

# Ecclesiology

## Topic 2 – Local Church Organization and Leadership

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### Review

The study of theology is important because thinking impacts living. Ecclesiology is the category of systematic theology that deals with the church – its definition, purpose, organization including leadership, ordinances, and practices. In Biblical usage, the word “church” refers to the local church or visible church and also to the universal or invisible church. The universal church is a united spiritual organism consisting of all members of the body of Christ. The formation of the church began at Pentecost and will come to an end with the Rapture. Members of the universal church are to gather together in local assemblies or bodies. The purpose of the church is to glorify God. The mission of the church is to make disciples. The metaphors of the church provide a rich description of the unique spiritual organism that Christ is building.

### Organization

Members of the universal church are to gather together in local assemblies or bodies (Acts 14:23, 27; 20:17, 28; Gal 1:2; Phil 1:1; 1 Thess 1:1; 2 Thess 1:11 Cor 11:18-20; Heb10:25).

The local church is organized for the purpose of ministry.

<sup>5</sup>For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would **set in order what remains** and appoint elders in every city as I directed you, Titus 1:5

<sup>28</sup>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. Acts 20:28

<sup>1</sup>Paul and Timothy, bond-servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, **including the overseers and deacons:** Phil 1:1

<sup>1</sup>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*. <sup>2</sup>So 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. <sup>3</sup>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. <sup>4</sup>But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.”** Acts 6:1-4

There are three main types of government or polity of the local church within the universal church: 1) Episcopal, 2) Presbyterian, and 3) Congregational.

### Hierarchical or Episcopal

This model takes its name from the Greek “episkopos”, which is translated “overseer” or “bishop.”

This system recognizes a (arch)bishop, or church leader by some other designation, who has power by virtue of his office to direct the local church. Bishops may also direct churches in a given area and decides who will be leaders in the church(es). Decisions are made at levels higher than the local church.

Churches or denominations where this form of government is used are the Roman Catholic church, the Eastern Orthodox church, the Anglican Church, the Episcopal Church in the United States, and the Methodist church.

The defense of this form of government is usually stated as the position and authority of James in Acts 15, Titus and Timothy's role with several churches, and the idea that "bishops" were designated to replace the apostles. There is historical precedence for this form of government in the centuries after the apostles. It was based on apostolic authority (see 1 Cor 5:3-5; 14:37; and 1 Thess 5:27) where the apostles had command authority over a local church. Advocates note that it is not banned in the NT. However, the term bishop is not a distinct office but a synonym for elder and NT history does not show that bishops replaced the apostles. For example, Paul alone did not ordain Timothy – it was a council of elders (1 Tim 4:14).

### Representative or Presbyterian

This model comes from the Greek "presbuteros", which means "elder." In this view, the members of the church elect elders to a "session" or board of elders. This form recognizes the authority of duly appointed representatives of local churches, usually grouped geographically. While rules and extent of power vary, the idea is that duly appointed representatives constitute the authority of the church. Elders rule over both local and regional or national churches as representatives of the members. Often representatives of a local group (called a presbytery) of churches come under the supervision and direction of a larger body (or synod) and in turn the synod comes under the larger body of a general assembly.

Churches or denominations where this form of government is used are Presbyterian, Reformed, and Lutheran churches.

For this form of government, Scripture nowhere calls for elders to have authority beyond their local flock.

### Congregational

Under this model, each individual church has its own government without an extra-local church government to control it. Each local church governs itself by means of democratic structures, often by vote. The authority remains with the local congregation, and important matters are decided by the congregation without respect to authority of other churches or officials. While local churches may be subject to some degree to higher bodies, committees, or officials, the concept of a congregational church is that a local congregation determines its own affairs, elects and ordains its own ministers, and directs the use of its own treasury. The local congregation has authority, by vote, to lead the church.

There is much diversity within congregational churches: a single pastor (or single elder), corporate board, pure democracy, and a plurality of elders.

Churches or denominations where this form of government is used are the Baptists, the Disciples Churches, Mennonites, the Evangelical Free churches, Congregationalists, and independent churches.

## **New Testament Words for Church Leaders**

There are three words in the NT that are used to refer to local church leaders. The NASB translates these words as "overseer", "elder", and "pastor" or "shepherd".

### Elder

"Elders" translates the Greek word "presbuteros". It refers to men who were older or more senior with no negative connotations but rather a sense of venerability. The NT uses the word to refer to several distinct groups, depending on the context.

1. Older persons advanced in years

<sup>17</sup>AND IT SHALL BE IN THE LAST DAYS,' God says, 'THAT I WILL POUR FORTH OF MY SPIRIT ON ALL MANKIND; AND YOUR SONS AND YOUR DAUGHTERS SHALL PROPHECY, AND YOUR YOUNG MEN SHALL SEE VISIONS, AND YOUR **OLD MEN** SHALL DREAM DREAMS; Acts 2:17

<sup>1</sup>Do not sharply rebuke an **older man**, but rather appeal to him as a father, to the younger men as brothers, 1 Tim 5:1

<sup>9</sup>When they heard it, they began to go out one by one, beginning with the **older ones**, and He was left alone, and the woman, where she was, in the center of the court. John 8:9

2. Jewish leaders – It is used 44 times in the Gospels and Acts to refer usually to the Jewish leaders who were opposed to Jesus.

<sup>21</sup>From that time Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the **elders** and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day. Matt 16:21

<sup>43</sup>Immediately while He was still speaking, Judas, one of the twelve, came up accompanied by a crowd with swords and clubs, who were from the chief priests and the scribes and the **elders**. ... <sup>53</sup>They led Jesus away to the high priest; and all the chief priests and the **elders** and the scribes gathered together. Mark 14:43, 53

<sup>7</sup>When they had placed them in the center, they *began to* inquire, “By what power, or in what name, have you done this?” <sup>8</sup>Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, “Rulers and **elders** of the people, <sup>9</sup>if we are on trial today for a benefit done to a sick man, as to how this man has been made well, <sup>10</sup>let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by this *name* this man stands here before you in good health. <sup>11</sup>He is the stone which was rejected by you, the builders, *but* which became the chief corner *stone*. <sup>12</sup>And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved.” <sup>13</sup>Now as they observed the confidence of Peter and John and understood that they were uneducated and untrained men, they were amazed, and *began to* recognize them as having been with Jesus. <sup>14</sup>And seeing the man who had been healed standing with them, they had nothing to say in reply. ... <sup>23</sup>When they had been released, they went to their own companions and reported all that the chief priests and the **elders** had said to them. Acts 4:7-14, 23

3. The 24 elders of Revelation who are “representative of the entire church pictured here on thrones (co-reigning), dressed in white garments (the imputed righteousness of Christ), wearing golden crowns (representing honor and reward). From Terry Riley’s notes on Revelation.

