
Church Organization and Leadership

13 Lesson Adult Bible Study

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For Northside Church of Christ

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LESSON ONE

“THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH”

Objective: to examine the organizational structure of the New Testament Church.

Lesson Text: Ephesians 4:11-13

INTRODUCTION

Does the New Testament authorize and prescribe a specific form of church leadership and organization? This question is important for any church that is serious about impacting the world with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The organization and form of leadership that governs the affairs of a church have a direct impact upon that church's ability to function and fulfill the Great Commission (Mt. 28:19-20).

Jesus recognized the importance of organization and leadership styles and quickly demonstrated such during his earthly ministry. Shortly after Jesus had invited several disciples to follow him, our Lord began organizing his followers, ***“One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God. When morning came, he called his disciples to him and chose twelve of them, whom he also designated apostles”*** (Lk. 6:12-13).

Why did Jesus spend the night prior to the appointment of the apostles in prayer to God?

Why did Jesus choose just twelve men as apostles?

BIBLE STUDY

In Mark's account of the appointment of the twelve, we are told that Jesus chose them ***“that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach”*** (Mk. 3:14). It is obvious that Jesus intended to train his apostles before sending them out both on the Limited Commission and later on the Great Commission. According to Paul, the apostles were to be the foundation of God's Church with Jesus as the chief cornerstone (Eph. 2:19-20). Their role in the early church included two primary purposes: (a) to be personal witnesses to both the ministry of Jesus and his resurrection from the dead (Lk. 24:48; Acts 1:8; 1 Cor. 15:3-5), and (b) to reveal the “new covenant” of Jesus Christ (Eph. 3:5; Heb. 2:3). Today, Christians possess the results of the apostles' work through the Holy Spirit in the book called the New Testament (Jn. 20:30-31).

Why did Jesus spend so much time training the twelve? (Jn. 16:12-13)

How much does the Holy Scriptures supply the child of God? (2 Tim. 3:16-17)

After the establishment of the church, the organization of its various ministries and work became of primary importance. The apostles called together the church for the appointment of seven servants (deacons?) after controversy arose over the daily distributions to those in need (Acts 6:1-7). By Acts 11, the churches in Judea have been organized with “elders” serving in leadership positions (verse 30).

LESSON TWO

“NOT LIKE THE GENTILES”

Objective: to examine the nature of spiritual leadership compared to worldly leadership.

Lesson Text: Matthew 20:25-28

INTRODUCTION

It is not unusual when elders are being selected to hear someone in the congregation say, “Oh, he’ll make a good elder because he’s a good businessman!” While someone might succeed both as a spiritual shepherd and in the business world, success in society’s high-pressured companies does not necessarily translate into successful leadership in the Kingdom of God. There is a world of difference between spiritual leadership and worldly leadership.

Jesus dealt with similar concepts during his earthly ministry. Near the end of his life, the mother of James and John requested of Jesus positions of prestige and authority for her two sons. Jesus replied, “*You don’t know what you are asking.*” Their concept of leadership and authority had them sitting on Jesus’ right and left, helping Jesus govern the restored nation of Israel. However, such was not to be the nature of the Kingdom of God nor the nature of leadership in that Kingdom. When the remaining ten apostles heard of James’ and John’s request, they were indignant with the brothers. Jesus found it necessary to call the disciples together to explain the difference between leadership among the Gentiles and leadership in the Kingdom.

Is it wrong to desire positions of leadership in the church? (1 Tim. 3:1) When would it be wrong?

Why were the other apostles indignant with James and John? Does this happen in the church today?

BIBLE STUDY

The question of who would be the greatest in the coming kingdom had been a frequent subject of discussion among the apostles. On one such occasion Jesus asked the apostles, “*What were you arguing about on the road? But they kept quiet because on the way they had argued about who was the greatest. Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, ‘If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all’*”(Mark 9:33-35). The concept of “servant leadership” was at the heart of Jesus’ teaching. Just as he had come to serve, so must his followers serve one another.

Why would the apostles argue so much about greatness?

What did Jesus do to teach the apostles a lesson about humility? (Lk. 9:47-48)

After the apostles became angry with one another over the request of the mother of James and John, Jesus called them together and said, “***You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many***” (Matt 20:25-28). Several important lessons about spiritual leadership are presented by Jesus in this text.

First, the rulers of the Gentiles exercised only “positional authority” and used such to “lord it over” their subjects. Their interest was first and foremost their own power and prestige, not the well-being of those they ruled over. They used the power of their position to get their way—lording it over the people.

“Positional authority” is the authority that comes with an office or position of leadership. For example, the President of the United States has authority in this country because he is the President. His position gives him authority. The problem with “positional authority” is that the leadership is only as good as the one occupying the office. If someone who is hungry for power gains the position, he can become a dictator ruling only in his own interest, not for the interest of the people. Many nations throughout the world experience this style of leadership.

Such was not to be the case in the Kingdom of God. Instead, the apostles, prophets, elders, etc., were to “rule” from a position of service. For one to be a leader in the Church, he must first demonstrate a “servant spirit.” God’s intention was that His people follow their leaders because those leaders had demonstrated Christian character and, therefore were worthy to be followed.

Do most businesses and governmental positions rule by position or from a “servant spirit”?

How does one develop a servant spirit?

What did Jesus mean when he said, “***Whoever wants to be first must be your slave***”?

One of the terms used to describe the work of elders is “overseer.” Interestingly, the style of leadership elders are to avoid is called “lording it over.” Godly leaders must avoid crossing over the line from overseeing the work of the church to lording over the work of the church. Peter seems to give guidance for how elders can avoid this mistake, “***not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock***” (1 Pet. 5:3). As the word “shepherd” implies, elders must lead, not drive, the flock. They must be willing to set the proper example before the church in both lifestyle and service to the Lord. Elders who are not out in the forefront serving will find it hard to encourage others to serve.

The following is a comparison of natural leadership and spiritual leadership. While some characteristics are similar, many are antithetical to each other.

NATURAL

Self Confident

Knows Men

Makes Own Decisions

Ambitious

Originates Own Methods

Enjoys Commanding Others

Motivated By Personal Desires

Independent

SPIRITUAL

Confident In God

Knows Also God

Seeks To Find God's Will

Self-effacing

Finds And Follows God's Methods

Delights In Obeying God

Motivated By Love For God And Man

God Dependent

It is significant that among the qualifications of the "special servants" in Acts 6 was that they be "*full of the Spirit and wisdom.*" Later, Paul would urge every Christian to be filled with the Holy Spirit (Eph. 5:18). Spiritual leadership is the result of the work of God's Holy Spirit in the lives of God's people. Spiritual leaders will exhibit the fruit of the Spirit in their lives.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why may good businessmen not necessarily make good elders?
2. Why is "service" so important as a leadership trait?
3. What happens to a church when a leader begins to "lord it over" the flock?
4. Why would a new-convert not be a candidate for leadership in the church?
5. What is the fundamental different between natural leadership and spiritual leadership?
6. What should Christians look for when choosing someone for a spiritual position?

LESSON THREE

“ESSENTIAL QUALITIES OF SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP”

Objective: to examine the essential qualities for spiritual leadership in the Kingdom of God.

Lesson Text: Joshua 1:6-9

INTRODUCTION

After the death of Moses, God commanded Joshua to cross the Jordan and conquer the land of Canaan. For Joshua, the challenge was intimidating. The people had wandered for forty years in the wilderness, God’s servant Moses had just died, and now Joshua had the challenge of both leading the people and conquering the land. But God reassured Joshua that he would be with him (Josh. 1:9). Over and over God told Joshua, ***“Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their forefathers to give them”*** (Josh. 1:6). Spiritual strength and courage are among the attributes essential for those who would lead God’s people.

Spiritual leadership combines ones own unique gifts and talents with other godly leadership skills and attributes. These combinations of gifts and skills are what equips God’s leaders to conquer the world for Jesus today. This lesson will examine some of the essential skills necessary to lead God’s people.

Why would God encourage Joshua repeatedly to be “strong and courageous”?

How important is the reassurance that God is with us in our endeavors to serve him?

BIBLE STUDY

The first attribute of a spiritual leader is DISCIPLINE. It has been said that the future belongs to the disciplined. That is true because without discipline, all other gifts, no matter how great, will never reach their full potential. The disciplined person is able to lead because Christ has conquered him. The words “discipline” and “disciple” are from the same root. A disciplined leader is one who has submitted himself as a disciple to someone else. Spiritual leaders must have surrendered their will and authority to Jesus as the supreme authority.

Especially important are the spiritual disciplines of prayer, fasting and Bible study. Christian leaders need to demonstrate their total dependence upon God through the practice of these Biblical acts.

The second attribute is that of VISION. Those who have had the most powerful and lasting influence upon their peers have been those with vision—leaders who have seen more and farther than others—men of faith, for faith is vision. Abraham was a man of vision for he looked for a city with foundations, whose architect and builder was God (Heb. 11:10). Yet, Abraham was the father of the “faithful.”

Vision combines the great qualities of optimism and hope. Spiritual leaders believe that God will bless them in their efforts and, therefore, they step out in hope. As Paul would write, “***We live by faith, not by sight***” (2 Cor 5:7). J. Oswald Sanders states, “Vision imparts venturesomeness, and history is on the side of venturesome faith.”

Why have Christians not practiced the discipline of fasting as they have prayer?

What effect does vision have on the growth of the church?

