

The Broadmoor Bulletin

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February 2009

Elders, Their Work and Qualifications

The term "elder" is used two ways in the scriptures: There are those who are elders simply because of age, older men and women (I Tim. 5: 1, 2). There is also the official use of the word "elders" to denote special men who meet certain qualifications and are appointed to the work of overseeing the congregation where they serve (Tit. 1: 5; I Pet. 5: 1-4). It is this latter use of "elder" that we shall herein explore. The scriptures do not teach the modern denominational "pastoral system of government" in which the local preacher presides over the local church. Rather, "And when they had ordained them elders in every church..." (Acts 14: 23). It is evident that these special men were very important to the well being and function of the early church (Acts 11: 30; 15: 4; 20: 17; I Pet. 5: 1-4). In fact, the local church is not fully organized in government unless there are elders present (cp. Tit. 1: 5). Elders and preachers or evangelists are not necessarily the same men. One can be an elder/preacher (if they meet the extra qualifications) or one can be simply an elder or a preacher. Timothy was an evangelist who worked with the elders in the church at Ephesus (I Tim. 5: 17-22, 2 Tim. 4: 1-5). Peter was an apostle (preacher) and elder (I Pet. 5: 1-4). In the case of elders, there was always more than one or a multiplicity (Acts 14: 23, Phil. 1: 1).

The need of good elderships. The organization of a local church consists of bishops (elders), deacons, and members (Phil. 1: 1). The need of elders is seen in the work God has assigned to them. Elders are to be examples to the flock, take the oversight (superintend), and take heed to the flock (I Pet. 5: 3; I Pet. 5: 2; Acts 20: 28). Elders have the responsibility of tending to the flock, watching for grievous wolves, and stopping the mouths of vain talkers or purveyors of error (I Pet. 5: 1, 2, ASV; Acts 20: 29-31; Tit. 1: 9-11). Elders are not businessmen simply in charge of the secular or monetary workings of the local church, but rather they are to be engaged in a spiritual work of soul keeping.

Different terms used to denote the leaders of God's people. There are three Greek words used regarding the overseers of God's people. There is the word presbuterion or presbuteros. From this word we have the English word "elders" and "presbytery" (Tit. 1: 5; I Tim. 4: 14). "Overseer" and "bishop" are derived from the Greek episcopos (Acts 20: 28; I Tim. 3: 1). From poimen we have the English "shepherd" and "pastor" (I Pet. 5: 2, 4; Eph. 4: 11). These three Greek words and the resultant six English words all denote the same function and group of men. Presbuteros (elders/presbytery) suggests one who is mature in age and spiritual development. Episcopos (overseer/bishop) involves ruling ability (Heb. 13: 7, 17, cp. I Tim. 3: 4 and 5: 17), and poimen (shepherd/pastor) indicates the care and watchfulness these men are to give to the flock, the local church.

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Discouraged By Absences

While visiting a small church on a Sunday, there were only a handful of people present. We asked about one of the regular members who was absent. It seems that she had decided to attend a birthday party rather than come to the assembly. You can imagine the discouragement that this caused.

When the numbers are small, even one absent member is really missed. If you were a member of such a church, don't you think you would give more serious consideration to your attendance? It would be easy to see that your presence was important, that others counted on you, that you needed to be there for every assembly. Surely, you wouldn't miss the church meetings for something as trivial as a birthday party, would you?

But here, in this church, we are larger. We have many more members, and our numbers are huge in comparison. And so, it is easy to imagine that if one member is absent, then their presence isn't missed so much. Others will carry on the worship - one person won't be missed too badly. Ever thought this way?

If you think that you can skip the worship services or Bible studies without being missed, you are wrong! Yes, there are others who faithfully attend every meeting, but we still miss those who neglect the assemblies. If every member was present at every service, it would be an incredible boost to every other member. Think of it: the pews nearly full every time, Bible classes with full rosters of eager students, close associations between fellow members being developed and nurtured. What an encouragement it would be in every way!

Have you missed the services recently for something trivial like a birthday party? If so, please think of the hurt you have caused to the church. Repent, and make a commitment never to miss the assemblies again for such a thing.

Greg Gwin

For an additional study on faithfulness, visit the site http://www.executableoutlines.com/fs/fs_15.htm to view an outline by Mark Copeland.

Times of Service

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| Sunday Bible Class | 9:00 a.m. |
| Sunday Morning Worship | 9:55 a.m. |
| Sunday Evening Worship | 5:00 p.m. |
| Wednesday Evening Bible Study | 7:00 p.m. |

Visit us on the web at <http://www.broadmoorchurch.com>

Elders, Their Work and Qualifications

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The qualification of elders. There are sixteen positive and eight negative qualifications that prospective overseers must meet (as I have them arranged). These requirements are listed in I Timothy 3: 1-7 and Titus 1: 6-9. These qualifications are not optional, and all of them are required (the word dei, "must" means "it is necessary," see I Tim. 3:2, 7). We shall at this point list them. Since most of the controversy revolves around "the husband of one wife" and "faithful children," I shall leave these domestic requirements until last so more detailed treatment can be given to them.

