

# ***Church Leadership: Function and Qualifications of Elders***

***Study Into the Structure, Qualifications and  
Responsibilities of Biblical Church Leadership***

Copyright © 1993, 1994, 1997-1999, 2003, 2004, 2009  
by J. L. Calahan. All Rights Reserved.

This document may not be hosted on  
any website other than [www.neverthirsty.org](http://www.neverthirsty.org).

All rights reserved. No part of this document may be reproduced in any form without  
permission in writing from the author.

All Scripture quotations in this document are from The New American Standard  
Bible, © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1973, 1975 and 1977 by The Lockman  
Foundation.

*Dedicated to my family  
for their love and all that they mean to me.*

# Contents

What Happened to the Church?	5
Biblical Leadership In Transition	10
What Is The Biblical Structure?	13
Acts 6:1-6	13
Acts 11:30	14
Acts 14:23	15
Acts 15:2, 4-6	16
Acts 20:17, 28-30	17
Acts 21:18	18
Philippians 1:1	19
I Thessalonians 5:12-13	19
1 Timothy 3:1-12	19
1 Timothy 5:17	20
I Timothy 5:19-21	21
Titus 1:5	22
Hebrews 13:7, 17	22
James 5:14	23
I Peter 5:1-3	24
Qualifications For Leadership	25
The Lord's Perspective	25
Marks of Spiritual Maturity	26
<b>Elders Determine the Health of the Church</b>	30
Summary About Elders	31
Personal Remarks	34
Leadership Selection	34
Leadership Qualifications	34
Shepherd-Leaders	35
Discipleship - The Priority	36
The Replacement	37
The Elder's Struggle	38
"Peter, Feed My Flock"	39
Like Priest, Like People	39
Lay Elders Are Pastors	40
Conclusion	40

# What Happened to the Church?

Some years ago, the board chairman of a large church announced to the congregation that the “New Testament did not apply to the church today.” He was struggling with what God had said about church government - church leadership. He did not like what he was reading. He viewed the New Testament teaching about church leadership to be “ancient” and not practical. The form, function and the qualifications of elders or leaders in our churches today is in decay in some areas and non-existent in others. The focus and vision of the church today is usually driven by other concerns and agendas, rather than what God desires. The fundamentals are ignored either directly or through well-intentioned neglect. Maybe that is why Ambrose made this observation hundreds of years ago.

“ . . . [Ambrose] complains in the following terms: ‘The old synagogue and afterward the church, had elders, without whose counsel nothing was done. It has fallen out of use, by what negligence I do not know . . .’ John Calvin, A.D. 1600

Unfortunately, more than just an unbiblical form of church leadership has become commonplace in evangelical churches throughout our world. While this is a very important issue, it is not as important as the decline of spiritual maturity in the lives of many leaders and pastors. It is a spiritual axiom that the quality of the spiritual leadership affects the spiritual health of the local church. It is very difficult for church members to grow beyond immature spiritual examples - immature spiritual leaders. These two issues are the cause of the fall and decline of the church in America today. Our focus will be on the local church and how to recover God’s pattern of biblical leadership.

**Typical Church Boards.** Today evangelical churches function with a variety of organizational structures. The specifics of the organization are defined by the Statement of Faith, Articles of Incorporation, Constitution, and By-Laws of the church. Collectively, they define a common set of beliefs, the boards and committees of the church, the methodology for selecting their leaders and the responsibilities of the leadership and the congregation. Some churches are organized with a democratic form of church leadership with the congregation having a significant amount of control. Other churches employ an autonomous form of leadership structure that has some or no accountability to the congregation. Others are completely governed by a single influential individual. In some cases, the denomination has dictated the structure. Churches have adopted a wide variety of organizational structures for a variety of reasons. Some are organized to avoid certain problems while others have adopted structures

that are a blur of multiple church constitutions and by-laws.

The governing leadership of many churches has been referred to by a variety of names, such as deacons, directors, elders, officers, trustees and servants. One church simply referred to its leadership as the “board members.” In others, the leadership can have lofty titles. Usually the title is an indication of the leader’s function within the church. In some churches, these leaders are expected to shepherd the congregation, while in others a strong business presence is desired for financial reasons.

The leadership may be passive with a paid staff completely running the church. This occurs because lay leaders are usually expected to be involved in the life of the church to some degree with the pastor usually functioning as the Chief Executive Officer (CEO). Most church members and pastors merely see lay leaders as organizational men and nothing more.

In most churches, the leadership serve different terms of

office. The pastor(s) are sometimes permanent members of the leadership board, while the laymen rotate off and on. This arrangement is often designed to remove poor board members, prevent control of the board by a select few laymen, provide for leaves of absence, and for the introduction of younger leaders or “new blood.” The ministry roles of the pastoral staff are usually considered to be too important to have them rotate off and on. While the rotation of lay leaders is commonly designed to prevent power blocks from forming among the leadership, it ignores the obvious fact that the pastoral staff is actually the biggest vested power block in the leadership. In other churches, all leaders serve as long as they are biblically qualified. In still others, the biblical qualifications are considered to be unimportant by the very practices employed in the selection of leaders.

Philippians 1:1 is the only passage in Scripture where we see the congregation, the saints, and the church leaders together. 1 Timothy 3:1-13 includes just the leadership. We will see in our study that elders and deacons are the biblical names for church leaders. But what is the function of the elders and deacons? What is common between the elders and the pastor? We will examine these key questions.

### **Typical Church Leadership Qualifications.**

Leaders are often selected because of their business experience, financial contributions, outside political connections, professional jobs, management skills, internal church connections, as well as for their spiritual characters. These are the criteria or qualifications churches frequently use when selecting leaders. As a result they select doctors, attorneys, bankers and successful business owners. Models of holiness are sometimes desired. Biblical knowledge is usually a



hen leaders are spiritually immature, the form of the church government is irrelevant.

### **God's Pattern For Church Government.**

Theologians have studied the New Testament for clues regarding a biblical pattern for church government. No directives commanding a specific form of church organization *in all of its many minute details can be found in black and white*. But the Bible is not silent either. Yes, it is sometimes vague, due to uncertain word meanings, grammar and cultural contexts. As a result, Scripture is used to support different forms of church government, such as congregational rule, or an autonomous leadership team, as well as other variations. Regardless of viewpoint, we will see that the biblical evidence weighs in favor of greater responsibility for the leadership and a supportive congregation. We will also see that God has given us foundational blocks for building a biblical form of leadership.

secondary consideration compared to administrative and organizational skills. In many churches, the pastor is the only recognized Bible expert and the leadership looks to him for spiritual guidance as well as theological and biblical knowledge. By implication, theological and biblical knowledge are less important in choosing lay leaders.

But the major criteria that is usually ignored is spiritual maturity. The marks of spiritual maturity are often minimized or even ignored in the pursuit of recognizing a sufficient number of men with the “right skills” to “run the church.” The concept of real, vital, spiritually mature shepherds and mentors of the flock is foreign in some churches.

Why and when should church members follow the admonition of Hebrews 13:7?

[Remember those who led you, who spoke the word](#)

## God's Warnings To The Old Testament Priests

Condemnations of Priests and Prophets	Passage
... [Priests] who handle the Law do not know [God] ...	Jer. 2:8
An appalling and horrible thing has happened ... the prophets prophesy falsely, and rule on their own authority, and my people love it so!	Jer. 5:30-31
For both prophet and priest are polluted; even in My house I have found their wickedness.	Jer. 23:11
Also among the prophets of Jerusalem I have seen a horrible thing: the committing of adultery and walking in falsehood; and they strengthen the hands of evildoers, so that no one has turned back from his wickedness ...	Jer. 23:14
Your prophets ... have not exposed your iniquity.	Lam. 2:14
... priests have done violence to My law ... they have made no distinctions between the holy and profane, and have not taught the difference between the unclean and the clean; and they hide their eyes from the sabbath ...	Ezek. 22:26
My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you from being My priest.	Hosea 4:6
[Priests] feed on the sins of My people, and direct their desire toward their iniquity.	Hosea 4:8-9
... priests instruct for a price, and her prophets divine for money, ... yet they lean on the Lord saying, "Is not the Lord in our midst ..."	Micah 3:11
You say, "My how tiresome it is!" ... and you bring what was taken by robbery and what is lame or sick ...	Mal. 1:13-14
For the lips of the priest should preserve knowledge ... but ... you have caused many to stumble by the instruction ...	Mal. 2:7-8
... [priests] are showing partiality in the instruction.	Mal. 2:9

of God to you; and consider the result of their conduct,  
imitate their faith . . . Hebrews 13:7 (NASB)

The answer is, “When their leaders are spiritually mature.” The passage is very specific. The Holy Spirit says that we are to imitate the faith of someone. It does not give us an option. It tells the saints to look for three things before they follow anyone’s spiritual example. First, he must have been a leader in the church. Second, the leader must have been a teacher of the Word of God within the congregation. That means the elder was a leader-teacher or a shepherd-leader. Third, the men and women in the church must evaluate “the result of the shepherd’s spiritual life before imitating him.” What does it mean to evaluate a shepherd’s spiritual life? It means to look

condition in Israel, for the Old Testament records that the prophets “rule on their own authority, and my people love it so (Jeremiah 5:30-31)” and the “priests approve of their own sins and the sins of the people (Hosea 4:8-9).

In the Old Testament, God warned and condemned the priests and prophets for a variety of sins. The sins revealed spiritual immaturity, indifference to their responsibilities and duties, and impersonal relationship with God. God was displeased with the priests when they taught falsely, partially, or not at all. God condemned the priests for not exposing sin and blurring the distinctions between “holy and profane.” What is worse, Scripture indicates that these “spiritual leaders” had the support of the people; and their messages were apparently weak in content, positive in tone and word,

The depth of a man’s spiritual maturity is a mark  
of the depth of his love-walk with Jesus . . .

at the spiritual character or spiritual maturity of the shepherd-leaders and ask, “Are they spiritually mature?” If so, then imitate them; if not, look for someone else. If you are a shepherd-leader, are you spiritually mature? What does spiritual maturity look like? That is a question we will explore in this study.

**Biblical Warnings.** If the marks of spiritual maturity for leaders are ignored or minimized to accommodate even select individuals, the church will suffer. If the responsibilities are ignored by the church leadership, the church will suffer too!

The health and life of a church depend on the quality of its leaders and on their fulfillment of the responsibilities the Great Shepherd gave them. When the governing leadership is unqualified, the form of church government is irrelevant. When the leaders ignore their responsibilities, the church will suffer.

The church is in trouble when the leadership is either blind or indifferent to its own sins and immaturity. This was the

socially acceptable, but weak on truth. The lengthy list of priestly sins included indifference to the sabbath, ministering for money, and not ruling according to God’s authority. These priests did not love God. They did not have a meaningful relationship with God. They may have thought that they were favored by God, but they were only serving themselves.

For some, the priesthood was like a social club for leaders. Some leaders performed their ministry on the sabbath and as required throughout the week, but their hearts were far from God. It was service unto self and for “ . . . the favor of men . . .” (Galatians 1:10), that is, the congregation.

It is amazing that every false teacher has a group of people who think that he is great - a following. In order to be a false teacher, you need a following! A false teacher without a following is not a false teacher. If he or she does not have a following, then he or she is just a person who has bad theology. Yet many churches see the size of their following - church attenders - as an indication of God’s blessing, an indication of



God's approval. But 2 Timothy 4:3-4 tells us that what the people want is not a good indication that the church nor its leadership is doing the correct things. It only means they have a following.

When a leader is serving himself, it is time for him to consider resigning from his position or ministry or fall to his knees in prayer and confession and seek the Lord for a right heart. Malachi 1:13 indicates that some Old Testament priests were merely doing their jobs. God heard their thoughts, "My, how tiresome it is!" They did not have a personal love relationship with God. Wow, what sad words! The ministry was just a job. Hosea 4:8-10 indicates that the result was that the people were like the priest. That is, the terrible fallout is "And it will be, like people, like priest."

Hosea 4:6 also tells us that these spiritual leaders were not shepherding the flock because the flock of God was "... destroyed for lack of knowledge." Teachers who are false, or do not know the Scriptures, or are not diligent in their responsibilities blunt the growth of their congregations. God is interested in growing believers who know and love Him (1 John 2:14-16). The pattern of spiritual maturity is outlined in 1 John 2:14-16. The purpose of His Word and the purpose of godly leaders is to mature believers to become like Christ. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 says,

*"All scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequately equipped for every good work." 2 Timothy 3:16-17 (NASB)*

The purpose of spiritual leadership is to lead, shepherd, oversee the flock, and to be examples of spiritual maturity. They are either bad or good examples of how to love and be like Jesus step-by-step.

