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ORGANIZATIONAL ISSUES:

Church Leadership Roles Defined

Introduction:

In the church, God has designated specific positions of service. A proper understanding of these positions helps church leaders better understand how the church is to correctly function. This is important because different perspectives on this topic, when put into practice, produce different effects within the church. This is why it is vital to understand the New Testament model, which is the goal of this article.

In the New Testament church, there are seven designated service roles given: apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor-teacher, elder, deacon and deaconess. Even though the last two listed (deacon and deaconess) are generally viewed as servant roles, any true New Testament leader is to be a servant (John 13:12-17). In this article, the focus will be on the servant roles of elder, deacon and deaconess; but not on the offices of apostle, prophet, evangelist and pastor-teacher. Those four offices are discussed in the article titled, "Pastor's Equipping Ministry."



Within Christendom, the terms of elder and deacon are used differently depending on how a pastor, church board, or denomination understands their usage in the New Testament. Some would define an elder as the church's pastor and the deacons as spiritual leaders who work alongside the pastor. Those who hold this viewpoint generally regard the pastor as being the main spiritual leader who is above all others in his church. Others view elders as a group of spiritual leaders who guide the church, the pastor simply being one of this group. This understanding of Scripture would then see the deacons and deaconesses as appointed servants of the church, not as spiritual leaders, but ones who receive their direction from the elders.

The elder and his function:

The role of the elder is threefold: he is an elder, an overseer, and a shepherd. This association is seen the clearest in Acts 20. It is recorded in this passage that as the Apostle Paul was journeying to Jerusalem, he stopped in Miletus. While he was there, he summoned the elders of the church in Ephesus. As Paul talked with them, he used these three terms to describe their role and function in the body of Christ.

The elders' function which Paul first referred to in this passage was their role as elders (vs. 17). It says in verse 17: "From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church." In the Old Testament the term "elder" (in Russian "старейшина" is similar in function to the NT elder "пресвитер") generally refers to a respected (cf. Gen. 50:7) or influential (cf. Exo. 3:16,18) leader (Exo. 3:16,18; 24:9; Num. 11:16) of the nation of Israel, but in this context it refers to those who are spiritually mature; not a new convert (1 Tim. 3:6; cf. 5:22). Therefore an elder is to be a person who manifests impeccable character, moderation, restraint, self-control, spiritual insight and wisdom. These are the spiritual requirements of a mature believer found in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9. An elder must be a person who is grounded in his faith and walk with Christ.

Paul also referred to the elders of Ephesus as overseers (vs. 28). In this verse Paul told the Ephesian elders: "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers..." Therefore, overseers are those who watch over ("exercising oversight... voluntarily... and with eagerness," 1 Pet. 5:2) and have charge over the people and affairs of the church ("have charge over you in the Lord," 1 Thes. 5:12; "not lording it over those allotted to your charge," 1 Pet. 5:3). The Greek word used in this passage for "overseer" is the same word used in 1 Timothy 3:1, translated as "bishop" in some versions (Gk., "episkopos"). Therefore a "bishop" in the New Testament is an elder of a church who oversees (manages) the church. He is not a pastor who oversees many pastors and their churches.

The third designation for an elder is that of a shepherd (vs. 28). Paul further told the elders in Acts 20:28: "...to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood." Therefore, elders are to shepherd the flock which they oversee. This aspect of the elders' work refers to their care for the people of the church through loving, guiding, directing, correcting, reproof and protecting the flock (cf. Isa. 40:11; Ezk. 34:2,4; Mat. 20:25-26; Luke 22:24-27; John 21:15-17; 2 Tim. 4:2; Heb. 13:17; 1 Pet. 5:2,4). In a sense, these elders were under-shepherds who will give an account to the Chief Shepherd when He appears (1 Pet. 5:4).

Why a plurality of elders?

