

Table of Contents

- Lesson 1: The Importance of Leadership
- Lesson 2: Qualifications of Elders (1)
- Lesson 3: Qualifications of Elders (2)
- Lesson 4: Qualifications of Elders (3)
- Lesson 5: Qualifications of Deacons (1)
- Lesson 6: Qualifications of Deacons (2)
- Lesson 7: Wives of Elders and Deacons
- Lesson 8: A Closer Look at Eldership Terminology
- Lesson 9: Positive Leadership in the Old Testament
- Lesson 10: Negative Leadership in the Old Testament
- Lesson 11: What God Expects from Leaders
- Lesson 12: What God Expects from Followers
- Lesson 13: What's So Tough About Being an Elder?
- Lesson 14: Leadership and the Local Evangelist
- Lesson 15: The Problem of Communication
- Lesson 16: The Process of Selecting Elders
- Lesson 17: Eldership and Congregational Autonomy
- Lesson 18: Women and Leadership
- Lesson 19: Dealing with Sin in the Church
- Lesson 20: Some Challenging Questions (1)
- Lesson 21: Some Challenging Questions (2)

Leadership in the Local Church

The Importance of Leadership – Lesson 1

1. The Universal Church vs. the Local Church

When considering the universal body of believers, all the Christians scattered across the globe at any given time, there is no visible organizational structure or authoritative body appointed to arrange, unify and set policy. There is no collective function given to this body. It is comprised of each individual as he or she stands in personal relation to God through Jesus Christ. Each person fulfills his duty toward God individually.

In this universal realm, the ultimate authority figure is Jesus Christ. All authority in heaven and earth has been given to Him (Mt 28:18). He is *“head over all things to the church, which is His body ...”* (Eph 1:22-23); He is the King who reigns over His subjects (1 Tim 1:17); He is the Chief Shepherd over His flock (1 Pet 5:4). God has spoken to all mankind through His Son (Heb 1:1-4), and through Him we have been given *“all things that pertain to life and godliness”* (2 Pet 1:3).

However, where possible, the universal body of believers is subdivided into smaller local units wherein association and function occur in a collective capacity. These local collectives are not casual, informal structures wherein individual Christians participate at their own pleasure. These local churches are designed to accomplish some vitally important functions. They engage in collective worship; they promote spiritual growth and edification; they provide material needs among the group if necessary.

In any collective human endeavor, organized structure is necessary because of the endless variations of will, character, preference and weakness of the individual members of the group. Armies need generals, teams need coaches, governments need authorized leaders – and local bodies of believers need spiritual oversight and recognized servants in order to function optimally.

This is the Lord’s plan. As head of the universal church, He implemented leadership that would arise not from consensus opinion, worldly status or popular election but from those of His people who have attained spiritual maturity. These people are not arbitrarily assigned to lead but are recognized by their peers in accordance with divinely mandated qualities.

2. What Are Elders?

In short, elders are knowledgeable and wise men who are of sufficient age and experience to guide a group of believers in the paths of truth. Primarily, they oversee the spiritual well-being of the local church. They do not do so from afar or from behind closed doors. They know the sheep, associate with the sheep, feed the sheep and protect the flock from potential harm.

Acts 15:6ff – When controversy erupted among Jewish loyalists against the Gentiles, who were being converted and accepted on an equal basis as they without circumci-

sion, the elders at Jerusalem acted in concert with the apostles to deliberate upon the matter and arrive at the truth. This process was not as simple as it perhaps appears from Luke's condensed account. There was "much dispute" (15:7); there was personal testimony and historical precedent to consider (15:7-12); there was Old Testament prophecy to evaluate and apply (15:16-17). Emotions ran deep on this issue, as can be seen by the continued problems spawned by the Judaizers even long after the letter of clarification had been issued on this occasion (cf. Gal 2:11-13). Elders must have the maturity to wrestle with such complex and volatile issues and the strength to implement proper decisions.

Acts 20:28-31 – The "elders" (20:17) of the Ephesian church are charged by Paul to *"take heed to yourselves and to all the flock"* (20:28). "Take heed" means hold your mind on, pay attention to. He tells them to "watch" (20:31), to be spiritually alert, on guard. Paul urges alertness to savage wolves, men who would see the sheep as food to gratify their own personal appetites. The peaceful and compliant qualities of God's people can make them vulnerable to unscrupulous opportunists. Elders must be able to identify such men and take appropriate measures to neutralize their influence.

But elders, themselves, are not impervious to weakness, for Paul also indicates that *"from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves"* (20:30). A man who is entrusted with valuables (money, jewels, people) may lose sight of his stewardship and become enamored with personal advantage or gain. An elder must remember that the church is not his, and that he merely oversees that which belongs to the Lord.

Titus 1:9-11 – Elders are specifically charged with exhorting the brethren by sound doctrine and withstanding those who contradict the truth. This passage again notes the potential damage done by "the circumcision," men who still advocated a hybrid Judaism/Christianity and did so for their own self-aggrandizement. Such responsibility requires not only a certain level of knowledge but strong character that is able to confront men who boldly promote evil.

Hebrews 13:17 – Elders are given "rule" that is exercised unto the objective of watching out for souls. "Watch" is from *agrupneo*, "to be sleepless" (from *agreuo*, "to chase," and *hupnos*, "sleep"). The word expresses not mere wakefulness, but the "watchfulness" of those who are intent upon a thing (Vine). The rule or authority of elders may be variously exercised, but the intent is not for elders to make every decision within the local church. Rather, their authority is specifically unto the objective of spiritual growth and protection.

Elders have a grave charge: the eternal well-being of God's people is to be fostered by their guidance, judgment, counsel and general oversight. They must be men of sufficient wisdom to separate their spiritual focus from extraneous matters that could and should be attended to by others. Further, their rule should not intrude into private matters of individuals unless those matters involve sin and its detrimental effect upon those who commit them or upon the local church as a whole.

3. What Are Deacons?

Briefly, deacons are recognized servants of the local church. Like elders, this recognition is not haphazard or impulsive but meets certain criteria manifested in the Scriptures (1 Tim 3:8-13). Strictly speaking, deacons are not assistants of the elders but servants of the whole local church. Like everyone else in the local assembly, the deacons are under the elders' rule. They may be assigned a work by the elders, who are charged with fostering spiritual soundness and service, but deacons work on behalf of the church, not a "board of elders."

What is the difference between deacons who execute various assignments and other members who do likewise? Not everyone who works in the local church is a deacon. Then what is the significance of a special appointment of a certain man to this position?

The answer to this can only be speculative, for the Scriptures do not directly address the issue. However, consider the following:

Acts 6:1-7 – In the midst of potentially divisive controversy, certain men were selected to handle a situation that would allow the apostles to remain focused upon prayer and ministry of the word (6:4). Note A.T. Robertson's observation on the phrase "serve tables": "This word is the same root as diakonia (ministration) in Acts 6:1 and deacon (diakonos) in Phil 1:1 and 1 Tim 3:8-13. It is more frequently used in the New Testament of ministers (preachers) than of deacons, but it is quite possible, even probable, that the office of deacon as separate from bishop or elder grew out of this incident in Acts 6:1-7."

There is no indication that this work was merely "physical," as we sometimes describe a deacon's work. To the contrary: the situation in Jerusalem was extremely volatile and had to be handled with delicacy and sensitivity. What was to be done was of grave spiritual import, but the apostles directed the congregation to search among themselves for respected and trustworthy men who could handle the affair in a manner fair to all. The selection and official appointment of such men gave them a certain "legitimacy" in the eyes of all; it gave credence to whatever decisions these seven men would have to make in the execution of their charge.

Philippians 1:1 – The significance of this passage is that "deacons" were officially recognized for a special role they played within the congregation. This suggests a formal role that carries with it due respect and submission, not in reference to the person, himself, but by virtue of congregational appointment. In essence, by a formal appointment the congregation is saying that this man is endowed with the congregation's confidence to serve it in a competent way in whatever capacity he may be needed. Others can and must serve without being so formally selected, and their work is praiseworthy. But a deacon must be considered a "cut above," not in personal glory but in recognition of his maturity and ability to serve.

4. A Lack of Competent Leadership

From the passages cited above it should be obvious that Jesus' ideal for the local church is structure and leadership that focuses the talent of the congregation, fosters

the impetus to work, clarifies spiritual objectives and provides warning and protection against threatening elements. Congregations without such organization may be “legitimate” and approved of the Lord, but they are immature, inefficient and vulnerable.

In an ideal world, Christians would follow the will of the Lord on their own initiative. However, beset with weakness, naive to dangers, distracted by ungodly allurements, saints occasionally need wise guidance, timely correction and pointed encouragement. They are described as “sheep,” domestic animals that need leadership to see that the basic care of life is provided for them.

For these reasons, congregations must place due attention upon and invest the effort to develop sound leadership. Further, every Christian man and woman should be examining their lives and equipping themselves to serve in the utmost capacity. Rather than sit idly and critique every decision that is not to one’s liking, brethren should support those who are on the firing line and endeavoring to promote peace and prosperity within the local church. Instead of making shallow judgments from the “luxury suites” where the crack of the pads cannot be heard and the crash of the car cannot be felt, critics should put themselves in the place not only of making the difficult decision but taking responsibility for the fallout.

Questions:

1. Why is earthly leadership needed in the church locally and not universally?
2. Answer: An elder must be old enough to ...
3. Why does the church need officially appointed deacons?
4. From what work did the apostles not want to be distracted in Acts 6?
5. What should a person do before criticizing a decision of the elders?

Leadership in the Local Church

Qualifications of Elders (1) – Lesson 2

1. Preliminary Considerations

1. *An elder must be “elder.”* The term *presbuteros* does not mean “elderly” but one who is looked upon with respect and deference because of his experience and maturity. This implies a degree of age that is not young and of early development, but the Scriptures do not specify a chronological age. This allows for cultural flexibility. (**Note:** Based upon environmental conditions, a person in one era may be “old” at thirty five while in another thirty five might yet be middle age. Maturity rates are not absolute. Some grow up faster than others.)

2. *An elder must be male.* Paul said “*if a man desires ...*” (1 Tim 3:1). Further, an elder must have a wife (1 Tim 3:2). This, of course, is in keeping with the leadership standards that God has instituted through the ages. Women are valuable in their talents and services, and male leaders need female support, counsel and encouragement, but males are entrusted with leadership.

3. *An elder must “desire” to serve.* He must not reluctantly accept the assignment because of obligation or pressure. He must not desire “a position” for the gratification of his ego. Instead, he must approach the work with full awareness that he oversees the people of God with their eternal welfare at stake. This will fill him with trepidation and sobriety. The mature man will not wilt under or flee from this burden, but will bear it conscientiously for the Lord’s sake.

4. *An elder must possess the qualities enumerated in 1 Tim 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9 before his appointment.* The degree of his fulfillment of certain qualities will naturally be relative, as no one is perfectly endowed with godly character no matter how old. But a church cannot merely appoint “the best we’ve got” in the hope that certain traits will be supplied by on-the-job training. The challenges of eldership will not courteously wait until a man grows up.

2. Specified Qualities

Elements of Age and Experience.

1. As previously noted, a man must have achieved a level of growth and age that garners the respect of the congregation. I have known of men being appointed that by my standards may have been of questionable age, but rather than make an incomplete judgment it must be realized that such a determination is rightly made by the congregation who has selected him.

2. *Not a novice* (1 Tim 3:6). Men who have not been tempered by experience do not make good leaders in any endeavor. A man must spend an adequate amount of time in the faith to learn the subtle nuances which cannot be acquired by book-learning. Specifically, Paul says that such a “green” Christian not be appointed “*lest being puffed up*

with pride he fall into the same condemnation as the devil.” An elder must be old enough to realize that shepherding is not about him; it’s about the flock and its welfare.

3. *A mature family man* (1 Tim 3:2, 4-5; Tit 1:6). The qualifications relative to a man’s family imply that he is not young. The following items suggest a family in a mature stage of development:

a. An elder must be married: *“the husband of one wife.”* There is nothing *scripturally* to indicate that he cannot be remarried after a divorce or a deceased first wife. By imposing such restrictions we add to the word of God. An elder whose wife has died no longer has a wife; thus he does not meet the qualification. Since there is no qualifier to the requirement, we must conclude that God wants a man who is currently married to serve in this capacity. There are several speculative validations for such a requirement.

b. An elder must have a “house,” a family, over which he must rule well. A man who has a wife and a child constitute a “house.” Regardless of the number of children in his household, whether one or more, he must have them *“in submission with all reverence.”* That is, he must demonstrate in his family the ability to command respect and to lead in such a way as to inspire “followership.” The man whose children are abusive and disrespectful, who either flagrantly or slyly disregard his authority and violate his rules, or who are otherwise out of control disqualify him from the work: *“for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?”*

c. An elder must have faithful children (Tit 1:6). Spiritual maturity is partially measured by a man’s ability to teach, nurture and influence his children to possess faith in Christ. This does not mean they have merely been immersed, but they are *faithful* to the Lord. They, themselves, possess spiritual qualities commensurate with their age. Whether or not *all* of his children must be Christians is an open question, for the language does not so specify. A man with three children, two of which are Christians and the third of which is underage, has believing children as the qualification requires. There are a variety of situations in which the congregation will have to exercise judgment in assessing this qualification.

4. *Able to teach* (1 Tim 3:2). The acquisition of knowledge and the ability to refute error is not something that happens overnight. It is not merely an intellectual exercise but involves a skillful handling of truth. This requires time, repetition and a familiarity that is almost “second nature.” False doctrines are often complex and are camouflaged by elements of truth. It takes a seasoned and trained intellect that understands the nuances of false teaching and is able to marshal accurate passages and concepts to answer it. Teaching is not an optional part of serving as an elder, *it is an essential element*. So much of an elder’s influence upon the congregation involves teaching: teaching to edify, exhort, correct, etc. This also necessitates effective communication skills. One need not be particularly eloquent or formally trained in pedagogy, but an elder must possess a degree of articulation that makes the truth plain and clear.

Questions:

1. If a minimum age is not specified in reference to serving as an elder, what factors are relevant in deciding when a man is old enough to serve? When is a man too old?

2. What must we have to ignore in considering a woman to be an elder? How do you answer the argument: "God doesn't want a woman burying her talents just because of her gender. There is 'neither male nor female' in God's kingdom."

3. What are the proper grounds for desiring to be an elder?

4. What behavior of a man's children can disqualify him from serving as an elder?

5. What are valid indicators of "able to teach"? Does a figurehead "facilitator" of class discussion satisfy the qualification?

Leadership in the Local Church

Qualifications of Elders (2) – Lesson 3

1. Elements of Temperament.

1. *Self-controlled* (“temperate” – NKJ, 1 Tim 3:2). There is evidence that a man acts with deliberation and control rather than impulsively and haphazardly. A man who is financially undisciplined, who engages in questionable entertainment practices, who speaks recklessly and injuriously (even in the absence of hostility) is not self-controlled.

2. *Sober-minded* (1 Tim 3:2). An elder must be clearly focused upon his task. His deliberations must be rational rather than emotional. He must discern arguments, identify motives of the unscrupulous. He must reasonably foresee the implications of decisions. He must have resolve in the face of criticism. A flighty, uncertain, reactionary man is unsuited to do the work of an elder.

3. *Not violent; gentle; not quarrelsome* (1 Tim 3:3). Taken together, the temperament of an elder is calm, cool and collected. He is not easily provoked, for there will be many temptations to anger and defensiveness. Among the Lord’s people, “let’s step outside and settle it” is not an option. On the other hand, we must not confuse gentle with cowardly. There comes a time when evil will have to be confronted and withstood. Even so, it must be done in a measured way and not with abuse or vindictiveness.

4. *Not self-willed* (Tit 1:7). There is a delicate balance between advising in matters of wisdom and imposing one’s personal views upon others. When an elder sees danger or drifting, he may be overcome with zeal for what is right and respond with a heavy hand. Too, an older elder may preempt a younger one thinking that such an inexperienced man cannot be as wise as he is. An elder must distinguish between truly *leading* the sheep in the right way and trying to *drive* them forcefully by personal will. Peter adds “*nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock*” (1 Pet 5:3).

2. Evidence of Moral Purity.

1. *Lover of what is good; holy* (Tit 1:8). An elder has a genuine desire to live purely and decently. He does not privately engage in questionable activities that would undermine his respect if others knew of his behavior. He truly seeks things that are beneficial, godly and of impeccable reputation.