**Summary.** Our churches must be biblically organized; our shepherd-leaders must fulfill the responsibilities that God has given them out of the overflow of their relationship with Him, and they must be spiritually mature, or it is all meaningless. True godly leaders are committed to these principles. This is why it is safe for the writer of Hebrews to

say,

*Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith . . . Hebrews 13:7 (NASB)*

Spiritual leadership is "followable." That is the path for God's dynamic, spiritually-growing church.

So how should the church be organized? What are the biblical responsibilities of leadership? What is the function of elders and pastors? How do we recognize spiritually mature men as shepherd-leaders? What does spiritual maturity look like? What follows will answer these questions.

# Biblical Leadership In Transition

In the Old Testament, the elders and priests shared responsibilities for leading the nation of Israel. The elders apparently governed Israel as senior statesmen, as implied in Exodus 3:16 and Exodus 4:29-31. How these men were selected and functioned is not stated in Scripture, nor are their responsibilities given.

After Israel left Egypt, a select group of the elders were chosen by Moses to serve the flock of Israel. Numbers 11:16-17 tells us that God commanded Moses to select “. . . 70 men from the elders of the people and their officers . . .” In verse 17, God says, “. . . they shall bear the burden of the people with you . . .” These 70 men joined Moses in leading Israel. The role of these elders continued after Moses, through the time of Joshua (Joshua 24:31, Judges 2:7), and into the period of the judges. During the time of the judges and until the monarchy, the role and function of these elders is not obvious. In I Samuel 8:4-5, the elders approach Samuel and ask for the establishment of a king “. . . to judge us like all the nations.” After the monarchy was established, kings and elders are mentioned together again at critical times (2 Samuel 12:17; 1 Kings 20:7, 8; 1 Chronicles 15:25; 21:16). It appears that there have been elders since Moses.

The priests provided spiritual guidance and administered the sacrifices. A priesthood was apparently established prior to Moses as suggested by references to Melchizedek in Genesis 14:18-20. But it is clear that after Israel left Egypt, God established His priesthood and defined its function and purpose primarily in Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers. Its function and responsibilities were exclusively religious, as indicated in Leviticus.

**Change In Leadership.** The New Testament church leadership differs from the Old Testament leadership team. With the death and resurrection of Christ, the abolishment of the sacrifices, and the establishment of the believer's priesthood, the leadership team in the church was changed.

Philippians 1:1 is the only New Testament passage that clearly identifies the leadership as including elders and deacons. The passage separates them from the general congregation. It is interesting to note that the leadership team is addressed last and not first. Both elders and deacons are referred to again in 1 Timothy 3. 1 Timothy 3 is a chapter devoted exclusively to the qualifications or marks of spiritual maturity of the leadership team. The elders and deacons are included, and no other category of leader is given. The letter, while available now to the entire church, was actually addressed to Timothy (1:2). Its original intent was not a general letter - it was not congregational in purpose.

The New Testament teaching on the role and responsibilities of both the Old Testament elder and priest were combined. The deacon is a new office. The term elder refers to quality of the man. Louis Berkhof states,

Among the common officers of the Church the presbuteroi and episkopoi are first in order of importance. The former name simply means “elders,” that is, older ones, and the latter, “overseers.” The term presbuteroi is used in Scripture to denote old men, and to designate a class of officers somewhat similar to those who functioned in the synagogue.<sup>1</sup>

In the New Testament, an elder, a bishop or a pastor is the same person. Titus 1:5 and 7 provide an important connection between the Greek word πρεσβυτερος, elder, and επισκοπος or overseer. These two Greek words refer to the same church leader that Homer Kent clarifies with,

“Elders (presbuterous) are synonymous with overseers or bishops (v.7). The former connotes their dignity, and the latter their function . . .”<sup>2</sup>

1. Berkhof, L., Systematic Theology, W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1939, p.585.

## Church Leaders In Scripture

Elder	Shepherd	Overseer	Deacon	Related Passages
πρεσβυτερος	ποιμην	επισκοπος	διακονος	
Acts 11:30 Acts 14:23 Acts 15:2-23 Acts 16:4 Acts 20:17 Acts 21:18 1 Tim 5:17-19 Titus 1:5 James 5:14 1 Peter 5:1-5	Acts 20:28 Eph. 4:11 1 Peter 5:2	Acts 20:28 <b>Phil. 1:1</b> <b>1 Tim. 3:1-7</b> Titus 1:6-9	Acts 6:1-6 <b>Phil 1:1</b> <b>1 Tim. 3:8-12</b>	Acts 6:1-6 1 Thess. 5:12-14 Heb 13:7, 17

Appear  
Together

1 Peter 5 provides the connection between elder and pastor in verse 2, where Peter, speaking to the elders, encourages the elders to pastor (shepherd) the flock. All three terms are grouped together in Acts 20:17 where it is recorded the apostle Paul sent for the elders (presbuteros) of Ephesus. Upon arriving in Ephesus, Paul meets these men and while speaking with them (verse 28), he refers to them as overseers (επισκοπος) and commands them “to shepherd” (ποιμαινω) the congregation.

These three terms are used interchangeably in the New Testament for the same individual - elder, overseer and shepherd or “pastor.” The term elder refers to the man, and overseer and shepherd refer to his function. A. C. Gaebelein states,

“How many elders (πρεσβυτεροθs)) had come to Miletus is not stated. Their office and their work is given in verse 28. They are overseers (επισκοποι), and the Holy Spirit appointed them to feed the church of God.”<sup>3</sup>

If all the New Testament references to elder and overseer are combined, there are 14 references related to elders in the New Testament and only 3 passages for deacons. The attention the New Testament gives to the office of elder shows the importance of the elders. The elders have the greater responsibility for the congregation and the deacons provide support as required.

**Summary.** In summary, the New Testament church leadership was comprised of elders and deacons. But these leaders were to be different from the world’s concept of leadership. (Jesus states that biblical leadership is contrary to that practiced in the world). Jesus tells us that leaders (elders and deacons) are to be servant-leaders of the flock of God. In Matthew 23:10-12 He said,

“Do not be called leaders; for One is your Leader, that is, Christ. But the greatest among you shall be called your servant. And whoever exalts himself shall be humbled; and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted.” Matthew 23:10-12 (NASB)

<sup>2</sup> Kent, H. A., The Pastoral Epistles, Moody Press., 1975., p. 218.

<sup>3</sup> Gaebelein, A. C., The Acts of the Apostles, Publication Office “Our Hope.”, 1912, p. 349.

Or again in Mark 10:42-45,

“ . . . 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.” Mark 10:42-45 (NASB)

Our Lord uses two very important words in this last passage. They are the Greek word for servant and slave. Lenski summarizes the meaning of the passage wonderfully,

“A [servant] is one who is intent on the service he is rendering to others. Greatness in the kingdom is measured by the readiness and the amount of blessed ministrations rendered to Christ’s people. Whether they reward and exalt us for this service or not makes no difference. The idea is carried to its climax. One may will with a holy will to be “first,” above even those who are “great” in the kingdom. The way to attain this height is to be your slave . . . the humblest and lowest of all servants who actually slaves for others for Christ’s sake, and who despite all his slaving is ready to be left without reward of honor.”<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> Lenski, R. C., The Gospel of Mark, Augsburg Publishing House., 1961

# Church Structure and Leaders' Duties

The book of Acts records the historical development of the New Testament church. The church flourished in Jerusalem, and the gospel spread to the Gentiles and throughout the world. Shortly after its establishment, the New Testament church was under attack, and believers were persecuted. Satan was on the prowl. In the middle of all of this, church leaders were being recognized and established. The Pauline epistles plus the remainder of the New Testament lay the doctrinal foundation for faith and practice in the life of the believer and the church. It is these epistles which provide a solid foundation for biblical church leadership.

In this section we want to look one-by-one at those New Testament passages which deal with the elders and see what they say about church leadership and how they should function. We will look at those passages which talk about the establishment of the church and of their responsibilities. We will delay discussion of the passages dealing with qualifications until the next section. For now, we want to focus on the establishment of the elders' ministry, their function, and the honor they should receive.

Our first passage is Acts 6:1-6. It tells when the apostles established the first deacons.

## Acts 6:1-6 - First Deacons

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 Holy 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 Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch. And these they brought before the apostles; and after praying they laid their hands on them. Acts 6:1-6 (NASB)

We are told that the apostles responded to the need of the Hellenistic widows by asking the congregation to select some deacons who were full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom. The congregation was not asked to look for a rich man, a famous person, a business man, a charismatic person, or someone who had been very much involved in the church. The apostles asked them to look for men with key spiritual characteristics. The apostles were looking for spiritual characteristics and men who had been highly involved in the local church or men who had certain skills.

What was the apostle's reason for selecting deacons to do this ministry? The answer was that their priority was the Word of God, prayer and administrative matters. Organizational matters were second. Today most leadership meetings - board meetings - are consumed with administrative items. Over the years I have noticed that time taken for prayer and the study of God's Word is considered to be almost "a waste of time" during board meetings by organizationally focused men. Many church board meetings start with prayer and a very brief study in the Word of God, and then many hours are spent in organizational matters. Prayer and God's Word are usually of little importance. But the apostles said their priority was the Word of God and prayer.

The apostles delegated the planning and execution of the task to deacons. They took time only to direct the selection of the men. They established the priority, created the ministry, gave the direction, delegated the authority, and got out of the way. We can be assured that they checked later to see how things were going, but it is also clear that they did not want to oversee the execution of the task.

## Biblical Statements About Church Leaders

Topic	Elders	Deacons	Together
<b>Ministry Established</b>	Acts 11:30 Acts 14:23 Titus 1:5	Acts 6:1-6	Phil 1:1
<b>Qualifications Given</b>	1 Tim. 3:1-7 Titus 1:6-9	1 Tim. 3:8-12	
<b>Responsibilities Implied &amp; Stated</b>	Acts 15:2-23 Acts 20:17-28 1 Tim 5:17-19 James 5:14 1 Peter 5:1-5	Acts 6:1-6 1 Tim. 3:12	
<b>Command To Honor</b>	1 Thess. 5:12-14 1 Tim. 5:17-19 Heb. 13:7, 17	1 Thess. 5:12-14 Heb 13:7	
<b>Guidelines For Discipline</b>	1 Tim 5:17-19		

When I was younger I found that I could give myself to service more easily than to God. But one who really enjoys a love relationship with God finds that time with Him is more enjoyable than administrative matters. It is an issue of priority and a desire of the heart. Great volumes of time are committed on organizational matters, but it is God who brings the results.

We have looked at two key points which are foundational to godly leadership in the New Testament:

- 1) The passage is about selecting deacons and not about the selection of elders. The selection of elders will come later. It is important to note that the apostles established a pattern for selecting deacons. The elders will eventually replace the apostles after the apostles go to be with Jesus in heaven. A clear indication of this can be found in 1

Peter 5 where the apostle Peter also calls himself an elder. Peter was an apostle, but he also identified himself as an elder. The baton in the relay race was eventually handed-off by the apostles to the elders.

- 2) The people nominated the deacons, and the apostles put the deacons in charge (καθίστημι). The people nominated the men; the elders, not the people, delegated authority to them. The Greek word καθίστημι suggests the apostles could have disagreed and refused to put them in charge.

### Acts 11:30 - Plurality of Elders

*And this they did, sending it in charge of Barnabas and Saul to the elders. Acts 11:30 (NASB)*

Acts 11:30 introduces us to the next member of the New Testament church leadership - the elder. The passage tells us that Saul and Barnabas were messengers for funds collected at the church in Antioch which were for the relief of the brethren in Judea. The verse indicates that the funds were going to the elders. The verse tells us that there was a plurality of elders in the church. The only allusion to a form of government is the reference to a plurality of elders. The church was not governed by a single individual.

What conclusions can be reached?

- 1) Elders were part of the church leadership.
- 2) A plurality of elders existed in this church. The remaining New Testament passages will indicate that a plurality of elders has always existed. We will never see a biblical church with just one elder, such as a single pastor, who is in control in the pages of Scripture. But there is an example of an ungodly man who is in control in 3 John. But that does not mean that there is not a role for a single man to provide vision and leadership. Yet he is only one among equals.

## Acts 14:23 - Elders Were Appointed

*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 14:23 (NASB)*

This is probably the most important passage regarding a pattern for the selection of elders in the New Testament. This passage has been used to support congregational election of leaders. Unfortunately, this conclusion is supported by a misunderstanding of a key Greek word. Therefore, we dwell on this passage a little longer.