<sup>6</sup>And I saw between the throne (with the four living creatures) and the **elders** a Lamb standing, as if slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God, sent out into all the earth. <sup>7</sup> And He came and took the book out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne. <sup>8</sup>When He had taken the book, the four living creatures and the twenty-four **elders** fell down before the Lamb, each one holding a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. <sup>9</sup>And they sang a new song, saying, “Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood *men* from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. <sup>10</sup>“You have made them *to be* a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth.” Rev 5:6-10

4. Spiritually mature leaders of the church. It used with this reference in Acts and the epistles.

<sup>20</sup>But while the disciples stood around him, he got up and entered the city. The next day he went away with Barnabas to Derbe. <sup>21</sup>After they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, <sup>22</sup>strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and *saying*, “Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.” <sup>23</sup>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 14:23-21 (During the first missionary journey)

<sup>17</sup>From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the **elders** of the church. Acts 20:17

<sup>5</sup>For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint **elders** in every city as I directed you, Titus 1:5

<sup>1</sup>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, 1 Pet 5:1

### Overseer

“Overseer” translates the Greek word “episkopos”. It is literally one who looks over closely or intently, who views carefully. It describes one who exercises oversight or watches over others, or is a guardian. It is found five times in the NT.

<sup>28</sup>“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. Acts 20:28

<sup>1</sup>Paul and Timothy, bond-servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the **overseers** and deacons: Phil 1:1

<sup>2</sup>An **overseer**, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, 1 Tim 3:2

<sup>7</sup>For the **overseer** must be above reproach as God's steward, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not addicted to wine, not pugnacious, not fond of sordid gain, Titus 1:7

<sup>25</sup>For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and **Guardian** of your souls. 1 Pet 2:25

### Shepherd/Pastor

“Shepherd” is literally is one who herds sheep and tends flocks as a shepherd. It is translated “pastor” only in Eph 4:11 where the English word comes from the Latin meaning herdsman. Metaphorically it refers to one who performs functions including feeding, oversight, protection, leading, and guiding. Ephesians 4 may indicate that shepherding is a giftedness and not necessarily a position to be held. The noun form is used 18 times in the NT.

<sup>36</sup>Seeing the people, He felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and dispirited like sheep without a **shepherd**. Matt 9:36

<sup>2</sup>“But he who enters by the door is a **shepherd** of the sheep. ... <sup>11</sup>“I am the good **shepherd**; the good **shepherd** lays down His life for the sheep. <sup>12</sup>“He who is a hired hand, and not a **shepherd**, who is not the owner of the sheep, sees the wolf coming, and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. ... <sup>14</sup>“I am the good **shepherd**, and I know My own and My own know Me, ... <sup>16</sup>“I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will hear My voice; and they will become one flock with one **shepherd**. John 10:2, 11-12, 14, 16

<sup>11</sup>And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as **pastors** and teachers, Eph 4:11

<sup>20</sup>Now the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great **Shepherd** of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant, even Jesus our Lord, Heb 13:20

<sup>25</sup>For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the **Shepherd** and Guardian of your souls. 1 Pet 2:25

The verb form is used 12 times in the NT.

<sup>6</sup>AND YOU, BETHLEHEM, LAND OF JUDAH, ARE BY NO MEANS LEAST AMONG THE LEADERS OF JUDAH; FOR OUT OF YOU SHALL COME FORTH A RULER WHO WILL **SHEPHERD** MY PEOPLE ISRAEL." Matt 2:6

<sup>7</sup>"Which of you, having a slave plowing or **tending sheep**, will say to him when he has come in from the field, 'Come immediately and sit down to eat'? Luke 17:7

<sup>16</sup>He said to him again a second time, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to him, "**Shepherd** My sheep." John 21:16

<sup>28</sup>"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. Acts 20:28

<sup>1</sup>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, <sup>2</sup>**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; 1 Pet 5:1-2

<sup>12</sup>These are the men who are hidden reefs in your love feasts when they feast with you without fear, **caaring** for themselves; clouds without water, carried along by winds; autumn trees without fruit, doubly dead, uprooted; Jude 1:12

So, what is the relationship between overseer, elder, and shepherd (pastor)? It seems from the usages in the NT that these three words are describing the same person.

In Titus, Paul, under the inspiration of the Spirit, uses "elder" and "overseer" interchangeably.

<sup>5</sup>For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint **elders** in every city as I directed you, <sup>6</sup>*namely*, if any man is above reproach, the husband of one wife, having children who believe, not accused of dissipation or rebellion. <sup>7</sup>For the **overseer** must be above reproach as God's steward, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not addicted to wine, not pugnacious, not fond of sordid gain, Titus 1:5-7

Peter, under the inspiration of the Spirit, uses "elder", "shepherd", and "overseer" interchangeably.

<sup>1</sup>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, <sup>2</sup>**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; <sup>3</sup>nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock. <sup>4</sup>And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. 1 Pet 5:1-4

Paul, when speaking to the Ephesian elders, referred to them as “elders”, “overseers”, and “shepherds”, all interchangeably.

<sup>17</sup>From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the **elders** of the church.<sup>18</sup>And when they had come to him, he said to them, ... <sup>28</sup>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. Acts 20:17-28

The conclusion is that “elder”, “overseer”, and “shepherd/pastor” all refer to the same person but emphasizing a particular function of the office. Elder emphasizes their spiritual maturity and strength. Overseer emphasizes their authority and leading. Shepherd or pastor emphasizes their care, feeding, protection, leading, and guiding.

### **Development from Apostolic Rule to Elder Rule**

The beginning of the church at Pentecost occurred in AD 33. At this time, the church was centered in Jerusalem and led or ruled by the Apostles.

<sup>42</sup>They were continually **devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching** and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Acts 2:42

<sup>34</sup>For there was not a needy person among them, for all who were owners of land or houses would sell them and bring the proceeds of the sales <sup>35</sup>and **lay them at the apostles’ feet, and they would be distributed to each as any had need.** <sup>36</sup>Now Joseph, a Levite of Cyprian birth, who was also called Barnabas by the apostles (which translated means Son of Encouragement), <sup>37</sup>and who owned a tract of land, sold it and brought the money and laid it **at the apostles’ feet.** Acts 4:34-37

<sup>5</sup>But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property, <sup>2</sup>and kept back *some* of the price for himself, with his wife’s full knowledge, and bringing a portion of it, **he laid it at the apostles’ feet.** Acts 5:1-2

As the church grew, the apostles determined that they could not be involved in every minute detail of ministry. So they chose seven qualified and tested men who could help them by serving the growing church. It is notable that these men were selected by the congregation from among the congregation. Some believe this group to be the first deacons.

<sup>2</sup>So 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. <sup>3</sup>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.** <sup>4</sup>**But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.”** <sup>5</sup>**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. <sup>6</sup>And these they brought before the apostles; and after praying, they laid their hands on them. Acts 6:2-6

After Paul’s conversion in AD 33/34 and subsequent ministry through AD 37 there is much growth in the church. Most likely necessitating the Apostles selecting mature men to lead the local bodies and be “devoted to prayer and to the ministry of the word”.

<sup>31</sup>So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria enjoyed peace, being built up; and going on in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it continued to increase. Acts 9:31

By AD 41-43, there are elders in the church at Jerusalem.

<sup>27</sup>Now at this time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. <sup>28</sup>One of them named Agabus stood up and *began* to indicate by the Spirit that there would certainly be a great famine all over the world. And this took place in the *reign* of Claudius. <sup>29</sup>And in the proportion that any of the disciples had means, each of them determined to send *a contribution* for the relief of the brethren living in Judea. <sup>30</sup>And this they did, **sending it in charge of Barnabas and Saul to the elders.** Acts 11:27-30

In AD 44, James writes his epistle to the believers scattered (James 1:1) during Agrippa's persecution and martyring of the Apostle James (Acts 12). In his letter he mentions elders.