The overwhelming evidence in the Scriptures is that within an established local church there is a plurality of elders and not just one elder, the pastor. The elders are men who oversee and shepherd alongside the pastor; he too being an elder, but the leading elder due to his gifting and special call of God (cf. Eph. 4:11). It is to be a joint effort. The scriptural evidence which indicates this begins in the Old Testament where it is clear that a plurality of elders led the nation of Israel (cf. Exo. 3:16; Lev. 4:15; Num. 11:16; Mat. 21:23). This is also a model which the Bible ends with in the book of Revelation, for in heaven there too is a plurality of elders (cf. Rev. 4:4,10; 5:6; 19:4). It is not surprising then to see this pattern repeated in the New Testament. There one sees many references to this fact. For instance, in Acts 14:23 as Paul concluded his first missionary journey, he "appointed elders for them in every church." He did not appoint one elder for each church, but a plurality. The church in Jerusalem was also led by a plurality of elders (cf. Acts 15:22; 16:4). Also, when Paul was in "Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church" (Acts 20:17). It was the job given to Titus by Paul to "appoint elders in every city" as

he had directed him (Titus 1:5). James wrote to his readers that if anyone was sick, then he must "call for the elders of the church and they are to pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord" (Jam. 5:14). When Paul wrote to the church of Philippi, he addressed the letter "to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers and deacons" (Php. 1:1). Also, the writer of Hebrews told his readers that they were to obey their elders (Heb. 13:17), and Paul told the Thessalonians to appreciate their elders and to highly esteem them in love because they have charge over them (1 Thes. 5:12-13). Therefore, throughout the Bible, from cover to cover, a plurality of elders is evident. This is why in the church there is to be more than just one elder who is involved in the oversight and shepherding of the church.

Why is a plurality of elders a better system than the appointment of just one spiritual leader over a church? Because, as King Solomon stated in the book of Proverbs, the counsel of many is helpful and necessary (cf. Pro. 1:5; Pro. 12:5,15; 13:10; 19:20; 27:9). When those giving counsel are godly believers, this is especially beneficial. When one man leads a church without the counsel of others, he is more prone to make decisions which are not as inclusive as they might otherwise be if others participated in the process. This is true because a single man left by himself is limited in his knowledge and perspective, no matter how great and godly he is. Left alone he is capable of making decisions which are not always correct and optimal in each and every situation. Therefore he will eventually make wrong decisions, some which might even have devastating effects. All one has to do to confirm this is true is to consider the consequences of great men who, when they were not thinking clearly, made terrible decisions. Many had devastating effects, such as Adam (Gen. 3:6), Abraham (Gen. 16:1-4), Moses (Num. 20:8-11), David (2 Sam. 24:1-4,10, when he did not listen to Joab's counsel), Solomon (1 Kings 11:1-6), and Peter (Gal. 2:11-14) to name just a few. Also when taking into account that power, position, fame, money, possessions, etc., can entice and corrupt (cf. 1 Tim. 6:9-11; 2 Pet. 5:2), then everyone needs to be careful (cf. 1 Cor. 10:12) and accountable to their peers (cf. 2 Cor 8:16-21). When a godly pastor takes into account the knowledge, wisdom, and counsel of the other godly elders of his church, together they will consistently come to better conclusions on issues than if he alone makes all the decisions. This is the result because represented collectively within such a group of men are various spiritual gifts, life experiences, knowledge, talents, abilities and backgrounds (family, cultural, geographical, racial, economic, social, religious). This unique combination of attributes, along with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, can help a plurality of elders see various situations from various perspectives. Their potential to understand and deal with a situation in the best possible way is far greater than the combined attributes of just one man. As a group, they are better equipped to make decisions that are thoroughly discussed and thought through, looking at the issues from many different perspectives. But when only one man is making all of the decisions on his own, he may see things only through his own, limited perspective. This can result in skewed decisions which are the result of a skewed perspective. This is the reason why God did not institute this form of church government. Although many times it is easier and more expedient to make decisions by oneself; when a person is not thinking clearly, his decisions can have long lasting detrimental consequences.

