



CHURCH GOVERNMENT
NEW LIFE FAMILY WORSHIP CENTER

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CHURCH GOVERNMENT

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CHURCH GOVERNMENT

SECTION 1: THE BIBLICAL PATTERN FOR CHURCH GOVERNMENT

1.1 - The Head of the Church

The greatest concern of a local church must be that of following the biblical pattern for church leadership. A careful investigation of all the passages in the New Testament regarding church government and decision-making leads to a number of serious conclusions. There can be no doubt that the Head of the church is none other than Jesus Christ the Lord (Eph. 1:22-23; 5:23; Col.1:18; 2:10-14). He is the established Head of the church and He has sent His Word as the authoritative standard for His church (Matt. 7:21-29; 28:18; Luke 24:25-47). The church is to obey Christ, the Chief Shepherd, in all things, to willingly submit to His control, and to do His work in the world. In order to carry out His will as the body of Christ, the Lord Himself determined and directed a pattern of leadership for His churches.

1.2 - The Lord's Pattern of Church Government

That pattern is the autonomous local body of believers operating under the lordship of Jesus Christ, with the responsibility of the government of that body in the hands of a godly plurality of elders, or undershepherds. The elders, including the teacher/preacher, are those whom God appoints, the elders recognize, and the church affirms, as men chosen to lead the fellowship. The elders of the church are the Lord's undershepherds and are commanded in Scripture to shepherd the flock and to serve as overseers (1 Pet. 5:1-4). By virtue of their offices, the elders are charged with being the spiritual leaders and governing administrators of the church in all its decisions (Acts 14:23; 15:1f; 20:17; Eph. 4:11; Titus 1:5).

1.3 - The History of Church Government

In trying to evaluate the history of church leadership, we recognize that many churches have been governed in a variety of ways. Every church has a "power structure" that controls the way decisions are made. The power may center in one person, sometimes the pastor, or a group such as the deacons, one or more committees, or some other group. Typically, congregations tend to be democratic (or congregationally ruled) in their government, or they are ruled autocratically by one man, usually the pastor. Normally, the final decision rests with the congregation, usually by some sort of vote. Often churches conduct monthly or quarterly business meetings in which all major, and sometimes minor, decisions are made regarding the ongoing functions of the church. (This form of government owes more to the Constitution of the United States than it does to the Bible). It tends to put the blame on one person (usually the pastor) for problems, and this person is held responsible for the success, or lack thereof, of the church, but with little or no authority to change things.

SECTION 2: THE BIBLICAL PLAN OF THEOCRACY & ELDERSHIP

There are two primary forms of government in churches that are not based on the Bible. One is **democracy** and the other is **dictatorship** or autocracy (one man rule). What the Bible affirms is a **theocracy**, God Himself ruling the church, mediating that rule by appointing some (elders) to be responsible for the leadership of others, while all are responsible to Jesus Christ. A careful study of the Scriptures reveals the plurality of leadership to be exercised within the local church. There are three primary words that the New Testament uses to describe and define church leaders, all referring to one office. The following three words indicate that elders have spiritual authority, are to be spiritually mature, and are responsible for the spiritual care of the flock.

2.1 - Episkopos - “Overseer or Bishop”

A man charged with the duty of seeing that things to be done by others are done correctly. The word was well known in ancient Greek society as the designation of an office. It was broadly used to describe any official who acted as a superintendent, manager, guardian, controller, inspector or ruler. This refers to the position of spiritual authority which the leader occupies and defines his function as an overseer (Acts 20:28; Titus 1:7).

2.2 - Presbuteros - “Elder”

A comparative of *presbus* (elderly). The word has several meanings, including old of age, the elder of two people, advanced in life, an elder, a senior. But it also referred to a term of rank or office among the Jews, such as members of the great council or Sanhedrin, because in early times the rulers of the people and judges were selected from elderly men. It also referred to those who, in separate cities, managed public affairs and administered justice. Among the New Testament Christians it referred to those who presided over the assemblies (or churches). Although the strict sense of advanced age is eliminated from the meaning elder when referring to a community leader, certain aspects such as maturity, experience, dignity, authority and honor are retained. It is normally used in the plural when referring to the office because the structure of leadership was always by a council of elders (Acts 14:23; 1 Tim. 5:1, 17; Titus 1:5; 1 Pet. 5:1).

2.3 - Poimen - “Pastor or Shepherd”

The noun is used only once in the New Testament, but the verb is used three times in the context of Christian leadership. The literal meaning of the word is a “shepherd,” one who tends herds or flocks, not merely one who feeds them. It is used metaphorically of a Christian “pastor” (Ephesians 4:1) who is also a teacher. Pastors guide as well as feed the flock (Acts 20:17, 28), which indicates that this was the service committed to elders (overseers or bishops). The tasks of a Near Eastern shepherd were to: watch for and defend the sheep from enemies; heal the wounded and sick sheep; find and save lost sheep; love them and share their lives, thereby earning their trust (John 21:16; 1 Pet. 5: 1-2).

2.4 - Summary of the Words Describing the Office of Elder

These words or titles are used interchangeably in the New Testament. They clearly indicate one and the same office. The qualifications for such leaders are clearly revealed in 1 Tim. 3, Titus 1, and 1 Peter 5. The Bible teaches that the congregation is spiritually accountable to the elders and that the elders are accountable to God (Heb. 13:7, 17). Therefore, the decision-making authority of the church is vested in a plurality of leaders (elders) who operate under the lordship of Christ. The elders are to function as humble servant leaders of the church and not as dictators. The desire to serve God's people should manifest itself in their lives, and it should be remembered by them that Christ paid with His own precious blood for the sins of those whom they serve. It is both a noble calling and a serious responsibility to shepherd the people of God.

SECTION 3: THE RELATIONSHIP OF ELDERS TO THE CONGREGATION

The congregation will be fully informed of all major decisions made by the elders which affect the life and ministry of the church. Members in good standing of the church will be given the opportunity to review and offer input on such matters. Any member who has a conviction regarding decisions of the elders may appeal to the elders in writing. The elders will seriously consider any objections or suggestions originating from the congregation. Communication between the elders and the congregation is of paramount importance. Certain matters are clearly indicated in the New Testament to be of concern to the whole body and are to be decided by the body. The primary issues in this regard are church membership and the exercise of church discipline. (The procedures for membership and discipline are outlined in Art. 4, Sec. 1 & 2 of Constitution). Other areas requiring affirmation of the entire congregation are stipulated in Art. 6, Sec. 3, 3.3 of Constitution.

SECTION 4: SPIRITUAL ACCOUNTABILITY

4.1 - Hebrews 13:7: "Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of *their* conduct." The expression, "those who rule over you," is one word in Greek, the present participle *hegoumenon*, used as a noun. The literal meaning, from the basic verb *hegomai* is: "to lead; to go before; to be a leader; to rule or command; to have authority over; a chief, leading as respects influence, controlling in counsel; overseers or leaders of the churches." Note that the specific function of these leaders is those "who have spoken the Word of God." They are leaders who are preachers and teachers of the Word of God and are to be recognized in a special way. The people to whom the leaders speak are to reproduce their faith, "whose faith follow." The Greek verb for follow is *mimeomai*, "to imitate or follow one's example." The English word "mimic" comes from this Greek word. This imitating of their faith, however, is as they review the result of their behavior, "considering the outcome of their conduct." "Considering" is *anatheoreo*, from *ana* "again," and *theoreo*, "to closely view with attention, to scrutinize closely." The meaning then, is "to look at attentively, to consider well, to observe accurately." What is translated "the outcome" is *ekbasis*, "way out

(of temptation); outcome (of life); the issue referring to the end of one's life; here it refers not only to the end of physical life, but the manner in which they closed a well spent life as exhibited by their spirit in dying (used also in 1 Cor. 10:13)." And the word "conduct" is *anastrophe*, meaning "manner of life, conduct deportment, or behavior." Reference is made here to the result of one's behavior.

The intent is not to follow just any professing religious leader. The elders are to be qualified men who know, preach and live the Word of God. Their conduct aligns with their profession. "Do what I say, not what I do," is an erroneous phrase in the concept of spiritual leadership as stated in 1 Peter 5:3, "nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock." As the elders of the church follow the Lord, the congregation is to follow their example and lead, especially when it comes to direct instruction from the Word of God. First Thessalonians 5:12-14: "And we urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. Be at peace among yourselves. Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all."

4.2 - Hebrews 13:17: "Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you." Those who rule (*hegomai*) are the leaders mentioned in verse 7. They are the elders, or spiritual leaders of the church. The present passive imperative command "obey" is *perithesthe*, form *peitho*, a primary verb, meaning "to be persuaded, to suffer one's self to be persuaded; to be induced to believe; to listen to, obey, yield to, comply with; to trust, have confidence, be confident." In essence, it means to acquiesce to the leadership provided by God through godly undershepherds. It is the duty of one who hears the pastor-teachers preach the Word to develop an attitude of spiritual ascent or agreement. If one listens with a negative attitude thinking the message is not for himself, one does his pastor and himself a disservice. One should listen with the attitude of the Bereans, "These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so" (Acts 17:11).

The second imperative verb in Hebrews 13:17 is *hupeiko*, "be submissive," derived from *hupo*, "under," and *eiko*, "to yield." This is the only place it occurs in the New Testament. *Hupeiko* means "to resist no longer, but to give way, yield (of combatants); metaphorically to yield to authority and admonition." *Hupeiko* involves an attitude as does the previous imperative verb, *peitho*, which means to place yourselves in positive attitude so you can be persuaded by your pastors. A more literal translation of these commands to the congregation toward their pastors is: "be disposed to persuasion and yielding." The congregation ought to recognize the spiritual authority of the pastor and the other elders. In both verses 7 and 17 the word for leaders is in the plural case. In verse 7, the leaders are designated as "those...who have spoken the Word of God," and they can be either the pastor-teacher at one church, or the pastor-teachers who successively taught at a local church. In verse 17, however, there is no designation of those leaders being only pastor-teachers in the sense of those who preach the Word of God, but other leaders also, who, along with the responsibilities assigned in Titus 1:9, oversee other areas in the local church. The attitude of the people must be one of positive openness to persuasion and yieldness to those leaders.

The reason for such a positive attitude toward them is, “for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account.” The verb “watch” is the present indicative of *agrupneo*, derived from *agreuo*, “to chase,” and *hupnos*, “sleep,”. They sacrifice sleep so that they can watch over a situation or people. The word expresses not mere wakefulness, but the watchfulness of those who are intent upon a thing. Indirectly, this refers to the elders’ duties as well as the reason for a positive attitude on the part of the congregation. It indicates that watchfulness over the souls of the people in a local church is the foremost duty of the elders. The church is a soul-wellness center, not a social club. Additionally, elders must never take their responsibilities lightly. Not only must each elder be held accountable to his fellow elders, but also to the congregation, and above all, to the Lord, as they will all one day appear before the judgment seat of Christ, along with all other believers (Rom. 14:10; 2 Cor. 5:10).

The result of a positive attitude of the people toward the elders becomes the motivation of a joyful task by the elders. “Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you” (Heb. 13:17). The participle translated “not with grief,” is *stenazo*, and means “to groan or sigh.” It refers primarily to the externalization of grief. When the congregation hears the sighs and groanings of elders, it is time to examine their attitudes. However, this accounting is made to the Lord. The elders are accountable to God for their faithfulness to the task given them by the Lord as preachers of the Word. The elders are accountable to give account (Ezekiel 3:17-21; 33:1-11), but it is the responsibility of the people for the account to be joyful. “I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth” (3 John 4).

It does not do the congregation any good if its negative attitude causes sighing and groaning elders. “That would be unprofitable for you,” says Apostle Paul. Failure to submit and yield to God-appointed spiritual authority will cause pain and anguish of soul in this life. You cannot be right with God and wrong with the church or its leadership at the same time. The most significant implication of Hebrews 13:17 is that there will be a payday, someday. Believers will give an account to God for their behavior in the church.

SECTION 5: THE QUALIFICATIONS OF ELDERS

The qualifications of elders are spelled out in 1 Timothy 3:1-13; Titus 1:6-9; and 1 Peter 5:1-4. The **very first, and most significant qualification**, is that of being “*blameless*” or “*above reproach*.” This is the primary principle for all the other qualifications. The phrase “must be” means that it is essential and mandatory they be blameless. The other qualifications clarify what it means to be “blameless.” *Blameless*, is to say that no one can bring a disqualifying accusation against them that is true, or that the public would believe to be true. This blameless is the standard for the deacon and the overseer and is verified by the word “likewise,” which appears in verses 8 and 11, and by the use of the word translated “blameless” in verse 10, of 1 Timothy 3. After identifying the standard of ‘blameless’, Scripture provides commentary on character traits which would be typical of one meeting the standard. One must be careful to not use the commentary as a hard and fast rule, but as a helpful guideline. For instance, a person who has not yet married would not be the husband of one wife. Yet, he still

could meet the standard of being blameless. On the other hand, the commentary must not be ignored in cases where its application is reasonable.