The elder must be a man. Paul wrote, "This is a true saying, if a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work" (I Tim. 3: 1). The prospective shepherd must rule well his own house (vs. 4, see vs. 2, "husband of one wife"). The scriptures are plain regarding the leaders of the church being male. The role of women in the church is not that of leadership (I Tim. 2: 8 ff.). The movement in the denominational world and even in some churches of Christ to appoint women to the presbytery is diametrically opposed to the scriptures.

Must desire the office. We read "...if a man desire the office..." (I Tim. 3: 1). If a man does not desire the function of eldership, he is not qualified to serve in this capacity. Paul used a different word each time for "desire." The first is oregetai, "stretches forward to." The second "desire" in the verse is the Greek epithumei, "to set one's heart upon." There is nothing necessarily political in a man seeking to serve as an elder.

He must be blameless (I Tim. 3: 2). The word "blameless" (anepileptos) does not mean sinless but rather "irreproachable." Some have mistakenly taught that "blameless" means none will bring a charge, even without grounds, against the man. The man's life must be such that others can not legitimately find fault with him. For instance, he does not curse, lie, is not irresolute, and ignorant of God's word (Eph. 4: 29; Col. 3: 9; I Cor. 13: 16; 2 Pet. 3: 18).

Must be vigilant (I Tim. 3: 2). Nephaios is translated "temperate" in the American Standard. The English words "vigilant" and "temperate" both convey the idea of nephaios in that to be watchful entails to have self-control. The bishops of the local church must be watchful regarding themselves and the flock they oversee (Heb. 13: 17).

Must be temperate (Tit. 1: 8). The word here used is enkrates and has reference to self-control as such. A lack of self-mastery would suggest the absence of spiritual stature that is requisite to be a leader of God's people. Besides, much self-control is needed in dealing with the various problematic circumstances that the elder encounters. For example, he must not lose his temper when challenged or irritated.

He must be sober (I Tim. 3: 2, Tit. 1: 8). The overseer must be of a well-balanced and sound mind. His thinking must be clear and lucid to be able to discern and address the many matters that will come before him. The dull minded and mentally indolent have no business being in the function of oversight.

Must be of good behavior (I Tim. 3: 2). Dignified and orderly conduct is meant. A. T. Robertson renders it "seemly, decent conduct" (Word Pictures, Vol. 4, pg. 572).

Must be given to hospitality (I Tim. 3: 2, Tit. 1: 8). The Greek is literally "love of strangers" (philoxenos, from philos, love, and xenos, a stranger). He must be willing to assist others and come to their aid, even those whom he does not personally know.

Must be apt to teach (I Tim. 3: 2, Tit. 1: 9). "Apt" (didaktikos) means skilled in teaching (Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words). We see why he must be skilled in teaching in the language of Titus: "Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and convince the gainsayers" (Tit. 1: 9). It is sad and inexcusable that men are serving as elders who cannot even teach, much less possess the level of skill required to silence errorists.

Must be of good report of them which are without (I Tim. 3: 7). Such is a general qualification for all Christians (I Thes. 4: 12). Those "without" are non-Christians, those outside of Jesus (cp. Gal. 3: 26, 27). It is important that the considered man possess the proper life style when seen by the world.

Must not be given to wine (I Tim. 3: 3, Tit. 1: 7). The prospective bishop must have an exemplary life that is without the negative influence of alcohol and intemperance. The American Standard renders paroinon, "not quarrelsome over wine" (footnote). Other biblical teaching plainly states that intoxicants are to be altogether avoided, even to the point of "not looking upon" (Prov. 23: 31-33, except for the medicinal application, I Tim. 5: 23).

He must not be a striker (I Tim. 3: 3, Tit. 1: 7). The reference is to physical violence. The first "elders" I met involved a situation of controversy. They were teaching and practicing error and I met with them to discuss the matter. There were three of them, and I was a nineteen-year-old who had great courage. They invited me into their office, and one locked the door after I entered. They then informed me that they were going to change my mind, even if it meant a physical whipping. I reasoned with them and explained to them that such conduct only compounded their sins. They finally released me. The persuasion of elders must be the word of God, not physical violence (Tit. 1: 9 ff.).

Must not be greedy of filthy lucre (I Tim. 3: 3, Tit. 1: 7). It appears that certain elders were financially supported in their work (I Tim. 5: 17). It also appears that churches were not stingy in their support; hence, the temptation to serve for money. However, money must not be the motivation (I Pet. 5: 2).

Men viewed for the eldership must be patient (I Tim. 3: 3). The Greek word translated "patient" on this occasion is epieikes. Epieikes means "fitting, suitable, fair, reasonable, kind, mild, equitable and gentle." Such a quality of character is a must in dealing with people in potentially explosive situations.

Must not be a brawler (I Tim. 3: 3). The American Standard has "not contentious." Again, in dealing with people, one must not have a contentious spirit or quarrelsome manner. This is not to say, however, that when the circumstances call for controversy that the elder will refuse to contend for the faith (Jude 3).

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Must not be covetous (I Tim. 3: 3). The idea is "no lover of money" (aphilarguros, philarguros means money-loving and the alpha-negative negates the word, no lover of money). Some suggest the difference in "not covetous" and "not greedy of filthy lucre" is this qualification deals directly with love of money while "not covetous" addresses method.

