

SCRIPTURAL ELDERS

Compiled by Paul R. Blake

Introduction (Lesson One) The Need for Elders:

- A. Rules for this study:
 - 1. What do I expect of you?
 - a. To listen with open minds and open Bibles.
 - b. To search the scriptures at home between lessons.
 - c. To obey what God says and to do the right thing.
 - 2. What can you expect of me?
 - a. To preach all relevant NT doctrine on this matter.
 - b. To preach only NT doctrine on this matter.
- B. Five Lessons:
 - 1. The Need for Elders
 - 2. The Work of Elders
 - 3. The Authority of Elders
 - 4. The Qualifications of Elders (Two Lessons)

I. THE NEED FOR ELDERS IS SEEN IN THE DUTIES THEY PERFORM

- A. Feeding the flock - *Acts 20:28*
 - 1. To feed - "poimen" - to pasture or shepherd a flock
 - 2. To tend - *1Peter 5:2*
- B. Guarding the flock - *Acts 20:29-30*
 - 1. Watching for false teachers from without and false brethren from within
 - 2. Watching for straying souls - *Heb. 13:17*
- C. Rule well - Lead carefully - *1Tim. 5:17*
 - 1. Diligently with earnestness and zeal - *Rom. 12:8*
 - 2. Not with enforced inaction but by being pro-active

II. THE NEED FOR ELDERS IS SEEN IN THE COMMAND TO HAVE THEM

- A. Command - *Titus 1:5*
- B. Example - *Acts 14:21-23*
- C. Divine implication - *1Tim. 3:1-7*

III. THE NEED IS SEEN IN THE DANGERS OF THE ALTERNATIVE

- A. Voting doctrinal matters is unscriptural.
 - 1. The church is a monarchy (rule of one), not a democracy (rule of many).
 - 2. Jesus Christ has all authority - *Matt. 28:18; Col. 1:18*
- B. Our responsibility as his subjects
 - 1. To accept his authority - *Col. 3:17*
 - 2. To obey him in all things - *2Cor. 5:10*
- C. In the local Church, Christ has given some authority to the elders
 - 1. To oversee the congregation - *1Peter 5:2*
 - 2. But not to act as lords - *1Peter 5:3*
 - 3. Congregation's duty to the elders is to obey and submit to them - *Heb. 13:7, 17*
- D. It is dangerous to bring the world into the church.
 - 1. Some Christians think of New Testament church government as a democracy.
 - 2. Note this comment by R. L. Whiteside: "Our thoughts and actions in business and politics influence our thoughts and actions in religious matters. The reason for this is plain. In every relationship in life, our thoughts and actions form and shape our character; and this character, in turn, manifests itself no matter where we are or what we are doing. The spirit of democracy, which has grown more or less luxuriantly on American soil for so long, has spread over the world as a result of the wars. Democracy, the rule of the people, is the cry. Wilson's plea to make the world safe for democracy spread like wild-fire. Monarchies fell, kings took a hasty departure, and thrones crumbled. Democracy was in the air, and the people everywhere became infected. It became a habit of thought to such an extent that it found its way into some churches of Christ, and majority rule became the order of procedure. In these

churches, any man would, if he could muster up a majority vote, run rough-shod over God's overseers or even depose the elders and appoint others. It is the spirit of the world over-riding the Spirit of God" (Doctrinal Discourses, 82, 85).

- E. The dangers of deciding any church matter by majority vote are many:
1. It makes the church subject to unqualified men
 2. It fails to distinguish experience and inexperience among members.
 3. It encourages preachers to cater to the wishes of the majority.
 - a. Foy E. Wallace Jr. wrote, "Almost any preacher who is a good mixer can put it over with women, young people and generally indifferent members whose interest has been revived to 'take sides.'" ("Majority Rule and Matters of Faith")
 - b. The Lord does not want men-pleasers as a preachers or elders - *Gal. 1:10; John 10:11-15*
 4. It provides occasion for politics and electioneering, resulting in division.
 5. It breeds anarchy and bitterness in the church.
- F. "But what if we don't have qualified men!?"
1. Get them. The churches in the New Testament ordained elders within a few years of their beginning as churches.
 2. Reasons why some churches do not have elders or find it difficult to appoint more.
 - a. Some people do not want to be in subjection to elders.
 - b. Some hobbyists elevate the qualifications above Divine intent.
 - c. Qualified men are too lazy or fearful to take up the task.

Conclusion:

- A. The only scripturally organized churches are churches with elders and deacons. We will do New Testament things for NT reasons in NT ways.