The key word in the entire passage is “appointed.” The understanding of the passage hinges on this word. Some

believe that this word indicates the congregation voted on the elders. That is, this was a congregational vote. But key Greek scholars agree that the meaning of the word χειροτονεω changed over time. Before Christ, it clearly meant “to stretch out the hand.” Therefore, some authors think it refers to hands being raised. But during Jesus’ time, this Koine Greek word had a different meaning. Therefore, when Acts was written, it had lost its original meaning.

The word is used only two times in the entire New Testament: Acts 14:23 and 2 Corinthians 8:19. A compound form of the word occurs in Acts 10:41. A comparative evaluation of these passages has been summarized by Kistemaker,

“ . . . the text clearly says that Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for the believers. Some commentators aver that the congregations were excluded from choosing elders. ‘While it is true that the word [appointed] could include congregational choice, such is not the case in the context [Harrison, Interpreting Acts, p. 237]. The issue is difficult.’”<sup>5</sup>

Vincent adds that χειροτονεω,

“Originally means to stretch out the hands for the purpose of giving a vote. Hence to elect by show of hands and generally to appoint . . . Plato uses the word of the election of leaders of choruses (‘Laws’, p. 765). In later ecclesiastical usage it signified ordain, as bishops or deacons.”<sup>6</sup>

When we come to Acts 10:41, χειροτονεω is used for God’s appointing human witnesses. Χειροτονεω has changed its meaning.

*God raised Him up on the third day, and granted that He should become visible, not to all the people, but to witnesses who were chosen beforehand by God . . . Acts*

<sup>5</sup> Kistemaker, S. J., New Testament Commentary, Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles, Baker Book House., 1990, p. 525.

<sup>6</sup> Vincent, M. R., Vincent’s Word Studies of the New Testament., MacDonald Publishing Co., 1886, Vol 1., pp. 503, 523.

## 10:41 (NASB)

The phrase “chosen beforehand” in Acts 10:41 is the word χειροτονεω. It is a compound word of προ which means “before” and χειροτονεω. Clearly God did not make His decision by calling for a congregational vote - a vote of the angels or some other group. God does not need advisement. With His omniscience, He needs neither a vote or advice for any of His creation - He is omniscient! Since Acts 10 and 14 were written by the same author, it is safe to assume the author understood the meaning of χειροτονεω and used it consistently. He did not force the word to mean “popular election” in one verse and “appoint” in another.

Josephus uses the word in the Antiquities of the Jews, Book 6, Chapter 4, para. 2. in reference to Samuel’s appointing Saul as king with

“Be thou a king, by the ordination of God, against the Philistines, and for avenging the Hebrews for what they have suffered by them . . .”<sup>7</sup>

The word is also used in Book 13, Chapter 2, para. 2. The word, χειροτονεω, is here translated “ordination.” Since Josephus’ works were written approximately 93 A.D., and Acts was written about 60 A.D., it is unlikely that the meaning of the word significantly changed over such a short period of time. It has been previously shown that Plato used the word for the election of leaders of choruses. Since Plato lived about 428 to 347 B.C., well before the New Testament era, this implies the meaning of the word had significantly changed in 400 years.

The only interpretation consistent with this New Testament passage is that χειροτονεω means appointment, without regard to how it is done. It does not mean elect. This implies that the congregation can nominate or recommend men to be elders, such as occurred in Acts 6, but elders are to be appointed, that is, selected by other godly elders.

Here are some conclusions from the passage:

- 1) The apostles may have involved, and probably did involve, the church in selecting the elders. But the text does not support a conclusion that the congregation voted on the elders.
- 2) They selected a plurality of elders - not just one in every church. Some have taught that each church had one elder and the term “elders” refers to the elders in a city. But this passage says that Paul and Barnabas appointed elders in “every church,” not city. Once again we see that the New Testament pattern calls for a plurality of godly elders in every church.
- 3) Regardless of the meaning of the word, it is clear that the apostles had the final appointment authority. The apostles did not relinquish their responsibility. A congregation can participate in the selection process, but it is not required to do so by Scripture. Who is best qualified to select elders? The answer is other godly elders.

## Acts 15:2, 4-6 - Elder Provided Direction

And when Paul and Barnabas had great dissension and debate with them, the brethren determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them should go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders concerning this issue . . . When they arrived at Jerusalem, they were received by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they reported all that God had done with them. But some of the sect of the Pharisees who had believed stood up, saying, “It is necessary to circumcise them and to direct them to observe the Law of Moses.” The apostles and the elders came together to look into this matter. Acts 15:2, 4-6 (NASB)

This passage illustrates how the elders and apostles made key decisions. By looking closely at the principles they followed, we can discern a biblical pattern for decision making by future elders.

<sup>7</sup> Whitston, W., Antiquities of the Jews, Kregel Publications. 1960, p. 127.



In the first verse, we discover that Paul and Barnabas arrived at Jerusalem and were received by the church, the apostles, and the elders. It is important to note that the elders were grouped with the apostles as leaders. Deacons were not included in the decision-making process. The passage tells that the apostles as elders were told what God had done through Paul and Barnabas for the Gentiles. But some Christians, who had been Pharisees, were confused and believed that the Gentile Christians needed to be circumcised.

As a result the leadership came together with everyone else to listen to the discussion. The passage tells that the entire multitude kept silent. Only the apostles spoke. The congregation observed. They were listening to Barnabas and Paul as they were relating what signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles. The conclusion of the issue is given next.

Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men from among them to send to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas - Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas, leading men among the brethren, and they sent this letter by them, 'The apostles and the brethren who are elders to the brethren in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia who are from the Gentiles, greetings. Since we have heard that some of our number to whom we gave no instruction have disturbed you with their words, unsettling souls, it seemed good to us, having become of one mind, to select men to send to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, we have sent Judas and Silas, who themselves will also report the same things by word of mouth. For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these essentials . . . Acts 15:22-28 (NASB)

Now while they were passing through the cities, they were delivering decrees which had been decided upon by the apostles and the elders who were in Jerusalem, for them to observe. Acts 16:4 (NASB)

Acts 15:1-23 and 16:4 indicate that the apostles and elders were unanimous in their decision. They did not follow Robert's Rules of Order; there was no majority vote, or consensus taking. There was not a two-thirds majority vote. The apostles and elders were in total agreement. There was unanimity among them. But most importantly, the Holy Spirit was in agreement. This is a key point! We have already seen that deacons were to be full of the Holy Spirit. How much more the apostles and elders?

When leaders are filled with the Holy Spirit, they will agree. They will be unanimous in their decisions because the Holy Spirit is not divided in His will. Here is a biblical principle for leadership decision-making. When there is disagreement among spirit-filled leaders, either the Holy Spirit does not agree with the pending decision or some of the men are in sin. When disagreements occur, is time to pray and wait on the decision. One problem that arises again and again in leadership is a rush to make a decision, rather than to wait on the Holy Spirit. We live in a fast-paced world that does not want to wait. It does not have the patience to wait. The fruit of the Spirit includes patience. That is something to remember.

What can we conclude from this passage? Several things are immediately apparent:

- 1) The text indicates that the congregation listened (15:12) and agreed with the resolution made regarding the Gentiles (15:22). The apostles and elders "came together" (15:6) and "decided" (16:4) while the congregation listened.
- 2) Verse 15:22 indicates that the congregation agreed with the selection of Judas and Silas, even if they did not participate.
- 3) This passage supports the concept of the congregation at least listening to critical doctrinal discussions and decisions.
- 4) The text presents the elders and apostles as actively functioning together. The congregation was in a more passive role.

## Acts 20:17, 28-30 - Elders Are Chosen By God

And 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. 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. Acts 20:17, 28-30 (NASB)

This passage will reveal the function or responsibilities of an elder. The first thing we discover in the passage is that elders have several responsibilities. It is important to note in verse 17 that the Apostle Paul called for the “elders” who were in Ephesus. The point is simple - He called the elders! This is important.

When we come to verse 20, we discover that Paul tells these elders that the Holy Spirit had selected them. Have you ever wondered why Paul said that the Holy Spirit selected them? The answer is found in their responsibilities and in their spiritual maturity, which comes only by the Holy Spirit. Paul goes on to say that they have some responsibilities:

oversight  
and  
shepherding.  
The term  
“elder” refers  
to the  
spiritual  
maturity of  
the man and

shepherding and oversight are what he does. An elder is an elder because he is an elder. He is an elder not because he has some duties such as oversight or shepherding. We will see in the next section that he is an elder because he is spiritually mature.

Only the Holy Spirit can make an elder. Only the Holy Spirit can prepare and grow a man. Elders are made by the

Holy Spirit to become overseers and shepherds. The church should never recognize a man to serve in the role of an elder if he is not one already spiritually mature and functioning as one in some sense.

Paul told the elders in the church at Ephesus that he “did not shrink from declaring anything profitable” (v. 20); he taught them “house-to-house” (v. 20); he was not prejudiced, because he shared Jesus with both Jews and Greeks (v. 21); and he did not “. . . shrink from declaring the whole purpose of God” (v. 27). Paul was an incredible example to them.

What can we conclude from this passage?

- 1) Elders are to be chosen by the Holy Spirit to shepherd the flock. An elder is an elder because he is an elder, not because he is elected to the office of elder.
- 2) There is a plurality of elders.

## Acts 21:18 - Elders Were The Focal Point

And now the following day Paul went in with us to James and the elders were present. Acts 21:18 (NASB)

When we come to this passage, the Apostle Paul has arrived in Jerusalem and the writer of Acts, who is Luke, indicates that Paul went to see James and the elders. The importance

of this verse is the word “elders.” It indicates there was a plurality of elders in the church at Jerusalem. It

An elder is an elder because he is an elder,  
not because he is elected to the office of elder.

is interesting to note that James is singled out. The church at Jerusalem had one individual who either had the primary responsibility for spiritual leadership or was an outstanding individual whom everyone in the church respected. Regardless of the reason, this brother of our Lord was undoubtedly a servant among servants and not the contrary. He was probably a very humble man.

So what can we conclude from this passage?

- 1) This is the fourth passage that has referred to multiple elders. This is a consistent pattern in Scripture. Elders are always in the plural and not the singular.
- 2) It is also important to note that no other leaders are mentioned. The elders had the role of shepherding and oversight.

## Phil. 1:1 - Churches Had Elders 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. Philippians 1:1 (NASB)

Philippians 1:1 is the only verse in the New Testament where elders and deacons are referred to together and with the congregation. It is interesting to note that the congregation is addressed first. The elders and deacons come after them. The elders and deacons are shepherd-leaders. They are not above the congregation. They are servant-leaders. The organizational charts in most companies have the “important” people at the top of the chart, and then the rest of the folks appear at the bottom. But in God’s kingdom, the leaders are leaders because they serve everyone else. They shepherd others. In the church the chart should be upside down.

What can we conclude from this passage?

- 1) Elders and deacons were official leaders in the church, distinct from the general congregation.
- 2) Each local church had elders and deacons.
- 3) Each local church should select a plurality of each category of leader. How many? At least three and probably more.

## I Thess. 5:12-13 - Church Is to Honor Elders

But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction, and that

you esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Live in peace with one another. 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13 (NASB)

In this passage the congregation is encouraged to respect those leaders who diligently “labor” or “work hard.” The lazy are not to be honored. But who are these leaders? The key to answering is found in two phrases: “charge over you” and “give you instruction.” This group of leaders includes the elders and maybe some others. Elders are shepherd-leaders and as shepherd-leaders they have oversight and teaching responsibilities before the Lord Jesus for His flock.

What can be concluded from this verse?

- 1) There is a plurality of leaders.
- 2) Special honor should be given to elders who work very hard in the ministry. The ministry includes oversight (“have charge over you in the Lord”) and teaching.
- 3) Excellence among shepherd-leaders is found among those who diligently labor, exercise oversight and teach. It is practical to believe that certain elders will be better at oversight than some who may be better at teaching. Some leaders will do well at both. Shortly, we will see that teaching is the responsibility of an elder.
- 4) The ultimate admonition in any church is to live in peace. It is common in many societies and in the human nature not to respect leaders in the church (see Romans 13:1-2; 1 Peter 2:13-15; 5:5-6). In some churches there are “holy wars” with God’s elders, but that is not biblical.