In studying the qualifications of elders, and comparing them with three titles for the office, there is a clear correlation. There are three primary words that the New Testament uses to describe and define church leaders, all referring to one office (see Article IV). These three words indicate that elders have *spiritual authority (overseers)*, they are *to be spiritually mature (elders)*, and they *are responsible for the spiritual care (pastors)* of the flock. Thus, the qualifications for such men clearly divide into categories which support these three concepts of leadership.

First, elders are to “serve as overseers” (1 Peter 5:2); they are commanded to assume **spiritual authority**. Acts 20:28: “Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.” It is clear then, that the Holy Spirit has made the spiritual leadership of the church overseers, and as such, they have spiritual authority. They cannot exercise spiritual authority unless they are men of deep commitment and conviction. They must be committed to the Lord Jesus Christ and His church, having strong convictions about their faith. They are to be blameless in their conduct. Their outward actions must reveal an inner conviction that, over time, have given them a reputation of being above reproach. This means that they should not be a novice, or a new convert, because they would not have been able to establish the necessary reputation. We are not speaking of sinless perfection, but about there not being any obvious moral defect which would render their ministry ineffective. Further, they will have a good reputation with those outside the church; their conduct, both in and out of the church is respected. Their convictions about the church would lead them to *willingly* and *eagerly* desire to shepherd the congregation with a servant’s heart.

Leadership marked by spiritual authority must also have a deep and firm conviction about marriage and family. The elder is to be a one-woman man, committed to his wife and children, and able to rule his own house well. His children should be in subjection to him, “for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?” (1 Tim. 3:5).

Second, elders are to be men of **spiritual maturity**. This is implied in the word *elder*. A mature man is one of **character and control**. As Allistar Begg states, “The relevance of the elder’s public ministry is dependent upon the reality of his personal morality.” (Authority in the Church, tape series, Truth for Life, Orange, CA, 1997). Elders’ conduct will be marked by integrity, honesty, morality, and humility. They will be men of their word and have the ability to get along with others. They will not be childish in behavior, but be marked by a seasoned growth in the things of the Lord, most notably, the ability to discern good from evil, right from wrong (Heb. 5:11-14). The qualifications for character include good behavior, hospitality, gentleness, loving what is good, a sense of justice, and a life of holiness. These are the traits of an inward character that will result in self-controlled outward conduct, marked by temperance and sober-mindedness; not being self-willed, violent, quarrelsome, or quick-tempered; and by being free from the lure of alcohol and the love of money.

Third, elders are those who have grave **spiritual responsibility** for the care of the church. In this regard they must be competent. They are stewards of God, and as such are spiritual managers of that which is most precious to the Lord – His church. They must, therefore, be competent in the Word (2 Timothy 2:15; 4:1-5), have the ability to teach sound doctrine, to recognize and refute false doctrine, and have the willingness and courage to stand against false teachers. They are to be examples to the flock, and therefore must not be afraid of hard work. They must be disciplined (1 Timothy 4:7), and willing to faithfully guard their own personal spiritual lives. Their ability in this regard can be seen in how they handle their own marriage and family.

SECTION 6: SCRIPTURAL QUALIFICATIONS FOR ELDERS:

The scriptural qualifications follow with a chart outlining the basic qualifications and then a detailed explanation of each qualification.

First Timothy 3:1-7, (NKJV) (1) “This is a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work. (2) A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach; (3) not given to wine, not violent, greedy for money, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous (4) one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence (5) (for if a man does not know how to rule *his* own house, how will he take care of the church of God?); (6) not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the *same* condemnation as the devil. (7) Moreover he must have a good testimony among those who are outside, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.”

Titus 1:5-9, (NKJV) (5)” For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you-- (6) if a man is blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of dissipation or insubordination. (7) For a bishop must be blameless, as a steward of God, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, (8) but hospitable, a lover of what is good, sober-minded, just, holy, self-controlled, (9) holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict.”

First Peter 5:1-4, (NKJV) (1) “The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: (2) Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; (3) not as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; (4) and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.” (See: Elder Spiritual Qualifications Chart on following page)

6.1 - Spiritual Authority - The Overseer’s Convictions: “This is a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of a bishop (*episkopos*), he desires a good work” (1 Tim. 3:1). The qualification are preceded by the statement, “This is a faithful saying.” In Greek it is *pistos ho*

logos. The word *pistos*, here translated “faithful,” means trustworthy or dependable. The word for “saying” is *logos*, which indicates that behind the saying there is the connotation of logic and reason. Paul, in his preamble to the qualifications of an elder says, in effect, “What I am going to say is dependable and there is a reason for it.” (Many churches have trouble because they disregard these qualifications in regard to those who govern the local church.)

An overseer (*episkopos*) is someone charged with the duty of seeing that things to be done by others are done correctly. The word was well known in ancient Greek society as the designation of an office. It was broadly used to describe any official who acted as a superintendent, manager, guardian, controller, inspector or ruler. This refers to the position of spiritual authority which the leader occupies and defines his function as an overseer (Acts 20:28; Titus 1:7). W. E. Vine defines the word, “an overseer (*epi*, over, *skopeo*, to look or watch), whence Eng. ‘bishop,’ which has precisely the same meaning, is found in Acts 20:28, Phil. 1:1, 1 Tim. 3:2, Titus 1:7, 1 Pet. 2:25; *Note: Presbuteros*, an elder, is another term for the same person as bishop or overseer. See Acts 20:17 with verse 28. The term ‘elder’ indicates the mature spiritual experience and understanding of those so described; the term ‘bishop,’ or ‘overseer,’ indicates the character of the work undertaken. According to the Divine will and appointment as in the New Testament, there were to be bishops in every local church, Acts 14:23; 20:17; Phil. 1:1; Titus 1:5; James 5:14. Where the singular is used the passage is describing what a bishop should be, 1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:7. Christ Himself is spoken of as ‘the...Bishop of our souls,’ 1 Pet. 2:25.”

The qualifications are non-negotiable. The call to serve the church as an elder, whether full time or not, is a call from God. It is reasonable to believe that God calls only the qualified. It would also be correct to say that God qualifies the called. There is a Holy Spirit-generated desire which issues forth in service which becomes noticeable to the church. The elders recognize, and the congregation affirms, those men whom God has called, appointed and gifted for service as elders.

ELDER SPIRITUAL QUALIFICATIONS CHART

1 TIMOTHY 3

Authority (Overseer)

CONVICTION:

- This [is] a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work. (1)
- Blameless (2)
- Not a novice (6)
- Good reputation (7)

Marriage/Family

- Husband of one wife (2)
- Ruling his own house well (4)

Maturity (Elder):

CHARACTER:

- Good behavior (2)
- Hospitable (2)
- Gentle (3)

CONTROL:

- Temperate (2)
- Sober-minded (2)
- Not violent (3)
- Not quarrelsome (3)
- Not given to wine (3)
- Not greedy (3)
- Not covetous (3)

Responsibility (Pastor):

COMPETENCE:

- Able to teach (2)

TITUS 1

Authority (Overseer)

CONVICTION:

- Blameless (6,7)

Marriage/Family

- Husband of one wife (6)
- Faithful children (6)

Maturity (Elder):

CHARACTER:

- Hospitable (8)
- Lover of good (8)
- Just (8)
- Holy (8)

CONTROL:

- Self-controlled (8)
- Not self-willed (7)
- Sober-minded (8)
- Not violent (7)
- Not quick-tempered (7)
- Not given to wine (7)
- Not greedy (7)

Responsibility (Pastor):

COMPETENCE:

- A Steward of God (7)
- Holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict (15); Acts 20: 19ff

1 PETER 5

Authority Overseer)

CONVICTION:

- not shepherding under constraint, but willingly,... with eagerness (2)

Additionally:

- A servant's heart, Matt. 20:25-28

Maturity (Elder):

CHARACTER:

- not as being lord over those entrusted to you (3) [humility]

CONTROL:

- Not for dishonest gain (2)

Responsibility (Pastor):

COMPETENCE:

- being an example to the flock (3)
- Additionally:
 - the ability to guard his own personal spiritual life, Acts 6:4; 20:28; 1 Tim. 4:6-16; 6:20; 2 Tim. 1:12-14; 3:13-17

Before the specific qualifications are considered, there must be a desire to serve on the part of the individual concerned. The two words translated “desire” in 1 Tim. 3:1 convey the idea of reaching out or seeking something. There must be a desire to be an elder and the office should never be imposed. The desire involves a personal inner calling of God. The word, *oregetai*, which means “to stretch oneself after” (see Hebrews 11:16, desiring a better country, heaven) is a clear indication of not only desiring the office, but of reaching out for it.

The second word for “desire” is *epithumeo*, which means “to desire earnestly, to long for with passion (*thumos*).” The noun form of this word, *epithumia*, has a bad connotation (“lusts, inordinate desire,” see Rom. 1:24; Gal. 5:16, 24; Eph. 2:3), as does the verb in other places (Matt. 5:28). But it can also mean “to earnestly desire in a benevolent manner (1 Thess. 2:17; Rev 18:14), and to desire passionately in a good sense (Matt. 13:17; Luke 15:16; 17:22; 1 Peter 1:12).” One can have a passion to dominate others as part of an ego trip, or to serve others with the desire of helping them. No one should earnestly seek the office of an elder-pastor unless he has a passion for benevolent service.

Having ascertained that the desire to serve is present, the desire in and of itself is not sufficient to place a man in spiritual leadership. The specific qualifications of the office must be considered and applied to each individual desiring the office. It should also be stressed to those desiring the office that being an elder means hard work, “he desires a good work.” Work is the word *ergon*, which means “labor, that which one undertakes to do, enterprise, or undertaking.” It gives us our English, “energy.” It is not a showy office, or simply a special title to be an elder of a church. It is work, hard work, which must be sought with a passion to serve. There are too many passionless church leaders who desire a name for the honor of it, yet they escape as much of the work as possible. Once a man desires the office and is willing to accept the hard work of the task, he must then be determined to be fully qualified according to the following standards set forth in Scripture. There can be no question about the fact that the Lord calls men of conviction to serve as His undershepherds. Without conviction, a man will cave in under pressure, and the duties and responsibilities of leading God’s people are pressure packed.

6.1.1 - Blameless (1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:6-7): This is the overall standard which all must meet. Paul uses two words with similar meanings, *anepileptos*, in 1 Tim. 3, and *anekletos*, in Titus 1. The Greek tenses indicate that both of these are referring to a present state of blamelessness. Over time, he must have developed and maintained a reputation for blamelessness. That requires deeply held convictions about his faith and conduct.

Anepileptos means “one who cannot be apprehended, laid hold of, or reprehended; one who is not open to censure, irreproachable.” He is a “Teflon” man - no accusation could be made to stick. He has no crimes for which he could be held liable. In other words, there are no skeletons in his closet. John MacArthur says, “A church leader’s life must not be marred by sin - be it an attitude, habit, or incident. That’s not to say he must be perfect, but there must not be any obvious defect in his character. He must be a model of godliness so he can legitimately call his congregation to follow his

example (Phil. 3:17). The people need to be confident that he won't lead them into sin." (The Master's Plan for the Church, Moody, Chicago, 1991, p. 216).

Anegletos is a word which means one who cannot be called into account, beyond reproach, or without fault. An elder should be unindictable, which is to what this word refers. One could be unindictable before a court of justice, but still be blamable. This qualification precludes someone who has had a conviction in court on some moral charge, or one who may have committed a crime but has not been discovered, therefore untried, but who, if discovered and tried, would be found guilty and therefore not "blameless." The stress in both of these qualifications, blameless (1 Tim. 3:2) and unindictable (Titus 1:6), require an elder to be clear of any possible blame, and to be clear of any legal charge. It is a high standard and its greatest significance is that spiritual leaders, especially elders, are to be examples to the congregation (1 Pet. 5:3).

6.1.2 - Not a Novice (1 Tim. 3:6): Spiritual leaders must have firmly established convictions, proven over time. An elder should not be a new convert, "not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the *same* condemnation as the devil." The Greek word translated "novice" (*neophutos*) means "newly planted." It means a neophyte, a new convert whose stability in the faith has not yet been tried and proven. "The opposite of a new believer is a mature Christian. An elder must be mature in the faith. Of course maturity is relative, so the standard of maturity will vary from congregation to congregation. The point is, that an elder must be more spiritually mature than the people he leads" (John MacArthur, The Master's Plan for the Church, Moody, Chicago, 1991, p. 230).

This qualification deals with two issues. The first is that of being in authority over others and thus needing a solid and respected foundation as a believer and leader in the church. To exercise authority rightly, a man must have firm convictions; he must be deeply rooted and grounded in the Word (Eph. 3:17; Col. 1:23). This cannot be true of a new convert. Second, is the issue of pride which has to do more with spiritual maturity. The character quality necessary is humility, the opposite of pride (See 2.2.7 - Humility).

Calvin warns of the danger of taking a man who is a new convert into the leadership of the church based on his "distinguished ability and learning." (John Calvin, Commentaries on The Epistles to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon, Baker, Grand Rapids, reprint 1996, p. 83). Just because a man is a good and successful businessman does not mean he is ready to lead the church. Paul points out the danger of one falling prey to the temptation of pride. This qualification must be tempered by the overall maturity of the congregation in consideration. Ephesus was a well establish and respected church and needed seasoned spiritual men. On the other hand, the list in Titus does not contain this warning, probably because the churches there were relatively new. Placing younger converts in leadership in Crete would less likely cause them to fall prey to pride.