SCRIPTURAL ELDERS: THE WORK OF ELDERS

Introduction (Lesson Two):

- A. What do elders do and what vital roles they are uniquely qualified to fill?

I. SCRIPTURAL NAMES

- A. Elder - presbuterion: elder, one who is older
1. Primary meaning is age (relative).
 2. Term means an older person in the church without regard to an office or any work. Speaks to one's years and experience in Christ.
 3. One can be an elder (older person), and not necessarily hold the office of elder in the local church.
 4. *1Peter 5:1-4*
- B. Bishop - episcopos: overseer, man charged with duty of seeing that things to be done by others are done correctly.
1. Synonym: a guardian, superintendent, or any curator
 2. *Acts 20:28; Phil. 1:1; 1Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:7; 1Peter 2:25*
 3. "Bishop" means overseer or one who looks after the affairs of others.
- C. Pastor - poiman: to keep sheep - *Luke 17:7*
1. To feed - *John 21:16; Acts 20:28; 1Cor. 9:7; Jude 12*
 2. To rule, to govern - *Rev. 2:27, 12:5, 14:15*
 3. To shepherd - *Matt 9:36, 25:32, 26:31; John 10:2, 12*
 4. To pastor - *Eph. 4:11; 1Peter 2:25*
- D. Fundamental meaning is that of supervision and feeding.
1. "Shepherd" is commonly one who feeds, tends, and guards the spiritual interests of Christians in a given location.
 2. The work of an overseer: he who tends the flock must know who they are; he must lead the sheep. He must watch and take the oversight and responsibility.
 4. "Pastor" has the same scriptural meaning as "shepherd."

II. THE DUTIES OF ELDERS

- A. Take heed to themselves - *Acts 20:28*
- B. To be guided by the word of God - *Acts 20:32; Titus 1:9*
- C. Be examples to the flock - *1Peter 5:3*
- D. Take the oversight - *1Peter 5:2*
- E. Take heed to the flock - *Acts 20:28*
- F. Rule well - *1Tim. 5:17*
- G. Feed the flock - *Acts 20:28; 1Peter 5:1-2*
- H. Watch for grievous wolves - *Acts 20:29-30*
- I. Stop the mouths of vain talkers - *Titus 1:11*
- J. Settle differences in the church - *Acts 15:6*
- K. Admonish the church - *1Thes. 5:12*
- L. Support the weak - *Acts 20:35*
- M. Pray for the sick and administer to their needs - *James 5:14*
- N. Establish churches where needed and to help with such work - *Acts 16:4-5*
- O. Watch for the souls of the church - *Heb. 13:17; Ez. 3:16-21*

III. DUTIES OF THE CHURCH TOWARD THE ELDERS

- A. Know the elders - *1Thes. 5:12*
- B. Esteem the elders highly in love - *1Thes. 5:13*
- C. Be submissive to the elders - *Heb. 13:17*
- D. Be at peace among yourselves - *1Thes. 5:13*
- E. Obey the elders - *Heb. 13:17*
- F. Rebuke not an elder, but entreat him as a father - *1Tim. 5:1*
- G. Receive not an accusation against an elder except in the mouth of two or three witnesses - *1Tim. 5:19*
- H. Remember and imitate the elders - *Heb. 13:7*
- I. Count the elders worthy of double honor - *1Tim. 5:17-18*
- J. Call the elders when in need - *James 5:14*

Conclusion:

- A. No wonder Paul told Timothy "If a man desires the office of a bishop, he desires a good work," for it is work indeed (*1Tim. 3:1*).

SCRIPTURAL ELDERS: THE AUTHORITY OF ELDERS

Introduction (Lesson Three):

- A. All things presented in these lessons will be based on what is written, and will not include the opinions and traditions that please men.
 - 1. If you do not agree with what is preached in these lessons, you would be my friend if you spoke with me instead of someone else about it.
 - 2. However, I will insist on two things in advance:
 - a. You must prove your point from the word.
 - b. You do not become angry and leave without discussing it.
- B. What do the scriptures say about the authority of elders?

I. SOURCE OF AUTHORITY FOR THE ELDERS

- A. Is it from themselves? Are elders the final authority, answerable to no one?
 - 1. *Eph. 1:22-23; Col. 1:18; Matt. 28:18*
 - 2. They are answerable to Christ.
 - 3. The only being not subject to Christ is the Father - *1Cor. 15:27-28*
- B. Is it from the congregation? Is the local church a democracy?
 - 1. "A form of government in which political power resides in all the people and is exercised by them directly or is given to elected representatives" (Funk & Wagnall, vol. 1, p 169).
 - 2. "The members chose the elders; the members can take them out if they don't like the elders' decisions." WRONG!

