

CHURCH LEADERSHIP

Elders

(Leader's Notes)



In our previous study we learnt about deacons, what sort of person is qualified to be a deacon and what his responsibilities are. The word deacon means 'someone who serves'. The deacons help with the practical running of the Church, so the elders can focus on their ministry. We have already seen in Paul's letter to Timothy that elders and deacons were appointed in the churches.

Before we begin our study on elders, let's look at some other verses that speak about Church leadership.

Deacons and Elders

- ♥ Who were the leaders of the Church in Jerusalem? Acts 15:22
(The apostles and elders.)
- ♥ What does Paul call the leaders of the church in Philippi? Philippians 1:1
(The overseers and deacons.)

We have already discovered that different words are used to describe the leaders. The word overseer and the word elder are used to describe the same person.

So we see there were both elders or overseers and deacons in the early Church. The people chose the deacons, but who chose the elders?

Who chooses the elders?

- ❶ Who appointed the elders in Acts 14:21-23? Why do you think they had the authority to do this?
(Paul and Barnabas appointed the elders. They were the men who had planted these churches and had the spiritual authority over them.)
- ❷ How did they make their choice?
(With prayer and fasting.)
- ❸ What did Paul ask Titus to do? Titus 1:5
(To appoint elders in every town.)

Titus often travelled and worked with the Apostle Paul, and he had probably helped establish the churches. Now Paul is asking him to complete the task by appointing elders.

So we can see that those who had the responsibility of appointing the elders of the churches were those with spiritual authority over them, or those who had helped in establishing the churches, particularly the apostles.

What are the qualifications of an elder?

There are two lists of qualifications given by Paul, one in the Book of Timothy and the other in Titus.

Scripture Reading

1 Timothy 3:1-13, Titus 1:5-9

- ④ What are the qualifications listed in 1 Timothy 3:1-13
(An elder must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to drunkenness, not violent, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money, able to manage his family well, his children obey and respect him, not a recent convert, and have a good reputation with outsiders.)
- ⑤ Why should an elder not be a recent convert? V6. What does this mean?
(A new convert may become proud and misuse his position. The devil was judged because of his pride, so this would cause the new convert to receive judgement too.)

The word elder is often used in the Bible. In the Old Testament times this word was used for the older man in the family group or the tribe. They were the spiritual leaders of their families and tribes. The word is then used for the leaders of the Church, however the person doesn't necessarily need to be an older man, rather someone who is spiritually mature.

- ⑥ What qualifications are listed in Titus 1:5-9 for an elder that are different to 1 Timothy 3?
(It adds that an elder's children must be believers, he must not pursue dishonest gain, be hospitable, love what is good, be upright, holy, disciplined and hold firmly to the message.)

It is very important that the person who is an elder is a mature Christian and his life and character are a real example to others. Paul writes that it is a noble task to be an elder. Let's look now at what an elder does.

What is the task of an elder?

- ⑦ What two tasks did the elders have and how were they to do their work? See 1 Peter 5:2
(They were to shepherd the flock and serve as overseers. They were to do this willingly, not for gain, but eagerly as examples to everyone.)

The elders are under the Chief Shepherd, who is Jesus Christ. As shepherds or elders they are to feed, protect, correct and care for God's people, just as a shepherd would take care of his sheep. They are also to oversee the Church. This shows they hold a position of authority and are responsible to lead the Church.

- ⑧ What other responsibilities will some elders have? 1 Timothy 5:17-19
(Teaching and preaching.)

We are told that some elders are worthy of double honour. Those who had proven faithful and were equipped with ministry gifts, deserved to be highly respected. Some of these men were set apart for the work of the Lord and supported financially for their labours.

- ⑩ What other types of ministries were the elders involved with? James 5:14-16
(Praying for the sick and ministering to needs.)

When the leaders of the Church in Antioch were meeting together the Holy Spirit told them to set apart Saul (who became Paul) and Barnabas for the work of the ministry. These leaders depended on the Holy Spirit to give them directions, and in the same way we should too.

The elders have a great responsibility and it requires commitment, but there is a wonderful promise for those who are faithful. In 1 Peter 5:4 it says that elders will receive a crown of glory.

What should our attitude be to the elders?

Only a few will be elders in a Church, but what should our attitude to our elders be?

- ♥ How are we to regard our elders, especially those who preach and teach the Word of God?
1 Timothy 5:17
(We are to honour and respect them highly.)

- ♥ What other instructions are given in Hebrews 13:17?
(We are to obey them and submit to their authority.)

The elders of a Church are responsible for the spiritual leadership of the Church, and work together with the senior leader, who we often call our Pastor. They are the ones who feed God's people, minister to them and train them, and also seek God's direction for the Church. Let's make their task a joyful one, by obeying and respecting them. When we do that, the blessing of God will flow through the Church, and into our lives.