The third ingredient of successful leadership is WISDOM. Among the characteristics of the “special servants” in Acts 6 was wisdom. Wisdom may be defined as the proper application of knowledge in moral and spiritual matters. It brings a balance to the church’s leadership that prevents them from moving too quickly without first thinking through the process. Paul reminded the Colossians, “***For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding***” (Col. 1:9). This should be the prayer for all Christian, but especially those in leadership positions.

The fourth ingredient for spiritual leadership is DECISION. A leader must be decisive. A man with a vision must do something about it or he will remain visionary, but not a leader. When Saul encountered Jesus on the road to Damascus, one of Paul’s first responses was, “What shall I do Lord?” (Acts 22:10). Having been convinced of Jesus’ claim, he was ready to act. Such is true of the great people of faith of Hebrews 11. Having seen where God wanted them to be (vision), they counted the cost, made their decisions, and acted on them. Today’s church desperately needs leaders who are willing to act—to be decisive.

How does wisdom and decisiveness balance each other?

What is the connection between wisdom and age?

Courage is the next characteristic of good spiritual leaders. Whether it was Joshua conquering Canaan or Paul conquering the Roman world for Jesus, each was blessed with a courageous spirit. Courage may be defined as “that quality of mind that enables one to encounter danger or difficulties with firmness and faith.” Paul reminded the young man Timothy, “***For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline***” (2 Tim. 1:7). These are the traits of courage.

Courage is developed as one grows in faith in Jesus Christ. Notice the difference in these two verses, “***On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them ...***” (Jn. 20:19); and “***When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus***” (Acts 4:13). Jesus turned these frightened disciples into courageous witnesses for him. He can do the same thing for us today.

The final characteristic of spiritual leadership in this lesson is HUMILITY. This is the hallmark of the man whom God can use, although it has little place in the leadership style of the world. The spiritual leader will choose the hidden pathway of sacrificial service and the approval of his Lord rather than the pathway of praise and admiration of the unspiritual crowds. Jesus becomes the spiritual leader’s ultimate role model, “***for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls***” (Mt. 11:29). As Jesus was so fond of demonstrating, true greatness is found on ones knees serving others.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What are some keys to a disciplined spiritual life? When do these characteristics need to be taught?
2. Why do many churches not have a vision of where they are going as a church?
3. What is required to fulfill ones vision for the church?
4. Why are many Christian leaders afraid of setting a clear vision and direction for the church?
5. In what circumstances might Christian leaders have to take a courageous stand?
6. How might Christians recognize that a leader is truly humble in his service to the Lord?

LESSON FOUR

“THE QUALIFICATIONS OF ELDERS”

(Part 1)

Objective: to examine the qualities men must possess to serve as elders in the Church.

Lesson Text: 1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:6-9

INTRODUCTION

The qualifications of elders are clearly set forth in 1 Timothy and Titus. Numerous studies have been made of these qualifications and any commentary will provide detailed analysis of each one. In 1870, J.W. McGarvey wrote an extensive treatise on the work and qualifications of elders. Although the work is now over one hundred and twenty years old, McGarvey's thoughts still provide a good starting point for examining the qualifications of elders. In this lesson and lesson five, McGarvey's examination of the qualifications of elders will be presented. You will not agree with everything brother McGarvey may present, but he will challenge your thinking regarding the life and character of the men who would serve the church as overseers.

BIBLE STUDY

The qualifications for the office of an Elder are all prescribed by the apostle Paul in the third chapter of 1st Timothy and the first chapter of Titus. They can be divided into six natural sections, and it will simplify our investigation to examine these divisions separately. They are distinguished as they relate respectively to experience, reputation, domestic relations, character, habits, and ability to teach and rule. We will consider them in this order.

Experience. We mean by this, experience in the life of a Christian. Paul says that an elder should not be a new convert, lest, being lifted up with pride, he fall into the condemnation of the devil (1 Tim. 3:6). The reason here given shows that the office was one of high honor and responsibility; otherwise, the occupant of it would incur no danger of being lifted up with pride. The condemnation of the devil is the condemnation into which the devil fell, which, according to Paul's understanding of it, resulted from pride. A new convert would be more likely to fall into this sin than an experienced Christian, because he would more recently have escaped the habitual service of Satan, and would have less power to resist temptation.

In assigning this qualification, the apostle shows how important it is that pride of office shall not characterize the eldership. It is the same important lesson that Jesus taught the disciples when he said, "He that would be greatest among you, let him be servant of all." Within what period after his immersion a man ceases to be a new convert, is nowhere indicated. It is left to the decision of those interested in the selection and ordination of elders. It is not at all difficult for men of

common sense to decide what members of a given church are new converts, although it would be difficult to express the idea more definitely than it is done by the apostle.

Reputation. The good which a church is capable of accomplishing in a community depends very much upon its reputation, and the reputation of the church depends very much upon that of its representative men. Most wisely, therefore, it is required that an elder shall have a "good report of them that are without, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil" (1 Tim. 3:7). If he fall into reproach, not only is the church reproached with him, but he must soon lose his influence over the membership of the church, and it is difficult for the devil to construct a snare more likely to catch his victim than when he brings an elder into reproach within the church. Both the elder himself and many members of his flock are exposed to almost certain ruin in that event. Many brethren can be found who have been caught in this snare, and who are now either standing aloof from the church, or coldly and sourly looking on and criticizing those who do the work which they once failed to do.

This qualification has a necessary limitation. When they that are without are men who despise what is good, and hold in bad repute the man who acts according to the will of Christ, we can not understand the apostle to mean that the elder shall have a good report from them; nor, indeed, does he refer to men of that character, whether many or few in the community. He refers to men whose opinion is worth considering, and who know the habits of the elder. He must have a good report from them in regard to his moral and religious character.

It is seldom, according to our observation, that a church has been so thoughtless as to select a man for the elder's office who was very deficient in this qualification, but it often happens that in the course of his career, an elder falls into bad repute, sometimes unjustly, but oftener, justly. Many churches are now languishing under the shadow of an eldership composed partly of such material, and they can never flourish till relieved by the death or resignation of the unfortunate party. It is too hazardous, in such cases, to wait for death to bring the desired relief, and voluntary resignations are least likely to occur with just that class of men. It is the duty, therefore, of all churches thus afflicted, to call upon the party to resign the office. It is a duty of a most delicate nature, requiring all the wisdom and prudence of which the leading men of the church are capable, but it must, at all hazards, be done. A conference of a large number of the more intelligent and disinterested members, conducted in the most private manner possible, and its decision communicated in the most considerate manner, will always effect the object with a man whose feelings are at all delicate. If, in any case, this should fail, more open and public means should be resorted to; for an elder must have a good report from them that are without, and upon the church rests the responsibility of seeing that no man is retained in the office who does not possess this qualification.

Domestic relations. To Timothy and Titus both, the apostle prescribes that the overseer shall be the husband of one wife. There has been a vast amount of disputation as to whether this requires him to be a married man. It is alleged, in opposition to this idea, that when churches were planted among a people practicing polygamy, men would frequently be immersed who had a plurality of wives, and that the apostle intends only to prohibit such from being made overseers. Undoubtedly the use of the numeral one in the text has this force, and it would be unlawful to place a polygamist or bigamist in the office. But while the expression has this force, we think that candor requires the admission that it also has the effect of requiring a man to be a married man. That he should be the husband of one wife forbids having less than one as clearly as it

forbids having more than one. If it be said that a man owns but one farm, it is just as clearly implied that he owns one as that he owns no more than one. Moreover, the context confirms the conclusion; for the apostle proceeds in both epistles to state how the overseer must govern his household, and especially his children; which statements imply that he is to be a man of family.

It has been urged as an objection to this conclusion, that it would disqualify Paul himself, and Barnabas and Timothy for the office of elder although they held offices or positions of much greater responsibility. But this objection can have no force, unless it be made to appear that these brethren were qualified for the elder's office, or that the qualifications of an Apostle or an Evangelist include those of an elder. Neither of the two, however, can be made to appear, and therefore the objection has no force whatever. Indeed, it seems most fitting that men whose chief work led them from city to city and nation to nation, through all kinds of danger and hardship, should be freed from the care of a family, and equally fitting that the shepherd, whose work was always at home and in the midst of the families of his flock should be a man of family. A married man certainly possesses advantages for such work that are impossible to an unmarried man, and the experience of the world must confirm the wisdom of the requirement that the overseer shall be the husband of one wife. It may be well to add that one living wife is clearly meant, and that there is no allusion to the number of deceased wives a man may have had. If my wife, is dead, I am not now her husband.

It is also required that the candidate for the eldership shall "rule well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity;" or, as it is expressed in Titus, "having faithful children not accused of riot or unruly." The reason given for this requirement is this: "For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?" The figure of interrogation is here employed in order to assert, most emphatically, that if a man does not know how to rule his own house, he can not take care of the Church of God--he is incompetent to fill the office of overseer. It is altogether vain for uninspired men to demur against a decision so emphatically rendered by an apostle; we therefore accept it without qualification.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. One of the obvious qualifications for being an elder is that the man must be "elderly." How old should a man be before serving as an elder? How old were those in the New Testament church likely to have been?
2. Why might pride cause problems with an eldership?
3. Why is a man's reputation with outsiders so important?
4. How would a church in today's culture check the reputation of a brother with those outside the church?
5. Why is family experience so important to leading the church?
6. For how long is a man responsible for the faithfulness of his children?