<sup>14</sup>Is anyone among you sick? **Then he must call for the elders of the church** and they are to pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; James 5:14

During the first missionary journey (Acts 13:1-14:28) in AD 48-49, Paul and Barnabas appoint elders in all the churches.

<sup>20</sup>But while the disciples stood around him, he got up and entered the city. The next day he went away with Barnabas to Derbe. <sup>21</sup>After they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, <sup>22</sup>strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and *saying*, "Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God." <sup>23</sup>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 14:23-21

By the time of the Jerusalem Council in AD 49-50, elders are mentioned prominently.

<sup>2</sup>And when Paul and Barnabas had great dissension and debate with them, *the brethren* determined that Paul and Barnabas and some others of them should go up to Jerusalem to **the apostles and elders** concerning this issue. <sup>3</sup>Therefore, being sent on their way by the church, they were passing through both Phoenicia and Samaria, describing in detail the conversion of the Gentiles, and were bringing great joy to all the brethren. <sup>4</sup>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. <sup>5</sup>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." <sup>6</sup>**The apostles and the elders** came together to look into this matter. <sup>7</sup>After there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, ... Acts 15:2-6

<sup>22</sup>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, <sup>23</sup>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. Acts 15:22-23

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

Note: There does seem to be some early evidence of the concept of "spokesman among equals" in the Jerusalem church. At the Jerusalem Council, the "apostles and elders" are meeting to discuss the place of keeping the law in the new covenant. James, the half-brother of Jesus, is a prominent figure who is summarizing and making judgment on the issue. Since he is not an apostle, we can safely conclude that he is an elder. He is apparently is the "point of contact" or "spokesman" for the elders at the Jerusalem church.

<sup>16</sup>But Peter continued knocking; and when they had opened *the door*, they saw him and were amazed. <sup>17</sup>But motioning to them with his hand to be silent, he described to them how the Lord had led him out of the prison. And he said, “Report these things to **James and the brethren.**” Then he left and went to another place. Acts 12:16-18

<sup>13</sup>After they had stopped speaking, **James answered**, saying, “Brethren, listen to me. ... <sup>19</sup>Therefore it is **my judgment** that we do not trouble those who are turning to God from among the Gentiles, Acts 15:13, 19

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

<sup>17</sup>After we arrived in Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly. <sup>18</sup>And the following day **Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present.** <sup>19</sup>After he had greeted them, he *began* to relate one by one the things which God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. Acts 21:17-19

During the second missionary journey (Acts 15:36-18:22) in AD 50-52, elders were presumably appointed (c.f. Acts 14). Paul wrote First (AD 51) and Second (AD 52) Thessalonians during this journey. In 1 Thessalonians, he does not call out elders specifically, but does mention them by their work and responsibility.

<sup>12</sup>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,** <sup>13</sup>and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Live in peace with one another. 1 Thess 5:12-13

During the third missionary journey (Acts 18:23-21:26) in AD 53-57, elders were presumably appointed (c.f. Acts 14) and the Ephesian elders are mentioned specifically.

<sup>17</sup>From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the **elders** of the church. <sup>18</sup>And when they had come to him, he said to them, ... <sup>28</sup>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. Acts 20:17-28

During Paul’s first Roman imprisonment, he writes Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon. In Philemon, he calls out the overseers (elders) specifically in the salutation.

<sup>1</sup>Paul and Timothy, bond-servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the **overseers** and deacons: Phil 1:1

In AD 62-65, Paul is released from Roman imprisonment and goes on his “Fourth Missionary Journey”. Apparently, he visited several cities in which he had ministered including Ephesus, where he left Timothy, and traveled through Macedonia (northern Greece) from where he wrote 1 Timothy (1 Tim 1:3) and Crete where he left Titus (Titus 1:5). He then traveled to Nicopolis in Achaia (southern Greece) from where he wrote Titus (Tit 3:12). First Timothy and Titus are called the “pastoral epistles” because Paul explains to Timothy and Titus the details of how to minister in the local church. Most notably, Paul gives the qualifications for elders and deacons. I assume that Paul has been using this criteria with new churches since his first missionary journey and is putting it down here for his co-laborers, Timothy and Titus, and others who would read his inspired letters.

<sup>1</sup>It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office of **overseer**, it is a fine work he desires *to do*. <sup>2</sup>An **overseer**, then, must be ... <sup>8</sup>Deacons likewise *must be* ... 1 Tim 3:1-13

<sup>5</sup>For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint **elders** in every city as I directed you, <sup>6</sup>*namely*, if any man is... Titus 1:5



In AD 63/64, Peter writes his two epistles from Rome. He mentions elders specifically in 1 Peter.

<sup>1</sup>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, <sup>2</sup>**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; <sup>3</sup>nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock. <sup>4</sup>And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. <sup>5</sup>You younger men, likewise, be subject to *your elders*; and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble. 1 Pet 5:1-5

Hebrews is most likely written in the AD 67/68 time frame and elders are mentioned by function and responsibility.

<sup>17</sup>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. Heb 13:17

So, within a few years of Pentecost, the NT pattern of elder rule was established and propagated to the churches founded during the missionary journeys and through continued disciple making efforts. It is only after the close of the apostolic age that we see development of different forms of church government looking like hierarchical or episcopal leadership.

### Gender Roles Related to Church Leadership

The role of women in the church and home can be one of the most emotionally charged controversies in the church. Though salvation does not hinge on this belief it is important in the life of individuals, the family, and the church.

Among evangelicals there are two main positions concerning gender and roles in the church:

- 1) The complementarian view (called the “traditional view” or by opponents the “hierarchical view”) teaches that God created men and women as equals with distinctive gender-defined roles.
- 2) The egalitarian view (also called “evangelical feminism”, “biblical feminism”, or “biblical equality”) teaches that God created man and woman fully equal and that true equality demands equal ministry opportunities in the church and equal marital roles in the home.

However, we are not concerned with “positions”; we are concerned with what the Bible teaches.

### Gender Equality – Equal in Position

The Scriptures declare that men and women are equal in nature, personhood, dignity, and worth.

<sup>27</sup>God created man in His own image, **in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them**. Gen 1:27

In addition, the Scriptures are clear that men and women have equal access to salvation and in terms of their position in Christ as recipients of the gift of saving faith are equal.

<sup>26</sup>For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. <sup>27</sup>For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. <sup>28</sup>There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, **there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus**. Gal 3:26-28

Egalitarians use this passage as their proof text for gender equality and “... assert that equality of soteriological *position* in Christ must receive an appropriate outworking in the *practice* of the church (and in society as well).” Stanley J. Grenz with Denise Muir Kjesbo, *Women in the Church: A Biblical Theology of Women in Ministry* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 101.

## Gender Equality – Equal in Nature of Ministry

Throughout the Bible women are equal in the *nature* of their ministry.

Women played a prominent role in the ministry of Jesus and ministry to Jesus (Matt 28:1-10; Luke 8:3; 23:49; John 11:1-46; 12:1-8).

No spiritual gift is limited to men (1 Cor 12:27-31; Rom 12:3-8; 1 Pet 4:8-11).

