

Notes On
ELDERS AND DEACONS IN THE CHURCH

© By

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ELDERS AND DEACONS IN THE CHURCH

So what are elders and deacons in the church? To some elders sounds like senior citizens, and of course we are all taught to respect our elders. To them grandma and grandpa are elders. Some people even have great grandmas and great grandpas still living. They are truly elders! By which we mean they are really old. Elders are retired people. They live off of social security and maybe pensions from work or savings if they have any. Many elders like to travel to visit their grandkids or friends or relatives. Some elders are snowbirds and fly south during the winter. So maybe it's self evident who elders are. But who it may be asked, are deacons? At first it may be wondered, did someone get the spelling wrong? Do they mean beacons instead of deacons? Or is it just some family's last name? The Deacons!

Well this obviously is taking an absurd look at elders and deacons in the church but we might be surprised at what a lot of people in the church surmise elders and deacons to be. Even major church denominations have meanings for elders and deacons that run true to their heritage, but ring sour when compared to the test of sound Biblical teachings. In order to understand what the Bible teaches about elders and deacons we need first to delve into some Old Testament history.

OLD TESTAMENT MEANING OF ELDERS

The earliest mention of the word elder in the Bible is found in the book of Genesis and actually does refer to those who are older: elder brothers (Genesis 10:21 and 27:15) and an elder sister (Genesis 29:16). But the first mention of elder of interest in this study is recorded in Genesis 50:7. Joseph is honoring his father Jacob by burying him in the land of Canaan. He has received permission from Pharaoh to make the long journey. "So Joseph went up to bury his father, and with him went up all the servants of Pharaoh, the elders of his household, and the elders of the land of Egypt." Why would this entourage go with Joseph to Canaan? This is a display of respect shown to Joseph, in honor of Jacob, by key representatives of Pharaoh's household as well as families throughout Egypt. Joseph was well respected by the Egyptians for his role in saving Egypt from the calamitous famine that struck the world not long before. The elders were the heads of families, clans or tribes representing them at such functions.

These elder representatives likely grew out of family units. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are good examples. Each of them were heads of their families and this kind of male, family leader is frequently referred to as a patriarchal system of rule. In fact Biblical scholars refer to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob collectively as the Patriarchs because God spoke to each one regarding promises he made to their families. Each in their turn represented the family when the former eldest father figure in the family died. Then God spoke to the new head of the household to renew his covenant with them. Patriarchal rule was very common in ancient times and cultures and continues to be so today in many countries of the world.

We do not hear about elders in the Bible again for 400 years. Actually its only a few pages over from Jacob's burial scene, but Bible time can move quite swiftly when nothing much unusual happens for a while. We find Moses being sent back to Egypt by God after learning the shepherding trade for 40 years. By this time family rulers had grown in numbers because we hear God saying to Moses, "Go and gather

the elders of Israel together, and say to them, “Yahweh, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, has appeared to me saying, ‘I am indeed concerned about you and what has been done to you in Egypt. So I said, I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt’” (Exodus 3:16-17). There is no longer one leader of Israel’s family as in Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, but multiple heads of families called elders. Why is this so? namely because the original family has grown considerably. There are more than half a million males over twenty years of age in this family now, not to mention women and children! Even so, the original patriarchal structure remains preserved. And now the heads of families have new names. They are called elders, likely because the eldest male in the family was traditionally the head as in Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. And this basic structure for the nation of Israel remains intact for centuries, right down to the time of Jesus.

ELDERSHIP EXPANDED

Not long after Israel escaped from Egypt Moses’ father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian, visited him and brought Zipporah, Moses’ wife, and their two sons back to him. During the visit Jethro observed Moses spending long hours counseling disputes among the people. Jethro was a wise man observing to Moses, “The thing that you are doing is not good. You will surely wear out” (Exodus 18:17-18). Jethro next lays out a hierarchy of judges to deal with different degrees of difficult cases. He tells Moses, “You be the people’s representative before God, and you bring the disputes to God, then teach them the statutes and the laws, and make known to them the way in which they are to walk, and the work they are to do. Further, you shall select out of the people able men who fear God, men of truth, those who hate dishonest gain; and you shall place these over them, as leaders of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties and of tens. And let them judge the people at all times; and let it be that every major dispute they will bring to you, but every minor dispute they themselves will judge. So it will be easier for you, and they will bear the burden with you. If you do this and God so commands you, then you will be able to endure, and all these people also will go to their place in peace” (Exodus 18:19-23).

At this time God had not yet formally given Moses his Law, but apparently Moses consulted God on disputes brought to him. The process to exact justice was tedious. Jethro saw this instantly. And his counsel was accepted by Moses. The idea was simple to administer, too. Check this strategy out with God, is Jethro’s advice, but “If...God so commands you” your hard life as a judge will greatly diminish. There is no direct statement in scripture telling us God approved the plan but it must have been since Moses implemented it.

Moses was taking all the responsibility on himself. Sound like pastors today? Now he was to become a teacher. What he learned from God he taught these new leaders. They then were to apply their good judgment in resolving the cases brought to them by the people. All the states in the United States have a similar judicial system today. Justices of the Peace hear the most minor cases. They begin to learn the ropes and are tested in their judgment skills as a low level of responsibility before being assigned more difficult cases. The judgment level of difficulty rises from there. Consequently, there are also Traffic Courts, City Courts, Juvenile Courts, Divorce Courts, County Superior Courts, State supreme Courts, Federal Courts and the United States Supreme Court. Each one has a level of difficulty of cases to hear appropriate to its jurisdiction. That is the same kind of arrangement

Moses put into effect for Israel when he set judges over 1,000's, 100's, 50's and 10's. In each situation the level to which one is assigned is measured by the aptitude of the individual in understanding the law and how to make appropriate judgments and decisions in each case.

There were special qualifications for these judges. Jethro suggested they be "able men who fear God, men of truth, those who hate dishonest gain" (v. 21). Sounds like they had graft and bribery problems back then similar to what we continue to experience today! Some things are as old as the hills and never change. These judges will also need to be able to teach just as Moses instructed these men in the application of the law (v. 20), for the time would come when Moses and all these men would no longer be around to judge. Each generation new judges need to arise to take their places. Once selected, they were appointed as "heads over the people, leaders" at various levels of responsibility depending upon their abilities.

But what does all this have to do with elders? Maybe nothing, then again maybe these are the forerunners of a new breed of elders within the ranks of the Israelite community. Just before Israel was to conquer Canaan Moses reviewed the Law with the elders again. It is interesting to note that in several parts of his review he mentions responsibilities of elders as judges. For example, what is to be done "if a slain person is found lying in the open country...and it is not known who has struck him?" The responsibility falls on the elders and judges of the towns nearest the dead body (Deuteronomy 21:1-9). In verse 5 the priests are mentioned concerning their role in such matters. The paragraph seems to end with the words "every dispute and every assault is settled by them." Yet the rest of the text speaks of these duties being performed by elders and judges (v. 2). The priests are probably mentioned specifically for related functions in such matters "to serve (God) and to bless in the name of Yahweh" (v. 5), and to declare and interpret the law to the people. Then the elders carry out the instruction in their daily affairs.

Another situation is referred to in Deuteronomy 22. It addresses a man's concern regarding the truthful virginity of the women he married. The elders are identified as the ones responsible to investigate all evidence to determine the final judgment in the indictment (see vs. 1-21). They are even to administer the punishment (v. 18). Then too, the elders were tagged with the administration of the levirate rule (25:5-10). It is apparent elders had judicial responsibility under the law. Whether all judges were also elders is not firmly discernable, but they seem to be the most likely candidates.

THE GIVING OF THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

During the third month of the Exodus Yahweh God called for all Israel to approach Mount Sinai to hear God himself speak his law to them. To prepare them for this event Moses spoke to the elders. "So Moses came and called the elders of the people, and set before them all these words which Yahweh had commanded them" (Exodus 19:7). The next verse we find the response, "And all the people answered together and said, 'All that Yahweh has spoken we will do!'" (v. 8). The elders must have taken Moses' words back to their own families and groups, received confirmation to commit to do as Yahweh instructed them and sent the elders back to Moses. The elders fulfilled their role as representatives of the people and as ambassadors between God and the people. They communicated the will of God and the will of the people to each other.

After hearing God's voice thunder forth the words of the ten commandments the people were too afraid to stand before Yahweh any more. "They said to Moses, 'Speak to us yourself and we will listen; but let not God speak to us, lest we die'" (Exodus 20:19). The "they" here is more likely the elders of the people speaking to Moses rather than all the people themselves, but it was the voice, the intent, the desire, the longing of the people to relieve them of this awesome and fearful sight. The wishes of the people were communicated through their representatives, the elders.

THE SEVENTY ELDERS

Two years into the Exodus the people of Israel were complaining so much Moses had a constant headache. Even he complained to Yahweh. "So Moses said to Yahweh, 'Why have you been so hard on your servant? And why have I not found favor in your sight, that you have laid the burden of all this people on me?'" (Numbers 11:11). "I alone am not able to carry all this people, because it is too burdensome for me" (v. 14). This problem was not like the role of judge addressed so aptly by Jethro. No, this was a burden for the needs, the daily life of the people enduring the hardship of existence in the desert. This was the role of a shepherd, a position Moses learned well. The people grew tired of the manna God provided. They complained about the loss of all the good food they used to enjoy in Egypt. They murmured, "We remember the fish which we used to eat free in Egypt, the cucumbers and the melons and the leeks and the onions and the garlic, but now our appetite is gone. There is nothing at all to look at except this manna" (vs. 5-6). Their complaints wore Moses down. His care for the sheep weighed heavy upon him. He was wearied by their incessant bickering. It is so intense that Moses makes his own heart cry to Yahweh, "Was it I who conceived all this people? Was it I who brought them forth, that you should say to me, 'Carry in your bosom as a nurse carries a nursing infant, to the land which you did swear to their fathers?'" (v. 12). He would rather die than live on like this (v. 15). Sound like problems faced by our pastors / elders today?

Yahweh heard the pleading of Moses' heart. So he said to him, "Gather for me seventy men from the elders of Israel, whom you know to be the elders of the people and their officers and bring them to the tent of meeting, and let them take their stand with you. Then I will come down and speak with you there, and I will take of the spirit (which) is upon you, and will put (it) upon them; and they shall bear the burden of the people with you, so that you shall not bear it all alone" (Numbers 11:16-17). Moses got his wish. And he couldn't be more excited. For "it came about that when the spirit rested upon them, they prophesied. But they did not do it again" (v. 25). Sound like shades of the day of Pentecost and the beginnings of the church? It also seems there were two other men registered among the seventy but had not joined the others at the meeting place. Even so, the spirit rested on them as well and they prophesied (vs. 26-27). Joshua, being very protective of Moses' authority, thought this behavior quite inappropriate. But Moses was thrilled. "Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all Yahweh's people were prophets, and that Yahweh would put his spirit upon them!" (v. 29).

The number of seventy select men appears twice more but this time in the New Testament. Even before Jesus was born the Jews had created a body of ruling men called the Council or the Sanhedrin, meaning seventy. It is possible God's

original call for seventy select elders to help carry Moses' burden inspired this new group some time after the return of many Jews from captivity to once again inhabit the promised land. This group had a falling out with Yahweh when they voted to condemn to death God's anointed one, Jesus of Nazareth. The Sanhedrin dispersed after the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple in 70 A.D.

The other group of seventy were disciples of Jesus, ones he personally selected. "Now after this the Lord appointed seventy others, and sent them two and two ahead of him to every city and place where he himself was going to come" (Luke 10:1). God's message of the coming kingdom of God and the need for people to repent needed advance notice to maximize the effectiveness of Jesus' ministry. It also prepared the disciples for the work they would do once Jesus ascended to heaven to be with his Father. These men were followers of Jesus – disciples. There is no specific indication they were chosen from among the elders of Israel, but some of them could have been. Some were rather young, like James and John, to have been considered elders in the normal Jewish way of thinking. More specifically these seventy disciples could be called apostles, sent out ones, because they were sent out by Jesus to prepare his way to visit new cities. They were sent out just like the original twelve apostles were sent out.

Other Old Testament texts further reinforce the prominent role of leadership the elders play among the Israelites throughout their history. Some examples are presented below:

LEADERS OF ISRAEL HEARING THE LAW READ

And all Israel with their elders and officers and their judges were standing on both sides of the ark.

Joshua 8:33

JOSHUA'S LAST WORDS

Joshua called for all Israel, for their elders, and their heads, and their judges and their officers.

Joshua 23:2

FAITHFUL ELDERS

Israel served Yahweh all the days of Joshua and all the days of the elders who survived Joshua and had known the deeds of Yahweh which he had done for Israel.

Joshua 24:31

CHASTISED FOR POOR JUDGMENT

The youth wrote down for (Gideon) the princes of Succoth and its elders. (Gideon) took the elders of the city... and he disciplined the men of Succoth with them.

Judges 8:14, 16

LEVIRATE RULE

(Boaz) took ten men of the elders of the city and said, "Sit down here." So they sat down. And all the people who were in the court (gate), and the elders, said, 'We are witnesses.'

Ruth 4:2, 11

DEMAND A KING

Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah; and they said to him, 'Behold, you have grown old, and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now appoint a king for us to judge us like all the nations.'

1 Samuel 8:4-5

KING SAUL SEEKS RESTORED HONOR WITH THE ELDERS

I have sinned; but please honor me now before the elders of my people and before Israel, and go back with me, that I may worship Yahweh your God.

1 Samuel 15:30

DAVID SENDS SPOILS TO ELDERS

Now when David came to Ziklag, he sent some of the spoil to the elders of Judah, to his friends, saying, 'Behold, a gift for you from the spoil of the enemies of Yahweh.'

1 Samuel 30:26

ANOINT DAVID KING

So all the elders of Israel came to the king at Hebron, and king David made a covenant with them before Yahweh at Hebron; then they anointed David king over Israel.

2 Samuel 5:3

ATTENDED THE ARK TAKEN TO THE TEMPLE

Then Solomon assembled the elders of Israel and all the heads of tribes, the leaders of the fathers' households of the sons of Israel, to king Solomon in Jerusalem, to bring up the ark of the covenant of Yahweh from the city of David, which is Zion.

1 Kings 8:1

KING REHOBAM CONSULTS

And king Rehoboam consulted with the elders who had served his father Solomon while he was still alive, saying, 'How do you counsel me to answer this people?'

1 Kings 12:6

JOSIAH READS THE LAW TO THE ELDERS

Then the king sent, and they gathered to him all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem. And the king went up to the house of Yahweh and all the men of Judah and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem with him, and the priests and the prophets and all the people, both small and great; and he read in their hearing all the words of the book of the covenant, which was found in the house of Yahweh.

2 Kings 23:1-2

ALL HEADS OF ISRAEL SUPPORT REBUILDING THE TEMPLE

Zerubbabel... began to rebuild the house of God which is in Jerusalem. 'Who issued you a decree to rebuild this temple and to finish this structure? (Tattanaï, the governor of the province) Then we told them accordingly what the names of the men were who were reconstructing this building. But the eye of their God was on the elders of the Jews, and they did not stop them until a report should come from Darius, and then a written reply be returned concerning it.

Ezra 5:2-5

POLITICAL REPRESENTATIVES

Then we asked those elders and said to them thus, 'Who issued you a decree to rebuild this temple and to furnish this structure?' 'We are the servants of the God of heaven and earth and are rebuilding the temple that was built many years ago, which a great king of Israel built and finished.' Leave this work on the house of God alone; let the governor of the Jews and the elders of the Jews rebuild this house of God on its site. Moreover, I issue a decree concerning what you are to do for these elders of Judah in the rebuilding of this house of God.

Ezra 5:9, 11; 6:7-8

RECEIVE YAHWEH'S JUDGMENT

Yahweh arises to contend, and stands to judge the people. Yahweh enters into judgment with the elders and princes of his people, 'It is you who have devoured the vineyard; the plunder of the poor is in your houses.'

Isaiah 3:13-14

ELDERS SPEAK IN DEFENSE OF JEREMIAH

Then the officials and all the people said to the priests and to the prophets, 'No death sentence for this man! For he has spoken to us in the name of Yahweh our God. Then some of the elders of the land rose up and spoke to all the assembly of the people... we are committing a great evil against ourselves.'

Jeremiah 26:16-17, 19

ELDERS LEAD PEOPLE INTO IDOL WORSHIP

Son of man, now dig through the wall. Go in and see the wicked abominations that are committed here. All the idols of the house of Israel, were carved on the wall all around. And standing in front were seventy elders of the house of Israel... each man with his censer in his hand. Son of Man do you see what the elders of the house of Israel are committing in the dark?...They say, 'Yahweh does not see us.'

Ezekiel 8-12

WHAT DO WE LEARN ABOUT THE OLD TESTAMENT ELDERS?

The name or title – elder – means an old, aged, elder, ancient man. It probably resulted from the wisdom derived from those with experience. It was an honorary position, one shown respect by the community.

They represented a specific segment of society, originally family oriented. They provided leadership to those they represented.

The position was held by a male. It is hard to find specific examples of females serving as elders in both the Old and New Testament.

During patriarchal days they communed with God and communicated his will.

They were taught God's will.

Some were specifically spirit-filled. All were intended to be God-minded and God committed. They were all spiritually able men who feared God.

They taught God's will to others.

They were shepherds, overseers of the people.

They were decision makers.

They were judges and expected to exercise good judgment.

They provided counsel.

They administered punishment.

They were held accountable for their decisions and actions and could be disciplined.

They were men of truth.

They were among those who hated dishonest gain.