Must not be a novice (I Tim. 3: 6). "Novice" is derived from neophutos (from neos, new, and phuo, to bring forth, produce; hence that which is new in its existence). God's leaders must be mature and experienced men who are immediately capable of doing the great work assigned to them.

He must not be self-willed (Tit. 1: 7). Presbyters must not be domineering and arrogant (I Pet. 5: 3). A self-willed attitude and character will only be unnecessarily abrasive. Such a trait hinders rather than promotes good relationships.

Must not be soon angry (Tit. 1: 7). All these people-oriented requirements are indicative of the work of elders. A man who is soon to anger will inflame matters and make possible reconciliation impossible. There will be too many combative matters encountered by elders to allow one into the office (function) who is soon to anger.

He must be a lover of good men (Tit. 1: 8). Some scholars believe Diotrephes was an overbearing elder in the church John desired to visit (3 Jn. 9, 10). If so, Diotrephes certainly lacked the trait of having the capacity to appreciate goodness in others.

Must be just (Tit. 1: 8). The elder must have upright and even judgment toward all men. Equity and fairness must characterize his dealings with all men, both in the body of Christ and regarding those not Christians.

He must be holy (Tit. 1: 8). Holiness is separation from the world for the purpose of being used in God's service (Jn. 17: 17). These foregoing characteristics reflect the man's ability to rule, work with people, and the fact that he is an example of one of God's servants in decorum and life-style.

It will be observed that each of the twenty foregoing requirements must be present prior to the prospective elder's appointment. It is also apparent that each man must possess these traits (not the eldership collectively). These requisites are straightforward and regarding them, there has been relatively little controversy. However, the two domestic requirements have been characterized by endless controversy among the people of God. I refer to "the husband of one wife" and "the father of faithful children." At this stage of our study, we shall turn our attention to the two remaining requirements and a treatment thereof.

Must be the husband of one wife (I Tim. 3: 2, Tit. 1: 6). The expression "husband of one wife" (andra mias gunaikos) has prompted no small amount of different views. The language of the New Testament is very precise (cp. I Cor. 2: 13). The Holy Spirit could have worded this requirement a number of ways. For instance, He could have said "the bishop must be married." This would mean that he is required to be married, but would not have precluded polygamy (more than one wife). He could have said, "the bishop must not be a polygamist." This would have forbidden polygamy, but would not have

required a marriage state. "The bishop must have been married only once," was another choice. This would prohibit polygamy, but would not have necessarily required a present marriage state. Instead of all these possible constructions, the Spirit wrote, "the bishop must be the husband of one wife." This construction requires marriage (present marriage) but forbids polygamy.

The question is sometimes raised, "does 'the husband of one wife' mean that he can never have been previously married?" Some contend that the prospective elder can not have ever been married before because such would place him in a questionable situation. However, in the case of the death of a mate, the living mate is no longer the "husband" (cp. Rom. 7: 3, the same would be technically true in the case of scriptural divorcement, Matt. 5: 32, 19: 9). Hence, if he remarries, he is "the husband of one wife." However, remarriage after divorcement does often open the door for problems and questions.

The elder must be the father of faithful children (I Tim. 3: 4, Tit. 1: 6). Out of the twenty-four qualifications, not a single one has had more controversy surrounding it than "the father of faithful children." The two areas of controversy involve whether or not the children qualification means more than one child and if the children must be Christians. Allow me to commence our examination by first examining the singular/plural argument.

In the first place, the word used for children is tekna. The grammatical information regarding tekna is nominative, accusative, or vocative plural (The Analytical Greek Lexicon, pg. 399, teknon is singular). One cause of confusion among those not conversant with the Greek grammar is when they use such works as Young's Analytical Concordance, they see teknon listed as the word in I Timothy 3: 4 and Titus 1: 6 (teknon is either nominative, accusative, or vocative singular or genitive or ablative plural, see the declension of omicron nouns using ergon in Beginner's Grammar of the Greek New Testament, 5th Edition, pg. 33, 34, by William Hersey Davis). Rather than providing grammatical detail, Young's concordance just presents the nominative singular form of our word. However, the actual word in I Timothy 3: 3 and Titus 1: 6 is tekna, plural in number. Plurals and singulars are not interchangeable. However, this is not to say that the plural does not include the singular. A determination of the singular application or inclusion when the plural is used is more a matter of interpretation.

In all fairness, there is what is called plurals of class. Plurals of class involve the plural form being used when it can have a singular application, as well as the plural (see A Grammar of the Idiom of the New Testament, 7th Edition, by Dr. Gottlieb Lunemann, pg. 175 and A Grammar of the Greek New Testament, by A. T. Robertson, pg. 408, Heb. 1: 2; 9: 8, are given as examples of plurals of class). There are a number of examples that fall under the heading of plural of class. For instance, the children (tekna, plural) of a widow are to assist their mother/widow (I Tim. 5: 4). We know that tekna in this case includes teknon (a single son/grandson) because verse eight mentions a single son or grandson. However, there is not anything in the context of I Timothy 3: 4 to indicate the presence of the plural of class (the scriptures recognize plurals and singulars, Gal. 3: 16, notice "seed," spermati, and "seeds," spermasin).

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It must be remembered that plural of class is the exception and not the rule. Just because plural of class occurs in some cases does not mean it can be argued as present when there is no reason for such an assignment.