The phrase "puffed up with pride," or "conceited" (NASB), is from *tuphoos*, from a root word meaning smoke or mist. The danger is putting a man in a position which

could lead him to think he is more spiritually mature or qualified than he is. He would not be condemned *by* the devil, but rather, “fall in to the *same* condemnation as the devil,” whose own great sin was pride.

6.1.3 - A Good Reputation (1 Tim. 3:7): “Moreover he must have a good testimony among those who are outside, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.” A man exercising authority must have a good reputation, not only within the church, but also with those outside the fellowship. He must be given adequate opportunity to establish a solid testimony among those outside the local church so that when he becomes a leader within the church, there will be acceptance. Every elder in a local church must have a good reputation in the community in which he lives, lest he become an object of ridicule and bring reproach on the church. The word “reproach” is *oneidismos*, meaning “insult, abuse, disgrace, or shame.” A new convert whose character in the community has not been tried will be much more likely to disgrace the church and bring shame on Christ. The devil likes nothing better than to subvert and destroy a spiritual leader. A man is not ready to have spiritual authority until the church is reasonably certain he is ready to overcome the snare of the devil. “Snare” is *pagis*, “snare, trap, noose; of snares in which birds are entangled and caught; it implies unexpectedly, suddenly, because birds and beasts are caught unawares; of sudden and unexpected deadly peril; of the allurements and seductions of sin; especially the allurements to sin by which the devil holds one bound.” A new convert will not yet be well-founded in the work of spiritual warfare, which is an absolute necessity for the exercise of spiritual authority. A man with a good reputation is one who lives by his convictions.

6.1.4 - Husband of One Wife (1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:6): An elder should not be a “womanizer,” which means, if married, he is to be faithful to his wife and, if single, he is to be above reproach in his relationship with women. This is so that people will have full confidence in his dealings with other women, and that he would do nothing to dishonor Christ. This does not mean that an elder must necessarily be married, but if he is, he must be scripturally married and faithful to his wife (Matt. 19:3-12; Rom. 7:1-3; 1 Cor. 7:1-40). He must have strong convictions about sexual morality and live by the standards God has set forth.

The words translated “wife” (*gunaikos*) and “husband” (*aner*) are also the words for “woman” and “man.” Translation depends on context. Scholars disagree as to how they should be interpreted. The Greek construction does place emphasis on the word *one*, thereby communicating the idea of a one-woman man. Regardless of the translation, there can be no doubt that the standard includes sexual purity.

Since the elder must exercise spiritual authority over other married individuals and their families, and since the stability of the family is a very significant factor for the church, elders must be those who meet the highest standards when it comes to marriage and family life. The goal or objective of this criterion must be to hold the sanctity of marriage in highest esteem. The church at large has failed to maintain the standard necessary to encourage fidelity to the institution of marriage as established by God. The leadership of the church must uphold the highest standard possible.

Was Paul prohibiting divorced men from serving as elders or deacons? Some say that if Paul was referring to divorce, he would have clarified the issue by saying clearly that an elder must never have been divorced. The issue can be clarified by using the basic standard of “blameless.” Can a man who has been divorced be “blameless” or “above reproach?” This is subjective, and the church must exercise common sense and sound judgment in determining the answer. The Bible does teach that remarriage after a divorce can be within God’s will under two circumstance, irreconcilable adultery (Matt. 5:31-32) and abandonment by a non-believing spouse (1 Cor. 7:12-16).

In the case of alleged irreconcilable adultery, careful consideration must be given to the circumstances. The implication of Scripture is that of unrelenting and unrepentant adultery. The offended spouse has an obligation to attempt to reconcile the marriage, particularly if the offending spouse is a believer. A pertinent consideration is what part the offended spouse had to do with the breakdown of the marriage. Was the offended spouse blameless in regard to the marriage relationship? The same questions must be asked in regard to abandonment by a non-believing spouse. Abandonment by a believing spouse is not a biblical allowance for divorce (1 Cor. 7:10-11).

Additionally, if a divorce occurred before one was saved, and after salvation reconciliation was impossible, it may be possible that the individual could be considered blameless. One must consider the previous requirement of a good reputation in the community. A man with a reputation for having been a “ladies-man” prior to his conversion would not be a good choice to serve as an elder.

6.1.5 - Ruling his own house well (1 Tim. 3:4-5), having faithful children (Titus 1:6): An elder should be one who rules his house well as demonstrated by his leadership of the family, his financial stability and integrity, and that *his* children are faithful and are in submission. The text says, “one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence (for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?)” (1 Tim. 3:4-5). The function of an elder is to rule. The local church is likened to a household. In the same manner that a wife and children submit to the leadership of a husband and father, so must the church submit to the biblical leadership of the elders. The corresponding expression in Titus 1:6 is “having faithful children.” The verb translated “rule” is the present participle of *proistemi*, which literally means “be a leader, have authority over, manage; care for, give help; engage in, practice.” A man who cannot properly lead his own family cannot lead a congregation. In 1 Tim. 5:17, the same verb, a perfect participle, *proestotes*, means “the elders who rule.” The word does not indicate authoritarian rulership but rather responsible example. In Titus 3:8 and 14, the verb is used of setting an example in good works, translated, “maintain.”

“Having *his* children in submission with all reverence (for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?)” The rest of the text goes on to explain the kind of leadership that is meant by the expression, *ruling one’s house well*, in regard to the children of the family. The word “submission” *hupotage*,

means “under him in their proper order.” It was “a Greek military term meaning ‘to arrange [troop divisions] in a military fashion under the command of a leader.’ In non-military use, it was ‘a voluntary attitude of giving in, cooperating, assuming responsibility, and carrying a burden.’” The word “reverence” in Greek is *semnotes*, “seriousness, proper conduct, respectability or dignity.” It refers to behavior which kindles respect on the part of others. There are two ways of making a child obey. One is by authoritarian command which the child may resent and which may never prove permanently beneficial, and the other is dignified leadership causing a child to understand his position in the family and to act in a proper manner. This is the way that elders should lead in a local church. In a local church we do not want believers who obey only certain laws imposed by the leaders, but rather who love the Lord Jesus in such a way that they are persuaded that it is to their best advantage to the glory of God to obey out of love and recognition of the advantages of the better way.

In 1 Tim. 3:5, there is a parenthetical clarification of the meaning of the word, *proistemi*, “rule,” of verse 4. “For if a man does not know how to rule (*prostenai*, second aorist infinitive, indicating each time a decision is to be made), his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?” “Rule” here is equated with taking care, which in Greek is *epimeleomai*, which means “to have care upon or over, such as the sick (Luke 10:34,35), or of the church.” That is what the good Samaritan did for the wounded man in the parable of Jesus when he brought him to an inn. He tenderly took care of him. It is the same as the verb, *merinmao*, “to take care, give thought, be anxious.” When it concerns self, it is being anxious as something to be avoided (Matt. 6:25, 28), while in the context of concern for others, it is a benevolent and necessary activity, a virtue (1 Cor. 12:25), and means to exercise tender care for others. As the rule of the father for his own children and household is that of forethought and provision, as well as concern, so it must be with the elder of a local church.

“Having faithful children” (Titus 1:6), refers to an elder who is married and has children. This does not mean that he must have children, but if he does, and the children are still young and under his jurisdiction, unless they are faithful, he should not serve as an elder. By faithful, it is meant that they should be obedient and trustworthy in regards to their relationship with their father. Some think this means that the children should be believers. A father cannot guarantee that his children will be saved. He should do everything in his power to lead his children to saving faith in Jesus Christ. The issue is not if they are saved, but how the father maintains control over and leads them. The proof of this is in the following words which say that an elder’s children are not to be “accused of dissipation or insubordination.” “Not accused” means that there is no reasonable cause for the children to be suspected of conduct unbecoming a true Christian. “Dissipation” is *asotia*, which means an abandoned, dissolute life or reckless living, as was the way of life followed by the younger son of the parable in Luke 15. He lived *asotos* (Luke 15:13), “prodigal living,” wasteful living, living his life in a manner which indicated he was unsaved. The word derives from the privative *a*, and *sozo*, “to save,” hence, “unsaved.” “Unruly” is *anupotakta*, “disorderly, disobedient; out of control, not made subject.” Reckless, disorderly, and out of control children are a sign that a man is not qualified to lead the church. It is a different matter when the children are grown and

are responsible for their own decisions. A father cannot be held responsible for the behavior of his adult children (Deut. 24:16; Ezek. 18:1-2; 2 Kings 14:6; Jer. 31:29, 30; Rom. 2:6-11).

A difficult, yet often asked question is, what is done with an elder whose children (still living at home) commit sin that in some way may bring reproach on the church? Each circumstance must be evaluated on its own merits. The decision to discipline an elder based on his children's conduct should carefully be considered as to how the elder handled discipline of the erring child. If the elder holds his children accountable and provides appropriate discipline for his children, then because the child behaved badly does not in itself disqualify the elder from service.

A man's home includes his possessions and resources. While he may love the Lord, have a family who believes and is obedient to the faith, and be otherwise qualified to be an elder, if he cannot handle money he is not qualified to lead the church. It is even possible that he may be a competent teacher, but if his finances are not in proper order he is not ruling his household well, and is therefore, disqualified from spiritual leadership. Stewardship of possessions is a critical test of a man's leadership potential. The home is a proving ground where his administrative abilities can be clearly demonstrated.

6.1.6 - A Servant's Heart (Matt. 20:25-28): An elder must have convictions about his call from God as a servant of the church. In the text listed, Jesus instructed the disciples about ambition in regard to spiritual leadership. The mother of James and John had asked that her two sons be given a special place in the Lord's kingdom. This aggravated the others, but Jesus used it as a teaching moment. He said that human rulers "lord" it over others. They try to dominate others and often rule with tyranny. They exercise authority for the sake of power or just because they can. Jesus told them this was not the way they were to lead. Rather than leading with tyranny, they were to lead with tenderness. They were to be servants, willing to give their lives away to meet the needs of others, just as Jesus Himself had done. It is essential that any prospective elder understand that the call of God requires a conviction that the office is one of service to others.

6.1.7 - Shepherd[ing]...not by compulsion but willingly (1 Pet. 5:2): The NASB says, "not under compulsion but voluntarily." "Compulsion" is the adverbial form of *anagkazo*, "to necessitate, compel, drive to, constrain." A serious pitfall for elders to avoid is that of serving unwillingly. Taking on the office of a shepherd/elder should occur only when the individual has an unmistakable conviction that God has called him to the work and there is nothing else he would rather do. There is a "divine constraint" that comes from God which is a very positive and necessary thing. "For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for necessity (*anagke*) is laid upon me; yes, woe is me if I do not preach the gospel!" (1 Cor. 9:16). But in 1 Pet. 5, the word is used in a negative sense, meaning without God-given incentive (2 Cor. 9:7). In other words, if a man serves as an elder because of pressure from others, be it family, friends, or circumstances, or simply because no one else will do it, then he is serving "under compulsion." On the contrary, he should serve willingly or voluntarily. The word here is *hekousios*, and it means acting out "of one's own accord." If an elder serves for any

reason other than a firm conviction that God has called him and he is reporting as an eager volunteer, then he will end up simply going through the motions, doing his work only when compelled by negative reasons. The vital importance of the work of elders demands willing servants who are ministering out of deeply held convictions.

6.2 - Spiritual Maturity, Part 1 - The Elder's Character: Spiritual maturity is required in those who lead the church. It has been noted that spiritual leaders must have firmly established convictions, proven over time. They cannot be new converts, which is implied in the very word *elder*. As Allistar Begg states, "the relevance of the elder's public ministry is dependent upon the reality of his personal morality." (Authority in the Church, tape series, Truth for Life, Orange, CA, 1997). The evidence of maturity is seen in character and positive moral traits that result in a life marked by good behavior, hospitality, gentleness, loving what is good, a sense of justice, and a life of holiness. These are the traits of an inward character that will result in self-controlled outward conduct, marked by temperance and sober-mindedness; not being self-willed, violent, quarrelsome, or quick-tempered; and by being free from the lure of alcohol and the love of money. An elder's conduct will be marked by integrity, honesty, morality, and humility. He will be a man of his word and have the ability to get along with others. He will not be childish in behavior, but be marked by a seasoned growth in the things of the Lord, most notably, the ability to discern good from evil, right from wrong (Heb. 5:11-14).