As a pastor-led church is not the biblical model, so a congregationally-led church is also not the biblical model. If however it were the form of church government that God desired, then one would have to answer the following questions: Why would God have elders in the church; men who are spiritually mature (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Titus

1:5-9), who are to be the overseers, shepherds and guardians of the flock (Acts 20:17,28-30; 1 Pet. 5:1-2), who are to be examples of how to live the Christian life before the flock (1 Pet. 5:3), whom God tells the people in the church to obey, appreciate and highly esteem in love (1 Thes. 5:12-13; Heb. 13:17), be under the authority of the flock? Why would God desire the members of the church who are not at the same level of spiritual maturity and responsibility as the elders, manage and direct the elders? Is it because collectively the combined wisdom of the congregation will be greater than that of the elders? Though this is possible, it generally is not the case. Many times the average church member is not aware of what is happening in the church. They do not understand many of the private issues which the elders are privy to and all of the other things that are happening behind the scenes. They may not share their vision and understanding of how God has been and is directing the church. They may also lack knowledge of how the church operates, its policies, procedures, etc. Also, since the pastor-teacher is a man called of God to his position (Eph. 4:11), and the other elders are spiritual men who aspire to their position (1 Tim. 3:1-7), it would make sense that these are the ones whom God will lead the church through, not the congregation. Taking these things into account along with the fact that generally the average member lacks the spiritual maturity, wisdom, experience, and knowledge of the Word of God which the pastor and elders have, they usually are not in a position to make more knowledgeable and informed decisions. Therefore, the elders are in a much better position to make decisions for the church.¹ This does not mean that the elders should not listen to and consider the views of the congregation, but they are the ones who are to be the final decision makers. It was never God's plan to have qualified, mature elders (men who are to be overseeing the church) be overseen by the church. This goes against the teaching of the New Testament and against the whole tenor of the Bible. Therefore, elders are to lead the people and not be led by the people, but by Jesus Christ (cf. 1 Pet. 5:4).

The tasks of an elder:

The tasks of an elder are very specific in the Scriptures, this being in contrast to those of a deacon and deaconess. His responsibilities are many, as well as his accountability to Christ (cf. 1 Pet. 5:4; Heb. 13:17). They include:

1. Guarding the flock:
 - a. Against false teachers -- Acts 20:28-30
 - b. Refuting those who contradict -- 2 Tim. 2:25; Titus 1:9
2. Overseeing the flock:
 - a. Keeping watch over and giving an account for the souls of the flock -- Acts 20:28; Heb. 13.17
 - b. Having charge over the flock -- 1 Thes. 5:12
 - c. Managing the flock -- 1 Tim. 3:5
 - d. Ruling the flock well -- 1 Tim. 5:17
3. Shepherding the flock -- Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:2
 - a. Caring for the flock and their needs -- cf. Ezk. 34:1-16
 - b. Being an example to the flock -- 1 Tim. 4:12; 1 Pet. 5:3
 - c. Disciplining the flock -- Mat. 18:17-18; Titus 3:10-11

¹This is of course true if the elders are true men of God who seek Him and live for Him as they should. If they do not, then they should not be elders (cf. 1 Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9).

- d. Restoring those who have strayed from the flock -- Gal. 6:1
- e. Ministering through prayer for the flock-- Acts 6:4
 - 1) Praying for the flock -- cf. Acts 6:4
 - 2) Praying for the sick of the flock -- James 5:14-15
- f. Ministering through the Word of God to the flock -- Acts 6:4
 - 1) Discipling the flock -- Mat. 28:19-20; 2 Tim. 2:2
 - 2) Exhorting and teaching the flock -- 1 Tim. 4:13; 1 Thes. 5:12
 - 3) Publicly reading the Scriptures to the flock -- 1 Tim. 4:13
 - 4) Teaching the Word of God diligently and accurately to the flock -- 1 Tim. 5:17-18; 2 Tim. 2:15; James 3:1
- 4. Other responsibilities:
 - a. Doing the work of an evangelist -- Mat. 28:19; Acts 1:8; 2 Tim. 4:5
 - b. Using their spiritual gift(s) within the body -- 1 Tim. 4:14
 - c. Working hard in the ministry and enduring hardship -- Acts 20:27; 1 Thes. 5:12; 1 Tim. 4:16; 2 Tim. 4:5
- 5. Attitudes of the elder:
 - a. Aspiring and desiring to do this work -- 1 Tim. 3:1
 - b. Doing the work -- 1 Pet. 5:2-3; Mat. 20:24-28; 2 Cor. 8; 1 Tim. 6:6-19
 - 1) Not under compulsion, but voluntarily
 - 2) Not for sordid gain, but with eagerness
 - 3) Not lording it over, but being an example