The argument is advanced that Paul had no other way to have worded this qualification. If the Holy Spirit had said, "having a faithful child," then more than one child would not be permissible." This argument sounds convincing and lends credence to the plural containing the singular; therefore, the elder may have only one child and serve. The problem is the Holy Spirit could have easily worded the requirement so that one child or a plurality would be meant. In fact, the Spirit did precisely this in the case of the domestic requirements for deacons. A prospective deacon may have one child or children and be qualified. Consider the construction of the requirement: "Let the deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well" (I Tim. 3: 12). Notice how the Spirit used "deacons" (plural) with "children" (plural). The plural used with the plural means one or more children are meant. In the case of the elder, though, you have this construction: "One (singular, dm) that ruleth well his own house, having his children (plural, dm) in subjection with all gravity" (I Tim. 3: 4, see vs. 1-3 and Titus 1: 6). It is evident that Paul wanted the plural in the case of the children understood as more than one child. As far as the reason for requiring more than one child, I can only speculate. I do know that there is by far more challenge in raising children (addressing the problems they have with each other) than in raising just one child. The elder will be dealing with people (plurality) in the church and often having to address their conflicts and relationship problems. Having raised children (plural) better qualifies him for the task he will be facing.

Having examined the singular/plural controversy, let us now consider "**faithful children**." Does "faithful" in Titus 1: 6 (parallel to I Tim. 3: 4, 5) mean the children are subject to their father's rule or does it, in addition, mean that the children must be Christians?

It is evident from the wording of I Timothy 3: 4 ("One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity") that the qualification has to do with the man's ability to rule. Indeed, elders must be able to rule. Paul presents the domestic rule of elders (their physical families) and their spiritual rule as parallel (I Tim. 3: 4, 5).

At the very outset, I would raise the question that if the Holy Spirit had meant to require a prospective (or actual serving elder) elder's children to all be Christians, why did not he simply word it so there could be no doubt about the matter? As we shall see, "faithful" (pistos, Tit. 1: 6) does not inherently mean Christian. Instead of pistos (pista), Paul could have written christianos (Christian) in Titus 1: 6 and left no room for discussion. Could it be, then, that the Holy Spirit had something else in mind when he wrote "faithful children" (pista tekna)?

Pistos ("faithful," KJV) is found sixty-six times in the Greek New Testament. Although pistos is used in connection with those who believe in God, it has the basic meaning of reliable.

Vine comments thus on the passive and active meaning of pistos: "(a) Passive, faithful, to be trusted, reliable, said of God...Active, signifying believing, trusting, relying..." (Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words). One can readily appreciate how pistos is used relative to Christians. Paul addressed the Ephesian Letter to the "faithful (pistos, dm) in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 1: 1). The saved are here said to be reliable and trusting, they rely and trust in God. As is the case with so many "ambiguous" words, though, the usage in a particular setting determines the full meaning. Paul had been found pistos by the Lord (I Tim. 1: 12). Here pistos is used of Paul while he was Saul of Tarsus, before he was a Christian (Acts 9: 22; 26). Even before Saul was a Christian, he possessed certain qualities that constituted pistos. Saul was trusting in the rule and discipline that he had accepted as a devout Jew. We read of a "faithful" (pistos) and "wise" servant, one who was reliable in the charge of taking care of the assigned household (Matt. 24: 45). Regarding stewards in general, faithfulness (pistos) was required (I Cor. 4: 2). As noticed, pistos can and is used to describe reliability regarding the Christian in his relationship with God and to a number of relationship applications that do not immediately involve being a Christian. Again, the particular usage and context must decide the application of pistos.

Most scholars admit that Paul is saying the same thing in Titus 1: 6 in writing to Titus concerning this domestic qualification as he had written to Timothy. It is clear that Paul had in mind the subjection of the children to their father's rule when he wrote to Timothy (I Tim. 3: 3, 4). In view of pistos being "ambiguous" and the context determining the exact application, I submit that Paul had in mind subjection to the father's rule when he wrote to Titus "faithful children." In fact, the converse or opposite in Titus 1: 6 is not simply non-Christian but "riot and unruly." Riot (asotia) means profligacy and unruly (anopotaktos) means not subject to rule (Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words). Riot and unruly describe a person who is out of control and in a state of spiritual prodigality, not just a non-Christian.

It is also important that we appreciate the detailed description of I Timothy 3: 3, 4. The house over which the elder exerts the rule is his own house (tou idiou oikou). In other words, these are children who are still under his immediate rule, not those who have established their own households (cp. Gen. 2: 24). It is also apparent from both texts that all his children under his rule are to be pistos. The man rules his house, and his children are not out of control. In some families the children rule. I spent a short time with an "elder" who had three children. Two had been baptized but all three were not subject to his rule. He issued orders but they disobeyed and mocked him. Not long after my stay, the church experienced division; the elders were not ruling (two out of the three were not).

We are faced with the challenge of avoiding extreme positions anytime we study the scriptures. Some want to compromise in setting aside qualifications that God has bound, in the case of elders, others attempt to bind where God never bound. The view held by some requires matters of elders that are beyond their control. Men can teach their children, set a good example, and exercise headship (rule), however, they can not always be held responsible for any of their children not being Christians, especially those who are out on their own.