- C. Is it from the preacher? Must the elders consult with the preacher for his approval on all decisions made? NO!
1. Timothy and Titus were told to appoint elders in every church.
 2. Does this make the elders subject to the preacher? "Evangelical oversight"?
 3. Preacher is to preach and teach, even to the elders.
 4. But elders are to have the oversight and are to rule well; therefore the preacher is subject to them.
- D. Is it from Christ? Does the eldership derive its authority from the Head?
1. Christ has all authority in the church. If authority is given, it must be from him.
 2. Authority of elders is the authority of Christ. Rebellion against scriptural elders is rebellion against Christ. Rejection of God's leaders brings one under condemnation.

II. NATURE OF THE AUTHORITY OF ELDERS

- A. It is not one man rule. It is an Eldership.
1. Decisions to be made must be made by the whole.
 2. Every New Testament example has a plurality of elders.
 - a. How many? More than one.
- B. Two areas in which authority is administered.
1. Divine rule - the making of laws.
 2. Human judgment - deciding how to act in agreement in practice of established law.
- C. Do elders function in both areas?
1. Elders cannot make any laws for the church. The making of laws belongs exclusively to Christ - *James 4:12, 1:25*.
 2. Can the elders make new laws for church work, discipline, or its organization? NO!
 - a. The elders guide the flock by helping the members to keep law already given by Christ, not by making new laws.
 3. In matters of human judgment and decisions concerning the church and its course of action, elders are to exercise authority in the local church.
 - a. Individual members submit their personal judgments on collective matters to the oversight of the elders.
 4. Examples:
 - a. Meeting times for worship - Can not change the day authorized by God, but can appoint best time of day. Time of day is not specified by God, but elders are authorized to choose the best time of day to suit needs of the local church.
 - b. Who will preach? Cannot choose an unsound preacher, but the specific choice of which man is made by the elders.
 - c. Who will teach Bible classes?
 - d. What Bible lessons will be studied?
 - e. When and who to have for a gospel meeting?
 5. Members may disagree with the judgment calls, but there should be no murmuring unless the elders clearly violate the scriptures.
 - a. If a member disagrees, it is likely that he is mistaken, because as a member and not an elder, he is not qualified to make those calls.
 - b. If elders are unreasonable or unapproachable, then they were improperly ordained; they aren't qualified. However, one must follow the NT pattern in correcting them - *1Tim. 5:1, 19*.
- D. Some misconceptions about the authority of elders:
1. "An elder can rule by example only."
 - a. *1Peter 5:3* - "being ensamples to the flock"
 - b. False - *Heb. 13:7* - "egoumenon" (the ones having the rule) has to do with following the words and faith spoken by those who have a rule. Obviously this extends beyond just example.
 2. "Elders have no authority outside of the church assemblies."
 - a. False - Elders must "watch in behalf of your souls" - *Heb. 13:17*.
 - b. Otherwise sins such as adultery, lying, drunkenness, hatred, etc., couldn't be disciplined unless committed in the assembly.

III. THE SCOPE OF THE AUTHORITY OF ELDERS

- A. Members of a local church must submit to the eldership in order to obey God.
 - 1. *Heb. 13:17; 1Tim. 5:17*
- B. However, the eldership must rule according to truth.
 - 1. *Titus 1:9; Heb. 13:7*
- C. Authority demands responsibility. What are the elders' responsibilities?
 - 1. Arranging orderly worship and all essentials to it.
 - 2. Directing the teaching program: classes, teachers, material, etc.
 - a. Could the church support a man preaching in another locality? If yes, then the supporting church has the obligation to monitor the work done by this man - *Phil. 4:16-17*.
 - 3. Initiating discipline. They "watch in behalf of your souls" - *Heb. 13:17*.
 - 4. Directing deacons in the work of benevolence for sick and needy saints.
- D. The limit of elders' authority:
 - 1. "Tend the flock of God which is among you" - *1Peter 5:2*.
 - a. Note: The autonomy of the local church must be respected.
 - b. "Autonomy"- right of self-government; a self governing state; an independent body.
 - 2. No local eldership has the right to oversee or rule over the affairs of any other local church under any circumstances.

Conclusion:

- A. There is wisdom in doing this God's way. There will always be strife and failure if we attempt to alter it. Let us simply say amen to God's plan for the church and fully comply without wavering or murmuring.

