at problems that are perceived by individuals in a congregation that may or may not be based upon fact.

The number of deacons does not have to be set in stone. The number can vary with the size of the church, the areas of need which have to be met, and the number can vary from year to year and time to time as certain ministries develop or are eliminated. A yearly re-evaluation needs to be carried out by the Elder Board as to the needs of the church.

1. No specific number of elders need to be designated ahead of time. This leads to forcing men into the office who may not desire to do so or may not be qualified to do so in order to fill up the required number. One or two elders might suffice or many more might be required depending upon the size of a local church.
2. No guilt trips should be laid upon those who are qualified but who serve the church in other ways. This can bring in men who serve only half-heartedly because they could better be doing something else.
3. A local church must relax and trust the Holy Spirit to lead men appropriately. If God cannot direct our churches then we are in great trouble, but He can! We like to force issues that are very easy for God to handle.

## SUMMARY OF CHURCH FUNCTIONS AND RELATIONSHIPS WITH AND ELDER BOARD AND DEACONS



### Notes on committee function under an elder system.

1. An elder will head each committee, usually with deacon assistance. Committee meetings should not be held without an elder present although there are times when it is necessary to meet without the elder with his approval.
2. Committee **suggestions** are subject to Elder Board **approval**. For minor issues the elder of that committee can often make the decision, for major issues Elder Board is required such as the support of a new missionary, allotment of funds, or decisions which affect church policy in any area. Ultimately the Elder Board is responsible for suggestions made at the committee level before such suggestions become policy.
3. Committee structure and membership is also subject to Elder Board approval. Generally those serving on a committee have a special interest in the area of ministry of that committee. New committees can be created as needs arise and sometimes committees can be eliminated if a ministry need is no longer present. Committees need to be under continuing review as to their necessity and ministry on a regular basis.
4. The pastor of the church is automatically a member of each committee although he may not physically be able to be present at each meeting.