LESSON FIVE

“THE QUALIFICATIONS OF ELDERS”

(Part 2)

Objective: to examine the qualities men must possess to serve as elders in the Church.

Lesson Text: 1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:6-9

INTRODUCTION

In lesson four, we studied the work of brother J.W. McGarvey that was first published in 1870 on the work and qualifications of elders. Brother McGarvey divided the qualifications of elders into six divisions—experience, reputation, domestic relations, character, habits, and the ability to teach and rule. In that lesson, we examined the first three of these categories. Today’s lesson looks at the latter three.

Once again, you may not agree with every position brother McGarvey held, but you will be challenged to think through these specific qualifications for church’s leaders. These qualifications are not given as suggestions that may or may not be followed. Instead, churches should carefully and seriously follow God’s instructions in choosing qualified men to lead His church.

BIBLE STUDY

Character. The traits of character prescribed for an elder are numerous, and when considered as a whole, they present a very rare combination. The first of these in logical order, and the first mentioned in both of the epistles that treat the subject, is blamelessness. When it is said that an overseer must be blameless, we must of necessity understand the term in a comparative, not in an absolute sense. This necessity arises from the fact acknowledged and insisted upon by the apostles, that no man is entirely blameless when his character stands a fair comparison with the characters of other good men. The apostle seems to have his eye upon the counterpart of the good reputation which we have already mentioned. If a man possessing a good repute among them who are without, is known to have a character corresponding to this, he is blameless in the only sense in which men in the flesh can be blameless. We may remark further that this qualification, from the very fact of its being comparative, must admit of different degrees, and that some qualified elders may be more blameless than others. The degree which is requisite to eligibility in any given case, must be determined by those who are immediately concerned in the selection and ordination of the elder.

To be blameless is merely to be free from faults. Not content with this general prohibition, the apostle proceeds to specify some faults that it is especially important for the overseer to avoid.

He must not be covetous. A covetous eldership will make a covetous church, and a covetous church is a dead church.

As the elder must not be covetous, so, according to the reading of our common version, he must not be "greedy of filthy lucre." The Greek adjective, of which this expression is the rendering, is "aischrokerdos," compounded of *aischros*, base, and *kerrdos*, of gain. There is a slight difference of opinion as to its meaning. Some critics render it "*greedy of gain*," and some, "*making money by base means*." The latter understand the apostle as prohibiting any disreputable business; and the former, as prohibiting the greed for gain that would lead to such a business. By either rendering, a disreputable occupation is prohibited—such, for example, as dealing in intoxicating liquors, jockey trading, rearing sporting stock, renting property for improper uses, and such like, in none of which can a man engage unless his greed for gain overrides his regard for the welfare of the community. Any other course of life by which a man betrays an excessive greed for gain is undoubtedly prohibited.

The apostle also specifies among prohibited faults, *self-will*. The elder must not be *self-willed*. No man is fit to hold office jointly with other men, who is not content to often yield his own will to that of his compeers. Neither is any man capable of exercising moral sway over a community, who, possesses an iron will that never bends to the wishes of others. We speak now of matters which are lawfully subject to the will of man, not of those in which God's will has been declared. Within the limits of the latter, there is no room for the human will to play—it has only to submit.

In the third place, the overseer is to avoid everything that would disturb the peace of the church. He is not to be a "*striker*," nor a "*brawler*," nor even "*soon angry*," but in opposition to all these, he is to be "*temperate*" and "*patient*." He will have frequent occasions for the trial of his patience, if he makes vigorous efforts to discharge his duties; and unless he be well supplied with it, though he may not fall to brawling and striking, he will become ill-tempered and discouraged. Nothing is more wisely said, than that he must be patient.

Besides the negative qualifications, or traits of character that an overseer must not possess, the apostle names a number of positive elements of character. He must be "*just*," for he is a judicial functionary of the church; he must be "*sober*," that is sober minded, for levity, which sobriety forbids, argues a want of piety. He must be a "*lover of hospitality*," for otherwise he is devoid of that sympathy that is necessary in order to secure the affection of others. He must be "*a lover of good men*," for all good men love one another. He must be "*holy*," for he is set apart to a holy office, and his official acts concern the most holy relations which bind men to one another and to their God.

Habits. A man's habits grow out of his character, but they also react upon his character, tending constantly to make it either better or worse. A habit of vigilance, or watchfulness, is enjoined upon the elder, because without it many things most deleterious to the congregation would escape his notice. A want of this habit is a very common fault. While the overseer should be far better informed as to the condition of the members of the church than any other person in it or outside of it, it is often the case that through mere want of watchfulness he is the last to learn what is going on. A habit of watchfulness in matters of business is apt to follow a man into the office of overseer; hence the importance of requiring it as a condition of eligibility.

It is not more important for the overseer to be watchful, than that he should avoid the only other habits mentioned by the apostle, and not implied in the qualifications already discussed. He must not be “*given to much wine.*” It is not merely drunkenness that is here prohibited; if it was, we would doubtless have the word that is appropriated to the expression of that idea. Neither is the idea of *much* in the original. The term is “*paroinon,*” *by wine*, and means simply, *given to wine.* It doubtless contemplates a man who is given to a freer use of wine than was customary among strictly sober people even though he might never become intoxicated.

We have now glanced rapidly at the rare combination of moral traits and habits that must characterize the overseer, and will next discuss the intellectual qualifications that are necessary to his usefulness as a teacher.

Ability To Teach And Rule. While the moral and religious traits of character requisite for the office of elder are numerous, and some of them are demanded by the apostle with great emphasis, only one qualification of an intellectual character is mentioned, and this is expressed in general terms. This fact is significant, and admonishes us not to misadjust the divine balance, by making the most of that which is made the least of in the Scriptures.

This one intellectual qualification is represented in the epistle to Timothy by the expression, “*apt to teach.*” The Greek for this expression is *didaktikos*, which I prefer to render “*capable of teaching.*” The Elder, then, must be capable of teaching; but this expression represents a variable quantity. One might be capable of teaching some persons, and utterly incapable of teaching others. It becomes a matter of necessity, then, that before we can form a judgment as to a man's possession of this qualification in the requisite degree, we must know whom it is that he is to teach. A person capable of teaching children might be incapable of teaching adults, as one capable of teaching an academy might be incapable of teaching the classes in a college. So an elder might be capable of teaching a congregation in one community, and not in another nearby. What is the standard, then, by which each individual candidate for the eldership is to be judged in this respect? Undoubtedly, it is to be found in the attainments of the congregation which he is to teach. He is to be their teacher, and theirs alone; consequently, if he is capable of teaching them, he has the capability required by the Scriptures. From this it appears that properly qualified elders may possess capability of teaching in as great variety of degrees as characterizes the intellectual and religious attainments of the various congregations. Furthermore, it must be evident that each individual congregation is the best judge of the capability of an elder to be its teacher. So long as they receive instruction from the elder, and are satisfied with him, he is qualified according to the Scriptures to teach that congregation however much he may fall below some other elder in some other congregation.

But this capability of teaching has a special direction given to it in the epistle to Titus. It is there said that the elder must “***hold fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able by sound teaching both to exhort and to convict the gainsayers.***” Here, both the source of his information, and one of the specific objects of his teaching are mentioned. The specific object is to exhort and convict the gainsayers—exhort them till exhortation fails, and then convict them before the congregation as corrupt opposers of the truth. Of course, this is only one of the many objects of teaching, and is mentioned in this place because the young congregations in Crete were at that time infested by “*vain talkers and deceivers.*” The source of information by which the elders were to silence these men, was not the philosophy in which the latter boasted, but the faithful word that had already been taught. The elders are required to hold fast this “faithful

word,” and, as a consequence, condemn everything unauthorized by it. A “*thus saith the Lord*” was to be the touch stone of every doctrine and every practice which Jew or Gentile might introduce, and thus, by “*sound teaching*,” the elders were to stop the mouths of all in their respective congregations who taught things which they ought not.

Some of the Christian congregations of the present day are at work on the plan here indicated. They have a board of Elders, all of whom are capable of teaching, and one of whom is a preacher. The latter proclaims the gospel to the world in the public assembly and takes the leading part in the instruction of the congregation. He gives his whole time to the work and lives off the gospel that he preaches. The others take a secondary part in the teaching, and share in full the responsibility of ruling. They give but a portion of their time to the work, and give it, like the elders of the church at Ephesus, gratuitously (Acts 20:34, 25). This is Scriptural and wise.

In a still larger number of congregations, an evangelist is called to the aid of the eldership. He preaches and takes the leading part in teaching, while the elders take the secondary part in teaching, and supreme control in ruling, making use, however, of whatever wisdom and experience the evangelist may possess, to aid them. This we also pronounce Scriptural; for in this capacity Timothy labored among the Elders at Ephesus, and Epaphroditus among those at Philippi (Acts 20:17, 1 Tim. : 3; Phil. 1: 1; 2: 25-30).

But, besides these, we must acknowledge that there are many congregations among us with elders in office who do not teach, and who are incapable of teaching. All such should immediately do one of two things--either resign the office, or put into exercise their latent powers, and prove themselves capable of teaching and therefore qualified for the office. However, all the congregations should be taught, by the evangelists who form them to select for the office only men who are capable of teaching, and all evangelists should be careful to ordain only such to the office. In this way, present evils may gradually be correlated, and a repetition of them in the future, avoided.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Does “blameless” mean that an elder must be without sin?
2. Why must an elder avoid covetousness and a love for money? How could these traits get him into trouble in a local congregation?
3. Why is it imperative that an elder be able to get along with others without engendering strife and anger?
4. Why is hospitality an important trait for elders?
5. How should elders handle a situation where false teaching is occurring within the church?