SCRIPTURAL ELDERS: QUALIFICATIONS OF ELDERS

Introduction (Lesson Four):

- A. To become an elder in the Lord's Church, one must be selected by the Holy Spirit - *Acts 20:28*.
 - 1. The Holy Spirit gave qualifications - *1Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9*
 - 2. To ordain men according to these qualifications is the equivalent of having them appointed by the Holy Spirit.
- B. 23 qualities are needed by a man who would help lead a local congregation as an elder.
 - 1. The need for elders does not authorize churches to dismiss or reduce any of these qualifications.
 - 2. We must not permit self-will, stubbornness, jealousy, ignorance, or animosity to make them stricter than God stated them.
- C. Eighteen are qualities every Christian man should have.
 - 1. Only five of those listed are required only for elders.
 - 2. While all Christian men should have these eighteen qualities, elders should have them to the extent that they are examples for others.

EIGHTEEN QUALITIES NEEDED BY ALL CHRISTIAN MEN:

I. WITHOUT REPROACH (Blameless - KJV)

- A. To live in a way that charges of wrong doing are not believable and cannot be proven.
- B. The Holy Spirit does not require that an elder must be above sin, but that he correct his sins as God instructs.

II. TEMPERATE (Vigilant - KJV; self-controlled - ASV)

- A. Watchful over self by restraining his appetites & passions; uses moderation.
- B. He has the power to control himself in the use of what is lawful.

III. SOBER-MINDED (Prudent - NASB)

- A. Calm, even tempered, cautious, circumspect, wise; sees all sides of an issue before acting; uses good sense in all judgments.
- B. He is stable enough mentally and emotionally to make sound decisions.

IV. ORDERLY (Of good behavior - KJV; Respectable - NASB)

A. His conduct in business, at home, at recreation, in dress, and in manners demonstrates modesty and propriety.

V. HOSPITABLE (Philoxenia - "one who loves strangers")

A. Cordially receives guests in order to supply their needs. Devoted to hospitality and derives pleasure from it.

VI. NO BRAWLER (NASB - not addicted to wine; KJV - not given to wine)

A. One whose reputation and mind are both free from all influences of evil and intoxication, or any other thing destructive to objectivity and influence.

1. This would include social drinking, drinking in the privacy of one's home, any abuse of drugs, and the use of tobacco.

VII. NO STRIKER (Not pugnacious - NASB)

A. One who is not quarrelsome, who is not inclined to lash out at opposition.

1. Even tempered, not easily excited, angered, or provoked.

VIII. GENTLE (KJV - Patient)

A. Epieikes - "Seemly, fitting, equitable, fair, moderate, forbearing."

B. Patient and humble with those in weakness or distress, not inconsiderate, bitter or disagreeable with those in a poor station.

IX. NOT CONTENTIOUS (Adverse to fighting)

A. Not a nit-picker or domineering, nor one who likes to have feuds going all of the time, locally or in the brotherhood.

X. NO LOVER OF MONEY (KJV - not covetous)

A. Grounds for discipline in *1Cor. 5*; one who loves money has the potential to be bribed or influenced by material concerns.

B. *Titus 1:7* - forbids one who obtains money in an unlawful manner.

XI. ONE THAT RULETH WELL HIS OWN HOUSE, HAVING HIS CHILDREN IN SUBJECTION WITH ALL GRAVITY (NASB - HE must be one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity)

A. This describes his leadership ability.

B. His role as husband & father is a basis for judging him capable of leading a local congregation.

C. In a well-ruled household, all recognize and fill their roles according to the NT blueprint.

1. A man with a domineering wife is not elder material.

2. A man with unruly children is not elder material.

3. He is only responsible for his own household, not another's.

XII. GOOD TESTIMONY FROM THEM THAT ARE WITHOUT (NASB - he must have a good reputation with those outside the church)

A. He must be known to be a moral and honest man.

B. A local church can only accomplish good with a good reputation; the church's reputation and influence often depends on the elders' good names.

XIII. NOT SELF-WILLED

A. Cannot be stubborn, headstrong, or self-pleasing, and expect to get along with others in the local church.

B. Must make decisions based on what is good for all concerned, not on what he personally likes or wants - *1Peter 5:2-3*.

XIV. NOT SOON ANGRY (Not quick tempered - NASB)

A. Doesn't allow difficulty to impact his composure; even tempered & at peace when under stress.

XV. LOVER OF GOOD (Loving what is good - NASB)

A. He doesn't do well from a sense of duty, but loves goodness for its own sake.

B. Imparts this love for goodness to others by example.

XVI. JUST

A. Fair, impartial, without prejudice.

B. This quality is crucial in matters of discipline.

XVII. HOLY (Devout - NASB)

A. One who religiously observes every obligation to God and man; spiritually minded. Continues to pray and study all of his life.

