

First Timothy 3

In the primitive church, there were but two orders of ministers or officers, bishops and deacons, (Phil. 1:1). After-ages have invented the rest.

1 Timothy 3:1–13

1 Timothy 3:1 – “trustworthy” means true. Paul was telling Timothy that the statement he was about to give was to be trusted.

Church leadership matters. Not only does it affect the church body, it also has the potential to affect those who have never heard the Gospel.

“If church leaders are casual about God and holiness and missions, then the church will fall short in these areas.”

In this chapter, we will be looking at the foundation of church leadership. We will discuss two groups of people in the church:

Elders = Servant leaders

Deacons = Leading servants

Church leadership is designed by God to be a display of His glory, and to display the beauty of His bride. The bride is His church. The church is also designed to be dependent on His Gospel.

The division of work is similar to what Jethro, Moses’ father-in-law, told Moses to do in Exodus 18:13–26. Jethro saw that Moses couldn’t do it all

by himself. He needed to delegate work to those who were qualified and willing to assist.

ELDER – 1 Timothy 3:1–7

Being an elder is a work more than an office. It requires diligence and application.

The term “elder” appears often in Scripture. It has different descriptions and uses but in 1 Timothy 3, it describes a unique leadership role within the church. Nearly every New Testament church is said to have elders.

The New Testament also uses two other words for elders: pastors (Ephesians 4:11) and overseers (Titus 1:7).

“Now these are the gifts Christ gave to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers.” (Ephesians 4:11)

“A church leader is a manager of God’s household, so he must live a blameless life. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered; he must not be a heavy drinker, violent, or dishonest with money.” (Titus 1:7)

We know these terms are interchangeable because of the way Paul used them in Titus 1:5–9.

“I left you on the island of Crete so you could complete our work there and appoint elders in each town as I instructed you. An elder must live a blameless life. He must be faithful to his wife, and his children must be believers who don’t have a reputation for being wild or rebellious. A church leader is a manager of God’s household, so he must live a

blameless life. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered; he must not be a heavy drinker, violent, or dishonest with money.

Rather, he must enjoy having guests in his home, and he must love what is good. He must live wisely and be just. He must live a devout and disciplined life. He must have a strong belief in the trustworthy message he was taught; then he will be able to encourage others with wholesome teaching and show those who oppose it where they are wrong.” (Titus 1:5–9)

Verse 5 – word “elders” appears

Verse 7 – word “overseer” appears (in many translations the word “bishop” or “manager” is used as overseer).

Both these words refer to the same position of leadership.

In Acts 20:28, Paul said these men were chosen by God to oversee or shepherd even though they were called elders in Acts 20:17.

“Therefore take heed to yourselves and to 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.” (Acts 20:28, NKJV)

“But when we landed at Miletus, he sent a message to **the elders of the church at Ephesus, asking them to come and meet him.” (Acts 20:17)**

In Ephesians 4:11, the word “pastors” in the Greek translates to “shepherds.”

The term “elder” almost always refers to the plural in the New Testament. Christ entrusts elders to lead the Church.

Four Responsibilities of Elders

What exactly does an elder do?

1. An elder leads under the authority of Christ (Acts 20)

- The elders belong to the church so they don't have final authority over the Church. Christ does.
- Elders are to lead as servants of the church and to not allow sin to persist within the church.
- Elders should not campaign to get elected to the position of elder; God appoints elders.
- Paul reminds the church in Acts 20:28 that elders are appointed to shepherd the church that **Jesus bought with His own blood**. The Church is about Jesus.
- Leadership within the church should never be taken lightly once the gravity of Jesus buying the Church with His blood is fully realized and understood.

2. An elder is to care for the body of Christ

- Elders are called to **protect the flock** not build their own platform or following.
 - They are to watch for false doctrine and false teachers infiltrating the flock (Acts 20:28–30).
- Elders are to **nurture the flock/feed the sheep**.