## 1 Timothy 3:1-12 - Qualifications For Elders

“It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do. An overseer then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not addicted to wine or pugnacious, but gentle, uncontentious, free from the love of money. 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 can he take care of the church of God?); and not a new convert, lest he become conceited and fall into the condemnation incurred by the devil, 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.

Deacons likewise must be men of dignity, not double-tongued, or addicted to much wine or fond of sordid gain, but holding to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. And let those also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons if they are beyond reproach. Women must likewise be dignified, not malicious gossips, but temperate, faithful in all things. Let deacons be husbands of one wife, and good managers of their children and their own households. 1 Timothy 3:1-12 (NASB)

Here Paul is writing to his co-worker in the Lord, Timothy, regarding conduct in the church. In this chapter he addresses the qualifications that men must satisfy in order to hold the office of elder and the qualifications that men and women must have in order to be deacons. This is the second and last section in the New Testament where elders and deacons are referred to together. Verses 1-7 are devoted to elders and verse 8-12 are devoted to deacons. While males and females can be deacons, only males can be elders. That is the meaning of the statement “one-woman man.” The Greek word for “man” refers to a male. Only males will meet this criteria.

The rest of the qualifications for an elder will be addressed in the next chapter. For now we want to conclude that this passage supports three key thoughts:

- 1) Elders and deacons are official leaders in the church.
- 2) An elder is male because he must be a husband of

one woman. This excludes women from being elders.  
3) Deacons are males and females.

## 1 Timothy 5:17 - Two Duties of Elders

Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching. 1 Timothy 5:17 (NASB)

Who is to be considered worthy of double honor? That is a better question than, “What is double honor?” Why? Because whatever double honor means, there are two groups of elders who are entitled to it. The first group that is entitled to “double honor” are the ones who are ruling well. The next group are the ones who are labouring hard in the word and teaching. Both groups are entitled to “double honor,” but especially those who labor in “word and teaching” (the literal Greek). That would imply these elders are really entitled to it. Did you notice that one responsibility is more important than another? That is God’s criteria. The responsibility is “word and teaching.” That is the same priority the apostles had in Acts 6:1-4. From God’s perspective oversight is less important than word and teaching, yet the oversight responsibility consumes most of the time among the elders, including the “pastors.” I have seen church leaders fight for “positions of oversight” - control. But in God’s view they are interested in the secondary blessing. From this passage, word and prayer should be the passion of an elder’s heart. He should delegate responsibilities to deacons within his sphere of oversight so that he can give himself to word and teaching. The priority is word and teaching and not the “organizational stuff.”

The English word “rule” is translated from the Greek word *προιστημι*. It has the sense of “stand before, protective leadership, care for, help, give aid, and to assist.”<sup>9</sup> The word has the idea of caring leadership, or a shepherd-leader. This passage does not teach authoritarian rule. The emphasis is not on ruling, but on caring and influencing others in order to cause them to follow.<sup>10</sup> How does one encourage others to

<sup>9</sup> Kittel, et al. Theological Dictionary of the New Testament. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, Mich. 1968. Vol. 6, p. 700-702.

<sup>10</sup> Louw and Nida. Greek-Lexicon of the New Testament based on Semantic Domains. United Bible Societies, New York. 1989. Vol. 1, p. 465.

follow? The answer is by using the Word of God and the spiritual character of the elders. This passage changes our view of the traditional church leader.

The passage clearly implies that God evaluates the performance of elders, and so should the congregation. God is watching! We are to honor some over others - distinctions will exist among the elders. Those who rule well, and especially those who labor in the word and teaching, are to be highly regarded. Should “one who is worthy of double honor” be preferred for leadership in the local church over “one who is not worthy of double honor?” The implication is yes! Those who do not labor hard are not worthy of double honor. God wants his shepherd-leaders to do something more than just holding a title.

What can be safely concluded from this verse?

- 1) A plurality of elders is mentioned once again.
- 2) Special honor should be given to elders who work hard at two specific responsibilities: oversight and “word and teaching.”
- 3) Distinctions among the elders are *supposed* to be made based upon the performance of their responsibilities.
- 4) Elders are to rule well and labor in word and teaching. This is the priority ministry.
- 5) When selecting elders it seems reasonable that among those elders who are qualified preference should be given to those who are worthy of “double honor,” especially those who labor in “word and doctrine.” There is a preference in God’s view.

## I Timothy 5:19-21 - How To Discipline Elders

**Do not receive an accusation against an elder except on the basis of two or three witnesses. Those who continue in sin rebuke in the presence of all, so that the rest also maybe fearful of sinning. I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of His chosen angels, to maintain these principles without**

**bias, doing nothing in a spirit of partiality. 1 Timothy 5:19-21 (NASB)**

Have you ever known a church leader or a pastor who considered himself to be above the people? Have you ever heard someone talk about “getting with the sheep”? It is a condescending term which suggests that they are above the people they are supposed to minister to. This passage reveals two things. First, the pattern of life of an elder is not above evaluation. In fact, this passage says that if an elder is found to be in sin, the church should treat him as it would non-leaders. A sinning elder must be removed from his position of responsibility. The Apostle Paul says, “doing nothing in a spirit of partiality.” I have known an elder who voluntarily resigned from his shepherd-leadership responsibilities because he felt that he was unqualified to continue. One man stepped down because it was not clear that his son was a Christian. He was looking at the qualifications of an elder in Titus 1:6. Now that is a humble heart. That is a man of high spiritual character.

This text provides guidelines for handling accusations against elders. It is similar to Matthew 18:15-20. This passage is designed to provide protection for an elder against false and malicious accusations from members of the congregation. This passage requires two people to attest to an elder’s sin. A single critic should not result in an elder having to answer charges or be investigated. Homer Kent says,

No charge against an elder (officer, not just old man), which would involve a public rebuke or other disciplinary measures, must be even entertained unless there are several witnesses on which to base this accusation. This follows the Mosaic command (Deut. 17:6), which was reiterated by Christ (Matt. 18:16). These witnesses are not thought of as appearing at the trial, but rather at the time when the disciplinary process is first contemplated. Unless the evidence is sufficient and practically certain, no action should be initiated against an elder.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Kent, H. A., *The Pastoral Epistles*, Moody Press., 1975., p. 185.

<sup>12</sup> Vincent, M. R., *Vicent’s Word Studies of the New Testament*. MacDonald Publishing Co., McLean Virginia. Vol 4., pp. 333.

This safeguard for the elder is a wise one. This is a rebuke against those who gossip about an elder, which term includes the pastor. No person is more subject to Satan's attack in the form of gossip and slander than God's servant.

What can we conclude?

- 1) Elders are subject to church discipline.
- 2) Elders are to be safeguarded from having to answer accusations unless there is corroborating evidence.
- 3) Elders are not a privileged group of people within the church when it comes to sin in their lives. They are to be shepherd-leaders and servant-leaders. They are to be examples to the flock of God.

## Titus 1:5 - Elders Appoint Elders

*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 1:5 (NASB)*

Titus was a colaborer in the ministry and not an apostle, yet he is directed by Paul to appoint elders in every church. This quickly tells us that the appointment of elders was not strictly an apostolic function. Both apostles and elders could appoint elders. It is amazing that the Apostle Paul did not follow the pattern in Acts 6:1-4 and ask Timothy to have the congregation select elders for his approval. He directed Titus to do the appointing.

The word Paul used for appoint is *καταστήσης* from *καθίστημι* meaning "to set down" or "to appoint one to administer an office." This is the same word used in Acts 6:3 which described the appointment process used by the apostles for the deacons. This word implies that the selection of the elders was not a congregational function. The congregation could have provided an evaluation of the potential elders as the congregation in Acts 6 did for the deacons. Vincent says,

The meaning of the injunction is, that Titus should

appoint, out of the number of elderly men of approved Christian reputation, certain ones to be overseers . . . of the churches in the several cities.<sup>12</sup>

This passage supports the following conclusions:

- 1) The word for appoint, *καθίστημι*, has the sense that one doing the appointing has the authority for selecting leaders. Titus 1:5 states that a single individual, Titus, had the responsibility for "appointing the elders."
- 2) The congregation may have nominated or recommended elders. In Acts 6:3 the apostles directed the congregation to ". . . select from among you . . ."). This implies that the local church at least participated in the selection process.
- 3) Titus was directed to select elders who met the marks of spiritual maturity - Titus 1:6-9.
- 4) Once again we see a plurality of elders.
- 5) The final authority for approving the elders belonged to Titus, not the congregation.

## Hebrews 13:7, 17 - Elders Are To Be Followed

*Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith. Hebrews 13:7 (NASB)*

*Obey your leaders, and submit to them; for they keep watch over your souls, as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you. Hebrews 13:17 (NASB)*

Throughout my life I have looked for someone to be a godly example, someone who could model spiritual maturity, someone who was becoming more and more like Jesus. This is biblical. That is the teaching of this passage. This passage

13 Kittel, et al. Theological Dictionary of the New Testament. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, Mich. 1968. Vol. 6, p. 1-7.  
14 Brown, C., Dictionary of New Testament Theology. Zondervan Publishing Co. Grand Rapids, Mich. 1969, Vol 1, p. 588-593.



tells us that every person in a church should be looking for someone whom he / she can imitate. But for whom should we look? How should we want that one to disciple or mentor us in spiritual things? This verse gives us the answer. This is a serious verse because only elders will fit the criteria.

Whom should the congregation follow? The answer has three parts: first, those who have been leaders in the church and second, those who have taught the Word of God to you. Every elder must do both. The priorities of elders are “word and teaching” and then “shepherd-leadership,” that is, oversight. Some elders may do one of these better than others. But this is not enough. The third criterion is humbling. The congregation is told to evaluate the elder’s life and see “the result of his life” - see the outcome of his life. The congregation is to look at his character. Is the pattern of his life truly godly? Is the pattern of his life one of godly spiritual maturity? Now that eliminates many people in the congregation as spiritual mentors. The real models of godly spiritual maturity are elders whose lives are “mimic-able.” The English word for “mimic” comes from the Greek word translated here as “imitate.” This passage is a strong statement about the high, godly standard that a congregation should look for when selecting elders.

Some reason that Romans 2:1 and Matthew 7:1-3 are admonitions against drawing conclusions about the life of fellow believers, including elders. This line of reasoning eliminates the evaluation of false teachers and renders the evaluation criteria for selecting elders in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 null and void. Those texts do not preclude the evaluation of lives of others. Otherwise, the admonitions of Galatians 6:1-3 and Matthew 18:15-17 could never be fulfilled. The Matthew passage is concerned with personal unconfessed, unrepentant sin and the Romans passage states that God’s criteria for condemning sinners will be the same that sinners use against others. Elders do live in a glass bowl. The examples of godly spiritual character that elders model for the congregations are to be exceptional.

The English word “obey,” in verse 17, comes from the Greek word *πειθω*. Kittel says this word means, “‘to convince,’ ‘to persuade,’ ‘to seduce,’ or ‘to corrupt.’”<sup>13</sup> Colin Brown agrees and adds,

... to put faith in, to let oneself be convinced, or to a demand, so that it gets the meaning of obeying, be persuaded.<sup>14</sup>

Here the congregation is encouraged to be willing to be persuaded by their leaders and to follow them. Why? Because they are shepherd-leaders. They serve the great Shepherd of the Sheep - Jesus Christ. The ones who serve well are worthy of double honor and those who do not “will give account.” An elder does not tend the sheep for his own pleasure. He is to be a shepherd.

So what do we conclude from these two verses?

- 1) Leaders are supposed to lead and encourage the flock to action.
- 2) A leader’s authority is spiritual in nature - “those who spoke the word to you” (v. 7) and “for they keep watch over your souls” (v. 17).
- 3) An elder’s life is to be “followable.” It is to be a godly example of spiritual maturity.
- 4) Leaders are not to be authoritarian - but shepherd-leaders.
- 5) Verse 17 tells us that leaders should persuade the local church to follow. The passages clearly indicate that the primary vehicle is the Word of God and the godly life of the leader.
- 6) People are to trust, submit, and obey.

## James 5:14 - Elders Care For The People

*Is anyone among you sick? Let him call the elders of the church, and let them 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. James 5:14 (NASB)*

This passage encourages those who are sick to call the elders of the church for prayer and anointing. This is not practiced in the life of the church today to the extent that it should be. What a great ministry of love this is for the shepherds in the

congregation and for those who are sick! The emphasis here is a shepherd's ministry.

The ministry is performed by a plurality of elders and not a single individual. The text says the "elders of the church." This passage encourages the sick to call upon the elders of the local congregation. This implies that elders are more than teachers and overseers; they are shepherds of the flock. Do you get the sense that elders are caring, loving, gentle, and godly men? There is no mention of organizational activities here.