LESSON SIX

“THE HISTORY AND WORK OF ELDERS”

Objective: to examine the history, nature and work of elders in the church of God.

Lesson Text: Exodus 3:16; 19:7; Acts 20:17; 1 Peter 5:1-4

INTRODUCTION

The term “elder,” translated from the Greek word “presbuteros,” is the most commonly used term of the three that describe the work of the church’s leaders. It literally means “an older person” and was used throughout the Bible to describe both “older people” in general and “older men” who had special leadership positions among the people of God.

Throughout history, most cultures have depended upon older individuals to provide leadership in the community. Their years of experience and wisdom helped guide, govern and educate the community in which they lived. During the Patriarchal age of the Old Testament, it was aged men like Noah, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob that God worked through to fulfill His plan of salvation. God has continued to the present day to look to “older members” of the spiritual community for leadership and guidance.

Why have communities around the world turned to the “aged” for leadership in those communities?

How has the United States followed this pattern of leadership?

BIBLE STUDY

From the very beginning of Israel’s history, elders served as leaders of God’s people. While preparing to send Moses to deliver His people, God gave Moses these instructions, “Go, assemble the elders of Israel and say to them, ‘The LORD, the God of your fathers-- the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob-- appeared to me and said: I have watched over you and have seen what has been done to you in Egypt’” (Ex. 3:16). Throughout Israel’s wandering in the wilderness, it is with the elders of each of the tribes with which God spoke and communed.

Even after the establishment of the Monarchy, elderly advisors were important to the kings as they made important decisions. One of the best examples is found in 1 Kings 12 when Rehoboam ascended to the throne of his father Solomon. Israel begged of Rehoboam relief from the severe taxation they were enduring. Rehoboam first consulted with the elders who had served his father. They urged him to listen to the people and to grant their request. Rehoboam,

however, listened to his younger friends and responded harshly to the people. The result was the dividing of the Kingdom of Israel. Elders are not infallible, but their years of experience provide a solid foundation for spiritual leadership.

Why did God first send Moses to the elders of Israel?

What was the fault in the advice of Rehoboam's young friends (1 Kings 12:8-11)?

Elders continued to serve the religious communities in Jesus' day. Numerous references to elders are found throughout the Gospels and the book of Acts. Elders like Nicodemus and Joseph of Arithathea became devout disciples of Jesus during his earthly ministry. However, it was also the elders of the people who prompted Pilate to hand Jesus over to be crucified (Mt. 27:1). The Jewish ruling council, the Sanhedrin, was made up of priests, Pharisees, Sadducees and various elders of the people.

After the establishment of the church on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2, it wasn't long before congregations began to appoint elders to lead them. In Acts 11, the church in Antioch decided to send help to the churches in Judea who were experiencing a famine. ***"This they did, sending their gift to the elders by Barnabas and Saul"*** (Acts 11:30). Not only were the churches in Judea organized with elders, but the newly established Gentile churches had elders appointed to lead them. "Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust" (Acts 14:23). That elders were to be the leaders in all of the churches is evident from Paul's instructions to both Timothy and Titus in which qualifications and responsibilities of the eldership and set forth (1 Tim. 3; Titus 1). In fact, Paul states plainly that Titus' mission was to appoint elders in every city where there was a church (Titus 1:5).

Was the organization of the church simply a "carry-over" from the Jewish community or was it the ordained form of government authorized by God?

What is significant about a multitude of elders being appointed in every church? What would be wrong with having just one elder in a church?

The word "elder" indicates spiritual age and advanced judgment. It is these two characteristics that give us insight into the work of elders. While other responsibilities are implied in the words "shepherd" and "overseer," the responsibilities of "elders" is to provide spiritual guidance and counsel to the local church. Since elders minister to both individuals and families, years of experience both in successful living and personal failure can help others during difficult decisions in their own lives. Elders must be prepared to share their life experiences as teachers of the congregation and should be ready to reach out in times of need and suffering.

Among the duties of elders in the early church was the care for the sick. In James 5:14-15, the Lord's half-brother instructed the sick, ***"Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven."*** Clearly, both physical and spiritual healings are under consideration here. While most see the physical healing as part of the miraculous age of the early church, the elders'

care and concern for the spiritual well-being of the sick is as important today as it was in the first century. While preachers can visit and care for the sick just as every Christian should, it is the elders of the church that Christians are urged to call in their time of need.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. When would a man be considered “elderly”? How has that changed down through the years?
2. Is there a consistent pattern of “elder-leadership” found in the Bible? Why is that important for our study?
3. How can respect for elders be nurtured and encouraged in a culture that prizes youthful appearances and trends?
4. What role did the elders of Israel play in the crucifixion of Jesus? Why did their wisdom fail in this instance?
5. How can churches reorient members to call upon the elders in times of sickness? How have denominational influences effected the church in this area?
6. How important is it for younger elders to have the opportunity to work with experienced elders? What pitfalls may occur when younger elders begin their ministry with men who have served for years?

LESSON SEVEN

“THE WORK OF THE OVERSEER”

Objective: to examine the nature and work of overseers in the church of God.

Lesson Text: Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:1-4; Titus 1:7; Hebrews 13:17

INTRODUCTION

The term “overseer,” translated from the Greek word “episkopos,” is the most generic of the three terms used to describe the work of the church’s leaders. It literally means “to look over” and was used in the Greek world to describe those who oversaw farms, businesses, city governments, building projects, governmental finances etc. In the Greek Old Testament, the officers appointed by Josiah to oversee the workmen repairing the Temple were called “overseers” (2 Chron. 34:12, 17) as were the men appointed to oversee the rebuilding of Jerusalem after the captivity (Neh. 9:5, 14). In our culture today, the work of foremen or supervisors correspond to the meaning of the Greek word. In the New Testament, the overseers were responsible for directing the work and affairs of the church (Heb. 13:17).

A term often used to translate the Greek word “episkopos” is the English word “bishop.” This word is an unfortunate translation for two reasons. First, it fails to convey the meaning of the original word. Secondly, it conveys a meaning in most religious circles that is inaccurate and unfaithful to the text. Bishops are recognized officials in certain denominations that have hierarchical forms of church government and do not reflect the work or ministry of overseers in the New Testament.

What kind of responsibility does a foreman have at a building sight? What implications does that image have upon the responsibilities of overseers in the church?

Why would the translators of the King James Version render the Greek word “episkopos” with the English word “bishop”? What influence might the Church of England have had upon the translation process?

BIBLE STUDY

The word “overseer” is used in several places interchangeably with the words “elders” and “shepherds.” In Acts 20, Paul calls for the elders of Ephesus to meet him at Miletus. While addressing the elders, he urges them “*Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood*” (Acts 20:28). Paul clearly identifies the elders at Ephesus as both overseers and

shepherds. In Titus 1:6-7, Paul uses the words “overseer” and “elder” to refer to the same ministry within the church. Likewise, in 1 Peter 5:1-2, the apostle Peter addresses the elders in the church and tells them “***Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers-- not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve.***” Once again, the words “elder,” “shepherd,” and “overseer” are used by the inspired writer to describe the same office in the church.

To whom do most denominations apply the title of shepherd or pastor?

Why would the Holy Spirit use three different words to describe the same leadership position?

Since the word overseer is such a generic word, it broadens the responsibilities of leaders in the church. The Hebrew author described their ministry with these words, “***Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you***” (Heb. 13:17). The question is often raised “In what areas is the church to obey its overseers?” Obviously, in areas where the Bible is clear and specific, Christians are obliged to obey the Bible and not men. In other areas where the Bible grants freedom and liberty, the Christian is under no obligation to submit to others except out of love and a desire for unity. Therefore, overseers must have authority in those areas where decisions must be made regarding the everyday affairs of the church. In 1 Corinthians 14:40, Paul commanded, “***But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way.***” The apostle is here addressing order in the worship services of the church. Overseers surely have the authority to decide how worship is done in a fitting and orderly way.

Another area where overseers must take the lead is in the withdrawing of fellowship from those who walk disorderly (2 Thess. 3:6). Since overseers “watch over our souls,” Christians who abandon the faith must be confronted and convicted of their error. Paul clearly places this responsibility on the overseers of the church (Titus 1:9-11).

A third area where overseers should provide guidance is in the usage of funds from the church treasury. When the church at Antioch decided to send funds to help relieve the famine in Judea, they sent them to the elders of the church (Acts 11:30). It is important at this time to point out that overseers are to provide OVERSIGHT. While such may sound obvious, there is a big difference between leaders who oversee and leaders who do everything. It is imperative that overseers recruit additional help in the work and ministry of the church. Such help should come from deacons, teachers and evangelists. By turning ministries over to these leaders, the overseers will be able to provide adequate oversight of all the ministries of the church.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How much “hands on” work does a foreman do at a building sight? What implications does that have for the work of overseers in the church?
2. What likely was the responsibility of the overseers who directed the repairs of the Temple in 2 Chronicles 34:12, 17?
3. How does one determine which areas in the church’s work should overseers have authority?
4. Why can the whole church not make decisions regarding such things as finances, worship services, withdrawal of fellowship, etc.? What involvement should the whole church have in these areas?
5. What is the difference between “oversight” and “lording it over”? For what characteristics should a church look to distinguish a difference?