Spirit-filled women allow the words of Christ to richly dwell within them and are empowered with all wisdom to teach and admonish (Col 3:16).

Additionally, women are commanded to edify the body of Christ, which included teaching (Titus 2:4) and prophecy (Acts 2:17-18; 21:9; 1 Cor 11:5).

Yet, the Scriptures are clear that within the church and the home, men and women are to function in specifically designed roles. Jesus (Matt 19:3-8) and Paul (1 Tim 2:11-15) both reference the creation account as the foundation for their teaching on gender distinctives. In order to understand the NT teaching of gender roles we must first visit the creation account since gender roles are a part of God's original design.

## Gender Distinctives – Theological Foundation

1. Adam was created first then Eve.

<sup>12</sup>But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet. <sup>13</sup>For it was Adam who was first created, *and* then Eve. <sup>14</sup>And *it was* not Adam *who* was deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression. 1 Tim 2:12-14

<sup>7</sup>Then the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being. Gen 2:7

2. God created Adam directly from the dust, He formed the woman out of the man.

<sup>3</sup>But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ. . . . <sup>7</sup>For a man ought not to have his head covered, since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man. <sup>8</sup>For man does not originate from woman, but woman from man; 1 Cor 11:3; 7-8

<sup>21</sup>So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then He took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh at that place. <sup>22</sup>The LORD God fashioned into a woman the rib which He had taken from the man, and brought her to the man. <sup>23</sup>The man said, "This is now bone of my bones, And flesh of my flesh; She shall be called Woman, Because she was taken out of Man." Gen 2:21-23

3. God created the woman for the man.

<sup>9</sup>for indeed man was not created for the woman's sake, but woman for the man's sake. 1 Cor 11:9

<sup>18</sup>Then the LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him." Gen 2:18

4. God gave commands to Adam not Eve.

<sup>16</sup>The LORD God commanded the man, saying, "From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; <sup>17</sup>but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die." Gen 2:16-17

5. God named Adam and Adam exercised his God-given leadership in naming Eve.

<sup>23</sup>The man said, "This is now bone of my bones, And flesh of my flesh; She shall be called Woman, Because she was taken out of Man." ... <sup>20</sup>Now the man called his wife's name Eve, because she was the mother of all the living. Gen 2:23; 3:20

6. The gender roles were reversed when Adam followed Eve into sin.

<sup>6</sup>When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate. Gen 3:6

7. After the fall God called out to Adam as responsible, not Eve (even though Eve ate first).

<sup>12</sup>Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned-- Rom 5:12 (c.f. Gen 3:8-9)

<sup>8</sup>They heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. <sup>9</sup>Then the LORD God called to the man, and said to him, "Where are you?" Gen 3:8-9

8. The curse highlighted the new struggle with the original order that men and women would have – male oppression and female rebellion (Gen 3:16; 4:7).

<sup>16</sup>To the woman He said, "I will greatly multiply Your pain in childbirth, In pain you will bring forth children; Yet your desire will be for your husband, And he will rule over you." Gen 3:16

<sup>6</sup>Then the LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen?" <sup>7</sup>"If you do well, will not {your countenance} be lifted up? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door; and its desire is for you, but you must master it." Gen 4:6-7

"... it is seen that the distinctions between men and women exist as part of God's original design from creation. The Fall has certainly complicated matters, but distinctions continue nonetheless." "The Role of Women in the Church" by D. M. Lorenzini at [frontlinemin.org/women.asp](http://frontlinemin.org/women.asp)

It is clear that the teaching on female submission applied to the church and home has a theological foundation, not cultural.

### Roles in the Church

While the Scriptures teach that men and women are equal in the in the *nature* of their ministry, they also teach a distinction in the *sphere* of their ministry.

#### Male Leadership

While women served a vital role in the church from the beginning, men were assigned the role of church leadership. The apostles were all men, the churches were started by men, the Scripture was written by men, and the churches were led by men. More important than the practice of the apostolic church, instructions are given to us that necessarily give men the role of church leadership.

#### Female Subordination in the Church

1 Timothy 2 addresses the roles of women in the local church.

<sup>11</sup>**A woman must quietly receive instruction with entire submissiveness. <sup>12</sup>But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet.**

<sup>13</sup>For it was Adam who was first created, *and* then Eve. <sup>14</sup>And *it was* not Adam *who* was deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression. 1 Tim 2:11-14

Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, commands women to “quietly” receive instruction and remain “quiet” in the local church. This is the same word used twice meaning “quiet or silence”. It is used here to bracket the teaching of women’s role in the local church. “Submissiveness” is the same word used with respect to the husband-wife relationship meaning “to line up under”. “Entire” emphasizing completeness of the submissiveness.

Does this mean that a woman cannot speak or must not make a sound in the local church? Fortunately, the text answers that question for us. Specifically, women are prohibited from teaching or exercising authority over a man in the church. “Allow” speaks of permitting someone to do what they desire to do.

In addition, Paul makes it clear that this is not a cultural limitation by resting his statement upon the order of creation (1 Tim 2:13). He uses Adam's priority in creation to demonstrate God's design that men are to be the leaders and teachers in the church. Paul's prohibition is permanent and universally binding.

The following should be noted when understanding 1 Tim 2:11-14:

1. Timothy was ministering at Ephesus when he received this letter from Paul and Paul never mentioned any problems with women specifically in the church at Ephesus.
2. Paul wrote to provide a standard of conduct in the church.  

<sup>15</sup>but in case I am delayed, *I write* so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth. 1 Tim 3:15
3. 1 Timothy 2:11-14 is consistent with what Paul wrote earlier to the church at Ephesus (Eph 5:22-23) in regards to gender roles
4. 1 Timothy teaches more on church leaders than any other epistle and in it women are told not to exercise authority over men.
5. After the prohibition of women teaching or exercising authority over men in the church is given, the qualifications of overseer are given. Namely, one of the qualifications for being an elder of a church is that the person is a man.

<sup>1</sup>It is a trustworthy statement: **if any man aspires to the office of overseer**, it is a fine work **he** desires *to do*. 1 Tim 3:1

The context of Paul’s prohibition is within the church. This means that women are restricted from teaching or exercising authority over men in the context of the church only. 1 Timothy does not preclude women from occupations that require instruction of or authority over men, as long as these occupations are not in the church.

Teaching in the Bible is more than simply a transfer of information. It is with the expectation of acceptance and a change of life. Biblical teaching carries direction and an exercising of authority (cf. 1 Tim 4:11; 4:16; 2 Tim 3:16-17; Titus 2:15; 3:8). Teaching should be a careful, accurate explanation of the biblical text for the purpose of transforming the life of the hearer and women are restricted in performing this ministry to men in the church.

Women are nevertheless free to teach in many ways. Outside the church, women instruct men in many ways, such as in a profession. Also, believing women are commanded to explain the gospel to all, including lost men (cf. Acts 18:26). Within the church, women may teach other women and children.

With men in the church, women should discuss spiritual matters in a manner that informs, but should not instruct men in a manner that carries the expectation of application. This does not mean that a man cannot learn from a woman's conduct or from a conversation with a woman and apply what he learns to his life; instead what it means is that the woman's purpose in talking with a man is not to instruct him in this way.