The word elder (*presbuteros*) is a comparative of *presbus* (elderly). The word has several meanings, including "old of age, the elder of two people, advanced in life, an elder, a senior. But it also referred to a term of rank or office among the Jews, such as members of the great council or Sanhedrin, because in early time the rulers of the people and judges were selected from the elderly men. It also referred to those who, in separate cities, managed public affairs and administered justice. Among the New Testament Christians it referred to those who presided over the assemblies (or churches). Although the strict sense of advanced age is eliminated from the meaning of elder when referring to a community leader, certain aspects such as maturity, experience, dignity, authority and honor are retained. It is normally used in the plural when referring to the office because the structure of leadership was always by a council of elders (Acts 14:23; 1 Tim. 5:1, 17; Titus 1:5; 1 Pet. 5:1). Vine's definition clarifies the term elder as it relates to the New Testament church, "in the Christian churches, those who, being raised up and qualified by the work of the Holy Spirit, were appointed to have the spiritual care of, and to exercise oversight over, the churches. To these the term bishops, *episkopoi*, or overseers, is applied (see Acts 20:17, ...28, and Titus 1:5,7), the latter term indicating the nature of their work, *presbuteroi* their maturity of spiritual experience. The Divine arrangement seen throughout the New Testament was for a plurality of these to be appointed in each church (Acts 14:23, 20:17, Phil. 1:1, 1 Tim. 5:17, Titus 1:5). The duty of elders is described by the verb *episkopeo*. They were appointed according as they had given evidence of fulfilling the Divine qualifications (Titus 1:6-9, cp. 1 Tim. 3:1-7, and 1 Pet. 5:2.)

6.2.1 - Good behavior (1 Tim. 3:2): An elder should be of good behavior or decent. The Greek word is *kosmios*, used only here and in chapter 2, verse 9, where it is used of women's dress and translated "modest apparel." The word means "orderly, well-arranged, decent, modest." It is an adjective which denotes not only decency, but also beauty, decorum, and order, from the word *kosmos* ("a harmonious arrangement or order,

then, adornment, decoration, hence came to denote the world, or the universe, as that which is Divinely arranged”). A man of “good behavior” will approach every aspect of his life in a systematic, orderly manner. He diligently discharges his tasks and obligations. A disciplined mind will produce disciplined actions. (This character trait is a result of being **sober-minded (2.3.2)**, or prudent (NASB), which is in essence a disciplined mind.) The opposite of this is chaos. Elders cannot afford a disorderly lifestyle because their work involves administration, oversight, scheduling, and establishing priorities. A disciplined, orderly, well-behaved life will be reflected in the clothing one wears. (Believers should remember that although they are in the world, they are not of the world.) An elder should dress decently and properly as part of his behavior.

“Plato presents someone who is *kosmios* as the citizen who quietly fulfills the duties which are incumbent on him and is not disorderly. He associates such a person, even as Paul does, with *sophron* [sober-minded], sensible, self-controlled, one who voluntarily places limitations on his own freedom. The virtue of the *kosmios*, however, is not only the propriety of his dress and demeanor, but of his inner life, uttering and expressing itself outwardly.” (Zodhiates, The Complete Word Study Dictionary, AMG, Chattanooga, 1992, p. 880). Such a man will be seen as both respectable and honorable, and will find much acceptance as a spiritual leader.

6.2.2 - Hospitality (1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:8): An elder should be hospitable, or “given to hospitality.” A local church ought to give hospitality for visiting preachers or missionaries, and to any who come seeking the fellowship of the church. The word is *philoxenos*, literally the “brotherly love of strangers” (*philos*, “loving,” *xenos*, “stranger”). It is a virtue which is enjoined upon all Christians by Peter, “Be hospitable to one another without grumbling” (1 Pet. 4:9). In the Gospels Jesus gave an extremely important role to hospitality (Matt. 25:31-46; Mark 1:29-31; 2:15-17; 14:1-9; Luke 9:57-62; 10:25-42; 14:12-14). The persecution of believers in the early years of the church, coupled with generally bad standards of inns, made this virtue indispensable to mission work in New Testament days.

It costs little, if anything, to befriend strangers who come into the local church. No one should be a stranger more than once. A local church should be a haven of friends, a group of caring people such as the world cannot find anywhere else (John 13:34-35). Paul admonishes, “Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith,” (Gal. 6:10). An elder should take seriously the apostolic admonition in Heb. 13:2, “Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some have unwittingly entertained angels.” In other words, elders should lead the way in showing hospitality to strangers. Obviously, this may require a degree of vulnerability and could even be dangerous as there are those who would take advantage of their kindness. Wisdom and discernment are not to be thrown to the wind (cf. Matt. 10:16), but we are to love strangers and demonstrate that love by exercising hospitality.

6.2.3 - Gentle (1 Tim. 3:3): An elder should be gentle or considerate. The word is *epieikes*, “from *epi*, unto, and *eikos*, likely, denotes seemly, fitting; hence, equitable, fair,

moderate, forbearing, not insisting on the letter of the law; it expresses that considerateness that looks ‘humanely and reasonable at the facts of a case’” (Vine’s Expository Dictionary, p. 263). Basically, the word refers to a person who is fair, moderate, and forbearing. He examines each case on its own merits instead of applying general rules without considering the circumstances of a situation. It is the opposite of *plektes*, “not violent,” one who is contentious and quarrelsome instead of understanding. The word is also used in 2 Tim. 2:24: “And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient...” Practically speaking, being gentle is the ability to remember good and forget evil; it is having the ability to pardon the failures of others. It is important for a spiritual leader to not keep a record of wrongs people have committed against him (cf. 1 Cor. 13:5). Carrying a list of grievances will rob one of the joy of serving others.

The character traits necessary for spiritual leaders are almost universally expected of all the believers. The reason for exactness in applying the standards to elders is that they are to set the example for others, especially with gentleness. The reason many churches are hurting over quarrels and fights within is because of a disregard for this virtue of gentleness among fellow believers. Paul instructs the church at large, “let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord *is* at hand” (Phil. 4:5), and, “Now I, Paul, myself, am pleading with you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ...” (2Cor. 10:1). Matthew Arnold translated the word “sweet reasonableness” (Frank E. Gaebelin, Editor, The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1978, Vol. 11, p. 365). If such an attitude pervades the life and work of the elders, the congregation will catch on.

6.2.4 - A lover of what is good (Titus 1:8): An elder must love goodness. The King James Version translates the Greek word, *philagathos* as a “lover of good men.” While this would be included, it is not a complete definition. The word *philagathos* derives from *philos*, “brotherly love,” and *agathos*, “good.” It simply means “loving goodness.” The theology of both the Old and New Testaments teach us that only God is good. The Old Testament states, “No one is holy like the Lord, For *there is* none besides You, Nor *is there* any rock like our God” (1 Sam. 2:2) and “Oh, give thanks to the Lord, for *He is good!* For His mercy *endures* forever” (Ps. 118:1). Accordingly, since God alone is good, our goodness must come from Him (Ps. 16:2). Doing the will of God is equated to doing good, “He has shown you, O man, what *is* good; And what does the Lord require of you But to do justly, To love mercy, And to walk humbly with your God?” (Mic. 6:8).

Jesus clarified this in Matt. 19:16-26 in His counsel with the rich young ruler. He made it clear that, “no one is good but One, that is God.” Romans 3:10-12, a quote of Ps. 14:1-3, makes it explicit that no man is good in and of himself. Furthermore, Paul says, “For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but *how* to perform what is good I do not find” (Rom. 7:18). Our goodness then must be received from Christ. Romans 4-5 teaches that our sin was imputed to Christ and His righteousness was imputed to us through the salvation we have received from Him.

So then, this character trait has to do with loving what God loves, of having a God-like virtue of loving good things and righteous people. In Phil. 4:8 Paul admonishes

us to think in a virtuous way, dwelling on goodness. An elder must think like God thinks so that he can act like God acts. Since Jesus “went about doing good” (Acts 10:38b) then we should follow His example. Interestingly, Paul contrasts this attitude with the one which will be prevalent in the last days where many will be “haters of good” (2 Tim. 3:3). Consequently, a selfish person should not be entrusted with the function of an elder.

6.2.5 - Just (Titus 1:8): An elder must be just, or fair and ethical in his treatment of others. The word is *dikaios* and is “used of him whose way of thinking, feeling, and acting is wholly conformed to the will of God, and who therefore needs no rectification in the heart or life.” In Greek secular usage, the word meant “ethical,” though the standard of ethics was found either in human law or the heart of the man himself. In New Testament usage the word carries with it the standard of righteous set by God in His law. In other words, a just man is a principled man (1 John 3:7), one who lives by the divine standard and can hold others to that standard without being legalistic. He is even-handed and is able to make right decisions in his leadership of the people of God, under his oversight (Prov. 29:7, Jas. 2:1-9). Job is a good example of this type of elder leadership (Job 1:1; 29:14-17).

This is another clear characteristic of God Himself. Jesus referred to God as the “righteous (*dikaios*) Father” in John 17:5. Paul said God is “just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus” (Rom. 3:26). The promise is also found in 1 John 1:9, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” The elder who is just, or upright, is the one who mirrors the just and equitable character of the Lord.

6.2.6 - Holy (Titus 1:8): An elder must be devout, living a life unpolluted by the world. The word is *hosios*, close in meaning to *hagios*, the more common word for “holy,” and yet it should be distinguished from that word. *Hagios* denotes separation from the world and attachment to God. *Hosios*, according to Thayers, is one who is, “undefiled by sin, free from wickedness, religiously observing every moral obligation, pure, holy, pious.” Only a just man (6.2.5) can be devout. Just means understanding and applying the principles of God’s Word, being conformed to the will of God personally and willing to address those principles fairly in the congregation. Being holy, devout, has to do with being true to those very principles, genuine in one’s obedience to the will of God. This is the “belief predicates behavior and behavior reveals” principle. A just man is principled and a devout man practices those principles. Simply put, the elder must practice what he preaches. While we certainly cannot attain sinless perfection, we can live righteously and devoutly. Paul did, and he admonishes us to. “You *are* witnesses, and God also, ***how devoutly and justly and blamelessly we behaved ourselves among you who believe;*** as you know how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father *does* his own, that you would walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory” (1 Thess. 2:10-12, *emphasis added*).

6.2.7 - Humility (1 Pet. 5:1-5): Perhaps the greatest test of an elder’s character is that of humility. Peter says, “nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock...and be clothed with humility, for ‘God resists the proud, But gives grace to

the humble.”” The whole concept of pastoral leadership and authority revolves around the idea of humble, servant leadership, as exemplified in the work of a shepherd. If we were to boil down the ministry of the pastor to two essential principles, they would be to be humble and to do the work of shepherding the flock. (See John MacArthur, editor, Rediscovering Pastoral Ministry, Word, Dallas, 1995, chapter 2).

Jesus gave clear instruction on the attitude with which His undershepherds were to approach their work, “But you, do not be called ‘Rabbi’; for One is your Teacher, the Christ, and you are all brethren. Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven. And do not be called teachers; for One is your Teacher, the Christ. But he who is greatest among you shall be your servant. And whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted” (Matt. 23:8-12).

The word for humble is *tapeinos*, “primarily signifies low-lying. It is used always in a good sense in the New Testament, metaphorically, to denote of low degree, brought low, (Luke 1:52, Rom. 12:16); cast down (2Cor. 7:6); of low degree (Jas. 1:9); humble in spirit, (Matt. 11:29, 2 Cor. 10:1; Jas. 4:6, 1 Pet. 5:5).” In Greek secular usage the word had a negative connotation because of their contempt for lack of freedom and subjection. This should be a clear warning for the prospective elder since our own culture is heavily steeped in self-aggrandizement. Worse still, the church is inundated with pastors and leaders who are in the ministry for selfish reasons, often for the allurements of using professed godliness as a means of personal gain, one of the very things Peter warns us about in 1 Pet. 5.

The New Testament concept of the word is, on the other hand, very positive. Humility is the biblical benchmark for any successful servant of God. Jesus was the greatest example of humility the world has ever witnessed. That He would leave heaven and come to this earth is beyond any human understanding and it represents the epitome of humility (Phil. 2:1-11). Beyond that, Jesus acted with great humility and grace while He was on this earth (John 13:1-17) and enjoined His disciples to follow suite (Matt. 18:2-4; Mark 9:33-37; Luke 14:10-11; 17:10; 18:13-14).

John the Baptist was considered by Jesus to be the greatest man who ever lived (Matt. 11:11) and yet he clearly demonstrated humility (John 3:29-30). The apostle Paul was the foremost church planter and missionary the church has ever known, save the Lord Himself, and yet he considered himself “the least of all the saints” (Eph. 3:8; cp. 1 Tim. 1:15-16; 1 Cor. 4; 15:9). Peter, leader of the twelve disciples, the great preacher of first revival in the history of the church, and leader of the first group of elders, made it clear that he had no superiority over the other disciples or elders. He called himself a “fellow elder” and admonished those who shepherd God’s Flock to do so with humility. Peter also called on the elders to be examples to the flock. The New Testament is replete with commands to be humble and statements that true believers will be humble, so it is incumbent on elders to provide the chief model in that regard (Rom. 12:3-5; Phil. 2:3-4; Col. 3:12; Jas. 3:1; 4:6-10).

6.3 - Spiritual Maturity, Part 2 - The Elder's Control: The spiritual maturity required of those who lead the church is based on firmly established convictions (6.1), the evidence of which is seen in their character (6.2); good behavior, hospitality, gentleness, loving what is good, a sense of justice, and life of holiness and humility. These traits of inward character will result in a self-controlled outward conduct marked by temperance, sober-mindedness, and self-control; not being self-willed, violent, quarrelsome, or quick-tempered; and by being free from the lure of alcohol and the love of money. An elder's beliefs are to issue forth in behavior that is pleasing to God. His conduct will be marked by integrity, honesty, and morality. Control begins with the mind, or thought life, which is the only way to control outward behavior.