Two key conclusions are reached:

- 1) Scripture never refers to just one elder, except in the discussion of qualifications.
- 2) A plurality of elders existed in this local congregation.
- 3) Elders are to be loving, caring shepherd-leaders.

## 1 Peter 5:1-3 - Elders Serve Eagerly and Sacrificially

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. 1 Peter 5:1-3 (NASB)

The last passage dealing with elders in the New Testament is found in 1 Peter 5:1-3. 1 Peter was written by Peter, an apostle, who calls himself an elder. It is written to other elders who reside in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia.

This incredible passage is a wonderful summary of the New Testament teaching about elders. First, the baton of leadership is being passed from the apostles to the elders. This implies that the elders had to be godly men just like the apostles. This does not mean that elders today exercise the apostolic gifts, however. We are talking about the character

of the elder.

Second, Peter says that elders are to shepherd and oversee the church from a heart that desires to minister in this way - voluntarily and according to the will of God. In a sense that was a negative statement. So Peter adds that they must do this with eagerness. The heart of a shepherd who wants to minister to His flock seeks a love relationship with Jesus.

One of the great tragedies in the ministry is the desire of leaders to control everything. This does not mean that elders should not establish policy and interpret the Scriptures. It means that when an elder sees a violation of some established policy, he is not eager to "get control" of the situation. Rather, his heart responds in love for the individual and gently helps him to understand what is correct.

Elders are to be examples of godly maturity. Peter was not talking about just his personal life, but also about how he exercised oversight and shepherding. He is an example in every aspect of his life.

What can we conclude from this passage?

- 1) Elders and apostles shared godly mature characteristics, and some common responsibilities.
- 2) Elders are to serve voluntarily, unselfishly, and be models fit to be patterned after.
- 3) Elders are not to be lazy, greedy, or to behave like popes and kings.
- 4) No statement is made about the selection of elders, but much is said about an elder's conduct.
- 5) Elders who serve to their own advantage and contrary to the interests and well-being of the people are in error.
- 6) Elders apparently had significant authority with minimal, if any, accountability to the congregation.



# Qualifications of Elders

God is looking for spiritually qualified leaders to feed His flock. He is looking for Daniels and Jeremiahs who are standing for Him today and will remain committed to Him when everyone else has abandoned Him. He wants leaders who know the truth and stand for truth, and He seeks leaders whose hearts long for Him (Ps. 42:1-2). Hearts that want to know Him deeper and love Him more. God is not interested in leaders who administrate well and are great teachers and preachers if there is no passion for Him! That is the message of Revelation 2:4.

Joseph is a great example of a godly leader who ran from sin and remained true to Jehovah God even when honored by a pharaoh. The great saints of old were men of holiness, men committed to God. They were not clever men who did clever things. They loved God and wanted a closer relationship with Him than they had yesterday. God is looking for David and not his older brothers. He is looking at the hearts of men, not the outward appearances, as man does. When a man longs and seeks after God day-after-day, godly, spiritual maturity follows over time. It is the passion for God that God develops in a man. It is a passion that grows with time and turns the man back to God. It is the mark of spiritual maturity, and the marks are evident in his walk among the congregation. It takes years to develop, but the passion must start somewhere in his life. There is a plaque on my library wall that reads like this,

It is by no means easy for a young man to become a shepherd, and he ought not be discouraged if he cannot become one in a day or a year. An orator he can become without difficulty. A reformer he can become at once. In criticism of politics and society he can do a flourishing business the first Sunday. But a shepherd he can become only slowly, and by patiently travelling the way of the cross. - Charles Jefferson, 1860-1937

Godly maturity takes time. That is why the Scriptures speak

of elders. An older man is not necessarily spiritually mature. We will see shortly that spiritually mature elders are foundational to a biblically-based, spirit-filled church.

## The Lord's Perspective About Leaders

God's ministry or "job qualifications" are outlined in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. These are actually marks of spiritual maturity. They define the type of leader God wants. These qualifications or marks of spiritual maturity were true of the Abrahams, Moseses and the Davids of our times as well as the more ordinary Stephens, Aquilas, Timothys and Marks. God is not looking for perfect men, but men whose pattern of life evidences the marks of godly, spiritual maturity. Unfortunately, many good Christian brothers and sisters are selected for leadership for the wrong reasons. They do not evidence the marks of spiritual maturity required in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. These wonderful brethren may be selected because they are wealthy, politically connected or influential in the church. They may be professionals, the social elite, charismatic, educated, church founding fathers or significant donors. But if the lives of leaders do not have the marks of spiritual maturity as outlined in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1, then the church has selected leaders whom God has rejected as leaders.

The prophet Samuel had the same problem that we have today. The Lord rejected Saul as king over Israel after he had sinned. He looked great, but God was not interested. Consequently, Samuel went looking for a different king once again. He went to the house of Jesse and he saw Eliab and thought this was the new king for Israel (1 Samuel 16:6). But the Lord responds in verse 7,

... the Lord said to Samuel, 'Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for God sees not as man sees for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart. 1 Samuel 16:7 (NASB)

While we cannot look at the heart, the list of leadership qualifications is designed to help us determine the quality of a potential leader's heart. Christ is not looking for men and women who can provide quality programs, support counseling ministries, execute wonderful youth and adult programs, perform great musicals, or demonstrate excellence in property management. The world can do that. If we are honest, the church is not really needed for these things. There is nothing wrong with these things, but God wants to grow Christians who are seeking Him (1 John 2:12-14). He is looking for men who long to know and love Him.

Thus says the LORD, "Let not a wise man boast of his wisdom, and let not the mighty man boast of his might, let not a rich man boast of his riches; but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the LORD who exercises lovingkindness, justice and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things," declares the LORD. Jeremiah 9:23-24(NASB)

Notice that Jeremiah writes that God "delights in these things." God delights in a man's longing and passion to know Him. Do you long for Him? Jeremiah 29:12-14 tells us how to long for Him. It occurs when we are seeking with all our hearts.

What makes the church distinct from the world is Jesus Christ. It is love for God first. It includes solid doctrine. And some of our church pastors and elders are offering milk and not solid food to the congregations. How can they really know God? Some leaders have the wrong focus and many of our churches are dying - our congregations are like their leaders (Hosea 4:6, 9).

## Marks of Spiritual Maturity For Elders

The marks of spiritual maturity presented in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 describe patterns of behavior - life-style patterns expected of the Stephens, Aquilas, Timothys and Marks. God's leader is one who has a pattern of life which conforms to the qualifications in Timothy and Titus - not just recently, or until recently, or for the most part.

**Above reproach.** The opening statement in 1 Timothy 3:2 is a summary of all the marks of maturity that follow. It simply says that the elder must be "above reproach" in all of the areas that follow. The Greek word does not mean that the elder must be free from accusations, but that after the evidence has been examined, the elder will not be found guilty of any valid accusation(s). The elder is not beyond reproach; he is to be above reproach. In the ministry it is not possible to please everyone. Accusations will arise. One who leads will eventually come under criticism. But after the evidence is reviewed, he will be cleared. This implies that the accusation should not be allowed to tarnish his reputation.

**Husband of one wife.** The first qualification that a prospective elder must satisfy is that he must be a "husband of one wife." The Greek says that the elder must be a "one-woman man." Some have said that the phrase could be reversed - "on-man woman" - and mean that a prospective female elder must be the "wife of one man." But that ignores 1 Timothy 5:9 where the qualification of a true widow is that she is a "one-man woman." Notice the order of the words. If the widow is to be a "one man woman," then a "one woman man" refers to a male. This qualification also answers the question "Can a woman be an elder?" The answer is "No!" She can be "if she was a male from birth."

Some of the early church fathers said that a "one-woman man" implied that an elder could not have multiple wives. Others say that it means that the elder cannot be a divorced man. But it seems best to understand "one-woman man" to imply that the elder is completely devoted to his wife. In fact, an elder who has never been divorced or who does not have multiple wives could have multiple mistresses, flirt with women, and be looking at pornography. But an elder who is completely devoted to his wife will be none of the above.

**Temperate.** An elder must also be one who avoids excesses and extremes. The Greek word for the first mark of spiritual maturity actually means "no wine" or "wineless." This word means the an elder must not be out of control. He must not be addicted to anything and must not be given to excesses. This could even exclude a man who is obese if he is addicted to food. The elder must be "balanced" in every area of life.

# Qualifications of An Elder

1 Tim 3	Meaning	Titus 1	Meaning
v. 2	one who cannot be validly accused	v. 6	cannot be validly called to account
v. 2	completely devoted to his wife	v. 6	children believe in Jesus
v. 2	avoids extremes and excesses	v. 6	children are not in rebellion
v. 2	wisely establishes priorities	v. 7	not self-serving
v. 2	respected	v. 7	long suffering
v. 2	loves strangers	v. 7	does not seek dishonest gain
v. 2	skillful teacher	v. 8	a lover of goodness
v. 3	not addicted to wine	v. 8	one who is a believer & consistently fair
v. 3	not given to physical violence	v. 8	one who is holy
v. 3	forbearing - yields his rights	v. 8	restrained in mind & over fleshly desires
v. 3	not an arguer	v. 9	faithful to the Word
v. 3	does not love money	v. 9	able to defend the truth
v. 4	manages his family well		
v. 4	children obey him with respect		
v. 6	not a new believer		
v. 7	good testimony with the world		

**Prudent.** The elder must also be σφφρφνα. That is, he must be well-disciplined or self-controlled. The Greek word has the idea that he wisely establishes his priorities. C. Spicq says,

“... the idea of a correct way of reasoning, but also a sense of moderation, a moderation or reserve that is expressed in inner equilibrium.”<sup>15</sup>

The emphasis is on his thinking. The idea of a “correct way of reasoning” implies that the elder is able to take facts and reach a wise conclusion.

**Respectable.** The next mark of spiritual maturity focuses on his conduct. The Greek word translated as “respectable” has the idea of “well-behaved, modest or respectable.” It means that the elder is well ordered in his life

and is honorable. The elder is respectable.

**Hospitable.** The next mark of spiritual maturity is that the elder must love strangers. The root Greek word φιλοχενος does not mean that he hosts parties or entertains people in his home. The Greek word means that he loves strangers. He may as a result have people into his home, but the emphasis is on his heart first and his actions second. The outward evidence of this mark of spiritual maturity is his treatment of new people or strangers.

**Able to Teach.** This qualification is greatly misunderstood today. Some have said that the root Greek word διδακτικος means that the elder is able to teach. If that is true, then this is not a qualification at all because everyone is able to teach. Some have said that it means an elder must be able to teach by his life. But everybody teaches by his life - either good or bad. Mothers and fathers teach their children

<sup>15</sup> Ceslas Spicq. Theological Lexicon of the New Testament. Hendrickson Publishers. 1994 , p.Vol 3, p. 359.

by both their lives and what they say. Fathers teach the family about God with the Bible. Everybody teaches someone all the time. If the Greek word means “able to teach,” then this qualification is meaningless. It does not discriminate against anyone, because everyone qualifies. We all teach by our lives and our words. If everyone qualifies, then this criteria for selecting elders is meaningless and can be ignored. Clearly, the Greek word means something more.

The question we need to ask is, “What kind of teaching does διδακτικός refer to?” First, the Greek word occurs only one other place in the New Testament - 2 Timothy 2:24. In that passage, Timothy is encouraged to do a number of things, including διδακτικός. These are encouragements, but the verse does not help us understand the meaning of the word.

However, help is found from Philo, who reveals that the word means “skillful in teaching.”<sup>16</sup> Other significant authors agree, including W. F. Arndt<sup>17</sup>, John Calvin<sup>18</sup>, Colin Brown et al<sup>19</sup>, Danker and Bauer<sup>20</sup>, and Thayer.<sup>21</sup>

Other well known authors and scholars say that the word means, “one qualified to teach”<sup>22</sup>, “not merely given to teaching, but able and skilled in it”<sup>23</sup>, “skill in teaching”<sup>24</sup>, “both the willingness and the skill and ability to teach”<sup>25</sup>, “highly skilled teacher”<sup>26</sup>, “skilled teacher”<sup>27</sup>, and “skillful in teaching.”<sup>28</sup>

Διδακτικός means more than an ability to teach. It means that the prospective elder is a skilled teacher. He is a recognized teacher in the church. Dr J. Vernon McGee adds this comment,

This is something I emphasize, because I do not feel

any man ought to be an elder in a church unless he can teach the Word of God. I used to say to my church officers that I wish it was possible to give a theological exam to each one of them to determine if he was qualified to be an officer.<sup>29</sup>

**Holds and Able to Refute.** While 1 Timothy talks about the ability to teach, Titus 1 adds that the elder must be a faithful man, that is, he “holds fast to the Word” and he is “able to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict.” This means that the elder believes that the Word of God is truth, and that he has a solid grasp of Scripture. His knowledge of the Bible is in his head. He has learned from the pages of Scripture how to defend the doctrines of the faith. These qualifications are extremely important, since this is one of his two responsibilities as an elder.