Seeing the many facets of the elder's work, this too is further evidence that a plurality of elders is necessary and is the wisest model. Together they can labor as a team, relying upon and helping one another.

His qualifications:

Because of the responsibilities of an elder, God requires that a mature believer be placed in this position. This is why Paul gives the characteristics of a mature believer, which an elder is to manifest in his life. Paul listed these characteristics in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9, which are listed below. Provided next to each characteristic is a brief explanation of that characteristic in parentheses. Those characteristics which are listed in both epistles by Paul are listed only once below in point 1 and are not repeated in point 2.

1. From 1 Timothy 3:1-7

"An overseer, then, must be":

- a. Above reproach (good reputation)
- b. Husband of one wife (male; having moral purity in regard to his wife)
- c. Temperate (balanced and moderate)
- d. Prudent (man of wisdom; self-controlled and sensible)
- e. Respectable (adorning or displaying the gospel in one's life; orderly)
- f. Hospitable (entertaining guests; generous, caring for others)
- g. Able to teach (teaching others in a humble, gentle manner; teachable)
- h. Not addicted to wine (avoiding overindulgence)
- i. Not pugnacious (not resorting to violence or being quarrelsome)
- j. Gentle (being meek and fair-minded; reasonable)
- k. Uncontentious (being a peacemaker; not quarrelsome)

- l. Free from the love of money (not desiring wealth, but generous)
- m. One who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity (order and stability in his home)
- n. Not a new convert (must be a mature man)
- o. Have a good reputation with those outside the church (being above reproach before unbelievers)

2. From Titus 1:5-9

"Namely, if any man":

- a. Having children who believe, not accused of dissipation or rebellion (having children who are trustworthy, faithful ("believe"), respectable and obedient; under control)
- b. Not self-willed (not self-centered)
- c. Not quick-tempered (does not lose control of his composure quickly)
- d. Loving what is good (in all aspects of his life, thus hating what is evil)
- e. Just (righteous, fair and upright)
- f. Devout (living a holy life)
- g. Self-controlled (disciplined man)
- h. Holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, that he may be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict (must hold strong to the faith and refute those who teach otherwise)

These character qualities of an elder paint the picture of a man (not a woman) who has his life and home in order. This is the kind of man who, along with his fellow elders, will be able to oversee and shepherd the church of God as God desires. The position of elder in the body of Christ is a spiritual one, thus such men must be mature, spiritual people. They have a great responsibility: "...to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood" (Acts 20:28). Therefore, because the people of the church who have been "allotted" to the charge of the elders (1 Pet. 5:3) were not purchased cheaply, the church elders need to remember their great responsibility; that they keep watch over the souls of their sheep "as those who will give an account" (Heb. 13:17). This is a serious responsibility that should not be taken lightly because one day the elders will have to answer for their labor or lack of it (1 Pet. 5:4).

Because of the very important role and responsibilities an elder has in the body of Christ, Paul told Timothy in 1 Timothy 5: "The elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching" (vs. 17). The double honor they are to receive are generous wages for their work (vs. 18). Also because of their position and being men of such high character, Paul told Timothy: "Do not receive an accusation against an elder except on the basis of two or three witnesses" (vs. 19). In other words, before an accusation could be made, there needed to be solid proof of the elder's transgression. If an elder were reprimanded for a sin and continued in it, Paul further stated: "Those who continue in sin, rebuke in the presence of all, so that the rest also will be fearful of *sinning*" (vs. 20). Discipline of an elder was to be followed, and the people were not to show bias in the process due to the elder's status within the church (vs. 21).