6.3.1 - Temperate (1 Tim. 3:2), Not self-willed (Titus 1:7), Self-controlled (Titus 1:8): An elder must be able to think clearly (soberly) and can ill afford to be selfish. He must put the concerns of others ahead of himself and be in complete control of his passions. The above three words convey this clearly. The word for temperate in 1 Tim. 3:2 is the adjective *nephalios*, also used in respect to the wives of the deacons (1 Tim. 3:11). The word literally means "abstaining from wine, either entirely or at least from its immoderate use." The word comes from the root word, *nepho*, "to be sober, to be calm and collected in spirit; to be temperate, dispassionate, circumspect." Obviously, a drunkard would not be a suitable elder.

According to Colin Brown, "in Hellenistic Greek the words can be used literally, of a state of abstinence from wine, but also figuratively indicating complete clarity of mind and its resulting good judgment...For the New Testament writers the literal is often implied, the figurative sense is also prominent. *Nepho* occurs twice in the argument of 1 Thess. 5:6-8...denoting the alertness required in the light of an imminent parousia, and once in the Pastoral Epistles (2 Tim. 4:5), where it indicates the clarity of mind able to resist the subtle attractions of deviant [beliefs]." (New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1967, Vol. 1, p. 514).

Since Paul addresses the issue of abstinence from alcohol in the statement, "not given to wine," in verse 3, it seems clear that the figurative sense is in mind. He is referring to mental sobriety. An elder cannot allow any personal disorder that would distort his judgment or conduct, such as alcohol or drugs might do. Hence, the primary meaning is alert, vigilant, watchful, clear-headed, sound in judgment and free from rash behavior. The temperate man is one who is mentally and emotionally stable. Brown further states, "the main point in these contexts is the self-control necessary for effective ministry." John MacArthur adds that such men, "are desperately needed in today's church" (The MacArthur New Testament Commentary 1 Timothy, Moody, Chicago, 1995, p. 106).

In Titus 1:7-8 Paul says that the elder is not to be **self-willed**, *authades*, but rather **self-controlled**, *egrates*. Vine states that *autades* means, "self-pleasing (autos, self, arrogantly asserts his own will...one so far overvaluing any determination at which he has himself once arrived that he will not be removed from it.)" Peter uses the word to describe false teachers, "and especially those who walk according to the flesh in the lust of uncleanness and despise authority. *They are* presumptuous, self-willed. They are not afraid to speak evil of dignitaries,"

(2 Pet. 2:10). It could be well used to describe them today. It is an arrogant frame of mind which gives in to “human impulse violating obedience to the divine command” (Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1972, Vol. 1, p.508). A self-willed man asserts his own interests without regard to how it may affect others. This is pride, the root of all sin, and its greatest problem is that it ignores God’s will and spurns His glory. While this type of attitude is often praised in secular pursuits and employments, it has no place in the qualifications of spiritual leaders for the church.

Rather than being self-willed, the elder is to be **self-controlled**, *egrates*. William Hendriksen defines it as “possessing the moral strength to curb or master one’s sinful drives and impulses” (New Testament Commentary, Thessalonians, Timothy, and Titus, Baker, Grand Rapids, 1979, p. 349). The main issue here is that of personal spiritual disciplines. While there is clear evidence that elders are accountable to one another and the congregation at large for their behavior (Matt. 18:15-20; Gal. 6:1-2; 1 Tim. 5:19-20), that is not the issue here. Paul is speaking of our need for personal integrity before God. D. Edmond Hiebert says the word means “disciplined, having the inner strength that enables him to control his bodily appetites and passions, a virtue listed in Gal. 5:23 as one quality of the fruit of the spirit” (The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, Zondervan, Grand Rapid, 1978, Vol. II, p. 431). Without self-discipline an elder will be an easy prey for the enemy and will have little ability to ward off a critical spirit, sexual lust, and other selfish desires. Keeping a clear conscience is essential to success in the work of shepherding the church (2 Cor. 1:12). The standard for behavior is just as high for other believers as it is for elders. The difference comes in the consequences. When a believer sins he does not forfeit his salvation, however, when spiritual leaders live ungodly and undisciplined lives they may very well forfeit their privilege to lead God’s people.

6.3.2 - Sober-minded (1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:8): This stipulation for elders is closely connected with the concepts listed in (2.3.1) which deal with elders’ self-control or personal spiritual disciplines. *Sophron*, “denotes of sound mind (*sozo*, to save, *phren*, the mind); hence, self-controlled, sober-minded.” In classical Greek the word meant to be “rational or discreet,” in other words, to be of a sound mind. The NASB translates it “prudent” in 1 Tim. 3, and “sensible” in Titus 1. The word is used in Mark 5:15 of the Gadarene demoniac whom Jesus healed, “and they saw the one who had been demon-possessed and had the legion, sitting and clothed and in his right mind” (*sophron*.” The elder has been set free from the power of the enemy who would distort and deceive his mind so that it is incumbent that he remain in that state.

Being sober-minded or sensible also means not thinking too highly of oneself, “For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think *of himself* more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly (*sophron*), as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith” (Rom. 12:3). Paul gives commentary on this in verse 16, “Be of the same mind toward one another. Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion.” Again, this is an area where elders are to set the example for others. In Titus 2, Paul admonishes each age group in the church to be sober-minded; verse 2, “that the older men be sober,”; verse 5, that older women admonish the young women “to be discreet,” and verse 12, that grace of God teaches all that “we should live soberly.” Sober, sensible, prudent living is

necessary in light of the seriousness of the times. Peter says, “But the end of all things is at hand; therefore be serious and watchful (*sophron*) in your prayers” (1 Pet. 4:7).

Another critical aspect of the word is the issue of being discreet or chaste. The issue of sexual immorality is a plague that has seriously hampered the work of the church. The older women of the church should have learned their lesson by now, either from personal experience, or from seeing the devastation of sexual looseness in others. In Titus 2:4-5, Paul tells them to instruct the younger women to be “discreet (*sophron*)” and “chaste (*hagnos*).” *Hagnos* means “pure from defilement, not contaminated (from the same root as *hagios*, holy).” In 1 Tim. 2, Paul instructs the women to dress in “modest apparel, with propriety and moderation (*sophrosune*),” verse 9; and to “continue with...self-control (*sophrosune*),” verse 15. The context of these verses makes clear that sensible, prudent behavior includes sexual morality. So then, the elders are to live and teach so that others will plainly see that the only sensible way to conduct oneself is with discretion and chastity in sexual matters.

A man in his right mind is serious about the things of God. John MacArthur comments, “*Sophron* indicates a person who is serious about spiritual things. Such a man doesn’t have the reputation of a clown. That doesn’t mean he avoids humor - any good leader is able to use and enjoy humor. But he is to have an appreciation for what really matters in life. Some young men have a frivolous mentality, but the longer they serve Christ and observe life, the more they see things through God’s perspective. As time passes, their frivolity is tempered by their increased understanding of man’s lostness and the inevitability of hell. That’s part of being a sober-minded person” (The Master’s Plan for the Church, Moody, Chicago, 1991, p 222).

6.3.3 - Not violent (1 Tim. 3:3; Titus 1:7): This is the first of several negative traits that should be absent from the elder’s personal character. The word is *plektes*, from *plesso* (“to strike”), and hence means, “bruiser, ready for a blow; a pugnacious, contentious, quarrelsome person.” Simply put, this is a man who thinks the issue at hand can best be settled by a fist fight. This would seem an unnecessary restraint, but apparently it was not uncommon for men in the day of New Testament to settle their disputes this way. This type of behavior can be expected from men in a tavern, but not in the church. Men prone to settle their differences with their fists are not fit for spiritual leadership. The correct approach is given by Paul, “And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth,” (2 Tim.2:24-25). An elder must be coolheaded and not go around with a chip on his shoulder. It should be noted that this is closely connected with the restraint regarding the use of alcohol. Hendricksen states, “Between the immoderate use of wine and the eagerness to engage someone in combat there is but a small step.” (New Testament Commentary, Thessalonians, Timothy and Titus, Baker, Grand Rapids, 1979, p. 125).

6.3.4 - Not quarrelsome (1 Tim. 3:3, Titus 3:2), Not quick-tempered (Titus 1:7): The difference in these words and violent is simply that violent has to do with physical fighting, whereas quarrelsome is more related to an argumentative attitude. The word is

amachos, “lit., not fighting (a negative, *mache*, a fight, combat, quarrel), primarily signifying invincible, came to mean not contentious.” It is translated “peaceable” in Titus 3:2, “to speak evil of no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing all humility to all men.” Contentious attitudes in men are a part of our fallen nature, but God clearly wants His people to be separate from worldly ways. In fact, God hates division and quarrels among His people (Prov. 6:16-19).

The man most likely to be quarrelsome is the one who is quick-tempered. The word is *orgilos* which means “prone to anger, irascible.” In classical Greek the word meant, “inclined to anger, passionate, irritable.” It comes from the word *orge*, “wrath, anger; retribution, punishment; revenge.” This is not referring to outbursts of anger, which are bad enough, but rather a seething, underlying, propensity to anger, a man with a “short fuse.” The KJV translates it “not soon angry,” which conveys the meaning well. This is a critical qualification for elders, for they must deal constantly with people and their problems. While all of us become angry at times, and often with good reason, the real issue is how well a man deals with his anger. The Bible says, “An angry man stirs up strife, And a furious man abounds in transgression,” (Prov. 29:22); and “So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; for the wrath (*orge*) of man does not produce the righteousness of God,” (Jas. 1:19-20). In other words, a man qualified to lead the church recognizes and controls his anger. He is not resentful, but rather, handles conflict with a calm and compassionate demeanor. If issues arise where there is justifiable “righteous indignation,” the man qualified to lead the church does not “blow-up” but rather, approaches the issue under guidelines of church discipline (see Bylaws, Art, VI, Sec. 2).

6.3.5 - Not given to wine (1 Tim. 3:3; Titus 1:7): An elder is to not abuse any intoxicating beverages and substances. The word is *paroinos*, “an adjective, lit., tarrying at wine (*para*, at, *oinos*, wine), ‘given to wine.’” Paul’s admonition is applicable to all believers, especially to those who hold leadership roles in the church, that they not abuse wine. The use of alcohol is dangerous because it easily leads to excess. “And be not drunk with wine, in which is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit” (Eph. 5:18). Paul recommends that wine be used only for medical purposes, “No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for your stomach’s sake and your frequent infirmities” (1 Tim 5:23). It is obvious from this statement that Timothy was a total abstainer.

John MacArthur says, “The Greek word translated ‘given to wine’ (*paroinos*) means ‘one who drinks.’ It doesn’t refer to a drunkard - that’s obvious disqualification. The issue here is the man’s reputation: is he known as a drinker? We saw that the Greek word translated ‘temperate’ (1 Tim. 3:2) refers in its literal sense to one who is not intoxicated. *Paroinos*, on the other hand, refers to one’s associations. Such a person doesn’t frequent bars, taverns, and inns. He is not at home in the noisy scenes associated with drinking. His lifestyle is not that of a drinker” (The Master’s Plan for the Church, Moody, Chicago, 1991, p. 225).

There are many who argue that moderate use of alcohol is acceptable, not only for the believer, but for the spiritual leaders of church. The typical argument starts along this line, “Jesus drank wine.” The issue then becomes, “is the wine drunk today the same that Jesus

drank?” Careful study will reveal an emphatic **no** to that question. (For further study of this issue see John MacArthur’s commentary on the Book of Ephesians, the section dealing with 5:18; or Tom Rush, “The Christian and Alcohol” tape series on Ephesians 5:18).

6.3.6 - Not greedy (1 Tim. 3:3; Titus 1:7), Not for dishonest gain (1 Pet. 5:2), Not covetous (1 Tim. 3:3): Money has been a great downfall for many who aspire to spiritual leadership. Either they cannot handle it, or their love for it causes them to use their position as a means of gain. The amount of money involved is not the real issue, for as Paul states it is the “the love of money [that] is a root of all kinds of evil” (1 Tim. 6:10). The phrase “not greedy” in the Timothy and Titus passages is the same word as the phrase “not for dishonest gain” in Peter. It is the adjective *aischrokerdes*, “from *aischros*, (filthy, baseness, dishonor), and *kerdos* (gain, profit, greed); hence the meaning, ‘eager for base gain, greedy for money.’” There are at least two applications of this point: (1) an elder should operate his business and manage his personal finance with integrity. He should not have a bad reputation in the community for being cheap, underhanded, or selfish. (2) He should not be in the ministry simply for the sake of making money. Since many pastors and full-time church staff do not make large salaries, one might wonder why this is a consideration. Since the early days of the New Testament many churchmen have thought that the ministry would be an easy way to make a living. If the task is done under the direction of the Holy Spirit and in accordance with biblical standards, it is far from an easy task and, at least from the human perspective, many pastors are probably underpaid and overworked. (Many TV evangelists fit the greedy category, because they are false teachers and greed is a clear mark of a false teacher [1 Tim. 6:5; Titus 1:11])

All believers, including full-time church staff members, have a right to make a living (Luke 10:7). Paul specifies that those who preach the gospel have a right to make a living from their preaching (1 Cor. 9:11-14). He states, “Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine. For the Scripture says, ‘You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain,’ and, ‘The laborer is worthy of his wages’” (1 Tim. 5:17-18). The word honor is *time*, and includes in its meaning monetary value as well as esteem. So then, it is right and proper to financially remunerate the elders for their service to the church, especially if they labor faithfully in the ministry of the Word (preaching and teaching). On the other hand, elders are to model godly contentment and not be men whose whole attitude and lifestyle revolves around the love of money.