**Not Pugnacious.** This is the first in a series of marks of spiritual maturity that are absolutely necessary for a group of elders to work together and make decisions. The Greek phrase, μετρηκτον, literally means that the elder is not given to physical violence. The foundational issue is that the elder does not insist on having his own way.

**Gentle.** The Greek word translated as “gentle” is εμεκκη and it literally means “forbearing, gentle, and yields his rights.” It has a sense of gentleness and grace, but the key thought is that he is willing to yield his rights. These last two marks of spiritual maturity go together. The elder must not insist on having his own way; in fact, he must be willing to yield his rights. He has an eternal focus. This does not mean that he never speaks up and on occasions may not be able to support a decision, but the pattern of his life is that he yields

16 Phil quoted by M. Dibelius and Hans Conzelmann. *Hermeneia, The Pastoral Epistles*. Fortress Press, Philadelphia. 1972. p. 53.

17 Arndt, W. F. *A Greek-English Lexicon*, University of Chicago Press., 1973. p. 190.

18 Calvin, John. *1 Timothy*, Calvin’s Commentaries, Baker Book House, 1996, Vol. 22, p. 79.

19 Brown, Colin. *Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Regency, Grand Rapids, MI., 1971, Vol. 3 p. 759.

20 Danker and Bauer. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*. The University of Chicago Press, Chicago. 1979. p. 240.

21 Thayer, J. H. *The New Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon*, Christian Copyrights, Inc., 1981, p. 144.

22 Balz, Horst, *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI., 1991, Vol 1., p. 316.

Robertson, A. T., *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, Baker Books, Grand Rapids, MI., 1931, Vol. 4, pp. 572.

23 Kenneth Wuest. *Word Studies in the Greek New Testament*. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, MI. 1973, p. 55.

24 Kenneth Wuest. *Word Studies in the Greek New Testament*. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, MI. 1973, p. 56.

25 D. Edmond Hiebert. *First Timothy*. Moody Press, Chicago, IL, 1957, p. 65.

26 J. MacArthur. *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary - 1 Timothy*. Moody Press, Chicago, IL., 1995. p. 108.

27 J. N. D. Kelly. *The Pastoral Epistles*. Hendrickson Publishing, Peabody, MA., 1960., p. 76.

28 Gorge W. Knight III. *New International Greek Testament Commentary, The Pastoral Epistles*. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, MI. 1973, p. 159-160.

29 J. Vernon McGee. *Thru the Bible*. Thomas Nelson Publishing, Nashville., 1983. Vol. V, p. 442.

his rights..

**Not Arrogant.** This Greek word means that he encourages others at his own expense. He does not promote himself. He does not seek his own honor. Instead, he gives honor to others.

**Uncontentious.** The Greek word for “peaceable” (1 Timothy 3:3) is ἀμύχων. It literally means “not argumentative, non-verbal violence, or peaceable.” It has the idea that this elder does not always express his opinion about everything and every topic. It is common among leaders to find several individuals that have an opinion about everything that comes up. Such a one is usually an arguer or debater. He usually feels strongly about the topics and wants to influence the decision. He usually wants to be the “king of many mountains.” But this qualification does not preclude an elder from taking firm positions on issues. He seeks unity of purpose and mind. The Apostle Paul gives us direction when he writes,

... make my joy complete by being of the same mind,  
maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on  
one purpose. *Philippians 2:2 (NASB)*

The goal is to have one mind, and to be intent on one purpose. That does not mean that the “one mind” is one of the elders. Together as a group they are to seek the direction of the Lord. The same thought is repeated in Romans 12:16.

**Not Quick Tempered.** The elder must not be quick tempered either. He must be long suffering and slow to anger. He seeks to bring others along, yet he is justly angry over sin. This last group of five marks of maturity are essential for a group of elders to work together. The goal is to shepherd the flock of God. The goal is not personal honor, my wishes, or my goals. The goal is to oversee the Lord’s flock and to shepherd them as a good shepherd.

**Free From The Love of Money.** This qualification means that the elder is not a lover of money. His focus is not on money. His life is not centered on money. If it were, he would have a difficult time in the ministry making financial decisions, especially when it comes to trusting the Lord to supply the needs of a ministry and the church.

**Not Fond of Sordid Gain.** This mark of spiritual maturity means that the elder is honest in his job, in his financial dealing at the church, and with the government. When we take both of these last two marks of spiritual maturity, we have a picture of an elder whose heart is not focused on money. He is wonderfully grateful to God for His financial supply and is just as eager to give it away because He (God) is the source of all that he has. A man once said that “I am a steward and not an owner.”

**Manages His House Well.** This mark of spiritual maturity is required for the second area of responsibility that an elder has. It addresses the issue of shepherding. Here is the verse,

He must be one who manages his own household well,  
keeping his children under control with all dignity . . .  
*1 Timothy 3:4 (NASB)*

The Greek word translated as “manages” is *προϊστημι*. It has the same root that “ruling” comes from in 1 Timothy 5:17. In 1 Timothy 5:17 we saw that the elder must be a caring and loving shepherd. He was also to lead the flock by his godly spiritual character. That is the same idea here. The elder must have demonstrated his ability to shepherd the church by having shepherded his family first. There is more to this requirement than just organizational stuff. It looks at the man’s heart for his family.

**Children Under Control.** This qualification asks the question, “Are his children in submission?” An additional question should be “Do his children respect him?” The next qualification illustrates this principle.

**Children Well Behaved.** This qualification is found in Titus. Rebellious children usually imply that there is something seriously wrong in the life of the prospective elder.

**Children Who Believe.** This is the third qualification dealing with children. The question here is if the children of the prospective elder have faith in God. Do they believe in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior? The Greek word for children is *τεκνον*. It was a general word for children at almost any age. So the key question is, “Does this mean that his

children must believe after they have left the home?” We are not sure. But it is clear that at least while they are in the home they should be professing a faith in Jesus. Children usually reflect the character and life of their parents, because children model mom and dad. The children are barometers of the character of an elder’s walk with Jesus. These are important marks of maturity. They are insights into the man and his life.

**Not A New Convert.** The Greek word for “new convert” means that the prospective elder is not “newly planted.” That is, the elder is not a new Christian. This eliminates the new Christian from leadership. It is important to note that Jesus started his ministry at the age of thirty. Elders were typically of an older age than we find today. Yet, Scripture does not mandate an age for an elder. The issue here is that he must have been a Christian for a number of years. Some practical issues that may occur later are trouble in the home and in his marriage. How could a young elder demonstrate that he is a “one-woman man” and that he is a good shepherd in the home?

**Good Reputation Outside.** This mark of spiritual maturity clearly requires that he has a good reputation outside the home and outside the church. The world should have a high regard for this individual’s ethics and morals, even if they disagree with his views. He should be known as a Christian to the world. He should not be a secret Christian. The church does not need a leader who appears to be one thing at church and another outside.

**Devout.** The elder must also have a holy life. This mark of spiritual maturity says that the prospective elder must have a pattern of life dedicated to holy living. He is committed to the Lord.

**Just.** This final mark of spiritual maturity requires that the elder is just in his dealing with everyone, including the government. He obeys the laws of the land; and he desires justice for all, including widows, orphans, and the poor.

## Elders Determine the Health of the Church

God is not impressed when leaders are selected because the qualifications have been watered down or the application of the qualifications has been administered incorrectly. For

example, it is sometimes reasoned that the early church selected immature believers as elders. Two key issues are typically ignored with this reasoning. First, the marks of spiritual maturity in Timothy and Titus occurred after the transitional period of Acts. This implies that the qualifications are norm for the church today. Second, it is assumed the Holy Spirit did not or could not start a church with converts who did not have the marks of spiritual maturity. This ignores the fact that the Holy Spirit did a remarkable work of grace in the lives of such men as Stephen in Acts 6:3 and Acts 7. Regardless of the circumstances in Acts, the books of Timothy and Titus are our pattern for today. The marks of spiritual maturity are meaningless if they are ignored. Many churches today wonder what has happened within the church. The answer is found in the leadership team. The problems within the church start within the leadership team. We must tread carefully when we start justifying and deleting the full impact of portions of God’s Word.

The health and life of the church rests in the spiritual examples the elders model. The problem in the church today is not the absence of innovative programs, financial giving, or dynamic preachers and teachers. The problem is in the leadership team.

The question that must be asked is, “To what absolute standard are the qualifications to be applied?” The answer is given in Acts 6. In that passage the apostles had asked the congregation to evaluate their men and recommend seven. Why seven? Did the apostles know that only seven existed? It is more likely that there were more than seven. The church was in its infancy, yet there were men full of faith and of the Holy Spirit. There were some men with high marks of spiritual maturity. The qualifications in Timothy and Titus came many years after Acts. We should never minimize the marks of spiritual maturity given in Timothy and Titus. They are minimal criteria. Only the best should be selected as elders. How many? As many as are qualified - not how many you need. Yet, there can be elders in the congregation who do not officially serve as elders.

The marks of spiritual maturity are given in both 1 Timothy and Titus. In combination, the two passages present a picture of an eldership that meets very high standards of

holiness. These elders are fathers in the faith (1 John 2:12-14). They are increasingly having victory over sin, they really know God's word, and they deeply know and love the Father of lights. The marks of spiritual maturity reflect the elder's life style in the church, at home, in business and in the neighborhood.

# Summary About Elders

These New Testament passages have addressed the critical areas of godly, spiritual eldership: the elder's role, his responsibilities and the qualifications or marks of spiritual maturity. The principles have been established but the actual details for direction and the day-to-day decisions that must be made for the ministry are not given in detail. The principles are there but not the specifics. What follows is a summary of some relevant points:

- 1) Jesus is the good shepherd of the sheep (John 10:14) and the elders need to follow His lead. Jesus is seeking a personal close relationship with us (Jeremiah 9:23-24; 29:13-14) and elders are to model that example (Hebrews 13:7; 1 Peter 5:3).
- 2) Jesus calls His under-shepherds to shepherd His flock by teaching them, caring for them, and overseeing the church (John 21:15-17; 1 Thessalonians 5:14; 1 Timothy 5:17).
- 3) Elders were selected by the Holy Spirit (Acts 20:28). It is only the Holy Spirit who can spiritually grow a man, give him the gift of teaching, and make him a shepherd of the sheep.
- 4) The elders affect the life and health of the church. They are the models of spiritual maturity in the elders' meeting, in the church, in the home, and in the world (1 Timothy 3; Titus 1).
- 5) Every church had a plurality of elders and deacons. There was not a single elder running the church (Acts 11:30; 14:23; Acts 15:2; 16:4; 20:17, 28; 21:18; Phil. 1:1; 1 Timothy 5:17; Titus 1:5, James 5:14; 1 Pet 5:1).
- 6) Elders shared some of the apostolic responsibilities (1 Peter 5:1) but not all.
- 7) Elders have decision-making responsibility - not rights (1 Timothy 5:17). They should not be "lording it over the flock" (1 Peter 5:3) and they should not be self-willed (Titus 1:7).
- 8) Elders are to serve voluntarily, unselfishly, and to be models fit to be patterned after. They are not to be lazy, greedy, and popeish. This is particularly true since the congregation is charged to trustfully submit to the elders (Hebrews 13:7, 17).
- 9) Scriptural support for congregational selection of elders is weak (see discussions on Acts 14:23; 15:2, 4, 6, 22-23; 16:4). At best, their participation is implied. The text provides far greater support for elders selecting elders. However, it is suggested that the congregation be involved in some way.
- 10) Whoever is involved in the selection of elders, whether it is 1) the elders or 2) the congregation, they are to select men who are qualified (1 Timothy 3:2-7; Titus 1:6-9) and they should give higher honor to those who rule well and labor in word and teaching (1 Timothy 5:17).
- 11) The Acts 6 passage states that the congregation was involved in the selection of deacons. But they did not have the final authority (see Acts 6:3 discussion).
- 12) Elders are to meet the qualifications of 1 Timothy 3:2-7 and Titus 1:6-9. The texts say "the overseer must be . . ." indicating a list of requirements will follow:
  - a) An elder must be a male ("one-woman man, 1 Timothy 3:2). A man is disqualified due to divorce or adultery for a period of time. His pattern of life must be established.
  - b) The qualifications speak of a pattern of life - marks of spiritual maturity - rather than a single occurrence, failure, or single positive act. "No man does good - no not one" (Romans 3:12). If a single event disqualified a man, no one would qualify. If a single act qualifies, then everyone qualifies and the entire passage is meaningless.
  - c) When the requirements of "skillful in teaching" (1 Timothy 3:2), "able to exhort in sound