XVIII. HOLDING FAST TO THE, FAITHFUL WORD

- A. Must adhere to sound doctrine in order to:
 - 1. Keep himself right - *Acts 20:28*.
 - 2. Teach others to be right - *Acts 20:28; Heb. 13:17*.

FIVE QUALITIES REQUIRED IN ALL ELDERS

Introduction:

- A. These five qualifications are required of all elders, but not necessarily of all Christian men.
- B. I believe all Christian men should work toward being elders, but not all will succeed because of these five qualities. These five are the most controversial of the qualifications, over which brethren have divided for many years. The division occurs, not because God has been unclear on these matters, but because men have tried to either bind or loose more than what has been bound and loosed in heaven.
- C. I am aware that there are some restrictive traditions held by a few here at TR with regard to the qualifications of elders. I will present the NT teaching on each matter; it is up to you to accept it. It may well be that contention over these things will arise so sharply that it threatens division. We will not allow it to get to that point. Instead, we will follow the NT teaching with regard to the strong bearing with the scruples of the weak, and not force men upon you as elders to whom you object because of your conscience. However, be it known that if we do not ordain a man or men in order to avoid division over these qualifications, it will not be for a scriptural reason, but due to traditions strongly held by those who are weak in understanding - *Romans 15:1-2*.
- D. At the same time, I pray that those who are the focus of objections made by brethren who are weak in understanding will demonstrate great strength and forbearance of character and be patient with them until such time as they grow.

XIX. HUSBAND OF ONE WIFE

- A. Must be:
 - 1. A man
 - 2. Married
 - 3. Lawfully
- B. Both restrictive and positive:
 - 1. Prohibits more than one wife,
 - 2. Demands one wife.
- C. Demonstrates:
 - 1. That he can communicate with women,
 - 2. That he can treat them with respect, recognizing their role & value to the Lord.
 - 3. That he can understand and empathize with those who are married.
- D. Controversies:
 - 1. Widowed man who remarries?
 - a. If it is a lawful marriage, he is truly the husband of one wife.
 - 2. Divorced man who has remarried?
 - a. While he may be lawfully remarried, his history demonstrates that he does not have the qualification of one who rules well his own house.
 - b. The appointment of such a man would become the focal point of dissention.

XX. NOT A NOVICE (Not a new convert - NASB)

- A. He will need to draw heavily on the experience, wisdom and knowledge that years as a Christian will bring.
- B. The length of time depends on the individual.
 - 1. Paul told Timothy & Titus to ordain elders in churches in existence for just a few years.
- C. Controversies:
 - 1. How old must a man be?
 - a. This qualification speaks of experience as a Christian, not chronological age.
 - b. Age is implied in the name "elder."

XXI. APT TO TEACH (Able to teach - NASB)

- A. Must have comprehensive knowledge of God's will & the ability to impart knowledge to others.
- B. Controversies:

1. It is easy to be stricter than God in this qualification.
2. Teaching abilities vary; one can teach publicly; others are skilled at "one on one" studies. Working together they will complement one another.
3. He doesn't have to be an Apollos in the pulpit, just able to teach.
4. This qualification does not refer to eloquence or speaking talents.

XXII. DESIRES THE OFFICE OF A BISHOP

- A. Wants to do the work, for it is work!
 1. Often men who love power or control are drawn to this office.
 2. The qualification process will sort out this kind; and if not, the difficulty of the work will press him out.
- B. A man who does not desire the office should not be imposed upon to lead the congregation.
 1. The church will be better off without a reluctant leader.
 2. However, what of the condition of a man who meets the other requirements, but is unwilling to serve?
 3. *Rom. 12:6-8; 1Cor. 12:28-31; Eph. 4:11-12; Matt. 25:14-30*
 4. Can one refuse the Lord with impunity?