3. Elders are to teach the Word of God.

- Elders are to build the church which is done through the teaching of the Word (Acts 20:32 –**“And now I entrust you to God and the message of his grace that is able to build you up and give you an inheritance with all those he has set apart for himself.”**)

- We should follow only the elders/pastors who know the Word of God, teach the Word of God, and follow the Word of God.
 - Elders must know the Word
 - Elders should study, memorize, and meditate on the Word.
 - Elders must communicate the Word
 - Elders should know the Word, teach the Word in church, and from the church throughout the world.
4. Elders should model the character of Christ.
- 1 Timothy 3: 1–7
 - Titus 1:5–9
 - 1 Peter 5:1–3
 - **“And now, a word to you who are elders in the churches. I, too, am an elder and a witness to the sufferings of Christ. And I, too, will share in his glory when he is revealed to the whole world. As a fellow elder, I appeal to you: Care for the flock that God has entrusted to you. Watch over it willingly, not grudgingly—not for what you will get out of it, but because you are eager to serve God. Don’t lord it over the people assigned to your care, but lead them by your own good example.”**
 - Elders are not qualified or disqualified by their age, business success or likeability.
 - Scripture gives no indication that the position of an elder within the church belongs to a female.

Leaders within the church are to be models in the church. Hebrews 13:7 says to imitate their faith:

“Remember your leaders who taught you the word of God. Think of all the good that has come from their lives, and follow the example of their faith.”

Practical application for today: Is the elder/pastor you are led by a servant? Are they a good example of whom to follow? Are they serving others or serving themselves? Are they teaching the full Word of God? Are they reaching all?

- **What does their personal life look like?**
- **What does their family life look like?**
- **What is their social/business life like (remember, not all are full-time pastors in many churches)?**
- **What does their spiritual life look like?**

No one can fulfill the qualifications of elder perfectly, however, elders should live lives worthy of imitating. If it is too much pressure for them, perhaps they should consider whether God was the one who appointed them.

I think of a parent/child relationship when I examine the role of an elder/pastor. Parents are to teach, protect, and nurture their children. If a parent abdicates this role, and solely chooses to have children as a note on their resume, they are not doing what God asked parents to do (train up their children in the way they should go). Elders/pastors are similar. If elders/pastors are in it for the wrong reasons, they aren't doing the tasks set forth for an elder/pastor and they would be wise to step aside as opposed to harming the entire flock. Teachers are held to a higher standard (**"Dear brothers and sisters, not many of you should become teachers in the church, for we who teach will be judged more strictly."** (James 3:1)).

Women did teach, however, we do not see in Scripture that they did so in the position of an elder in the New Testament church. Perhaps it was because of the social status of women during the time this was written and/or because the Church is the bride of Christ. The marriage model

may be what Paul and the early church was relying upon—the image of a husband a wife with the husband leading—so as to send a unifying message to the churches.

We must refer back to my notes from 1 Timothy 2 in order to determine the call of a woman to teach to determine if it is right or wrong. The Bible never specifically says no, but nor does it give us an example of a New Testament female elder.

DEACON – 1 Timothy 3:8–13

The responsibilities of deacons are not as clear as they are for elders.

We see the first act of calling out a special service ministry in **Acts 6:1–7:**

“But as the believers rapidly multiplied, there were rumblings of discontent. The Greek-speaking believers complained about the Hebrew-speaking believers, saying that their widows were being discriminated against in the daily distribution of food.

So the Twelve called a meeting of all the believers. They said, ‘We apostles should spend our time teaching the word of God, not running a food program. And so, brothers, select seven men who are well respected and are full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will give them this responsibility. Then we apostles can spend our time in prayer and teaching the word.’

Everyone liked this idea, and they chose the following: Stephen (a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit), Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas of Antioch (an earlier convert to the Jewish faith). These seven were presented to the apostles, who prayed for them as they laid their hands on them.

So God’s message continued to spread. The number of believers greatly increased in Jerusalem, and many of the Jewish priests were converted, too.”

The Twelve were considered the elders (the ones who taught). Because the church was rapidly growing, the needs of the people were increasing. The apostles who were teaching and called to prayer needed help tending to the needs of the people in a fair manner. Seven Greek speaking people were elected to fulfill this initial role. Whenever the Greek form of the word for deacon is used in the New Testament — *diakonos*, *diakonia*, *diakoneo* is used, it is almost always referring to some sort of ministry service. These are people who lead out in service.