The limitation that 1 Timothy 2:12 places upon the ministry of women is not a limitation of either the nature or the significance of their ministry. They are called to minister in the same basic way as men are called to minister and the significance placed upon their ministry is in no way diminished. It is only the *sphere* of ministry in which women are limited in their authority. Women are not to teach men or exercise authority over men, either corporately in formal church leadership or personally in informal church relationships. Women may communicate information to men, but in regard to spiritual matters women must not teach believing men in a way that directs or demands a response.

### **The Work of Elders**

First, it is important to note that there is always a group of elders, a plurality, that lead a local congregation. We always see "elders", "leaders", "those" in plural. This is a group of equals. Yet each one has a diversity of gifts and talents.

<sup>23</sup>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

<sup>17</sup>From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the **elders** of the church. Acts 20:17

<sup>1</sup>Paul and Timothy, bond-servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the **overseers** and deacons: Phil 1:1

<sup>12</sup>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,** <sup>13</sup>and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Live in peace with one another. 1 Thess 5:12-13

<sup>14</sup>Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the **council of elders** laid their hands on you. 1 Tim 4:14 (ESV)

<sup>5</sup>For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint **elders** in every city as I directed you, Titus 1:5

<sup>17</sup>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. Heb 13:17

<sup>1</sup>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, 1 Pet 5:1

From a human viewpoint, elders are appointed by other qualified elders. Yet, it is the Holy Spirit who makes them qualified and gifted and fruitful for the purpose of being an elder.

<sup>5</sup>For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and **appoint elders** in every city as I directed you, Titus 1:5

<sup>28</sup>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. Acts 20:28

The work of elders is ministry in the lives of the local body by pray and ministry of the word.

<sup>4</sup>"But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word." Acts 6:4

Elders are men.

<sup>1</sup>It is a trustworthy statement: if any **man** aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires *to do*. 1 Tim 3:1

<sup>5</sup>For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city as I directed you, <sup>6</sup>*namely*, if any **man** is above reproach, the husband of one wife, having children who believe, not accused of dissipation or rebellion. Titus 1:5-6

<sup>12</sup>But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet. 1 Tim 2:12

Elders are the caretakers of the church.

<sup>5</sup>(but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he **take care of the church of God?**), 1 Tim 3:5

Elders rule and exercise oversight .

<sup>12</sup>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, 1 Thess 5:12

<sup>17</sup>The **elders who rule well** are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching. 1 Tim 5:17

<sup>2</sup>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; 1 Pet 5:2

Elders preach and teach the Word.

<sup>17</sup>The elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor, **especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching**. 1 Tim 5:17

<sup>11</sup>And He gave some *as* apostles, and some *as* prophets, and some *as* evangelists, and some *as* **pastors and teachers**, <sup>12</sup>for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; Eph 4:11-12

Elders shepherd the flock of God.

<sup>28</sup>"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. Acts 20:28

– To feed

<sup>2</sup>An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, **able to teach**, 1 Tim 3:2

– To lead

<sup>7</sup>Remember those who **led** you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith. Heb 13:7

<sup>2</sup>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; 1 Pet 5:2

– To protect and watch over

<sup>17</sup>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. Heb 13:17

- To care for

<sup>7</sup>But we proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children. 1 Thess 2:7

Elders lead by example.

<sup>3</sup>nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but **proving to be examples to the flock.** 1 Pet 5:3

Elders select other leaders within the local body.

<sup>14</sup>Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the **council of elders** laid their hands on you. 1 Tim 4:14 (ESV)

### **The Responsibility of the Body**

Members of the local body have responsibilities toward their leaders:

- To appreciate and highly esteem

<sup>12</sup>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,** <sup>13</sup>and **that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work.** Live in peace with one another. 1 Thess 5:12-13

“Appreciate” literally means to perceive. In context it is the recognition of the of the vital function of elders and their hard work among the body to care and protect and also that God has placed them there. The ESV translates this “respect”.

“Esteem” means to engage in an intellectual process. In context, the congregation is to reason through the important, eternal life and death, work of the elders and come to the conclusion that they are to be valued. “Very highly” is a superlative that means over and beyond.

Each elder is unique with their own personalities yet each is to be appreciated and esteemed very highly because of their:

- diligent labor
- placement over the body by the Lord
- important task of teaching
- work of shepherding difficult sheep

- To obey and submit and be subject.

<sup>17</sup>**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. Heb 13:17

“Obey” is a complicated word to translate with many different meanings depending on context. In context here it means to continually obey or follow.

“Submit” means to continually resist no longer; to continually yield or surrender to the authority and admonition of their leaders.

<sup>5</sup>You younger men, likewise, **be subject to your elders;** and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble. 1 Pet 5:5

“Subject” means to urgently place under in an orderly fashion. In context, to fall in line under and submit and yield to God’s appointed leadership.

There is no limiting condition in respect to these commands, other than violating a clear commandment found in God's Word. The reason why they have been given such great authority is because they have been given a great responsibility – the oversight of souls for which they will be held accountable. It clear that effective leadership requires effective following.

- To support them financially.

<sup>6</sup>The one who is taught the word is to share all good things with the one who teaches *him*. Gal 6:6

<sup>17</sup>The elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching. 1 Tim 5:17

<sup>14</sup>So also the Lord directed those who proclaim the gospel to get their living from the gospel. 1 Cor 9:14 (see the entire chapter)

Elders who are dedicated full-time to the work are to be supported from the congregation from their purposed (2 Cor 8:3, 9:6-7; 1 Tim 6:18) and regular giving (1 Cor 16:1-2).

- To test what elders teach against Scripture.

<sup>11</sup>Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily *to see* whether these things were so. Acts 17:11

It is the congregation's responsibility to test what they are being taught against Scripture. They are not to blindly follow someone's teaching.

### **The Qualifications of Elders**

There are specific character and ministry qualifications for elders. In 1 Timothy and Titus, Paul describes the qualifications for the recognized positions of leadership within the church. These are not people who are popular or are successful in their vocation. They are called by God to shepherd His people and are therefore gifted and qualified to do so.

<sup>1</sup>It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do. <sup>2</sup>An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, <sup>3</sup>not addicted to wine or pugnacious, but gentle, peaceable, free from the love of money. <sup>4</sup>He must be one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity <sup>5</sup>(but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?), <sup>6</sup>and not a new convert, so that he will not become conceited and fall into the condemnation incurred by the devil. <sup>7</sup>And he must have a good reputation with those outside the church, so that he will not fall into reproach and the snare of the devil. 1 Tim 3:1-7

<sup>5</sup>For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city as I directed you, <sup>6</sup>*namely*, if any man is above reproach, the husband of one wife, having children who believe, not accused of dissipation or rebellion. <sup>7</sup>For the overseer must be above reproach as God's steward, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not addicted to wine, not pugnacious, not fond of sordid gain, <sup>8</sup>but hospitable, loving what is good, sensible, just, devout, self-controlled, <sup>9</sup>holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict. Titus 1:5-9

Interestingly, the two lists of qualifications are not the same. This leads to the conclusion that each list is not exhaustive in itself nor are the lists exhaustive when combined, but are indicative of the character and giftedness of a mature believer who is being set apart by the Holy Spirit to oversee/shepherd Christ's body.