- doctrine” and “he must be able to convince those who contradict” are combined it indicates the elder must be one who really knows the Word and is skillful in teaching others. This point is even more obvious when I Timothy 5:17 is added, where the elders are honored for excellence in only two areas: “laboring in word and teaching.” The elder must really know the Word. This is required for his major responsibility.
- d) He must be a good shepherd/manager in the home because he will be required to shepherd the church of the Chief Shepherd (I Timothy 3:4; 1 Peter 5:4). His children must be in submission and controlled (I Timothy 3:4). His children must believe, be submissive, and not be unruly (Titus 1:6). This mark of spiritual maturity is also essential, since it demonstrates his ability to fulfill the other major responsibility of the elder.
  - e) He must not be a new Christian (I Timothy 3:6). A period of evaluation should be required for all elders.
  - f) He must have a good reputation inside and outside the church (I Timothy 3:3, 7; Titus 1:6, 7). That is, there are no valid accusations (pattern of life or major single sin) which can be brought against him.
  - g) He must be an individual who exhibits a pattern of being serious, self-controlled, balanced, a mature thinker, disciplined, well-ordered in his life, and restrained in mind and flesh (I Timothy 3:2-3; Titus 1:6-8).
  - h) He must be an individual who exhibits a pattern of love, goodness, holiness, and justice. He must be an individual who does not exhibit a pattern of physical fighting, quick-temper, self-will, or a love for money. These are essential for working with people, especially other elders.
  - i) The ideal elder does not exist! We are all sinners. If one wants to search for grounds to disqualify any man, even minor disqualification can be found. The qualifications, however, must speak to a pattern of life. The best available men must be chosen.
- 13) I Peter 5:3 warns elders to not be “lording it over” the congregation.
  - 14) The priority ministry of an elder is the Word and prayer. It is not administration. Oversight is a different function and a secondary responsibility (John 21:15-17; Acts 6:1-4; 1 Timothy 5:17). Yet, most elders and leaders in the church focus on the financial and organizational aspects of the church. Most pastors and lay people view laymen as organizational men - the men who run the church. Lay elders are to be involved in the ministry as shepherds and teachers. That is the ministry the Great Shepherd of the sheep has asked elders, the under-shepherds, to do.

# Personal Remarks

The weight of Scripture clearly indicates that the organizational structure of the early church was an elder-led, not elder ruled/controlled form of government. The elders were males and not females. There was a plurality of elders who had the oversight in each local congregation, and the deacons served the church under the guidance of the elders. The degree to which the church was congregational in function is in question, since Scripture is not specific. The New Testament indicates that the congregation had more of a supportive role than a controlling role. The Holy Spirit has provided us with the spiritual qualifications for selecting leaders. That is the key to a healthy spiritual church. The responsibilities of elders are clearly defined as teaching the Word of God and prayer. Oversight was secondary, and the responsibilities of deacons are ambiguous.

Elders, deacons and deaconesses were apparently selected differently. Getz says,

“Paul is not consistent in the instructions he gave regarding the appointment of elders and deacons.”<sup>30</sup>

Paul indicates one selection process for elders and another for deacons. Apparently, new elders were selected by existing elders with supporting input from the congregation. Scripture indicates that a pure congregational form of government did not exist in the early church. Most congregational forms of church government are partially motivated by the democratic form of government practiced in the United States of America, and our inherent mistrust of authority. This reaction to authority is currently evidenced by a desire for the absence of rules, constraints and responsibility; a permissive philosophy that looks for “freedom” in the pages of Scripture, freedom from authority and a thirst for control to prevent “unjust events” in our lives. While an example of a

democratic form of government in Scripture is elusive, Scripture does not rule out input from the congregation. The New Testament pattern strongly indicates that the elders were a largely independent leadership team supported by the congregation. It appears that the congregation did provide input into the selection of deacons.

## Leadership Selection

The manner in which governing leaders were selected or are selected today does not make a government intrinsically bad or good. The spiritual maturity of the leadership determines whether it is good or bad. The local congregation should be involved, in some way, in the selection of the plurality of spiritually mature elders. The local body should at least nominate or recommend biblically qualified men to serve as elders, and the elders should make the final decision. If Acts 6 is an indication, the approach could be as simple as the congregation’s nominating a list of candidate elders from which the current elders are bound to select new elders - no additions. Since leaders can have a distorted view of a potential candidate, input from the congregation about the final prospective candidates is desirable. A popular voting methodology cannot be supported from Scripture. The deacons should then be selected under the direction of the elders (Acts 6).

## Leadership Qualifications

Regardless of the form of government and how much or how little control a congregation has over the selection of the elders and governance of the church, the critical point is the team of elders. Simply put, not just anyone can be an elder. Elders are elders because they are elders - not because they are elected. We cannot grow an elder. A man does not become an elder because he is elected.

<sup>30</sup> Gene A. Getz. *Sharpening The Focus Of The Church*. Moody Press, Chicago, IL. 1974. , p. 109.

The Apostle Paul told the Ephesian elders that the Holy Spirit had made them elders. What a statement! Giving a man duties of oversight and shepherding does not make him spiritually mature. Only the Holy Spirit can prepare a man spiritually to be an elder. Only the Holy Spirit can impart the spiritual gift of teaching (1 Corinthians 12:28; Ephesians 4:11-12) and leading (Romans. 12:8). It is interesting that the Greek words for teaching and leading in 1 Corinthians 12:28 and Romans 12:8 are rooted in the qualifications of 1 Timothy 3. Elders are men with a unique combination of spiritual gifts and spiritual maturity which has been developed by the Holy Spirit. Wow, what a thought.

Gene Getz adds this thought,

So whether we call them elders . . . or bishops . . . it matters not, implies Paul. The important issue is what are these men like, what characterized their lives. The title was secondary, their qualifications and functions were primary.<sup>31</sup>

When the leadership is bad, it does not matter what form of government the church has. If the leadership is spiritually immature, if it does not meet the criteria of 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 then the church is in trouble! Churches have adopted an elder form of government and changed the name of the leadership team to “elders” and ignored the marks of spiritual maturity in selecting the new elders. The criteria was minimized because no one wanted to offend. Unqualified elders will bring disaster. It is only a matter of time.

The spiritual maturity of a man is paramount. Only spiritually mature men are to be elders and deacons. The New Testament plows virgin territory by providing women a role in the church as deaconesses. But they must be qualified to serve. Getz says, “The most important criterion for selecting local leadership is spiritual qualifications.” The quality of the elders makes or breaks the church. Who is best qualified to make this decision about these men? Who makes the selection? The new Christian? The believer who is a “child” in the Lord (1 John 2:13)? Shall the newcomer to the

local church, who really isn’t sure who-is-who participate in the selection of leaders? Or, what about those who have been rebuked due to sin? Misbehavior? Or, what about disgruntled church employees? Only “Fathers in the Faith” or elders appear best qualified to make the final decisions regarding spiritual qualifications. This conclusion assumes the elders themselves are qualified.

## Shepherd-Leaders

An elder’s responsibility in the body of Christ is first and foremost one of servitude. He is a shepherd-servant. His priority is to shepherd and then to serve. Elders dare not view individual ministry responsibilities as acquisition of power or influence! Christ did not intend the eldership to be a position of personal honor, prestige or glory. Jesus’ instruction to His disciples was that their role was one of service (being a servant) and slaving for others. The congregation should be at the top of the church’s organization chart, with the elders at the bottom and not the reverse. Jesus speaking of the Gentiles in Matthew 20:25-28 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 . . . just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve . . . Matthew 20:25-28 (NASB)**

Any organizational structure is inherently vulnerable to abuse. To reduce the human tendency to acquire power and obtain influence, lines of responsibility and accountability within the leadership team and the church should be clearly outlined and followed, or centralization of responsibility (or authority) will occur, usually to a small group within the leadership, or to one man. As Getz indicates with the following,

People tend to extol human leaders, to put them on a pedestal, and - to make this item very personal and

31 Gene A. Getz. *Sharpening The Focus Of The Church*. Moody Press, Chicago, IL. 1974. , p. 105.

relevant - in a sense to become “pastor-worshippers [or elder-worshippers].” Most Christians would be horrified at this accusation. But, unfortunately, it cannot be denied.

Every Christian leader must constantly strive to keep his people from becoming overly dependent upon him. He must strive to ‘equip the saints’ to minister to each other and to keep their primary loyalty centered on Christ. Unfortunately, Christian leaders are human beings. To be honored and respected - both biblical injunctions - is highly satisfying psychologically. Ego-building is a pleasant experience. And it is tragic when spiritual and emotional immaturity causes a man [or men] to build a work around himself and not around the body of Christ, and particularly its Head - Jesus Christ. The work is destined for trouble, no matter how large it grows. Growth in size must be commensurate with growth in spiritual maturity. Results must be both “qualitative” and “quantitative.”

All Christian leaders must remind themselves that we are but “human means” to achieve “divine ends.” The true test of our success lies not in numbers, activities, or loyalties. We are successful only as we are used of God ‘to equip the saints’ to function in the body; we are successful only when the body grows and develops and ultimately manifests the “more excellent way” - the way of love and unity - followed by a strong faith and a steadfast hope.

. . . multiple leadership in the church is a New Testament principle. The “one man” ministry is a violation of this important guideline. The Scriptures frequently stress the “mutuality of the ministry.” No local church in the New Testament was ruled and managed by one person. Plurality of elders appears as the norm.

This also means that the minister or pastor [or chairman of the board] as we conceive of him in many churches today is not “head of the church” or the

“president of the corporation.” . . . Their flock, conditioned to such an approach, either dutifully attend each service and activity of the church and say “amen!” or they react against such unbiblical approaches and leave the church to find a more pleasant pasture in which to graze. Naturally there will be some functional problems when more than one man [i.e. a plurality of leaders] is classified as the spiritual leader [leaders] in the church. But this need not be, when a man who serves as a full-time pastor-teacher recognizes his position as an elder “worthy of double honor.” He is only one among several qualified men designated as spiritual leaders in the church. The time he spends, or his academic training, or his remuneration does not automatically entitle him to more power. In fact, the more training he has and the more remuneration he receives, the more responsible he is to serve. Though “greatest” in one sense, in another he is to be “servant of all.”<sup>32</sup>

The eldership should be shared ministry. The responsibilities of the ministry are to be shared, the burdens of time, grief, agony and leadership. The ministry is one of responding to the needs of the flock. The load elders carry and the time they give should be one of service to Christ - not to the eldership - not to the flock. I do not mean an indifference to the congregation, but a personal focus and eagerness that says “I will please Christ in my service to His flock.” An eagerness that says I want to please the One who loves - my friend Jesus Christ.

## Discipleship - The Priority

From the overflow of that relationship with Jesus, the elder’s ministry will flow. His ministry should be primarily one of shepherding others to spiritual growth. He is a “growth shepherd” who works to mature all Christians and to shepherd a select number into future shepherd-leaders. The goal is spiritual maturity. The elders are to be models of spiritual maturity for a reason. That is where we want to take

---

32 Gene A. Getz. *Sharpening The Focus Of The Church*. Moody Press, Chicago, IL. 1974. , p. 109.

the flock. The goal is to make each believer spiritually mature - a “godly disciple.”

We are not talking about just any “godly disciples,” but “godly disciples.” who are seeking an intimate and personal relationship with Jesus. What does it mean to seek an intimate relationship with Jesus? The answer is found in the Old Testament book of Jeremiah,

*And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart. And I will be found by you,’ declares the LORD . . . Jeremiah 29:13-14 (NASB)*

This passage was true for Israel, and it applies to us today. Both Moses and the Apostle Paul were seeking a closer relationship with Jesus (Exodus 33:13; Philippians 3:8). Intimacy comes when we search for Jesus with all of our hearts. I love the statement in verse 14, “And I will be found by you.” He promises that we will find Him. But we must search for Him with all of our hearts. If we are content with a Bible reading program, or reading books about the Bible, or knowing facts about God, then we will never really know Him. If our goal is to know the Bible, that is a good goal; but it is not the best one. Some have said that we do not need to know the Bible and all that we need is to know God. Some have claimed that 1 Corinthians 8:1 shows that biblical knowledge is a problem, but they have missed the Holy Spirit’s statement that “we all have knowledge.” We all have that problem, whether it is little or much. But, my friend, it is not possible to know God without knowing the Scriptures.