LESSON EIGHT

“THE WORK OF THE SHEPHERD”

Objective: to examine the nature and work of shepherds in the church of God.

Lesson Text: 1 Peter 5:1-4

INTRODUCTION

Shepherding is an occupation about which most Americans are unfamiliar. While ignorance of the profession has little bearing on everyday life at home, work or school, it has a significant effect upon our lives in the church. Throughout the Bible, both God’s relationship with His people and the church’s relationship with her leaders are defined by the concepts and principles of shepherding. In fact, one of the most dear and memorable passages in all the Bible begins with these words, “The Lord is my shepherd ...” (Ps. 23:1).

In Ephesians 4:11, Paul wrote by inspiration, “*It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers.*” The Greek word translated “pastors” is “poimen” and would be better translated “shepherds.” Many in the denominational world have applied this term to the work of the local minister. However, in the New Testament, pastors, shepherds, elders, bishops and overseers are all interchangeable terms for the same ministry—the spiritual oversight of the church of God.

Why has the 23rd Psalm endeared itself to the hearts of so many people down through the ages?

Why is it important to use Biblical terms for the various ministries in the church? For example, does it make any difference if the term “pastor” is applied to the preacher instead of to elders?

BIBLE STUDY

The concept of shepherd is used extensively in the Bible as a description of God and His care for His people. He is called the “*Shepherd of Israel*” in the Psalms (Ps. 77:20; 80:1). Zechariah prophesied about Jesus being struck as the shepherd and his sheep being scattered (Zech. 13:7; Mk. 14:27). The author of Hebrews calls Jesus “*that great shepherd of the sheep*” (Heb. 13:20) while Peter described the Lord as the “*shepherd and overseer*” of our souls (1 Pet. 2:25).

Ezekiel foresaw God’s bringing Israel back from captivity as a shepherd searches and brings home the sheep that go astray. “*As a shepherd looks after his scattered flock when he is with them, so will I look after my sheep. I will rescue them from all the places where they were*

scattered on a day of clouds and darkness. I will bring them out from the nations and gather them from the countries, and I will bring them into their own land. I will pasture them on the mountains of Israel, in the ravines and in all the settlements in the land. I will tend them in a good pasture, and the mountain heights of Israel will be their grazing land. There they will lie down in good grazing land, and there they will feed in a rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. I myself will tend my sheep and have them lie down, declares the Sovereign LORD. I will search for the lost and bring back the strays. I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak, but the sleek and the strong I will destroy. I will shepherd the flock with justice” (Eze. 34:12-16).

Why would God use shepherd terminology to describe His relationship with Israel?

Do you ever think of Jesus as a shepherd watching and caring for you?

In addition to God, Israel’s leaders were often viewed as shepherds, charged with the care of the people. Unfortunately, Israel’s shepherds did not always fulfill their responsibilities in caring for the people. Both Jeremiah and Ezekiel bring serious charges against the spiritual shepherds of Israel:

“Woe to the shepherds who are destroying and scattering the sheep of my pasture!’ declares the LORD. Therefore this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says to the shepherds who tend my people: ‘Because you have scattered my flock and driven them away and have not bestowed care on them, I will bestow punishment on you for the evil you have done,’ declares the LORD” (Jer. 23:1-2).

“Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy and say to them: ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Woe to the shepherds of Israel who only take care of themselves! Should not shepherds take care of the flock? You eat the curds, clothe yourselves with the wool and slaughter the choice animals, but you do not take care of the flock. You have not strengthened the weak or healed the sick or bound up the injured. You have not brought back the strays or searched for the lost. You have ruled them harshly and brutally. So they were scattered because there was no shepherd, and when they were scattered they became food for all the wild animals. My sheep wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill. They were scattered over the whole earth, and no one searched or looked for them” (Ezek 34:2-6).

God is very serious about the work of shepherding His flock. The Hebrew author explains why, *“Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account” (Heb. 13:17).* One day, every shepherd will give an account to God of how he “watched over” the flock under his care.

What were the shepherds of Israel doing to bring such a strong rebuke from God?

Instead of taking advantage of the flock, what specific things were the shepherds of Israel expected to do?

In the New Testament, the concept of shepherds as leaders of the church is found in several passages. Paul encouraged the Ephesian elders to be “shepherds of the church of God” (Acts 20:28). Later, Paul would write to the church at Ephesus, explaining that shepherds (pastors) have been given to the church by Jesus so that the church might be equipped and built up in the faith.

The most significant passage about the work of the shepherds is found in 1 Peter 5:1-4. Here Peter identified himself as an elder and shepherd of the church of God and encouraged his fellow shepherds to look to the chief shepherd—Jesus Christ.

“To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ's sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed: Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers-- not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.”

In the Gospel of John, Jesus identifies himself as the good shepherd (Jn. 10:11). He goes on to describe what the good shepherd does. Shepherds in the church today would do well to examine and follow the example of the Good Shepherd as Jesus described his ministry in John 10. Among the things a good shepherd does are:

- (1) He is sacrificial. Jesus said, ***“The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep”*** (Jn. 10:11). The work of shepherding demands time, talent and devotion to the church of God. It is a full-time job.
- (2) The shepherd knows his sheep. ***“I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me”*** (Jn. 10:14). For shepherds to minister to the spiritual needs of the flock, it is imperative that they know the members of the church and that the members know them well-enough to entrust to them their spiritual care.
- (3) The shepherd feeds the sheep. While evangelists often preach the word in our assemblies, shepherds must be able and ready to teach and must safeguard the congregation from false teachings (Titus 1:9).
- (4) Shepherds reach out and care for the injured and wounded. One of the shepherds primary responsibilities is to seek the sheep that go astray and to help in the healing process of those sheep that are wounded (Lk. 15:4; James 5:14).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why would David risk his life in combat with a lion to defend his sheep (1 Sam. 17:34-36)?
2. What duties are listed in Ezekiel 34:1-4 for shepherds in the care of their flocks?
3. Is it right for one group of people in the church to be responsible for the spiritual well-being of another group (Heb. 13:17)?
4. If shepherds “shepherd” the flock of God, who then should shepherd the shepherds?

LESSON NINE

“THE WORK OF DEACONS”

Objective: to examine the nature and work of deacons in the church of God.

Lesson Text: Acts 6:1-6; Philippians 1:1

INTRODUCTION

Few ministries are as misunderstood in the religious world today as the work of deacons in the church of God. It is not unusual in many denominations to hear the word “deacon” applied to those who serve in the New Testament role of elders. In fact, many in our congregations often see deacons as something of a “junior elder.” While deacons may at some point be selected to serve as shepherds of the church of God, the work and responsibility of the deacon is vastly different from that of elders.

The ministry of deacons is clearly established in the New Testament. Paul addressed his epistle to the Philippian church “*together with the overseers and deacons*” (Phil. 1:1). After having given the qualifications for both elders and deacons, Paul further stated to Timothy, “Although I hope to come to you soon, I am writing you these instructions so that, if I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth (1 Tim. 3:14-15). However, while the ministry and qualifications of deacons are clearly taught in the New Testament, there is much we don't know about the nature and extent of their work. It appears that God gives the church great liberty in using “special servants” to fulfill the need of leadership in the various works the church may find itself doing.

What preconceptions do you have about the work and ministry of deacons?

Since all Christians should be servants, why would God ordain the appointment of “special servants” in specific instances?

BIBLE STUDY

The Greek word for deacon is “diakonos.” Our English word is a transliteration of the Greek which sometimes fosters inaccurate concepts of the work of deacons. The Greek word simply means “a servant” and is used extensively throughout scripture to describe both the work of Jesus and the service all Christians should render in the Kingdom (Mt. 20:28; Jn. 12:26).

Just like the word for elders, however, there is both a generic and specific application of the word “servant.” On the one hand, while there are ministries in which all Christians can serve, there are special ministries that require more mature Christians to lead. Such was the case in the church at Jerusalem in Acts 6.

“In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Grecian Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, ‘It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word.’ This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism. They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them” (Acts 6:1-6).

It was not the case that Christians were not available to handle this specific need. Instead, because of the nature of the ministry, the apostles authorize the church to choose men that everyone respected and that met certain qualifications to whom the apostles would turn over this special ministry. While the term “deacon” is not found in this text, the words “to wait on” is the verb form of “diakonos.” These men were the first “special servants” of the church at Jerusalem.

What happens to a ministry when no one is specifically responsible for its administration?

To whom did the apostles assign the responsibility of choosing the seven?

Why is congregational involvement so important in leadership decisions?

While the qualifications of deacons are clearly found in 1 Timothy 3, the ministry of deacons is extremely vague except for the possible exception of Acts 6. As was said in the introduction, God seems to give the church great liberty to appoint deacons wherever the need may arise for mature Christian leaders. Since the Word of God was to go into all the world, different cultures might find different needs for special leadership.

After the apostolic age, church history tells us that deacons were used in a variety of tasks. Like the seven in Acts 6, deacons were responsible for the benevolent work of the church and for the ministry to widows. Because these ministries involved the usage of the church treasury, deacons were also the financial officers of the early church. During the early days of the Restoration Movement in the 1800’s, the church treasurer and the work of deacon were often interchangeable. Additional ministries of deacons in the early church included assisting in the worship of the church and in baptizing new converts. Specifically, deacons were assigned the task of taking communion to the sick and aged.

Deacons in the church today fulfill many of the same functions that we read about in church history. A good guide for where deacons should serve is found in Acts 6:4. Deacons should

serve in any area that will free elders to fulfill their function as overseers of the flock and that will free evangelists to fulfill their role as preachers of the Word (2 Tim. 4:2). A church should have as many deacons as there are ministries available for them to lead.