Paul further tells Timothy that the elder is not to be **covetous**. The word is *aphilarguros*, “not loving money, not avaricious.” The literal meaning is “not a friend of silver.” John MacArthur’s comments clarify the issue very well, “Love of money can corrupt a man’s ministry because it tempts him to view people as a means by which he can get more money...(1 Tim. 6:6-10).

“How do we keep from loving money? Here’s a simple principle I’ve used. Don’t place a price on your ministry. Sometimes people ask me how much I charge to teach or preach. I don’t charge anything. If I’m paid, that’s fine, if not, that’s fine too. I leave that up to the Lord

and those to whom I minister. I'll accept whatever He supplies, but I don't want my ministry to be influenced, distorted, or corrupted in any way by financial expectations.

“If someone gives you a financial gift you didn't seek, you can accept it from the Lord and be thankful for it. But if you pursue money, you'll never know whether it comes from Him or from your own efforts. That robs you of the joy or recognizing God's provision for your needs” (The Master's Plan for the Church, Moody, Chicago, 1991, p. 227).

6.4 - Spiritual Responsibility – The Pastor's Competence: All of the previously mentioned qualifications relate to spiritual character and attitudes, or what an elder is to **be**. We now turn our attention to what an elder is to **do**. Just as the primary responsibility of a shepherd is to feed the sheep, so the primary responsibility of a pastor is to feed (teach) his flock (John 21:15-19). One of the greatest failures of the modern church is the lack of emphasis on straightforward Bible preaching. What is meant is the verse-by-verse exposition of Scripture proclaimed from the pulpit week after week. The ineptness and weakness of the church is directly due to lack of knowledge of what the Bible actually says.

The final word used to describe and define the office of church leaders is *poimen*, “pastor or shepherd.” The noun is used only once in the New Testament, but the verb is used three times in the context of Christian leadership. The literal meaning of the word is a “shepherd,” one who tends herds or flocks, not merely one who feeds them, though the feeding is the most critical aspect (Ps. 23). Metaphorically, it is used of a Christian “pastor” (Ephesians 4:11) who is also a teacher. Pastors guide as well as feed the flock (Acts 20:17, 28), which indicates that this was the service committed to elders (overseers or bishops). The tasks of a Middle Eastern shepherd were to: watch for and defend the sheep from enemies; heal the wounded and sick sheep; find and save lost sheep; and to love them, sharing their lives, thus earning their trust (John 21:16; 1 Pet. 5:1-2).

When asked if their pastor can preach, a typical response from many church members is, “No, but he's a good pastor.” What is normally meant by this is that the pastor is a good counselor; he visits in the homes and hospitals; he has a good personality; he doesn't “rock the boat;” he gets along well with others; he loves the senior adults and the youth; and he presides well over committee meetings. He is busy about church work. He expends many hours doing “good things.” Unfortunately, he is also most likely guilty of spending too little time doing the “best thing.” Recently a pastor stated that it took him from Monday morning through Thursday afternoon to take care of his administrative responsibilities. This left him with only Friday to prepare to preach, unless he spent no time with his family. Such travesty is not what the New Testament teaches that pastors are to do. If a pastor is not a great preacher he cannot be a good pastor! It is not meant to imply that skills of oratory are required, but rather, that he be faithful in presenting the text of Scripture, explaining it, and exhorting the people to obey it.

Preaching is the number one responsibility of the pastor! It takes time to prepare and pray so that the preaching ministry will be effective. The two office system of elders and deacons is designed to provide the best possible situation for the preparation and preaching of God's Word.

Elders jointly bare the burden of the spiritual leadership with assistance from the deacons in the practical aspects of ministry. This simple and profound method was employed from the very start of the church when the apostles appointed the very first deacons so they would have time to spend in the Word and prayer (Acts 6:1-7). The church will be much better off when it returns to a biblical form of church government and allows its pastor-teachers to truly labor in the Word and doctrine.

6.4.1 - A steward of God (Titus 1:7), A good work (1 Tim. 3:1): Elders are the stewards of God and have been called to a good work. The work is arduous and requires diligent labor saturated in a conscientious study of the Word of God and submission to the Holy Spirit. An elder/pastor is to be a steward (*oikonomos*) of God's house (1 Tim. 3:15). The word primarily denoted the manager of a household or estates (*oikos*, a house, *nemo*, to arrange), a steward (such were usually slaves or freedmen) (Luke 12:42, 16:1,3,8; 1 Cor. 4:2; Gal. 4:2).. In Rom.16:23, the treasurer of a city...; it is used metaphorically, in the wider sense, of a steward in general, (a) of preachers of the gospel and teachers of the Word of God,... 1 Cor. 4:1; (b) of elders or bishops in churches, Titus 1:7; (c) of believers generally, 1 Pet. 4:10. The word "economist" is from this Greek word, so it is evident that elders are to oversee the financial affairs of the church and serve as its trustees. This qualification means that an elder must possess common sense as well as genuine integrity when it comes to money.

The church is God's household and the elders/pastors are His stewards. As such, their primary accountability is to God. Paul put it this way, "Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards (*oikonomos*) of the mysteries of God. Moreove it is required in stewards that one be found faithful" (1 Cor. 4:1-2). Consequently, management and administration of the church fall to the responsibility of the elders. They are to spiritually supervise the feeding (teaching), counseling, training, disciplining and encouraging of the members of the local church in their charge. The elders, appointed by God, recognized by their fellow elders, and affirmed by the church as men chosen to lead the fellowship, are commanded in Scripture to shepherd the flock and to serve as overseers (1 Pet. 5:1-4). By virtue of their offices, the pastors and elders are charged with being the spiritual leaders and governing administrators of the church in all its decisions (Acts 14:23; 20:17; Eph. 4:11; Titus 1:5).

6.4.2 - An example to the flock (1 Pet. 5:3): the word "example" is *tupos*, and is in the present active which means that elders are to continually be making themselves examples to other believers. It is set in opposition to being an autocratic domineering type of leader. The phrase "lording it over" is *katakurieuo* meaning to "exercise dominion over; to bring under one's power, to subject one self, to subdue, master." It comes from *kata*, "down," and *kurieuo*, "to rule, have dominion over, to exercise influence upon, to have power over." It conveys the idea of gaining mastery over others for selfish purposes. Jesus was clear that this type of leadership was not appropriate within His church, "But Jesus called them to *Himself* and said to them, 'You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them (*katakurieuo*), and their great ones exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. And whoever of you desires to be first shall be

slave of all” (Mark 10:42-44). The Apostle John denounced the autocratic leadership of the pastor of an early congregation, “I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to have the pre-eminence among them, does not receive us. Therefore, if I come, I will call to mind his deeds which he does, prating against us with malicious words. And not content with that, he himself does not receive the brethren, and forbids those who wish to, putting *them* out of the church” (3 John 9,10).

To whom are the elders to be an example? “those entrusted to you” (NKJV), “God’s heritage” (KJV), and “those allotted to your charge” (NASB). These various phrases translate the Greek word *kleros*. The word has an interesting definition, “an object used in casting or drawing lots, which was either a pebble, or a potsherd, or a bit of wood; the lots of several persons concerned, inscribed with their names, were thrown together into a vase, which was then shaken, and he whose lot fell out first upon the ground was the one chosen; what is obtained by lot, allotted portion; a portion of the ministry common to the apostles;...of persons - those whose care and oversight has been assigned to one [allotted charge], used of Christian churches, the administration of which falls to the lot of presbyters.” So then, the people are not the possessions of the elders but rather, are given to them for their care. The analogy of the family comes more into focus with the word *kleros* and we understand why it is required of elders that they demonstrate the ability to care for their families before they are given charge of the church (1 Tim. 3:4-5).

Just as the ancient shepherds did not drive their flocks but rather lead them, so pastors are to lead their flocks by setting an example of godliness and holiness before them. The Bible is a book full of examples for elders themselves to follow, Jesus being the Chief Shepherd Himself. The elders’ primary leadership style should be to model Christ likeness to the congregation, “For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps” (1 Pet. 2:12).

6.4.3 - Able to teach (1 Tim. 3:2), Holding fast the faithful word (Titus 1:9): An adjective, “able to teach” is *didaktikos*, “skilled in teaching (Eng., didactic).” The word occurs in both 1 Tim. 3:2 and 2 Tim. 2:24, and the concept is clearly stated in Titus 1:9 where elders are commanded to “hold fast the faithful word” in order to be able to exhort and convict others. This requirement is the biggest difference between the qualifications of an elder and a deacon. Elders must be able to clearly communicate the Word of God to others. The church is built on the Holy Scriptures and those who lead must be knowledgeable of the Word and capable of sharing that knowledge. When Paul called together the elders from the church at Ephesus in Acts 20, he emphasized the importance of the Word of God in his own ministry and for the future stability of the church. Paul said, “For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God. Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears. So now, brethren, I

commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified” (Acts 20:27-32).

The Pastoral Epistles repeatedly emphasize the importance of sound doctrinal teaching within the church. Paul instructed Timothy to “remain in Ephesus that you may charge some that they teach no other doctrine,” (1 Tim. 1:3). It was obviously critical that the church be taught sound doctrine. False doctrine was clearly a problem and the best way to combat falsehoods was with the truth (1 Tim. 4:1-5; 2 Tim. 4:3-4). In worship, careful attention was to be given to reading, to exhortation and to doctrine (1 Tim. 4:13). Timothy was to give himself to the study of the Word in order to be able to preach and teach the Word such that people would be saved (1 Tim. 4:14-16). Elders who rule well, especially in the Word and doctrine, were to receive double honor (1 Tim. 5:17). If anyone rejected sound doctrine, Timothy and the church were to reject such preachers (1 Tim. 6:3).

Paul told Timothy to “hold fast the pattern of sound words...” (2 Tim. 1:13). In other words, every single word of Scripture was important and Timothy was not to give up any ground on the Word of God. In addition, it was essential that the teaching be passed on from generation to generation, “And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also” (2 Tim. 2:2). Diligence in this task would be essential to Timothy, just as it is to us, “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15). Finally, Paul instructed Timothy to be a thorough-going Bible man and to have a thorough-going Bible ministry (2 Tim. 3:10-4-5).

The instruction on the importance of the Word of God continued in Paul’s Epistle to Titus (1:9-16). Paul required that elders hold fast to the Word in order to be able to contradict false teachers and expose their errors. In chapter 2, verse 1, he commanded Titus to speak only the things which are in accordance with sound doctrine.

John MacArthur adds some essential information in regard to the elder’s teaching responsibility: “The most powerful impetus to effective teaching is credibility. A skilled teacher will practice what he preaches. If you teach one thing and live another, you are contradicting and undermining your teaching.

“Paul said to Timothy, ‘Let no man despise thy youth, but be thou an example [to] the believer’ (1 Tim. 4:12). He wanted Timothy to be a model others could follow - a prototype of his own teaching. Paul went on to list the areas of life in which Timothy should be an example: ‘in word [what you say], in conduct [what you do], in love [what you feel], in spirit [what you think], in faith [what you believe], in purity [what motivates you]’ (v12). That’s exemplary behavior in every dimension of life and is the first and foremost factor in skilled teaching.

“In 1 Cor. 11:1 Paul says, ‘Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ.’ You are not a skilled teacher unless you can call on people to follow your example.

“The Holy Spirit gives the gift of teaching to those called to teach the church (Rom. 12:7; 1 Cor. 12:28; Eph. 4:11). It is not a natural ability but a Spirit-given endowment that enables one to teach the Word of God effectively.

“First Timothy 4:6 describes a good minister as being ‘nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine.’ Even though Timothy was that kind of minister, Paul encouraged him to guard carefully the sound doctrine he had been taught. In 1 Tim. 6:20 Paul says, ‘O Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust.’ In 2 Tim. 1:13-14 he says, ‘Retain the standard of sound words which you have heard from me...Guard, through the Holy Spirit...the treasure which has been entrusted to you.’

“Generally speaking, the more doctrinal knowledge a teacher has the more skilled his teaching will be. That doesn’t mean a new Christian can’t be a skilled teacher, but he will have to work hard to make up for his lack of knowledge” (The Master’s Plan for the Church, Moody, Chicago, 1919, pp. 224-5).

6.4.4 - Standing against false teachers (Titus 1:9-16; Acts 20:19f): Here is the reason for Paul’s call for an unyielding stand on the Word of God. The Book of Acts, the Pastoral Epistles, and church history, teach us plainly that there are many false teachers who contradict the Word of God. Much of their error is not outright, but rather, subtle. Sometimes those who teach the doctrines of demons look and sound like messengers of the light (1 Tim. 4:1; cp. 2 Cor. 11:5-15). Consequently, pastors must hold fast to the “faithful word.” The “word” is *logos*, which literally means “a word, uttered by a living voice, [it] embodies a conception or idea; what someone has said, a word, the sayings of God,..., of the moral precepts given by God, Old Testament prophecy given by the prophets.” In the New Testament the word *logos* came to be a synonym for the Scripture (Mark 7:13; John 10:34-36; 1 Thess. 1:8; 2 Thess. 3:1; Rev. 1:2), and as a reference to Jesus Christ as the living Word of God (John 1:1-18; 1 John 1:1). Some try to elevate Jesus above the written Word, but this is not being “faithful” to the Word itself, “I will worship toward Your holy temple, And praise Your name For Your loving kindness and Your truth; ***For You have magnified Your word above all Your name***” (Ps. 138:2, *emphasis added*). You cannot worship God without recognition of the greatness of His Word, “Whenever I am afraid, I will trust in You. ***In God (I will praise His word)***, In God I have put my trust; I will not fear. What can flesh do to me?” (Ps. 56:3,4; *emphasis added*; cp. Is. 42:21; Matt. 5:18; 24:35). A pastor must be committed to the full authority and sufficiency of Scripture in all matters.

It is an elder’s duty to protect the church from false teachers. Anyone who speaks or teaches things that do not line up with the “the faithful” Word as he has been taught,” sound doctrine clearly stated in Scripture, should be named, marked and refuted by the godly pastor. Dealing with this issue was one of the main reasons Paul called the Ephesians elders to Miletus to meet with them. He warned them, “Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock.

Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears” (Acts 20:28-31). There is a great need in the church for exposing errors, because the devil and his demons are the masters of deception and manipulation. That Jesus would have to admonish the church at Ephesus for leaving their first love (Rev. 2:4) is evidence enough of the seriousness of such a duty.

Calling false teachers by name is specifically commanded in Scripture. “Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, **and avoid them**,” (Rom. 16:17). All three of the Pastoral Epistles give us the instruction to point out and avoid false teachers and their doctrines, “If anyone teaches otherwise and does not consent to wholesome words, *even* the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which accords with godliness, he is proud, knowing nothing, but is obsessed with disputes and arguments over words, from which come envy, strife, reviling, evil suspicions, useless wranglings of men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain. **From such withdraw yourself**,” (1 Tim. 6:3-5). Paul also says that false teachers are those, “having a form of godliness but denying its power. **And from such people turn away!**” (2 Tim. 3:5). Paul told Titus that false teachers were “insubordinate, idle talkers and deceivers.” He said they could best be recognized by professing to know God yet their works expose them as fraudulent. Consequently, Paul insisted that their “mouths must be stopped” (Titus 1:10-16). Ultimately, Paul says that if the divisive man is within the congregation he must be removed if he will not cease and desist from his untruth, “**Reject a divisive man** after the first and second admonition, knowing that such a person is warped and sinning, being self-condemned,” (Titus 3:10; cp. 2 Thess. 3:6-14; 2 John 10, 11). (*Emphasis added in the above verses*).

Under the label of “tolerance” many professing Christians believe that denouncing false doctrine is unloving and judgmental and leads to division within the body. The greater error is the compromise of Scripture in the name of “unity.” We are often called upon to sacrifice doctrine on the altar of unity. The Promise Keepers men’s movement insists on exactly that. They demand that men who attend their meetings “park their doctrine at the door.” This is not “speaking the truth in love,” as we are charged to do in Ephesians 4:15. Godly pastors will not tolerate false doctrine and will be quick to warn their people of the subtle dangers brought on through adherence to anything that contradicts God’s Word.

6.4.5 - Guarding one’s personal spiritual life (Acts 6:4; 20:28; 1 Tim. 4:6,7,16; 6:20; Tim. 1:12-14; 2:15; 3:13-17): The pastor/elder will never have success in leading God’s people unless he carefully guards his own personal spiritual life. Paul was well aware of this, and that is why he emphasized the need to *guard* our time with the Lord, using it wisely in the study of the Word and prayer. The very reason for the selection for the first deacons in Acts 6 was so the apostles could devote more time to the study of the Word and prayer. The need for study and prayer in the life of the pastor-teacher, or those elders who specifically labor in the Word and doctrine, cannot be overstated. However,

regardless of the particular teaching responsibilities of individual elders, none can afford to absent themselves from daily time with the Lord in study and prayer. The responsibilities of the office demand diligence in personal spiritual disciplines. W. A. Criswell stated, "If the preacher does not grow, he will become an increasingly narrower and weaker man. He ought to discipline himself. Nothing will overcome the temptation to dissipate his life but a profound conviction that study - persistent, regular, and lifelong - is the first duty of the man who seeks to stand before God in the pulpit as an instructor of the people." (Criswell's Guidebook for Pastors, Broadman, Nashville, 1980, pp.64-65). This should certainly apply to the elders whose responsibility it is to lead the people of God to the green pastures and still waters.

In the early days of the church, Paul warned the Ephesian elders that they must "take heed" to themselves and their flock seeing that they were appointed as "overseers" (Acts 20:28). "Take heed" is *prosecho*, "lit., to hold to, signifies to turn to, turn one's attention to; hence, to give heed." They would need to give attention to their own spiritual progress so they could encourage and nurture the spiritual growth of their congregation. Consequently, Paul's parting statement from them was, "So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified" (Acts 20:32). Commending them to God was their impetus to prayer, and commending them to the Word of God was their stimulus to study (cp. 2 Tim. 2:15).

In 1 Tim. 4:6-16, Paul specifically instructed Timothy regarding the importance of his personal spiritual disciplines. He told him essentially that if he wanted to properly *instruct the brethren* he would have to be *nourished in the words of faith and of the good doctrine* he had been taught. That would require that he, "exercise (discipline) [him] self toward godliness." "Exercise" is *gumnazo*, "to exercise vigorously, in any way, either the body or the mind." Timothy would have to *labor and suffer reproach*, but he was to maintain a godly example before the other believers *in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity*. He was charged to, "give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine. Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you by prophecy with the laying on of the hands of the eldership. Meditate on these things; **give yourself entirely to them**, that your progress may be evident to all. **Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine**. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those hear you" (1 Tim. 4:13-16; *emphasis added*). Paul charged Timothy to "guard" that which was entrusted to him so that he would never stray from the truth (1 Tim. 6:20; 2 Tim. 1:12-14; 3:13-17).

6.5 The Selection of Elders: In 1 Tim. 3:10 there is specific instruction to examine a man before making him a deacon. The necessity for examination of elders is equally evident in several Scriptures. Paul instructed Timothy to, "not lay hands on anyone hastily, nor share in other people's sins; keep yourself pure... Some men's sins are clearly evident, preceding *them* to judgment, but those of some *men* follow later. Likewise, the good works of *some* are clearly evident, and those that are otherwise cannot be hidden" (1 Tim. 5:22,24-25). The point is, that a man should not be placed in spiritual leadership of the people of God unless he is obviously qualified. With some, their sins are evident even to the casual observer. With others, they can

be discovered only through diligent inquiry. There is a serious recognition of spiritual authority, maturity, and responsibility, when one is appointed to the office of elder. In a sense, there is need for an ongoing evaluation of the ministry of any one called to serve God. Paul reminded Timothy to, “not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you by prophecy with the laying on of the hands of the eldership” (1 Tim. 4:14); and “Therefore I remind you to stir up the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands” (2 Tim. 1:6). Specifics on the selection of elders for this church are contained in Article V, Section 4.5 of the Bylaws. Men who are deemed qualified to serve as elders will undergo a program of elder training before being presented to the congregation.

SECTION 7: THE QUALIFICATION OF DEACONS

First Timothy 3:8-13, and other related Scriptures, are the criteria by which a man is to be measured for deacon selection. More recent times have seen different interpretations arise from this passage of Scripture. Those holding the office of deacon are held in high regard as spiritual leaders and are seen as examples to be followed. It is no wonder God has put such stringent conditions on this office of service. The criteria for deacon selection are plain to this end: In 1 Tim. 3:1-13, the governing standard for both the elder and the deacon is found in verses 2, 10, and 11. Elders and deacons *must be “blameless” or “above reproach.”* That is to say, no one can bring a disqualifying accusation against them that is true or that the public would believe to be true (Titus 1:7). This blameless is the standard for the deacon, and the overseer is verified by the word “Likewise” which appears in verses 8 and 11, and by the use of the word translated “blameless” in verse 10 (*anegkletos*, also used in Titus 1:7). If any part of a prospective deacon’s past or present could be considered a hindrance, or would bring reproach to the office of deacon, or to the church, he should not be considered. After identifying the standard of blameless, the Scriptures provide commentary on character traits which would be typical of one meeting the standard. For instance, a person who has not yet married would not be the husband of one wife. Yet, he could still meet the standard of being blameless. On the other hand, the commentary must not be ignored in cases where its application is reasonable. The following traits, given in Scripture, offer excellent assistance in determining if a deacon candidate meets the biblical standard of blameless (see **Section 6.1.1**).

7.1 The Character Qualities Required in Deacons (Acts 6:3; 1 Tim. 3:8,9): There is considerable debate over whether the seven men chosen to assist the apostles in Acts 6 were the first deacons. There can be little doubt, however, that they were at least the forerunners to those who would be deacons as the church developed. The standards that the apostles called for in the men who would assist them with the work of the ministry would surely be applicable to those serving the church as deacons. The apostles called for the church to, “seek out from among you seven men of *good* reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business” (Acts 6:3). As the church grew and extended there was a need for persons to serve the church in an official capacity as deacons. The term for an official office of deacon occurs in only two places; Philippians 1:1 and 1 Timothy 3:8-13. The word for deacon is *diakonos*, a “servant or helper.” The word originally meant to wait on tables but the definition grew to include any kind of helpful service rendered to others. The idea of the original meaning is seen in several places in the New Testament, such as the wedding feast at Cana in John 2:5 where the

waiters were called *diakonos*. The concept behind the word for deacon includes the words, *diakonia* (“service”) and *diakoneo* (“to serve”). These three words appear over 100 times in the New Testament and are translated variously. *Diakonos* is translated “servant,” “minister,” and “deacon.” *Diakonia*, is translated “ministry,” “serving,” “service,” “distribution,” “administration,” and “relief.” *Diakoneo*, is translated “ministered,” “served,” “administered,” and “provided for.”

There are at least three basic uses of this group of words. In general, the terms refer to any and all service performed for Christ and His church. Jesus equated following Him with serving Him, “If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also. If anyone serves Me, him My Father will honor,” (John 12:26). In Ephesians 4:12, the spiritual leaders of the church were to equip all the believers for the “work of the ministry.” (Rom. 12:6-8; 1 Pet. 4:10-11). A second use of the word has to do with the spiritual gifts of service or ministry. Those with this gift may or may not be deacons, but God has specifically gifted them to meet the needs of others. The third use of the word has to do with those who hold an official office as a deacon. As John MacArthur states, “Everyone is a deacon in the general sense, some are specially gifted by the Holy Spirit for service, but still others hold the office of deacon.” (The MacArthur New Testament Commentary 1 Timothy, Moody, Chicago, 1995, p. 125).

Interestingly, there is very little in the New Testament on the duties of deacons. The specifics of their responsibilities must be determined by the elders of each local congregation. Since needs differ from church-to-church, this would make a great deal of sense. On the other hand, the caliber of persons selected for service is critical, and whatever they actually do, they are required to be models of spiritual strength and benefaction. The seven chosen in Acts 6 were men of “good reputation” or “honest report” (KJV). This is a characteristic required of elders in 1 Timothy 3:7 (see 6.1.3) and is the word *martureo*, “to be a witness, bear witness, testify, signifies, in the passive voice [as here], to be well testified of, to have a good report.” Deacons should be men of strong conviction and spiritual maturity who are well respected by others. Further, the apostles wanted men who were “full of the Holy Spirit,” meaning that they were saved and “spirit-filled” (Eph. 5:18). “Full” is *pleres*, “of the soul, thoroughly permeated with,” hence, controlled by. Deacons should live under the control of the Holy Spirit by being godly examples to others and willing to serve the people for Jesus’ sake. Deacons must also be men full of wisdom. The word is *sophia*, “wisdom, broad and full of intelligence; used of the knowledge of very diverse matters; skill in the management of affairs; devout and proper prudence in intercourse with men not disciple of Christ, skill and discretion in imparting Christian truth; the knowledge and practice of the requisites for godly and upright living.” Wise, Spirit-controlled men of good reputation will make the finest deacons and will fit the qualifications outlined in 1 Timothy 3:8-13.

7.1.1 - Reverent: *Semnos*, “first denoted reverend, august, venerable (akin to *sebomai*, to reverence); then, serious, grave.” Trench, a noted Greek scholar, says, “the word we want is one in which the sense of gravity and dignity, and of these as inviting reverence, is combined.” The NIV states, “men worthy of respect,” and the NASB states, “men of dignity.” Deacons must be respectable, serious-minded men whose moral character

elicits esteem from others. This is what the apostles had in mind in Acts 6 when they sought out men of “good reputation.”