ELDERS OF THE JEWS DURING NEW TESTAMENT TIMES

It is clear from the ministry of Jesus and the history of the early church that the Jewish tradition of elders continued to exist in positions of leadership during Jesus' life. Recall that during this time the Sanhedrin prevailed as the leadership Council among the Jews. It was composed of various groups such as the high priests, the Sadducees, the Pharisees, the scribes/lawyers and of course elders of the Jews. There is reason to believe all of these, in a sense, were considered as elders of the Jews. There were still elders in the local regions of Palestine, and in many parts of the known Roman world, but the main concentration of power presided in Jerusalem in this Council. Elders on this Council, however, strictly speaking, likely came, in large part, from the outlying regions, serving for a time. As a rule they were not "professional" elders appointed to serve on the Council for life. The Sanhedrin may have been created to resemble the seventy elders God instructed Moses to assemble, but the lust for power soon changed the mood and operation of the Council.

We will return to this Council later, but let's first examine the elders in the outlying areas of Palestine. Luke is the only writer to mention these elders by title at length. In his gospel he mentions only one occurrence. A certain centurion in Capernaum sent some Jewish elders asking (Jesus) to come and save the life of his slave. And when they had come to Jesus, they earnestly entreated him, saying, 'He is worthy for you to grant this to him; for he loves our nation, and it was he who built us our synagogue'" (Luke 7:3-5). A god-fearing Gentile, a Roman soldier who made large contributions to the Jews in Capernaum, appealed to the miracle worker Jesus, who was in town, to come heal his servant. He knew the elders well and requested they represent him by appealing to Jesus to come. This is a common elder duty.

The apostle John does not refer to elders in his account of the life of Jesus. Rather he uses the term "the Jews". This can be somewhat confusing because he can mean both the Jewish people as a nation as well as those Jews who are rulers of the Jewish people. And by the rulers John likely means the elders on the council of seventy, and by extension any or all of those members. It may also include any of the select groups represented in the council, for example, the Pharisees. At any rate it is largely easy to distinguish between the two uses of the Jews since those in the council are most often out to find wrongdoing in Jesus' behavior and are those who condemn him to death.

Luke, in his Acts of the Apostles, does not mention Jewish elders in cities outside of Jerusalem. His only exception was written in his gospel for the incident just related above in Capernaum. Instead he, like John, uses the phrase "the Jews". The apostle John used this phrase invariably in his gospel. Both Luke and John use the phrase "the Jews" primarily in two ways. It is used as a generic term to refer to all Israelites, descendants of Abraham, collectively all the people who are Jews. For example, John writes, "The Passover of the Jews was near" (John 2:13). Equally, Luke writes, "We are witnesses of all the things he did in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem" (Acts 10:39).

The other use of the term "the Jews" is when referring to the Jewish leadership. John first refers to this group when they sent a delegation to inquire concerning whom John the Baptist was. "The Jews sent to him priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, 'who are you?'" (John 1:19). This delegation was authorized by the official body of the Jews known as the Council or the Sanhedrin. During Paul's trial before Governor Festus Luke tells us, "the chief priests and the leading men of the Jews brought charges against Paul" (Acts 25:2). Earlier "the high priest Ananias came down with some elders (to governor Felix)... and they brought charges to the governor against Paul" (Acts 24:1). Here we see "the Jews" equated with the elders, meaning the leaders of the Jewish people.

John gives us a definitive connection between the Jews and the Sanhedrin when he tells us about the night time visit of Nicodemus to see Jesus. He writes, "Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews" (John 3:1). "A ruler of the Jews" is descriptive of a member of the Sanhedrin. Later on John notes a meeting of this Sanhedrin in which Nicodemus is present. Officers had been dispatched to take custody of Jesus. When they came to report to "the chief priests and Pharisees," members of the council, "they said to them, 'Why did you not bring him?'" (John 7:45). Nicodemus was in attendance at this meeting. We know it is the same Nicodemus because John writes, "he who came to him before," and that he is part of the council because John further states, "being one of them" (v.

50). The Council is bantering back and forth trying to determine who Jesus is and what to do with him (see vs. 51-52).

Both John and Luke write much about “the Jews” when meaning the rulers of the people. We can most often identify them by their constant questioning and badgering Jesus and the mention often made about them that they were trying to kill Jesus.

At times however the line between the two meanings of “the Jews” gets blurred, and it seems like a smaller body is referred to but not specifically the members of the Council. It is here we run headlong into the local Jewish leaders who incite the rest of the people against Jesus and the apostles. So even though the term elders is not used by Luke and John when referring to Jewish community leaders outside of Jerusalem we have good evidence that when they spoke of antagonists as “the Jews” they were most likely the elders of the people in the local community inciting rejection of Jesus or the apostle’s messages. Here are some examples.

After feeding the five thousand Jesus taught concerning himself in the synagogue at Capernaum saying, “I am the bread of life” (John 6:35, 59). “The Jews therefore were grumbling about him, because he said, ‘I am the bread that came down out of heaven’” (v. 41). A little later these same complainers, again called “the Jews,” “began to argue with one another, saying, ‘How can this man give us his flesh to eat?’” (v. 52). Any of the Jews could have entered into this debate, but the likely vocal ones were the elders.

We are also given specific indication that this is true by Luke when he recorded Paul and Barnabas’ visit to Iconium during their first missionary journey. They entered the synagogue in the town to proclaim the gospel. Acceptance of their message was mixed, as usual. They “spoke in such a manner that a great multitude believed, both of Jews and of Greeks. But the Jews who disbelieved stirred up the minds of the Gentiles, and embittered them against the brethren” (Acts 14:1-2). The apostles persisted in speaking the word of grace. “But the multitude of the city was divided; and some sided with the Jews; and some with the apostles. And when an attempt was made by both the Gentiles and the Jews with their rulers, to mistreat and to stone them, they became aware of it and fled” (Acts 14:4-6). Here the phrase “the Jews with their rulers” reveals that ruling Jews or elders were deeply involved in the mix.

What we can make of this rather tedious analysis is that elders, as a ruling body, both in local regions and towns as well as in a larger, overreaching body, the Sanhedrin, still existed in the time of Jesus and the apostles. That is important to know in our study of elders and deacons in the church because the progenitors of church elders were the natural result of the intimate relationship of early believers with the Jewish community. It is what they knew and lived by either as Jews or god-fearers mainly through the synagogue centers of worship in local areas or the temple and the Sanhedrin as it affected all the Jews. This is to say we can only truly understand and appreciate elder functions in the church by understanding their roots in both the Old Testament times and the new.

NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH ELDERS

Now we are ready to examine the role of elders in the New Testament church. It is usually assumed that elders were always a leading office in the organization of

the church. Yet the first time we actually hear about elders as related to the church is when Saul and Barnabas were sent with a financial gift to help provide the means to buy food during a famine in Judea (Acts 11:27-30) as it affected the saints at Jerusalem (Acts 12:25). The gift was delivered casually it states “to the elders” as if to say, there have always been elders, there never was a time when there were no elders. This event occurred more than a decade following the earthly ministry of Jesus.

The next mention of elders in the church is during Paul’s first missionary journey when he and Barnabas appointed elders in the newly founded churches of Asia Minor. Luke records that “they... appointed elders for them in every church” (Acts 14:23). Some form of leadership would be needed to sustain the work in these new churches in the absence of their founders, Paul and Barnabas. They may not have known it then but it would be several years before Paul would pay them a return visit.

Interestingly, when Paul and Barnabas returned home to Antioch in Syria “They gathered the church together” and “began to report all things that God had done with them and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles” (Acts 14:27). The report was to “the church.” Reference to elders is missing. As we will see elders were usually mentioned on such occasions. Were Paul and Barnabas the only “elders” in the Antioch church? It is possible Luke only referred to the larger body without specifying the presence of elders. At any rate we do not know from this text whether or not there were other elders in Antioch at this time. Luke’s account simply does not say. Earlier when the Antioch church sent Paul and Barnabas out on their journey we learn that there were “prophets and teachers” in the church (five are named – Acts 13:1), but no specific mention of elders as an official office, and among these five both Saul and Barnabas are named.

THE JERUSALEM COUNCIL

The next mention of elders in the church was the result of certain “unauthorized men” from Judea (Acts 15:1, 24) paying a visit to the Antioch church. They wanted to set the Gentile believers straight telling them, “it is necessary to circumcise them (the Gentiles), and to direct them to observe the law of Moses” (v. 5). After some heated debate “the brethren” (supplied in the text) determined to send “Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them” to Jerusalem to resolve this issue with “the apostles and elders” in the Jerusalem church (v. 2). Plainly the Jerusalem church has elders but strangely none are specifically mentioned related to the Antioch church at least by name. When the Antioch delegation arrived they were greeted by the church and the apostles and the elders.” This is the more common way Luke tells about official receptions involving the entire church and why his leaving out any mention of elders at Antioch is unusual.

Now one thing we do learn about this gathering is that the Jerusalem church, as a whole, did not resolve the issue. Rather, “the apostles and the elders came together to look into this matter” (v. 6). The leaders of the two churches made council to hash out the issues. Here “the apostles and the elders” seem to only refer to the Jerusalem leadership as the recognized center of Christian ministry operations at that time. Luke does not provide much detail to conclude otherwise. If the phrase includes representatives from both Antioch and Jerusalem then it is the first mention of elders in the Antioch church. But this appears unlikely.

It is certainly clear that elders were decisive leaders at this conference along with apostles. The weight of evidence to say this phrase means the apostles and elders of the Jerusalem church solely is in the letter they send as official notification from Jerusalem concerning the results of the council. The letter begins, “the apostles and the brethren who are elders, to the brethren in Antioch” (v. 23). The emphasis on elders clearly sides with the Jerusalem church because it is the recognized authoritative head and center of the church at this time, and the letter is from them. Luke captures this idea when he states, “then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men from among them to send to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas” (v. 22). “The apostles and the elders” is tied directly to “the whole church” and not with Paul and Barnabas. Paul and Barnabas are to be accompanied by their (the apostles and elders of the Jerusalem church) choice of delegates who will firmly establish that this letter carries the weight of the central church. An interesting side note in verse 30 is that the Antioch church as a whole receives the letter from Jerusalem. There is no indication of calling the elders specifically as a recognized authoritative body in addition to the congregation, but only the church as a whole was called to receive the message.

All the above is said to make the observation that the leadership at Antioch, the strongest Gentile church at the time, was seemingly composed of apostle(s) (Paul specifically), prophets and teachers. Elders were not specifically mentioned by title. Paul and Barnabas recognized the need for some form of leadership in their newly formed missionary churches, and they appointed elders, the common form of leadership in local Jewish communities. The most likely candidates were Jewish converts who already knew the Old Testament scriptures and especially ones who were already elders in the Jewish community. Unless there really were no suitable Jewish candidates Paul would not likely immediately appoint Gentiles to these positions, unless they were god-fearers who were already trained in the scriptures. Certainly the elders at the Jerusalem church functioned in this council in the traditional manner as was the custom in their culture for centuries. Paul and Barnabas recognized the worth of elder leadership and they acted in that capacity in the Antioch church even though there is no specific scripture stating they were called elders. But what all this seems to say is that elder leadership was probably not a form of leadership unique to the church of God. More likely it was an adaptation of an ancient, well established Jewish tradition now sliding into use by local churches of God.

Luke next tells about Paul and Silas heading out on the second missionary journey to inform the Gentile churches of the Jerusalem council decree (Acts 16:4). Again no specific mention is made of elders at Antioch sending out Paul and Silas. Rather, Luke writes, “Paul chose Silas and departed, being committed by the brethren to the grace of the Lord” (Acts 15:40). But in referring to the decree Luke says, “which had been decided upon by the apostles and elders who were in Jerusalem” (Acts 16:4). Emphasis is on the Jerusalem located apostles and elders who were the recognized authority of this decree.

ELDERS AT THE CHURCH OF EPHESUS

As Paul wraps up his third missionary journey he requests an audience with “the elders of the church” in Ephesus (Acts 20:17). In verse 28 he calls them overseers, a word more reminiscent of their duties. He also calls them shepherds, a

very visual description of the work they were to perform. Obviously, these had been appointed some time after the church was formed. The earliest mention of Ephesus with a body of believers is in Acts 18:19 when Paul stopped there at the end of his second mission trip. He did not stay long but promised to return. He left Priscilla and Aquila to provide further training to these new disciples. We learn of their teaching skills when Luke tells us a dynamic evangelist named Apollos came to town preaching an incomplete message concerning the messiah. "When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately" (Acts 18:26). Both Aquila and Priscilla acted in a way resembling the duties of an elder even though they are not so called here or elsewhere. Interesting that Priscilla, Aquila's wife, is mentioned first in this connection.

When Paul returned to Ephesus he "found some disciples" (Acts 19:1, 7). For the next three years (Acts 20:31) Paul made new disciples in Ephesus, instructing them in the good news message, preparing and appointing some to be elders. So then when he wrapped up his third mission trip he was able to call these elders to hear some parting words of instruction and warning before he set sail for Jerusalem (v. 17). Luke does not specifically say Paul appointed these elders but we already know he had done so before in other churches. And his tone of address to these elders on this occasion was very personal and emotional in nature. There was a very deep seated affection between them.

JERUSALEM ELDERS RECEIVE PAUL'S REPORT

Only one other time does Luke mention church elders in his book of Acts. Paul has arrived back at Jerusalem one last time before being arrested and eventually hauled off to Rome for trial. Luke says, "When we had come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly. And now the following day Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present: (Acts 21:17-18). Paul reported to them "the things which God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry" (v. 19). The Jerusalem elders again acted as agents of the larger Christian community to welcome Paul and to hear and eventually report to their local constituencies all the things accomplished among the Gentiles.

SUMMATION

From these episodes recorded by Luke we learn that Christian church elders performed harmoniously to what were the duties of the elders in the Jewish community. It was quite natural for the apostles to follow and adapt what they already knew from their Jewish heritage. There was no reason to create something new. God did not order up some new ecclesiastical order for the church. It was in the hands of the apostles, and what they saw in how God worked through Israel in the past was what seemed appropriate to them. So they simply adopted and adapted what they already knew.

FORMATION OF A MORE FORMAL ELDER LEADERSHIP

After Paul was released from his first Roman imprisonment he began to consider that the church age may extend beyond his lifetime. Tumultuous times had come upon the church. Soon after his release from this first Roman imprisonment

Caesar Nero burned Rome (64 AD), and in his attempt to deflect persistent accusations that he gave the orders to set it ablaze, Nero began a campaign to slander Christians as the guilty party. He put many of them to death. Two years later the Jews were the persistent pests in the Roman Empire. They rebelled in Jerusalem. A four year war raged ending with the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple and the scattering of all Jews, as well as Christians, to the four winds of the world. He did not know it yet but both Paul and Peter would die at Nero's hands sometime between 67 and 68 AD, before Nero's own death.

Following his death, and the death of the other apostles, leadership of the church would need to flow seamlessly to another generation of leaders. Paul felt an urgent need to solidify how church leadership should function into the future. That is when he wrote to Timothy and Titus regarding elders and other church offices. These written documents could become useful information to key leaders like Timothy and Titus who were told, "the things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, these entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also" (2 Timothy 2:2). Faithful progression through time was becoming the name of the game.

Timothy and Titus were long time trusted companions and fellow-workers with Paul in gospel ministry. Who better to tag responsibly with keeping elder leadership alive and active? So, to help them with this task Paul outlines some key qualifications for those who are willing to accept the responsibility. First listed below are those qualifications common to both the Timothy and Titus texts. The second list shows what is unique and in addition to Titus that is not found in Timothy.

QUALIFICATIONS OF ELDERS (1 TIMOTHY 3:2-7 AND TITUS 1:6-9 COMBINED)

Above reproach

The husband of one wife

Temperate – Not quick-tempered – Self-controlled

Prudent- Sensible

Respectable

Hospitable

Able to teach

Not addicted to wine

Not pugnacious

Gentle

Uncontentious

Free from the love of money – Not fond of sordid gain

Manages his household well – Keeping his children under control

Having children who believe; not accused of dissipation or rebellion

Not a new convert

Must have a good reputation with those outside the church

ADDITIONAL QUALIFICATIONS FROM TITUS 1:6-9 NOT IN 1 TIMOTHY 3:2-7

God's steward – details of this quality is discussed more fully later in the section entitled SLAVE, SERVANT AND STEWARD on page 37 and in the APPENDIX on page 59.

Not self-willed

Love what is good

Just

Devout

Hold fast the faithful word

Able to exhort in sound doctrine; able to refute those who contradict

Provided below are definitions of the Greek words related to the qualifications listed above. Included in each are several texts found elsewhere in scripture using these Greek words or closely related ideas. Some of the texts present a negative trait, meaning it tells what not to do. This is an indirect way to help clarify the meaning by providing the opposite of what is expected.

ABOVE REPROACH – ANEPILEMPTOS – not to be caught anywhere by an antagonist; hence, one in whom there was no just cause for blame; away from any offensive or disgraceful blight or conduct.

Phil. 2:15 that you may prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world,

Col 4:5 Let your forbearing spirit be known to all men. The Lord is near.

1 Thes. 4:11-12 and to make it your ambition to lead a quiet life and attend to your own business and work with your hands, just as we commanded you; so that you may behave properly toward outsiders and not be in any need.

1 Thes. 5:23 Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

THE HUSBAND OF ONE WIFE – MIAS – one (f.); GYNAIKOS – wife or woman; ANER - husband or man, an adult male person; a one-woman man or one-wife husband.

Must be maritally and sexually above reproach.

Gen. 2:24 For this cause a man shall leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and they shall become one flesh.

1 Cor. 7:2 But because of immoralities, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband.

1 Cor. 39 A wife is bound as long as her husband lives; but if her husband is dead, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord.

Eph. 5:21, 22, 28 be subject to one another in the fear of Christ...Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord... So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself;

Col. 3:18-19 Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives, and do not be embittered against them.

Heb. 13:4 Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge.

TEMPERATE – NEPHALIOS – sober, temperate, especially in respect of wine, abstinent; sober in mind, watchful, circumspect. Practice sobriety in the use of wine, here mental sobriety, self-control, balanced judgment, freedom from debilitating excesses or rash behavior. Stable, circumspect, self-restrained, clear-headed; the absence of any personal disorder that would distort a person's judgment or conduct.

