

1. ACCORDING TO GOD'S STANDARD – THE WORD OF GOD

Many elders and deacons believed they are called into their offices mainly because they have certain leadership qualities recognized by the church. Some of them may be company managers, executives, accountants or engineers who have achieved great success in their secular profession. But certainly it would be a great mistake if they were to serve in the church the same way they did in the world. To the world, it is the result that determines if it is a success or not. They don't care how one does it (though legally) as long as the desired result is accomplished. But it is different for the Lord's ministry. According to Wayne Grudem in his book "Systematic Theology" wrote concerning the selection of elders,

‘Those who are choosing elders in churches today would do well to look carefully at candidates in the light of these qualifications, and to look for those character traits and patterns of godly living rather than worldly achievement, fame, or success. Especially in churches in western industrial societies, there seems to be a tendency to think that success in the world of business (or law, or medicine, or government) is an indication of suitability for the office of elder, but this is not the teaching of the New Testament.’

The church must ensure the election of elders and deacons be according to God's standard which is the Word of God. After elected into office, elected elders and deacons must know their own role and responsibility listed in the Word of God. Not only that, they must also know each other's role and responsibility. If not, they might get confused and likely to cause contention in their service. It is possible that the elders are doing the work of the deacons and deacons doing the work of the elders simply because they do not know their own role and each other's responsibility.

2. BIBLICAL ELDERSHIP

Purpose of Elders

Why did God give elders/ pastors to the church? Apostle Paul teaches in 2 Corinthians 10:8, “*For though I should boast somewhat more of our authority, which the Lord hath given us for edification, and not for your destruction, I should not be ashamed.*” Apostle Paul states that his authority was given him for the purpose of “*edification.*” This verse

states that the purpose of pastors-teachers is to perfect or equip the saints. He teaches the same thing also in Ephesians 4:12, “*For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.*” Pastors/ elders are to equip the saints who, in turn, are responsible for the work of the ministry and the building up of the body. In other words, their purpose is to teach and apply the Word of God to the lives of believers and so equip them to serve and build up the church themselves. Through the equipping of the elders, the members of the body are ministered, bringing it to the “*unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ*” (verse 13).

This ministry of edification is consistent with his command to young Timothy, “*the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also*” (2 Timothy 2:2). It is the elders' responsibility to teach and train others for the Lord's ministry. In Titus 2, Paul instructs Titus in this way also. Titus is exhorted to teach (verse 1) in order every man and woman in the church will be able to minister, in turn, to others (verses 2-5). The duty of elders is to teach and train others to minister for Christ also, each in his own capacity.

Specific Roles of Elders

It is evident that the duties of elders are basically two: ruling and teaching. The New Testament contains many specific instructions and commands (both by precept and by example) to pastors/ elders concerning the fulfilling of their ministry. These commands when taken all together, provide a basic job description for them. A few of them are surveyed here.

In Acts 6:4, the apostles give matters of lesser concern to others so that they may give themselves “to prayer and to the ministry of the Word.” This verse is significant in that it views prayer as one half of the elders' ministry. But why prayer is deemed so important as part of the elder's ministry? Douglas Wilson in his book “Mother Kirk” says, “The truth is a very simple one; talking to men about God must always be accompanied by talking to God about men.” Elders must devote themselves not only to God's Word but also prayer.

Throughout Paul's first letter to Timothy (properly called a “pastoral epistle” because of its purpose to give instruction concerning the ministry) he speaks over and again of doctrine and teaching (1:3, 10; 3:2; 4:6, 13, 14, 16; 5:17; etc.). His second letter to Timothy emphasizes the same (1:6, 8, 13; 2:2; etc.), as well as his letter to Titus (1:9; 2:1; etc.).

Elders must be apt to teach. According to Acts 20:20, elders are responsible for both pulpit (public) and home (private) teaching. Elders are to contend for the faith, refuting and rebuking false teachers (1 Timothy 1:18; Jude 3; Titus 1:9-16). Elders are to guard the church from errors and sins, both from within and without (Acts 20:28-31; Hebrews 13:7; 1 Timothy 4:16). Elders are to exhort (Titus 1:9; 2 Timothy 4:2), which combines all the ideas of encouragement, comfort, persuasion, counseling, teaching, rebuking, etc. Elders are to rule (1 Peter 5:1-2; 1 Timothy 5:17) and lead by precept and example (1 Timothy 4:12; 1 Peter 5:3).