Elders are the most mature within the body of Christ. They are exemplified by these character qualities. These are qualities that all believers should be striving to develop in their lives.

The following table lists the qualifications in 1 Timothy compared to the ones in Titus along with the Greek. It is also interesting to see how the NASB and ESV have been translated.

<b>1 Tim 3:1-7 Greek</b>	<b>1 Tim 3:1-7 NASB</b>	<b>1 Tim 3:1-7 ESV</b>	<b>Titus 1:6-9 Greek</b>	<b>Titus 1:6-9 NASB</b>	<b>Titus 1:6-9 ESV</b>
oregō	aspires/desires (v1)	aspires/desires (v1)			
anepilēmptos	above reproach (v2)	above reproach (v2)	anegklētos	above reproach (v6)	above reproach (v6)
	husband of one wife (v2)	the husband of one wife (v2)		husband of one wife (v6)	
nēphalios	temperate (v2)	sober-minded (v2)			
sōphrōn	prudent (v2)	self-controlled (v2)	sōphrōn	sensible (v8)	self-controlled (v8)
kosmios	respectable (v2)	respectable (v2)			
philoxenos	hospitable (v2)	hospitable (v2)	philoxenos	hospitable (v8)	hospitable (v8)
didaktikos	able to teach (v2)	able to teach (v2)		able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict (v9)	able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it (v9)
mē paroinos	not addicted to wine (v3)	not a drunkard (v3)	mē paroinos	not addicted to wine (v7)	must not be a drunkard (v7)
mē plēktēs	not pugnacious (v3)	not violent (v3)	mē plēktēs	not pugnacious (v7)	must not be violent (v7)
epieikēs	gentle (v3)	gentle (v3)			
amachos	peaceable (v3)	not quarrelsome (v3)			
aphilargyros	free from the love of money (v3)	not a lover of money (v3)	mē aischrokerdēs	not fond of sordid gain (v7)	must not be greedy for gain (v7)
proistēmi	manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity (v4-5)	He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive (v4-5)	pistos	having children who believe, not accused of dissipation or rebellion (v6)	children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination (v6)
mē neophytos	not a new convert (v6)	must not be a recent convert (v6)			
kalos martyria	must have a good reputation with those outside the church (v7)	must be well thought of by outsiders (v7)			
			oikonomos (steward)	above reproach as God's steward (v7)	as God's steward, must be above reproach (v7)
			mē authadēs	not self-willed (v7)	must not be arrogant (v7)
			mē orgilos	not quick-tempered (v7)	must not be quick-tempered (v7)
			philagathos	loving what is good (v8)	a lover of good (v8)
			dikaios	just (v8)	upright (v8)
			hosios	devout (v8)	holy (v8)
			egkratēs	self-controlled (v8)	disciplined (v8)

aspires/desires (1 Tim 3:1)

“Aspire” means “to reach out after,” or “to stretch out oneself to grasp something”. It speaks of external acts – the outward steps to become an overseer. “Desire” means “a passionate compulsion”. It is the inward feeling of desire. It speaks to the driving compulsion to shepherd God’s people.

❖ **To what do you aspire?**

above reproach (1 Tim 3:2; Titus 1:6, 7)

This is the over-arching principle in Paul’s description of the character of elders. They have a good reputation. They live in such a way that no charge of guilt can be proved against them. They may not necessarily be free from accusation, but they are free from accusations that can be rightly proven.

❖ **Are you above reproach?**

husband of one wife (1 Tim 3:2; Titus 1:6)

“Husband of one wife” presents an interpretive challenge. Possible meanings are:

1. That an elder must married. But this would disqualify Paul and Timothy.
2. That an elder cannot be a polygamist. But this is already prohibited by 1 Cor 7:2.
3. That an elder cannot be a remarried widower. But there is no character or lack of character associated with being a widower and remarrying after the death of a spouse is permitted (Rom 7:2; 1 Cor 7:39).
4. That an elder cannot be divorced. But Paul could have said that more directly. However, an unbiblical divorce is probably included in the thought of a “husband of one wife” (Mal 2:13-16; Matt 5:31-32; 1 Cor 7:12-16).

“The husband of one wife” literally means "a one woman man". Paul is not referring to a leader’s marital status, as the absence of the definite article in the Greek indicates. Instead, this is a character quality. There are men who are married to the same woman for a long time, but that does not make them a “one-woman man”. A “one-woman man” is faithful physically, emotionally, and mentally and devoted to the woman God has given him. This implies inner as well as outward sexual purity.

Purity is critical to an elder’s qualifications. The cost of any sin is high – it causes the name of God to be blasphemed (Rom 2:17-24; 2 Pet 2:2). Sexual sin has the added consequences of destroying marriages, families, ministries, churches, etc.

❖ **Are you striving for purity?**

temperate (1 Tim 3:2)

“Temperate” literally means “wineless” or “unmixed with wine.” It came to mean clear headed, mentally alert, watchful, vigilant, well balanced, and able to make sound judgments. It is one who does not lose proper physical, mental, and spiritual orientation. An example of this type of usage is found in 1 Thessalonians 5:2-6 where we are directed to be "alert and sober" (temperate) in light of the coming day of judgment.

❖ **Do you have a clear picture of reality?**

prudent (1 Tim 3:2; Titus 1:8)

“Prudent” or “sensible” means of a sound mind, sane, in one’s senses; or curbing one’s desires and impulses, self-controlled. This man in control of his mind, including what he thinks about and what he does. He is balanced in his opinions and actions. He follows sound reason, and is not under the control of passions; his desires and passions being well regulated. He has a sound or healthy mind and thus possesses the ability to curb desires and impulses so as to produce a measured and orderly life.

❖ **Does your mind control you or do your passions and emotions?**

respectable (1 Tim 3:2)

“Respectable” carries the idea of orderly, not chaotic. It is a well-ordered lifestyle that reflects Biblical principles in matters such as dress, speech, appearance of home and manner of doing business. A respectable man is honorable, decent, dignified, and modest, according to the cultural norms in which he ministers.

❖ **Is your lifestyle well-ordered?**

hospitable (1 Tim 3:2; Titus 1:8)

“Hospitable” means literally “loving strangers”. It is not about entertaining friends. This is a practice of pursuing (Rom 12:9-13) reaching out in love and using one’s resources to minister generously and compassionately to others, without complaint (1 Pet 4:8-9), especially to those that you do not know well.

❖ **Are you practicing hospitality, why or why not?**

able to teach (1 Tim 3:2; Titus 1:9)

A man who is “able to teach” is a man of the Word. He has an unwavering commitment to the Word of God. He may not necessarily be a gifted public speaker, but he knows Bible doctrine and can use it effectively to exhort and encourage believers and to refute those who contradict the truth of God’s Word.

❖ **Do you strive to bring the Word to bear in your relationships?**

not addicted to wine (1 Tim 3:3; Titus 1:7)

“Not addicted to wine” literally means “to be continually alongside, or in the presence of, wine.” Elders (mature believers) do not make alcohol their companion. They exercise wisdom when deciding to partake of alcohol in moderation. This quality describes someone who does not drink to excess or abuse intoxicating substances. His desire is to be controlled by the Holy Spirit and nothing else (Eph 5:18).