XXIII. HAVING CHILDREN THAT BELIEVE; NOT ACCUSED OF RIOT OR UNRULY

(Having faithful children, not accused of rebellion)

- A. An elder must be a man who has demonstrated his ability to lead and teach.
- B. "Believing children" is the qualification that gives Christians more difficulty than the remaining 22 qualifications.
 1. It has been said that TR will not accept a man as an elder who has only one believing child. I am inclined to accept that statement as true, because TR's tradition is to accommodate the consciences of those who are weak in their understanding of difficult texts. Therefore, neither I nor anyone else here will force the issue at this time. However, two things will not change as a result of tolerating this extra restriction: 1) I will still preach it the way it is written, and will not change what is written for the conscience of anyone, including myself. 2) Simply because the church will not press the point, this will not change the fact that limiting "children" to a plurality is a scruple of conscience and not doctrine. It is not a sin to hold and practice a scruple of conscience, and it is right and good to accommodate those who do, which is what we will do in this matter. However, it is a sin to bind a scruple of conscience as a test of fellowship, or to teach it as if it were revealed doctrine. One who does so becomes a prospect for discipline and should be marked.
 2. *Rom. 14:1 – 15:7, 16:17-18; 1Cor. 8:4-13; Gal. 2:3-5*
 3. "Believing or faithful" - obviously means that they are Christians.
 4. "Not accused of riot, unruliness or rebellion" is self-evident
- C. The question of the number of children: "'Children' is plural, so he must have more than one."
 1. The Bible is self-consistent. One must give a reason from the text or context for interpreting the same word two different ways.
 2. Assume that when a command specifies children that it only applies when one has more than one child.
 3. *Gen. 21:7; Matt. 22:24; Acts 2:38-39; 1Tim. 5:4, 10, 16; Eph. 6:4; Col. 3:21*
 4. He cannot have it both ways.
- D. "It takes more than one child because he cannot get enough experience with only one child."
 1. The object is to demonstrate his ability to guide a home, not show how prolific he can be. If more than one child gives one experience, why did God ask for only one wife?
 - a. If a man with two children is more qualified than a man with one, then a man with ten children is more qualified than a man with two.
 2. The Bible often uses the plural for the singular.
 - a. *Gen. 19:29, 21:7, 46:7; Jer. 6:16; Gen. 1:20*

Conclusion:

A. *Titus 1:5; Acts 14:21-23* - The time between Paul's first journey and his second was about three years, and so from the time when he first established those local congregations and the time when he told them to ordain elders was also three years. The implication of this approved example is that

congregations should not continue on in perpetuity without ordaining elders. Let us take these commands seriously. By the authority of the word of the Lord, I admonish you to heed this command.

The Work and Qualifications of Scriptural Deacons, the Qualifications of Elders' and Deacons' Wives, Duties of the Church toward Elders, and Plans and Procedures for the Appointment of Elders & Deacons

Introduction:

- A. No study of the organization and work of the local church would be complete without considering the servants of the saints, the deacons.
- B. Nothing degrading or undignified in serving as a deacon.
 - 1. Excellent training for the eldership.
 - 2. Simply a step in the maturation of a Christian.
 - 3. Consider the qualifications and one sees a special individual.
 - a. That person is qualified for the task set before him.
 - b. Charles Hodge - "A man too big to be a deacon is too small to be an elder." "If I can't be an elder, then I won't be a deacon!"
 - c. The higher the office, the more service the holder must render.
 - 4. There are certain tasks which would take elders from their appointed duties. The office of deacon was created to answer that need.
- C. At present, the area of service needed more than any other is that of deacons.

I. WHAT IS A DEACON?

- A. Deacons are highly skilled servants in the work of the local church.
 - 1. diakonos - Literally "Through dust"; verb form: "To raise dust by hastening; to hasten after, pursue."
 - 2. "One who executes the commands of another; to be distinguished from a servant."
 - 3. A deacon is a servant relative to his work; a slave is a servant relative to his master.
 - 4. Practically speaking - one that promotes the welfare and prosperity of the local church by carrying out tasks assigned by the elders.
 - 5. It has been falsely assumed in the church that the elders oversee the spiritual needs of the church and the deacons oversee the physical needs. Inaccurate. Elders oversee all needs of the church, and deacons serve them in the work.
 - a. Deacons are not given oversight; they are given tasks.
- B. They are officers of the local church, acting in subjection to the elders of that local church. The diakonate is a ministry, not a position.
 - 1. *1Tim. 3:13* - Those that carry out their responsibility well are to be esteemed by others.
 - 2. More is required of deacons than members.
 - a. He has increased duties and responsibilities.
 - b. He has increased vulnerabilities and temptations.
 - 3. He is a steward of the gifts of benevolence.