Gal. 5:23 gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

Eph. 4:2, 26, 29 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing forbearance to one another in love... BE ANGRY AND yet DO NOT SIN; do not let the sun go down on your anger... Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, that it may give grace to those who hear.

Col. 3:8, 12 But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth... And so, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience;

2 Thes. 3:10-12 For even when we were with you, we used to give you this order: if anyone will not work, neither let him eat. For we hear that some among you are leading an undisciplined life, doing no work at all, but acting like busybodies. Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to work in quiet fashion and eat their own bread.

Jam. 1:19-20 This you know, my beloved brethren. But let every one be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger; for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God.

Jam. 1:26 If any one thinks himself to be religious, and yet does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this man's religion is worthless.

Jam. 5:10-11 As an example, brethren, of suffering and patience, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. Behold, we count those blessed who endured. You have heard of the endurance of Job and have seen the outcome of the Lord's dealings, that the Lord is full of compassion and is merciful.

Titus 2:2 Older men are to be temperate, dignified, sensible, sound in faith, in love, in perseverance.

NOT QUICK TEMPERED – ORGILOS - not soon angry; not prone to anger or being revengeful

Gal. 5:22 But the fruit of the spirit is love, joy peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,

Gal. 6:1-2 Brethren, even if a man is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and thus fulfill the law of Christ.

NOT SELF-WILLED – AUTHADES – to satisfy self; self-complacent; and hence, assuming, presumptuous, self-willed

2 Pet 2:9a, 10 the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation... and especially those who indulge the flesh in its corrupt desires and despise authority. Daring, self-willed, they do not tremble when they revile angelic majesties.

PRUDENT – SOPHRON – sober, of sound mind, sane; used of one who follows sound reason, and restrains his passions; stresses self-control, especially in exercising good judgment, discretion, common sense; sound-minded, discreet, sensible, able to keep an objective perspective in the face of problems or disagreements.

Eph 5:15-17 Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men, but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil. So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

Col. 4:5 Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders, making the most of the opportunity.

Titus 2:2, 6, 12 Older men are to be temperate, dignified, sensible, sound in faith, in love, in perseverance... Likewise urge the young men to be sensible... instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age,

Jam. 1:5 But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all men generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him.

Jam. 3:13, 17 Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom... But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy.

RESPECTABLE – KOSMIOS – good behavior, well ordered, of persons, orderly, well behaved, discreet; associated with prudent; self-control, proper behavior and orderliness; orderly, well-behaved, virtuous; that which causes a person to be regarded as 'respectable' to others.

Col. 4:5 Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders, making the most of the opportunity.

2 Tim 2:21 Therefore, if a man cleanses himself from these things, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified, useful to the Master, prepared for every good work.

HOSPITABLE – PHILODZENOS - given to hospitality, loving strangers

Romans 12:13 contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality.

1 Peter 4:9 Be hospitable to one another without complaint.

Hebrews 13:2 Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it.

ABLE TO TEACH – DIDAKTIKOS – apt to teach, willing, able and fit to teach; capable of teaching.

Col. 3:16 Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

2 Tim 2:24-26 And the Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, and they come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will.

NOT ADDICTED TO WINE – PAROINOS - not given to wine; not beside wine, not sitting long beside wine: also implying that which goes on or takes place beside or over wine; above reproach in use of alcohol; no preoccupied or overindulgence with wine.

1 Cor. 5:11 But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he should be an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler – not even to eat with such a one.

1 Cor. 6:9-10 Or do you not know that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor

effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, shall inherit the kingdom of God.

Gal. 5:21 envyings, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you just as I have forewarned you that those who practice such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.

Eph. 5:18 And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the spirit,

1 Pet. 4:2-4 so as to live the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for the lusts of men, but for the will of God. For the time already past is sufficient for you to have carried out the desire of the Gentiles, having pursued a course of sensuality, lusts, drunkenness, carousals, drinking parties and abominable idolatries. And in all this, they are surprised that you do not run with them into the same excess of dissipation, and they malign you;

NOT PUGNACIOUS – PLEKTES – not a striker, especially not one apt to strike; not a fighter, not bad-tempered, not irritable, not out-of-control individual; plektes suggests a violent person who is prone to physical assault on others.

Gal. 5:20-21 idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissension, factions, envyings, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you just as I have forewarned you that those who practice such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.

Phil 2:14 Do all things without grumbling or disputing;

Col. 3:8 But now you also, put them all aside; anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth.

2 Thes. 3:6-7 Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep aloof from every brother who leads an unruly life and not according to the tradition which you received from us. For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example, because we did not act in an undisciplined manner among you.

2 Tim. 2:24 And the Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged,

Jam. 4:1-3 What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. And you are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures.

GENTLE – EPIEIKEIA – a yielding disposition (contrasted with justice, and approximating to kindness), a tempering of strict justice, correcting its inaccuracies, and supplying its defects with the gentleness and firmness of equity; sweet reasonableness, fairness; considerateness, forbearance; the not insisting on just rights.

Gal. 5:22 But the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,

Gal. 5:23 gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

Gal. 6:1 Brethren, even if a man is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, lest you too be tempted.

Eph. 4:2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing forbearance to one another in love,

Eph. 4:32 And be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.

Eph. 5:2 and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you, and gave himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma.

Phil 4:5 Let your forbearing spirit be known to all men. The Lord is near.

Col. 3:12 And so, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience;

Col. 4:6 Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned, as it were, with salt, so that you may know how you should respond to each person.

2 Cor. 10:1 Now, I Paul, myself urge you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ – I who am meek when face to face with you, but bold toward you when absent!

Jam. 3:17 But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy.

1 Pet. 2:18 Servants, be submissive to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and gentle, but also to those who are unreasonable.

UNCONTENTIOUS – ARAXOS - not a brawler; without battle, and so, with whom no one fights; disinclined to fight, peaceful, peaceable

Gal. 5:22 The fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace...

Eph 4:29 Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, that it may give grace to those who hear.

1 The. 5:13 esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Live in peace with one another.

2 Tim 2:24-25 And the Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance

Titus 3:1-2 Remind them...to be ready for every good deed, to malign no one, to be uncontentious, gentle, showing every consideration for all men.

Heb 12:14 Pursue peace with all men

FREE FROM THE LOVE OF MONEY – NOT FOND OF SORDID GAIN –

AISXROKERDES – Not greedy of filthy lucre; not eager even for dishonorable gain; not love money or be greedy. APHILARGUROS – unavaricious, without covetousness, not greedy of filthy gain. Not money loving. Not fond of or friendly toward silver (coins, money).

Eph. 5:3, 5, 7 But do not let immorality or any impurity or greed even be named among you, as is proper among saints... For this you know with certainty, that no immoral or impure person or covetous man, who is an idolater, has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God... do not be partakers with them.

Col. 3:5 Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry.

1 Tim 6:5-10 and constant friction between men of depraved mind and deprived of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain. But godliness actually is a means of great gain, when accompanied by contentment. For we have brought nothing into the world, so we cannot take anything out of it either. And if we have food and covering, with these we will be content. But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and

some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith, and pierced themselves with many a pang.

2 Tim. 3:2, 5 For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money (the Pharisees are an example – Luke 16:14)... avoid such men as these.

1 Pet. 5:2 shepherd the flock of God among you, not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness;

Heb. 13:5-6 Let your character be free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for he himself has said, "I WILL NEVER DESERT YOU, NOR WILL I EVER FORSAKE YOU," so that we confidently say, "THE LORD IS MY HELPER, I WILL NOT BE AFRAID. WHAT SHALL MAN DO TO ME?"

Jam. 5:1-6 Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries which are coming upon you. Your riches have rotted and your garments have become moth-eaten. Your gold and your silver have rusted; and their rust will be a witness against you and will consume your flesh like fire. It is in the last days that you have stored up your treasure! Behold, the pay of the laborers who mowed your fields, and which has been withheld by you, cries out against you; and the outcry of those who did the harvesting has reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth. You have lived luxuriously on the earth and led a life of wanton pleasure; you have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter. You have condemned and put to death the righteous man; he does not resist you.

A MAN WHO MANAGES HIS HOUSEHOLD WELL – KEEPING HIS CHILDREN UNDER CONTROL WITH ALL DIGNITY – MANAGES – PROHISTEMI –One that ruleth well (KALOS – becomingly, suitably, properly, excellently, aptly) his own house; to cause to stand before, to set over. In N.T. only, intransitive, to stand before, be over, preside; rule as with care and diligence. Manage, lead or care for his household well.

Eph. 6:1-4 Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. **HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER** (which is the first commandment with a promise), **THAT IT MAY BE WELL WITH YOU, AND THAT YOU MAY LIVE LONG ON THE EARTH.**

And, fathers, do not provoke your children to anger; but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

HAVING CHILDREN WHO BELIEVE – PISTOS – to persuade, win by words, influence; faithful, trusty, worthy of confidence; of persons, one on whom we may rely; having faithful children; faithful, trustful, dutiful; the contrast is between obedient, respectful children and lawless, uncontrolled children.

2 Tim. 2:2 And the things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, these entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also.

Matt. 24:45-51 Who then is the faithful and sensible slave whom his master put in charge of his household to give them their food at the proper time? Blessed is that slave whom his master finds so doing when he comes. Truly I say to you, that he will put him in charge of all his possessions. But, if that evil slave says in his heart, 'My master is not coming for a long time,' and shall begin to beat his fellow-slaves and eat and drink with drunkards; the master of that slave will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour which he does not know, and shall cut him in pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites; weeping shall be there and the gnashing of teeth.

Eph. 6:1-4 Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER (which is the first commandment with a promise), THAT IT MAY BE WELL WITH YOU, AND THAT YOU MAY LIVE LONG ON THE EARTH. And, Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger; but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

Col. 3:20-21 Children, be obedient to your parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing to the Lord. Fathers, do not exasperate your children, that they may not lose heart.

NOT ACCUSED OF DISSIPATION – ASOTIA – riot, the life and character of one who is unsaveable, incorrigible, past hope; dissoluteness, profligacy; living abandonedly, in riotous excess.

Eph. 5:18 And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the spirit.

1 Pet. 4:4-5 And in all this, they are surprised that you do not run with them into the same excess of dissipation, and they malign you; but they shall give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.

Luke 15:13 the younger son... went on a journey... and there he squandered his estate.

NOT ACCUSED OF REBELLION – ANUPOTAKTOS – unruly; not ranged or put in order, not subordinated, unsubjected, not made subject; hence, insubordinate; resisting control or authority; stubborn; not readily ruled, disciplined, or managed; having a lack of or incapacity for discipline. Ungovernable, not easily governed, managed, or directed; obstinately defiant of authority or restraint, willful, headstrong. Rom. 2:8 but to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, wrath and indignation.

Phil 1:17 the former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, rather than from pure motives, thinking to cause me distress in my imprisonment.

Phil 2:3 Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself.

2 Thes. 2:12 in order that they all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness.

Jam. 3:14, 16 But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth....For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing.

Heb. 2:8 THOU HAST PUT ALL THINGS IN SUBJECTION UNDER HIS FEET. For in subjecting all things to him, he left nothing that is not subject to him. But now we do not yet see all things subjected to him.

NOT A NEW CONVERT – NEOPHUTOS - not a novice; newly planted, a neophyte (that is, a new plant); not a beginner in the faith, not a recent convert, not a baby Christian.

1 Tim. 6:3-5 If any one advocates a different doctrine, and does not agree with sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with the doctrine conforming to godliness, he is conceited and understands nothing; but he has a morbid interest in controversial questions and disputes about words, out of which arise envy, strife, abusive language, evil suspicions, and constant friction between men of depraved mind and deprived of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain.

2 Tim. 2:26 and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will.

A MAN WITH A GOOD REPUTATION AMONG NON-BELIEVERS – MARTURIA – a bearing witness, certifying; a testimony that informs as well as corroborates; that which any one witnesses or states concerning any person or thing; witness borne or given.

Acts 22:12 And a certain Ananias, a man who was devout by the standard of the Law, and well spoken of by all the Jews who lived there,

1 Cor. 5:12 For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Do you not judge those who are within the church?

1 Cor. 10:32 Give no offense either to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God;

2 Cor. 8:21 for we have regard for what is honorable, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men.

Phil 2:15 that you may prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world,

Phil 4:8 Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, let your mind dwell on these things.

Col 4:5-6 Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders, making the most of the opportunity. Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned, as it were, with salt, so that you may know how you should respond to each person.

1 Thes. 4:11-12 and to make it your ambition to lead a quiet life and attend to your own business and work with your own hands, just as we commanded you; so that you may behave properly toward outsiders and not be in any need.

1 Tim. 5:14 Therefore, I want younger widows to get married, bear children, keep house, and give the enemy no occasion for reproach;

1 Tim. 6:1 Let all who are under the yoke as slaves regard their own masters as worthy of all honor so that the name of God and our doctrine may not be spoken against.

Titus 2:5, 8, 10 to be sensible, pure, workers at home, kind, being subject to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be dishonored... sound in speech which is beyond reproach, in order that the opponent may be put to shame, having nothing bad to say about us... not pilfering, but showing all good faith that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in every respect.

Titus 3:1-2 Remind them to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good deed, to malign no one, to be uncontentious, gentle, showing every consideration for all men.

1 Pet. 2:12, 15 Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may on account of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation... For such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men.

1 Pet. 3:1, 16 In the same way, you wives, be submissive to your own husbands so that even if any of them are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives... and keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame.

SELF CONTROLLED – EGKRATES – temperate; having power over, being master of one's self, having self-control.

Acts 24:25 he was discussing righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come,
Gal. 5:23 gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

Eph. 4:2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing forbearance to one another in love,

2 Pet. 1:5-6 Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge; and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness; and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, Christian love.

LOVING WHAT IS GOOD – PHILAGATHOS – a lover of good men (things); loving (strong friendship with) good; loving what is good (worthy of admiration; morally speaking, inner harmonious perfection, which is its own standard and measure, and which primarily belongs to God).

Rom. 7:12 The law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.

Eph. 2:10 We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

Gal. 6:10 While we have opportunity, let us do good to all men, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.

Rom. 12:9, 21 Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good....Do not be overcome with evil, but overcome evil with good.

1 Thes. 5:15 See that no one repays another with evil for evil, but always seek after that which is good for one another and for all men.

1 Pet. 3:13 who is there to harm you if you prove zealous for what is good?

3 Jn 11 Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good. The one who does good is of God; the one who does evil has not seen God.

Titus 2:14 He gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for himself a people for his own possession, zealous for good deeds.

Heb. 10:24 let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds.

2 Thes. 3:13 But as for you, brethren, do not grow weary of doing good.

JUST – DIKAIOS – fulfilling all claims which are right and becoming. A right state (of which God and his word are the standard) so that no fault or defect can be charged.

(Used of God it refers to his doings as answering to the rule which he has established for himself.) Hence, of man it is just, conformity to God's revealed will.

Also the act of God establishing a man as righteous.

Matt. 25:37, 40 Then the righteous will answer him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry, and feed you, or thirsty, and give you drink?... The king will answer and say to them... to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of mine, even the least of them, you did it to me.

Luke 1:6 And they were both righteous in the sight of God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and requirements of the Lord.

John 7:24 Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment.

Rom. 2:13 for not the hearers of the Law are just before God, but the doers of the Law will be justified.

Rom. 5:18 For as through one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous.

Phil 4:8 Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, let your mind dwell on these things.

Col. 3:23-25 Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men; knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve. For he who does wrong will receive the consequences of the wrong which he has done, and that without partiality.

Col. 4:1 Masters, grant to your slaves justice and fairness, knowing that you too have a Master in heaven.

1 Thes. 5:15 See that no one repays another with evil for evil, but always seek after that which is good for one another and for all men.

Heb. 11:33 (People of faith) who by faith conquered kingdoms, performed acts of righteousness, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions,

Jam. 2:1, 4 My brethren, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with an attitude of personal favoritism... have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil motives?

1 Jn 2:29 If you know that he is righteous, you know that every one also who practices righteousness is born of him.

1 Jn 3:7 Little children, let no one deceive you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as he is righteous.

DEVOUT – HOSIOS – Holy; pure from crime, the condition of one who has committed no crime, but religiously observes every duty and fulfils every obligation.

Eph. 5:8 for you were formerly darkness, but now you are light in the Lord; walk as children of light

Eph. 5:9 (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth),

Eph. 5:10 trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord.

Titus 2:12 instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age,

HOLD FAST THE FAITHFUL WORD

Titus 2:2 Older men are to be temperate, dignified, sensible, sound in faith, in love, in perseverance.

Titus 2:7 in all things show yourself to be an example of good deeds, with purity in doctrine, dignified

Titus 2:8 sound in speech which is beyond reproach, in order that the opponent may be put to shame, having nothing bad to say about us.

Jam. 1:21 Therefore putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls.

Jam. 1:22 But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves.

Jam. 1:23 For if any one is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror;

Jam. 1:24 for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was.

Jam 1:25 But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man shall be blessed in what he does.

EXHORT IN SOUND DOCTRINE – to give warnings or advice in teachings that are free from flaw or defect.

REFUTE THOSE WHO CONTRADICT – convince, refute, put to shame those who contradict.

Rom. 15:14 And concerning you, my brethren, I myself also am convinced that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, and able also to admonish one another.

Eph. 4:14-16 As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into him, who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.

Eph. 5:11 And do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even expose them,

Phil. 2:16 holding fast the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may have cause to glory because I did not run in vain nor toil in vain.

Col. 1:23 if indeed you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard, which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, was made a minister.

Col. 2:8 See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ.

Col. 3:16 Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

Col. 4:6 Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned, as it were, with salt, so that you may know how you should respond to each person.

1 Thes 5:14, 21 And we urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with all men....But examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good;

2 Thes. 2:15 So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught, whether by word of mouth or by letter from us.

Heb. 13:9 Do not be carried away by varied and strange teachings; for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by foods, through which those who were thus occupied were not benefitted.

1 Pet. 3:15-16 but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to every one who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence; and keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame.

Sources of Greek word definitions (listed for elders above and deacons and “women” later in this document):

A Critical Lexicon and Concordance to the English and Greek New Testament, Ethelbert W. Bullinger, D.D., Samuel Bagster and Sons Limited, 1877, Ninth Edition 1969.

Biblical Eldership – An Urgent Call to Restore Biblical Church Leadership, Alexander Strauch, Lewis and Roth Publishers, Third Edition, 1995, pp. 181-238.
Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary, G. & C. Merriam Company, Publishers, 1916, 1963 Edition.

QUALIFICATIONS OF CHURCH LEADERS

What is interesting about the scripture references in this summary of elder qualifications is that all of them refer to behavior expected of any church member, not specifically and only for elders. So what does this mean? Paul knew appropriate behavior among all believers must exemplify these traits. This is what he taught his congregations to pursue, and he expected them over time to grow in spiritual maturity to attain them. Some would grow faster than others, but the same traits were expected of all members of the church. And quite obviously these are not all the qualities of character Paul and the other New Testament writers wrote about but they are a good summary of basic characteristic for church leaders. So when Paul composed his list of elders qualifications he wanted Timothy and Titus and any future church leaders to especially make sure these qualities were existent to a reasonable degree in any candidate considered for the position of elder.

Note that the lists are not identical. After composing the list for Timothy Paul adapted his list for Titus to better suit needs in the Cretan culture. Paul tells Titus, "one of themselves, a prophet of their own, said, 'Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons'" (Titus 1:12). He had just identified some "rebellious men, empty talkers and deceivers... who must be silenced" (see vs. 10-11). Those chosen to serve as elders in Crete "must be... not self-willed, not quick-tempered... loving what is good... just, devout, self-controlled, holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, that he may be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict" (vs. 7-9). These are traits Paul listed specific to Titus' situation which are not found in Timothy's list.

That is not to say these are unimportant qualifications for elders in Ephesus where Timothy was when Paul wrote to him. In fact, the Ephesian elders were extremely effective in handling such "rebellious" people because years later they were commended for appropriate expulsion of such characters from their church. In John's Revelation from Jesus he was instructed to send the Ephesians a message to them which in part commended their good behavior in this regard. It stated, "I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot endure evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false" (Revelation 2:2). At the time Paul wrote to Timothy the Ephesians likely did not need to be specifically reminded of this qualification for their elder candidates.

Likewise, Paul included "temperate... respectable... able to teach... gentle, uncontentious... manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity... not a new convert... must have a good reputation with those outside the church" (1 Timothy 3:2-7) in his instructions unique to Timothy's need. Both lists are valid and useful to any church in weighing credentials for candidate elders. Copies of both letters may have circulated to both Timothy and Titus for their use. The point is there are many traits a Christian is urged to acquire. These are useful ones for elders but by no means are exhaustive lists. When selecting elders any combination of Christian virtues will be useful in church work and should be

maximized for the benefit of ministries each is best equipped to perform. There will always be lesser and greater abilities and qualities in each candidate. But there cannot be flaws that are known to exist that could bring discredit on the name of God and his work. Herein lies the greater discipline in knowing when a candidate is truly really ready to serve in a higher level position of responsibility, in this case that position has come to be called an elder.

THE ANTITHESIS OF ELDER QUALIFICATIONS

In Paul's second letter to Timothy he provides a most interesting antonym to his earlier appraisal of good qualities to be found in elder candidates. He is giving a warning that men of the world will practice these opposite characteristics in the last days. He writes, "But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God; holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; and avoid such men as these" (2 Timothy 3:1-5). This is quite a lengthy and severe laundry list of brutal attitudes and behaviors to be found among indecent people. It can be helpful and instructive to us, however, if we attach opposite meanings to each one, for in the contrasts are those qualities God deems important and essential be found in those he claims as his spiritual children. Note how many of them are the exact opposites of the elder qualifications, or in a broader sense, qualifications for all believers. Admittedly, some of the opposites presented below are strained, but still give an opposite perspective.

POSITIVE TRAITS

lovers of self
 lovers of money
 boastful
 arrogant
 revilers
 disobedient to parents
 ungrateful
 unholy
 unloving
 irreconcilable
 malicious gossips
 without self-control
 brutal
 haters of good
 treacherous
 reckless
 conceited
 lovers of pleasure
 not lovers of God
 holding a form of godliness

NEGATIVE TRAITS

Tim hospitable
 Both free from the love of money
 Both not self-willed
 Both not self-willed
 Both incontinentious
 Titus not accused of dissipation, rebellion
 Both have good reputation with outsiders
 Titus devout
 Both gentle
 Titus not accused of dissipation
 Tim (women) not malicious gossips
 Titus self-controlled
 Both not pugnacious
 Tim love what is good
 Titus just
 Titus not accused of rebellion
 Tim not a new convert
 Both temperate
 Titus devout
 Titus devout

Tim – Found only in 1 Timothy 3:2-7

Titus – Found only in Titus 1:6-9
Both – Found in both texts above

Note that the unbecoming list has opposites found in either or both the Timothy and Titus elder qualifications lists. So, even though Paul did not include a complete list of all good qualifications he identified, as a whole, in either of the Timothy or Titus lists, still he is mindful of including some of the opposites even to Titus' list in his second letter to Timothy. This is kind of a back door way of observing that such traits, in the positive viewpoint, or the negative, are not complete lists of such characteristics or behaviors but a fair representation of the larger complete list which is found in scripture, but never in one list in one place. We need to be mindful and appreciative of other good qualities to be found in individuals who can serve well in the church.

A WORD ABOUT DEACONS

Paul includes instructions to Timothy concerning deacon qualifications. Most of these are repeats of what was provided for elders: “not... addicted to much wine or fond of sordid gain... beyond reproach... husbands of only one wife, and good managers of their children and their own households” (1 Timothy 3:8, 10, 12). Among the unique traits listed for deacons are “men of dignity, not double-tongued... hold to the mystery of faith with a clear conscience” (vs. 8-9). This is obviously a short list compared to that for elders. One might well ask, why were the three things listed uniquely for deacons not listed for elders? Aren't they just as relevant for elders? Surely this is true. Elders must also have these traits. They are important qualifications for both elders and deacons, and for all believers for that matter, but they are pointed out for deacons to give them a heads up as to what is expected of them character-wise to then be entrusted with duties in a capacity officially representing God and his church. Below are more details describing the three new qualifications listed for deacons.

MEN OF DIGNITY – SEMNOS – venerable (conveying an impression of aged goodness and benevolence, respect or awe excited by personal dignity or consecration), reverend (one held in honor or respect); of things – honorable, reputable; of persons – grave (meriting serious consideration, important, authoritative, weighty), dignified (worthy, honored, esteemed). Reserve or restraint in conduct prompted less by obedience to a code than by a sense of personal integrity or of social importance.

Titus 2:2 Older men are to be temperate, dignified, sensible, sound in faith, in love, in perseverance.

Phil 4:8 Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable... if there is any excellence, if anything worthy of praise, let your mind dwell on these things.

NOT DOUBLE-TONGUED – DILOGOS – uttering the same thing twice, repeating. Equivocal, i.e., telling the same story. (He does not say one thing to one person and something different to another. He does not 'talk out of both sides of his mouth.' He does not say one thing and know another, like Gehazi (2 Kings 5:19-27) or Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11) – New Testament Commentary, Thessalonians, The Pastorals, and Hebrews, William Hendriksen, Baker Academic, 1957, p. 131.)

Col 3:9-10 Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices, and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him,

1 Jn 1:6 If we say that we have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.

Rev 21:27 nothing unclean and no one who practices abomination and lying, shall ever come into it (the kingdom of God), but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.

Rev. 22:15 Outside are the dogs and the sorcerers and the immoral persons and the murderers and the idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices lying.

HOLDING TO THE MYSTERY OF FAITH WITH A CLEAR CONSCIENCE-
MUSTARION – a secret especially as related to God's plan of redemption and revealed when he determined the time was right. In the New Testament used especially of the 'great secret' which is Christ Mystical. KATHAROS – pure from everything that would change or corrupt the nature of the subject with which it is combined, free from every foreign admixture, whether good or bad; clean, and free from every stain, odor, color, or any useless thing whatever; free from every false adornment

Eph. 1:7-9 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us. In all wisdom and insight he made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his kind intention which he purposed in him.

Rom. 5:6 For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly....God demonstrates his own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by his blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through him. For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, we shall be saved by his life.

1 Cor 15:51 ,52, 54 Behold, I tell you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed....Death is swallowed up in victory.

WOMEN DEACONS

In the midst of talking about the deacons Paul inserts one verse referring to "women." It is unclear as to exactly why Paul mentions women here and what he means by them. GUNA means a woman, wife; also used of a maiden, damsel. (see Lexicon reference above).

Broadly speaking it can mean any of these. We depend on the context to help determine which it is. In this case the reference is so short and indefinite we are left guessing what Paul might have meant. The Authorized Version calls them "their wives" meaning the wives of the deacons, but we have no accompanying qualifications for the wives of elders. So, this would seem inconsistent. By calling them women, instead of supplying a feminine word form for deacon, we have no direct evidence that a new office is implied, meaning deaconesses. Thus, the debate rages on related to who these women are.

Assuming they are intended to be women performing some significant servant work in the church Paul felt the need to expound on a few qualifications. We have

heard of dignified and temperate before. Not malicious gossips and faithful in all things are new although the latter is very much like being above reproach, the one emphasizing the positive side of the trait and the other more the negative viewpoint. It is the sense of being faithful, trusty and worthy of confidence, people on whom we may rely.

MALICIOUS GOSSIPS – DIABOLOS – a calumniator, slanderer, accuser, adversary. Used of the devil.

2 Tim 3:2, 3, 5 For men will be... malicious gossips, without self-control... avoid such men as these.

Titus 2:3 Older women likewise are to be reverent in their behavior, not malicious gossips, nor enslaved to much wine, teaching what is good.

Noteworthy, in the last scripture above (Titus 2:3), is the fact that Paul tells Titus older women are to have two of the qualities, reverent in their behavior (dignified) and not malicious gossips, he listed for Timothy to consider for the mysterious “women” we discussed earlier. Again it doesn’t seem to matter much whether these lists are for office holders or general members of the church, all are expected to adhere to them. Admittedly, official representatives of the church should have better control of each in order to serve effectively, but these are Christian traits not strictly speaking only church officer characteristics.

Women Elders

One more comment on women in service to God. A major debate continues to roar today concerning whether or not women can be considered for the office of elder. From some of the comments made on both sides of the issue there is not always the true spirit of a servant of God being expressed by either side. Before anyone can be considered for such an office they must be demonstrating their willingness to gain and live by the attributes discussed above. But even more than those attributes is the need for the would-be office holder to demonstrate their yieldedness to God as a humble and obedient bond-slave as discussed in the following sections. Such demonstration in daily conduct and service argues much more effectively for anyone to serve in any given capacity than all the scriptural arguments to be found in support for either side of the subject. So, we best get on with demonstrating our worth in doing the work rather than arguing for our case to hold the office. Do the work whether or not holding the official title to the office whether male or female. God will honor such willingness and service.

In examining the whole of scripture there are examples of women in positions of leadership. We know them. For example judge Deborah (Judges 4:4), and Queen Esther (Esther 2:17). Among “chief positions” in the church there are several women prophets named in both the Old and New Testaments: Miriam (Exodus 15:20), Deborah (Judges 4:4), Huldah (2 Kings 22:14), Naodiah (Nehemiah 6:14), unnamed (Isaiah 8:3), Anna (Luke 2:36), and the four daughters of Philip (Acts 21:8). God chooses to whom he wants to give his word to be delivered to others. Though they be relatively few still God did not make the work of a prophet distinctly male by appointment. The daughters of Philip may have been ones who proclaimed God’s message much like an evangelist rather than proclaiming some message of future consequence. Still, the only evangelists so named are Timothy (2 Timothy 4:5) and

Philip (Acts 21:8) (both males), and Philip was the father of the four women prophetesses mentioned above.

But we do not find any women apostles either among the twelve or the seventy or any others called apostles. Furthermore, we would be hard pressed to find a specific example of a woman holding and exercising the position of elder in either the Old Testament or the New. So, yes women did hold positions of leadership in God's work. And they proved themselves capable of doing the work. The difficulty is in finding specific examples to fully support that some positions are not specifically male only designated like apostles and elders. Could women do the work of apostles and elders? Quite evidently they could. Women have demonstrated leadership abilities in other positions both in the past and today. But to err on the side of caution may be the best action without more definitive information.

This is not to say even today that women cannot do the work of an apostle or an elder. They may well be the best persons suited to do such in certain situations and considering the abilities of the individuals, but to do so in an official capacity of the church does not seem to be warranted by scriptural support. Be a humble and faithful servant. Do the work without demanding the office. Good advice for men as well. There is scriptural support for not "lording it over" women because of taking such a stand. And you men who are elders be well prepared to do your job well.

A woman can certainly be capable of doing the work of an elder. Women have proven they can perform the duties of an elder. Note the example of Priscilla (Acts 18:26). So, why would women not be considered to carry out such duties at least to half the members of a congregation, namely the female half? Paul's objection seems to be, "I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet" (1 Timothy 2:12). He also says, "Let the women keep silent in the churches...if they desire to learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is improper for a woman to speak in church" (1 Corinthians 14:34-35). The prohibitions seem to be, "I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man" and "women keep silent in the churches." Yet he also says, "every woman who has her head uncovered while praying or prophesying" (1 Corinthians 11:5), seems to leave the door open for women to speak in some capacity in the church, to proclaim the word. Both prohibitions can be practiced by a woman if she does elder type functions only among women. Keeping silent in the churches assumes men are present. But if it is a ladies function is there any objection to a woman speaking to and serving them? Not likely. Many churches have and even rely on women's organizations in the church. To be an effective servant to women a woman can perform the duties of an elder, without officially holding the office of an elder, and still be a most effective servant of God on behalf of women and the church as a whole. Consider the possibility. Titles can get in the way of effective ministry and become a means for pride to get a foothold.

Also consider that in our modern world mass communications permits a woman to prepare and present messages for women, while men may tune in. There is no way to prevent this from happening. Oh one might sternly warn men that they are forbidden to listen to women talking to other women by television or radio. But this gets pretty legalistic and rather silly.

So there are the lists and descriptions of qualifications identified for the offices of elders and deacons in the New Testament church. But there is another position,

though not specifically identified as an office, which must be considered in this discussion on church leaders. It is more a duty than a position and it is something once again that all church members must consider themselves to be if they are going to fulfill their roles most appropriately in the church. It is the position and work of a servant.

THE FIRST AMONG YOU SHALL BE YOUR SLAVE

One trait that sets Christianity apart from other organizations and religions is that its leader expected all its members to be servants. In fact, its leader himself set the tone and the example by being a servant himself. The perfect opportunity to teach this concept occurred on one occasion when Jesus was nearing his final destiny and approaching Jerusalem. Two of his disciples, along with their mother, stepped up to Jesus to ask a very sensitive question. Abruptly, the mother of James and John demanded, "Command that in your kingdom these two sons of mine may sit, one on your right and one on your left" (Matthew 20:21). In short Jesus told them that authority was not in his hands to grant. Only Yahweh God, his Father, could make such appointments. But by now the other ten disciples were very indignant about this brash behavior of two of their younger compatriots. This was the perfect opportunity for Jesus to give all the disciples a very valuable lesson on church governance, since he would soon no longer be physically present with them as their leader. He taught them this, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. It is not so among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave; just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many" (vs.25-28).

This is a great challenge for those who would claim to be followers of Jesus. It is not the way of the world. Jesus reminded his followers of the way of the world. "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them." It's how one achieves wealth and the good life, and who doesn't want that? Subdue the masses. Get them to work for you. Take from the weak. It is the way of the world. But Jesus says, "It is not so among you." It's like Peter once wrote concerning the elders, the spiritual guides of the church. He said they are to "shepherd the flock of God among you, not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God, not for sordid gain but with eagerness, nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock (1 Peter 5:2-3). Being great in Jesus' eyes does not involve subduing others under your authority. Quite the contrary, being great in the spiritual realm involves becoming the servant, the diakonos, the deacon of others.

Oh, how this goes against everything people of the world believe. One cannot get ahead in this life if all they propose to be is a servant. And worse yet, for Jesus adds, "Whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave." He instructs his disciples to forget the idea of being supreme leaders of all people. That's the way the world thinks. No, instead, you must think like a slave, a bond-servant, the lowest level productive worker on the planet. How crude! How insulting! The disciples' minds must have deflated instantly. Where is Peter, boisterous Peter? Why is he not protesting the very idea? Did he leave a useful fishing business only to walk the dirty, sweaty trails with an itinerant preacher the rest of his life? Before he could get a word out Jesus made his point and Peter could not resist. Jesus told them he set

the example. He explained it by saying you must become deacons, servants, bond-slaves “just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.” Jesus says he came not to benefit from diakoneo but to be diakoneo, that is, to be one who renders diakonia, service. He says plainly that he is a diakonos, a servant, a deacon, and his disciples must follow his lead.

THE GREATEST AMONG YOU SHALL BE YOUR SERVANT

A day or so later Jesus reiterates this teaching. The end of his work is near. By stating this concept again so soon he puts emphasis on it. This time he begins by criticizing the behavior of the Pharisees, those Jewish leaders who put great importance on having lording authority over the rest of the Jews. “They do all their deeds to be noticed by men” (Matthew 23:5). They love “respectful greetings in the market places, and being called by men, Rabbi” (v. 7). This is certainly the behavior of academics who sport “Dr.” as their mark of distinction. No doubt it is a well earned title, but it can lead to unnecessary lofty attitudes and presumed special privileges above the masses. By contrast Jesus warns his disciples, “do not be called Rabbi” (v. 8), and for good reason. He reminds them, “One is your teacher, and you are all brothers.” By the “one” he is referring to himself. Each one of us is to honor Jesus as his true and ultimate teacher and source of spiritual instruction. Jesus is to be called Lord just as a slave yields in obedience and respect to his master. What Jesus received of his heavenly Father he dispensed to his followers (John 12:49; 17:8). Jesus’ words are originally from the Father. So even Jesus follows a source higher than himself, but in some ways he is willing to treat us as equals. Paul once put it this way, “I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ” (1 Corinthians 11:3).

Earlier he taught, “A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a slave above his master. It is enough for the disciple that he become as his teacher, and the slave as his master” (Matthew 10:24-25). We are instructed to “follow in his steps.” Peter wrote, “you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in his steps” (1 Peter 2:21). On the night before he was crucified Jesus lifted the status of his disciples. He told them, “You are my friends, if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you slaves; for the slave does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you” (John 15:14-15). Jesus wanted to maintain a very close association with his followers. That is one reason why he did not want them to be called Rabbi. “For one is you Teacher, and you are all brothers” (Matthew 23:8). He pressed his point further. “And do not call anyone on earth your father; for one is your Father, he who is in heaven. And do not be called leaders; for one is your leader, that is, Christ” (vs. 9-10). Jesus openly admitted he was the Christ and only he should be called their leader. Otherwise, they were to treat each other as brothers, equals. Then he makes his pitch again concerning what they really must be, especially in light of the world’s view of those who are great. “The greatest among you shall be your servant” (v. 11). That is, he who really wants to be great among friends must be your diakonos, your deacon, your servant.

WASHING THE DISCIPLES' FEET

One more time Jesus makes this critical point and that on the night he was betrayed. Recall that Jesus rose from supper, “and laid aside his garments; and taking a towel, girded himself about. Then he poured water into the basin, and began to wash the disciple’s feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which he was girded” (John 13:4-5). This was quite out of character even for Jesus. In another home he had accepted having his own feet anointed with fragrant oil and for a towel a woman bowed deeply and respectfully to wipe his feet with her long, dark hair (John 12:3). Now he was stooping before each of his disciples, in servants’ garb, doing the job of a lowly slave. “When he had washed their feet, and taken his garments, and reclined at table again, he said to them, ‘Do you know what I have done to you?’” (John 13:12). Bewildered, the disciples looked blankly at each other or downward unknowing how to respond. Just like us today. We speak many good things about Jesus and are extremely happy to do so. And rightfully we should, for there is much in the way of great things to speak about Jesus. But when it comes to this episode at the end of the life and ministry of Jesus we are deeply humbled at God’s long awaited anointed one would stoop to do the work of a common slave and then ask, “Do you know what I have done for you?” Our minds are too stayed on what greatness means to us to dwell very long on this humiliating scene.

But we need not wonder what is was all about, for Jesus plainly tells us. “I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you” (v. 15). Some have interpreted this foot washing to mean Jesus introduced another ordinance for the church to practice on a regular basis. Added to baptism and eating the communion bread and drink the fruit of the vine he now added foot washing. And while this may have a useful emblematic and practical humiliation experience for the believer, the greater purpose is stated by Jesus himself. “Truly, truly, I say to you, a slave is not greater than his master, neither one who is sent greater than the one who sent him. If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them” (vs. 16-17). Jesus, now for the third time, is telling his disciples the way of discipleship is in serving one another and treating each other as equals. Serve one another with a humble frame of mind, the mindedness of a faithful slave. By these acts of service you demonstrate in practical ways that you truly love one another with Godly love. Love puts aside any thought of greatness of one person over another. Counting each other as brothers establishes a true equality among all believers. And servanthood shows we are willing to count others as better than ourselves to the degree we want the best from God for all people.

THE HUMBLE SERVANT

Paul captured this concept very well in a portion of his letter to the Philippian church. He told them to “Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself; do not merely look out for you own personal interests, but also for the interests of others” (Philippians 2:3-4). Here Paul reveals the essence of Jesus’ expectations of disciple servanthood and introduces two related elements, namely humility and submission. Even though he did not walk with Jesus during his ministry on earth Paul either was taught this behavior through revelation from Jesus (Galatians 1:11-

12) or was taught it by the other disciples. Either way it became a key element of his own teachings of the gospel.

Now this was just the beginning of what he had to say on this subject. His next few thoughts return us to how Jesus himself became the example of the life he expects all believers to emulate. For he next says, "Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although he existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross" (Philippians 2:5-8). Discipleship servanthood begins with an attitude adjustment in our minds. "Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus." Our Lord Jesus did not accept the worldly point of view of greatness. His Father taught him that being a servant is what Yahweh required. Paul told the Roman church, "do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Romans 12:2).

The world view merely requires conformance to what one sees in the world. To acquire Christ-mindedness requires specific concentration on what is important to God. Jesus obediently emptied himself before God to become a pliable vessel for his Master's use. He came to serve and give his life a ransom for many (Matthew 20:28). He came to do what God required of him. And he submitted willingly, and obediently to do God's will in spite of the intense pain and agony he knew was coming his way. Jesus also said, "I am among you as the one who serves" (Luke 22:27) or as said another way, to do the duties of one who serves (a deacon). He yielded his will to conform to his Father's will and in so doing portrayed the equally valuable trait of obedience to what God called upon him to do. A slave is not a useful slave if he is disobedient. God required Jesus to yield up his life for abusive treatment by wicked men and eventual torturous death in crucifixion at the hands of those same cruel men. We do not relish such an end to our lives or that of anyone we know. But molding of our will to submit to God's will is the challenge put forth to us in order to serve God faithfully.

Those who would be servants (deacons) of God must put on these qualities of character. Successful service as servants requires nothing less. If our own Lord and Savior willingly yielded to his Father to live the life of a servant, we can hardly expect that we can escape the same role in life for ourselves. Certainly those who envision themselves becoming great as ministers of the gospel cannot truly be great in God's eyes without behaving like a servant, without truly acquiring a servant's heart.

SLAVE, SERVANT AND STEWARD

Christians are referred to as servants in three main ways using three Greek words in the New Testament: DOULOS, DIAKONOS, and OIKONOMOS. A DOULOS is a slave bound to do service for another person. A DIAKONOS is one who performs a service. An OIKONOMOS is a household manager who has authority over a family and its affairs. Below each of these classes of servants are examined as they relate to each and every believer.

Slaves Or Bond-Servants

DOULOS is the most common word used in the New Testament for a slave or servant. This is the lowest working class of people in the economic system. A slave was in service to another person usually because they were indebted to them or had become spoils of war. They had little if any rights outside the Mosaic law. Gentile societies used them as cheap labor, often considered expendable except for those willing to work long and hard. Israelite society upheld the dignity of fellow countrymen who willingly submitted to serfdom for a time to reimburse debts. As a rule slavery was not intended to be permanent in Israelite society. But even in their society, non-Israelites could be and were kept as forced laborers all their lives.

When Jesus taught that his disciples must become slaves in service to one another he raised a lot of eyebrows. When he became a servant to his twelve disciples by washing their feet he stamped all his future followers with a mark that would take time and mental reconfiguring to adjust to such a new way of life. No society had built its preferred citizenry on such a lowly class of people. Yet this is the very nature of the highest class of citizen God wants in his kingdom. These are the most pliable, accepting, willing, and subservient of people as far as God is concerned. He can best accomplish his will with an army of humble, obedient slaves. Proud, arrogant, self-motivated superstars are good only for themselves. They do not accurately serve the interest of God.

When we think of bond-slaves our minds envision a slave market where an auctioneer urges buyers to bid for the slave standing on the auction block. Paul reminded us that we are the slave on the auction block and it is God who has bid for us to buy us out from under that life of bondage. By paying our purchase price God has made it possible for us to be set free, or rather to become slaves to a new and a better master. Paul told the Corinthians, "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit (which) is in you, (which) you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body" (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). "You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of men" (1 Corinthians 7:23). "Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness? But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed, and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness....But now having been freed from sin and enslaved to God, you derive your benefit, resulting in sanctification, and the outcome eternal life" (Romans 6:16-18, 22). Peter adds to Paul's admonition by saying, "Act as free men, and do not use your freedom as a covering for evil, but use it as bondslaves of God" (1 Peter 2:16).

Paul The Bond-Servant

All other attributes of believers or of leaders in the church (for example, elders and deacons) cannot successfully qualify for these positions or attain the Christian virtues without first submitting to the Lordship of Yahweh God and his chosen son Jesus. Paul certainly caught this teaching of Jesus and lived it out wholeheartedly from the day of his conversion. He once wrote, "We do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your bond-servants for Jesus' sake" (2

Corinthians 4:5). Several of his letters begin with an emphatic statement to that effect.

Rom. 1:1 Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus

Phil. 1:1 Paul and Timothy, bond-servants of Christ Jesus

Titus 1:1 Paul, a bond-servant of God, and an apostle of Jesus Christ

Besides Paul, other letter writers in the New Testament also identified themselves as bond-servants.

Jam. 1:1 James, a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ

2 Pet. 1:1 Simon Peter, a bond-servant and apostle of Jesus Christ

Jude 1 Jude, a bond-servant of Jesus Christ.

Rev. 1:1 The Revelation of Jesus Christ... He sent and communicated it by his angel to his bond-servant, John.

In fact the revelation John received was destined to be delivered to “bond-servants” meaning all believers in Jesus. It is interesting that both Paul and Peter equated their status as apostles to that of bond-servants. That certainly elevates servanthood remarkably.

Just like Paul angels considered themselves bond-servants (slaves) of believers. “I am a fellow servant (slave) of yours and your brethren” (Revelation 19:10; 22:19). Likewise, the prophets of old God considered to be his bond-servants (slaves). “In the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he is about to sound, then the mystery of God is finished, as he preached to his servants (slaves) the prophets” (Revelation 10:7; see also 11:8).

With good reason then the apostles challenged the readers of their letters to realize who they truly are in relation to their Lord Jesus and to each other. For example Paul was happy to remind the Galatians that their new found faith granted them spiritual freedom, but they were to use this freedom wisely. He said, “You were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve (be a slave to) one another” (Galatians 5:13). He reminded the Colossians, “Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men; knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve (as a slave)” (Colossians 3:23-24). And to the Thessalonians he was pleased to say about them, “For they (other of Paul’s converts) themselves report about us what kind of a reception we had with you, and how you turned from idols to serve (be a slave to) a living and true God” (1 Thessalonians 1:9). They had correctly and accurately captured in their minds and hearts exactly what it meant to be a follower of Christ and God. All of this reframing of our minds and hearts to be slaves of God has a very definite purpose in God’s overall plan to save us and provide a place for us in his eternal kingdom. For only those who get the point and change their way of thinking will fit in to live in harmony with God in his future kingdom. The angel told John among the last words he received in his Revelation concerning Jesus Christ that in that kingdom “There shall no longer be any curse; and the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and his bond-servants shall serve (be a slave) him” (Revelation 22:3). The time to get in line with this way of thinking is now, during our life and work for our master in this life.

Servants Or Deacons

The second of our words for servant is the Greek word DIAKONOS. The translation of DIAKONOS is very simply deacon, serve or minister. We are very familiar with the word and the idea of the position of deacon, but what we most likely are not aware of is how significant the underlying word is in the overall concept of our relationship to Jesus and God. To begin to enlighten our understand it is useful to realize that though the English word deacon is used only five times in the New Testament the Greek word, or its related words, are used over 100 times. Apparently, the use of servant by translators was preferred over deacon in most other occurrences because its meaning may be clearer in the context in which it is used. So if we use servant in place of deacon, where it is used, we get an interesting perspective on what it means to be a deacon. The five verses where the English word deacon occurs would then read:

1 Tim 3:8 **Servants** likewise must be men of dignity, not double-tongued, or addicted to much wine or fond of sordid gain,

1 Tim 3:10 And let these also first be tested; then let them **render service** if they are beyond reproach.

1 Tim 3:12 Let **servants** be husbands of only one wife, and good managers of their children and their own households.

1 Tim 3:13 For those who have **rendered service** well obtain for themselves a high standing and great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.

Phil 1:1 Paul and Timothy, bond-servants (slaves) of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers and **servants**.

Notice how the tone of the position deacon changes when we use the meaning of the word rather than a title. All Christians are expected to be servants in some capacity, and to the degree they can be entrusted with responsibility they should be so entrusted. It would appear that Paul has in mind a more responsible role for those servants we have come to know as deacons, but nonetheless they are still servants.

It is an interesting read to see how a literal translation which uses servant in place of deacon presents these verses. Below is such a rendition from the Concordant Literal New Testament, Concordant Publishing Concern, Saugus, California, 1966, p. 487-488:

Servants, similarly, are to be grave, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not avaricious, having the secret of the faith in a clear conscience. Now let these also first be tested: thereafter let them **be serving**, being unimpeachable. The wives, similarly, are to be grave, not adversaries, sober, faithful in all things. Let **servants** be the husbands of one wife, controlling children and their own households ideally, for those who **serve** ideally are procuring for themselves an ideal rank and much boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.

The Emphatic Diaglott by Benjamin Wilson (International Bible Students Association Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, Brooklyn New York, 1942, p. 704) is another literal translation giving a slightly different slant on the subject material.

Assistants in like manner ought to be serious, not deceitful in speech, not being addicted to much wine, not eager for base gain; holding the secret of the faith with a pure conscience. But let these also be proved first, then let them **serve**, being unblamable. Let the women in like manner be serious, not accusers, vigilant, faithful in all things. Let **assistants** be husbands of one wife, presiding well over their own families. For those having **served** well, acquire for themselves an honorable station, and much confidence in that faith which is in Christ Jesus.

It is interesting how we are drawn into the individual's work as a servant as opposed to an office holders' responsibility. Jesus wanted us to focus on the attitude and yieldedness of a servant. Focusing on the office of a deacon takes our minds away from servanthood to think more on our position in relation to others. Jesus said we are to be equals among each other. An office distinguishes us from our fellows. It would seem the interpretation that uses the word deacon does far more harm than good toward our goal of being what Jesus wants us to be. Recall also that the elders were given oversight and leadership responsibilities but they were expected to see themselves as equals with their fellow believers. Elders are sternly reminded several times not to "lord it over" their companions. This is not the way with the servants of God.

Furthermore, look at how different verse 11 appears when using "women" as opposed to "wives". The "wives" version echos like a position forcing the thoughts to swerve toward a particular group of women, whereas "women" is more generic and fits better in line with the overall general instruction being supplied in the text. Servants can be male or female. Servants are not just wives as opposed to women in general. This also helps to explain why wives of deacons would not be singled out when no equivalent mention was made of elders' wives. It also puts additional weight upon the requirements of elders to be males since the indication of women servants is listed apart from the elder qualifications.

Spiritual Gifts For Performing As Servants (Deacons)

Another aspect of service highlighted in church work are spiritual gifts. Paul tells the Ephesians that God gave these gifts to men, "some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers" (Ephesians 4:11). More such gifts are found elsewhere in the New Testament such as in Romans 12:6-8; 1 Corinthians 12:4-10; 28-30. The purpose of these gifts is "for the equipping of the saints for the work of service (performing as deacons)" (v. 12a) This is a very basic work of servants in God's church. Service rendered will result in "building up the body of Christ" (12b).

In his Corinthian letter Paul starts his instruction on spiritual gifts by saying, "Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same spirit. And there are varieties of ministries (deacon works), and the same Lord. And there are varieties of effects (work produced) but the same God who works all things in all persons" (1 Corinthians 12:4-6). Obviously there are varieties of service, or work done by deacons, to be performed for building up of the body of Christ.

Peter adds to this work in the church by saying, "each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving (performing as a deacon to) one another, as good stewards (house managers) of his manifold grace. Whoever speaks, let him speak,

as it were, the utterance's of God; whoever serves (performs as a deacon), let him do so by the strength which God supplies" (1 Peter 4:10-11).

We see that work as a deacon occurs throughout the New Testament and here specifically related to spiritual gifts. Even apostles work as deacons. Paul recognized he was not only a bond-servant (slave) to God and Jesus but he also saw himself as a deacon (servant) to those he served. Paul said of himself, along with his companions, that the Lord "gave us the ministry (deacon work) of reconciliation" (2 Corinthians 5:18). While talking to the Ephesian elders Paul recounted his pressing assignment from Jesus, "that I may finish my course and the ministry (deacon work) which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God" (Acts 20:24). Timothy's deacon work was evangelism, "fulfill your ministry (deacon work)" (2 Timothy 4:5). Even angels perform deacon tasks. "Are they not all ministering (worshipping) spirits sent out to render service (perform deacon work) for the sake of those who inherit salvation?" (Hebrews 1:14).

Also note that the content of the letters is pervaded with this concept of servanthood. Other workers with Paul are referred to as servants. Col. 1:7 Epaphras, our beloved fellow bond-servant (slave), who is a faithful servant (deacon) of Christ on our behalf.

Col. 4:7 Tychicus, our beloved brother and faithful servant (deacon) and fellow bondservant in the Lord.

1 Cor. 3:5 What then is Apollos? And what is Paul? Servants (deacons) through whom you believed.

Rom 16:1 I commend to you our sister Phoebe, who is a servant (deacon) of the church which is at Cenchrea.

1 Cor. 16:15 You know the household of Stephanas... that they have devoted themselves for ministry (the work of deacons) to the saints.

Col. 4:17 To Archippus, 'Take heed to the ministry (work of a deacon) which you have received in the Lord, that you may fulfill it.

2 Tim. 4:11 Pick up Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for service (work as a deacon).

Phile. 13 In your behalf he (Onesimus) might minister (do deacon work) to me in my imprisonment

2 Tim 1:18 You know very well what services (work as a deacon) he (Onesiphorus) rendered at Ephesus.

2 Tim 4:5 (Timothy), do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry (work as a deacon).

Note that Matthias, Judas' replacement, has his apostleship linked to his work as a deacon similarly to Paul and Peter.

Acts 1:17 (Judas) counted among us, and received his portion in this ministry (deacon work).

Acts 1:25 (Matthias) to occupy this ministry (deacon work) and apostleship from which Judas turned.

In the early church the apostles considered themselves deacons of the word.

Acts 6:4 we (the apostles) will devote ourselves... to the ministry (deacon work) of the word.

And in relation to other unnamed believers we note these few accounts among many that they too serve as deacons.
Matt. 25:44 Sick, or in prison, and did not take care of (do the work of a deacon to) you?”
Heb. 6:10 Having ministered (done the work of a deacon to) and in still ministering (doing the work of a deacon) to the saints.
Rom. 12:6-7 We have gifts... exercise them... if service, (deacon work), in his serving (doing deacon work).
The work of a servant is the work of the believer in Jesus, God's anointed one.

In the Old Testament a common expression God used of those individuals who not only believed him but faithfully did what he told them to do was to call them servants of Yahweh. For example God called Moses, “my servant Moses (Numbers 12:7-8).” Likewise among others so named are Joshua (Joshua 24:29), Caleb (Numbers 14:24), David (2 Samuel 3:18), Elijah (2 Kings 9:36), Jonah (2 Kings 14:25), Job (Job 1:8; 2:3), Isaiah (Isaiah 20:3), My Servant... My chosen one (Isaiah 42:1), Jacob/Israel (Isaiah 44:1), Zerubbabel (Haggai 2:33), the prophets (Zechariah 1:6) and the Branch (Zechariah 3:8). If anyone in the Bible can be found to be considered great surely these are some among the list. Yet Yahweh more fondly chooses to call them his servants rather than great men. It is the way of Yahweh, and by his way we learn what is the best attitude for us to hold, both of ourselves, and of others in the family of God.

As servants of our God we should spend time first doing what he has plainly told us he wants us to do as found in his word. That is clearly his will for our lives and it is consistent for all of us. What is unique to each of us is the use of specific abilities he has given to each of us to use for his purposes and in the ways in which he directs us. These are the spiritual gifts and are intended to be used “for the equipping of the saints for the work of service (performing as deacons), to the building up of the body of Christ” (Ephesians 4:12). God grants all men some measure of gifts, abilities to make a living and be of service to society. When these abilities are used in God's work they are spiritual gifts, abilities in use for spiritual purposes.

The degree of success in using these gifts for God and his people is largely measured by the time commitment and personal devotion of the individual who is willing to apply them in some way to benefit the saints to the glory of God. It is easy to focus on the more highly visible gifts and thus conclude that since “I cannot teach or preach or lead or write” therefore I am not equipped to be of service to God or his people. But the work of service, the work of a deacon is much broader than can be realized by the more noticeable gifts. Practically anything we are willing to do that benefits the advancement of God's work is a work of service. Carpenters and artisans were needed to build and keep in good repair the temple of God, as well as to decorate and enhance its beauty and the beauty of the worship experience. Secretaries and scribes kept essential records of the kings of Israel and continue to serve a similar function for the church. Landscapers, cooks, janitors, maintenance workers all play vital roles in the overall work of the church. We all fit in somewhere. It is just a matter of willingness to serve that marks the difference between a faithful servant and the unfaithful or uncommitted.

Jesus once told a parable about a certain nobleman who “went to a distant country to receive a kingdom, for himself, and then return. And he called ten of his

slaves, and gave them ten minas (money), and said to them, ‘Do business with this until I come back.’” (Luke 19:12-13). Each received one mina representing the gift the nobleman gave to each to use for his purposes. Most of his servants (called citizens in the parable) hated the nobleman and basically let him know they did not respect him as king. Needless to say each of them probably spent their mina on themselves.

The time came for the nobleman, now returned as king, to take account of what his citizens did with what they were given. To the faithful who made good use of what was entrusted to them, to benefit the king, the king rewarded them and granted them authority and responsibility in the king’s new kingdom. To those who squandered it away the king was highly displeased and did not permit them access to his kingdom. He considered them “enemies of mine” (v. 27) and ordered them to be slain in his presence.

We are all given certain gifts, abilities which we can use to benefit God and his work. The question is not what gift(s) were we given but what use did we make of what we were given. The faithful slave will find some good use for the gift given to him. The worthless slave will spend the gift on himself and ignore its benefit to the king, which is a way of saying they do not respect the king. We must ask ourselves do we want the king to say to us “well done good slave” or hear him call us “enemies of mine?” Which result we receive is in our hands today to determine.

Each slave received one mina representing what the nobleman entrusted to each person. Note that Jesus used the term “slave” in the parable to refer to all people who receive life on this earth. The question is what is the attitude of each slave toward the nobleman and how is that reflected in how he uses his time and his gift for the benefit of the nobleman? The emphasis is not on what the gift is, for all received the same in the eyes of the nobleman. The emphasis is on how it was used. In another similar parable (Matthew 25:14-30) there were different levels of talents given to the citizens in recognition that there are degrees of abilities given to different people. Still, in both parables, the faithful slaves produced exceptional results and were rewarded accordingly. So we cannot say because I do not have this gift or that gift I am not of much use to God in his work. We must rather take a hard look at ourselves and ask what level of commitment am I willing to make to use what God has entrusted to me. Faithful service is what will be rewarded, but we must first be willing to serve. We must gain the heart of a servant.

Stewards Or Household Managers

The third word denoting believers as servants in the New Testament is the word steward or OIKONOMOS in Greek. It means a household manager who oversees and administers all the affairs of a household. This steward could be a trusted slave or member of the household. Joseph, son of Israel, is the perfect example, when he was sold as a slave to Potiphar in Egypt and proved himself to be both capable and trustworthy to manage all of Potiphar’s household affairs (Genesis 39:4).

Jesus used the illustration of stewards in some of his parables. For example, he once taught, “Who then is the faithful and sensible steward (household manager), whom his master will put in charge of his servants (body of attendants), to give them their rations at the proper time? Blessed is that slave whom his master finds so doing when he comes. Truly I say to you, that he will put him in charge of all his

possessions” (Luke 12:42-44). Here the steward is a slave entrusted with household manager duties. The master is very pleased when his manager is continuously trustworthy during the master’s absence. Faithful stewardship, especially in the absence of the master, will receive commendable rewards. This is a picture of believers taking responsibility in this lifetime to take care of the affairs of Jesus while he is in heaven. The ones who take the responsibility seriously are faithful stewards. Those who act as if Jesus will delay his return such that they can fiddle away their time have a big surprise awaiting them when he comes.

Paul the apostle included stewardship in his description of an overseer in his letter to Titus. He wrote that “the overseer must be above reproach as God’s steward, not self-willed, not quick-tempered” (Titus 1:7). When Paul spoke of his own calling to preach the gospel he said, “I am under compulsion, for woe is me if I do not preach the gospel. For if I do this voluntarily, I have a reward; but if against my will, I have a stewardship entrusted to me” (1 Corinthians 9:16-17). His conversion to Christianity was not his idea, neither was his call to preach the gospel. Paul was called, he was chosen, and he was commanded to preach. This was his appointment to his stewardship. He was expected to be trustworthy for he himself said, “It was required of stewards that one be found trustworthy” (1 Corinthians 4:2). Paul was trustworthy to his call to perform the duties of a steward in God’s work. We too are expected to be good stewards of God and of the word he has entrusted to us. We cannot ignore it. Jesus laid this trust on us all in the great commission.

Peter is another apostle who understood this role of believers. He tied stewardship to the special gifts God has given to each one of us and which he furthermore expects us to use as faithful and trustworthy stewards. “As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving (doing the work of a deacon – servant to) one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God” (1 Peter 4:10). Such serving includes a multitude of activities but primarily focuses on making known the word of God to any and all who will receive it. Paul understood this when he wrote, “Of this church I was made a minister (deacon – servant) according to the stewardship from God bestowed on me for your benefit, that I might fully carry out the preaching of the word of God” (Colossians 1:25). The good word of God carries within itself the grace of God. Thus Peter spoke of a similar stewardship.

Paul likes to refer to his stewardship as one involving mysteries. By this he means things that, until Jesus came, were always a part of God’s plan of redemption for mankind, but which had been made fully known only in the days and years since Jesus ascended into heaven. To the Ephesians, for example, he refers to the work of a steward being engaged to sum up all the benefits of Jesus’ works of redemption into a united whole so the beneficiaries of his redemption fully realize what they have obtained. He writes that God “made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his kind intention which he purposed in him (Jesus) with a view to an administration (a stewardship or work of a steward) suitable to the fullness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in the heavens and things upon the earth: (Ephesians 1:9-10). From this point to the end of the chapter Paul lists an array of all the benefits that now accrue to believers as a result of Jesus’ redemptive work on the cross and God’s exalting him at his right hand following his resurrection from the dead. The news and the promise of all these blessings now compose the work of the steward of God to convey this good news concerning them and teaching new converts how to acquire them.

Paul, along with his companions, wanted to be known "as servants (deacons) of Christ, stewards (those managing affairs) of the mysteries of God" (1 Corinthians 4:1). This is why he was called into service by God to proclaim vividly and boldly all the things formerly hidden which God now wanted made known clearly and openly. Peter and John and the other disciples were first sent to reveal those things to the Jews, the household of Israel, but Paul was sent to the Gentiles. "For this reason, I Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus, for the sake of you Gentiles – if indeed you have heard of the stewardship (those managing affairs) of God's grace which was given to me for you; that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief. And by referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets in the spirit; to be specific, that the Gentiles are fellow-heirs and fellow-members of the body, and fellow-partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel, of which I was made a minister (deacon – servant), according to the gift of God's grace which was given to me according to the working of his power" (Ephesians 3:1-7). This is Paul's explanation about how Jesus made him the apostle to the Gentiles to reveal the whole plan of God to them and to make them aware that all these treasures from God were now fully available to them. In this task Paul is both a servant to render service and a steward to manage the work to get the word out.

In different ways and to different degrees all believers are slaves, servants and stewards of God. It is up to us to learn, understand, and exercise our skills and perform our duties in the household of the faithful.

There is more information on these three key Greek words related to our servanthood toward God in the APPENDIX on page 59 along with many of the texts which use the words in scripture.

HUMILITY AND OBEDIENCE

A man who would serve God must submit humbly to his will. God is his master, his supreme sovereign. He recognizes that "(God) jealously desires the spirit which he has made to dwell in us" (James 4:5). Our spirits, our minds must be renewed to conform to his for he is gentle and gracious to the one whose heart yields to his command. "God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble. Submit therefore to God" (vs. 6-7a). "Humble yourself in the presence of the Lord, and he will exalt you" (v. 10). There is no other place a servant of Yahweh can take his stand for God than on his knees in heart and soul and mind. "Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you at the proper time" (1 Peter 5:6).

Our true exaltation does not come from our own hand, or by the hand of our friends, or by those whose lives we affect by our service. Only God brings us our true exaltation. Until then, "with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself" (Philippians 2:3). "Be subject to one another in the fear of Christ" (Ephesians 5:21).

Our service in God's work is most effective when we consider ourselves servants of one another. Paul told members of the Corinthian church to follow the example and support the work of the household of Stephanas because "they have devoted themselves for ministry (deacon work) to the saints." Paul urged them to

“be in subjection to such men and to everyone who helps in the work and labors” (1 Corinthians 16:16). Offering ones’ self up for service is the step that must be taken for any believer to begin walking down the path that ultimately leads to exaltation by the hand of Yahweh. Great works come through the yieldedness of such people, and Yahweh remembers humble hearts of submission with his own rewards in due time. Keep in mind that the servant’s heart is the one God designed to be present in his kingdom.

Paul is our greatest New Testament example, apart from Jesus, to demonstrate how a haughty spirit, useful to no man and especially not to God, can be transformed to a humble and obedient spirit which is very useful in the hands of God. As a young man Paul was pretty cocky. “For you have heard of my former manner of life in Judaism, how I used to persecute the church of God beyond measure, and tried to destroy it; and I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries among my countrymen, being more extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions” (Galatians 1:13-14). But his encounter with Jesus on the Damascus road deflated his puffed up spirit. After that event Paul began to say, much more humbly, “I am the least of the apostles, who am not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God” (1 Corinthians 15:9).

Even so, Paul knew where he stood in his relationship with God and Jesus. When push came to shove, and the situation demanded he take his stand, Paul was not bashful about stating his appropriate standing before his two heavenly masters. Other church leaders had nothing to boast above his own standing. “I consider myself not the least inferior to the most eminent apostles” (2 Corinthians 11:5)” But before Jesus and God he knew his place and he humbly bowed his knee to them. Take for example his struggle with his “thorn in the flesh.” Paul ardently appealed to his heavenly authorities to remove its debilitating affects. But Paul later wrote about his submission to their reply to his request. “(Jesus) has said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.’ Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ’s sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong. I have become foolish; you yourselves compelled me. Actually I should have been commended by you, for in no respect was I inferior to the most eminent apostles, even though I am a nobody” (2 Corinthians 12:9-11). Paul gives us a great example to follow as humble and obedient servants of God and Jesus. There is much greater reward even in this life to such submission as evidenced in the life of Paul. God always creates his own strength out of our weakness when we are altogether yielded to him.

OUR ULTIMATE GOAL – ACQUIRING A SERVANT’S HEART

Jesus had it. Paul had it. Every “great” person in the Bible had it. And if we want to be useful to God we too must acquire it. What is “it”? a servant’s heart. In every major undertaking in which God called out men to accomplish his objectives he called upon men and women who saw themselves as humble, obedient servants of God, slaves to their heavenly master. There is a reason for this. These are the people who will do what God calls upon them to do. They won’t make up their own rules as the challenge progresses. They won’t be available one day but not the next. They won’t hassle their master regarding working conditions or requirements. They

will simply knuckle down to the task at hand and do what they must to complete it. They are servants. They are slaves. And they do what they are told to do.

It is easy to get tied up into the semantics of who is eligible or qualified to be an elder or a deacon, when we need to be concentrating on knowing what God wants us to be as good citizens of his kingdom. John the Baptist came proclaiming, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel" (Mark 1:15). People came from everywhere to hear him preach. He told them to "bring forth fruits in keeping with your repentance" (Luke 3:8). They were all asking him the same question, "What shall we do?" (vs. 10, 12, 14). They were asking the right question because they were not doing what they needed to do to be pleasing in the sight of God. A servant will do what is pleasing in the sight of his master and the servant of God must do what is pleasing to God. So the right question is not what must I do to qualify to be a deacon or an elder? The right question to ask ourselves is what must I do to be pleasing to my God? And that can only be answered, first and foremost, by knowing what God has already called upon us to do as recorded in his word. We must know his word and do his word. That is what he expects of us. That is where we begin our quest.

Then when we know his word and do his word he will open the doors of opportunity for other challenging service opportunities. Too often we allow ourselves to think the best opportunities of service we have are those we have always longed to attain, things like to be a pastor, an elder or chairman of the board or member of a conference board. While all the time God has prepared an avenue of service we completely overlooked because we were so intent on attaining our own dreams and not opening ourselves up to his leading. We missed major opportunities we had hoped to achieve through persistent insistence on achieving our own limited dreams. We insisted on wanting what we wanted rather than what God wanted for us. A servant will continue to do faithfully what he knows his master wants him to do. At the right time the master will need this faithful servant to perform a most significant task and because he has been ever faithful in what he knew he was to do God knows he will now be equally faithful to perform a more significant task. God knows what we can handle and what we can do best for him. It is our duty to wait for his call and not to try to force a calling he knows we are not best suited to pursue.

Do the work you know God wants you to do as found in his word, then when the time is right God will call on you to do what only you can do best. That is honoring God and when we honor God he will honor us. What more can we ask?

TEAMWORK – UNITED LEADERSHIP

We need only look at a few of the letters of Paul to see how he depended largely upon a group of workers to carry out the task Jesus laid on him. Jesus directed a very specific assignment to Saul of Tarsus on the day he was on the road to Damascus to arrest another batch of dangerous wayward Jews, those who now claimed a new allegiance to Jesus, the Nazarene. He would put them in bonds to stand trial before the Sanhedrin. But before he got to Damascus Jesus knocked him off his horse and told him flat out, "arise, and stand on your feet; for this purpose I have appeared to you, to appoint you a minister (deacon) and a witness...(to) the Gentiles, to whom I am sending you" (Acts 26:16-17). It took a few days for his mind to reorient to believing what he formerly persecuted, but over time Saul, later to become Paul, began to organize his efforts to accomplish his assigned task. For a

decade he went home to Tarsus in Cilicia and lived a rather quiet life. At least nothing is said of his efforts during this time. It was Barnabas who went to him to call for his assistance in the work underway in Antioch of Syria. There Paul began to associate with other workers. Four are named who were called prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Niger, Lucius, and Manaen. For the next few years he worked hand in hand with these fellow-servants of God to proclaim the gospel to Gentiles in that large city. But it was not until he was called again to his primary task that Paul began to really begin building his network of fellow-workers. Besides Barnabas who was his companion on his first missionary journey, Paul also went with Silas on his second journey. Silas is also called Silvanus (a Latin spelling) in the greeting of both his letters to the Thessalonians (1:1).

In his letter to the Roman church he enumerates a large list of people he knows and has worked with during his missionary journeys. The ones he names as fellow-workers include Phoebe, Prisca (Priscilla) and Aquila, Andronicus and Junias, Urbanus, Herodion, Tryphaena and Tryphosa, and Persis,.

Others named seem to be local Roman church members, but not necessarily fellow-laborers in his task. These include Epaenetus, Mary, Ampliatus, Stachys, Apelles, Aristobulus, Narcissus, Rufus, Asyncritus, Phloegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas, Philogogus and Julia, Nereus, and Olympas.

Those with Paul as he writes the letter to the Romans include: Timothy, Lucius, Jason, Sosipater, Tertius, Gaius, Erastus and Quartus. So immediately in his presence are eight fellow-workers. Sometimes these workers assist him where he is and sometimes he sends them on special assignments.

Paul had a long and fruitful association with Aquila and Priscilla whom he met on his second missionary journey while at Corinth. They were tentmakers like Paul and they accepted him as a worker in the tent trade to allow Paul to earn his means of paying for his food and lodging (Acts 18:1-3). Aquila and Prisca were recent immigrants from Rome. It seems there were skirmishes between Christians and Jews taking place in the city and the emperor Claudius expelled them from the city because their behavior was so disruptive. They became faithful and hearty supporters of Paul's work for we hear that they joined Paul when he left Corinth. He then left them in Ephesus where they met Apollos (Acts 18:18, 24-26). Paul, in his Roman letter included these fond remarks about them: "who for my life risked their own necks, to whom not only do I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles" (Romans 16:4). This may be referring to the uprising that occurred in Ephesus during Paul's third missionary journey (Acts 19:30-31).

While Paul was in Ephesus he wrote a letter to the Corinthians and included Aquila and Prisca in his closing remarks (1 Corinthians 16:19). He also mentioned Apollos (1 Corinthians 1:12; 3:4-6) as one who worked among them. In Ephesians 6:21 he tells the Ephesians he is sending Tychicus to make everything known to them. To the Philippians he sent Timothy to learn of their spiritual condition (Philippians 2:19-20) and Epaphroditus, because they had heard he was very ill. Paul tells them to "hold men like him in high regard; because he came close to death for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was deficient in your service to me (vs. 29-30). Later in this letter Paul mentions Clement, along with some unnamed individuals, whom he calls "my fellow-workers, whose names are in the book of life" (Philippians 4:2).

Another letter Paul wrote while in prison in Rome was sent to Colosae. In it he mentions Tychicus as a faithful servant whom Paul is sending to them that they

may be informed about his prisoner status (Colosians 4:7-8). Onesimus, one of their own, will be sent with Tychicus (v. 9), and Aristarchus is noted to be a fellow-prisoner with Paul. Also mentioned is John Mark, cousin of Barnabas, who became useful to Paul in ministry (v. 10). He also refers to Jesus, who is called Justus, a fellow-worker, and again mentions Epaphras (v.12) whom he had mentioned earlier in the letter as “a faithful servant of Christ on our behalf” (Colosians 1:7).

In writing to the Thessalonians Paul calls Timothy “our brother and God’s fellow-worker in the gospel of Christ” (1 Thessalonians 3:2). In his second letter to Timothy he reminds Timothy to “do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry” (2 Timothy 4:5).

Paul had heartache over some fellow-workers who broke ranks with him, among whom he mentions Hymenaeus and Alexander in 1 Timothy 1:20 who rejected their faith and Demas who “loved this present world” and left Paul in prison (2 Timothy 4:10). Though they were still faithful servants Paul bemoaned the parting of Crescens and Titus who had gone on to Galatia and Dalmatia respectively. He also mentions Hymenaeus and Philetus as former believers “who have gone astray from the truth” because they enjoy engaging in “worldly and empty chatter” (2 Timothy 2:16-18). Luke alone remains with Paul in Rome. He asks Timothy to “pick up Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for service” (4:11). Finally, he mentions having sent Tychicus to Ephesus (v. 12). Others are mentioned in this final letter of Paul’s but it is unknown if they are fellow-workers or merely beloved believers. Prisca and Aquila are mentioned again, but we already know of their devotion to his work.

Paul had left Titus in Crete to firmly establish the work there and to appoint elders (Titus 1:5). In closing his letter to Titus he says he will “send Artemas or Tychicus to you” (3:12) and requests Titus to “diligently help Zenas the lawyer and Apollos on their way so that nothing is lacking for them” (v. 13).

It is quite apparent Paul had influenced and made close working relationships and associations with many people. Each had caught his passion for the work of proclaiming the gospel to the Gentiles. As a servant of Christ Paul spearheaded the efforts to keep what works had been started alive and thriving and he depended on these fellow-workers to accomplish this task. They worked as a team and as a result their influence was quite pronounced and effective. Paul practiced what he preached. He told Timothy, “the things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, these entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also” (2 Timothy 2:2). This is the key task of faithful servants of the word of God. Teach it so others learn it well enough to teach it to others. This is how the gospel gets out into all the world and elders and deacons are right in the very heart of this work in the church. And it cannot be done by one person. It takes a team to do the work and it takes a team to encourage one another to keep at the work and to lift each other up when things begin to get tough.

Though Paul was a very effective organizer of workers and preachers and teachers of the good news message he was admittedly first and foremost a servant of God and of men. Jesus originally appointed Paul as a minister (servant – deacon) and witness” (Acts 26:16). Paul always considered himself so. He never lost sight of who he was and where he stood in relation to his master. He told the Ephesians, “that the Gentiles are fellow-heirs and fellow-members of the body, and fellow-partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel, of which I was made a minister (servant – deacon), according to the gift of God’s grace which was given to

me according to the working of his power” (Ephesians 3:6-7). What Jesus was in his earthly life and ministry Paul became and taught others to become. He never assumed a lordship role over his fellow-workers, but considered them equal partners in the task at hand. He had different skills and abilities but not a different rank. All worked together toward a common objective.

Elders (pastors) who are serving a church alone or have very inexperienced elders and deacons should try to make associations with other, more experienced church elders to receive the kind of support needed to keep spirits high in the work. Individuals need support from others. This work can be very lonely when attempted to be accomplished alone. The load can become overbearing leading to discouragement. This work was never intended to result in loneliness.

The one place where Paul was alone in performing his proclamation of the gospel was in Athens. Silas and Timothy had stayed in Berea and others who had escorted Paul to a boat bound for Athens left him to sail alone (Acts 17:14-15). Paul then began proclaiming the gospel in Athens as a lone preacher. He was not very effective. Luke records that only “some men joined him and believed.” Only two are named (v. 34). Admittedly Athens would be a tough place to proclaim the gospel, but so was Ephesus and it became a Christian stronghold in Asia Minor. It may be that his spirits were not very bold or emboldened to preach the word with power and courage because he was alone. A support team can make all the difference.

In the Church of God there is an association of pastors, who get together once a year or so to share experiences and Biblical studies of interest. But there is no similar association for elders and deacons. It would seem a good idea, at least within local regions, to have such association meetings to strengthen skills and abilities of all these leaders in the church. After all pastors are elders and elders are pastors! It is certainly Biblical to work together toward our common tasks.

UNITY AND CONSENSUS

When working as a team there is always the concern as to how all the members of the team come to agreement on any issue. Paul reminds us, “Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree, and there be no divisions among you, but you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment” (1 Corinthians 1:10). That is a tall order especially since we all come to the table with different perspectives, understandings and commitments to the issues under consideration. Consensus is certainly the goal. It is very important for leaders to be united in what they present as the direction to be taken by a church as a whole. A dictionary definition of consensus is “group solidarity in sentiment and belief; general agreement; unanimity; collective opinion.” Among these definitions the word unanimity is the strongest and when taken to excess would frequently result in stalemate. Under unanimous we find these definitions: “being of one mind; agreeing; formed with or indicating unanimity; having the agreement and consent of all” (From Webster’s Dictionary). That last phrase, “having the agreement and consent of all,” is key to achieving acceptable consensus without demanding absolute unanimous agreement. It is possible to come to consensus without there being total agreement in every point among all the members. So how can this kind of consensus be achieved?

First there must be a will among the collective group to come to a consensus. That must be the goal of all. Scriptural teachings must be the bases of the

agreement. Often specific scriptures will be lacking to address the issues so general principles from scripture must also be considered for guidance. Asking God's guidance and direction must be part of the equation. We must be willing to do what he is directing us to do. Personal experiences of members of the team, research on how others have handled the issue are all also valuable in helping to assess the situation and gain insight. In the end though, decision time must come.

The most important thing to realize when making a decision that leads to an action is that most decisions do not involve life and death. And if the decision proves to be inappropriate most decisions can be reconsidered. There may be a cost involved. Financial costs can sting but they are not usually back breakers. At least the decisions made can take such risks into consideration. If the decisions will result in significant, long lasting effects on all the members of the church then these should certainly involve the congregation as a whole not only for input, but more importantly for their buy in to wholeheartedly support it. They must certainly understand all the ramifications to their involvement if it is to gain successful implementation.

Consensus does not necessarily mean everyone must agree totally. It means it is a decision all are willing to support, to try fairly and to be willing to adjust as necessary to improve as conditions warrant. Most of the time decisions are not one time commitments that lock us in to something for all time. There are almost always ways to include the means to make adjustments. The wise and understanding among us can help strategize decision-making in this regard.

We as individuals, the church ruling body and the congregation as a whole have decisions to make all the time. We cannot let disagreement interfere with good decision making. We, as good stewards of God, must be willing to seek out those opportunities and ideas that can result in the best decisions available while always realizing decisions or elements of decisions can be readdressed and changed if necessary. The important thing is that all agree to support decisions made and to help make it work to the benefit of all.

SHOW YOURSELF AN EXAMPLE TO OTHERS

When Paul wrote his letters to Timothy the young disciple may have been in his mid- to late twenties. Still Timothy had proven himself effective in proclaiming and teaching the word of God. However, his youthfulness and tenderness may have prevented him from having staying power in the face of stern opposition. Paul tried to encourage Timothy to stand his ground based on his understanding of the word of God and his knowledge of how God helped Paul through many difficulties. Timothy had a good and quick mind to understand gospel teachings and apparently was excellent in communication skills. He just needed to step up his courage. So Paul gave him some stepping stones to advance in his development as a useful servant of Jesus. He wrote to him telling him to "let no one look down on your youthfulness, but rather in speech, conduct, love, faith and purity show yourself an example to those who believe" (1 Timothy 4:12). He was telling Timothy to concentrate on these qualities, build them up in your life, Timothy. By them Paul believed Timothy could mature in areas where he was weak. These are also good qualities for all servants of God to pursue. Below are additional scriptures related to these keys qualities to help make them indwell us more readily.

SPEECH (Word) – Matt. 12:3-35 Make the tree good, and its fruit good...for the tree is known by its fruit....The mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart. The good man out of his good treasure brings forth what is good.
Eph. 4:29 Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, that it may give grace to those who hear.
Col. 4:6 Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned, as it were, with salt, so that you may know how you should respond to each person.
1 Pet 3:15 Sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to every one who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence.

CONDUCT – (Conversation) – 2 Cor. 1:12 For our proud confidence is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in holiness and godly sincerity, not in fleshly wisdom but in the grace of God, we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially toward you.
1 Thes. 2:10-12 You are witnesses, and so is God, how devoutly and uprightly and blamelessly we behaved toward you believers; just as you know how we were exhorting and encouraging and imploring each one of you as a father would his own children, so that you may walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.
Jam. 3:13 Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom.
1 Pet 1:14-15 Like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; because it is written, ‘You shall be holy, for I am holy.’
1 Pet 2:12 Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may on account of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation.
2 Pet. 3:11 Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness.

LOVE (Charity) – 1 Cor. 13:4-8a Love is patient, love is kind, and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails.
Gal 5:22-23 The fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such there is no law.
1 Jn 4:7-11 Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and every one who loves is born of God and knows God. The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love. By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent his only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

FAITH – Heb. 11:1, 6 Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen....Enoch...obtained the witness that before his being taken up he was pleasing God. And without faith it is impossible to please him, for

he who comes to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of those who seek him.

Jam. 1:22; 2:17, 18, 24, 26 Prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves....faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself. But someone may well say, 'You have faith, and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works'....faith without works is useless....You see that a man is justified by works, and not by faith alone....For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead.

PURITY – Matt. 5:8 Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.”

Phil. 4:8 Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, let your mind dwell on these things.

1 Tim. 1:5 But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.

2 Tim 2:22 Now flee from youthful lusts, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.

Heb. 10:19, 22 Since therefore, brethren, we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus....let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

Jam. 1:27 This is pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father, to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.

Jam. 3:17 But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy.

1 Pet. 1:22 Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart.

1 Jn 3:3 Every one who has this hope fixed on him purifies himself, just as he is pure

EXAMPLES AND IMITATORS

Role models are powerful incentivisors to us to get us interested in that in which they are engaged. Successful sports figures in particular electrify the interest of the young to want to go outside and start throwing balls, kicking them, batting them just like the pros do. The masters make it look so easy and when it looks easy it looks like fun. But the pros know there were hours and hours of work effort put into training and practice to get them to perform with such excellence that they make their plays flow as smoothly as silk. Nonetheless, their skills are excellent examples for youth to imitate.

One of the chief duties of elders and deacons, and for that matter any servant of God, is to so conduct our lives and behavior as to provide excellent examples to the more youthful and immature believers who need good examples to imitate so their lives can be more in line with what God expects from us. This is an awesome responsibility. And we cannot fall back on saying “do as I say and not as I do” because what we do speaks much louder than words. Every professed Christian is watched very closely by other Christians, especially young ones and immature ones and even more especially by non-Christians. We simply have no way out of this expectation from our Master. Besides, Jesus taught that he expects us to be lights

of truth in the world and one of the clearest expressions of truth in action is how we conduct ourselves in our daily lives. Face it, once we put on the name of Christ we become examples to others whether we like it or not.

Paul and other New Testament writers gave us a number of insights into this irrepressible duty. Below are some choice excerpts.

“Our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia” (1 Thessalonians 1:6-7).

“For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example, because we did not act in an undisciplined manner among you, nor did we eat anyone’s bread without paying for it, but with labor and hardship we kept working night and day so that we might not be a burden to any of you; not because we do not have the right to this, but in order to offer ourselves as a model for you, that you might follow our example. For even when we were with you, we used to give you this order: if anyone will not work, neither let him eat” (2 Thessalonians 3:7-10).

“Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ. Now I praise you because you remember me in everything, and hold firmly to the traditions, just as I delivered them to you” (1 Corinthians 11:1-2).

“I do not write these things to shame you, but to admonish you as my beloved children. For if you were to have countless tutors in Christ, yet you would not have many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel. I exhort you therefore, be imitators of me. For this reason I have sent to you Timothy, who is my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, and he will remind you of my ways which are in Christ, just as I teach everywhere in every church” (1 Corinthians 4:14-17).

“Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith” (Hebrews 13:7).

“Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow-elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, shepherd the flock of God among you, not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock” (1 Peter 5:1-3).

SHEPHERDS OF THE FLOCK

Jesus, Paul and Peter all gave clear insights comparing the duties of elders and deacons to shepherding a flock of sheep. Shepherding is a full time job. In fact, the shepherd must stay with his sheep at all times. They belong to him and they demand constant care. The shepherd cannot safely pen up his flock in the sheep fold at 5 pm and return to his home to enjoy a tasty hot meal, watch a good sports game before going off to sleep in a nice soft bed. His sheep are not altogether safe without his presence. They are still in danger of wolves and lions, predators who are looking for a free, easy to secure, evening meal. He cannot leave them to a hired hand because the sheep do not belong to him. He has no personal vested interest in them. When danger of the threat to his life arises the hired hand flees to save his own neck leaving the sheep once again defenseless. The good shepherd stays on

duty and, if the need arises, he gives his life for the sake of and in the protection of the lives of the sheep. This means finding as soft a ground as possible to sleep on out under to stars and in inclement weather, as need be. The good shepherd seeks out suitable grazing fields and watering holes, and keeps watch out for strays who can endanger themselves by getting too close to cliffs and slippery terrain. And there is always the one sheep that gets lost, having not noticed that he has become separated from the rest of the flock. The shepherd knows when one of his sheep is missing and leaves the rest in good hands while he goes out searching for the one lost sheep until he finds it and brings it back to the fold. The sheep know the shepherd's voice. Even though another speaks their name they do not respond to the voice of a stranger. So a shepherd is trusted implicitly by his sheep.

There is a whole array of similarities between the duties of shepherds compared to those of elders and deacons. Either elders or deacons can be inserted in the following examples. Both apply.

Overseeing the spiritual welfare of believers and would be believers is a demanding task. Elders can be called on for advice and assistance at any time and under any circumstances. God's servant must be available and organized well enough to respond as the need arises. Multiple elders and deacons in a church make this task easier to bear. Though deacons have a personal life, and in fact are expected to manage their own households well, they also realize they have committed to responding when duty calls to help those in need, even if it means missing a favorite TV program. The call to duty is to assist physical and spiritual needs of God's people be they believers, interested parties or strangers. They are all God's people and he wants them all. The elder does his work willingly. He is not compelled to fill his responsibilities but responds eagerly with a sincere heart of devotion as one who has accepted his call to duty from God and not from any man. He understands how much God wants to include all people in his kingdom and does his part to reach out to all to help them understand as well. Sometimes deacons are inconvenienced to fulfill their duties. They may be called on with short notice or when they have had a hard and tiring day of work, but with God's help they muster up the strength to respond lovingly and caringly. They make time to study the word of God to better understand and appreciate the whole plan of God so that their own hearts are full of thanksgiving to the God who saved them and has provided a magnificent home for them in his kingdom. They joyfully prepare and share lessons from God's word to his people so they too can experience the joy found in the heart of God's servant. Elders are also prepared to gently and respectfully rebut teachings and teachers that present ideas which conflict with those from the word of God. At times there will be Christians who have given more heed to the enticements of the world. Elders must have a heart of compassion to reach out to these to help them understand the destructive road they are taking and urge them back to faithfulness. Not all will respond, but deacons must try and kept them constantly in mind in prayer. Those who do come to their spiritual senses bring great rejoicing to the whole household of God. Many times the reason they respond favorably is because they know the one who has come is one they trust.

By way of remembrance and for personal edification below is quoted John's account of Jesus' teaching about himself as the good shepherd. When we recall what Jesus was willing to do we gain anew the strength and courage to follow in his steps, to follow his example.

“Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter by the door into the fold of the sheep, but climbs up some other way, he is a thief and a robber. But he who enters by the door is a shepherd of the sheep. To him the doorkeeper opens and the sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name, and leads them out. When he puts forth all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. And a stranger they simply will not follow, but will flee from him, because they do not know the voice of strangers.’

This figure of speech Jesus spoke to them, but they did not understand what those things were which he had been saying to them.