2. *Not given to wine* (1 Tim 3:3). A man who needs all his mental, emotional and spiritual faculties in optimum working order, as does an elder, cannot allow himself to be compromised by chemicals. Alcohol, in the form of wine, beer and other fermented or distilled beverages, must not impair judgment. With what we know of the effects of alcohol on the nervous system and how little it takes to dull perceptions and judgment, there is no excuse for anyone to say, “Well, I can drink so long as I don’t get drunk.” While there are many other factors that enter into the discussion of drinking in our modern age, one thing is clear: an elder under the influence of alcohol is worse than useless,

and it doesn't take much alcohol to undermine a man's self-control. The same goes for any other mind-altering, recreational chemicals.

3. *Not greedy for money* (1 Tim 3:3). Wealthy and greedy are not synonymous. A man may be wealthy because of education, choice of vocation, inheritance or dumb luck. On the other hand, an impoverished man may be consumed with greed. The man who works to the neglect of his family, who lives beyond his means and who manifests a lack of contentment with what he has is not qualified to oversee spiritual things. Either he will neglect his duties in pursuit of his acquisitions, or he will be negatively influenced in the responsible disbursement of the funds of the church. Greed and materialism are surface cracks emanating from deeper spiritual fault lines.

Questions:

1. Are people born with differences of temperament? What must a potential elder learn about himself relative to his temperament if he is to become qualified?
2. What might persuade an elder to be self-willed in leading the congregation?
3. How might greed cause an elder to look wrongly upon congregational finances?
4. Respond to this observation: "Any man who can run a successful business ought to make a good elder."
5. If a prospective elder said, "I refuse to give up my nightly beer because I think I can drink so long as I don't get drunk," would you feel this disqualifies him?

Leadership in the Local Church

Qualifications of Elders (3) – Lesson 4

1. Evidence of Good Influence.

1. *Blameless* (1 Tim 3:2). The idea here is not being above accusation, for even Jesus was accused falsely and was a source of much contention. More accurately, an elder must not be guilty of substantive charges; he is not due censure, reprimand or correction because he is, in fact, in the wrong. “Blameless” further does not mean “never did anything wrong.” We sometimes arbitrarily set standards that no human being would ever meet. Peter identifies himself as a “fellow elder” (1 Pet 5:1), and yet he not only denied the Lord but shunned the Gentiles after being the first to preach to them via Cornelius (Gal 2:11-12). If a man’s errors compromise his influence, then he will have no moral capital upon which to lead others.

2. *A good testimony among unbelievers* (1 Tim 3:7). Not only must an elder have the respect of his brethren, the community at large must recognize his integrity and acknowledge his solid character (even if they disagree with his doctrinal views). It is easy to put on an act in select company whose standards are high. But what if a man relaxes those standards around people who are not quite so stringent? Co-workers, neighbors and clients should not see different principles and characteristics in a man than what the brethren see. If they do, his hypocrisy disqualifies him from serving as an elder.

3. *Just* (Tit 1:8). This is fair and equitable treatment afforded to all. An elder demonstrates a deep sense of right that goes beyond favoritism, popularity or personal gain.

4. *Hospitable* (1 Tim 3:2). An elder (and his wife) must be generous, helpful, concerned with the welfare of others. He must be a “people-person.” Not everyone is gregarious, extroverted or comfortable in the presence of others, but “hospitable” goes beyond personality. It involves the will. An elder cannot be aloof, distanced from the brethren. An elder cares about others and shares his home, food and time with those in need.

2. Applying the Standards

1. *Some are relative*. One problem in applying these qualifications to a given individual is that some of them are possessed to a relative degree. For example, how frequently must one show hospitality in order to be hospitable? Someone may say, “I’ve never been in brother So-and-so’s home, so I believe he is inhospitable.” But is this the only standard? Is there any other evidence that suggests a brother’s home is open and that he is willing to share?

2. *Some are hard to quantify*. It can be difficult to determine, especially in our prosperous society, who is blessed because he is fortunate and who possesses an abundance because he is greedy. Someone may make a superficial judgment by saying, “Brother So-and-so drives a _____ car, and I don’t believe any Christian ought to be spending that much money on a car.” Does one man’s opinion in this regard establish the fact of a brother being greedy for money?

3. *We must know the men of the congregation.* How will a congregation be able to make a wise decision about its leadership if they are unacquainted with each other? So many members remain so aloof, private and out-of-touch with the everyday activities of the local church that they are totally unprepared to make a judgment regarding a man's effectiveness to lead. Ultimately, we must look at an elder candidate and say, "Do I have the confidence to entrust my spiritual welfare to such a man's leadership capability? Can he handle the weight of a local church?"

4. *One-sided considerations.* Because brethren are often unacquainted with each other, it is all too easy to overemphasize one or more particular traits to the exclusion of others. Perhaps many have thought of a prospective elder: "Well, he comes to church all the time and his kids have been baptized. I think he'd make a good elder." Churches cannot afford to take the easy way out in the matter of selecting elders. The qualifications are comprehensive. A man cannot be appointed on the basis of a few with the hope that he will gradually acquire the rest. **Serving as an elder will magnify a man's weaknesses.** The pressures which come to bear upon a man in this role will overwhelm him if he is not prepared at the outset. This is not to say a man will not grow as an elder, for he will if he is the right kind of man to begin with. But the qualifications are comprehensive for a reason. A mishandled situation may become the crack upon which the congregation eventually splits.

5. *What does an elder do, anyway?* Even though a congregation has had elders for a number of years, this does not mean that the members automatically understand all the particulars of what must be handled by them on a daily basis. Some think of elders as money-spenders, so they might think a successful businessman would make a good elder. Others think of elders as decision-makers, so they might be drawn toward a brother who has a college degree. Others may see an elder as a comforter, so they might opt for the man who is friendly and outgoing. But we must educate ourselves better on what the duties, pressures and challenges upon the eldership are so that our decisions are based upon the job to be done.

6. *That's not the way we believed it back home.* Various differences exist among brethren regarding qualifications, some so strongly held as to promote strife and rancor. We will discuss some of these differences in later lessons, but for now we must note that we must avoid the temptation to impose our personal views upon the group. We must be honest with our position, whatever it may be, and question whether there is substantive scriptural backing for it. Is it clear-cut, or is there a reasonably alternative view? Does the majority of the congregation see it differently? What is the current eldership's judgment? Am I confident enough in my position to withstand a man who might actually be qualified in the eyes of God to lead the flock? What if this man was the only one standing between a church having or not having an eldership? Would I still hold to my position if it meant subverting an eldership? Sometimes men can just hold stubbornly to a view for invalid reasons. We must be honest and admit that some views and opinions are regional and generational. It is not uncommon for an entire area to hold a position espoused by an influential preacher only to have those views change over time as men study the Scriptures for themselves. Self-will cannot be allowed to hold a congregation hostage and deprive it of the leadership that legitimately exists among itself. This is as unacceptable as appointing a man who is clearly unqualified to serve as a shepherd.

George Lemasters offers the following observation regarding the evaluation of prospective elders:

Now, since it is generally conceded that congregations “look out” among them who will be set in this position, it follows that those whose heart is inclined toward things spiritual and who have demonstrated their concern for the church be the ones whose voice be considered in this matter. The inexperienced youth, the novices, and the dissidents should have no part nor parcel in the matter, for various though obvious reasons.

Questions

1. What reason does Paul give in 1 Tim 3:7 for an elder to have “a good testimony among those who are outside”?
2. Cite a qualification that is relative and explain how to rightly determine whether a man meets the qualification.
3. How much emphasis should be placed upon the views of a baptized child of 12 or 13 years of age relative to a given man’s qualification to be an elder?
4. How should a congregation proceed when the majority feel a man is qualified but a small number object to him? Does the nature of the objection make a difference in how it should be handled?
5. What role does the current eldership play in the selection process?

Leadership in the Local Church

Qualifications of Deacons (1) – Lesson 5

1. Deacons: Specially Recognized Servants

As previously noted, a deacon is not merely a member given an assignment but holds a special position of recognition among the congregation. This position is granted by virtue of his acquisition of qualifications (1 Tim 3:8-13) and the respect the congregation has in him relative to those qualifications.

The full and definite scope of the deacons' sphere of activity must be arrived at by deduction, for there are no specific guidelines laid out in the Scriptures. Deacons are not charged with spiritual oversight; they are not given rule as are elders. But to function in harmony with the elders' rule, and to serve in matters even of spiritual import – as long as the elders are not shirking or abdicating their responsibility to oversee the flock – is within the scope of a deacon's work. Too often, barriers of assumption have been placed upon deacons, limiting the fuller scope of what they can do in assisting the congregation and the elders. This has led to elders being overloaded with petty details and deacons being relegated to "building and grounds" assignments.

If elders are charged with feeding the flock, and they partially exercise that responsibility through a paid evangelist who works under their oversight, have they violated their charge? If elders are charged with overseeing the work of the church, and they partially exercise that responsibility by appointing deacons to make duty assignments, communicate with supported preachers, plan evangelistic activities, etc., all under their oversight, have they violated their charge? Generally speaking, elders tend to spend too much time on administrative duties and not enough time on actually feeding and shepherding the sheep. It is vitally important to be in members' homes, studying and talking with them, praying with them, providing counsel, encouragement and comfort.

The high and lofty qualifications of deacons are not necessary for painting, carpentry and gardening. As previously noted, the work given to the servants in Acts 6 was of vital spiritual importance to the unity and welfare of the Jerusalem church in its infancy. But the apostles' directive was: *"Seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may **appoint over this business**"* (6:3). If we see these men as prototypical deacons, which most do, then there is no basis for making glorified "yard men" out of them. This issue was potentially explosive and had to be handled with spiritual wisdom and sensitivity. Note that the congregation was not to seek out seven "accountants, men of financial skill" to oversee the situation. They needed spiritually mature and knowledgeable men who would have the trust of both the Hebrew and Hellenist widows. The way most brethren think about deacons today, they would argue that there's no way a deacon should be placed in charge of such a vital and precarious issue. Only elders, they might reason, could possibly have the maturity and experience to handle such a delicate matter. But the apostles did not so decide. They felt that it could be handled effectively by others than themselves and did not consider it a reflection on their oversight. Hence, a deacon (or an elder) must be of trustworthy character in the eyes of the congregation, for his work demands it.

2. Deacons Must Be ... (1 Tim 3:8-9)

1. *Reverent.* This qualification identifies a deacon as one who is mature enough to take seriously the work assigned him. *“Often younger men are prone to be light hearted and irresponsible in certain duties given to them. The man for this office must be aware of his influence and reputation and strive to be zealous and serious in his manner of life”* (Phillips, *Scriptural Elders and Deacons*, p. 260). This does not mean a deacon cannot enjoy the lighter things in life, but he is filled with seriousness and gravity when the situation demands it.

2. *Not double-tongued.* Our expression “two-faced” applies here. A deacon cares more for the truth than for currying favor with men by telling different stories to different people. Thus, he is consistent in his words. The substance of what he says to one will be said to another. He will not embellish, twist or deceive by playing fast and loose with the truth.

3. *Not given to much wine/not greedy for money.* These have been covered in reference to elders. Some make a play on the addition of the word “much,” as to say that an elder can drink no wine but a deacon can have a little (but not much). This does not hold up to scrutiny, for deacons do not need less respect than elders to do their job even though their job spheres are different. If a little wine would be disgraceful for elders, a little wine would be likewise disgraceful for deacons. The inability to refrain from substances that interfere with judgment and that are known throughout the ages to enslave men disqualify men to serve in such responsible, visible positions in the local church. A man who cannot forego the occasional beer as a recreational beverage is more concerned with his self-willed wants than the honor of serving with integrity. He is disqualified as a deacon.

4. *Holding the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience.* The deacon must first have a good grasp of doctrine and then live consistently with it in his life. Knowledge, stability and consistency are the hallmarks indicated here. The prospective deacon should be the first to know if he is qualified and should have the honesty to say so if he is not.

Questions:

1. How can we determine the scope of a deacon’s work?
2. Is it wrong for elders to delegate “spiritual” work to deacons?
3. Did Paul ever consider collecting alms to have a spiritual dimension to it? Explain.
4. Does reverence rule out telling a clean joke, playing sports or enjoying board games?
5. What does being “double tongued” say about a man’s character?

Leadership in the Local Church

Qualifications of Deacons (2) – Lesson 6

1. Deacons Must Be ... (1 Tim 3:10, 12)

1. *First be proved; blameless.* The term “proved” means tested or scrutinized. Some brethren turn this into an issue of age or experience and arbitrarily dismiss men they think are too young by saying, “They haven’t been proven yet.” But this effectively circumvents all of the other specific qualifications listed here. A man may meet all these standards and still be rejected with the charge, “He hasn’t been proven yet.” But in the context, he must be “proved” relative to being found “blameless.” That is, the prospective deacon is to be scrutinized, tested, evaluated unto the end of being found blameless. He cannot be guilty of outstanding charges of sin in his life. He must also be proven relative to the other qualifications listed here. However this “proving” is implemented is a matter of judgment, but that it must be done (as opposed to appointing men via a popularity contest) is undeniable.

2. *Husbands of one wife.* He must be married, not polygamous. Again, a man divorced and remarried with heaven’s approval has but *one wife*. If having been married before means he now has two wives, then he is polygamous and not fit for fellowship, much less for being a deacon. A man who remarries after his wife dies has but *one wife*. He is all God wants him to be relative to marriage; he is not in violation of divine law in any way. Whereas a divorced and remarried person may have been stigmatized in times past in American culture, at present this is not so. Any divorce and subsequent remarriage is unfortunate, for the innocent one who has endured such trauma has been hurt deeply through no fault of their own. Nonetheless, they are acceptable before God and bear no stigma in our society which has come to see divorce as a common thing.

3. *Ruling their children and their own houses well.* A deacon must be a father as well. This does not mean merely a procreator; he must guide and rule his family in an orderly fashion. As in the case of elders, “house” indicates a family, and a family is comprised in this context of a man, woman and at least one child. Vine says, “by metonymy, of the members of a household or family, e.g. ... 1 Tim 3:4, 5, 12” (Vol. 2, p. 236). A man whose children are unruly, unsupervised, uncooperative and disrespectful is not qualified to serve as a deacon. The qualities that are required to serve effectively in the local church are going to be first in evidence at home. A man will not have a disastrous family life and suddenly find the qualities of leadership in dealing with church issues. Further, the man whose children are unruly will not be respected by others. He will lack the moral authority to encourage others to cooperate in his work.

2. Additional Qualities – Ac 6:3

While these may not have been deacons, per se, they certainly do represent the kind of men who will be held in esteem and confidence by others to do work on behalf of all. These qualities are not “new testament” requirements; they reflect the kind of men that God has always desired to serve Him in special ways. Such men always have to be the “cream of the crop,” men of godliness and spiritual maturity. Who else should serve?

1. *Good reputation.* Men who have gained the respect of their peers without having held some official position. They gained such standing just by being the kind of men that God wanted them to be.

2. *Full of the Holy Spirit.* This is not a miraculous endowment (though Stephen and Philip did have such power) but character that has conformed to the will of the Spirit as revealed first through inspired prophecy and now through the written word. We shy away from this language today, for we don't want to be misconstrued as advocating charismatic ideas. But it is entirely scriptural to say of a godly man that he is "full of the Holy Spirit" (or bears the fruit of the Spirit, Gal 5:22; or led by the Spirit, Rom 8:14).

3. *(Full of) wisdom.* Again, this is evidence that more than menial labor is under consideration. Men who serve the congregation as deacons will occasionally be put in delicate situations that require wisdom and sound judgment. This comes from a deep acquaintance with the word of God, a mind conditioned to think in terms of what God's will stipulates rather than what one's own passions or impulses tell him to do.

3. A Promise – 1 Tim 3:13

"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." It is an honor to be so recognized by the congregation as a faithful servant. A man who puts his faith into practice, who sees fruit of his labor, who is acknowledged as a valuable component of the local church will gain confidence in his professions. Such confirmation will add strength, zeal and boldness to one's character. On the other hand, those who shrink from duty and avoid taking an active part in the work will lack this affirming feedback. Yes, there is a price to pay for being depended upon by a group of people, but the rewards far outweigh the investment.

Questions:

1. What standard is to be used in "proving" a prospective deacon?
2. What is said about the spiritual status of a deacon's children? What does this imply about a deacon's age?
3. How can we tell today if a man is "full of the Holy Spirit"?
4. If a deacon's work is completely dictated by the elders, why does he need wisdom?
5. T/F Deacons should be looked upon no differently than anyone else in the church.

Leadership in the Local Church

Wives of Elders and Deacons – Lesson 7

1. Who Are the Women of 1 Tim 3:11?

There is a degree of textual ambiguity that leaves uncertain the identity of the women mentioned. First, the term *gunaikas* can mean “women” or “wives,” depending upon the context. Various versions translate the term “women” or “wives” or “their wives.” Some (e.g., A.T. Robertson) understand the reference to be female deacons – deaconesses. Others, like H.E. Phillips, think Paul is addressing wives of both elders and deacons. Some take a middle of the road position, such as William Hendriksen:

“These women are here viewed as rendering special service in the church, as do the elders and the deacons. They are a group by themselves, not just the wives of the deacons nor *all* the women who belong to the church. On the other hand, the fact that no special and separate paragraph is used in describing their necessary qualifications, but that these are simply wedged in between the stipulated requirements for deacons, with equal clarity indicates that these women are not to be regarded as constituting a third office in the church, the office of ‘deaconesses,’ on a par with and endowed with authority equal to that of deacons ... 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*, pp. 132-133).

I do not find Hendriksen’s observation objectionable, for women certainly do provide a valuable service to any congregation that cannot be as effectively rendered by men, and he falls short of creating a special status that would be at odds with the general tenor of Scripture that places women in a subordinate role to men. On the other hand, the specific focus of Paul in 1 Tim 3 seems to be upon *men* who serve as elders and deacons (married heads of households; masculine pronouns). Thus I conclude there is contextual cause to identify these women as wives of both deacons and elders. Though the verse comes in the midst of deacons’ qualifications, it seems to have the character of afterthought, as if Paul interjects that it is not only male headship that is crucial to these roles but the quality of the women they are married to as well. This is certainly true in practice. A man’s spiritual influence can be hampered or enhanced by his wife. A possessive, domineering, defensive or neurotic woman can completely neutralize the impact a man may otherwise have. Thus, our comments will be directed toward these women as wives of elders and deacons.

2. “*Likewise Their Wives Must Be ...*”

1. *Reverent.* The same as in reference to deacons. Wives must be sober, serious, mature. They cannot be trifling, petty, bogged down in frivolous details that seem to captivate the attention of some women. These wives will be dealing with serious issues via their husbands. If they are not spiritually oriented, they will undermine his service by complaints, criticisms and general discontentedness.

2. *Not slanderers.* These servants' wives must not be malicious gossips; they must be guarded and measured in speech. With access to some privileged information arising from their husbands' duties, they will learn things about members of the congregation they would rather not know. They can do a lot of damage by spreading tales. Deacons and elders must have good relationships with their wives characterized by open communication and emotional dependence. The stresses and strains can be enormous, and confidential sharing of thoughts and feelings is a crucial element of marital oneness. A man must know that he can speak candidly with his wife and not have it leaked to others.

3. *Temperate.* Same as 3:2, a balanced, deliberate, sober, controlled demeanor. This is not a woman who lives by her impulses and is undisciplined and given to extremes. A temperate woman lives a well-ordered, though not necessarily a regimented, life.

4. *Faithful in all things.* She must be trustworthy, reliable, true to the principles of godliness as she goes about her daily life. Like so many of these other qualifications, this must be applied by general observations and judgments. Does she keep her word and her appointments? Is she dependable, or do I always wonder if she will come through as she promised? Do I have spiritual confidence in her, or is there evidence of divided loyalties in her life?

3. The Importance of Godly Women

Far too often, a man is not fit to serve as an elder or deacon because of an unwilling wife. Perhaps she doesn't want her life interfered with by church issues. She may resent having to share her husband with the brethren. She may not want her schedule bound by his obligations. Too, it is difficult for women to see their husbands attacked and slandered. It is often easier to accept mistreatment than to witness it directed at one's spouse. Godly wives will weigh all the potential negatives and hardships that come with serving the Lord in a visible position with the potential benefits and rewards. Faith will see that the rewards outweigh the liabilities. The Scriptures are sprinkled with inspirational stories of great and godly women that served God in their own right and encouraged faithful men to accomplish things that were beyond their reach alone. A "daughter of Sarah" will be able by her faith to see the heavenly reward for a life of service unto the people of God.

Questions:

1. Give some specific examples of intemperate behavior often displayed by women.
2. Look up the term "slanderer" in Vine's. What word does it come from? Definition?
3. When should a man and woman discuss their ultimate goals in serving God?
4. Discuss: Can a man serve as an elder or deacon whose wife is not a Christian?

Leadership in the Local Church

A Closer Look at Eldership Terminology – Lesson 8

1. Nouns: Who Are These Men?

1. *Elders*: The Gk. term *presbuteros* can refer to one who is older in reference to others, one who is advanced in life, ancestors or ones recognized as leaders due to their age and experience. In its most highly specialized usage, it applies to a particular class of men who meet the specific qualifications previously discussed and are selected to serve a local church in leadership matters. The context of a given passage will determine which application the author intends. The term “elder(s)” in this specialized sense is found in Ac 14:23; 20:17; 1 Tim 5:17, 19; Tit 1:5; 1 Pet 5:1.

2. *Overseer (bishop)*: The Gk. *episkopos* is “lit., an overseer (*epi*, over, *skopeo*, to look or watch), whence Eng. ‘bishop,’ which has precisely the same meaning, is found in Ac 20:28; Phil. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:2; Tit. 1:7; 1 Pet 2:25 (Vine, Vol. 1, p. 128). The OT term “watchman” is synonymous; elders look out over the local church and make sure that it is what the Lord wants it to be.

3. *Shepherd (pastor)*: This word is the Gk. *poimen* and literally refers to a shepherd or tender of sheep. This well-known occupation served as a metaphorical reference to serving as an elder or overseer. The term is used in Eph 4:11.

These three terms are synonyms and not three different positions or offices. This can be seen by comparing passages that use them interchangeably:

1. Paul called for the Ephesian *elders* (Ac 20:17) and told them that the Holy Spirit had made them *overseers* (Ac 20:28). Paul then tells these elders/overseers to “*shepherd*” (verb) the church, to tend the flock of the local church in Ephesus.

2. Peter directed the *elders* (1 Pet 5:1) to serve as *overseers* (1 Pet 5:2) and “*shepherd*” (verb) the flock of God (5:2).

3. Paul left Titus in Crete to appoint *elders* in every city (Tit 1:5) and then gave criteria for *bishops or overseers* to be selected (Tit 1:7).

2. Verbs: What Are These Men to Do?

1. *Shepherd*: The verb *poimaino* is translated by shepherd (1 Pet 5:2; Ac 20:28) and tend (Jn 21:16). This word indicates more than merely feeding the sheep; it is a comprehensive term meaning to function in all respects of a shepherd: protect, lead, calm, feed, retrieve strays – to pursue the overall welfare of the flock.

2. *Rule*: The verb *proistemi* means “lit. ‘to stand before,’ hence, to lead, attend to (indicating care and diligence), is translated to rule ... with reference to a local church, in Rom 12:8 ... 1 Tim 5:17” (Vine, Vol. 3, p. 307). Vine notes this is the same word of the

man's rule with reference to his family in 1 Tim 3:4. The English term "rule" also translates another Greek word, *hegeomai*. This word is found in Heb 13:17 and refers to the authority of elders over the flock, not as "lords" but as "examples" (1 Pet 5:3), influencing Christians through moral suasion rather than heavy-handed duress.

3. *Watch*: The verb *agrupneo* means "to be sleepless (from *agreuo*, to chase, and *hupnos*, sleep), is used metaphorically, to be watchful ... Heb. 13:17. The word expresses not mere wakefulness, but the watchfulness of those who are intent upon a thing" (Vine, Vol. 4, p. 201). Elders watch for the *souls* of men. They are concerned about the spiritual strength and vitality of the congregation. Any conscientious elder relates to this aspect of his work, for to bear the troubles and weaknesses of others certainly robs one of sleep.

4. *Take heed*: This means to turn one's attention to, take careful note of. It is used in Ac 20:28 of the elders' own lives and then the lives of the sheep. Paul gravely warns the elders in this passage that future trouble will afflict Ephesus through the elders, themselves.

5. *Admonish*: This word in 1 Th 5:12 is "an old verb from *nouthetes* and this from *nous* (mind) and *tithemi*, to put. Putting sense into the heads of people. A thankless, but a necessary, task" (A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures*, Vol. 4, p. 36). Again, elders (and preachers and teachers) fully understand this observation of Robertson.

6. *Labor*: This word, *kopiao*, means toil or labor unto weariness. Being an elder is *work* ("esteem them very highly in love for their **work's** sake" – 1 Th 5:13). It is not an honorary or a figurehead position. The elder who isn't weary from the toil of shepherding and overseeing isn't doing his job as fully as he should, unless he serves a very unusual congregation. Further, Paul refers to elders who "*labor in the word and doctrine*" (1 Tim 5:17), men who concentrate upon teaching and preaching in addition to the spiritual oversight of the brethren. These, he says, should be "*counted worthy of double honor*" and he cites the same passage as in 1 Cor 9:9 relative to preachers receiving financial support. An elder's work is worthy of pay, though his motivation should not be "*for dishonest gain*" (1 Pet 5:2). This is true with preachers, also, and does not mitigate against their being financially compensated for their work.

3. Other Descriptive Terms

1. *Not by constraint but willingly, eagerly*: Elders should not agree to serve out of coercion, guilt, family expectations or any other form of outside pressure. He must take on the mantle of leadership because he understands the vital importance of eternal souls and the ability God has granted him to contribute to their welfare. One may think back to Elisha who accompanied Elijah as he went to meet "the chariot of Israel and its horsemen." Elijah asked Elisha to let him go on alone (2 Kgs 2:1-6), but Elisha wouldn't be separated from his mentor. When Elijah indicated the end was near, Elisha asked that "*a double portion of your spirit be upon me*" (2:9). Elisha had seen all the grief and agony Ahab and Jezebel had wrought upon Elijah and all the prophets of God (1 Kgs 18-19), yet he was zealous to take up Elijah's mantle and "part the Jordan" (2 Kgs 2:14). A mature man will recognize the gravity of the eldership but will not flee from it.

2. *With joy and not with grief:* Of course, this in context depends upon the reaction of the sheep to the shepherds. The Hebrew author instructs them to “*obey them who have the rule over you, and be submissive ...*” (Heb 13:17). There is enough stress upon those men who are concerned with the spiritual health and fruitful labor of the congregation. What adds to it are those who refuse to heed their warnings, who are chronically weak and disobedient, who are resistant to study, worship and meaningful interaction with other saints. These consume much of the elders’ time and energy.

3. *Being examples to the flock:* Elders must exemplify the principles, doctrines and habits they urge upon others. They must be living demonstrations of spirituality, godliness and purity. They must be studious, resilient, hopeful and consistent. They must model, not merely command, the expectations of God. It is much easier to imitate a living example, a personal embodiment, of certain characteristics than to conform to some impersonal theory. This is precisely why God sent Jesus into the world to *live* among us, not merely to deliver a message from heaven.

As has been noted so many times before, *words mean things*. Since religious corruption often starts with some form of leadership aberration, we would be wise to become extremely familiar with the terminology of the NT that pertains to elders. Ignorance is the breeding ground of apostasy. We must not fall into the trap of thinking “it won’t happen here.” Error can happen anywhere people stop scrupulously following truth.

Questions:

1. T/F The church at Jerusalem didn’t need elders because it had apostles in it.
2. To what aspect of leadership does the term “elder” refer? Shepherd? Overseer?
3. What happened to the prophets of God under Jezebel (1 Kgs 18:4)? Did this keep Elisha from wanting to be a prophet after Elijah?
4. What responsibility of being an elder is defined as “to be sleepless”? Do you think this is literal or figurative, or both?
5. What things can rob an elder of his joy in serving the Lord’s flock?
6. How can one determine whether “elder” is referring to simply age or an overseer?
7. Do you think “bishop” is a good translation of *episkopos* in today’s society? Why, or why not?

Leadership in the Local Church

Positive Leadership in the Old Testament – Lesson 9

1. Moses

Moses stands out as the quintessential leader figure from the Old Testament. While it is obvious that elders and deacons do not occupy the same mediatorial position as did Moses, there are still many leadership characteristics exemplified in Moses that are worthy of emulation.

1. *Identification with the people of God.* Though Moses had every earthly advantage in his Egyptian connections, “*when he became of age (he) refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God*” (Heb 11:24-25). These people were slaves, despised and subjugated foreigners from the Egyptian perspective. Yet Moses saw value in these people because they belonged to God and were heirs of the promises made to Abraham. A leader must first and foremost love the people of God and appreciate their uniqueness.

2. *Submission to the will of God.* Moses first tried to exert leadership on his own terms by killing an Egyptian who was brutalizing one of his brethren: “*For he supposed that his brethren would have understood that God would deliver them by his hand, but they did not understand*” (Ac 7:25). He was rejected by the Israelites, and God sent him to the wilderness of Midian for forty years to learn that God’s work must be done in God’s way. Moses presumed that which was the prerogative of God.

3. *Courage.* This he lacked at first but found it along the way. How difficult it must have been to walk into the courts of Pharaoh, the most powerful ruler on earth, and demand that which would have been odious in his sight. What courage it must have taken for Moses to ascend the quaking and rumbling Mt. Sinai, a sight which terrified the rest of the people (Ex 20:18-21). Many other acts of courage adorn Moses’ resume.

4. *Patience.* Moses endured repeated episodes of unfaithfulness among those around him. Aaron disappointed him by making the golden calf (Ex 32); the people chronically grumbled and murmured about the care God extended to them (Ex 15:22; 16:1ff; 17:1-3; Num 11:1-15; etc.); his leadership was challenged by friends and foes alike (Num 12:1-10; 16:1-50). He lived an uncomfortable life in the hostility of the wilderness, not because of anything he had done, but as a result of the faithlessness and disobedience of others. For forty years he endured that which we might find demoralizing after a short while. If an elder is appointed at 50 years old, he may serve 20-30 years if he enjoys a full lifespan. This can seem lengthy given the stresses faced. As in the case of Moses, the first two-thirds of life often prepares us for greater service in the final third.

5. *Wisdom.* The people depended heavily upon Moses to help them settle their disputes (Ex 18:13-26). Diplomacy, the art of seeing different sides of an issue and helping men come to a common understanding and agreement, is indispensable to any leader. Paul counsels the appointment of wise men to help settle differences of judgment (1 Cor 6:5).

6. *Faithfulness.* “Moses indeed was faithful in all His house as a servant” (Heb 3:5). This does not mean that Moses was sinless, for his failure to hallow the name of God before the people testifies to his imperfection. But Moses was dependable, steady, constantly available to God for whatever service he could render. All Christians should strive for such faithfulness, but it is necessary in elders and deacons. Their faith cannot ride a pendulum; an elder cannot be one person one day and someone else the next. There must be maturity of faith that leads to habitual service.

7. *Zealousness.* Moses was “humble, more than all men who were on the face of the earth” (Num 12:3). That’s pretty high praise. But humility must not be confused with softness or weakness. Moses was not one to campaign for himself or “blow his own horn,” but when it came to defending the honor of God or the welfare of the people he was fierce. Moses boldly stood up to Korah, Dathan and Abiram (Num 16); he was a warrior who led Israel in victory even in his waning years (Num 21:21-35); even at the end he angered God by repeating his request to enter Canaan and participate in the conquest (Dt 3:23-27). An elder is not to be so tenderhearted as to let unscrupulous brethren walk all over him. There is a time for elders to be tough and hold people rigidly to the Lord’s standards. Men who have no zeal to defend the truth and protect the flock against savage wolves lack the tools to lead.

2. David and Saul

Again, David is in a special category as a king, prophet and military commander, but he manifests certain qualities needed by spiritual leaders. What is it that inspired people to sing David’s praises, follow him into battle and remain loyal to him as Saul tried to hunt him down and kill him? And what was it about Saul that caused the nation to decline under his watch?

David:

1. *Dependence upon God’s revelation.* Early in his life, as a fugitive from Saul’s murderous plots, David maintains a vital connection with the will of God. David inquires of God concerning his fate among the people of Keilah (1 Sam 23:1-11). When the Amalekites plundered his camp and David found himself facing a near mutiny, “David strengthened himself in the Lord his God ... So David inquired of the Lord ...” (1 Sam 30:6-8). He inquired of God about where he should go once Saul was dead (2 Sam 2:1ff); he consulted God on attacking the Philistines (2 Sam 5:19-25); he appealed to the prophet Nathan in reference to building a temple (2 Sam 7:2; Nathan initially gave him his blessing but he later reversed his advice at God’s insistence). The times where David got into the most trouble are the instances where he did not consult God’s will: moving the ark (2 Sam 6:1-10); adultery with Bathsheba (2 Sam 11:1-5); excusing Amnon’s rape of Tamar (2 Sam 13), etc. David demonstrates the importance of seeking to do the will of God as one leads the people.

2. *Honest assessment of sin.* Like Moses, David is not a flawless leader. But when he is confronted with his sin, David does not deny, hide or cast blame. His psalms of confession of sin are some of the most meaningful to good people who occasionally stum-

ble: Ps 25; 32; 51, etc. David was blinded for a time in relation to Bathsheba, but when Nathan condemned him, David took responsibility for his actions.

3. *Faithfulness to the will of God.* God describes David thusly through Paul: “I have found David ... a man after my own heart, who will do all My will” (Ac 13:22). David first had regard for the will of God; then he could lead the people in the right way.

Saul:

1. *Selfishness.* When Jonathan and his armor bearer routed the Philistines, Saul “*strictly charged the people with an oath, saying, ‘Cursed is the man who eats food this day.’ And the people were faint*” (1 Sam 14:28). Saul was interested in exacting his personal vengeance upon his enemies who had exposed his weakness, but in the process Jonathan notes, “*My father has troubled the land*” (14:29). Jonathan unwittingly violates the rash oath which Saul placed upon the people, and Saul is intent upon making him pay the penalty – death (14:43-44). This leads to an uprising as the people intervene to spare their hero’s life (14:45). Undoubtedly, the people lost confidence in Saul that day as a benevolent and trustworthy leader.

2. *Weak leadership.* When Saul was ordered to utterly destroy the Amalekites, he disobeyed and brought back King Agag and the best of the livestock (1 Sam 15). When confronted by Samuel, Saul blames the people for his actions (15:15, 20-21, 24). He became a *follower* instead of a *leader*.

3. *Cowardice.* The picture in 1 Sam 17 is a pitiful one. The army of the living God is cowering in fear as one man, Goliath, taunts them day by day (17:8-11, 24). Saul had earlier won a great victory against the Ammonites and had delivered the city of Jabesh Gilead (1 Sam 11:1ff). But this was in the days when, in Samuel’s words, “*You were little in your own eyes*” (1 Sam 15:17). Against the backdrop of Saul’s cowardice stands the courage of David, who takes on the giant single-handedly. Such fearlessness and initiative inspires the people to sing David’s praises and even secures the admiration of Saul’s son to David (1 Sam 18:1-7). Note also how the compromise and vacillation of Saul cause him to fear and oppose David, a man who has the spirit of God (1 Sam 18:8-16).

Stories of great leaders abound in the Old Testament: Noah, Abraham, Joseph, Joshua, Samuel, Hezekiah, Josiah, Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, etc. Much can be learned by reading their life stories and observing the principles by which they lived.

Questions:

1. What is a basic quality of a spiritual leader that Moses violated (cf. Num 20:12)?
2. What did David’s sin with Bathsheba cause (2 Sam 12:14)?
3. What attitude does Moses demonstrate toward God’s people in Num 14:11-19?
4. When spiritually restored, what did David want to do (Ps 51:12-13)?

Leadership in the Local Church

Negative Leadership in the Old Testament – Lesson 10

1. Where Do Poor Leaders Come From?

Leadership will often be a reflection of the culture or society that produced it. Granted, an unscrupulous or ill-equipped man may maneuver himself into a position of leadership, but a core of mature and responsible people will often be able to neutralize much of the damage he may do. When leadership begins to fail on a broad scale, it would be instructive to look at the wider sociological picture to see what is happening.

Jeroboam:

Jeroboam stands as an eternal monument to poor leadership spawned by disaffected multitudes. Solomon had set the stage for Jeroboam's rebellion by oppressing and mistreating the northern tribes. When Solomon died, these frustrated masses rallied behind Jeroboam and encouraged him to petition Rehoboam for relief (1 Kgs 11:26-12:5). Rehoboam, of course, relies on immature advice and compounds the problem by threatening even worse treatment than his father (1 Kgs 12:6-16). Jeroboam responds by leading a rebellion against Rehoboam. The disgruntled multitude appointed a leader who would give them what they wanted: political independence. Jeroboam institutes a false religious system which sets the stage for the gradual collapse of the northern tribes (cf. 1 Kgs 12:26-33). So powerful was Jeroboam's influence that all the kings who followed him were ungodly and self-serving.

Ahab and Jezebel:

Ahab, a later king of Israel, appears as a spineless, immature, small-minded man who married a dominant idolatrous female. A defining story of Ahab's character is his coveting of Naboth's vineyard (1 Kgs 21). When Naboth refuses to sell Ahab his property, "*Ahab went into his house sullen and displeased ... and he lay down on his bed, and turned away his face, and would eat no food*" (21:4). What a pathetic picture of a king! But Jezebel, of the Sidonian royal family (1 Kgs 16:31), shows her true colors in framing Naboth and having him executed.

Jezebel had massacred the prophets of God (1 Kgs 18:4), and she threatened to do the same to Elijah (19:2). Ahab launched an international manhunt for Elijah (18:10), and when the great prophet presented himself to the wicked king, Ahab said, "*Is that you, O troubler of Israel?*" (18:17). Ahab and Jezebel reflected the morals and religious convictions of their society. They ruled by the will and agreement of people who had no higher expectations of their leaders. Jeroboam (and even Solomon through his intermarriages) had laid the foundation of idolatry; Ahab's generation took it to its ultimate end.

When Jeremiah told of Judah's coming downfall, he lamented, "*The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests rule by their own power, and My people love to have it so*" (Jer 5:31). People get the kind of leaders they want. If they want to be led in their own selfish ways, someone will volunteer to lead them there.

2. Other Leadership Failures

False prophets and priests: Jeremiah further mentions the covetousness of the priests and prophets (Jer 6:13-15; 8:10-12), as does Micah before him (Mic 3:11). God roundly condemns the prophets who merely spoke what they wanted in order to please the people (Jer 23:9-40). Priests, who were specially chosen by God to instruct the people, are condemned for failing their charge: “*The priests did not say, ‘Where is the Lord?’ And those who handle the law did not know Me*” (Jer 2:8). Instead, they taught the people to follow idols (Jer 2:26-28). Similar references to the failures of prophets and priests abound in the OT. They all add up to one simple observation: leaders among God’s people must continually teach the truth of God’s word and instill within successive generations a knowledge of God. It is so easy to get side-tracked by personal ambitions, alternative projects and other distractions, but God’s leaders cannot go wrong by fostering the teaching of God’s revealed will.

Princes and rulers: Earlier in Jeremiah’s ministry he was defended by the princes against the slanderous attacks of the priests and prophets (Jer 26:11-24). But later, the princes and rulers of the land turned against him (Jer 37:15; 38:4). Those who had potential political influence and who might have neutralized Zedekiah’s suicidal leadership were themselves so corrupt that they opposed this great and venerable prophet of God. Jeremiah’s faithfulness and courage stands in stark contrast to these covetous, compromising and conniving rulers.

The bottom line is that failure at the leadership level compromises the integrity of the people. The situation is compounded as bad leadership creates further distance from God. A downward spiral thus begins that is very difficult to reverse.

Questions:

1. What leadership mistake(s) did Rehoboam make?
2. How did God’s watchmen fail in Isaiah’s day (Is 56:9-12)?
3. How did rulers look upon the people according to Micah 3:1-3?
4. Who did God make Jeremiah strong against (Jer 1:18)?
5. List two passages where Jesus faulted leadership among the Jews in His own day.
6. What will happen if God’s leaders turn away from Him (cf. Jer 4:22; 8:9; Is 44:18)?
7. What should leaders among God’s people “hate” (cf. Ex 18:21)? Why?

Leadership in the Local Church

What God Expects from Leaders – Lesson 11

1. God Expects His Leaders to Obey the Rules Like Everyone Else

Nadab and Abihu: Nadab and Abihu were sons of Aaron who were priests in the early history of Israel. They were privileged to go upon Sinai with Moses where “*they saw the God of Israel*” (Ex 24:1, 9ff). This should have humbled them, but in the course of time they became lax in their obedience. When they “*offered profane fire before the Lord, which He had not commanded them ... fire went out from the Lord and devoured them*” (Lev 10:1-2). God’s explanation: “*By those who come near Me I must be regarded as holy; and before all the people I must be glorified*” (10:3). So strict was God in this matter that He forbade Aaron to openly mourn the death of his sons (10:6-7).

We might also cite Moses striking the rock for water, Saul’s preservation of Agag, David’s adultery with Bathsheba, Uzziah’s offering of incense, etc.

2. God Expects His Leaders to Be Corrected When They Sin

Uzziah: When Uzziah became proud and entered the temple to offer sacrifice, “*Azariah the priest went in after him, and with him were eighty priests of the Lord, who were valiant men. And they withstood King Uzziah ...*” (2 Chr 26:16-20). Leaders among God’s people are not impervious to weakness and sin, and they are not “untouchable” because of their spiritual stature. Paul directs Timothy: “*Do not receive an accusation against an elder except from two or three witnesses. Those who are sinning rebuke in the presence of all, that the rest also may fear*” (1 Tim 5:19-20). Like so many times in the Old Testament, the prophet or messenger of God may be attacked or faulted for opposing a man in his sin. But God directs that we should not be respecters of persons and excuse in some what would be rebuked in others (1 Tim 5:21).

3. God Expects His Leaders Not to Be a Cause for Blasphemy

David: Not only was David’s crime against Uriah wrong on its own merits, “*by this deed you have given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme*” (2 Sam 12:14). The same type of charge is leveled against the Jews as a whole by Paul (Rom 2:17-24), who saw his people as those who should have been leaders among all nations because of their peculiar relationship with God. The truth is, there is a double standard for leaders, not a double standard that makes them a puppet of every person’s whim and fancy, but a higher standard of God-approved behavior. When any Christian sins, it harms the influence of Christ as a whole. But when an elder, deacon or preacher sins it does even further damage. The world will point to such breakdowns as justification for their rejection of the truth that we urge upon them.

4. God Expects His Leaders to Be Servants

God has never appointed certain tasks or functions for the benefit of the person who engages in them. God understands the harm that comes from men exalting themselves

and receiving undue honor. He knows how it breeds jealousy, fosters arrogance and undermines the goal He is trying to achieve: the overall good of His people. James and John didn't understand this principle at first. They thought that leadership among the disciples meant prominent places at Jesus' right and left hands. Thus, Jesus says to them, *"You do not know what manner of spirit you are of"* (Lk 9:55). He contrasted leadership among His people with the Gentile model: *"You know that the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant"* (Mt 20:25-26). The eldership is a "service institution"; it exists to provide a much needed service to a local church. Men who so serve deserve respect, honor and support, but even that is an outgrowth of appreciation for what God provides to all through them, not a response to their personal attributes. If a man is spiritually mature and full of good judgment, it is because God has provided for such growth.

5. God Expects His Leaders to Know His Law

"My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge" (Hos 4:6), and this ignorance directly came from the failure of leaders to instill such knowledge in them. Josiah's desire for reformation was aimless until a copy of the Law was found (2 Kgs 22:8-20). David's attempt to bring the ark to Jerusalem was a disaster until he consulted the law and discovered the approved way of moving it (2 Sam 6:6ff). Ezra and Nehemiah reinstated public instruction in the Law of Moses (Ezra 7:6, 10; Neh 8:1-9:4). Elders are to be mature in Bible knowledge and able to strengthen the weak, refute those who contradict and comfort the troubled. They must not be merely "keepers of the orthodoxy" but students of the law of Christ. They must understand the historical framework of redemption, the proper application of Scriptural authority, evidence refuting atheism, basic philosophies of false doctrines and other foundational matters that pertain to advancing and defending the truth. They must also understand how God's law operates in the lives of real people and how to advise people wisely relative to that law.

6. God Expects His Leaders to Sacrifice Themselves for His People

Jesus is the prime example of self-sacrificial love and concern for the people of God.

"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep. But he who is a hireling ... sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them" (Jn 10:11-12).

"Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends" (Jn 15:13).

While death is the ultimate sacrifice and demonstration of love, elders in American culture are called upon to show their devotion in other sacrificial ways. It takes a substantial amount of time to get to know brethren, to learn their lifestyles, job obligations, spiritual weaknesses, personality quirks and other subtle characteristics that challenge people's spiritual well being. Studies must be conducted; congregational threats must be considered; planning sessions must be held for future work, etc. The work of elders is comprehensive and taxing; it requires self-sacrifice to do the job well.

7. God Expects His Leaders to Continue Growing

The Apostles: While the apostles possessed enough character to be selected by the Lord for special service, that selection was merely the commencement of their education in leadership. They grew tremendously under the tutelage of Jesus, but even at His death there were many things lacking in their spiritual completeness. We continue to witness their growth and development as we consider the history of Acts and then examine their epistles written in later years.

Likewise, while elders are to possess certain minimum qualifications before being appointed, and while elders are to direct others in the process of spiritual growth, they have not personally reached a terminus in their own development. No man will reach such a state in this life, for though maturity in faith and knowledge may be realized, there will always be room for improvement. Elders must study the Scriptures, explore new avenues of learning, pray, examine their attitudes, seek counsel in their own struggle to faithfully serve the Lord. Preachers often fail in their personal growth even while attempting to direct others in the same. The demands of service can be so taxing that one may neglect himself for the sake of others. Leaders must learn to take time for themselves and invest in their own growth and spiritual health. Otherwise, they will gradually weaken and lose their effectiveness as leaders.

Questions:

1. List one other leader among God's people who was rebuked for his sin.
2. Cite a NT passage that directs men not to be respecters of persons.
3. Why might the sin of an elder do worse damage than someone else who commits the same sin?
4. T/F An elder should never be openly rebuked, for his influence may be permanently damaged.
5. How does a congregation know if a man has sufficient knowledge to serve as an elder?
6. What was a necessary part of Ezra and Nehemiah's reforms (Neh 8:2-3, 7-8)?
7. On what basis should an elder be given honor? Is it because of his personal achievements or something else?

Leadership in the Local Church

What God Expects from Followers – Lesson 12

1. Followers Must Not Murmur Against Leaders

The word “murmur” is the Gk. *gonguzo*, “to mutter, murmur, grumble, say anything in a low tone ... an onomatopoeic word, representing the significance by the sound of the word” (Vine, Vol. 3, p. 93). Murmuring is more than mere complaint or disagreement; it is behavior that becomes subversive, that foments discord and resists the authority of the leadership. It has been noted by many that Christians appoint elders because they trust their judgment, but almost immediately act as though they can’t do anything right. There seems to be a tendency to complain and find fault with those who make decisions that affect us. (In fact, many brethren oppose the appointment of elders altogether because they do not want to submit to the authority of others.)

We must learn to see the decisions and judgments of elders through the eyes of men charged with the spiritual welfare of all. It is easy for any one individual to feel that his needs or views were overlooked when a choice was made for the overall good. It is also easy to second guess the elders because of a one-dimensional outlook on things or without full knowledge of all the facts upon which a particular decision was made. In such cases, we must step back, take a deep breath, and trust the men whom we have selected for this very purpose. Brethren who disagree with the elders’ judgment have a right to be heard, for truly the wrong decision may have been made. But there can be a fine line between respectfully disagreeing and harmfully murmuring.

2. Followers Must Not Be Insubordinate

“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” (Heb 13:17). While elders do not have the right to “legislate in the place of God,” they do wield discretionary power to make judgments in areas of practical application. This power is tempered by the instruction not to be *“lords over those entrusted to you”* (1 Pet 5:3), so elders must be careful not to arbitrarily make demands of people that have no direct bearing upon implementing the laws of God. But Christians must be willing to submit to the wisdom and counsel of those who guide them in harmony with truth. If a brother adamantly refuses to abide by the judgment of the elders, then of what good are elders? They have no police force or bodyguard to physically enforce their will. The only moral leverage they have to enjoin obedience is voluntary submission that grows out of respect for their position and the Lord who so empowered them.

I am aware of two situations in the past several years where insubordinate members have “ousted” an elder. Campaigns were mounted among disgruntled members to force the elder to resign. This process usually takes advantage of a man’s integrity and conscience. The elder, if he truly is the kind of man he should be, is prone to capitulate because he doesn’t want to become the lightning rod for congregational strife. Threats are issued: if brother so-and-so doesn’t resign at our insistence, then we will

leave. I am convinced that this is extremely displeasing to the Lord, and God has proven on various occasions that He detests such insubordinate challenges to His approved leadership. Moses' own sister got a severe lesson in this, and she was saved further grief by Moses' forgiveness and intercession on her behalf (Num 12). Korah and Co. learned this lesson the hard way as did Absalom and the entire city of Jerusalem that rejected and murdered their spiritual King. **God is severely displeased with people who undermine the leaders that He has appointed.** So when one brings accusations against elders, or when a stand is taken against some decision or position advanced by them, it must be on the basis of truth and error, not preferences, opinions, traditions or some other foundation that will not withstand the scrutiny of God.

3. Followers Must Offer Positive Encouragement and Support

Paul directs the Thessalonians 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”* (1 Th 5:12-13). Paul himself solicited prayers on his behalf that he might accomplish the Lord's purposes in his life (Rom 15:30-32; Col 4:3-4; Eph 6:19). Encouragement comes in a variety of forms. It may simply be a willingness to serve when asked without grumbling. It may be volunteering to provide some service without being asked specifically to do it. It may be a prayer, a note of encouragement, a verbalized word of appreciation for a job well-done. Elders do not serve for the praise they receive, for it isn't enough to sustain them. But it is invigorating and energizing when someone acknowledges our efforts and the benefits that have come from them.

4. Followers Must Make Good Choices in Their Leaders

As noted previously, we often end up with the leaders we deserve. If our standards are low, we will end up with inept leadership. While it is sinful to depose a qualified and capable leader, it is difficult to challenge one who is an elder if he, in fact, has demonstrated his inability to lead. Our standards for leadership must not be higher than God's lest we become more restrictive than He is and reject competent leaders. On the other hand, they must not be lower than God's, thus empowering unspiritual men to rule over God's people. We must understand what the roles of elders and deacons are, be familiar with the qualifications and know the men of the congregation personally so as to make a wise decision. Remember, we will live with the consequences of our choices.

Questions:

1. How can someone's life bring "grief" (Heb 13:17) to the elders?
2. How should disagreements with the elders' decisions be handled?
3. Find a passage where some brethren murmured against Paul's teaching or practice.
4. What change can **you** make to make the elders' job easier?

Leadership in the Local Church

What's So Tough About Being an Elder? – Lesson 13

1. Looking from the Outside In

Any job looks easier when we only see the finished product. We are often not privy to the extensive training, practice, study and other behind the scenes preparation for any job that is done well – from playing professional sports to making an automobile to running a restaurant. Competence creates the appearance of ease, and this is the curse of doing one's job well. Perhaps only an elder's wife knows the depths of agony and anxiety that must be traversed by one who wrestles with the souls of men. We would do ourselves and the elders a great service by consciously taking note of the things that must be attended to for a congregation to function as it should.

2. Some Nuts and Bolts of Congregational Activity

Perhaps it would be instructive to briefly reflect upon the various elements of congregational function. The following does not represent the work of elders, for much of this must be delegated in order for the elders to concentrate upon spiritual duties. But these things must be accomplished, and elders will have to account for them.

Teaching:

1. How will classes be divided? Who will schedule teaching assignments? How will teachers be trained and monitored? What curriculum will be used? What does the congregation need in the short, mid and long-term? How will physical teaching materials be procured? Where stored?
2. Who needs personal teaching attention? Who will do this? What other home studies might be beneficial?
3. Will we support outside evangelists? Who? How much shall they receive? Will we give them raises? When will we visit them? When will they be invited to visit us? How can we maintain close ties of love and concern for them? Which geographic areas should we concentrate on? Which preachers will we terminate support for?
4. Will we support a local evangelist? What qualities will we look for in such a man? How much will he be paid? How will we determine a fair salary? What other benefits will be supplied? What will be his duties? How will he be monitored for truth and effectiveness? How will we blend his efforts with the elders' spiritual oversight? How much vacation/meeting time will he be allowed?
5. How will the lost in our community be sought? Direct mail? Correspondence courses? Newspaper articles? Billboards? Springfest booth? Door-knocking? Gospel meetings? How many meetings should be held? Who will be invited to preach? How much will he be paid? Where will he stay? What is our goal for these special efforts? How will we respond to visitors at worship?

Worship:

1. When shall worship services be held? Where? A purpose-built building? Rent? Relocate? How much shall be spent on maintenance and repairs? How will the building be cleaned? Secured? What kind of insurance should be carried? Who will handle this? How can safety be insured while meeting? Weather? Crime? Who will handle climate control? How will the grounds be maintained?
2. What will be the order of services? Who will be scheduled to participate? How will they be informed? How can their service be enhanced (microphones, serving from the front, reading scriptures, etc.)? Shall we have services devoted to singing? When? When should we call special gatherings for prayer, say to deal with a crisis situation?
3. How will we train men to take a leading part in the worship? Training class? Personal instruction?
4. Who will provide the elements of the Lord's supper every week? How will they be procured, stored?

Financial Issues:

1. How shall the contribution be budgeted? How much for evangelism? Supplies? Shall we own a preacher's home? Pay a salary that allows the preacher private home ownership?
2. Who will handle the treasury? How will we comply with tax laws? How will we report financial details to the congregation?
3. How much debt should be taken on? When? For what reasons?

Shepherding the Flock:

1. How will the spiritual welfare of the congregation be monitored? Shall attendance be taken for class, worship? Who will do this? What will be done with the information? Can work groups assist in supplying needs? When will they meet? Who will direct them? What issues will they address? Can the telephone be utilized to keep abreast of the troubles suffered by members? Who will maintain this?
2. How shall weak members be encouraged? When are personal visits for exhortation or correction indicated? When should the chronically unfaithful be disciplined with expulsion from fellowship? How will this be handled?
3. How and when will the elders communicate with the congregation? Annual meetings? Quarterly reports? Bulletin? How will the elders assess the concerns of the congregation? Questionnaires? Informal talks?

3. The Behind the Scenes Work of Elders

If we only see each other at services, we do not really know what goes on throughout the week. We will not know of the hours and hours the elders spend in private with members who need immediate spiritual attention. Marital difficulties, job woes, hidden sins and conflicts among brethren are some of the more common issues that have to be dealt with. Hospital visits, funeral presence, responding to social invitations (weddings, home gatherings, etc.) all take their share of time in the elders' schedule. While the presence of other members may not be missed, the absence of elders (or the preacher) at times like these will be noticed and often resented. There needs to be fairness shown in this regard. Elders are not mind-readers; they need to be informed of what is happening. Others need to realize that they are regular people and circumstances beyond their control may hinder them from responding in as timely a fashion as others may assume they should. Remember: *"Whatever you want me to do to you, do also to them ..."* (Mt 7:12). Judge the elders by the standard you would like to be judged by.

The bottom line is that elders have a spiritually oppressive, emotionally taxing, conscience-jarring job to do. It is a work that never seems done. No matter how well done, it could have been done better. It is a role in which it is impossible to satisfy everyone. Thus, there always seems to be discontent from some quarter or other. Second-guessing is always easy when one does not have to face the real consequences of his imagined decisions. The elders are on the firing line. They are putting their happiness and well-being in the hands of sometimes ungrateful people whom they are trying to prop up and drag toward heaven. Serving as an elder should not be sugarcoated or gift-wrapped with a pretty bow. It is hard, exhausting work. But it also carries the reward of knowing that the good people will benefit and will be everlastingly grateful for the effort some shepherd made to feed and protect them on their way to heaven. Serving as an elder isn't for everyone. It is for the man who walks by faith, not by sight. It is for the man who does not become weary in well-doing. It is for the man whose wife is confident enough to share her husband with the Lord as He works in the lives of men. We need more of these good men.

Questions:

1. How can micromanagement hinder elders from giving attention to their specific task of spiritual oversight?
2. Why is it important that prospective elders understand the full scope of congregational function?
3. Give three practical suggestions of how to help an elder do his job better.
4. What do you think is the most difficult aspect of being an elder? After writing your answer, call one of the elders and ask him what **he** thinks is most difficult.

Leadership in the Local Church

Leadership and the Local Evangelist – Lesson 14

1. The “Pastor System”

For many years denominational models of leadership have favored a pastor system whereby one man – the “pastor” – oversees the local church. He may be assisted by other administrative officials or deacon boards, but “the pastor” is seen officially and unofficially as the leader. Sometimes he is dressed in clerical garments, robes or other clothes symbolic of a “higher calling.” Often, his vocal tones and inflections exude a soothing, sometimes effeminate quality, and his speech cadence adds vowels and stresses words artificially into a “Bible-speak” lingo. His vocabulary is punctuated with “Thees” and “Thous” and other expressions borrowed from the King James Version.

The typical denominational pastor wears many hats: preacher, radio and television personality, counselor, social director and sometimes school principal, athletic director, campus architect, etc. More and more the pastor is a religious CEO. He and his carefully coiffed wife are the heart and soul of the organization, the engine that makes it all run.

This, however, is not according to the NT pattern. The term “pastor” is from the Gk. *poimen* and means “a shepherd, one who tends herds or flocks (not merely one who feeds them), is used metaphorically of Christian ‘pastors,’ Eph. 4:11. Pastors guide as well as feed the flock; cp. Acts 20:28, which, with ver. 17, indicates that this was that service committed to elders (overseers or bishops); so also in 1 Pet. 5:1, 2, ‘tend the flock ... exercising the oversight,’ R.V.; this involves tender care and vigilant superintendence” (Vine, Vol. 3, p. 167). The consistent NT pattern is that a single congregation is overseen by a plurality of shepherds, men who meet the specific qualifications as given by Paul and who are charged with fostering the spiritual health of the church. One man was never meant to have the kind of power and influence within a local church as many modern pastors exercise.

2. The Role of the Evangelist

An evangelist performs a separate function than, but not entirely unrelated to, an elder. The books of Timothy and Titus are sometimes misnamed the “pastoral” epistles; they are never identified as pastors but served as evangelists. “*Do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry,*” Paul urges Timothy (2 Tim 4:5). The term “evangelist” is from the Gk. *euangelistes*, “lit., a messenger of good (*eu*, well, *angelos*, a messenger), denotes a preacher of the Gospel, Acts 21:8; Eph. 4:11, which makes clear the distinctiveness of the function in the churches; 2 Tim. 4:5” (Vine, Vol. 2, p. 44).

An evangelist is essentially a teacher, either of the lost in order to bring them to salvation in Christ, or of the saved in order to enhance their understanding of the truth and exhort them to faithful service. Most of the instruction given to Timothy and Titus concerned their teaching efforts among the churches where they lived and worked. An evangelist may make his living from his teaching efforts, being supported by free-will of-

ferings of the brethren (1 Cor 9:3-14; 2 Cor 11:8), or he may support himself through secular endeavors as did Paul on various occasions (cf. Ac 18:3; 20:34-35). There is no such thing as a “calling” or “the ministry,” per se, where a man is somehow mysteriously and divinely drawn to a vocation that he can never leave without failing the Lord, Himself. Granted, careful and conscientious consideration ought to be given by any man before undertaking the work of an evangelist, but this is true whether he determines to make it a full-time vocation or part time pursuit.

Obviously, teaching is fundamental to the role of an elder, but this is not to say that the only teaching to be done in a given congregation must come from the elders. The church at Ephesus had elders, but Timothy is the one addressed by Paul concerning his teaching duties in that congregation (1 & 2 Timothy). Evangelists and elders both have roles to play in the healthy functioning of a congregation. They should work together harmoniously; they should help and counsel each other in the work. But the bottom line is that an evangelist who works within the framework of local church membership is subject to the rule and authority of the elders just like everyone else. Some brethren today believe and teach that an evangelist is sort of a “Christian at large” and subject to no one. What a disastrous mess is often made of men who feel accountable only to themselves and above the rules to which everyone else adheres. No, an evangelist must never compromise his responsibility to teach the truth, even if it means rebuking an elder in need of it (1 Tim 5:19-20). But this is a far cry from the concept of evangelistic oversight advocated by some.

3. Why Aren't There Qualifications Given for Evangelists?

Frankly, I don't have any idea why God did not stipulate at least *some* guidelines for evangelists. Obviously, a single, youthful man may devote himself to teaching. He may lack many qualities and traits that can only come with time, but the true power of his teaching should rest in the content of his preaching as it relates to the truth, not his range of experience. Practically speaking, a man will be given only the credence that he earns by his performance. That is, brethren should only give “the floor” to men they trust and who have demonstrated ability, knowledge and insight that the church would profit from. The older I get, the more amazed I am that anyone paid any attention to me when I started preaching at 21 – or for a number of years thereafter, for that matter. But ideally, preachers will do their work under the guidance and restraints of godly shepherds who will temper their influence.

A real danger comes from evangelists working with congregations without elders. In such a situation, brethren so easily fall into the denominational “pastor” system and force a preacher to serve them as a spiritual shepherd. This “force” may be subtly applied, but it is applied nonetheless, as I can testify from experience. Many young preachers are “burned out” by the pressure of serving, not as a teacher, but as a shoulder for everyone to lean on. People are crying out for leadership, for spiritual strength, for encouragement, and it can be too overwhelming for a twenty-something to supply for a whole church. On the other hand, there are some preachers who feed on such dependence. They cultivate and encourage dependence because it strokes their ego. It was never a part of God's plan to place such unilateral power in the hands of an individual. It is too tempting, too corrupting, too easy to take advantage of.

4. Can Evangelists Also Serve As Elders?

If we rightly understand the roles that each fulfill, the obvious and Scriptural answer is that there is nothing to prevent an evangelist from serving as an elder. It is currently being done in many congregations, and evangelists that we have long respected through the years are currently serving as shepherds where they preach. If some hold that the deaconship is a good training ground for elders, how much better the training ground of an evangelist, when in many cases he has been treated as a de facto elder anyway?! Intensive Bible study, a variety of teaching opportunities, personal counsel, dealing with the bereaved, working closely with elders, dealing with brotherhood issues and problems, interpersonal skills, an inside look at how the gospel operates in the lives of people – all these and more are involved in the work of an evangelist.

The problem that people have with evangelists serving as elders does not rest on Scriptural grounds; it can be traced back to logistical considerations. People are afraid that an evangelist who is an elder can't be fired. They are afraid that the preacher/elder will vote himself a hefty salary. Brethren can always find a negative situation where a preacher serving as an elder did not work out, and they will forever use this as a "reason" as to why it should never be done. But how many elders have abused their position? Do we argue that we should not have elders because some individual took advantage of his position? How many preachers cause strife and discord where they preach? Do we argue that we should not have preachers on this account?

There are objective ways of dealing with the potential conflicts of interest concerning salary and sermon content and when a change of evangelists needs to be made. To make some hard and fast rule on the basis of potential abuse is unwarranted, and we may find ourselves being robbed of mature oversight by self-imposed rules that originate in our own judgment rather than in the Scriptures.

(Disclaimer: This evangelist/author is not campaigning for the eldership. I have enough to do as it is, and my children still need a fully-engaged father. Somebody needs to address these issues, and it falls my lot to do so.)

Questions:

1. Discuss the advantages in having a plurality of elders. Are there any potential disadvantages in this requirement?
2. What is a "poimen" in Greek?
3. How should a man who works "full-time" as an evangelist be treated differently than anyone else in the congregation? Should he dress differently? Should he live on a lower economic level than others in the congregation? Should he make more than average because of the vital role he plays in the local church?
4. Is there a Scriptural prohibition against an evangelist also serving as an elder?

Leadership in the Local Church

The Problem of Communication – Lesson 15

1. Communication Breakdowns

Communication is essentially the transmission of ideas and thoughts between people. “Lack of communication,” or at least lack of *meaningful* communication, is a common complaint in marriages, the workplace and in the church. People become frustrated when they feel they are being left in the dark, their concerns aren’t being considered or their suggestions for improvement fall on deaf ears. In a vacuum of information, people will search for an understanding of what is happening around them. Unfortunately, they will often turn to the wrong or uninformed sources and rumor, assumption and speculation take the place of accurate information. An eldership that does not encourage a free flow exchange of information is creating an unstable atmosphere.

2. Communication from the Members to the Elders

The ultimate example of communication by members to the leadership is the neglect of widows in Acts 6. Apparently, favoritism (a common problem addressed throughout the NT) had crept into the Jerusalem church as the pure Hebrew widows were receiving preferential treatment over the Hellenist widows. (The Hellenists would have been seen as compromisers by the Hebrews, untrue to the ancient traditions and too familiar with the Greek culture around them.) In some manner, the complaint was voiced and the apostles took it seriously.

Without reading too much into the situation, it appears that certain members of Chloe’s household may not have received a satisfactory response to their complaints about – guess what? – favoritism. This time it is a competitive exaltation of one Christian servant over another (1 Cor 1:12-13). They take their complaint directly to Paul, and he responds to the situation at Corinth as outlined by Chloe’s family (1 Cor 1:11).

Elders cannot effectively lead without knowing what is happening in the lives of the members. They need to be attuned to the pressures, frustrations and hurdles that the members are facing. Members need to know that the elders truly care about them and that they are not merely dictating from behind closed doors. Further, elders are not all-wise and omniscient. They have blind spots and limited knowledge in certain areas. They are not above needing counsel, advice and input from the congregation. An eldership that does not acknowledge this, thinking that the reason they are elders in the first place is that they know it all, is sorely misguided. Further, there are some issues on which women have a better handle than any man in the congregation, and elders unwilling to admit this are foolishly rejecting vital counsel.

A good elder is one who gathers information from sources smarter and wiser than he. He then processes the information and makes the most balanced and accurate decision that can be made by the authority God has given him. This is not an affront to his authority; rather, it is the proper use of it. By comparison, no man would rightly argue that God made him head of the house because he doesn’t need any help running the family.

Any husband/father who makes decisions like some elderships would drive his family to despair in short order.

Elders need to *listen* to *certain* brethren. Sad to say, some brethren should not be taken very seriously in their chronic complaint and fault-finding. But elders who are attuned will learn who to trust, who has sound judgment, who thinks circumspectly and soberly. He will give ear to their thoughts and views. Further, the weak and discouraged need to feel comfortable in approaching the elders as fatherly advisors. To be received gently, to be taken seriously, to be advised wisely is a great blessing to any Christian in need. Now, if they would only *listen* to the elders' advice ...

3. Communication from the Elders to the Members

Truly, it is by the resources the members provide that the elders are able to support preachers, buy literature, improve the physical facilities and accomplish other financial objectives. Too, they rule because of the congregation's vote of confidence in them. While there are many private and sensitive issues that do not belong in the public arena, the elders still have an obligation to inform the congregation on plans, dangers and opportunities that lie ahead. Elders must make decisions according to Scriptural principle and wisdom and not public opinion polls. Still, it is highly unwise to foist something controversial or challenging upon the congregation without educating them beforehand. To fail to do so is to invite a lack of support and enthusiasm.

While some brethren may look upon the contribution as "the Lord's money," (a misnomer, in my opinion), it is still the elders who are going to spend it for the Lord. This means that people will naturally want to know where it is being spent and why. This is not an unnatural or unfair request, for the conscience becomes engaged in matters which we advocate and support by our financial contributions. Regular financial reports, clear communication of future intent (building projects, etc.), warnings of impending financial difficulties, etc. should be communicated to the people who will be affected by such issues.

Communication is also important as the elders seek to create a certain spiritual climate within the congregation. While the evangelist has a role in teaching and exhorting, it falls to the elders to *lead the flock*. If they detect apathy in the church, if they see that gossip or materialism or immoral behavior is a growing problem, if they determine that the congregation is not developing teachers or prospective deacons and elders, then they must take corrective action. Perhaps they can request certain sermon topics from the evangelist, preach lessons themselves, hold private studies, make exhortational appeals, implement certain activities that will have a corrective effect upon the congregation (institute work groups, initiate home studies, invite visiting preachers to deal with certain subjects, etc.). For too long, too many elderships have shut themselves up behind closed doors and either ignored what was going on around them or tried to dictate an outcome instead of *leading* the flock in the right path. This takes great skill and requires insight as to how to motivate people.

Elders who have the respect and confidence of the congregation, who have demonstrated wisdom and good judgment in their lives, who have displayed godliness and maturity

in their own lives will inspire sincere people to follow. A brother or sister who recognizes the importance of spiritual oversight, who is striving for heaven, who knows there are pitfalls all around, who is encouraged by good men and women who have built godly lives and reputations, will welcome the stabilizing, protective and uplifting atmosphere created by a sound eldership. It is not uncommon for brethren to drive past one congregation in order to worship with another that has elders. People are crying out for leadership; godly people *want* to be led by spiritual men. Effective communication will foster such a sheep/shepherd relationship and enhance the lives of both the flock and elders.

Questions:

1. Discuss how the mass media has affected people's need to be informed.

2. How might the elders do damage by revealing *too much* information?

3. Discuss various methods of communication that would be helpful between elders and the congregation.

4. In what ways did Jesus' communication with the apostles fall on deaf ears?

5. How can a congregation err in demanding too much information from the elders?

6. What must elders guard against in hearing the complaints and criticisms of the congregation?

7. In what circumstances might women be able to advise elders more effectively than men?

Leadership in the Local Church

The Process of Selecting Elders – Lesson 16

1. A Crucial Moment in the Life of a Congregation

One of the main issues that frames presidential campaigns is the appointment of supreme court justices. Because of the power of the high court to affect law and policy for years to come, appointments are a highly publicized and scrutinized process. Men are examined in a sometimes hostile environment in order to ascertain their philosophy of law and how they will vote on certain key issues.

The selecting of elders should not be the media spectacle that accompanies supreme court nominees, but we should realize the gravity of the proceedings. Churches that undertake the appointment of elders are engaging in a process that will likely affect the congregation positively or negatively for years to come. How this process is accomplished should be considered with utmost gravity.

2. No Specified Method of Selection

Some find it disturbing that the Scriptures do not stipulate a particular method of selecting elders. Some object to the appointment of elders for this reason. However, many things in the administration of the new covenant are left to the discretion of the local church. Absolutely no criteria at all (other than being faithful) are given for the selection of evangelists, but this doesn't stop churches from crafting a process for "trying out" a prospective preacher (which is often woefully inadequate). Churches must discuss and agree upon a selection process that somehow fairly determines who the congregation recognizes as capable and qualified to serve as an elder.

3. A Refresher Course in Qualifications

Usually, it is wise to begin with lessons on qualifications and what each entails. It is good to be reminded of God's standards for the nature of the work as well as the indicators of a man's ability to be a shepherd. These study sessions, however, should be just that – **study sessions** – and not merely exercises in reaffirming what one already believes about elders. It must honestly be admitted that people have changed their convictions through the years on various issues that have historically been sources of conflict. Before one indignantly declares that there is no way he will ever agree to an opposing position, he needs to give careful, prayerful thought to his own position and ask if it is based on Scripture or personal bias. Truth can stand up to scrutiny, and if one's position is true, he should be willing to have it fairly examined.

A congregation must try and establish a consensus on what qualifications are acceptable and what are not Biblically based. It has been too easy in the past for a self-willed minority of brethren to dictate the leadership of a congregation under the banner of their conscience. Never mind that the majority of the congregation and perhaps the current eldership have determined that the man *is* qualified based upon their understanding of the Scriptures. If there are alternatives that would provide more peaceful and harmoni-

ous solutions, by all means they should pursue them so as not to cause undue stress to another's conscience. *But in the case of leadership decisions, an **erroneous conclusion** should not become the determining factor of who will shepherd the church.* The leadership of the local church is too important to be decided by the "lowest common denominator." Rather than jeopardize the future welfare of the church, the church should act upon the basis of what is **right** and continue to try and teach those in error.

How practical is it for a congregation to function only when no scruples of the weakest brother are violated? How is it possible to get 200+ people to agree on every nuance of eldership qualifications? Should the congregation be ruled by a brother's conscience that is misinformed about Scriptural principle – even though he thinks he is right? Not only this, but once elders are appointed, can one submit to their leadership when he disagrees with their judgment without violating his conscience? Or will he pick and choose which decisions he will abide by and which he will ignore?

If a brother or a small minority of brethren find themselves in disagreement with the prevailing convictions of the congregation, they must ask themselves some soul-searching questions. Is it possible that I have drawn the wrong conclusion? Why do so many others see this issue differently than I do? (We grant that truth is not decided on majority rule, and it is not unusual for the majority to be wrong.) Do I have the right to demand that the entire congregation bend to my scruples? Am I certain that the brother under consideration is not qualified, or is it possible that my objection is preventing a capable leader from assuming his rightful position over the congregation? Is my conviction in this matter worth creating congregational strife? Can I voice my view, let my objection be made known, and continue to worship where the majority has recognized a man to be qualified when I think he is not? Will this absolutely violate my conscience so that I cannot continue to serve the Lord acceptably in this congregation? Are there other alternatives where I would be more comfortable because more brethren see this qualification the way I do?

The determination of competent leadership is based on group consensus. While an individual may have some reservation about a man's qualification, if the group considers his reservation to be invalid, then the appointee legitimately becomes an elder because the group so recognizes him. At this point the dissenting individual must determine whether his reservation is of such nature as to violate his conscience or whether he can defer to the judgment of the group.

4. When Should a Selection Process Be Undertaken?

The *evaluation* of potential leaders should be an ongoing process. The members of a congregation should be observing those who are maturing and showing signs of developing leadership interest and skill. They should encourage those who are potential leaders to set their sights on becoming deacons and elders and let them know of their confident expectations. When the actual selection process takes place is a matter of judgment, but if a thorough search is conducted and certain men are held to be unqualified, it is not likely that they will become qualified in a matter of a few months. On the other hand, if some sort of semi-regular process is not undertaken, it is easy for a congregation to "settle" for its present leadership and only consider additional ones if a cri-

sis arises. If a man is qualified to serve as an elder or deacon, it is not right that he not serve in that role simply because the congregation has no impetus to identify and appoint him. Perhaps a general guideline to the frequency of the selection process is sometime between a year and only when forced by an emergency.

5. The Method of Selection

As stated earlier, there is no stipulated process to follow. Somehow, men need to be identified as having a substantial level of support from the congregation. This is often done by asking members to list those whom they think are qualified. Some figure is determined that indicates substantial support, say 40%, 50% or maybe 60% of ballots returned. The number of men that meet that preliminary figure are then placed before the congregation for further scrutiny and evaluation. Often the congregation will be given a window of time to individually meet with men whom they consider to be of questionable qualification. If an impasse occurs, more time may need to be allotted for disagreeing brethren to meet with the current elders or mature brethren to try and resolve the issue. If the issue involves sinful behavior, and this is unquestionably established, then the prospective elder should deal with this in the manner prescribed by the Scriptures. If the charges are matters of judgment, then the disagreeing brother should defer to the will of the group. If he cannot do this, then he has no further foundation to create strife and disharmony over his objection. After the allotted time has passed with no substantial charges being filed, the individual(s) are appointed by the consensus agreement of the congregation.

Selecting men to serve as elders or deacons is a sensitive process that can inflame emotions and hurt feelings. For a man and his family to be put under public scrutiny and then rejected can be traumatic. However, any brother who raises a stink over not being appointed usually vindicates the judgment of the group not to consider him.

Questions:

1. What did Jesus do before selecting apostles? Does this set a precedence for us?
2. Should a congregation consider anonymous objections to a prospective elder?
3. What percentage of support do you think a brother needs to be further considered as a candidate for the eldership?
4. If a Christian submits to an eldership that contains a man whom he may think is of questionable qualification, does this necessarily constitute violating his conscience or participating in sin? Discuss.

Leadership in the Local Church

Eldership and Congregational Autonomy – Lesson 17

1. Over Whom or What Do Elders Rule?

To the elders of the Ephesian church, Paul said, *“Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God ...”* (Ac 20:28). Don’t miss the point: Paul *“sent to Ephesus and called for the elders of the church ...”* (Ac 20:17). Which church? The universal church? The “church” in the province of Asia? Was Ephesus the “mother church” of the province? Comparing this reference with Acts 14:23 – *“So when they had appointed elders in every church ...”* – it is apparent that each church is to have its own shepherds. When John later writes to the “seven churches of Asia,” Ephesus being one of those churches, it is evident that Ephesus holds no special status or authority relative to the others.

Further, Peter exhorts elders to *“shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers ...”* (1 Pet 5:2). Elders can only oversee people with whom they are intimately familiar, with whom they commonly associate. Acts 14:23 defines this scope as the local church, like the one Paul addressed thusly: *“To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons”* (Ph 1:1). Those who serve as elders must have the trust and confidence of the congregation. The flock must know them well enough to accurately apply the standards of 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. The elders must then concentrate their efforts on the spiritual well-being of people with whom they associate with regularity.

There is no indication in the NT of an organizational structure which goes beyond the local church. Elders are not regional managers; they are not to oversee a diocese of churches. Each flock, each local church, is to look amongst itself and see if any of its members meet the qualification of leadership. If so, they appoint them over themselves, not over any other group of saints. No other church can willingly or forcibly submit themselves to elders elsewhere, for such violates the bounds of rule placed upon elders.

2. Overstepping the Bounds of Rule

It should not be lost upon us that so many major apostasies have originated throughout history from corrupt ideas of leadership. From the Catholic hierarchy to the Protestant pastor system to the missionary society to the sponsoring church to the Boston movement, men have floundered repeatedly on the basic issue of organizational integrity.

In the 1950s-1960s, brethren with grandiose plans to convert a war-ravaged planet talked themselves into believing that the local church was insufficient to preach on a global scale. So local elderships began to “oversee” gospel preaching over entire countries, and they accepted funds from numerous congregations to sustain such efforts. All the while, they told themselves they were simply doing the work of the “local church,” and they told supporting churches that each was doing its own work, merely through the instrumentality of the sponsoring church. Autonomy was not violated, they said.

But since such a large expenditure of money was involved, and the “local” elderships were overseeing dozens of preachers – selecting, training and assigning them – it was easy to fall into the trap of thinking that they were also overseeing the *congregations* where “their” preachers were working. Dissenting brethren rightly pointed out that such an arrangement was essentially a repetition of Campbell’s American Christian Missionary Society disguised in the garb of the local church. The erroneous concept held by many such elderships was that they controlled all the major decisions of the local works where they supported evangelists until those congregations appointed their own elders.

In relation to evangelism, it is important to understand that a church supports *an evangelist*, not a *church*. While it is not wrong for a congregation to have concern for the lost in a particular area, perhaps in close proximity to its own location or a particular foreign country, it must not lose sight of the fact that it merely provides funds for a preacher to do his teaching in an area or church that cannot alone support him. There is Biblical precedent for this in the example of Paul (Ph 4:10-18; 2 Cor 11:7-9), but there is no precedent or precept that suggests *control* or *influence* of one congregation upon another. It can be a strong temptation for a church to interfere when it disagrees with congregational decisions made where they support an evangelist. If a church that is not “self-supporting” (i.e., cannot pay its own preacher adequately) spends money in a particular endeavor (say, sending benevolent aid to another church), the church(es) supporting its preacher may withdraw support. This is dangerously close to violating the autonomy of other churches and concerning oneself with matters that must rightfully be deliberated and decided by others.

3. When Is Autonomy Not Violated?

Autonomy is not violated when legitimate humanitarian aid is given. The NT gives examples of churches sending financial aid to other churches to provide for the necessities of life (Rom 15:25-28; 2 Cor 8:1-4, 13-15, 18-21; 9:1-2). There is no dictation of decisions, no overseeing of work, no elders meddling in the affairs of others – just aid given with no strings attached. Unscrupulous men, however, have turned this example of Christian love and support into a pretext for funding their schemes. I have heard some actually argue that the sponsoring church is “needy” and is therefore justified in soliciting and accepting funds to support their schools, orphan homes, etc. This is a travesty and a wresting of the Scriptures to one’s own destruction.

Autonomy is not violated when elders investigate the spiritual standing of a prospective member. This becomes an issue in an area with a multiplicity of churches. Brethren occasionally avoid discipline by simply associating with another local church. Spiritual fellowship can only be granted where there is a reasonable assumption that another human being is legitimately in fellowship with God. This does not make us “private investigators,” but it does place upon us the obligation to know whom we count as a brother, invite to participate in worship, give opportunity to teach, and perhaps eventually ask to lead. When Apollos left Ephesus for Corinth, “*the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him*” (Ac 18:27). However ascertained, local churches must determine who is fit for fellowship. This is not optional; it is a fundamental part of being a spiritual body of people who are related to the Lord. It does not violate autonomy to gather information or receive recommendations on brethren desiring fellowship.

Autonomy is not violated by communication among churches. If area churches wish to schedule gospel meetings so they do not conflict, if they seek jointly to arrange a debate, or if they gather for mass worship (singings, gospel meetings, lectureships, etc.), they have not violated the principle of autonomy. On the other hand, if they pool funds to buy air time, rent convention booths, sponsor debates, etc., then a structure larger than a local church is created and decisions will be made concerning the resources of other congregations. History has proven that this inevitably leads to greater corruption.

Autonomy is not violated when churches act concurrently through an agent. When Paul took the funds from Macedonia, Achaia and Galatia to Jerusalem, many churches were acting in concert through Paul and the other men selected to accompany him (2 Cor 8:19-22). Each church was doing its own work, and there was no mingling of resources wherein some were making decisions over the affairs of others. When the funds arrived and were given over to the elders, by the principle of "gift" the funds then belonged to the Jerusalem church. They were distributed on this account, and thus there was no violation of decision making power against the contributing churches.

(An interesting illustration arises here. When donors gave to the Red Cross for the express purpose of aiding New York City in the aftermath of 9/11, they were justifiably indignant when they later learned that the Red Cross spent the funds elsewhere. So long as the purpose for giving was achieved, i.e., people stricken by the disaster were helped, contributors did not care who the specific recipients were. But when the Red Cross funneled the money into other projects, the contributors felt their "autonomy had been violated." Their right to control their own funds was removed by the Red Cross, which had become something more than a distributing agency.)

Autonomy is not violated when elders consult each other for advice. While this is a valid principle, it can easily be abused. An area church can become a dominating force when others continually bow to its judgments. Subtle violations of autonomy occur when churches are afraid to make their own expedient judgments for fear of "what the elders at the So-and-So church might think." Intimidating pressure can be exerted by phone calls, whispering and indirect passing of information. I fear that many churches are inclined to make policies in order to protect their reputation when perhaps a different decision might have been more practical and beneficial. There doesn't have to be an exchange of money for autonomy to be violated.

Questions:

1. Write your own concise definition of the word "autonomy."
2. Why do you think apostasy so often starts with organizational corruption?
3. T/F Communication between churches is a violation of local autonomy.
4. Why should elders be cautious when approaching elders from another congregation for advice?

Leadership in the Local Church

Women and Leadership – Lesson 18

1. The Modern Trend

We are witness to what has been called the “liberation” of the modern woman. By liberation is meant freedom from a domestic role, greater economic independence (and thus less dependence upon males), increased availability of education, more access to leadership positions in society. While no godly man would advocate oppression or mistreatment of women, it is a fair question to ask if such liberation has ultimately been to the woman’s emotional and spiritual benefit.

Nonetheless, in our “enlightened” atmosphere that celebrates the equality of woman and her boundless abilities, it is not politically correct to maintain the Biblical and traditional role in which God has placed the woman. Any suggestion that females should be “*discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands*” (Tit 2:5) is cause for scoffing and ridicule, sometimes from other Christians. Thus, those who have not held so firmly to the authority of the Scriptures have found themselves powerless to stem the tide of women clamoring for leadership roles in mainline denominations.

Women constitute a majority of students in many theology schools around the country. Women “pastors” and other religious administrative officials are increasingly the norm. Women preachers, singers, and other worship leaders are becoming commonplace. The justification for such usually runs along the lines of commensurate talents and abilities to those of men. And, frankly, it must be admitted that many women are much more spiritually inclined and attuned than men, sometimes more energetic and motivated than men. But does pragmatism trump Biblical authority? Are we to discard what God says in favor of what works better, in our estimation?

2. Male Leadership Through the Ages

Male leadership is not a product of Pauline chauvinism. The role of women in the new covenant of Jesus Christ is not significantly different than previous history or covenants *because the relationship of men and women was established at the creation*. Thus, there is a consistency throughout the Scriptures concerning male leadership and female submission.

Note the points established by Paul in 1 Cor 11:3, 7-9: 1) The head of woman is man; 2) Woman is *from* man (not vice-versa); 3) Woman was created *for* man (not vice-versa). The head covering as practiced in that locality was consistent with God’s established order; therefore, Paul instructed the women to wear it. They were not to discard it because their gifts of praying and prophesying were equal with their male counterparts.

Paul makes essentially the same point in 1 Tim 2:12-13, but his application there is to forbid women to take an authoritative role of teaching over a man: “*For Adam was formed first, then Eve*” (2:13). Those who cast off such restraints are unwittingly running afoul of the natural order. This cannot be done without negative consequences.

Note the patriarchal patterns of male dominance:

1. *Genealogies*: God traced the tree of human development through sons (Gn 5). We know Cain's name, but what was his sister/wife's? The only female names in Genesis from Eve to Sarah (Sarai, Gn 11:29) are the wives of Lamech (Gn 4:19).

2. *Noah*: Noah was the spiritual leader of his family (as were all the "patriarchs," male heads of households through whom God dealt with mankind) and offered sacrifice for all (Gn 6:8-9; 8:20; cf. Job 1:5). The genealogies of Noah after the flood are likewise reckoned through males (Gn 10-11).

3. *Abraham*: Though married to a godly woman who fulfilled her station as a submissive wife (1 Pet 3:5-6), Abraham is designated by God as the "father" of the nation through whom redemption would come. The sign of the covenant was distinctively male: circumcision.

4. *Isaac and Jacob*: The birthrights and blessings in Israel were transferred to the first-born *son*. Further, God built the nation of Israel upon the pillars of Jacob's sons; Dinah was excluded. Character is not the issue, for Dinah may have been a better choice morally than either Simeon or Levi. What is affirmed is God's sovereign right to stipulate male leadership.

Mosaic patterns of male leadership:

1. *Moses*: God appoints a male as leader of Israel and mediator of the Law. His brother, Aaron, assists him as spokesman and first high priest. When Moses needed judicial help in governing the people, God provided for 70 male elders to assist him (Ex 18; Num 11:16-17). What about their sister, Miriam? She is the first mentioned prophetess but leads other *women* in worship (Ex 15:20-21). She is severely rebuked by God when she challenges Moses' leadership (Num 12).

2. *Priesthood/Levites*: Only males are designated for spiritual service.

3. *Kings*: God anointed only males as kings over Israel. Athaliah was a usurper who murdered her own grandsons to gain the throne.

4. *Leadership prophets*: While there were female prophetesses, those whom God sent to lead the nation out of sin were males. Likewise, the literary prophets were men.

New Covenant Patterns:

If God was to revolutionize the role of women, free them from the incompetent and hypocritical leadership of the Pharisees and Sadducees, surely the time to do so would be when Jesus comes to establish the final covenant with man. Yet, surprisingly to some, this does not happen. In fact, the patterns of male dominance that have held sway for so long are not repealed by Jesus but rather reinforced. While Jesus restores respect for women and acknowledges them as the spiritual equals of men, He does not reorder the scheme of female submission and male leadership.

1. *John*: The forerunner of Jesus, the prophet whose coming to the world was foretold by prophecy, was male. John fulfilled his mission of bringing the nation to repentance and preparing them for the coming Messiah.
2. *Jesus*: God had a gender choice when setting forth a Savior. He created a son, a king and a priest.
3. *Apostles*: Again, God had a choice of who would serve in such prominent leadership roles. He did not create a 10/2, 8/4, 6/6 mix of male and female; rather, all the apostles were male.
4. *Jerusalem servants*: When a distinctly “women’s issue” arose, it presented a perfect opportunity to appoint women to a prominent and useful leadership role. Strangely, at least from an “enlightened” point of view, all males were chosen. Furthermore, this did not lead to a revolt or outcry among the women, for “*the saying pleased the whole multitude*” (Ac 6:5).
5. *Other special appointments*: Evangelists, bearers of funds, deacons, inspired authors, even angels (both Old Testament and New) are male figures.

The Scriptures do not advance the idea that women are inferior, but it does rather consistently state that God has stipulated men for leadership roles. “*Neither male nor female*” (Gal 3:28) does not address authority and leadership but spiritual value and equal access to salvation. To press for female elders and other dominant roles for women under a banner of “liberation” is to fly in the face of God’s sovereign historical choices.

3. Throwing the Baby Out with the Bathwater

None of this, of course, justifies artificially hindering or excluding women from legitimate service roles out of fear that such use will raise a spirit of rebellion within them. Becoming such a stumbling block to women is an evil all its own. The proper course is to continually educate Christians about their roles and responsibilities, and utilize male and female, young and old, babe and mature to the fullness of their capabilities.

Questions:

1. Why do you think so many women have become dissatisfied with a domestic role?
2. How would you respond to those who point to Deborah as an example of female leadership (Jud 4)?
3. T/F It is wrong for a woman to be a job supervisor over a man. Explain your answer.
4. If God gave a woman the ability and demeanor to handle a leadership role in spiritual things, then shouldn’t she be allowed to use these skills for the Lord?

Leadership in the Local Church

Dealing with Sin in the Church – Lesson 19

1. The Problem of Transgression

Since congregations are comprised of people, and people are riddled with weaknesses and flaws, violations of God's laws will inevitably arise and potentially create havoc within the local body. While it is true that all sins are equal in the sense of incurring guilt, it is not true that all sins equally affect the community. They do not. Some are subtle; the apathy and general unfaithfulness of some fringe members can infect the group and gradually drain the life and vibrancy from a congregation. Other sins are scandalous; they shock our sensibilities, discourage our hearts and poison our influence in the community. If left unaddressed, sins of various kinds will not only consume the sinner but greatly damage the whole church. *"Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?"* (1 Cor 5:6).

2. The Congregation Without Elders

Often, the "business meeting" arrangement of handling congregational affairs centers upon the physical necessities. Frequently overlooked are those individual situations where weak Christians are showing signs of spiritual danger and drifting. These are difficult to discuss in a business meeting setting for different reasons. First, with such a broad representation in the business meeting, the weak person is often a relative of someone present. It can be awkward and embarrassing to address highly personal spiritual needs in front of a family member. Secondly, the business meeting contains brethren from across the spiritual spectrum. It can be exasperating to handle menial affairs against everyone's "two cents worth," much less a delicate spiritual matter.

Additionally, in a situation where there is no official oversight, what is "everybody's job" often becomes "nobody's job." There is great risk in approaching someone about a perceived spiritual weakness that has manifested itself. The one who approaches becomes vulnerable to charges of meddling in another's affairs or trying to run the congregation. To state one's concern may put a friendship on the line or create a cold distance that may never be bridged. Granted, these things should not stop us from pursuing the spiritual welfare of our brother, but the bottom line is that the weak are often neglected until they are not recoverable.

It is admirable to see a local church without elders engaging in congregational discipline. Such often hinges upon two or three strong brethren who, though perhaps not fully qualified as elders, are willing to step forward and urge others to faithfulness.

3. The Congregation With Elders

Having the right kind of elders creates an atmosphere of accountability, discipline and attention within the congregation. Many resent this because they know they are not living a godly life and they are afraid they will eventually be discovered or confronted. Men who are truly overseeing the flock are attuned to the members' lives; they can see

weaknesses long before the unsuspecting are aware of them. The elders are not the only ones in the congregation who are obligated to confront sin. If a particular situation can be rectified by spiritual brethren acting to affect the repentance of the offender, then the goal of restoration has been met: *“Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness ...”* (Gal 6:1). If someone is personally sinned against and the matter is unknown to others, the offended party is to make a direct appeal to the offender (Mt 18:15).

If the sinful brother cannot be persuaded, the elders will eventually become involved as the congregation must move to *“put away ... that wicked person”* (1 Cor 5:13). Even then, appeals may be made by the elders to anyone who may have influence with the trespasser to make an effort to save him. We must not assume that just because certain men are designated shepherds that they have the necessary rapport in any circumstance to bring about change. They may take the lead, create impetus and direct the efforts undertaken, but this does not mean that *they alone* must do the job at hand. Elders and evangelists were gifts of the Lord to the church *“for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry ...”* (Eph 4:12). In some circumstances, some of the saints may be more effective than the elders to foster a certain outcome. The specific circumstance often dictates the wisest and most beneficial way to handle it.

When a decision is made by the elders, then it is to be respected by the members. The responsibility for having done the right thing rests upon the shoulders of the shepherds, and they will give account to the Lord for what they decide (Heb 13:17). The members will not be held responsible when they were unaware of all the facts, were not part of the deliberations and were not agreeable to an unjust outcome. While elders need to communicate reasonably with the congregation, especially in matters that potentially affect the entire church, the members must trust the judgment of the elders. That is precisely the reason for which they have been appointed.

It is my personal judgment that churches do not largely suffer from too much oversight or overzealous elders. The opposite is true, and a greater worry: too many congregations are lax and lazy and lethargic. This is due to lack of accountability, either because elders are nonexistent or they merely occupy a figurehead role. God be thanked for faithful and courageous men who hold us accountable for our transgressions.

Questions:

1. Why might some fail to confront sin in the congregation (2 Th 3:13)?
2. What was Peter’s attitude toward Paul after Paul’s public rebuke of him (2 Pet 3:15)?
3. Explain the nature of congregational discipline according to 1 Cor 5:5 and 2 Th 3:15.
4. How do impenitent people often react to the efforts of others to correct them?
5. What is the motivation for turning a sinner from his error (Jas 5:19-20)?

Leadership in the Local Church

Some Challenging Questions (1) – Lesson 20

1. Some Thoughts on Controversy

Our generation is not the first to have thought of potential problems and questions relative to elders. Different views on qualifications, the nature of elders' authority, "decommissioning" an elder, etc. have troubled brethren since early days. As with any other issue, we must strive to stay close to the text and draw reasonable conclusions and *necessary* inferences when called upon. Not every nuance is spelled out; we must use judgment tempered with love, patience, submissiveness and a desire for the overall good to be done in order to work through various issues.

Each congregation must work to arrive at conclusions that it feels are consistent with Scripture. This does not mean that everyone will automatically agree. But as studied in an earlier lesson, a local congregation cannot be ruled by the least informed conscience or the brethren with the weakest knowledge. By all means, study all the issues, openly discuss the evidence for various positions and examine the pros and cons of proposed conclusions. *Then settle on what is Scripturally sound and make decisions on that basis*, always being willing to rethink issues that are difficult or involve human judgment.

In the following material, I have suggested views that I think are consistent with Bible principles. But I encourage all to think circumspectly about these questions and draw the conclusions that they feel are Scripturally supportable.

2. Can a single elder ever serve alone?

If three men meet the qualifications and are duly appointed, and two of them are killed in a car wreck, does this automatically mean the third man is incapable of serving as an elder? Has he suddenly lost his ability to serve because the other two are gone? The Scriptures are consistent when referring to elders: there is always a plurality in each local church (cf. Ac 11:30; 14:23; 15:4; 20:17; 21:18; Ph 1:1; 1 Th 5:12-13; Tit 1:5; Heb 13:7, 17). **Never** is a reference made to a single individual exercising oversight over a congregation. Practically speaking, human nature demonstrates time and time again why this is so. The job is too taxing and tempting for the health of one man. The conscientious man will be overwhelmed by stress; the unscrupulous man will be corrupted by the power and attention. This is an area where we are tested in the absence of a direct, positive reference. Will we make an argument from the silence of the Scripture, or will we be satisfied with the conclusion that the divine will, so clearly and consistently in favor of a plurality, mandates a plurality? The single elder is *immediately disqualified* by the deaths of the others, not because he is no longer capable of leading, but because the whole structure of his role – one among several – has been compromised.

3. When Does Absenteeism Disqualify an Elder?

Modern business schedules and winter/summer homes have posed the problem of absenteeism. Let me first say that settling this issue is going to involve judgment; I don't

believe there is any hard and fast rule on how many weeks per year an elder has to be present to be able to “shepherd the flock.” We do have to start with the principle that the shepherd must know the sheep; he must be intimately acquainted with their personal lives, problems, weaknesses, etc. Further, elders must be available to study with members, meet certain crises which arise unexpectedly, etc. They must be *present*. They cannot merely “phone in” their duties.

Now, how much absenteeism is excessive? How many weeks of travel shall we designate? What if the absenteeism is sporadic? What if the absenteeism is *voluntary*, i.e., a retiree chooses to spend three or six months out of the year living elsewhere? I believe there is a point at which being absent severely hinders a man’s ability to oversee the flock, and my own opinion is that a man is compromised quickly by his absences. But I know good men who are gone from their home congregations fairly frequently and it does not seem to cause adverse effects. Perhaps the composition of the congregation, the eldership, the man’s ability to remain in contact, his degree of influence must all be taken into account on an individual basis. I cannot criticize a congregation who accepts the oversight of a man simply because I, from an outside point of view, may be of the opinion that he is gone too much. On the other hand, if a congregation determines that a given man has been rendered ineffective by his absences, I respect their decision to ask him to resign on that basis. *It is a congregational decision.*

4. Must One Serve As a Deacon Before Becoming an Elder?

The most obvious point on this subject is that the Scriptures make no correlation between serving as a deacon and serving as an elder. Nowhere in the specified qualifications is the suggestion that a man should serve as a deacon first. A man may grow to spiritual maturity in a congregation where no one else is qualified to serve as an elder; thus, the man never has an opportunity to serve as a deacon. If another man moves in who also meets the qualification of an elder, or the first man moves to a congregation where elders are present, is he thus barred from being appointed because he never had opportunity to serve as a deacon? If so, we have made a qualification, and thus a law, where one doesn’t exist. No one would argue that serving as a deacon would not enhance one’s spiritual growth and development, for any obligation taken on for the Lord’s sake will teach one about sacrifice, responsibility, reward and other aspects of spiritual stewardship. But the *Scriptural* training ground of the eldership is **ruling** in the *home*, not **servicing** as a deacon (1 Tim 3:4-5).

5. Must All an Elder’s Children Be Christians?

The only phrase relative to this qualification is in Tit 1:6: “*having faithful children not accused of dissipation or insubordination.*” It must be admitted that the text does not include the word “all” or “every” or any such word indicating totality. Further, it seems that the qualification has less to do with the question of baptism and more to do with the *character* of a man’s children. The issue is not have all of a man’s children been baptized, but does the man demonstrate spiritual leadership, nurture and influence so that his children honor the Lord and live submissively to God and their earthly father? If an otherwise qualified man has three children, ages 19, 14 and 8, and the oldest two have obeyed the gospel and live exemplary lives, *he has faithful children not accused of dis-*

sipation or insubordination. All evidence shows that the man can lead his family, and thus he demonstrates that he can lead the church.

Another scenario that would not automatically disqualify a man is if he has raised faithful children but then enjoys a late-life surprise child (or perhaps adopts). The man (and his wife, of course) have raised faithful children who are now on their own. Does the man suddenly become disqualified because they decide to adopt an unfortunate infant in their later years? Has he not already demonstrated spiritual leadership capability? This is not some “check-list” item (all children baptized, *check!*) but rather a measure of a man’s ability to guide a disciplined home (“*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).

We must be careful not to read things into qualifications that are not intended. For example, does the requirement to have children mean that they must be his biological offspring? Is it the ability to *procreate* or to *lead* that is under consideration? On the other end of the spectrum, suppose a man is raising his orphaned niece and nephew in addition to his own children. The niece and nephew are wild, unruly, community nuisances, disruptors of Bible classes, etc., while his own children are model Christians. Can the man argue that he is qualified to be an elder because the niece and nephew “aren’t my children anyway?” No, for the issue is *rule* and *leadership*, and simply because they are not his biological children does not free him from his responsibility to “*rule his own house.*” While under his care, they are of “his own house,” and they can do just as much damage in the church and the community as any biological children he may have who are similarly unruly.

Questions:

1. How should we decide issues of elders’ qualifications?
 - a. Go by what John T. Lewis said.
 - b. Go by what we’ve always believed.
 - c. Go by what other congregations do.
 - d. Go by what H.E. Phillips wrote in his book *Scriptural Elders and Deacons*?
 - e. None of the above.
2. If you answered “e” to the question above, then how *should* we decide such issues?
3. How does the principle of congregational autonomy apply to selecting elders?
4. Why can’t a single elder continue to serve temporarily until another man is appointed?
5. Will all elders possess the listed qualifications equally? Does this mean that some will be better elders than others? If yes, should there be a “chief elder” appointed?

- 6.** T/F Philip, one of the first “deacons” in the church, went on to become an elder in the church at Caesarea.
- 7.** In what way(s) would serving as a deacon not particularly prepare a man for the rigors of the eldership?
- 8.** Is a man qualified to be an elder whose children are baptized but notorious in the community as troublemakers? What is the deeper issue here?
- 9.** Is a man qualified to be an elder whose children are baptized but consistently speak derisively and disrespectfully to him?
- 10.** On what basis should an elder’s absenteeism be evaluated in order to determine whether he should serve?

Leadership in the Local Church

Some Challenging Questions (2) – Lesson 21

1. Is a Man Automatically Disqualified As an Elder by Adult Unfaithful Children?

Two companion verses on this subject taken together state: *“having faithful children not accused of dissipation or insubordination ... 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?)”* (Tit 1:6; 1 Tim 3:4-5). I would understand these observations to refer to the behavior of children while they are yet under his parental authority. In other words, the conduct of the children is *directly tied to the ability of the father to rule, or the lack thereof*. Twice here Paul uses the phrase “his own house.” But how did this man come to have “his own” house? By virtue of leaving his parents’ house and establishing his own. That is, when he left his parents’ house he was no longer under their authority by virtue of his declared moral and financial independence. This is how children become adults, how the “nest empties,” and how individual households are established. This is how God would have it to be (Gn 2:24). Granted, the process of independence isn’t always this surgical, for children may gradually become self-sufficient and responsible for their own decisions. But the point is, there comes a time when a father is no longer “ruling” over his children’s lives. They are adults; they rule their own affairs. So, my own answer to the question above is “no,” with emphasis upon the word *automatic*.

Does this mean that a man is *never* implicated by his adult children’s disobedience and unfaithfulness? No. A man may be an autocrat, one who rules with an iron fist. His children may be baptized and may be outwardly obedient, but inwardly they may be bitter and demoralized by his unjust treatment. They may express their true feelings when they finally get away from home by rejecting everything their father stands for. Or, in a different scenario, a man may have raised his children properly but they abandon their faith in adulthood. If they live in the same community where the parents live, it may be that their behavior reflects so negatively upon the man’s good name that his influence is rendered impotent in that area.

Sometimes we want clean, clear, black and white lines when it comes to applying the standards of qualification to elders, but they are difficult to draw. Some require judgment, fine distinctions and a consideration of the particular circumstance. When this is the case, we cannot “sanitize” the situation by arbitrarily making a law where God intended for flexibility of judgment to be implemented. Are these qualifications infallible? Certainly not. We may make the best judgment possible given our knowledge of an individual, and he may turn out to be someone different than we thought, or after his appointment his “true colors” may come out. But this also happens with hiring preachers, employees in the secular realm, choosing a mate, etc. In other words, there is no such thing in this imperfect world as “foolproof” rules. We make the best choices we can using God’s guidelines and we then work to make those choices the right ones.

2. Is an Elder Automatically Disqualified When His Wife Dies?

The pertinent qualification reads, “A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife ... if a man is blameless, the husband of one wife ...” (1 Tim 3:2; Tit 1:6). Some assert that this qualification must only be met *at the time he is appointed*. They argue that a fully qualified, functioning elder is not rendered suddenly disqualified just because his wife dies. In fact, this argument seems plausible given our earlier observation that a man does not become suddenly disqualified just because he adopts a child later in life. The comparison breaks down, however, in that there is no qualifying statement accompanying “the husband of one wife.” We may conjecture all we want about the *reason* this requirement is given, but the fact is that the Scriptures do not give a specific reason. Paul simply says he “must” be the husband of one wife.

Simply put, God stresses the importance of a shepherd being married. Those who are already elders probably have greater insight into the wisdom of this requirement, but it is not difficult to speculate upon the value of a good wife to an elder: She knows him like no other; she can share his burdens and relieve his stress; she helps him retain a sense of balance when he is criticized or otherwise under fire; she can be present when delicate and potentially compromising situations arise, etc. Whatever God had in mind when He established this qualification, the text indicates that it is necessary for an elder to be married to fulfill his responsibilities.

3. Does a Man With One Child Meet the Qualification of Having “Children”?

First, note that the mention of children is only incidental relative to their character: “one who rules his own house well, **having** his children in submission with all reverence ... **having** faithful children not accused of dissipation or insubordination” (Tit 1:6). In other words, the phrase dealing with “children” merely clarifies the kind of household over which the man rules. Is it in disarray? Are the children genuine believers? Do they manifest it in their behavior? Does the father command the respect of his children? The *size* of his household is not under consideration.

The simplest and clearest way to demonstrate that one child suffices is simply to ask: “Does a father, a mother and a child constitute a ‘house’?” Nowhere is it insinuated *in Scripture* that a man with two or more children is a more competent leader than a man with one child; that is an assertion of judgment that is imposed upon the text. A man, a woman and a child *do* constitute a household, and a man who rules over it according to the principles of godliness is demonstrating in a tangible way his ability to lead. *That is the purpose of the qualification as stated in the Scripture*. It is pure opinion that a man with two or three or four children will make a better elder than one with one child. Such a notion is read into the text, not something that is implied by the language.

Further, it can be amply demonstrated *in Scripture* that the use of the term “children” is not reserved only for indicating a plurality. Rather, the term is also used to indicate “offspring” of any number, one or more. Note the following:

1. When Sarah only had Isaac, one child, she said, “*Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse **children**? For I have born him a **son** in his old age*” (Gn 21:7).

2. The Levirate marriage law obligated a man to take his deceased brother’s wife and raise offspring if he died childless. The Pharisees asked Jesus, “*Teacher, Moses said that if a man dies, having no **children**, his brother shall marry his wife and raise up **offspring** for his brother*” (Mt 22:24). Did this law apply if the brother only had one child? Or did the term “children” include only one? Dt. 25:5-6 indicates what would fulfill raising up “children” to the brother: “*And it shall be that **the firstborn son** which she bears will succeed to the name of his dead brother ...*”. That is, if the first child produced by this union is one male child, the brother has fulfilled his duty to raise up offspring or children to his dead brother. “Child” again fulfills the term “children.”

3. Paul instructs fathers not to “*provoke your children to wrath*” (Eph 6:4). Each individual father was to make application of this to his situation. Would he be justified by excusing himself if he only had one child? We would say, obviously, “Of course not!” But if the plural **forbids** a singular application, then a father could provoke his only child to wrath merely on the basis that he doesn’t have “children” (a plurality).

4. Perhaps the clearest illustration of the singular “child” fulfilling the plural “children” (in the sense of offspring) is 1 Tim 5:4, 10. This is particularly valuable because it is in the same book as the qualifications of elders and it is almost identical in construction. Paul says, “*But if any widow (singular) has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to show piety at home and to repay their parents ...*” (5:4). Two things about this verse are pertinent: a widow with **one child** or **one grandchild** is not a true widow as Paul refers to her in this passage (cf. 5:3 – “*Honor widows who are **really widows***”). “One child” disqualifies her from being “taken into the number” (5:9) because she has legitimate “offspring” (“children” – 5:4). Additionally, this widow who is truly childless is to be supported “*if she has brought up children*” (5:10). Now, who believes that a woman is not truly alone because her husband and one child have preceded her in death, thus she *didn’t have **children** ... ?!*

The point: the assertion that “children” **must** mean “more than one child” *cannot be Scripturally sustained*. The *Scriptures* use the term “children” to refer to “offspring” without any reference to the *number* of offspring. There is no *Scriptural* basis for mandating that an elder **must** have more than one child when the language itself is indefinite as to number. We must be willing to put our opinions and personal desires aside and listen to *the text*.

4. Is a Man Who Has Divorced and Remarried With the Lord’s Approval Disqualified to Serve As an Elder?

The pertinent texts: “*A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife ...*” (1 Tim 3:2; same construction in Tit 1:6). Literally the Gk. text reads “to be, of one wife husband” (*Berry’s Interlinear*, p. 542). The qualification demands that the man be married and that he be lawfully married in the eyes of God, i.e., that he has only one wife. If a man does not divorce for adultery and remarries, then he (in the eyes of God) has two wives. That is, he has contracted two lifelong covenants when God has only

allowed one at a time. This man is obviously in violation of God's marriage laws and, therefore, is not only morally unfit to serve as an elder but even to be in fellowship with other Christians.

If a man's mate dies, and he marries again, *he only has one wife*. If a man puts his wife away for adultery and remarries, *he only has one wife*. He is lawfully married in the eyes of God; his marriage is as pure and acceptable as if he had never been married before. It cannot be otherwise. If such a man has two wives, then he is a bigamist and an adulterer and is in a far worse position than being disqualified as an elder or deacon. He is condemned in the sight of God.

It is instructive to notice that the text *does not say* what some men want it to say. Those who hold that a man who has been married twice, and thus has two wives, try to make the text say "only married once" instead of "husband of one wife." But the text does not say that. The words "only," "married," and "once" are not in the text. There are Greek equivalents for these words, but the Holy Spirit did not choose them. He chose the words translated by the English words "husband of one wife."

But tampering with the text does not end here. Consider what others have done to twist and torture this passage:

The attempt on the part of some to change the meaning of the original – making it say what it does not say – is inexcusable. In harmony with the views of *some* Church Fathers ... these translators and commentators are of the opinion that Paul is here referring to men who, having been widowers, remarried. The translation (?) then becomes, "An overseer must be a man *who was married only once*." One can *understand* how men who reject or soft-pedal Scripture's infallibility ... can read their private reconstruction of the formation of these letters into the text, so that they think of the author of the Pastorals as a man who considered marriage and certainly *remarriage* to be sinful or nearly so. One *cannot excuse* an attempt to make a text say what it does not actually say in the original. The original simply says, "He must be ... one wife's husband." (Hendriksen, *Thessalonians, Timothy and Titus*, p. 121-122).

Such a retroactive interpretation of this phrase does not square with other qualifications. Is Paul saying that an elder must have *never been* covetous? Must he *always have been* able to teach? Is a man qualified if, in the past, he has been quarrelsome but has repented and learned diplomacy, patience and deference to others? Obviously, the eldership requirements are things *presently possessed and demonstrated* in the life of an individual. Again, if Paul had meant to say "he must have only been married once in his lifetime," there are words to convey that thought. Why do some brethren insist on making this qualification retroactive and not others? Because they know such is not reasonable or tenable with other qualifications.

We must always be aware of the dangers of falling short of God's word, of doing less than what God expects as clearly stated in the Scriptures. But there is another danger of equal proportions, and that is adding our opinions and standards to the revealed will of God. I have come to think that many conservatively minded brethren abhor the first

but don't blink an eye at the second. Some justify the imposition of their will upon others by saying, "It's better to take the 'safe' position." Interestingly, they always identify *their* view as the "safe" one. **Brethren, the only "safe position" is the TRUTH.** If we aren't sure of what the truth is, we need to be studying and praying more diligently.

Conclusion: The observations and conclusions in these lessons will not satisfy everyone. The challenge of any congregation is to seek a deeper understanding of leadership – its qualifications, obligations, objectives, challenges and rewards – and work toward a peaceful consensus of how that understanding is to be applied in that locality.

In my short lifetime I have been part of congregations that have never had elders and probably never will. I have witnessed good, qualified men unscrupulously opposed and black-balled from leadership roles when the church desperately needed such men. I have witnessed capable, courageous elders forced into resignation by evil elements within the congregation that didn't want to face rebuke and discipline. We are all presently witness to a generation that is spiritually withered, distracted by worldly interests and selfishly engaged in life's pursuits, leaving many churches without competent leaders. **The Lord's people are facing a leadership crisis**, and Hueytown will not be exempt unless we **"grow up in all things into Him who is the head – Christ"** (Eph 4:15). I pray that this study will be a catalyst for such growth.

Questions:

1. Over whose house does a man rule: his own, or his adult children's house?
2. What reason is given in Scripture for an elder to be "the husband of one wife"?
3. Cite the verse that says a man with two or more children will make a better elder than one with a single child.
4. Can you find an additional passage not listed in the notes wherein the term "children" would include a single child?
5. If a man's first wife is dead and he remarries, how many wives does he have?
6. If a man is divorced and remarried with God's approval, how many wives does he have?
7. If a man is divorced and remarried with God's approval, does God consider him any differently than a man still married to his first wife? What passage indicates that he is any less of a Christian than any other man?