A common misconception of the work of deacons is that elders oversee the spiritual well-being of the church while deacons are responsible for the physical concerns of the church. While the elders do have the spiritual oversight of the church, deacons are often involved in spiritual matters from directing educational programs, to leading in worship to visiting and caring for the sick. We must be careful not to define the work of deacons too narrowly.

How long should a person serve as a deacon? Is a person still a deacon who has ceased leading a ministry?

What freedoms does a church have in assigning ministries and determining length of service?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Since all Christians serve, why did God see the need for appointing “special servants” within the church?
2. Would the church approach the work of deacons differently if we called them “special servants” instead of “deacons”?
3. In addition to waiting on tables, what else did the “special servants” at Jerusalem do (Acts 6:8; 8:5)?
4. How can the church avoid “life-time” appointments? Can someone serve as a deacon who is not leading in a specific ministry? How can the church avoid these difficulties?
5. Who should hold the deacons responsible for their specific ministries?

LESSON TEN

“THE QUALIFICATIONS OF DEACONS”

Objective: to examine the qualifications and character traits of deacons in the church of God.

Lesson Text: 1 Timothy 3:8-10, 12-13

INTRODUCTION

That the church should have qualified men serving as elders and deacons is a Biblical given. The qualifications of 1 Timothy 3 are not optional. Neither should the qualifications be taken lightly. Churches that see these qualifications as mere guidelines, and not requirements, do the church a grave disservice. God needs mature Christians leading the various ministries of the church.

On the other hand, meeting the qualifications of scripture does not mean that a deacon must be “perfect” in these areas. If perfection is required of all those who lead the church, then no church would have leaders. Instead, common sense dictates that these qualifications be taken seriously, but that, at the same time, spiritual growth be allowed in areas where one is weak. One does not have to achieve perfection in order to be a deacon any more than one has to achieve perfection in order to be a Christian.

What is wrong with the concept, “Well, he may not be qualified, but he’s the best we have”?

What efforts should be taken by a church to ensure the knowledge of what qualifications God demands of those who would lead His church?

BIBLE STUDY

The qualifications of deacons are found in 1 Timothy immediately following the qualifications of elders.

“Deacons, likewise, are to be men worthy of respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine, and not pursuing dishonest gain. They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience. They must first be tested; and then if there is nothing against them, let them serve as deacons ... A deacon must be the husband of but one wife and must manage his children and his household well. Those who have served well gain an excellent standing and great assurance in their faith in Christ Jesus” (1 Tim. 3:8-10, 12-13).

The first two qualifications of deacons are “worthy of respect” and “sincere.” The KJV translates these words as “grave” and “not double-tongued.” These two qualifications address the character of those who would serve as deacons.

The first qualification is that a deacon must be “worthy of respect.” Vine states that “No English word exactly conveys the meaning of “semnos” which combines the thoughts both of gravity and dignity.” This does not mean that deacons must go around with a frown on their face or a strut in their walk. Instead, to be worthy of respect is to take ones responsibilities seriously and to demonstrate a dedication to the ministry and service of God.

The word “sincere” literally means in the Greek “not double-tongued.” This describes someone who says what others want to hear and is inconsistent both in life and word. Because deacons often work with large numbers of people, they must be sincere and free from accusations of being two-faced. Their word must be their bond.

Why is “respect” so important for those who serve in leadership positions?

How can a Christian gain the “respect” of the congregation?

In what circumstances might a deacon be prone to be “double-tongued”?

What effect would an unbridled tongue have upon a local congregation?

The next two qualifications describe attitudes towards alcohol and money—“***not indulging in much wine, and not pursuing dishonest gain.***” Drunkenness is condemned throughout the Bible. The Wise Man of old warned, “Do not gaze at wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup, when it goes down smoothly!” (Prov. 23:31). Paul later urged the Ephesians, “***Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit***” (Eph. 5:18). It is imperative that those who lead in the local church be free from the influences of alcohol. The Christian who is worthy of respect will go even further, avoiding its very appearance.

“***Not pursuing dishonest gain***” is of special importance due to the work of many deacons with the church treasury. Whether it is maintaining the facilities of the church or distributing aid to the poor, the church must be able to trust those who will be using the Lord’s money. Paul would later write in this epistle, “***For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs***” (1 Tim. 6:10). The deaconship is not the place for someone who is incapable of handling money wisely and honestly.

What effect does alcohol have on ones ability to make good decisions (Prov. 31:4-5)?

What safeguards can be taken to insure that deacons are not entrapped by the deceitfulness of riches?

The fifth qualification demands that deacons “***keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience.***” There are two important aspects to this qualification. First, deacons must be

grounded in the faith. They must be men who are knowledgeable of God's Word and committed to its truths (2 Tim. 2:15). This would exclude those who were recent converts or who have never matured after obeying the Gospel.

Secondly, deacons must demonstrate a "clear conscience." This refers to someone who has realized the cleansing power of the blood of Jesus and who is striving to walk in the light as He is in the light. The Hebrew author wrote, "***let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water***" (Heb. 10:22). This describes the spiritual nature of those who would serve as deacons. Then again, it should describe the spiritual condition of every Christian.

The next qualification is that deacons must "***first be tested; and then if there is nothing against them, let them serve as deacons.***" One who has never proven himself ought never to be appointed to a leadership position. Men who are qualified to be elders will have demonstrated their care for the flock long before they are appointed to the position. The same is true of deacons. If a man has not demonstrated an ability to fulfill the function to which he is being assigned, he has no business being appointed. Like elders, deacons must have the support of the congregation—***if there is nothing against them***—or they should not serve.

Finally, deacons should prove their leadership skills by demonstrating godly leadership in the home. "***A deacon must be the husband of but one wife and must manage his children and his household well.***" The home is the training ground both for elders and deacons. If deacons cannot "manage" their own household well, how will they be able to lead the various ministries in the church of God.

Paul concludes his qualifications of deacons with this wonderful promise, "***Those who have served well gain an excellent standing and great assurance in their faith in Christ Jesus***" (1 Tim. 3:13). What a fitting tribute to those who serve God's church!

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What can a church do to prepare men to fulfill the ministry of deacons?
2. What should be done if a charge is brought against a potential deacon?
3. What traits does one use in the church that would first be demonstrated in the home?
4. How often should deacons be appointed in a church?
5. Why are deacons sometimes reluctant to step down even though they no longer lead in a ministry area?
6. How are the qualifications of deacons and elders different?

LESSON ELEVEN

“THE RESPONSIBILITY AND WORK OF THE EVANGELIST”

Objective: to examine the responsibility and work of the evangelist in the church of God.

Lesson Text: Ephesians 4:11-13; 2 Timothy 4:5

INTRODUCTION

While extensive writing has been done on the qualifications and work of elders and, to a lesser extent, on the work of deacons, very little has been done on the work of the evangelist. In fact, often the evangelist is excluded when someone is describing the Biblical pattern of church leadership. However, the New Testament makes no such exclusion. In Ephesians 4:11-13, evangelists are listed behind apostles and prophets and along with shepherds and teachers as those whom Jesus gave to the church ***“to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.”***

One of the reasons why evangelists are neglected in a study of church leadership is the absence of qualifications of evangelists in the New Testament. Unlike the roles of elders and deacons, we have to glean the qualifications and roles of evangelists from various places throughout the New Testament. The most important source is the books of 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus. Both Timothy and Titus were evangelists in the early church and these books describe the work Paul expected them to carry out in their ministries. In one instance, Paul tells Timothy, ***“But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry”*** (2 Tim. 4:5). To Titus, Paul wrote, ***“The reason I left you in Crete was that you might straighten out what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town, as I directed you”*** (Titus 1:5).

What titles have we used in the church in the place of the word “evangelist”?

What effect does the absence of a specific title have on that particular ministry? For example, if we use exclusively the title “elder,” will it have any effect upon the ministry of elders?

What has contributed to the exclusion of evangelists in the leadership structure of some churches?

BIBLE STUDY

The word “evangelist” is derived from a Greek word meaning “to share the good news.” It is from the same root as the word for “gospel,” which means “good news.” In Ephesians 4, it is evident that an evangelist’s work is primarily concerned with the preaching of the Word of God. With the end of the apostolic age, it became the responsibility of evangelists to carry on the ministry of the Word (Acts 6:2). Only two specific examples of men being called evangelists are found in the New Testament.

After his work as one of the “special servants” in the church at Jerusalem, Philip went up to Samaria where he preached the Gospel for the first time to the Samaritan people. Later, he was sent by the Holy Spirit to an Ethiopian eunuch who was on his way home. After studying with him from the book of Isaiah, he baptized him into Christ. Philip later preached up the coast of the Mediterranean sea until he arrived in Caesarea where he settled to live. Many years later when Paul visited him, he is referred to as “Philip the evangelist.”

Can men serve in dual roles in the church? For example, can one be both an evangelist and an elder or an evangelist and a deacon (1 Pet. 5:1)?

From the example of Philip, did an evangelist primarily work among the lost or the saved?

The only other reference to this ministry is found when Paul encouraged Timothy to do the work of an evangelist in 2 Timothy 4:5. However, knowing that Timothy was a New Testament evangelist allows us to study his ministry as a means of discovering the characteristics and work of evangelists.