II. WHAT DOES A DEACON DO?

- A. "Deacons deke." Few understand the question and cannot answer.
 - 1. First assigned to look after the poor and distribute the contributions of the church among them fairly - *Acts 6:1-4*
 - a. Does apply. Apostles fulfilled the role of elders at Jerusalem until they left in mission work, at which point other men were appointed to serve.
 - b. If deacons did their job properly, there would be no interest in missionary societies and benevolent institutions.
 - 1) Hard job - practically speaking, there should be several in each congregation to get the work done.
 - 2) The deacons are the only ones given the privilege of handling money to be distributed to the poor.
 - 3) Human institutions do not have that right.
 - c. Institutional churches make fun of their deacons for two reasons:

- 1) They frequently appoint unqualified and immature men,
 - 2) They have no spiritually productive work for them; they gave the deacons' work to institutions.
2. Considerable time was devoted to this task.
 - a. Appears to be full-time job, shared by a number of qualified, co-operative men
- B. Deacons were teachers.
1. Stephen and Philip of Jerusalem - *Acts 6*
 2. Epaphroditus of *Philippians 2* was believed to be a deacon.
 3. One would be a great asset to the church if he could teach.
- C. Too often we think that all a deacon has to do is count the money and handle the physical work in the local church.
1. In his capacity as a teacher, he can take some of the burden from the preacher by teaching new converts classes.
 2. He can teach wayward Christians about faithfulness.
 3. He can conduct Bible classes in the homes of shut-ins.
 4. Help with Gospel meeting preparation.
 5. Be alert to the physical and financial needs of widows and shut-ins.
 6. He can go out and teach and preach where needed if he has ability.

III. THE QUALIFICATIONS OF A DEACON

- A. Men - *Acts 6:3*
- B. Known for his honesty
1. Cannot have a disregard for civil law.
 2. Does what is moral in business; ethics aren't enough. He is known to be fair in trade, forthcoming in his debts, not inordinately ambitious or acquisitive.
- C. Full of the Holy Ghost
1. One is filled with the Holy Ghost today when he is filled with the word of God. A deacon must be a student of the Bible, having more than just a working knowledge of it
- D. Wisdom
1. Going to have to make judgment calls in his duties.
 2. Must not be naive, partial, or short-tempered. Able to hold his tongue in adversity and to wait patiently until a beneficial solution presents itself.
- E. Grave - Serious and dignified - *1Tim. 3:8-13*
1. Not a flippant, careless joker, nor a moody, pouting brooder. He is adult and serious, but not negative and sad.
 2. He is respected. Respect must be earned, not demanded.
- F. Not double-tongued
1. Not talking two ways to suit the company he is with. He must have the confidence of the elders and the ability to be discreet.
 2. Does not speak softly to those over him and harshly to those under him.
- G. Not given to much wine
1. A Deacon must guard his influence. He cares about what others think and expect; he does not live for himself alone. He surrenders his comfort and appetites for his service.
 2. The use of liquor is incompatible with the Christian character. How much more so with one who has increased responsibilities!
- H. Not greedy of filthy lucre
1. Must not have an occupation that will harm others or exert bad influence. Needs to be known as generous and hospitable before he practices generosity on behalf of the congregation.
 2. Must not have an occupation that will prevent him from fulfilling his duties as a deacon. He is not greedy or grasping with material goods.
- I. Not a holder of false doctrines
1. *1Tim. 3:9* - He is not a "yes" man, nor hobbyist, nor errorist. He is known for his personal study habits and willingness to communicate the truth with others.
 2. He may hold various scruples of conscience, but he refuses to equate them with revealed doctrine.

J. Not a novice

1. "Let them first be proved."
2. New converts and Christians who are unlearned and unstudied in the scriptures are not suitable to be given responsibility, and they are liabilities to the office.

K. Blameless

1. Accusations of wrongdoing are not believed and cannot be proven. One does not become blameless; he is found to be blameless. He is recognized as a true servant and trustworthy leader.
2. Simple test of blamelessness - Do you trust him? Are you afraid of him? Are the members comfortable working with him?

L. Husband of one wife

1. He is loyal and devoted to one woman, his wife. He has no sexual interest in any other woman. He must be a Christian at home before he can be a deacon in the church.

M. Ruling children and his own house well

1. Shows ability to care for the needs of the church by caring for the needs of his family
2. A man's virtues, priorities, and weaknesses often find reflection in his children. Children uninterested in the church may have learned that at home. Test: How does he direct matters in his home. He will likely follow the same course in the work of deacon.
3. Children who are known for unruliness or a wife that has a reputation for being outspoken reduce the influence of a man who would serve as a deacon.

IV. WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF BECOMING A DEACON?

A. Pleasing the Lord.

B. Fulfillment (growth)

1. *1Tim. 3:13* - Builds himself an excellent foundation as a Christian and develops courage and experience to become an elder one day.