In the same passage Paul addresses another important issue with Timothy, that of choosing elders. Paul stated: "Do not lay hands upon anyone *too* hastily and thereby share *responsibility* for the sins of others; keep yourself free from sin" (vs. 22). Paul's point was that when Timothy was involved in choosing elders, he was to make sure that these men were truly qualified and ready for such a position before he committed them to the Lord through the laying on of hands. This is important because Paul said, "the sins of some men are quite evident, going before them to judgment; for others, their *sins* follow after. Likewise also, deeds that are good are quite evident, and those which are otherwise cannot be concealed" (vss. 24-25). In other words, some men's sins are evident and easy to see, whereas other men's sins are hidden and not revealed until later, maybe after they have already been appointed as an elder. Therefore Timothy was to be careful in this process, as church leaders must be today. This same error of putting unqualified men in positions of leadership is common today as well.² When a man is placed in a leadership position before he is ready, various problems can arise. One potential problem can be pride (1 Tim. 3:6; 1 Pet. 5:5-7). This can occur when one desires the position of elder for the sake of position only, not for the sake of serving others.

Another potential problem arises when an unqualified person with hidden sin is placed into leadership. Such a person is one who lacks maturity, and this may be the reason he is hiding sin. A person with any degree of maturity would simply turn down the position and not accept it because of his condition. If however he accepts the position, he shows that he lacks understanding, discretion and possibly integrity. This is not the kind of person who should be placed in such an important role as that of an elder. A decision to do this will result in poor spiritual leadership on his part, and he probably will not be able to handle the responsibility and power associated with his position. As the writer of Hebrews said: "For everyone who partakes *only* of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant. But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil" (Heb. 5:13-14). This is the reason a pastor/elder is to be mature; a person who is used to solid food and can discern good and evil. This is why churches are not to place just anyone in a position of leadership, even when qualified people are not available. Church leaders need to pray and train up leaders, not just taking anyone to fill the position.

The position of spiritual leadership over a church is a responsibility of great importance. This position is not to be taken lightly, for the ramifications of such a position are eternal. Therefore, regarding church leaders who build upon the foundation of the church, that being Christ (1 Cor. 3:11), Paul stated: "Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is *to be* revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. If any man's work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward. If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire. Do you not know that you are a temple of God and *that* the Spirit of God dwells in you? If any man destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him, for the temple of God is holy, and that is what you are" (1 Cor. 3:12-17). Therefore if an unqualified leader does substandard or even negligent work within the church, the church will suffer, the body of

²Another, yet opposite problem, is when pastors and elders do not want to share their authority base with others in the church. They purposely do not place qualified men in leadership positions so that they can be in complete and absolute control.

Christ will suffer; and one day this leader will suffer when he has to give an account to Christ for his poor performance³ (cf. 2 Cor. 5:10). As this passage states, the Holy Spirit indwells the church of God and the church is holy. The church is not to be a place where zealous, unqualified people are allowed to be in positions of authority. The church is the body of Christ; it is made up of people who are loved by God the Father and Jesus Christ His Son. They were purchased with the precious blood of Christ (Acts 20:28). Because this is true, the church's leadership needs to be very cautious about who they lay hands upon to be in charge of the church of Jesus Christ.

The deacon and his function:

The role of a deacon is much different than that of an elder, even though often churches use these two words interchangeably. Whereas elders are the spiritual leaders of the church, deacons are the church's servants (the word "deacon" comes from the Greek word "*diakonos*," which means servant). Therefore the role of a deacon is to serve the church.