7.1.2 - Not double-tongued: *Dilogos*, “saying the same thing twice, repeating; double tongued, double in speech, saying one thing with one person another with another (with the intent to deceive).” Many of us have been taught well by our fathers that, “A man is as good as his word.” Deception and lying are the results of a double-tongue and such action is detrimental to the life and well-being of the church. Deacons must be men of integrity who can control their tongues, whose “yes” is “yes” and their “no” is “no”.

7.1.3 - Not given to much wine: This phrase is similar to the one in 1 Tim. 3:3 and Titus 1:7, *paroinos*, which applies to the elders (see 6.3.5). Some believe that the elders are not to have any wine, but that moderate use is acceptable for the deacon since the phrase is worded somewhat differently, “not given to **much** wine.” However, the statement applied to deacons is actually a stronger prohibition. *Paroinos*, translated “given to wine,” is one word that literally means “beside wine.” Elders should avoid being in or near places where wine is served because of its evil effects. “Not given to much wine” in verse 8 is actually three words, *prosecho*, “given,” *polus*, “much,” and *oinos*, “wine.” *Prosecho* means “to turn one’s mind to, attend to, is used of giving oneself up to.” The NASB has a good translation, “addicted to.” It is a present active which means that the deacon is not to be preoccupied with alcohol or allow it to influence his life. The influence of a deacon is significant, and therefore, he should totally abstain from intoxicating beverages. It has already been stated that the wine used in the days of the New Testament church was not the same as the wine used today. Due to the tremendously negative impact of alcohol on our society, as well as on our churches, spiritual leaders must not do anything that could cause another to stumble. According to our church covenant, abstaining from alcohol is a virtue expected of the entire membership; thus, deacons should set the example.

7.1.4 - Not greedy for money: Deacons’ first concern should be for service that glorifies God. Those who practice greedy and shady business deals in pursuit of material wealth should not be considered. Since deacons will have access to church funds in the discharge of their duties, they cannot be of the sordid character that would tempt them to abuse or misapply God’s money, especially for personal gain. A sobering biblical example of such an attitude was Judas (John 12:4-6). (See 6.3.6)

7.1.5 - Holding the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience: Men who believe and know the Scriptures and live them out with a clear conscience are in mind here. “Mystery” is *musterion*, “primarily that which is known to the *mustes*, the initiated”. In the New Testament it denotes not the mysterious (as with the Eng. word), but that which, being outside the range of unassisted natural apprehension, can be made known only by Divine revelation, and is made known in a manner, and at a time, appointed by God, and to only those who are illumined by His Spirit. In the ordinary sense a mystery implies knowledge withheld; its Scriptural significance is truth revealed. What the deacon is to hold to is the “mystery of the faith.” The “faith” here represents the revealed truth or the whole body of Christian doctrine found in the Scriptures.

Belief cannot be separated from behavior. It is not enough for deacons to believe the truth (cp. James 2:19); they must also live the truth with a conscience free from accusation. The more a man lives out his biblical convictions the stronger those conviction will become (2 Cor. 1:12; Rom. 2:14-15).

7.2 Commitment to Family Life Required in Deacons (1 Tim. 3:12): Deacons, just like elders, must maintain a godly material relationship and rule their household within a manner consistent with biblical principles. Throughout the Bible, God warns His people of the dangerous consequences of licentious, debased sexual immorality, including fornication, adultery, homosexuality, and divorce. The consequences from failure in these crucial areas came just as God said. The flood destroyed the entire world, save Noah and his family, because God's people chose to engage in marriage outside His revealed will (Gen. 6). The wicked prophet Balaam could not directly curse Israel, but told King Balak that he could destroy them by tempting them to defile themselves sexually (Num. 25:1-9; 31:16). The plan worked and Satan is still using it against God's people today. "Nor let us commit sexual immorality, as some of them did, and in one day twenty-three thousand fell; nor let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed by serpents; nor complain, as some of them also complained, and were destroyed by the destroyer. Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come" (1 Cor. 10:8-11). "But I have a few things against you, because you have those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality" (Rev. 2:14). Examples of the dire results of sexual sin run through the entire Old Testament. The New Testament is replete with warnings against immoral behavior and encourages solid, Christ-centered marriages and homes.

The need for the church to champion God's holy and righteous standards for marriage has never been greater. There is an all out demonic attack on cherished family values and morals. The major problem is not the downfall of society, but the collapse of the church. In recent years many mainline Protestant denominations have abandoned God's standards regarding marriage, divorce, sexuality and gender differences. Sexual sin and adultery among religious leaders is epidemic. Divorce and remarriage among members of the clergy are seemingly inconsequential to many professing religious people. It was appalling to discover several years ago that some of these same denominations were ordaining female pastors. Now many of them are embracing and advocating same-sex, marriage-type ceremonies and ordaining gays and lesbians to serve as pastors.

Alexander Strauch says it well, "we must understand that the church isn't a country club or a casual self-help group. It is God's holy temple, a congregation of redeemed saints and priests who are consecrated to God. It is God's lighthouse in a dark world. It is 'the pillar and support of the truth.' Thus the Scripture commands, "But do not let immorality or any impurity or greed *even be named among you, as is proper among saints*" (Eph. 5:3; italics added)." (Minister of Mercy, The New Testament Deacon, Lewis & Roth, Littleton, 1992, p. 135)

There can be no doubt that one of Satan's key strategies is to destroy the marriages and families of men called to lead the church. Therefore deacons (and elders) must be models of

God's standards, that of faithful monogamous marriages and orderly, loving Christian homes. The specific standards laid out in Scripture are exactly the same for both deacons and elders.

7.2.1 - Husband of one wife: This standard is exactly the same as the standard for elders cited in 2.1.4.

7.2.2 - Ruling their children and their own houses well: The home life of a deacon is an indication of his ability or inability to be a leader in the church. The lifestyle of the children should be characterized as obedient and submissive to authority. The home life should be characterized as harmonious, of good report in the community, and a model of Christian living which brings honor and glory to our Lord Jesus Christ. (See 6.1.5)

7.3 Examination Demanded of Deacons (1 Tim. 3:10): In order to be considered for the office of deacon, a man should have been an active member for at least one year and served for a sufficient amount of time to determine that his lifestyle, conduct, doctrine, and example meets the requirements of deacon. Exceptions should be made only in cases where it is clear to the both the elders and the church that such a move is of God and in keeping with the spirit of the Scripture's intention in this regard.

7.4 Character Required of the Deacon's wife (1 Tim. 3:11): The technical information regarding just exactly what Paul was referring to when he said, "likewise, *their* wives..." is vast. There are at least three possibilities. The word "their" is supplied by most Bible translations giving the reader the idea that Paul's intent was to refer to the wives of deacons. The problem is, that there was no pronoun or modifier to clarify it in the actual text of Scripture. The three possibilities are (1) wives of deacons, (2) women who assist deacons, and (3) women who are deacons (a separate class of church officers). There are good men who hold to one or the other of these positions. Our opinion is that option (1) is the most correct view.

The verse regarding these women (*gynaikas*, the Greek word for woman/wife) is within the context of Paul's qualifications for male deacons. If this was a separate class of church officers then why did Paul place it where he did, and why did he not include that a woman deacon should be the wife of one husband? If this was Paul's intent, it would seem to contradict the larger context of the Bible, particularly 1 Tim. 2:9-15, where Paul prohibited women from having any authority over men. Furthermore, the qualifications he stated for these women were nearly the same as the basic character qualifications for male deacons.

The possibility that Paul is referring to women who assist deacons hold some merit. William Hendriksen says, "The simplest explanation of the manner in which Paul, not yet finished with the requirements for the office of deacon, interjects a few remarks about women, is that he regards these women as the *deacons' assistants* in helping the poor and needy, etc. These are *women who render auxiliary service*, performing ministries for which women are better adapted" (New Testament Commentary, Thessalonians, Timothy, and Titus, Baker, Grand Rapids, 1979, p. 133). The problems with that view are twofold: (1) that it does not fit the overall picture Paul painted for church leadership and (2) it would create immense practical problems of having women who are not the wives of deacons helping them. Such a situation could lead to the possibility of infidelity, or the appearance of it.

It makes good common sense that those women were the wives of the deacons. Who better to assist those men in their duties? The structure of the language is best suited when it is seen as a reference to the wives of the deacons. He does not say anything about their marriage and home situation because that is covered by the requirement placed on the husband. He added nothing new to the qualifications, only to say that wives must be of similar character as their husbands. One practical question that arises is, “If this refers to the wives of deacons, then why are there no qualifications for the wives of elders?” Strauch states, “The answer lies in the nature of the diaconate, which is not a teaching, governing office like the eldership. First Timothy 2:12 states, ‘But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man...’ Pastor-elders (shepherds) teach and govern the whole church. Their wives are not to assist in the governing of the church” (Minister of Mercy, The New Testament Deacon, Lewis & Roth, Littleton, 1992, p. 127). In so far as elders do the work of deacons their wives should meet the qualifications listed for deacon’s wives. Those qualifications are as follows:

7.4.1 - Reverent: This is the same word used for their husbands (see 7.1.1), *semnos*, meaning “worthy of respect.” A deacon’s wife should be “dignified and respected” by the congregation.

7.4.2 - Not slanderers: Whereas the deacon is not to be “double-tongued” (see 7.1.2), the wife is not to be a “slanderer,” or a “malicious gossip.” It is the word *diabolos*, “an adjective, slanderous, accusing falsely, is used as a noun, translated ‘slanderers,’ ... where the reference is to those who are given to finding fault with the demeanor and conduct of others and spreading their innuendos and criticisms in the church.” This word is also a name given to the Devil by God. The damage done in the church by double talk and malicious gossip is untold. The results are division, hatred, bitterness, anger, jealousy, and pride, to name just a few. It is clearly the Devil’s work and cannot be tolerated in the leadership of the church. Many who fall into this sin are self-deceived; they actually believe that lies are true and their words are helpful rather than harmful. Consequently, they are generally in need of church discipline and are not qualified to assist their husbands as a deacon.

7.4.3 - Temperate: This is the same word as required of elders (see 6.3.1), *nephalios*, the word literally means “abstaining from wine, either entirely or at least from its immoderate use” (Thayers). The word comes from the root word, *nepho*, “to be sober, to be calm and collected in spirit; to be temperate, dispassionate, circumspect.” In this case, it parallels the prohibition to deacons, “not given to much wine.” It should be obvious that a deacon’s wife should be sober in regard to the use of wine. In our society, total abstinence is the only acceptable position for a church leader’s wife. It may also refer to mental and emotional stability leading to a self-controlled life. There should be nothing in the life of a deacon’s wife that would cause her to be faulty in judgment or excessive or abusive in conduct.

7.4.4 - Faithful: This general statement corresponds to the deacons’ requirement not to be greedy and to hold to the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience. Faithfulness is a key ingredient of genuine Christianity. It certainly speaks of loyalty to the Lord and His

Word and to their husbands and families. But it goes beyond that, “faithful in all things.” God’s expectations are related to faithfulness, not to ability or skill. Our world is characterized by duplicity and lack of integrity. Deacons and wives who model biblical faith will counter the worldly model and be a great asset to the church. A deacon’s wife should have a firm grasp of Bible doctrine, live in accordance to those beliefs, and be fully committed to their marriages and families. They should be a willing servant ready to assist their husbands in the duties and responsibilities to which they are assigned.

7.5 The Work and Ministry of the Deacon (1 Tim. 3:13): Very little in Scripture defines the work of deacons. What is obvious is that they are to take care of the benevolent ministries of the church, meeting the needs of the poor and assisting widows (Acts 6:1-7; Jas. 1:27). They are assistants to the elders, but with a specific bent to service ministries in mind. Many deacons are likely to have the spiritual gift of service, giving, or mercy. They are to show mercy to those who need it most. They should have charge of the church’s benevolence funds. They should assist the shut-ins (including those in nursing homes), the sick, the elderly, the widowed, and the otherwise disabled members of the church. They should encourage and visit the church members in their homes.

Deacons do not have any governing authority within the church, nor are they to serve as the church’s teachers. This is not to say that a deacon who is capable of teaching cannot do so, but teaching is not a part of his responsibility. Deacons are to model themselves after Jesus, the greatest minister of mercy to ever grace the earth. It is appropriate to note that faithful service as a deacon has its rewards. “For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a good standing and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus” (1 Tim. 3:13). “A good standing” means that a deacon has a place of respect and influence in the church. The word “good” is *kalos*, “good; right, proper, fitting; honorable; beautiful, precious,” and “standing” is *bathmos*. “[lit., a] threshold, step; of a grade of dignity and wholesome influence in the church.” A deacon obtains status, not in a proud way, but in a useful way. In the process, he develops “great boldness in the faith.” This word is *parrhesia*, “freedom in speaking, unreservedness in speech; ... free and fearless confidence, cheerful courage; boldness, assurance; the deportment by which one becomes conspicuous or secures publicity.” The work of a deacon demands spiritual vitality and great faith. As they serve they grow in boldness. In fact, they have great or much boldness which allows them to have a continuing and ever-growing positive affect on the church-at-large.

May God grant His continuing grace and wisdom to our deacons as they faithfully fulfill their role as loving and compassionate servants to the congregation of God’s people know as New Life Family Worship Center Benson.