

Elders

February 16, 2025

Titus 1:5–9 (ESV)

⁵This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you— ⁶if anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife, and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination. ⁷For an overseer, as God's steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, ⁸but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined. ⁹He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.

Introduction

Paul's letter to Titus highlights the necessity of godly leadership in the church. Elders, also called overseers or pastors, are entrusted with shepherding God's flock. Their role is not about power but stewardship—leading by example, teaching sound doctrine, and refuting falsehood. Their character, family life, and doctrinal commitment must align with God's standards found in Scripture. A church thrives spiritually when its leaders walk in holiness and truth, modeling Christ-like humility and faithfulness.

Reflection Question:

- Why is it important for church leaders to meet biblical qualifications?

1. The Character of Elders

Key Verse: *"For an overseer, as God's steward, must be above reproach."* (Titus 1:7)

Elders are called to a high standard of moral and spiritual integrity:

1. **Blameless Life** – Their conduct should be exemplary.
 - How does personal holiness impact one's ability to lead?
2. **Faithful Marriage and Family Leadership** – Their home life reflects their fitness for church leadership.
 - Why does Paul emphasize the elder's family?
3. **Self-Controlled and Upright** – They must exhibit godly discipline in all areas of life.

- How does self-control relate to shepherding the church?

2. The Role of Elders

Key Verse: *"He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught."* (Titus 1:9)

Elders are entrusted with teaching and guarding doctrine:

1. **Sound Teaching** – They instruct and encourage in the faith.
 - Why is doctrinal faithfulness essential for church leaders?
2. **Defending the Truth** – They refute error and protect the flock.
 - How can elders wisely correct false teaching?
3. **Shepherding the Church** – They nurture spiritual growth and provide oversight.
 - What does biblical shepherding look like in practice?

3. The Importance of Elders

Key Verse: *"Appoint elders in every town as I directed you."* (Titus 1:5)

Paul instructs Titus to appoint elders in every church:

1. **Establishing Order** – Elders guide and organize church life.
 - Why is leadership necessary for a healthy church?
2. **Providing Accountability** – They ensure the church remains faithful to Christ.
 - How do elders help maintain spiritual accountability?
3. **Equipping the Saints** – They prepare believers for ministry (Ephesians 4:11–12).
 - How does eldership strengthen the church's mission?

4. The Overlap of Pastors, Elders, and Overseers

In the New Testament, the terms **pastor**, **elder**, and **overseer** are used interchangeably to describe the same office of church leadership. This reveals a unified role of shepherding, teaching, and oversight.

According to the Baptist Faith and Message 2000: The Church's "two scriptural offices are that of pastor/elder/overseer and deacon. While both men and women

are gifted for service in the church, the office of pastor/elder/overseer is limited to men as qualified by Scripture.”

Pastor/Shepherd

- **Ephesians 4:11** – "And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds (pastors) and teachers."

Elder

- **James 5:14** – "Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord."
- **Acts 15** – This entire chapter shows the role of elders in the Jerusalem Council, where they made decisions on doctrinal matters and exercised authority in the early church.

Bishop/Overseer

- **Philippians 1:1** – "Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons."
- **1 Timothy 3:1-7** – "The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church? He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil."

Passages Uniting These Roles

- **Acts 20:28** – "Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood."
 - Paul addresses the elders of the Ephesian church, calling them "overseers" and instructing them to shepherd the church of God, showing the overlap between the roles of elder, overseer, and shepherd.

- **1 Peter 5:1-2** – "So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly."
 - Peter exhorts the elders to shepherd the flock and exercise oversight, using the terms interchangeably, affirming the unity of these roles.
- **Titus 1:7** – "For an overseer, as God's steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain."
 - Paul refers to the elders in Titus 1:5 and immediately describes their role as overseers, further showing that these roles are considered the same office with different aspects.

This overlap demonstrates that pastors/elders/overseers are entrusted with both pastoral care and doctrinal fidelity, ensuring that the church remains faithful to Christ.

5. The Plurality of Elders as the New Testament Norm

The New Testament consistently presents a pattern of **plural eldership** within local churches. Rather than a single leader, churches were overseen by a group of elders:

- **Acts 14:23 (ESV)** – "And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed."
- **Titus 1:5 (ESV)** – "This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you."
- **James 5:14 (ESV)** – "Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him."

The consistent use of **elders (plural)** indicates a shared responsibility in leadership, guarding against authoritarian rule and fostering mutual accountability.

Reflection Questions:

- How can you support and encourage your church's elders?
- What qualities should you pray for in your church leaders?

Prayer:

- Thank God for the gift of godly leaders.
- Ask for wisdom and integrity for your elders.
- Pray for the church to value, protect, and submit to biblical leadership.

Historical Document:

William B. Johnson, pastor of First Baptist Church of Anderson, SC, and the first president of the Southern Baptist Convention, stated in *The Gospel Developed Through the Government and Order of the Church of Jesus Christ* (1846),

“That over each church of Christ in the apostolic age a plurality of rulers was ordained, who were designated by the terms elder, bishop, overseer, pastor, with authority in the government of the flock.”

Commenting on the structure of New Testament churches, Johnson observed,

“It is worthy of particular attention, that each church had a plurality of elders, and that although there was a difference in their respective department of service, there was a perfect equality of rank among them.”

Deacons

February 23, 2025

1 Timothy 3:8–13 (ESV)

⁸Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain. ⁹They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. ¹⁰And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless. ¹¹Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things. ¹²Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well. ¹³For those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.

Acts 6:1–7 (ESV)

6 Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. ²And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, “It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. ³Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. ⁴But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.” ⁵And what they said pleased the whole gathering, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. ⁶These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands on them.

⁷And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.

Introduction

Deacons are a vital part of the church, appointed to meet the needs of her members and serve as the hands and feet of Christ. While elders are responsible for teaching and shepherding the church, deacons serve by ensuring the congregation’s physical and logistical needs are met, fostering unity and care within the body of Christ. The word *deacon* comes from the Greek *diakonos*, meaning *servant* or *minister*, reflecting their Christlike call to humble service.

The role of deacons originates in Acts 6, where the apostles appointed men to serve the church so that they could remain devoted to preaching and prayer. These men

were required to be full of wisdom and the Holy Spirit, demonstrating that serving the church is not merely administrative but deeply spiritual.

Reflection Question:

- How do deacons contribute to the health and unity of the church?
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1. The Character of Deacons

Key Verse: *"Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain."* (1 Timothy 3:8)

Deacons must demonstrate integrity and godly character, just as elders do. Their qualifications emphasize both moral uprightness and faithfulness in service:

1. **Dignified and Trustworthy** – Their conduct must inspire respect and reflect Christ's character.
 - Why is trustworthiness essential for deacons?
 2. **Sincere and Self-Controlled** – They must not be deceitful or given to excess in speech or lifestyle.
 - How does self-control impact one's ability to serve?
 3. **Faithful in Doctrine** – They must hold firm to the faith with a clear conscience.
 - Why must deacons be spiritually grounded?
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2. The Role of Deacons

Key Verse: *"And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless."* (1 Timothy 3:10)

Deacons serve the practical and spiritual needs of the church, ensuring that the body of Christ is cared for and functioning well.

1. **Serving the Church's Needs** – Deacons assist in distributing resources, caring for members, and handling logistical matters.
 - How does the role of deacons reflect Christ's servant-hearted ministry?
2. **Promoting Unity and Peace** – Deacons often help resolve conflicts and promote harmony in the church.
 - Why is peacemaking an important part of a deacon's ministry?

3. **Supporting Elders** – By taking care of physical and administrative concerns, deacons free elders to focus on teaching and shepherding.
 - How does diaconal service strengthen the church’s leadership?
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3. The Blessing of Deacons

Key Verse: *"For those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus."* (1 Timothy 3:13)

Faithful deacons receive spiritual encouragement and serve as examples to others:

1. **A Testimony of Faithfulness** – Their service strengthens their own confidence in Christ and encourages others.
 - How does serving as a deacon deepen one’s faith?
 2. **An Honorable Calling** – Deacons who serve well are recognized for their commitment to Christ’s work.
 - How can we encourage and appreciate the deacons in our church?
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Reflection Questions:

- How can you support and encourage the deacons in your church?
 - What qualities should we pray for in those who serve as deacons?
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Prayer:

- Thank God for faithful deacons who serve His church.
 - Ask for wisdom and strength for those in diaconal ministry.
 - Pray for unity and servant-heartedness within the church.
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Historical Document: J. L. Reynolds, *Church Polity* (1849)

“[Deacon] means a minister or servant; and was, originally, applied to servants of all classes...Hence it is the appropriate business of the deacons, to serve tables...

The official duties of the deacons, are the opposite of those which are assigned to ministers; and the very object contemplated in the institution of the order, was to relieve preachers of the Gospel from the management of secular interests, by placing them under the direction of others.”