❖ **Is alcohol your companion?**

not pugnacious (1 Tim 3:3; Titus 1:7)

Pugnacious literally means “a striker” or “bruiser”, one who is “ready with a blow”; a contentious, quarrelsome person; anger out of control – not just verbally, but physically. This is a man who does not strike out at people either with his fists or with harsh, angry words, but remains calm and gentle even in difficult situations. He does not respond to provocation with harsh words or fists.

❖ **Do you respond to people with harshness or gentleness?**

gentle (1 Tim 3:3)

“Gentle” is from the root meaning "reasonable." A gentle man is not unduly rigorous. The word is found in secular Greek and is frequently applied to a person who does not insist on the "letter of the law." He is one who will be fair-minded and does not tend to throw the book at someone just because it is in his power to do so.

❖ **Are you rigid and inflexible or is your interaction with people seasoned with grace?**

peaceable (1 Tim 3:3)

“Peaceable” literally means “not fighting”. This is a man who is not given to struggle with others, consistently debating, arguing, or quarreling.

❖ **Are you a contentious person? Do you enjoy debating and arguing?**

free from the love of money (1 Tim 3:3; Titus 1:7)

The parallel passage in Titus 1:7 describes this quality as "not fond of sordid gain" meaning not fond of filthy, shameful, or greedy profit. Money must not control the man's life causing him to be sidetracked from pursuing true spiritual riches. This is a person who, without honesty or integrity, seeks wealth and financial prosperity has his highest priority. The positive way to say this is that they are content.

❖ **Are you content with where God has you and what God has entrusted to you ?**

manages his own household well, ... (1 Tim 3:4-5)

“Manage” literally means "to stand before," hence to lead or to attend to. A man who manages his household well is one who provides firm but loving leadership in the home. This good management leads to "keeping his children under control with all dignity". This qualification does not eliminate a man because he has no children. Jesus had no children and yet He is the Great Shepherd. 1 Timothy 3 is not looking at grown children who are not at home and therefore not available for management. This passage is looking at children who are living in the home and how well they are being managed. A man's management of the church can be seen in how he manages his household.

❖ **Are you raising your children according to God’s principles?**

having children who believe, not accused of dissipation or rebellion (Titus 1:6)

“Believe” is most frequently translated "faithful." The children of an elder therefore must be faithful to the leadership and authority of their father. This would be manifested by children who are not being accused of dissipation or rebellion. These children are still in the home, but are older. These are not toddlers and probably not grade school children. They are old enough to be living a blatantly immoral life. Older children living away from and independent from their parents are not likely in view in this passage.

❖ **Are your children faithful to their parent’s leadership?**

not a new convert (1 Tim 3:6)

This refers to a man who has proven himself to be consistent in fulfilling the qualifications. Churches need to be careful not to recognize an individual for church leadership too quickly. This would be a protection not only for the church but also for the man himself as he might be tempted to be filled with pride.

❖ **Are you pursuing growth in your walk?**

must have a good reputation with those outside the church (1 Tim 3:7)

Elders must be recognized by non-Christians in the community as a man of high moral character and proper conduct. He must live in such a way that he brings no dishonor on the Lord or His church. His life must be consistent in all areas – church, family, and community.

❖ **Does your non-church, non-family life reflect that of a believer?**

above reproach as God's steward (Titus 1:7)

The over-arching character quality is reiterated. Elders live in such a way that no charge of guilt can be proved against themselves. They may not necessarily be free from accusation, but accusations that can be rightly proven. Here the focus on being above reproach is their stewardship. Elders recognize that everything in their life is God's (salvation, spiritual gifts, money/possessions, relationships, our very life, etc.). They strive to honor God's priorities and be faithful with all that God has given them.

❖ **Does your life reflect God's priorities?**

not self-willed (Titus 1:7)

A self-willed person wants his own way regardless of others. They are stubborn; arrogant; inconsiderate of others' opinions, feelings, and desires; headstrong; independent; self-assertive; and ungracious toward those of different opinion. Elders are NOT characterized this way. They are striving to be humble and yielded to God and to have a sacrificial love, service, and preferential attitude toward others.

❖ **Are you proud and headstrong or are you easy to work with?**

not quick-tempered (Titus 1:7)

Not quick-tempered means not being prone to anger or easily angered. Elders are quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger. An elder must not be inclined to become angry nor even easily angered. He must not be given to outbursts of anger.

❖ **Are you slow to anger?**

loving what is good (Titus 1:8)

"Loving what is good" means having a strong affection for what is intrinsically good, helpful, beneficial, and worthwhile. Elders love the things that God loves. This is a fondness for a commitment to what is helpful, beneficial and worthwhile. This type of man is committed to the things that promote the pursuit of righteousness.

❖ **Do you love the things that God loves?**

just (Titus 1:8)

"Just" means to be upright, honest, fair, and impartial in one's dealing with people. The just man is able to make mature and proper judgments in his relationship with others.

❖ **Are you impartial?**

devout (Titus 1:8)

"Devout" means to be pleasing to God, holy. This refers to a man's holy life, his faithfulness to what God would have him to be and do. It involves a commitment to becoming more like Christ in daily life and conduct. He strives moment-by-moment to be pleasing to the Lord.

❖ **Are you striving to be pleasing to God?**

self-controlled (Titus 1:8)

“Self-controlled” describes exercising restraint over impulses, passions, emotions, appetites, and desires. He exercises self-control and discipline for the purpose of godliness.

❖ **Do you have self-control?**

### **The Work and Qualification of Deacons**

While elders are the overseers of a congregation, deacons are the recognized servants who lead certain church ministries and advise the elders in their shepherding role. As deacons are set apart to manage the ministries within the congregation, the elders are better able to fulfill their primary function of oversight, giving full attention to prayer and the ministry of the Word.

The apostles were concerned about fulfilling this oversight function in Acts 6 when they gave instruction that seven men be selected to oversee a specific task. The apostles were concerned that they would not be able to properly serve the church in their capacity as overseers if they were distracted from prayer and the ministry of the word.

<sup>1</sup>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. <sup>2</sup>So 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. <sup>3</sup>"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. <sup>4</sup>"But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word." <sup>5</sup>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. <sup>6</sup>And these they brought before the apostles; and after praying, they laid their hands on them. Acts 6:1-6

Some believe these seven men to be the first deacons because the word itself means “servant,” and this is what these men were being called to do. Others do not believe that they were deacons, because they are not specifically called deacons and it does not appear to be an office, as much as a responsibility to perform a short term task. If they are not the first deacons they certainly were the prototype. Therefore deacons are individuals who make it possible for elders to function properly without being distracted.

Approximately 30 years had passed since Pentecost by the time 1 Timothy was written. By this time, the church had codified a set of character and ministry qualifications for these officially recognized servants.

“Deacon” and the related Greek terms “to serve” and “service” are used ~100 times in the NT. Only in 1 Tim 3 and Phil 1:1 and perhaps Rom 16:1 do they appear to specify an office.

Deacons, like elders, must meet certain character qualifications. The only difference in their qualifications is the ability to teach. Deacons are men (or women) of good reputation, who are full of the Spirit and of wisdom.