Some people may say that deacons are people who serve within the church. However, all people are called to serve within the church. Deacons are called to **lead** the church in service. They are the ones who should be doing the most, leading by the best example, and encouraging those within the church to get involved and use their gifts. Deacons should empower those around them to get involved. Deacons should not hold the office so close that they Lord over the people in the church or make their position seem unattainable.

Elders are a group of men responsible primarily for prayer and the ministry of the Word. Deacons are a group of people who rise up to lead out in specific areas of service.

Responsibilities of Deacons

1. Deacons are to meet the needs of the church according to the Word. In the account in Acts 6:1–7, the need for deacons arose because of the specific circumstances going on. Different needs call for different types of leaders. And there is all kinds of needs within the church. This may be one reason why the specific responsibilities are not better outlined so as to not limit the service/needs scope of ministry.
2. Deacons must also support the ministry of the Word. Deacons serve elders so the elders may lead. Deacons do what the Word says (care for widows, orphans, etc. as in the case in Acts 6).
 - The church needs people who are willing to meet both needs: prayer and teaching and the meeting of the needs of the church.
 - Deacons should never compete with elders to provide overall leadership within the church. Deacons are there to serve the elders and the people.
 - Deacons are not only to serve the elders, but they are also to lead others so they can serve. In Acts 6, we see that only seven people were chosen even though the needs were huge. The seven would not have been able to meet the needs by themselves. These seven would have also had to find others who were willing to serve and lead. The deacons must be the ones to lead in service.

3. Deacons must unify the body around the Word.
 - Physical neglect was causing spiritual disunity.
 - Deacons were appointed to ease the tension (not contribute to the tension as some have done and do...no gossiping and complaining).
 - Deacons are to be “shock absorbers.”

Requirements of a Deacon

1. Deacons must have a mission mind-set.
 - It can't be about them, their causes, etc. It must be about the Gospel and about all.
 - If someone is pulling the church away from this mission, they are not qualified to be a deacon.
2. Deacons must have a Christ-like character.
 - Similar to the expectations of all Christ-followers.

Practical application questions regarding deacons:

- **Is the person honorable?**
- **Does this person exhibit self-control?**
- **Is this person a sacrificial giver?**
- **Is this person devoted to the study of the Word?**
- **Is this person faithful? And trustworthy?**
- **Does this person have an honorable reputation?**
- **What does this person's family life look like?**

The Bible does not make it clear whether women can or can't be deacons. Some may argue verse 11 refers to deacons' wives. However, the translation of this verse may not mean "their wives" after all. Some commentators argue that instead of how some view Paul transitioning from verse 7 to verse 8 and then in verse 11 (first elders—likewise deacons—likewise deacons' wives) it really reads first elders—likewise deacons—likewise deaconesses. 1 Timothy 3 makes no mention of the elders' wives, but only mentioning deacons' wives would be strange. Elders were not precluded from marriage.

The Greek word *gyne* or *gunaikas* is used in the original language and this word can be translated both as "a woman of any age (married or unmarried, widow, virgin) or a wife."

Some say Paul laid out the qualifications for the male deacons as well as (likewise) the female deacons. Paul specifically mentioned a female deacon in **Romans 16:1–2** whom he held in high regard and relied upon.

"I commend to you our sister Phoebe, who is a deacon in the church in Cenchrea. Welcome her in the Lord as one who is worthy of honor among God's people. Help her in whatever she needs, for she has been helpful to many, and especially to me."

It wouldn't make sense that Paul would only name and allow one woman to hold the role of deacon in the church. There were many who came after Phoebe (namely, Prisca/(Priscilla)^[Rom. 16:3], Mary^[Rom. 16:6], Junia^[Rom. 16:7], and Tryphena, Tryphosa, and Persis^[16:12]).

For the Church to operate in the manner in which it was to initially go forth must have both servant leaders and leading servants. Everyone is assigned a gift (or gifts) at the moment of salvation and these gifts are to be used for the sole purpose of building, strengthening, and unifying the Church.