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Elders, Their Work and Qualifications

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Remember the parallel we saw between the domestic and spiritual rule of elders (I Tim. 3: 3, 4)? Those who want to bind the children being Christians and claim a man is disqualified if ever he has a child to go astray, will not make a consistent argument regarding the spiritual side of the comparison, the rule in the local church. "Elders cannot be held responsible for a member who falls away, especially after they have done all they can to teach and persuade," they explain and I agree. However, these same people often claim that anytime a child goes astray, the man ceases to be qualified. While parents exert great influence on their children, we must realize children have minds of their own, especially when they go out on their own (see Prov. 3: 1-12, 4: 1-13). We tend to forget that children are held responsible which is indicative of their own free moral agency, "...A wise son maketh a glad father: but a foolish son is the heaviness of his mother," wrote the wise man (Prov. 10: 1). The Law of Moses did not automatically assign failure to parents whose children did not turn out right (Deut. 21: 18 ff., see Ezek. 18: 1-13). Godly fathers must rule, but they cannot legislate Christianity (each person elects to become a Christian). While this is the case, most children at home who are of accountable age will probably become Christians (cp. Acts 10: 2, 44-48; 16: 34). Alas, many of these will fall away when they are removed from their father's influence.

It is tragic that so much time is spent observing only whether or not the children have been baptized instead of observing the father's rule (they are not exactly the same thing). Men are too often appointed who have children who have been baptized (often the result of their mother's teaching), but they have no ruling ability (cp. Heb. 13: 7, 17, I Thess. 5: 12, I Pet. 5: 2, 3). As a result of lack of ruling ability (the very thing required in I Timothy 3: 3, 4 and Titus 1: 6), insurrections commonly occur in local churches (cp. Tit. 1: 9-11).

We have noticed the work of elders, the need of qualified elders and the twenty-four requirements placed on them by the Holy Spirit. Godly men should be seeking to achieve this appointment and churches should be seeking out such men (cp. Acts 6: 3-6). Scriptural overseers are a must to the completion of the organization of the local church and are a blessing to those who have banded together to serve God as his people (Acts 2: 42, Heb. 10: 25). In regards to these qualifications, we must seek the happy medium of not relaxing or binding where God has not relaxed or bound (Josh. 1: 7).

Addendum: A study of Samuel and Eli as fathers is very profitable (I Sam. 8: 3). Eli's sons did not turn out well. Eli was held responsible for the behavior of his sons (I Sam. 3: 13). After a similar fashion, Samuel's sons were a disappointment. However, Samuel continued to serve in his capacity as leader of God's people with God's approval (I Sam. 8). What was the difference in the circumstances involving Eli and Samuel as fathers? In the case of Eli, we are expressly told, "and he restrained them not" (I Sam. 3: 13). However, it is evident that Samuel exonerated himself in regards to his parental duties. Samuel is one of the greatest men mentioned in the Bible, one of the few regarding whom no fault is stated. In the person of Samuel we can see the principle of "...neither

shall the father bear the iniquity of the son..." (Ezek. 18: 20). In fact, Ezekiel presents an unquestionably godly father producing an ungodly son (Ezek. 18: 5-13). The ungodly son in no way diminished from the godliness of the father. Some have erroneously used Proverbs 22: 6 in an effort to prove that when a child goes astray, the parents are to blame. However, Proverbs 22: 6 ("Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old he will not depart from it") is stating a general truth and not an absolute law (cp. 18: 22 with 21: 9). What I am attempting to say is, the prospective elder's family must be considered, but he is not to be automatically rejected because "he has a child who has fallen away."

Regarding "the children being at home, under the father's immediate rule," I am not meaning to say that I believe a man whose children are grown and have moved out is disqualified to be appointed or to continue serving. I believe Paul is simply considering the situation of the man whose children are at home under his rule without any design to exclude good men whose children are grown and who have proved their ruling ability. However, if a man has become associated with a local church after his children are grown, this does present a challenge for the local church regarding the man being appointed to serve in the capacity of an overseer. The church must be able, with some degree of certainty, to decide what kind of ruler the man was when his children were at home.

Don Martin

"For Our Good Always"

"And the Lord commanded us to observe all these statutes, to fear the Lord our God, for our good always, that He might preserve us alive, as it is this day" (Deut. 6:24).

In his final words to the Israelites, Moses recounted the commands that God had given on Mt. Sinai. And, he urged them to realize that everything the Lord had commanded them to do was in their own best interest.

The subsequent history of Israel bears witness to the truthfulness of Moses' statement. So long as they faithfully followed God's will, things went well for them. But, when they neglected their duty and turned away from His law, they always suffered awful consequences.

The statement that Moses made so many years ago is still true today. Some may ask, "Why did God command this?", or "What is the purpose of that?" The simple answer is that it is for OUR good.

God did not make the rules just because He wanted to "flex" His divine power. He didn't order us to do various things simply to test us or torment us. Instead, He established His law because He knows us. He created us. He knows what is best for us. And, He desires that everything go well for us.

Think about some of God's laws, and see that they are "for our good always." Consider His prohibitions against drunkenness, adultery, lying, stealing, murder, etc. By keeping from these evils we are insuring our own well-being. Meditate upon His commands to study, pray, love our spouses and children, treat others as we want to be treated, etc. Each of these - when fully obeyed - leads to happiness and joy in our lives.

God loves us. His commands are a real manifestation of that love. Let us show our love for Him by obeying His law faithfully.

Greg Gwin

Faithfulness

- Is a car that starts 7 out of 10 times *faithful*?
- Is a refrigerator that only quits once a month *faithful*?
- Is your paper boy *faithful* if he only misses delivering your paper two or three times a week?
- If your hot water heater greets you with hot water 5 mornings out of 7 would you call it *faithful* - or would you call a plumber?
- If you don't come to work one or two mornings a week, would your boss consider you *faithful* - or unemployed?
- If you attend church services in a similar manner, only missing occasionally, coming most of the time ... **ARE YOU FAITHFUL?**
- Read Hebrews 10:25

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Deacons, Their Work and Qualifications

A study of deacons, their work and qualifications is not only designed to be a companion article to "[Elders, Their Work and Qualifications](#)", but there is much misunderstanding relative to this subject so that the truth needs to be clearly set forth. Also, the office (function) of deacons is involved in the organization of the church that Jesus built (cp. Phil. 1: 1). For some reason, many tend to doctrinally and practically intermingle the separate functions of preacher, pastors, and deacons. A preacher can also serve as one of the pastors, but he is not "the" pastor (cf. I Pet. 5: 1, 2). Elders, pastors, or overseers are always spoken of in the plural relative to serving in a local church (cp. Acts 14: 23). Deacons and elders are clearly distinguished as different men with different attendant work. There are three Greek words used regarding the overseers of God's people. There is the word presbuterion or presbuteros (denoting age and maturity), episcopos suggests the ruling ability of overseers, and poimen involves the responsibility of these men to shepherd the flock (Tit. 1: 5, I Tim. 4: 14; Acts 20: 28, I Tim. 3: 1; I Pet. 5: 2, 4, Eph. 4: 11). These men are called, respectively, elders, presbytery; overseers, bishops; and shepherds, pastors. Based on these three Greek words, we see that these men are older and that their work consists of overseeing and shepherding the flock or local church.

"Deacon" is derived from the Greek diakonos. Diakonos simply means "servant." We read of domestic servants, civil servants, and then, the focus of our study, deacons in the church (Jn. 2: 5, 9; Rom. 13: 4; I Tim. 3: 8, the minister, diakonos, of the gospel is a servant pertaining to teaching the word, I Tim. 4: 6). All Christians are servants, but deacons are special servants who, like elders and preachers, meet specific qualifications (I Tim. 3: 8-10, 12). The "likewise" shows that just as the men who have met certain qualifications and are appointed by the church to oversee; deacons also must meet certain qualifications and be appointed by the church (I Tim. 3: 8, see vs. 1-7). Notwithstanding the separation made in the

scriptures between elders or pastors and deacons, some teach that deacons may oversee a local church. Denominations that have the pastoral system of government (the preacher oversees the church), often recognize deacon oversight, especially in the absence of a preacher ("pastor"). Consider the following:

"They (deacons, dm) are to have charge of the sick and needy members, and are also to act as counselors and assistants to the pastor in advancing the general interests of the body. In the absence of a pastor it becomes the duty of the deacons to conduct the devotional meetings, provide for the supply of the pulpit and administer the affairs of the body generally" (The Hiscox Guide for Baptist Churches, pg. 72).

The word diakonos is indicative of the work of these special men (see the addendum regarding deaconesses and other matters). In view of the spiritual oversight of elders, the work of deacons is primarily physical (there is spiritual administering also involved, see I Tim. 3: 13). H. E. Phillips wrote thus regarding their work:

"The administration to the physical needs of the church goes further than just to the looking after the widows, orphans, and the poor (Phillips has earlier referred to Acts 6, dm). Constant service is needed at every worship service. Ushers are needed. The preparation of the building and all elements of the worship, such as the emblems for the Lord's Supper, the distribution of song books, distribution of tracts, etc., must be done. This is directly the work of deacons. The preparation of the building, heating or ventilation must be done. The general care of the grounds and buildings come directly in line with the nature of the work of the deacons. In general the nature of the work done by deacons is easily determined, but specific duties are assigned by the elders" (Scriptural Elders and Deacons, pg. 272).

Some have pointed to the example of the seven men who were appointed to serve the material needs of the widows in Acts 6 as an example of deacons. While these men are not called "deacons" as such, we do find the resident words diakonia ("ministration" in verse one) and diakonein ("serve" tables in verse two). These seven men also had to meet certain qualifications. Indeed, their work would be similar to the work deacons would later perform; however, the qualifications are different. For instance, there are no domestic requirements found in Acts 6: 3, 5 compared to I Timothy 3: 12. Therefore, I would not refer to these seven men as being deacons in the "official" sense of the word.

"8: Likewise must the deacons be grave, not doubletongued, not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre; 9: Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience. 10: And let these also first be proved; then let them use the office of a deacon, being found blameless. 12: Let the deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well" (I Tim. 3).

It will be observed from the foregoing qualifications for deacons that there are a total of nine stated. These nine qualifications are broken down into six positives and three negatives. In total, these qualifications present the deacon as not necessarily older in years and yet having arrived at a certain level of spiritual maturity.