Paul’s first epistle to Timothy was written while the young preacher was working with the church at Ephesus. Paul tells Timothy clearly why he is writing his letter, “***Although I hope to come to you soon, I am writing you these instructions so that, if I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God’s household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth***” (1 Tim. 3:14-15). A quick survey of 1 Timothy reveals that Timothy’s primary role was to teach the Christians at Ephesus how they were “***to conduct themselves in God’s household.***” Timothy’s role included everything from the training of leadership to the establishment of ministries for the widows to instructions about worship and godly living. Paul would summarize Timothy’s work in his second epistle, “***Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage-- with great patience and careful instruction***” (2 Tim. 4:2).

It is apparent from a study of the ministries of both Philip and Timothy that evangelists have responsibilities both inside and outside the church. They fulfill the roles of preaching the “good news” to those who are lost and of instructing those who are converted to the Lord. They are to be especially involved in the training of future leaders in the church, “***And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others***” (2 Tim. 2:2).

Evangelists join with elders in the responsibility of protecting the church against false teachers. It is the evangelist who sometimes must rebuke an elder who has sinned and brought reproach upon the church (1 Tim. 5:19-20; Acts 20:30).

As for the qualifications for an evangelist, unlike the responsibilities of elders and deacons, the work of the evangelist is much more narrowly focused in the ministry of the word. Also, there appears to be no family requirements regarding evangelist such as being married and having children. On the other hand, an evangelist should meet most of the other qualifications found for elders and deacons. Obviously, young evangelist will not have the age requirement elders have, but they should exhibit a level of spiritual maturity that will serve as an example to other Christians. Of Timothy, Paul stated, “set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity” (1 Tim. 4:12).

Evangelists have the special privilege of presenting the Word of God to others. Because of this solemn obligation, it is imperative that preachers be allowed the time to study and meditate upon the Word of God. Unfortunately, the religious world has often been more influential in establishing the responsibilities of evangelists than has the Bible. Just as elders need to be allowed to shepherd the flock, free from the work and ministry which deacons should fulfill, so should evangelists be allowed to fulfill their ministry and not be expected to do the work of elders and deacons.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What effect does it have on ministry to refer to evangelists in such specific roles as “pulpit minister” or “youth minister”?
2. According to God’s Word, who should minister to the sick of the congregation (James 5:14)? Why are ministers the ones usually called during times of sickness?
3. How important is the support of the eldership when an evangelist must preach on a difficult topic? What can the eldership do to indicate to the church their support of the evangelist?
4. How important is education to the training of evangelists? What role have our Christian schools played in this preparation?
5. How can elders and evangelists work together to maintain a healthy relationship in the ministry of the church?
6. What roles, in addition to preacher, should an evangelist fulfill in the local church?

LESSON TWELVE

“LEADERSHIP AND THE ROLE OF WOMEN”

Objective: to examine the New Testament’s teaching about the role of women in the leadership of the Church.

Lesson Text: 1 Timothy 3:11; Romans 16:1

INTRODUCTION

Questions regarding the role of women in the church and, especially in leadership positions, are a hot topic in today’s church. Questions arise regarding women serving on church staffs, being involved in selection committees, participating in various aspects of worship services, etc. While this subject is too broad to be studied in one lesson, maybe some needed questions can be answered and additional ones raised for examination at a later date. The following material is from a book by James D. Bales entitled The Deacon and His Work. In one of the chapters, brother Bales examines the role of women in the work and service of the church. As with brother McGarvey, you will not agree with everything brother Bales presents, but you will be challenged to diligently study God’s Word regarding these matters.

In the midst of the presentation of the qualifications of deacons, Paul said, “*Women in like manner must be grave, not slanderers, temperate, faithful in all things*” (1 Tim. 3:11). Does this refer to an office of deaconess? The scriptures make it clear that there were women who served the church; thus although no woman was an apostle, or elder, or public preacher, women could do something in addition to being silent in the assembly of the saints (1 Cor. 14:33-35; compared with 14:28, 29, 30). The qualifications of the women in 1 Timothy 3:11 are qualifications that every woman ought to have; but there are many Christians who are immature, and Paul demands that these women who serve the church should possess these qualifications.

Paul is not discussing women in general, any more than he is discussing men in general in 1 Timothy 3. Chrysostom, in the fourth century said, “Some have thought that this is said of women generally, but it is not so, for why should he introduce anything to interfere with his subject? He is speaking of those who serve as deaconesses ... for that order is necessary and useful and honorable in the Church.”

There were women servants of the church, but was there an office of deaconess, as there was an office of deacon? Who were the women of 1 Timothy 3:11?

WIVES OF DEACONS? The King James translation identifies these women as the wives of the deacons. They assumed this evidently because they were mentioned in the midst of the qualifications of deacons. And some have thought that the wives of deacons were deaconesses; that a man to be qualified had to have a wife who qualified as a deaconess.

It has been asked why the qualifications of wives of deacons are mentioned, but qualifications of the wives of elders are omitted—except by implication, since they were to be in subjection to their husbands (1 Tim. 3:5); just as the deacons' wives also were to be in subjection (1 Tim. 3:12). Thus here the same thing is implied about the wives of the deacons and of the elders. It may be, if reference is to the wives of the deacons, that since the deacons would be involved, among other things, in helping the sick and the poor, it would be important for their wives to accompany them. In some countries, the wives were secluded, and only a woman servant of the church would be able to see them. Then, too, in any society it would be important that a deacon's wife be with him when he visited a home; especially if there was no man of the house present. Thus, the qualifications of the wives were such as fitted in with the work of their husbands. It will be observed that there is no special reference to domestic duties of the wives; but rather to qualifications that would have enabled them to assist their husbands in their work.

However, would not the wives of the elders be important in visiting with them in the homes of members of the church; especially with reference to visits with women whose husbands were not members of the church? Would they not have to visit the women, instead of the men visiting them?

However, the author is not convinced that it can be proved that these women were the wives of the deacons; or at least, that this is confined to the wives of deacons. First, the Greek word which is used is "women," not wives. If Paul had meant wives, it would have been easy to use the word for "wives"; in fact, he used the word "wife" in the next verse. Second, when Paul introduced his discussion of the women he said: "women in like manner. . ." Is he not speaking of a distinct class, just as he is speaking of a distinct class when he introduced the discussion of deacons? Third, Paul goes on, after the reference to the qualification of "women," to mention the wife of the deacon. "***Let deacons be husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well***" (1 Tim. 3:12). If the women in verse eleven referred to their wives, this would have been a clear statement that deacons were married men. Why, then, repeat in verse twelve the requirement that deacons be married? Fourth, if these women were deacons' wives, it would still follow that some special work is being discussed here, and some special women—women who met these qualifications—were being designated for this special work.

However, it could be a sufficient reply to this that the deacons themselves were not necessarily full time in their special work as deacons; nor that they were to devote all of their spare time to their work. For they, too, have family responsibilities. Christian women, including the wives of deacons, would have duties to help the poor and needy as they have opportunity. No one is exempt from responsibilities outside the home just because they have responsibilities in the home. While it is doubtless true that a wife with several small children does not have as much time as she will have when they are grown and out on their own, yet she, too, should do something beyond the borders of the home.

It would be important that the wives of both the elders and the deacons be such women as Paul described; even though they did not assist in any direct way with the work which either one of

the officials performed. As the wife of a church official, a woman would become acquainted with many of the problems of the congregation that should not be broadcast. If she did not have a degree of maturity as a Christian, she could become a source of a lot of friction and trouble in the congregation.

OFFICE OF DEACONESS? There are those who maintain that the office of deaconess, alongside the office of deacon, is provided for in the New Testament church. The expression "even so" of verse 11 is the same expression as *likewise* or *in like manner* in verse 8. H. Harvey suggested "*in like manner*," with which this verse begins is the same transitional word that introduces the directions for the deacons. It suggests, in itself, the introduction of a class separate from them; and doubtless the verse was introduced at this point, because the qualifications of the deaconesses formed, as will be seen, a parallel to those required of the deacons in the immediately preceding verses."

Phoebe was a servant of the church that was at Cenchrea. Paul said: "*I commend unto you Phoebe our sister, who is a servant of the church that is at Cenchrea: that ye receive her in the Lord, worthily of the saints, and that ye assist her in whatsoever matter she may have need of you: for she herself also hath been a helper of many, and of mine own self*" (Rom. 16:1-2).

In early church history there are references to deaconesses. Pliny, a pagan, mentioned deaconesses in a letter which he wrote early in the second century to the Emperor Trajan: "I deemed it necessary to put two maidservants who are called deaconesses to the torture in order to ascertain what is the truth." The Apostolic Constitution, Book 3, in the third century said: "Ordain a deaconess who is faithful and holy for the ministries toward the women."

OFFICE OF DEACONESS—NO. While it is true that there were deaconesses in the sense of female servants of the church, there are arguments against the idea of an office equal to that of the office of a deacon. First, Hendriksen suggested that "the fact that no special and separate paragraph is used in describing their necessary qualifications, but that these are simply wedged in between the stipulated requirements for deacons, without clarity indicates that these women are not to be regarded as constituting a third office in the church, the office of 'deaconesses' on a par with and endowed with authority equal to that of deacons." Deacons, it should be observed, have only delegated authority. They are not overseers of the church. Paul, as it were, "parenthesizes the requirements for women-helpers," and Hendriksen concluded that the "simplest explanation of the manner in which Paul, not yet finished with the requirements of the office of deacon, interjects a few remarks about women, is that he regards these women as the deacons' *assistants* in helping the poor and needy, etc. These are women who render auxiliary service, performing ministries for which women are better adapted."

Second, if there is an office of deaconesses, it is strange that it is nowhere clearly stated. Why did not Paul mention it in sending greetings to the church in Philippi? He mentioned bishops and deacons (Phil. 1:1).

If the women in 1 Timothy 3:11 are deaconesses, it is strange that they are not called deaconesses. It would have been as easy for Paul to have used the term deaconesses as to use the term women.

Furthermore, these qualifications are in the midst of the discussion of the deacons, and this seems to indicate—as Wolf suggested—that the women here mentioned "sustained a close relationship to the deacons, and if not a separate class engaged in similar duties, they must have been their wives actively taking part in the official duties of their husbands. In administering alms to sick and dependent females, the deacons would of necessity call to their assistance their own wives, who must accordingly excel in the same virtues prescribed for their husbands."

There is no such clear statement concerning the office of deaconess. Just as women could labor with Paul and assist him in his work without being apostles (Phil. 4:2-3), just so women could labor with the deacons and assist them without being deaconesses who occupied an office.

FEMALE SERVANTS OF THE CHURCH. The author is not convinced that there was an office of deaconess in the church, but it is clear that there were female servants of the church. It is not necessary to prove that there was an office of deaconess in order to prove that there were women whom the church selected to do special work for the church. Thus, it is unnecessary to settle the question as to whether technically there is such an office; for surely there is such work.

There were women who in some way helped the apostle Paul in his work. Paul urged the church in Philippi to help two women who had labored with him in the gospel. "*I exhort Euodia, and I exhort Syntyche, to be of the same mind in the Lord. Yea, I beseech thee also, true yokefellow, help these women, for they labored with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and the rest of my fellow-workers, whose names are in the book of life*" (Phil. 4:2-3). These women were doing the work of the Lord, and it was right for the church to help them.

Churches selected and supported women to do some of the work of the Lord. Thus Paul said, "*I commend unto you Phoebe our sister, who is a servant of the church that is at Cenchrea: that ye receive her in the Lord, worthily of the saints, and that ye assist her in whatsoever matter she may have need of you: for she herself also hath been a helper of many, and of mine own self*" (Rom. 16:1-2). The work which she was doing was not confined to the vicinity of the congregation of which she was a deaconess or servant.

Women may be asked by the elders to serve the church in numerous ways. They may see that the materials are available for the Lord's supper; they can assist women at baptismal services; they can do visitation work; and many other things.

The apostle Paul showed that aged Christian women in general were to possess at least some of the characteristics of the women in 1 Timothy 3:11. The aged women were to be grave in that they were to be reverent in demeanor. They were to teach the young women to be sober-minded (Titus 2:3, 5). The women were not to be slanderers, and neither were the aged women. (Titus 2:3). The women were to be sober, and the aged women were not to be "enslaved to much wine." (Titus 2:3). The women were to be "faithful in all things," and this general description would well describe the aged women.

These aged women were to help train "*the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be sober-minded, chaste workers at home, kind, being in subjection to their own*

husbands: that the word of God be not blasphemed” (Titus 2:4-5). The church needs more servants of this kind.

QUALIFICATIONS OF THE WOMEN. The women who could assist the deacons and do the work which women were better fitted to do, either by training or because of the customs of the day, were to possess certain qualifications. What were these qualifications? First, they were to be grave or dignified. Second, she was not to be a slanderer. This same word is used with reference to aged women, and with reference to men (Titus 2:3; 2 Tim. 3:3). Women servants of the church, more than the other women in the church, would be in a position to learn of many problems about which they might be tempted to gossip. They might learn some things which would tempt them to jealousy, and to slander. Slander reveals evil in one's heart. Every Christian, including the men, needs to guard against that idleness of life and busyness of tongue.

Third, sober or temperate. If taken in its literal sense, Wolf said that it was parallel to "not given to much wine" in verse 8. Certainly, temperate would include this, but also much more. This is the same word as in 1 Timothy 3:2. To be temperate is to keep in hand, to control; and this quality would be essential for wives of deacons, or any other women who served the church.

Fourth, faithful in all things. This would include faithfulness or trustworthiness in every way and in every sphere of her life and work. If she helped to dispense alms, she would not love money so that it stuck to her fingers instead of being used to relieve the poor. She would be conscientious in using it for the purposes for which it had been designated. They would be trustworthy in keeping private those matters which were entrusted to them, and which were of such a nature that they did not need to be known by others. They would be careful in carrying out the instructions and duties which they were given. At the root of such faithfulness, and upholding it, would be their faithfulness to the Lord Jesus Christ. He who really trusts his Lord can be trusted by men, for trust in Christ involves obedience to His will; and this includes trustworthiness.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is the evidence both for and against women serving as deaconesses in the church?
2. What reasons exist that would prohibit women from being appointed to special ministries? Especially those that only women would be appropriate to serve in?
3. Would there be much opposition to “special women servants” if the deacons were simply called “special men servants”?
4. Does the Bible refer to the various positions of leadership as “offices”? What connotations does the word “office” carry?

CHURCH ORGANIZATION AND LEADERSHIP

LESSON THIRTEEN

“SELECTING LEADERS IN THE CHURCH”

Objective: to explore how the church should appoint elders, deacons and ministry leaders.

Lesson Text: Acts 6:1-6; 1 Timothy 3:10; Titus 1:5

INTRODUCTION

The Bible does not tell us how leaders were selected in the early church with the exception of the seven “special servants” in Acts 6 and passing references to the “appointment” of elders in several passages. Even Acts 6 is not clear as to the process of selection. Because of the lack of scriptural instructions regarding details, God has once again left it up to the individual congregation regarding how it will choose and appoint its leaders as long as the process doesn’t violate those principles that are revealed. However, general Biblical principles and common sense should dictate certain procedures in the selection process.

How did the church in which you were reared select its leaders?

Should a church have a clear procedure for how it will select its leaders and who should draw up that procedure?

BIBLE STUDY

Some have believed down through the years that the selection process for elders and deacons is accomplished solely by the Holy Spirit. Paul told the Ephesians elders in Acts 20:28, “***Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.***” It is therefore argued that men simply begin fulfilling the role of whatever position for which they believe they are now qualified. If, however, the Holy Spirit was solely involved in the selection process, why was it necessary for Paul and Barnabas to appoint elders in the churches they had established, which presumably included the church at Ephesus (Acts 14:23). Also, if the selection process is solely under the direction of the Holy Spirit, how is both the individual and the congregation informed that these men are fulfilling their respective roles. To defend the appointment of leaders by the Holy Spirit only seems to overlook too many passages that indicate the church’s involvement in the process.

What would happen to a church in which a person argued that the Holy Spirit had made him an elder while the congregation refused to recognize him or follow him?

The only selection process recorded in the early church is found in Acts 6. ***“In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Grecian Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, ‘It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word.’ This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism. They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them”*** (Acts 6:1-6).

The first principle we find is that the apostles commanded the whole church to ***“choose seven men from among”*** them. It was the church that these men would be serving and, therefore, it was the church that was to choose them. Clement of Rome, writing in the early part of the second century AD confirms the church’s role in choosing leaders. When the church is NOT involved in the process, the church is unlikely to trust both those who did choose and the ones chosen.

Secondly, the apostles laid down the qualifications for those who would fill the positions. We too have the qualifications laid out in scripture for those who would lead the church in its various ministries. It is important that the church honor the Lord’s instructions regarding qualifications.

Thirdly, once the selection was made, the apostles appointed these men to their task. Later in Acts and in the epistles to Timothy and Titus, evangelists fulfill this function. “To appoint” simply means “to ordain” or “officially recognize” ones new ministry.

A fourth principles is found in 1 Timothy 3:10, ***“They must first be tested; and then if there is nothing against them, let them serve as deacons.”*** A process must be in place for dealing with accusations brought against potential leaders in the church. The New Testament nowhere gives us such a process. However, the principles of dealing with problems with a brother would likely need to be applied in these cases (See Mt. 18:15-17).

A final aspect of the selection process of leaders involves the actual appointment process. ***“They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them”*** (Acts 6:6). In Acts 14:23, fasting is added to this list. It would seem a Biblical mandate that men when appointed to leadership positions, be so committed with prayer, fasting and the laying on of hands (a sign of authority and dedication).

A few additional “uninspired” suggested guidelines seem appropriate:

- (1) Process is very important for avoiding difficult situations. It would seem helpful if a process for appointing church leaders could be developed and approved by the entire congregation.

- (2) A means must be developed for ascertaining the congregation's willingness to follow a candidate for a church leadership position. Once again, the Bible gives the local congregation the freedom to develop such a process.
- (3) A process also needs to be developed for ascertaining whether a nominee meets the qualifications laid out in scripture. Some committee consisting of elders and other respected leaders in the church should lead in this process.
- (4) Special prayers, along with fasting, should accompany the appointment process. A church's leadership will determine both the faithfulness and direction of the congregation. It is imperative that God's guidance is sought.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How do most churches choose elders and deacons?
2. When nothing more than an announcement is made regarding new leaders, what attitude regarding the leadership is communicated to the church?
3. If a church is given the right to "appoint" its leaders, is it also given the right to "disappoint" those same leaders if they go astray? If so, how?
4. How can the church prevent petty dislikes from disqualifying good men from leadership positions?
5. How can the church assure that a selection process doesn't degenerate into a popularity contest?