<sup>8</sup>Deacons likewise must be men of dignity, not double-tongued, or addicted to much wine or fond of sordid gain, <sup>9</sup>but holding to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. <sup>10</sup>These men must also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons if they are beyond reproach. <sup>11</sup>Women must likewise be dignified, not malicious gossips, but temperate, faithful in all things. <sup>12</sup>Deacons must be husbands of only one wife, and good managers of their children and their own households. <sup>13</sup>For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a high standing and great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus. 1 Tim 3:8-13

dignity (3:8)

“Dignity” means worthy of respect and honor (Phil 4:8), serious in purpose and remaining upright in conduct. Deacons are committed to the Lord and ministry in the body. They are faithful and can be counted on. Because deacons have a seriousness of purpose, those they are ministering to trust and respect them.

not double-tongued (3:8)

“Double-tongued” is someone that speaks out of both sides of their mouth. They say one thing to one person and another thing to another person. This is insincerity – saying one thing but meaning another, or representing the same thing differently to different people. Deacons need to shoot straight and explain things truthfully and consistently.

not addicted to much wine (3:8)

Similar to elders, the deacon must not be controlled by any substance and only by the Holy Spirit.

not fond of sordid gain (3:8; same as Titus 1:7)

The pursuit of money should not distract deacons from ministering to the welfare of the body of Christ. Nor should deacons be so fond of money or material possessions that they would use dishonest methods in acquiring them. Deacons are content.

but holding to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience (3:9)

The deacons should not be holding the truths revealed in the NT as theological abstractions, but should be living out those truths in daily life. They must be holding to this mystery of faith and be holding to it with a clear conscience, practicing it, not holding back, not rebellious, not resistant but actually doing what they profess to hold to. Deacons are putting their faith into practice.

must also first be tested of proven character (3:10)

Deacons must have been observed over a period of time and shown to have proven character; found to be a faithful disciple of Christ and His church. Before being recognized as deacons they were expected to have experience in the ministry of the church

beyond reproach (3:10)

Same as elders, a deacon lives in such a way that no charge of guilt can be proved against him. He may not necessarily be free from accusation, but accusations that can be rightly proven.

husband of one wife (3:12)

Same as elders, “the husband of one wife” literally means “a one woman man”. A “one-woman man” is faithful physically, emotionally, and mentally and devoted to the woman God has given him. This implies inner as well as outward sexual purity.

good manager of his children and household (3:12)

Same as elders, a deacon gives firm but loving leadership in the home, where his sound Christian character and his consistent spiritual oversight should be clearly evident and responded to by his children.

Women as deacons

There is an interpretive challenge with 1 Tim 3:11.

<sup>11</sup>Women must likewise be dignified, not malicious gossips, but temperate, faithful in all things. 1 Tim 3:11

Some translations say “wives” (ESV, KJV) others say “women” (NASB, NIV). The Greek can be rendered either women or wives. The reason to understand this to be women is:

1. The use of “likewise” points to a second group of deacons.
2. There are not possessive pronouns connecting the women to deacons as wives.
3. There are no qualifications for elder’s wives even though they have greater responsibility.
4. The women’s qualifications are similar to the male deacon qualifications.
5. Paul refers to a woman named Phoebe who appears to be called a deacon.

<sup>1</sup>I commend to you our sister Phoebe, who is a **servant** of the church which is at Cenchrea; <sup>2</sup>that you receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and that you help her in whatever matter she may have need of you; for she herself has also been a helper of many, and of myself as well. Rom 16:1-2

#### dignified

Same as male deacons.

#### not malicious gossips

Malicious gossips is the same word used as a name for Satan and means slander or accuser. Satan is the father of lies, the false accuser. It comes from the roots to throw between and pictures what is done in relationships by throwing lies between. Sinful words come from a heart that is not bowed before God, this person is not walking consistently in the Spirit.

#### temperate

Same as elders.

#### faithful in all things

Similar to male deacons with the idea of proven character and holding the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience.

### ❖ **Are you striving to serve the body?**

#### **Selection of Elders and Deacons at VBC**

VBC currently has five elders. A question someone might ask is, “Why only five? Shouldn’t every man who meets these qualifications be recognized as an elder?” There are two ideas that answer these questions.

- First, many individuals may meet the character and ministry qualifications of an elder/overseer/shepherd, but they do not aspire/desire to minister in this way. Aspire/desire is a necessary prerequisite to being appointed an elder.
- Second, as long as the church is “set in order” (Titus 1:5), there is no reason to add additional elders that complicate the functioning of a unified plurality. When there are ministries within the body that require oversight that are not being overseen by an elder, then the body is not set in order. In those times, additional oversight is needed and another (or more) elders would need to be appointed to set in order what remains.

At VBC, once there is a need to set in order what remains and an individual is identified and is believed by the elders to be qualified and willing, he becomes a candidate. The elders of VBC then notify the congregation that this particular individual is being considered for the overseership and then the congregation has thirty days to speak to the man if they have any reservation. If the one who expresses the reservation is not satisfied with that conversation and the candidate does not withdraw himself from being considered, then the person with the reservation can then go to the elders with their concern who will decide if it is valid.

The goal of the VBC elders is to have every one of the ministry leaders to be recognized as a deacon. The same vetting process described above for elders is used for deacons.



## **Summary**

Members of the universal church are to gather together in local assemblies or bodies (Acts 14:23, 27; 20:17, 28; Gal 1:2; Phil 1:1; 1 Thess 1:1; 2 Thess 1:11 Cor 11:18-20; Heb10:25). The local church is organized for the purpose of ministry (Titus 1:5). The leaders of the church are called synonymously elders, overseers, or shepherds (or pastors). Elders are men (1Tim 2:12-14) who aspire to the office of overseer (1 Tim 3:1) and are set apart and qualified by the Holy Spirit (Acts 20:28) for prayer and the ministry of the word (Acts 6:4). They must be qualified (1Tim 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9). They are the caretakers of the church (1 Tim 3:5). They rule and exercise oversight (1 Thess 5:12; 1 Tim 5:17; 1 Pet 5:2). They shepherd the flock of God (Acts 20:28) to: feed (1 Tim 3:2); lead (Heb 13:7; 1 Pet 5:2); protect and watch over (Heb 13:17); care for (1 Thess 2:7); and equip (Eph 4:11-12). They preach and teach the word (1 Tim 5:17). The body is responsible to: appreciate and esteem them very highly (1 Thess 5:12-13); obey and submit to them (Heb 13:17); and be subject to them (1 Pet 5:5). The recognized servants within the local body are deacons (or deaconesses). Generally, the service of deacons was meant to free the overseers to give full attention to prayer and the ministry of the Word (Acts 6:2-4). Before being recognized as deacons they were expected to have experience in the ministry of the church (3:8-10; 12-13).

## **Questions to Ponder**

1. Why is organization of the local church important?
2. Are you resisting your God appointed leaders?
3. How do you think of, speak about, and treat your elders?
4. Why should you obey your spiritual leaders?
5. Why does not obeying your elders bring grief to them?
6. Should you obey your leaders in anything they ask? If not, what limits your obedience?
7. What are your righteous options if you are being asked to do something you consider foolish?
8. Think of several ways you can help your spiritual leaders serve with joy and not with grief.
9. Read through the character qualities for elders. Pray for God to reveal to you where your character does not match mature character. Which ones do you need to change in?
10. In what ways are you serving the local body of Christ?