



# ELDERS & DEACONS

A GFC DISTINCTIVE



**THE LORD HAS GIVEN TWO OFFICES TO THE CHURCH: THE OFFICE OF AN ELDER AND THE OFFICE OF A DEACON. SINCE THE CHURCH IS IMPORTANT TO GOD, THE BIBLE HAS A LOT TO SAY ABOUT EACH OF THEM. HERE IS A SUMMARY OF WHAT IT SAYS:**



## **1. WHAT AN ELDER IS**

. The English word "elder" comes from the Greek word "presbuteros" which refers to a man who is seasoned with wisdom. It can refer to an older man but it does not have to because the point is that he is wise. He knows the Lord and stays close to Him. Another word for "elder" is "episkopos", which means overseer because that is another aspect of his role. He is able to watch over the church of God.

First Timothy 3:1-3 gives us some insight into the character of an elder when it says: *"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, peaceable, free from the love of money."*

While there are a lot of qualifications in that list (and more that could be mentioned), the list begins with the phrase "above reproach" which is one word in Greek: : "anepileptos" It means "blameless" or "unable to call into account." This is a man who cannot be called into account for his sin. He cannot be accused of blame. While there are a lot of leaders bringing disgrace to the church today, the Bible says that an elder should not do that. He needs to be above reproach.

## 2. WHAT AN ELDER DOES

Not only does the Bible tell us what an elder is but it also tells us what an elder does. It tells us the type of duties that he is to perform. For example, it says that he is to be a teacher. One of the qualifications that was mentioned in First Timothy 3:2 is that an elder must be *“able to teach.”* Titus 1:9 also says that he should be *“holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able to exhort in sound doctrine, and refute those who contradict.”*

Elders are also to serve as shepherds of the church. It is their job to protect people, and help them grow in their walk with the Lord. First Peter 5:1-2 says, *“Therefore, exhort the elders among you . . . to shepherd the flock of God among you.”* The idea here is that an elder should lead people with great tenderness as a shepherd would.

Finally, elders should also pray for the church. Since they are powerless to lead anyone to the Lord on their own efforts, they need to be constantly in prayer. James 5:14 says, *“Is anyone among you sick? Then he must call for the elders of the church and they are to pray over him.”*



## 3. WHAT A DEACON IS

Another office the Lord has given to the church is that of deacon which comes from the Greek word “diakonos” or “servant.” It refers to a man who serves the church. He helps to meet the needs of the people. While every Christian is called to serve and meet needs, a deacon is a man who excels at it. He helps to maximize our efforts in this area.

First Timothy 3:8-9 gives us some insight into the character of a deacon when it says: *“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. These men must also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons if they are beyond reproach.”* While there are a lot of qualifications in that list (and more that could be mentioned), they are all summarized with the phrase: “beyond reproach.” In fact, the qualifications for an elder and a deacon are the same with the exception that an elder must be able to teach. Other than that, there is no difference. Since they set an example for others to follow, deacons need to be held to the same high standard that the elders are. They need to be beyond reproach.

## 4. WHAT A DEACON DOES

The Bible tells us what a deacon does as well. It tells us the type of duties that he is to perform for the church. For example, deacons oversee the physical needs of the church. They take on certain physical responsibilities to free the elders up to focus on their tasks. Acts 6:2-4 shows us why the first deacons were selected: *"So the twelve [apostles] 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. Therefore, brethren, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and the ministry of the word."*

A distinction is made here between the office of the elder, and the office of deacon. One focuses on prayer and the ministry of the Word, and the other focuses on physical needs. The deacons make sure that the church is taken care of tangibly.

This passage also demonstrates another duty of the deacons. They help to resolve conflict. In Acts 6:1, it says that *"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."* Certain people were starving. They were hungry and did not have enough to eat. So who was sent in to help? The deacons. They helped to reconcile this difficult situation. Acts 6 highlights other things that they do such as mercy ministry. It shows how they are to supervise the church's benevolence and financial giving, along with showing hospitality and generosity to others. In fact, there is no end to the things that the deacons do. Their work is boundless because it is their primary calling to serve.

## CONCLUSION

The Lord truly loves His church and, as such, He gives men of the highest character to lead it: the elders and the deacons. They are both called to be above reproach. They are both called to have a good reputation with others and to honor the Lord in their ministry. In the words of one author: "All authority in the church belongs to Christ"[1] and He has chosen to exercise His authority through these two offices: which is why this is a distinctive for our church. We want to obey Christ's commands in this area. We want to follow His direction in the leadership of our church.

## CONTACT US

Join us Sundays @ 9:30 AM

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[1] Edmund P. Clowney, *The Church* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1995) 202.