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Some churches, alas, are very careful in the selection of elders, but careless in the matter of deacons. This ought not to be for several reasons. First of all, there is equal stress placed on the must of these men meeting qualifications before their appointment. Second of all, new elders are usually selected from those already serving as deacons. These nine requirements, as mentioned, must be in place anterior to the appointment, they are not to be appointed and then allowed to "grow into the requirement." As with elders, these requirements must be individually possessed, not simply collectively possessed. Let us now briefly consider each of these nine qualifications.

"Likewise must the deacons be grave" (vs. 8). As mentioned, the "likewise" (hosautos) indicates the seriousness of prospective deacons possessing these requirements (see the repeated occurrence of "must," *dei*, vs. 2, 7). "Grave" (semnous) is reflective of a basically serious man as opposed to a flippant, silly sort of personality.

"...must be a grave, serious man, whose life is such that he would be dependable and trustworthy in the work. He must be of sedate and dignified conduct" (Scriptural Elders and Deacons, pg. 260).

"...not double-tongued" (vs. 8). The double-tongued (*dilogous*) – *dis* in Greek means twice and *logos* means a word. Hence, to be double-tongued means to have two words or rather two contradictory words. A double-tongued man could cause a lot of confusion within a local church as he moves among the members saying contradictory things.

"'Double-tongued' is used in the New Testament in this verse only. The double-tongued says one thing to one person and a contradictory thing to another person....The double-tongued are insincere...." (The Deacon And His Work, pg. 18).

"...Not given to much wine" (vs. 8). In the case of prospective elders we read, "Not given to wine" (I Tim. 3: 3). Some have fallaciously concluded that in the case of the elder, he must not drink alcohol; while in the case of the deacon, he may drink, but not "much." The language in verses three and eight is different. "Not given to wine" in verse three is *me paroinon* and "...not given to much wine" in verse eight is, *me pollo oino prosechontas*. Hence, literally "not (me) given to wine (*parionon*)" (vs. 3) and "not (me) to much (*pollo*) wine (*oino*) given or addicted (*prosechontas*)" (vs. 8). Rather than concluding that in the case of the elder, he must not drink alcohol; while in the case of the deacon, he may drink but not "much," the conclusion should be, using this logic, that the elder is not to be "given" to any amount and the deacon is not to be "given" to much wine. While the wine prohibition for both elders and deacons may involve excess, the Bible teaches against the "recreational" use of strong drink to the point of total avoidance (Prov. 23: 31, 32). Paul's focus in the case of deacons and elders, respectively, appears to be excess and the effect of fermented drink (I Tim. 3: 8, 3, see the American Standard rendering of verse three, "No brawler").

"...Not greedy of filthy lucre" (vs. 8). The Christian must be concerned about material and financial matters (I Tim. 5: 8). However, he must avoid greed and avarice.

"If a man is so desirous of filthy lucre that he spends most of his time trying to get possession of it, so that he has absolutely no time for his service that belongs to the office of a deacon, he is not qualified" (Scriptural Elders and Deacons, pg. 263).

"Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience" (vs. 9). The gospel is called, "the mystery of the faith" because it was once a mystery before its revelation (Col. 1: 25, 26). The prospective deacon must respect the truth and be not opposed to doctrine or God's commandments (cp. Tit. 1: 9). In his proximity to the word, he must hold a pure conscience.

"And let these also first be proved..." (vs. 10). Paul herein stresses the order of things ("first," *protos*). Just as in the case of the elder, the prospective deacon must have an established track record before he is considered (I Tim. 3: 6). Appointing a man to serve as a deacon before he is prepared is not only unscriptural and injurious to the church, but it can be very discouraging to the man. I say this because he will not have the ability to perform his work. In the language, "use the office of a deacon" or "let them minister" (Marshall, Nestle Greek-English Interlinear), Paul is showing that there is work to be done as opposed to simply being a figure head or only holding an honorary position.

"...Being found blameless" (vs. 10). Just as some minimize the qualifications, there are others who place them so high that they are unattainable. In this latter vein, some believe "blameless" means without sin. This cannot be the idea because "all sin" (I Jn. 1: 8-10). The meaning of "blameless" (*anenkletoi*) is simply that the man being considered does not have some fault to which others can point. Translations that translate *anenkletoi* "irreproachable" do justice to the original.

A man who is shiftless and does not support his family, has outbursts of uncontrolled anger, and is heard using vulgar and banal language is not blameless regardless of the positive traits he may possess (cp. I Tim. 3: 2)

"Let the deacons be the husbands of one wife" (vs. 12). The language, "...be the husbands of one wife" (*estosan mias gunaikos andres*) literally means, "be of one woman men." The language condemns polygamy, many wives, and requires the future deacon to be married. The language here applied to the deacon is essentially the same as that applied to the elder (I Tim. 3: 2, except for the singular/plural difference, elder and deacons). H. E. Winkler wrote:

"I believe 'husband of one wife,' conveys the same thought with regard to the deacon that it does to the elder" (The Eldership, pg. 106). (For a complete study of this requirement, refer **"Elders, Their Work and Qualifications"** above.)