V. GODLY WIVES OF ELDERS AND DEACONS

A. *1Tim. 3:11; Gen. 2:20* - "A helper comparable"

B. Do not under estimate the influence of a woman.

1. A good woman can make of a man more than he would ever be alone.
 - a. *1Sam. 1:22-23* - Hannah's influence on Elkanah
2. A bad woman can be the undoing of the best of men.
 - a. *Judges 16* - Delilah's undoing of Samson

C. The wife of an elder or deacon:

1. Can support and encourage him in his work, enhancing his service to the congregation
 - a. Can by her example, set a model of behavior for other women.
2. Can damage his influence.
 - a. Can dominate the congregation by trying to rule through him.
 - b. Can destroy the good name of other disciples with the access she has to sensitive information.

D. Being the wife of an elder or deacon carries with it no significance other than she is held to a higher standard than other women.

1. She has no office in the church; she has no more standing than any other member.
2. Yet she will live the same fishbowl existence experienced by the wife of a preacher.
3. She will not be thanked for the extra effort she will expend, and she will often be the object of hurtful things said about her husband's work.

E. May the Lord richly bless them for the special homes they create!

VI. QUALIFICATIONS

A. Grave, reverent

1. Prudent, dignified, of sound judgment; not giddy or foolish.
2. *1Tim. 2:9-10* - prudent in dress

B. Not slanderers, not double tongued

1. No slander is ever pleasing to God.
2. *James 3:5; 1Peter 3:10* - in control of her speech.

3. Gossip will destroy a church; it is audible malice and is always a sin.
- C. Sober, temperate
 1. Self-controlled, self-possessed, calm and even-tempered.
 2. *Titus 2:3-4* - To the extent that she can credibly teach it to others.
- D. Faithful in all things.
 1. In how many areas of life and duty? ALL!
 2. *Eph. 5:22-23, 33; Titus 2:3-5* - In the home
 3. *1Tim. 2:12; Heb. 10:23-26* - In the church
 4. *Matt. 25:34-40* - In the community
- E. Consider *Proverbs 31:10-31* and the worthy woman.

VII. DUTIES OF THE CHURCH TOWARD THE ELDERS

- A. Know the elders - *1Thes. 5:12*
- B. Esteem the elders highly in love - *1Thes. 5:13*
- C. Be submissive to the elders - *Heb. 13:17*
- D. Be at peace among yourselves - *1Thes. 5:13*
- E. Obey the elders - *Heb. 13:17*
- F. Rebuke not an elder, but entreat him as a father - *1Tim. 5:1* - ultimatum is sin
- G. Receive not an accusation against an elder except in the mouth of two or three witnesses -
 1. *1Tim. 5:19* - Listening to gossip about an elder is sin
- H. Remember and imitate the elders - *Heb. 13:7*
- I. Count the elders worthy of double honor - *1Tim. 5:17-18*
- J. Call the elders when in need - *James 5:14* - Not the preacher; call on elders when sick, fearful, or troubled by another Christian

VIII. PLANS AND PROCEDURES

Phase One: "Study To Show Yourself Approved"

For the past two months, we had a series of sermons on the subject of scriptural elders, deacons, and their wives. Those unable to attend all of these services are encouraged to obtain a copy of the sermon CDs and listen to it. Outlines of all of the lessons are being provided, and all members are encouraged to obtain a copy and to study it at home.

Phase Two: "Look Out Among Yourselves"

For the next two weeks following this sermon, members are asked to consider the qualifications of elders and deacons and to look within this congregation for men who meet those scriptural requirements. Write the names of these men on paper along with a brief statement of why you believe these men are suited to this office. Sign this paper and submit it to the evangelists. To avoid secret selections and vetoes, no unsigned recommendations or objections will be considered.

Phase Three: "Let Each One Examine His Own Work"

The men who were named by the congregation and who meet the qualifications of elders and deacons will be asked if they desire the office, and if they believe they can fulfill all of the responsibilities of that work. The evangelists will attend to this task.

Phase Four: "Recognize Those Who Labor Among You"

These names will be placed before the congregation for a brief period of time to allow all members to consider whether or not there is a Biblical objection to their appointment. If there is a scriptural reason why any of these men should not serve, those who have the objection will go with the evangelists to the man against whom they hold the objection and talk to him about it. Only if it is a valid, scriptural objection will he be asked to remove his name from consideration. Personal, secret, or anonymous objections will not be considered.

Phase Five: "Set In Order The Things That Are Lacking And Appoint Elders"

Those men whose names remain under consideration at this point will be ordained at a Sunday morning worship service, and will serve as elders of this local church.