The tasks of a deacon:

Unlike the elders, a deacon does not have specific responsibilities listed in the New Testament for him to perform. His tasks are determined by the elders of the church. We see an example of this in Acts Chapter 6 where a problem arose in the church in Jerusalem (vs. 1). As a result of this problem, the Apostles who oversaw the church proposed a solution to the problem (vs. 3). Seven men were to be chosen for the purpose of the administration and distribution of food to widows in the church in Jerusalem. The Apostles also gave the congregation four character qualities that the men who were to be chosen needed to possess in order to fulfill this role (vs. 3). Though these men were not called deacons in this passage, this is the role which they fulfilled as chosen servants of the church (vs. 2); this in contrast to a spiritual task such as prayer, ministry of the Word (vss. 2,4), etc. Another evidence that they were deacons was that after they were chosen, the Apostles prayed and laid hands on them (vs. 6), indicating that their position did possess a level of responsibility within the church. We also see in this passage that as it was the task of the Apostles (they being the elders of the church; cf. 1 Pet. 5:1; 2 John 1; 3 John 1) to pray and minister the Word (vss. 2,4) and to determine the solution to a problem that had presented itself (overseeing and shepherding), it was the task of the chosen servants (deacons) to carry out the solution, being under the authority of the Apostles.

³Many misunderstand 1 Corinthians 3:16-17 as talking about an individual believer. This is incorrect because the word "you" is plural, therefore referring to the church. Though the one destroying the church could be a false teacher, in context it makes more sense that the one who does this is a believer. In what way then will God "destroy" the believer? Possibly by making him sick, weak, or even by taking his life (cf. 1 Cor. 11:30; 1 John 5:16; Heb. 12:4-11), though God cannot (Rom. 8:1) and will not destroy him spiritually (1 Cor. 3:15).

Therefore it can be concluded that a deacon, though he is to be a spiritually qualified person (see his qualifications below), is not a spiritual leader like an elder⁴. Instead, he is a servant who is required to meet spiritual qualifications due to his level of responsibility, and also because he is a representative of the church. Does this mean that a deacon cannot be in a position of leadership within the church? No. He can lead people if his responsibilities call for it. But the point to be made is that his responsibilities are not the same as an elder, which are mainly spiritual in nature.

Though the role of a deacon is very important within the structure of a church, his qualifications as well as his role are considerably less than those of an elder. However, he is still to be a person who has proven character qualities, being first tested to see if he is above reproach. He must be faithful, manifest the other designated character qualities of a deacon, and be capable of carrying out the role that has been assigned to him by the elders. Paul lists the qualifications of a deacon in 1 Timothy 3:8-10,12-13. Provided next to each characteristic is a brief explanation of that characteristic in parentheses. Also provided is the list of the four qualifications which the Apostles gave to the early church as recorded in Acts 6:3.

1. 1 Timothy 3:8-10,12-13

"Deacons likewise must be":

- a. Men of dignity (honorable in deeds)
- b. Not double-tongued (not a deceiver)
- c. Not addicted to much wine (avoiding overindulgence)
- d. Not fond of sordid gain (not greedy)
- e. Holding to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience (not wavering, but standing firm in his faith)
- f. Tested; then let them serve as deacons if they are beyond reproach (good reputation)
- g. Husband of only one wife (having moral purity in regard to his wife)
- h. Good managers of their children and their own households (order and stability in his home)

"For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a high standing and great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus."

2. From Acts 6:3:

- a. Good reputation
- b. Full of the Spirit
- c. Full of wisdom
- d. Able to take charge of a task

We can see from these characteristics that a deacon is to be a man of impeccable character who does not waver in his faith, who walks in the Spirit, who is trustworthy, and who is a good manager of his home. These qualifications are specified

⁴If deacons are spiritual leaders, than it would logically follow that deaconesses are spiritual leaders as well because the word "deaconess" is simply the feminine form of the word for servant.

for a person who is officially chosen by the church to carry out the responsibilities designated by the elders within the local church.

The deaconess and her function:

The role of a deaconess is the same as that of a deacon. The word "deaconess" comes from the same Greek word, "*diakonos*" (as the word "deacon"), which means servant. Therefore a deaconess, like her male counterpart the deacon, is a servant of the church. Please note that in Romans 16:1 the same Greek word used to describe Phoebe ("*diakonos*") is used for a deacon.