In order to know God, we must first know the Word of God. In fact, that is the pattern of spiritual growth given to us in 1 John 2:12-14. It tells us about Him. That is why Scripture calls us again and again to study it. Listen to God,

*Thus says the LORD, “Let not a wise man boast of his wisdom, and let not the mighty man boast of his might, let not a rich man boast of his riches; but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the LORD who exercises lovingkindness, justice and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these*

*things,” declares the LORD. Jeremiah 9:23-24 (NASB)*

Did you see God’s last words, “I delight in these things”? God’s greatest desire is that you want to know Him - not about Him, but Him! God’s greatest desire is that after you believe in Him, you will earnestly desire a very close and deep relationship with Him. This is the priority of growing “godly disciples.”

## The Replacement

The second goal of an elder is to find someone who can eventually replace him, just as Jesus trained His disciples to be His ministers after he left. He needs someone into whom he can pour his life. Each elder should be viewed as a member of a team whose collective goal is to minister to the flock, with the primary goal of finding his replacement. He should be their “pastor” and a “pastor” to them. Each elder should have personal responsibility and authority to act in “his assigned ministry” but with total accountability to all the elders for any and all actions he takes. When possible the elder’s ministry should continue for multiple years so he can effectively shepherd the flock. The motivation for an elder’s service is really tested when another elder has “extraordinary success in the ministry.” If he harbors jealousy, then his service is probably not unto the Lord. A true elder will seek the expansion of Christ’s kingdom even at the cost of his own “glory.” That is one of the marks of spiritual maturity. If he craves to be first amongst the elders then he will not be “first in the kingdom.” All elders, pastoral or lay, must minister together as a team.

Some will excel in teaching and others in ruling. In the Spirit’s great plan, each elder complements the leadership team. Every elder should have the support and the respect of the other elders just as the congregation is encouraged to honor its elders. The elders should hold each other accountable for a holy walk with Christ and the performance of their ministerial responsibilities. One of the great discouragements in the ministry is the lack of mutual encouragement and support amongst the elders. Being an elder is difficult at times, especially when elders of strong conviction clash with other elders over vision, policy, direction and doctrine. Most

elders wonder what others think of them. Being an elder can be very lonely, even when among elders. Elders need to honestly encourage one another. Elders need to love each other.

## **The Elder's Struggle**

An elder-led form of government is very vulnerable to collapse when either pastors or laymen who are serving as elders determine they are “spiritually correct” and conclude the other elder(s) who disagree are wrong. The fundamental question is “Who determines who is correct? Elders usually have a strong commitment to their “ministry” and on occasions believe they have a corner on God’s will for their ministry. Sometimes they will fight for what they think is correct instead of seeking a common mind amongst the elders, as well as be willing to question their own views. Leaders need to be much in prayer, searching for the unifying decision the Holy Spirit wants. If elders believe the Holy Spirit desires like mindedness and works amongst elders for unity, as suggested in Acts 15:22-28, 1 Corinthians 1:10: and Phil. 2:2, then disagreements should suggest that the timing is not right - the Holy Spirit has not adequately prepared the fellow elders for the decision. Leaders must serve fellow leaders, serve the congregation and always remember that they are servants of Christ.

## **“Peter, Feed My Flock”**

In recent history, the pendulum has been swinging from an emphasis on doctrine (in some cases without love) to an over-emphasis on love (without doctrine). The swinging pendulum may be symptomatic of a search for meaning, commitment and obedience in the Christian life. We are affected by a humanistic society without moral absolutes when we consider love to be supreme and downplay doctrine. I Corinthians 13:1, Ephesians 4:12 and 2 Timothy 2:15 are in harmony with each other - they go together. Leaders must emphasize obedience (I John 5:3) in conjunction with both doctrine and love! Without doctrine we are “tossed here and there” (Ephesians 4:14) and without love we are in sin (James 2:8-9). Spiritual maturity is to obey Him and to know Him (2 Timothy 3:16-17; I John 2:14) and to love all men (Galatians

6:10). We need more Marys who are obedient, who love and feed on Jesus’ words at His feet.

Over the years, pastors have expressed concern and even wondered why believers in their church were spiritually immature. This is in part because our congregations are being provided milk or “watered-down theology” and not solid biblical content (Hebrews 5:12-14). 1 John 2:12-14 indicates spiritual maturity requires a knowledge of His Word resulting in stability in the believers lives (Ephesians 4:12-14). This includes systematic teaching of His Word both topically and book-by-book. We also need to teach systematic theology from a biblical basis and not from a historical discourse of the councils. A chapter-and-verse understanding of systematic theology is an absolute must. We must become students of the text first and foremost (we need Bereans). Most Christians need a systemized understanding of Scripture. For many, their understanding is in bits and pieces.

Some Christians would be too embarrassed to take a course on doctrine. Others would mistakenly believe they know it all. Unfortunately, what the congregation believes they need is not always an indication of what they actually need. The writer of the Book of Hebrews told them they were not growing. Why? They were not getting solid food. The Los Angeles Dodgers Stadium or Lakers Coliseum can be filled with “people who ‘know’ what they need and want.” Churches can be filled with unbelievers, the uncommitted and the misdirected. The need for spiritual maturity is the reason leaders are given to the church (Ephesians 4:11-12).

Just as with the Old Testament priests, some leaders today do not really understand what is needed in their church or they are too weary in well doing. There are leaders who are tossed to and fro with every wind of “pop” doctrine. Their baseline theology was established in seminary by professors. Our seminaries do an excellent job of producing graduates who know systematic theology, church history, counseling, Christian Education etc. What is typically missing is a solid extensive knowledge of the Bible, and it is evidenced in our seminary graduates and churches. Some leaders do not belong in the ministry - they do not have a solid working knowledge of Scripture. I do not mean a working knowledge of systematic theology, but the text itself.

There are some leaders who do not want to study the Word. Consequently, their message preparation (both lay and pastoral elders) is inadequate and they confidently expound truths they have not diligently studied (2 Timothy 2:15). Unfortunately, these leaders will “incur a stricter judgment (James 3:1).”

Some churches are preoccupied with providing a church that meets the personal needs of those attending their church. There are two concerns with this stance. The first concern is the phrase “their church.” The church does not belong to the leaders. They may think and act as if it does, but it is the Lord’s church first and the Lord’s church last. The second concern is that members are increasingly coming to church “seeking a blessing,” “to be encouraged,” “to be strengthened for the week,” or “to meet friends.” Are we consumed with ourselves and not our Lord? Has the worship of God become secondary? It appears we are increasingly self-preoccupied with our brother and sister in Christ and we are ignoring the lost world. We should be consumed with Him and others. Oswald Chambers has stated,

... human sympathy absolutely overwhelms the meaning of being sent by Jesus. The great dominant note is not the needs of men, but the command of Jesus. We forget that the one great reason underneath all missionary enterprise is not first the elevation of the people, nor the education of the people, nor their needs, but first and foremost the command of Jesus Christ - Go ye therefore, and teach all nations.<sup>33</sup>

There is no room for a church which is preoccupied with itself, or is a social club, or just an intellectual library - there must be room only for following Jesus (Ecclesiastes 12:13).

## Like Priest, Like People

The spiritual health of a congregation is limited by the spiritual health of its leadership. Jesus summarized this point nicely when He said,

**A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a slave above his master. It is enough for the disciple that he become as his teacher, and a slave as his master. Matthew 10:24-25 (NASB)**

The point is, a congregation needs spiritual fathers in the faith who are still growing spiritually. A barometer of the quality of the leadership is usually the spiritual condition of the congregation. 1 Peter 5:3 says elders are to be examples or models to the flock. Church leaders often forget that they are examples even if they do not want to be. Leaders set the tone. They are examples. Elders must not forget: they are the examples! True examples are individuals who are examples on Sunday and when no one else is with them to see what they really do when no one is watching. In reality it is his passion to know and love Jesus that defines a man’s spiritual character. The problem of the Ephesian Church is with us - “left their first love” (Revelation 2:4). A woman once described her disappointment about her Christian life. In a letter she asked, “Isn’t there something more to the Christian life than this?” Her heart was in pain. She was struggling. She wanted something more. Many believers have become content with a social Christianity because there does not seem to be anything else in the Christian life. Yet, they are all looking for “something more!”

Many are looking for something more in their Christian lives and sometimes they “feel” that they have found something more. Often this sense of finding “something more” is nothing more than a series of “spiritual disciplines” or “service unto the Lord.” For awhile it feels like they have found “something more.” As a result their Christian lifestyles and ministries at the church may change. They may teach others their new passion while they are still searching. But unfortunately, it often does not last, and after a while they discover that they are looking for “something more” again. They do not realize what Jesus promised when He said,

**He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, “From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.” John**

<sup>33</sup> Chambers, Oswald, “My Utmost For His Highest,” Barbour and Company, Inc., 1935, p. 222.

### 7:38 (NASB)

Jesus was talking about “something more.” He was talking about an experience. He was talking about an ongoing experience of walking with God through the Holy Spirit. If this is a promise, why does it not occur in the lives of more Christians? The answer is found in the passion of David’s heart,

*As the deer pants for the water brooks,  
So my soul pants for You, O God.  
My soul thirsts for God, for the living God;  
When shall I come and appear before God? Psalm  
42:1-2 (NASB)*

He was in love with God. He was earnestly seeking a deeper and closer relationship with God with all his heart (Jeremiah 29:12-14) - as one friend knows another very close and personal friend. All through the Psalms David seeks after God. It was his desire. The “something more” is found in seeking God day after day.

When an elder seeks God day after day, when his life is overflowing with his love for Jesus, those whom he desires to mentor will become like him. Best of all they will draw nearer to Jesus and become more like Him!

## Lay Elders Are Pastors

The ministry is the ministry of all the elders. Full time elders (pastors) and part-time elders (lay elders) must minister together. Lay elders frequently function as business executives and financial administrators in the church. The ministry of the church is often left to seminary graduates or full-time paid staff. It is interesting to note that Scripture makes no distinctions between the elders, other than to recognize that some will rule well and others will excel in teaching. It is surprising how many laymen view themselves as support laymen and not as fellow pastors. Elders are pastors. This point is made in 1 Peter 5:1-2 where Peter speaking to the elders, encourages them to pastor (shepherd) the flock. An elder is a pastor, but a staff pastor is not necessarily an elder.

Many individuals can shepherd the flock (function as a pastor) who may not qualify as an elder, but an elder is also a pastor.

A true lay elder is one who is convinced in his heart that God wants him to serve as an elder. He should believe God wants him to be an elder or he should seriously consider declining to serve as an elder. Otherwise, he has been selected as an elder on his own merits. Without this conviction how can he survive under the burdens of the ministry? An elder who administers, must not give 100% to administration. His priority is to be a shepherd. He must function as a shepherd. He must have a pastor’s heart. Only then will he be able to fulfill the role of an elder and fulfill it as a servant. He must know the voice of Jesus and hear His words, “I love you.” Then his emotional response will be “I really love you, Lord.” Otherwise, his service is one of duty, of convenience or for the honor of men and not one of a passionate love for the Lord. To serve as an elder is to always be a bond-slave to our Lord. It is always an act of love!

## Conclusion

God is not looking for attractive leaders, charismatic leaders, warm leaders, leaders who can develop superb church organization, create multiple programs, creatively use slick gimmicks, or anything else. He is not interested primarily in excellent oratory, warm worship services, raised hands, “worship songs,” or large offerings. There is nothing wrong with these things, but God is looking for holy, spiritual, committed and responsible leaders who honor Jesus above themselves. He is looking for men who long to know Him and love Him. He is looking for men who are seeking and searching for Him just as Moses, David, and Paul did.

The conclusion is simple, for God the central issue is the elder’s heart-love for Jesus. That love relationship will change him and those to whom he ministers. It is a mark of spiritual maturity. It is the mark of a walk with Jesus. This was the characteristic that Jesus was looking for in Peter. Jesus told Peter, who is every elder’s fellow elder, that there was only room for one thing in his life. That was loving Jesus - “tend My lambs” - “shepherd My sheep.”