"...Ruling their children and their own houses well" (vs. 12). In using the plural "deacons" with the plural children," Paul is requiring the man being considered to serve as a deacon to have one or more children (there is a difference in the grammar in verse 12 and in verse 4. In verse 4, Paul uses the singular "bishop" with the plural "children," thus requiring more than one child.)

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Hence, the deacon must be a serious, truthful, temperate man with a good sense of priorities, one who insists on truth, knowing the truth. He must be established, no practiced sin in his life, and a spiritually successful family man, able to exercise his ruling ability.

One incentive for serving as a deacon is seen in the following language:

"13: For they that have used the office of a deacon well purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus."

As mentioned at the outset of our study, the organization of local churches involves the "saints," the "bishops," and the "deacons" (Phil. 1: 1). While it is true that all of the requirements for being a deacon are generally taught regarding all Christians, except the marriage and children qualification, deacons have a serious work to perform and can either be an asset or liability, depending on how well they possess these requisites.

Addendum: In a study of "deacons," the question is often raised about "deaconesses" (female servants of the church). Some would hastily say that the Bible knows nothing of "deaconesses." The truth of the matter is "deaconesses" are mentioned. Paul referred to "...Phoebe our sister, which is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea" (Rom. 16: 1). "Servant" is from diakonon. The grammar of diakonon in Romans 16: 1 is "accusative, singular, masculine and feminine" (The Analytical Greek Lexicon, pg. 91). Phoebe, then, was a deacon or deaconess, as we would say in English. The question, though, is what was meant. Was Phoebe simply a female servant who ministered in some way, or was she one of a class of special women who served equally along side of deacons.

Some believe I Timothy 3: 11 is referring to deaconesses. The verse is literally rendered, "Women in like manner *must* be grave, not slanderers, temperate, faithful in all things" (ASV). The common position is that these women were the deacon's wives (see vs. 8-10, 12). If so, why was there nothing said regarding the wives of elders? Others contend that the women were the wives and the deacons and elders. However, why are they only mentioned in the middle of the qualifications for deacons? A growing number are of the persuasion that the women were deaconesses, female deacons. If this is the case, why are they not separately and clearly mentioned and addressed as were the elders and deacons? Could it be that these women were not necessarily the elders or deacon's wives or female deacons as such, but that these women were simply female servants who might assist the deacons? In view of the social distinctions and barriers especially in the First Century society regarding men and women, deacons would have had a number of impediments in assisting the female sick and infirm, etc.

While I certainly have to admit the existence of female servants in the early church, I do not believe these women were deaconesses, on an equal level with deacons. Again, the fact of female servants such as Phoebe who were used by churches cannot be denied, but even these women would have

to meet certain requirements (perhaps I Tim. 3: 11). If I Timothy 3: 11 is referring to deaconesses just as verses 8-10 and 12 are referring to deacons, why the qualification difference? For instance, they are not required to be married or have children as is the case relative to deacons. One danger in officially appointing women to serve as deacons, besides the foregoing matters, is that such can be just one step away from appointing them to serve as elders, knowing how man thinks and works (women are excluded from serving as elders, I Tim. 3: 1-5, I Tim. 2: 12-15).

On occasion the question is raised regarding a church having deacons but not having elders, is such scriptural? Many point to Acts 6: 1-7 and argue that the church in Jerusalem had deacons but no elders. To make this argument, certain matters must be assumed. First, these seven men are not called "deacons" and the qualifications are not the same as those found in I Tim. 3. Second, while "elders" as applied to "bishops" is not mentioned until Acts 11: 30, it is apparent that elders were already in place in Judaea.

There is a present and real danger with a church having deacons in the absence of elders. Without rulers (bishops, elders, Acts 20: 17, 28, I Tim. 3: 4, 5), a church tends to place more overseeing duties on deacons and deacons themselves face the risk of moving into the position of oversight. Deacons, I repeat, have no spiritual oversight of a local church assigned to them in the scriptures.

Some also ask about the case of just one man being qualified to serve as a deacon, should the church appoint him? All I can say is that such male servants are spoken of as in a plurality. The same is the case regarding presbyters or bishops (Acts 14: 23).

Don Martin

Press On

The apostle Paul not only told the elders of the church at Ephesus that he "shrank not" from fulfilling his role as a preacher, but he told the brethren at Philippi that he would "press on" to lay hold of the prize of the high calling in Christ Jesus.

Press on comes from a Greek word that means literally "to pursue" and was a metaphor for a "foot race," according to Vine. It means "to speed on earnestly." That was Paul's point to the Philippians – he was stretching forward, as in a race, to win the incorruptible prize (Phil. 3:12 – 14; see 1 Cor. 9:24 – 27).

To press on suggests that Paul had a goal, that he was focused on that goal, and that he was determined to reach it. We all pursue and press for the things that interest us in life: promotions, money, sports, fashions, exercise, etc.

God calls on us to seek his kingdom first and set our minds on things above. These other things matter very little if in the end we lose our reward. Paul knew that and forsook all worldly pursuits to focus on the Lord and the heavenly reward. Those who are occupied with other pursuits have no energy to "press on" to heaven. In so doing they "shrink back" to perdition (Heb. 10:39). Press on, brethren!

L. A. Stauffer

Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.

Revelation 2:10b