Jesus therefore said to them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and robbers; but the sheep did not hear them. I am the door; if anyone enters through me, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal, and kill, and destroy; I came that they might have life, and might have it abundantly. I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. He who is a hireling, and not a shepherd, who is not the owner of the sheep, beholds the wolf coming and leaves the sheep, and flees, and the wolf snatches them, and scatters them. He flees because he is a hireling, and is not concerned about the sheep. I am the good shepherd; and I know my own, and my own know me’” (John 10:1-14).

In addition Jesus also told the parable about the lost sheep (Luke 15:4-7). It is a powerful reminder to our call to fulfill the great commission and to God’s impassioned desire to save all men, if it were possible. God “desires all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:4). “The Lord is...not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9).

DUTIES OF SHEPHERDS (OVERSEERS) OF GOD’S PEOPLE

Below is an excerpt from a booklet written by Edward E. Werner in 1996 entitled *The Elders of the Church*. A copy may still be available care of the Church of Christ, 775 W. Donnelly Avenue, Coos Bay, Oregon 97420. Mr. Werner identifies the following areas of leadership, directing and service that he believes are involved in overseeing an assembly of believers by elders.

Teaching, Preaching, Advising. “Those who work hard at preaching and teaching: should “be considered worthy of double honor” (1 Timothy 5:17) was spoken of elders. Overseers don’t do all of the teaching in a congregation, but they oversee all of it to be assured that the proper instruction is given to the congregation. The elders are the “directors of Christian education” in the church.

Public Worship. They are concerned that each member of the body of Christ is “not forsaking (his) own assembling together” (Hebrews 10:25). He oversees the Lord’s Supper service, prayer, music, stewardship; and finances, and anything else that involves the public worship assemblies of the church.

Benevolence. (Special care which is given to) the members of the body of Christ. A part of pure religion is to “visit the orphans and widows in their distress” (James 1:27). Every Christian is to do this. But older widows who are “widows indeed”, having no children or grandchildren to care for them and who are otherwise qualified, are to be honored and “put on the list” to be supported in exchange for their pledge of special service in the church (1 Timothy 5:3-12). One determining factor involving our heavenly inheritance is how we have responded to brothers in Christ

who were hungry, thirsty, without sufficient clothing, sick, and even in prison (undoubtedly for their faith) (Matthew 25:34-40). Certainly, the church collectively should be involved in this same benevolence toward its members, under the leadership of the elders. Naturally, and wisely, just as the Bible prescribes certain conditions for the church body regarding the support of widows, it also tells us that “if anyone will not work, neither let him eat” (II Thessalonians 3:10). But the local Church of Christ, under the oversight of its elders, is to care for its truly needy members. The elderly and the shut-ins must know that the church loves them and cares for them and is ready to assist them in any need that they may have.

Evangelism. The two primary purposes and functions for the church’s existence are (1) the spiritual edification or building up of the Christians, and (2) the evangelization of the lost world. Among at least 4 responsibilities which are placed upon the evangelist is the evangelization of the lost in the local community. But the elders also help the church realize and carry out this important purpose of the church’s very existence. The elders lead the church in supporting evangelists who go out preaching not only in the local area, but those who “go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation” (Mark 16:16; III John 5-8).

Spiritual Welfare. The spiritual welfare and growth of each member of the congregation (Ephesians 4:13-16). They are to provide a well-rounded program to include and actively involve all the members for their personal development (Ephesians 4:12). They should see that adequate facilities are provided for the Bible school classes. Then need to provide times of fellowship together, and schedule special services or meetings for the edification and the strengthening of the Christians. Personal study is needed with weak or new Christians to help them become strong. They should visit regularly in each Christian’s home to maintain a healthy relationship between the overseers and the members of the congregation, and anything else that involves the education and personal growth of the Christians.

Dissension/Conflicts. Stop dissension and resolve conflicts in the congregation. Unfortunately Satan will see to it that there will sometimes be some conflict and sin in the church. The overseers in Ephesus were charged with the responsibility to “be on guard for (1) (themselves) AND for (2) all the flock” against false teachers (Acts 20:28-30). Years later, that church in Ephesus, under the oversight of these elders, or probably their successors, had gained a reputation for keeping that congregation free from false teachers (Revelation 2:2, 3, 6). Unfortunately, they had left their first love (v. 4).

Judgments/Decisions. Make needed judgments and decisions for the benefit of the entire congregation.

HOW DO I FOLLOW THEIR ACTS?

In this study great men and women of God were called God’s servants, God’s slaves, God’s stewards. Likewise, those who served under the leadership of these great people of God considered themselves servants, slaves and stewards of God. Any of us who take the name of Jesus as our savior and are willing and eager to be called Christians acknowledge that he is our Lord Jesus Christ meaning Jesus is master over us and we are his slaves.

He is master because Yahweh God made him so. Yahweh chose Jesus, he anointed him to be King of kings and Lord of lords (Revelation 19:16). It remains for us to bow our knees willingly before his throne and submit ourselves humbly to hear

and to heed what he commands us to do. For we know that if we are not willing to do so in this life there will come a day when we will be forced to bow our knees before him and that will not be a pleasant day or event. On that day Jesus will come in judgment before all mankind.

For this purpose Yahweh established Jesus as kng over all his creation seating him at God's right hand. "Therefore also God highly exalted him, and bestowed on him a name which is above every name that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Philippians 2:9-11). Either now or on that fateful day every knee will bow in acknowledgement that Jesus is Lord. Better to bow humbly now in obedience to serve than to be forced to kneel in disgrace.

Jesus is a loving and caring master to those who serve him willingly. "Come to me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart; and you shall find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light" (Matthew 11:28-30). Jesus bore and continues to bear our burdens. He is a servant just as he calls on us to be his servants. Can we do anything less?

He asks us to take his yoke upon us. It seems contrary to reason that taking on another's burden would create a lighter burden in effect. Nonetheless, that is his promise to us. As long as we choose to carry our own burdens they will lay heavy upon us, but when we take up his burden, his yoke, we find it a much lighter load. God works in mysterious ways. His thoughts are not our thoughts. It takes faith to accept that what he says, and what his Son says, is true, but those who have done so have found his word to be true.

As a self acknowledged servant of God yield yourself to find a work you can do in the body of Christ. Do not wait for someone to ask you to serve in some capacity. Do not expect someone to approach you to be nominated for a church office. Rather, show yourself to be a willing and obedient servant ready to do what needs to be done. Allow the more experienced among you to lead you along in your journey of service, to see your willing heart and ready mind, to help you acquire the qualities and skills useful for other acts of service you may not know are in you even now to do for the sake and the glory of your Lord and master. Recognition and greatness are not your objective.

APPENDIX

Below are listed three key Greek words related to the Christian's position as servant before God and Jesus. A number of texts containing these words are also listed. Note also in these instances that Christians are servants to one another.

SLAVE OR BOND-SERVANT

SLAVE - DOULOS – a slave, one bound to serve. This word and its derivatives is used over 100 times in the New Testament. It is the word for the person who is bound to serve another due to obligation. In the texts below it is interpreted by the English words and phrases: serve(d), servant, slave(s), serving, enslave(d), bond-servant(s), bondslave(s)

Matt. 6:24 No one can serve two masters
 Matt. 6:24 You cannot serve God and mammon
 Matt. 12:18 Behold, my servant whom I have chosen; by beloved
 Matt. 18:23 a certain king who wished to settled accounts with his slaves
 Matt. 20:27 whoever wishes to be first among you must be your slave
 Matt. 21:34 he sent his slaves to the vine-growers to receive his produce
 Matt. 22:3 he sent out his slaves to call those...invited to the wedding feast
 Matt. 24:46 Blessed is that slave whom his master finds so doing when he comes
 Matt. 25:14 a man...called his own slaves, and entrusted his possessions to them
 Mark 10:44 whoever wishes to be first among you shall be the slave of all
 Mark 12:2 at the harvest time he sent a slave to the vine-growers
 Mark 13:34 upon leaving his house and putting his slaves in charge
 Luke 12:37 Blessed are those slaves whom the master shall find on the alert
 Luke 14:17 at the dinner hour he sent his slaves to...those who had been invited
 Luke 16:13 No (house) servant can serve two masters
 Luke 16:13 You cannot serve God and mammon
 Luke 19:13 he called ten of his slaves, and gave them ten minas
 Luke 20:10 at the harvest time he sent a slave to the vine-growers
 John 15:15 No longer do I call you slaves
 John 15:15 for the slave does not know what his master is doing
 John 15:20 A slave is not greater than his master
 Acts 4:29 grant that thy bond-servants may speak thy word with all boldness
 Acts 20:19 serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials
 Rom. 1:1 Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle
 Rom. 6:18 you became slaves of righteousness
 Rom. 6:19 so now present your members as slaves to righteousness
 Rom. 6:22 having been freed from sin and enslaved to God...resulting..sanctification
 Rom. 7:6 died to that by which we were bound, so that we serve in newness
 Rom. 7:25 with my mind am serving the law of God...my flesh the law of sin
 Rom. 12:11 not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord
 Rom. 14:18 he who in this way serves Christ is acceptable to God...approved
 1 Cor. 7:22 he who was called while free, is Christ's slave
 1 Cor. 9:19 I have made myself a slave to all, that I might win the more
 Gal. 5:13 through love serve one another
 Eph. 6:6 as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart
 Phil. 1:1 Paul and Timothy, bond-servants of Christ Jesus
 Phil. 2:7 emptied himself, taking the form of a bond-servant
 Phil. 2:22 he served with me in the furtherance of the gospel
 Col. 1:7 Epaphras, our beloved fellow bond-servant
 Col. 3:24 It is the Lord Christ whom you serve
 Col. 4:7 Tychicus, our...faithful servant and fellow bonds slave in the Lord
 1 Thes. 1:9 how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God
 2 Tim. 2:24 the Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome
 Titus 1:1 Paul, a bond-servant of God, and an apostle of Jesus Christ
 Jam. 1:1 James, a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ
 1 Pet. 2:16 your freedom as a covering for evil, but use it as bondslaves of God
 2 Pet. 1:1 Simon Peter, a bond-servant and apostle of Jesus Christ
 Jude 1 Jude, a bond-servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James
 Rev. 1:1 Revelation...God gave him to show his bond-servants

Rev. 2:20 she teaches and leads my bond-servants astray
Rev. 6:11 until the number of their fellow servants and their brethren
Rev. 7:3 until we have sealed the bond-servants of our God
Rev. 10:7 mystery of God is finished, as he preached to his servants the prophets
Rev. 11:18 time to give their reward to thy bond-servants the prophets
Rev. 15:3 they sang the song of Moses, the bond-servant of God
Rev. 19:2 he has avenged the blood of his bond-servants on her
Rev. 19:5 Give praise to our God, all you his bond-servants
Rev. 19:10 I am a fellow servant of yours and your brethren
Rev. 22:3 throne of God...in it, and his bond-servants shall serve him
Rev. 22:6 sent his angel to show to his bond-servants the things...take place
Rev. 22:9 I am a fellow servant of yours and of your brethren the prophets

SERVANT

SERVANT – DIAKONOS – a servant, attendant, waiter at table. The main thought in the word is service rendered to another, the servant of him whom the labor benefits. Interestingly, the word for deacon (DIAKONEO) means one who does the work of a DIAKONOS. Even more interesting these two words, along with DIAKONIA, occur far more frequently in the New Testament than the words for elder and overseer. In fact, these words often refer to all other major offices in the church, like elder, apostle, prophet and teacher.

In the texts below DIAKONOS is interpreted by the English words and phrases: servant(s), minister, worker. In place of these words insert the word “deacon” to gain an interesting insight into what the author is saying.

John 12:26 If any one serves (DIAKONEO) me, let him follow me... where I am, there shall my servant also be

Rom. 15:8 I say that Christ has become a servant to the circumcision

Rom. 16:1 Phoebe... a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea

2 Cor 3:6 who also made us adequate as servants of a new covenant

2 Cor 6:4 in everything commending ourselves as servants of God

Eph. 3:7 of which I was made a minister, according to the gift of God's grace

Eph. 6:21 Tychicus, the beloved brother and faithful minister of the Lord

Col. 1:7 (Epaphras) a faithful servant of Christ on our behalf

Col. 1:23 gospel... of which I, Paul, was made a minister

Col. 1:25 of this church I was made a minister

Col. 4:7 (Tychicus) beloved brother and faithful servant

1 Thes 3:2 God's fellow-worker in the gospel of Christ

1 Tim 4:6 you will be a good servant of Jesus Christ

DIAKONIA – service, attendance; and ministerial office with reference to the labor pertaining thereto; serviceable labor, service rendered, especially as benefitting others, ministry in every form.

In the texts below DIAKONIA is interpreted by the English words and phrases: servant(s), serve, service, serving, ministry, mission, support, supplying the needs. In place of these words insert the phrase “deacon work” to gain an interesting insight into what the author is saying.

Acts 1:17 counted among us, and received his portion in this ministry

Acts 1:25 to occupy this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned

Acts 6:1 Their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving of food
 Acts 6:4 we will devote ourselves to the ministry of the word
 Acts 11:29 Send a contribution for the relief of the brethren living in Judea
 Acts 12:25 Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem...they fulfilled their mission
 Acts 20:24 that I may finish my course, and the ministry which I received
 Acts 21:19 things which God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry
 Rom. 11:13 I am an apostle of Gentiles, I magnify my ministry
 Rom. 12:7 if service, in his serving
 Rom 15:31 my service for Jerusalem may prove acceptable to the saints
 1 Cor 16:15 Stephanos... devoted themselves for ministry to the saints
 2 Cor 5:18 reconciled us to himself... gave us the ministry of reconciliation
 2 Cor 6:3 giving no cause for offense... in order that the ministry be not discredited
 2 Cor 8:4 for the favor of participating in the support of the saints
 2 Cor 9:1 superfluous for me to write to you about this ministry to the saints
 2 Cor 9:12 for the ministry of this service is not only fully supplying the needs
 2 Cor 9:13 because of the proof given by this ministry they will glorify God
 2 Cor 11:8 I robbed other churches, taking wages from them to serve you
 Eph. 4:12 for the equipping of the saints, for the work of service
 Col. 4:17 to Archippus, take heed to the ministry which you have received
 1 Tim 1:12 he considered me faithful, putting me into service
 2 Tim 4:5 endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry
 2 Tim 4:11 Pick up Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for service
 Heb 1:14 ministering spirits, sent out to render service for... those... inherit
 Rev. 2:19 I know your deeds, and your love and faith and service and perseverance

DIAKONEW – to serve, render service, wait upon; to do anyone a service, to help, to minister to anyone in anything; care for one's needs (always a reference to the work done, as service rendered). Again, try using the substitute phrase "does the work of a deacon to" in place of phrases like ministry, ministered, ministering, administered, serves, served, serving, services he rendered, take care of and cared for by us.

Matt 4:11 behold, angels came and began to minister to him
 Matt 25:44 sick, or in prison, and did not take care of you?
 Mark 1:13 and the angels were ministering to him
 Luke 22:27 I am among you as the one who serves
 John 12:26 if any one serves me, let him follow me
 John 12:26 if any one serves me, the Father will honor him
 Acts 19:22 having sent into Macedonia two of those who ministered to him
 Rom 15:25 now I am going to Jerusalem serving the saints
 2 Cor 3:3 you are a letter of Christ, cared for by us
 2 Cor 8:19 gracious work, which is being administered by us for the glory
 2 Cor 8:20 taking the precaution that no one should discredit us in our administration of this generous gift
 1 Tim 3:13 for those who have served well as deacons obtain... high standing
 2 Tim 1:18 (Onesiphorus) you know very well what services he rendered
 Phile 13 (Onesimus) in your behalf he might minister to me in my imprisonment
 Heb 6:10 in having ministered and in still ministering to the saints
 1 Pet 1:12 (prophets) revealed... they were not serving themselves, but you
 1 Pet 4:10 special gift, employ it in serving one another, as good stewards
 1 Pet 4:11 whoever serves, let him do so as by the strength which God supplies

STEWARD

STEWARD of God – OIKONOMOS – a household manager, one who had authority over the servants of a family, assigning their tasks, and generally managing all the affairs and accounts – Joseph was a prime example (Genesis 39:4).

The English word most often used in the texts below is steward(s) but substituting “household manager” can be helpful in understanding better the meaning.

Luke 12:42 Who then is the faithful and sensible steward, whom his master will put in charge of his servants, to give them their rations at the proper time.

Luke 16:1 There was a certain rich man who had a steward, and this steward was reported to him as squandering his possessions.

Luke 16:3 And the steward said to himself, ‘What shall I do

Luke 16:8 And the master praised the unrighteous steward because he had acted shrewdly;

1 Cor. 4:1 Let a man regard us in this manner, as servants of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God.

1 Cor. 4:2 In this case, moreover, it is required of stewards that one be found trustworthy.

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

1 Pet. 4:10 As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.

Chamberlain

OIKONOMEOS – be Steward

Luke 16:2 for you can no longer be steward.

OIKONOMIA – Stewardship

A helpful phrase to substitute for stewardship is “do the work of a household manager”.

Luke 16:2 What is this I hear about you? Give an account of your stewardship,

Luke 16:3 What shall I do, since my master is taking the stewardship away from me?

Luke 16:4 “I know what I shall do, so that when I am removed from the stewardship, they will receive me into their homes.”

1 Cor. 9:17 For if I do this voluntarily, I have a reward; but if against my will, I have a stewardship entrusted to me.

Eph. 1:10 (9. He made known to us the mystery of his will)... with a view to an administration (stewardship) suitable to the fullness of the times,

Eph. 3:2 if indeed you have heard of the stewardship of God’s grace which was given to me for you... (4. The mystery of Christ, 5. Which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men... 6. To be specific, that the Gentiles are fellow-heirs and fellow-members of the body, and fellow-partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.)

Col. 1:25 Of this church I was made a minister according to the stewardship from God bestowed on me for your benefit, that I might fully carry out the preaching of the word of God.