Evaluation

It is the responsibility of elders to rule and teach. Within this biblical guideline are many other responsibilities such as prayer, guarding, exhorting, etc. It is God's directive for elders to serve its church in this way. Included in the pastoral ministry are marrying, burying, and praying at local social gatherings visiting the sick at the hospital, home visitations, organizing church events, outings, camp, and Sunday School curriculum etc. If a man does not by his teaching and preaching equip his people for the ministry, he is not a good pastor, for he has failed to fulfil God's requirements for that office. A good "shepherd" is one who will not starve his sheep but feed them, as well as lead them.

3. BIBLICAL DIACONATE

Deacons are not Elders

The two New Testament offices are mentioned together in Philippians 1:1 and in 1 Timothy 3 — bishops and deacons. In 1 Timothy 3, the qualifications are spelled out for the two offices, bishops in verses 1-7, and deacons in verse 8-13. The qualifications are similar, but not identical. For example, the bishop is required to be "apt to teach" whereas the deacon does not have that expectation.

The differences in title and qualifications also mean that the offices are distinct. The term "bishop" contains the idea of an overseer. In Greek, it is επισκοπος (episcopos) from which we get the word "episcopal." It means, "to look upon, inspect, oversee, look after, care for" and refers to "the care of the church which rested upon the elders." The term is used interchangeably with "elder" and "shepherd" (i.e. pastor) in Acts 20 and 1 Peter 5. There is no question about the authority of the office: "Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine" (1 Timothy 5:17). In the Greek language, the word *deacon* is διακονος which means *servant*. A

deacon is a willing servant, one who does only what he is assigned to do.

Specific Purpose of Deacon

The biblical account is clear on the foundation of the diaconship: "*And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministrations. Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables. Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business*" Acts 6:1-3.

The office of deacon was established to free the Apostles (who functioned as the first pastors/ elders) to pray and to minister the Word. The Apostles, in dealing with the physical concern of the Jerusalem church, told the congregation that, "*It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables. Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word*" Acts 6:2-4.

Evaluation

1 Timothy 3 and Acts 6 expound the qualifications for the office of deacons; the latter contains what could fairly be called the "core qualifications": 1) "*Men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom*" Acts 6:3. 2) "*Full of faith and of the Holy Ghost*" Acts 6:5.

The original seven deacons were people who were able to serve the Lord in ways which were more spiritual in nature than just showing their faces regularly in church meetings. Stephen was a man of spiritual power: "*And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people*" (Acts 6:8). Philip was not only a deacon, but also was gifted in evangelism (Acts 8:5-7).

Deacons are to be useful for the Lord's service, always available to assist whenever the pastors/ elders would need them. Oftentimes, when someone is discussed as a possible deacon one hears a remark such as, "He is always ready to serve and attends prayer meeting regularly." But God is looking for faithful men who are godly and have great love for Him and His people, which cannot be determined in a superficial way.

4. DISTINCTION BETWEEN THE ROLES OF ELDERS AND THOSE OF DEACONS

Some have misunderstood that the elders have the oversight over spiritual matters of the church while the deacons have the oversight over the physical matters of the church. This is not what God intends it to be. The elders have oversight over **ALL MATTERS** pertaining to the church. The elders may put one or more deacons to take charge of a certain matter, but the elders are still responsible and have the oversight.

Elders and deacons are serving together as leaders of the local church, however, the deacons do not have the equal authority with the elders. Deacons are appointed because there is a service to be rendered. And they have no authority in the governing of the church. They only have authority as much as the eldership gives them. Growth in the relationship between elders and deacons is enhanced when they have good communication with one another. In other words, there must be regular meetings among them. These meetings should take place so that the deacons can report their area of service within the local church.

5. PREPARING FOR ELECTION

The B-P practice of the election of Session is implemented in two stages: a) Nomination, b) Voting. Nomination is essentially the responsibility of the Board of Elders who observe over a period of years those who are spiritual, honest, of good moral behaviour, well versed in the Word, men of prayer, of good Christian witness, and able to relate well with others. “*Novices*” are to be avoided (1 Tim 3:6) in case they may become “*puffed up*” with pride.

The list of candidates deemed worthy in the esteem of the Board of Elders will be announced next week. The general membership will then be able to assess more closely each candidate, how each one has contributed toward the advancement of God’s Kingdom. Canvassing for votes is not practised or condoned. Much prayer for wisdom is encouraged. We need Holy Spirit illumination and discernment so that members may cast their votes correctly and the right persons may be chosen to lead the church in the biblical direction.

May God bless us with a God-fearing Session in these last days. Amen.

Yours in Christ,
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