The tasks of a deaconess:

As in the case of a deacon, a deaconess does not have specific responsibilities listed in the New Testament for her to perform. Therefore her tasks are also determined by the elders of the church. In the New Testament Phoebe was called a deaconess ("servant" in English translations). Priscilla and Anna are examples of godly female servants of what a deaconess should be. Here are their characteristics:

1. Phoebe -- Rom. 16:1-2
 - a. A servant of the church
 - b. A helper of many

2. Priscilla -- Rom. 16:3-4; Acts 18:24-26; 1 Cor. 16:19
 - a. Risked her life for others -- Rom. 16:3-4
 - b. Was knowledgeable in the Word and able to teach others -- Acts 18:24-26
 - c. Opened her home for a church to meet -- 1 Cor. 16:19

3. Anna -- Luke 2:36-37
 - a. Always served in the temple ("serving night and day")
 - b. Was a woman of prayer
 - c. Was a woman who fasted

In these examples we see various characteristics. What is common to each of them is that they were godly servants.

Her qualifications:

A deaconess, as her male counterpart the deacon, is also to be a spiritual person. Paul lists her qualifications in 1 Timothy 3:11. Provided next to each characteristic is a brief explanation of that characteristic in parentheses.

"Women must likewise be":

- a. Dignified (honorable in deeds)
- b. Not malicious gossips (not a false accuser or slanderer)
- c. Temperate (self-controlled, free from influences which control)
- d. Faithful in all things (trustworthy, dependable)

Some interpret this verse as the qualifications necessary for a deacon's wife, and not for a deaconess. This explanation does not follow the context of the passage. First, Paul is speaking to Timothy about the qualifications of designated positions within the church, of which a deaconess is one. Second, Paul does not state that he has deviated from this pattern and is now giving the qualifications of a deacon's wife. Third, if Paul were giving the qualifications of a deacon's wife, then one must ask why did he not give the qualifications of an elder's wife earlier. It would make sense that he would have, knowing that an elder's position holds much greater responsibility as a spiritual leader. Therefore, one can conclude that this verse states the qualifications of a deaconess.

A deaconess, therefore, is to be dignified, temperate and faithful like the deacon. Added to her list of qualifications, she is not to be a malicious gossip. Such qualifications were specified for a person who is officially chosen by the local church to carry out the responsibilities designated by the elders of that church.



APPLICATION QUESTIONS:

1. List below the names of the elders of your church. Include yourself if you are an elder or the pastor.

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2. If you are an elder (pastor), do you feel that you meet the qualifications given in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9? If not, please list below the characteristics which you feel that you need to improve? Then list a plan on how you can work at doing this (e.g., accountability partner, memorizing Scripture, studying the Scriptures, reading a book on the topic, practical steps on how to make the necessary changes, etc.).

Issues to work on:

Plan:

8. Identify potential future elders, deacons and deaconesses whom you need to help to develop in their faith.

Elders:

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Deacons:

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Deaconesses:

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8. What is your plan to prepare these future servants of the church? You can begin training potential elders, deacons and deaconesses together in a group with general training. You can then make their training more specialized over time, separating them into their respective groups. Please remember that future elders should first serve as deacons to prove themselves. List some ideas below of how you can begin to develop these people through ministries of the church to prepare them for future church positions.

SPECIFIC QUESTIONS FOR CROSS-CULTURAL MISSIONARIES AND CHURCH PLANTERS:

1. Many times a church planter or pastor will invest a large amount of time in a potential elder or deacon only to have them leave the church or never really develop enough in their faith to become a leader. Though this investment of time was not wasted, how might you try and protect yourself from this happening to you?

2. When preparing elders, deacons, and deaconesses, what characteristics will you look for when determining in whom to invest your time? Whom you choose and train will either help or hinder the church planting process.
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3. What general time frame do you have in mind before you think that someone will be ready to become an elder, deacon, or deaconess? How will you know when they are ready for their responsibilities? The amount of time needed should be based upon the training required for the average person to mature in their faith to meet the qualifications for these positions. List your ideas below. Please keep in mind Paul's exhortation found in 1 Timothy 5:22,24-25.

Elder:

Deacon:

Deaconess:

