What Does the Bible Reveal about the Calling, Characteristics, Authority, and Function of Elders in the Church?

A Tutorial for Elders

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The Biblical Authority and Function of Elders in the Church

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Introduction

When Adam and Eve sinned by disobeying God, their sin unleashed a powerful corruption of God's perfect creation. A four-fold disharmony resulted: disharmony between God and man, among all human beings, within each person, and through the whole cosmos.* God, who is all-knowing and all love, immediately instituted his plan, which he had established before creation, to redeem and restore his creation. The focus of that plan is the life and work of Jesus Christ, God's only begotten Son, the Second Person of the triune God, and is recorded in the Bible, the Word of God.

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* For further information on this and other subjects in this program for elders, see *Essential Christianity: Historic Christian Systematic Theology—With a Focus on Its Very Practical Dimensions, Including Answers to Our Great Questions of Life—for Now and Eternity (PowerPoint)*.

The Biblical Authority and Function of Elders in the Church

The whole Bible incrementally reveals God's plan of redemption in Jesus Christ. The Old Testament points to the coming of the Christ, the Messiah, the only Savior and Lord, and the New Testament explains him and provides a glimpse of what will occur between his first coming and his second coming, when he will return and consummate God's plan to redeem and restore his creation.

One of the greatest of the early church leaders, Augustine (A. D. 354-430), Bishop of Hippo in North Africa, offered a helpful mnemonic for remembering the relationship between the two Testaments and their meaning: "The New is in the Old concealed; the Old is in the New revealed." (Cf., e.g., 1 Peter 1:3-12)

In the implementation of his plan, God is reconciling the world to himself in Christ. (2 Corinthians 5:17-21) In his great love for human beings, who bear his image, God wants those "from every nation, tribe, people and language" (Revelation 7:9) to be saved and be brought into his kingdom.

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To most effectively communicate his plan of redemption to the world, God established a covenant with Abraham and his descendants through Isaac (Genesis 17), who were to be God's special people through whom he would work to implement his plan. His covenant people, through whom the Messiah (Christ) would come, were and are to take his message of redemption to all the world.

Sin took its toll in the old covenant, and Israel hoarded the blessings God had given them, which they were to share with the world (Genesis 12:1-3), and they became self-serving. Thus, God spoke through the prophet Jeremiah that he would establish a new covenant. (31:31-34) When the time was right in his sight, God sent his only begotten Son to establish that new covenant and redeem and restore all creation. (Galatians 4:4-5) Those who believed in the Messiah, the Christ, were credited with his righteousness by their faith, as was Abraham. (Romans 4) Thus in Christ, they thereby became Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise. (Galatians 3:29)

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The church is the visible manifestation of God's covenant with his people. The New Testament church is the new covenant God revealed through Jeremiah, which is clearly seen in the original Greek of the New Testament. At the Lord's Supper, Jesus said, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you." (Luke 22:20) Jesus used a special Greek word for new, καινός (*kainos*, new). The word *kainos* means new in nature or quality (i.e., renewed), not new in time or origin, which is designated by another Greek word also translated new, νέος (*neos*, i.e., brand new). The new covenant is based on the old covenant but is significantly different in its manifestation in Christ Jesus.

Thus, the church was not born at Pentecost. It was empowered at Pentecost to do what the covenant people were called to do when God made the covenant with Abraham, the original and new forms of which were briefly referenced in God's first announcement of his plan of redemption and restoration already in Genesis 3:15.

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As I have explained in *Essential Christianity* (*op cit*.), the unity and connection between Old Testament Israel and the New Testament church are also seen very clearly in the Septuagint, the (250 B. C.) Greek translation of the Old Testament Hebrew, which was the Bible that Jesus and the early church used, "the holy Scriptures" to which Paul refers in 2 Timothy 3:15. In the Septuagint and in the New Testament, the Greek word, ἐκκλησία (*ekklēsia* < ἐκ [*ek*], from, out of + καλέω [*kaleō*], call), meaning assembly, congregation, church, and translated church in the New Testament, is used to translate the Hebrew word, קָהָל (*qāhāl*), assembly, congregation some 100 times throughout the Old Testament.

Thus, the church constitutes those of us who are called from the world's evil to be holy to God to serve him in his high and holy purpose for us. (1 Peter 1:13-23) The church is God's covenant people, whom he has called to bring the good news of his plan of redemption in Christ to the whole world, equipped and empowered to do so by the Holy Spirit. (1 Corinthians 12:3ff.; Ephesians 4:11-16ff.)

The Biblical Authority and Function of Elders in the Church

Being the Word of God, the Bible is completely true, trustworthy, and realistic, thus explaining the current reality of the vast disharmony throughout the world due to human sin and its devasting effects, including the four-fold disharmony described in the beginning of this Introduction. Nevertheless, God's Word reveals the greatest help and hope for human beings: that greatest help and hope comes in our only Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and his Gospel of redemption and restoration that the church exists to proclaim in word and in deed.

Since human sin and disharmony are everywhere throughout the world in this phase of life in this age, that means it is in the church as well. Yet, the Holy Spirit is working in the lives of those in the church, who by their faith in Christ Jesus, have been credited with his righteousness (Romans 4), and are maturing in Christ. (Ephesians 4:11-16ff.) This maturation process is called sanctification (1 Peter 1:1-2), whereby the believer in Christ Jesus is cooperating with the Holy Spirit to live more and more in accord with God's Word and empowered to do God's will.

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The English word sanctification (< Latin, *sanctus*: holy), translates the Greek word ἁγιασμω (*hagiasmō* < ἅγιος [*hagios*, holy, uncommon; separate from common condition and use]). Thus, the root meaning of holy is that God's people, called to be holy, are called out to be separate from the sin and evil in the world. We repent (μετανοέω [*metanoeō*, turn against, reject, and commit to not repeat]) of sin and evil that we have done. God helps us to do this through his Holy Spirit dwelling within us and by regular and intentional involvement in the life and work of the church with fellow believers in Christ Jesus. (Cf. Hebrews 10:25)

Yet our sin still regularly emerges from our sinful nature and influences us to do what we hate and not do what we should. (Romans 7:15-25a) In order to limit the destructive effects of human sin between its origin and the consummation of God's plan of redemption and restoration in Christ Jesus, God established governmental authority to restrain sin and to provide order in both the world and in the church.

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In the church God has commanded, “Let all things be done decently and in order.” (1 Corinthians 14:40 KJV) The original Greek text clearly emphasizes God’s will for decency and order. The mood of the verb γινέσθω (*ginesthō*, “let be done”) is imperative; i.e., a command. The verb is in the middle voice, which indicates the church is responsible to do so with accountability, and it is in the present tense, denoting a durative, constant, ongoing action; it is <u>never</u> “one and done.” Furthermore, the verb is the last word in the sentence, another of the ways the Greek indicates emphasis; this is vital!

The context of this verse is worship. Yet here the hermeneutical axiom (from the Greek *hermēneutikos* < *hermēneuein*, to interpret) of the need to distinguish between principle and application of principle is important. The <u>principle</u> is the necessity to do all things decently and in order, “speaking the truth in love.” (Cf., Ephesians 4:15) In 1 Corinthians 14:40 the <u>application of the principle</u> is requiring worship to be done decently and in order.

The Biblical Authority and Function of Elders in the Church

Now the question before us becomes, “What is the form of government for the church that God wills and has revealed in his Word to require and assure that all things, especially in worship, but also throughout the life and work of the church, be done decently and in order?” In examining the Scriptures on this subject, we see that the church, the body of Christ, with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, raises up elders with oversight and authority to provide the required decent and orderly functioning of the church that will enable God’s covenant people to accomplish the work he is calling his holy people, albeit who still sin, to do in his great plan of redeeming and restoring his creation as we honor and glorify him in so doing.

We see in the Bible, that the Holy Spirit works through the congregation to select and appoint the elders. The elders are the leaders of the congregation and are empowered to do so from the Holy Spirit through the congregation. Due to human sin, if the elders were to select and appoint themselves, they could turn into an oligarchy without accountability to a higher authority. Sadly, this has occurred, but not when they are under the Biblical authority of and accountable to a congregation that is aware of its authority and actively engaged in serving the Lord accordingly.

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The converse is also true. If a congregation were to function as a democracy (rule of the people), a committee-of-the-whole, the congregation making all the key decisions, an inefficient and ineffective indecency and disorder would result.

To function decently and in order, Scripture reveals, as we'll see below, that the Holy Spirit gives gifts to each church member for the upbuilding of the church. (Ephesians 4:11-16ff.) Some of the elders have the gift of pastoring. Pastors are elders, but they have distinct work to do that other elders do not do. Larger churches have more than one pastor. Nowhere in the New Testament is there any hierarchy, but to maintain decency and order, there is an accountability structure.

The Biblical Authority and Function of Elders in the Church

This tutorial is a study of the Bible's teaching on the ministry of elders. It is thus entirely focused on how and whom God is calling, how he is equipping, what he is requiring of—and the authority he has given to—the leaders of his people.

Therefore, it does not contain information from any denominational materials. If such are required for your congregation, use them as needed *where they are in accord with God's Word*. See the sections and their page numbers in the Table of Contents (Slide #2) for the identification and order of the subjects in this program and ready access for specific reference.

The Biblical Authority and Function of Elders in the Church

Using this Tutorial for Learning about the Ministry of Elders

The tutorial is designed to inform the church and its leaders and others about what the Bible teaches pertaining to God's will for a specific group of leaders, in particular for elders in the body of Christ. It is primarily a manual for helping elders learn what the Lord is calling them to do, as well as their authority, responsibility, and ability to do so in order to facilitate the church's functioning decently and in order (1 Corinthians 14:40) to accomplish the church's key role in God's plan of redeeming and restoring his creation.

The manual is designed to be used in several ways. Here are at least four.

1. As indicated in the text, it can be used as a course for elders. It is flexible so it can be used in a wide range of formats, e.g., weekly classes; a fewer number of longer Friday night-Saturday morning sessions; or other time frames that fit the schedules of those who will be attending.

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2. It can be used as a course for in-service continuing education. It is a basic resource for periodic reviews where elders can come together to focus on specific subjects they need to further examine and discuss to function more effectively in accord with God's Word.

3. After attending the classes for all the elders, this tutorial can also be used by each elder for further individual study to reflect more personally on specific matters he needs especially to address in his ministry.

4. Reading and examining the accompanying Scripture texts and explanations, can—with prayer—also make the manual useful for devotional times as well. This can be a special blessing for the elder, as he reads and prays with specific matters and requests in mind pertaining to how he can serve and please God most effectively in those matters, and doing so with great thanksgiving for the high and holy calling God has given him and for countless other blessings as well!

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This manual is also helpful for all church members. As discussed herein, God's Word explains the key role of all in the congregation who are members in good standing, a term that will be defined below in the appropriate place in the program, through whom God works to identify, call, and select elders.

The tutorial will help elders, prospective elders, and the rest of the congregation to learn what is presently unknown, and for refreshing the memory of those who have long forgotten some of the information herein. Everyone can use this manual as a reference resource by accessing the computer's "Search" and "Find" features and typing in any subject of need or interest. It is thus a valuable resource for individual reading to inform all people of the vital ministry of church elders.

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In order to understand the fullest meaning of the Bible texts, I include several explanations of the original Greek of the New Testament and, where applicable, some of the Hebrew of the Old Testament. The Greek and Hebrew are especially important to understand God's Word, for many of the words—including the tenses and other inflections of the verbs—have very significant meaning that is lost in the English translations.

Since these Greek and Hebrew terms are the very words the Holy Spirit inspired and guided the prophets and apostles to write (2 Timothy 3:16-17), that the Spirit expects us to know and do, we must understand them in order to *read and heed* them. Therefore, since the rich meaning of those very verbs and nouns are not evident in the English translations, and since they are so vital, they are included here in this tutorial. I have tried to explain them as briefly as possible but as fully as necessary. Furthermore, there is much joy in knowing and doing the Lord's will.

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Therefore, I include the Hebrew and Greek for everyone, yet understanding that several groups in particular will benefit in extra ways. Such groups include but are not limited to:

- those who are interested in the very significant understanding of God's Word, which the original languages provide that the English cannot;
- those who want to see documentation of what I say;
- pastors, theologians, seminary professors, and other scholars;
- and those who don't want to read and study the original words but who find satisfaction and even joy just in knowing it exists—and where to look for it and refer others to it—if needed.

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Readers will notice that I include translations from several versions of the Bible. I have quoted the translations that I perceive as being the most accurate rendering of the original Greek. Pertaining to a few texts where I do not see any English translation as being the most accurate, I humbly offer my own translation of the Greek.

In any case, don't avoid reading and using this program because of the references to the original Hebrew and Greek. If you find studying and reflecting on the meaning of the specific original Hebrew or Greek words included is difficult, or if you cannot do so presently, then at least skim these references for now in order to know that they exist and where you can find the information for future reference. But do daily read and meditate on God's Word, including the sections of this elder tutorial being studied.

The Biblical Authority and Function of Elders in the Church

Cognitive Objectives

By the end of these sessions, each elder will meet with the presenter—either individually or as a whole group—and demonstrate at least one, or if time permits all three, of the following cognitive competencies:

1. Cite at least one Biblical text that is the basis for the authority of the elders.

2. From the Bible texts presented in class, list at least three characteristics church elders should possess.

3. Identify at least three functions of the work of church elders with at least one accompanying text for each in God's Word.

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Affective and Behavioral Objectives

By the end of these sessions, each elder will meet with the presenter—either individually or as a whole group—and demonstrate the following affective and behavioral competencies:

1. Affective Development: Over half of the elders will testify to feeling more confident and assured of their Biblical authority as an elder.

2. Behavioral/Functioning: Each elder will identify at least one Biblical teaching of the function of an elder that he is now incorporating in his work as an elder and explain at least one way how he is doing so.

New Testament Terms for Church Elders

All three of these terms refer to the same person but convey slightly different aspects of the leader's work. As the church grew and more leadership requirements arose, certain elders were paid.

- **ἐπισκοπή (*episkopē*) = overseer, bishop** (Acts 20:17,28; 1 Timothy 3:1; Titus 1:7); refers to the structural work to be done. Apostle Peter speaks as a "fellow elder (*sumpresbuteros*)." Context and verb *form* (*episkopountes*) clearly indicate careful oversight but without constraint or self-interest, a suffering servant leadership as seen in and points to Jesus. (Emphasis on task; 1 Peter 5:1-2; Matthew 20:25-28) Apostolic elders and congregational elders are the same in substance.
- **πρεσβύτερος (*presbuteros*) = elder** (Acts 20:17,28; 1 Timothy 5:17; Titus 1:1-9); refers to the dignity of the calling and the leader holding it. (Emphasis on serving God, not on status) The apostles referred to themselves as *presbuteros*. (1 Peter 5:1; 2 John 1; 3 John 1)
- **ποιμήν (*poimēn*) = shepherd, pastor** (John 21:16; Acts 20:17,28; Ephesians 4:11); refers primarily to the function of the leader as teacher and caregiver. (Emphasis on serving Jesus' people, not on status)

Why Do We Need Church Elders?

The Biblical Basis for Elders in the Church

Why Do We Need Church Elders?

The Biblical basis for the need of elders is seen in the rapid growth of the church in the first century in the context of the realities of human sin about which we read above in the Introduction. In A.D 55, in 1 Corinthians 5:1-5, Paul speaks to a report of egregious sexual sin that was occurring in that church—which was located in Corinth, the large (250,000 + 400,000 slaves) and key city in Greece on a major trade route, the culture of which was heavily influenced by worship of the Greek goddess, Aphrodite (whom the Romans called Venus), the goddess of "love," which involved ritual prostitution—and this culture influenced church members who were spiritually immature, resulting in much unbiblical behavior.

About the same time (ca. AD 57), Paul addressed the call of Christ upon his church to not be conformed by the worldly culture but to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. (Romans 12:2) The church still has this great need today.

Why Do We Need Church Elders?

Guided by the Holy Spirit, Paul wrote, “Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, *which* is your spiritual service of worship. [2]And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.” (Romans 12:1-2 NASB)

Without God’s will as the church’s standard for evaluation, everyone would be “doing whatever is right in his own eyes,” (Deuteronomy 12:8 ESV)—which is precisely the practice of the postmodern philosophy of this age—and the church would be in chaos. Darkness, not light, would mislead the church away from and destroy her holiness to God, through which holiness God is fulfilling his plan to redeem and restore his marvelous creation. We need God’s standard to be holy.

Why Do We Need Church Elders?

To avoid this chaos, darkness, and evil that diverts people from being holy to God, he has called us to be “a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.” (1 Peter 2:9)

Paul wrote to the church in Corinth that God “[18]through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; [19]that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. [20]Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us.”

Why Do We Need Church Elders?

Thus, we see that the church is the body of Christ (Ephesians 4:12), the means through whom God in Christ Jesus is redeeming and restoring his creation, the main focus of the Bible. Now here is where we see the vital necessity of our being holy. If our identity and purpose is to represent Christ, who—together with the whole triune God—is holy, holy, holy, i.e., most holy—as his ambassadors, we, too, must be holy and growing in maturity in Christ. (Ephesians 4:11-16ff.)

As one pastor explained, "No one living his life in the gutter will attract others to the only Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." The pastor was referring to the metaphorical moral gutter. Such a lifestyle repels rather than attracts. Communication research refers to "avoidance tendency" and "approach tendency" to indicate the likely response of others to our behavior. As ambassadors of Christ we must be holy to God to attract people to him.

Why Do We Need Church Elders?

However, we need help to be holy to the Lord, in the church and in the world, and to rightly worship him, have fellowship with him, be his ambassadors, and effectively serve him in all other ways. Therefore, already in the first century, as the church was growing rapidly, yet with many members not very mature in Christlikeness, *the Lord raised up elders to provide the solely human leadership* necessary for the church to effectively serve God in the accomplishment of his redemptive and restorative purposes*.

Surely, Jesus is always with us (Matthew 28:20; Hebrews 13:1-8, esp. v. 5; *et al*.), and he guides us through the Holy Spirit. Yet he knows we need his guidance also through special human leaders, the elders he has called for that purpose.

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* I use the term, solely human, in recognition that Jesus was 100% human, but he was also 100% divine, thus "God of God," as we say when reciting the Nicene Creed.

Why Do We Need Church Elders?

The Holy Spirit led the Apostle Paul to state in a command that “all things must be done properly and in an orderly manner.” (1 Corinthians 14:40 NASB) The NASB, one of the most accurate English translations, correctly renders the original Greek verb, γινέσθω (*ginesthō*, let be done) as a command; it is in the imperative mood, and it is expressed emphatically in the Greek.

For the church to serve effectively, and function “decently and in order” (14:40 NIV), called and qualified leaders—who in the Bible are called elders—are necessary. We see in God’s Word that this necessity is one of the most important aspects of the life and work of the church throughout all time, and it is no less so today. See also Titus 1:5, where Titus is to set what remained in order, and appoint elders in every town.

Why Do We Need Church Elders?

Very importantly, these elders are special people with a God-given authority. Not everyone is called to be an elder.

We've already answered one question: Why do we need elders? The rest of this tutorial will answer the following questions:

1. What is this authority the elders have?
2. What is the origin of this authority?
3. Who calls elders to their ministry and how is that done?
4. What are the Biblical qualifications for selecting and vetting elders?
5. What do the elders do, individually and corporately? What is their work?
6. How are they equipped to do their work?

The Origin and Authority of Church Elders

Origin and Authority of Church Elders

The Biblical basis for the recognition of proper functioning, accountability, and church discipline in the body of Christ, the organized church, is primarily seen in such passages as Acts 14:23. The Greek text reads, “Having chosen…for them elders (< *presbuteros*) according to [i.e., in every] church, having prayed with fastings they [Paul and Barnabas] committed them [the elders] to the Lord, on whom they had believed.” [Greek, EDS trans.]

Both the meaning and the placement of the Greek word for “having chosen” is significant. The root word is χειροτονέω (*cheirotoneō*, choose, select, elect by raising the hand), and it is the first word in the sentence, indicating emphasis. Thus, we see that the Lord responded to the congregation’s prayer and fasting with the guidance of Paul and Barnabas by leading the congregation to raise their hands, i.e., vote, on and choose the elders the Lord was calling to lead them.

Origin and Authority of Church Elders

In his commentary on Acts 14:23, the outstanding Greek New Testament scholar, R. C. H. Lenski, further explains the important meaning of the text.

"As in 2 Cor. 8:19, χειροτονέω [*cheirotoneō*] means to vote by stretching out the hand. In [Acts] 10:41 the compound with πρό [pro] has God as the agent; but even when it is thus used with reference to an individual and not to an assembly [ἐκκλησία (*ekklēsia*), church], the idea of a vote is not removed from this verb. We may translate "designate," "elect," "appoint"; but the one designating or appointing voted to do so.

Origin and Authority of Church Elders

In his commentary on Acts 14:23, Lenski continues:

“Luke would make an important point by using this verb here. For the question at issue is whether Paul and Barnabas chose these elders without congregational participation or whether they conducted a congregational meeting in which a vote was taken by show of hands, the congregation choosing with participation of the apostles and under their guidance. The latter is undoubtedly correct, just as the praying with fastings by no means includes only the two apostles but each congregation as well. The method used is fully explained in [Acts] 6:2–6.

Origin and Authority of Church Elders

Lenski adds:

"The point to observe is that both participles [having chosen and having prayed] refer to the subject of παρέθεντο [*parethento*, they committed], to Paul and Barnabas, and are thus used in a wide sense. The apostles presented the matter, had the eligible men named, had the vote taken, and thus appointed those chosen and ordained them as the elders. The ceremony of laying on of hands was certainly used, for in 1 Tim. 5:22 the very act of putting a man into the ministry is called "laying on hands"; compare 1 Tim. 4:14; 2 Tim 1:6. On this ceremony see [Acts] 6:6."*

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* R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1961), pp. 585–586.

Origin and Authority of Church Elders

"While these historical points regarding the first organization of the apostolic church are of utmost interest, they constitute no law for the Christian Church which binds us to repeat every feature and method. But the example of the apostles stands for all time as having been given under the direct influence of the Holy Spirit. Some of the various types of organization found in the church today reflect the spirit of the gospel and of its apostles less than others, and we decline to adopt the former, namely those that are hierarchical and monarchial and that curtail the rights of the congregations."*

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* Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 586–587.

Ordination of Church Elders

The Biblical basis for the ordination of elders in the church of Jesus Christ, is also seen in such passages as Titus 1:5. In this text, Paul tells Titus, "I left you behind in Crete for this reason, so that you should put in order what remained to be done, and should appoint elders in every town, as I directed you:…" (NRSV) Lenski also refers to Jesus' calling of the Twelve as apostles in Matthew 10 as His institution of the ministry. Apostolic elders oversaw many flocks; congregational elders oversaw the one congregation that called them.

The original Greek verb in Titus 1:5, translated "should appoint," is καταστήσῃς [*katastēsēs*], from καθίστημι [*kathistēmi*], which also means ordain. Ordination is <u>always</u> to a function, a task, a ministry, a <u>service</u>, <u>not</u> to a <u>status</u>. (Cf. Matthew 20:25-28) Ordination is the recognition and designation by the church, the body of Christ, that God has called this person to serve Him in and through the church as an elder. Elders are to feed Christ's sheep. (John 21:15-17; Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:1-3)

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In 1 Timothy 5:17 Paul writes, “Let the elders that rule well [προΐστημι (*proistēmi*, rule, manage, govern)] be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine.” (KJV)

- Here and in 1 Corinthians 12:28 we see that some elders have the Spirit-given gift of administration (in 12:28 κυβέρνησις [*kubernēsis*, administration, direction, piloting, governing]) and others have the Spirit-given gift of teaching and preaching, and some have both.

In 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13 we read, “Now we ask you, brothers, to respect those who work hard among you, who are over [*proistēmi*] you in the Lord and who admonish you. 13Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work. Live in peace with each other.”

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God's Word reveals in Titus 1:7,9 that "[7]It is necessary for the overseer…[9]holding fast to the trustworthy Word in accord with the doctrine, that he may be able to both encourage with sound [< ὑγιαίνω (*hugiainō*, healthful, correct)] teaching and convict those who contradict it." (EDS trans.; cf. Lenski) Here, as elsewhere in the Bible, the elder has a teaching as well as an administrative function, thus offering affirmation and encouragement as well as admonition and discipline.

Lenski offers crucial insights in his commentary on 1:9. Carefully attend to this section, where he writes as follows:

> An elder must cling to the Word, not only for his own person, but also—and that is the point to be noted here—"in order that he may be able to exhort in the teaching that is healthful and (in order that he may be able) to convict those speaking to the contrary." Note the difference between "the doctrine" (διδαχή [*didachē*]) and "the teaching" (διδασκαλία [*didaskalia*]). The latter presents the former, and all admonishing and exhortation [see next slide]

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to faith and Christian living (παρακαλεῖν [*parakalein*, encourage]) is in most vital connection with "the teaching," the substance of which is "the doctrine"; all other exhortation is with out inner basis although so many pulpits today offer nothing better. Nine times in these letters Paul uses "healthful," participle and adjective; here four times in succession (1:3; 2:1, 2, 8). Who wants diseased teaching? Diseased animals are not offered to the public for consumption, they are taken out and buried, but some pulpits today offer such diseased matter. Follow out the further implications yourself.

If there be any who speak to the contrary, the elder must be able to convict such people, namely in connection with the healthy teaching, i.e., convict by showing convincingly that they are wrong. This need not secure their admission that they are wrong; some would not be convinced by the Lord himself; but it does mean a conviction that is plain to true believers, one that

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> in not a few instances will also make a convert of the gainsayer.
>
> Titus is to instruct the churches city by city, to choose only such properly qualified men. When such elders lead the congregations, the latter will prosper.*

Note that Lenski was a pastor himself in addition to being a professor of theology and an excellent exegete of the New Testament Greek. Such oversight of the pastor(s) by the other elders—or a committee of those elders—should pro-actively include at least a yearly review, affirming good work and addressing needed changes. Additional meetings should occur as needed as soon as issues arise per established congregational policy. Use applicable guidelines throughout this program.

_____

* Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles to the Colossians, to the Thessalonians, to Timothy, to Titus and to Philemon* (Columbus, OH: Lutheran Book Concern, 1937), pp. 899–900.

Authority of Church Elders

The preceding Scripture texts provide a Biblical basis for the authority of the elders and recognition of necessary organizational leadership, functioning, accountability, and church discipline in the body of Christ, the church. Churches generally perceive the elders' Biblical authority pertaining to the spiritual matters of the church, including assisting the pastor(s).

Such assistance usually involves keeping in touch with each member in the elder's Elder Care Area (ECA), that part of the congregation who are assigned to his caring, e.g., hospital calls, helping individuals in other needs, serving the elements in the Lord's Supper and helping with Baptism. It also consists of decision-making in periodic, usually monthly, meetings as a board of elders.

Authority of Church Elders

Therefore such often extensive, complex, and highly detailed subjects as stewardship; other financial aspects of the church, e.g., budget, including—but not limited to—staff salaries, building maintenance, and insurance; and meeting special needs of church members, and community people, are typically delegated to another leadership team often called deacons, trustees, or a type of executive council. *However, Biblically, all these areas of the life and work of the church* ***also have clear and significant spiritual dimensions*** *and thus function properly under the authority and oversight of the elders*, even though the elders cannot attend to all the many details that have already been prayerfully and thoughtfully addressed by and delegated to the diaconate or an executive council that serve under the auspices of the elders. (Cf. Acts 6:1-7) They should thus regularly report to the elders and receive the elders' approval of their decisions and actions, though not by micromanaging and redoing what has been delegated to the diaconate or other similar church ministry.

New Testament Term for Other Church Leaders/Servants

διάκονος (*diakonos*) = servant, deacon, minister (Matthew 20:28; Romans 15:25; 16:1; Acts 6:2ff.; 1 Timothy 3:12) In Greek culture the *diakonos* was the servant of the king. The church used the term but applied its meaning to its service of the King of kings, Jesus Christ, including serving the body of Christ, the church.

The apostles functioned as the leaders of the church. In Acts 6, we see that they responded to a need in the rapidly growing church by transferring tasks they had been doing—but could no longer do—to others. The apostles were not delegating their divinely appointed functions (prayer and ministry of the word [6:2,4]) to these others referred to as *diakonos* (servant, deacon < διακονέω [*diakoneō*, serve, wait upon tables, minister, serve as deacon]); the apostles were only transferring the additional tasks they had taken on to meet needs, but now they saw doing so was not the best use of their time; it was taking away from accomplishing their God-given responsibilities. As Lenski comments on this text, as necessary as are these other tasks, that doesn't make them part of the work of those whom God has called to function as apostles and pastors.

New Testament Term for Other Church Leaders/Servants: διάκονος (*diakonos*), servant, deacon, minister

- In Acts 6:3, we read that the apostles direct (the verb is an imperative) the congregation to pick out from their membership each of those needed to serve as a *diakonos*, deacon, and wait on the tables so widows will be able to eat and drink.
- The apostles gave instructions as to the attributes that should characterize those chosen to serve. These characteristics included are: men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom (6:3), and full of faith and of the Holy Spirit (6:5). The apostles appointed them to the function of deacon. (6:3,6)
- The congregation did so, selecting the first seven men for this task (6:5). The Greek words indicate the congregation voted for each, and then they brought those they selected to the apostles, who prayed for the Lord's blessing upon and laid their hands on the new deacons (6:6), thereby certifying them as the Spirit-led congregation's choice and doing so in a fitting ceremony.

New Testament Term for Other Church Leaders/Servants: διάκονος (*diakonos*), servant, deacon, minister

- As Lenski points out in his commentary on this passage, the laying on of hands is an Old Testament practice, continued in the new covenant church, that symbolically transferred the calling with its responsibilities and privileges and "pictured the bestowal of the divine blessings that were necessary for this important work. Compare Numbers 27:18; Deut. 34:9. This rite was freely adopted by the early church; we read of it in [Acts] 13:3 in connection with missionaries, and in 1 Tim. 4:4; 5:22; 2 Tim. 1:6 in connection with elders. We still use it in connection with confirmation and ordination. It was always symbolic and never charismatic."
- It must be observed that this new ministry of deacons was to carry out the Lord's calling to care for the poor and needy. It was not to engage in the work of the apostles and other elders. (Acts 6:4)

New Testament Term for Other Church Leaders/Servants: **διάκονος (*diakonos*),** servant, deacon, minister

- That this newly established ministry, “like everything else belonging to the life and the activity of the congregation, would be under the guidance and the leadership of the apostles…goes without saying,” observes Lenski in his comments on 6:4.

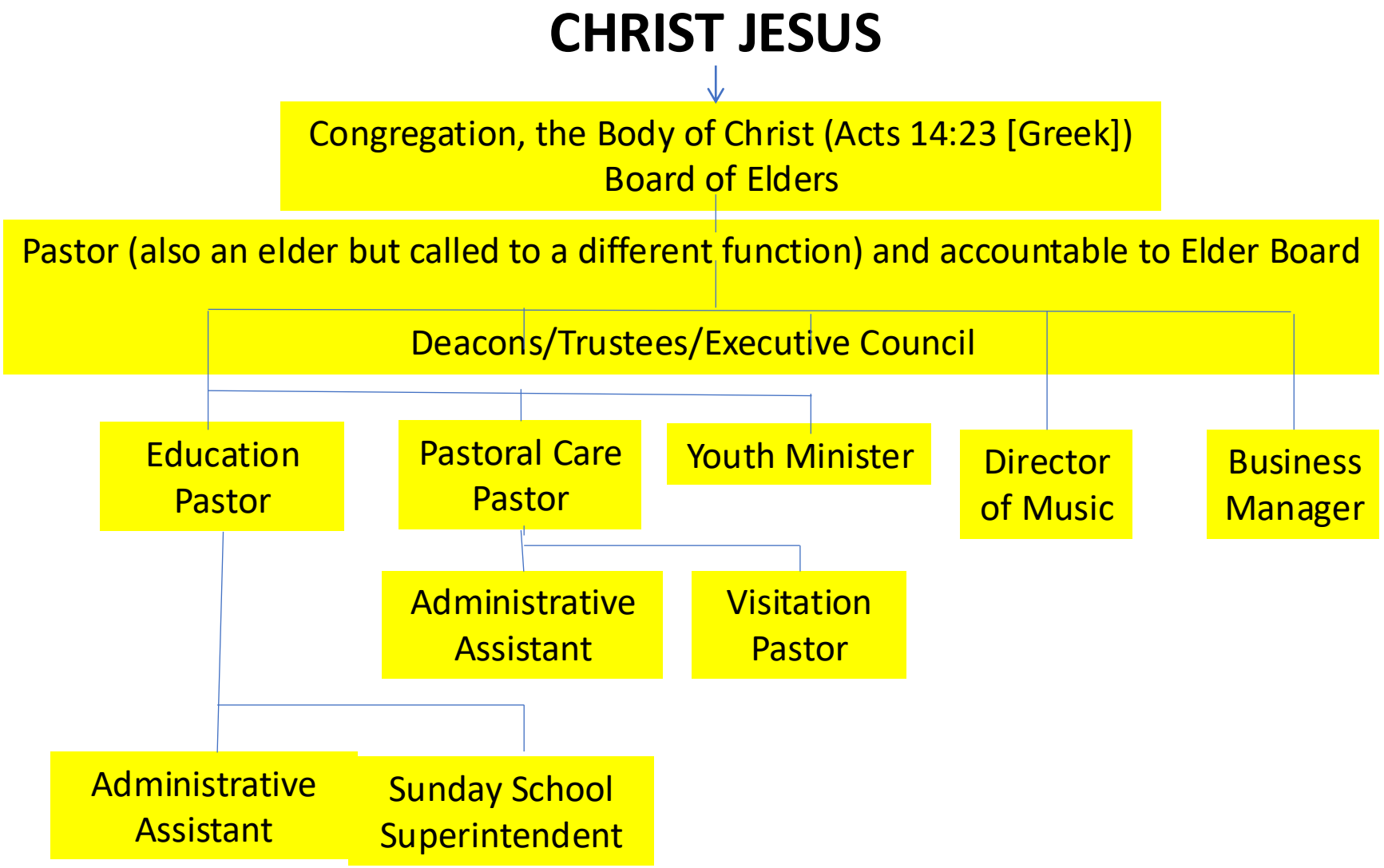
Authority of Church Elders

As we saw in the beginning of this study on church elders, according to the Bible, humanly speaking, the church must do all things decently and in order. The elders function under the authority of the congregation, the body of Christ. The elders bring certain high level recommendations—but not all decisions—to periodic meetings of the congregation, the number and timing of which are specified in each church's constitution and bylaws, all under the ultimate authority of God's Word.

One way to picture a Biblical form of church government is in the following graphics. Individual ministerial, including elder, functions vary according to the size and needs of the church, but the Biblical bases of the authority and function of the elders remain constant. Elders have their God-given authority, but that authority is not for status; it is for servant functioning, as taught and modeled by Jesus Christ and illustrated in the second slide graphic.

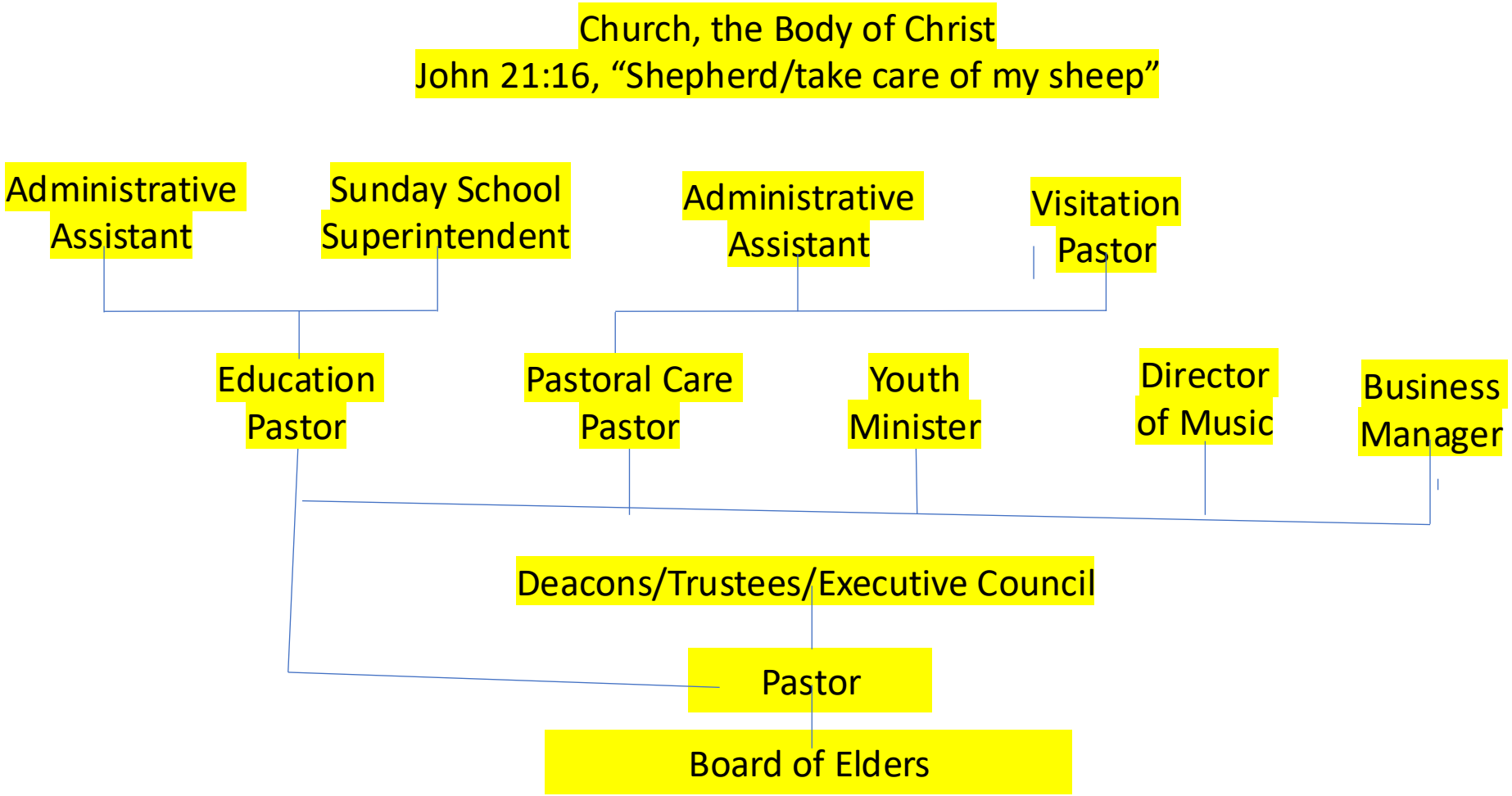
Authority Flow Chart of Church Leadership

Ephesians 1:22-23; 4:7,11; Acts 14:23; 1 Corinthians 14:40



Functional Flow Chart of Church Leadership

1 Peter 5:3; According to Matthew 20:25-28, Christlike Servanthood, cf. vs. 26: ἔστω (*estō*, must be: imperative [command]; present tense [constantly])



Authority of Church Elders

These high level matters brought to the congregation, the elders have already thoroughly researched, studied, and discussed in the light of God's Word and prayer, some by the elders themselves and others from recommendations to the elders after exhaustive study by the deacon board or executive council. Those recommendations have been approved by the elders, guided by the Holy Spirit in the context of God's Word and prayer, with all prior preparation done well.

These matters come to the congregation as elder recommendations. As is generally understood, committee-of-the-whole decision making cannot be well done decently and in good order. The whole congregation does not have the time or resources to attend to all the vital details that have already been thoroughly processed by its representative authorized sub-groups. To try to do so in a congregational meeting would be very inefficient, ineffective, unnecessary, and counterproductive; so the congregation listens, deliberates, prays, and votes on its elders' recommendations.

Authority of Church Elders

The elders are charged with the responsibility to admonish all wrongdoing in the church that is contrary to God's Word and that doesn't feed Christ's sheep, including in the pulpit as well as in the pews. The failure to do so has greatly harmed the unity of the church for which Jesus so fervently prayed the night of his passion. (John 17)

Unrepented sin, heresy, and apostasy **must not be allowed** in the church. (1 Corinthians 5:1-5; 11:28; Ephesians 5:7) Not only elders but all members are to care for, including at times admonishing, one another, all for the purpose of forgiveness and restoration in Christ. (Leviticus 19:17; Proverbs 15:1; Luke 17:3; Acts 20:31; Colossians 1:28; 3:16; Galatians 6:1; 1 Timothy 5:19-20; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; James 5:19-20) For more on the Biblical teaching pertaining to admonishment and also judging, see my essay, Should Christians Never Judge? and my sentence PowerPoint, Essential Christianity: Historic Christian Systematic Theology—With a Focus on Its Very Practical Dimensions, Including God's Answers to Our Great Questions of Life—for Now and Eternity.

The Calling of Church Elders

The Calling of Church Elders

Elders have been given gifts by Christ Jesus through the Holy Spirit. All these gifts are an essential and necessary part of the body of Christ. See the spiritual gifts in God's Word in the accompanying chart.

As we read in one of the Apostle Paul's three main spiritual gift catalogues, Ephesians 4:11, those gifts include being shepherd (ποιμήν [*poimēn*]) and teacher (διδάσκαλος [*didaskalos*]). In 1 Timothy Paul added that "the elder must [δεῖ (*dei*, It is necessary)] be…skillful in teaching [διδακτικόν (*didaktikon*, well able to teach)]." (1 Timothy 3:2)

Gifts of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament

Romans 12:6-8	1 Corinthians 12:4-11;28	Ephesians 4:11	Matthew 19: 11; 1 Corinthians 7:7-8	Matthew 12:22-32	Acts 13:2,3
Prophecy	Prophecy	Prophecy			
Teaching	Teaching	Pastor-Teacher			
Serving					
Exhortation					
Giving					
Giving Aid					
Compassion					
	Healing				
	Working Miracles				
	Tongues				
	Interpretation of Tongues				
	Wisdom				
	Knowledge				
	Faith				
	Distinguishing between Spirits				
	Apostleship	Apostleship			
	Helps				
	Administration				
		Evangelizing			
		Shepherding			
			Celibacy		
				Exorcism	
					Missionary

The Calling of Church Elders

Notice and remember the importance of what Paul is saying in 1 Timothy 3:2. The English translations lack the emphasis indicated in the Greek, which is seen in the verb *dei* (It is necessary) being the first word in the sentence and *didaktikon* being last—both placements are ways the Greek indicates that which is to be emphasized. Greek and English grammar, including word structure, are significantly different, requiring different word sequences in English translations to facilitate reading, but then the Greek emphases are lost in the process. Also, *dei* is in the Greek present tense, meaning a durative, constant, continuing reality that is always to be operative and functioning accordingly.

The Calling of Church Elders

Having given the gifts they will need, the Spirit then calls those whom the Lord wills to serve in these capacities. Only church members—but not all church members—are qualified to be elders. Only those members in good standing—who believe in and abide by God's Word and are maturing in Christ Jesus—are to have such authority, respect, and influence in the church.

God calls a person to serve as an elder in two ways:

1. He calls the person internally. He gives the one he is calling a desire to serve in that position.
2. He calls the person externally.
    a. God speaks through one or more elders who—after prayer and consultation with and agreement of other elders—asks the person's willingness to be confirmed by the congregation to serve as an elder.

The Calling of Church Elders

2. b. God also speaks through other members of the congregation, affirming the recognition of the gifts and spiritual maturity indicating that God is calling this person to be an elder in the body of Christ.

   c. When enough people have been identified as having the gifts and spiritual maturity indicating they are possibly being called by God to serve as an elder, and after they have agreed to serve if elected, the congregation prayerfully votes to confirm that calling.

   d. If I think I have a calling from God to be an elder in the church, including the gifts to function accordingly, but no one else—especially on the elder board—in the church believes I do, then I don't, and I shouldn't be given the opportunity to serve in that ministry, at least not now.

The Calling of Church Elders

e. This does not necessarily mean such a person will never be called to be an elder, but right now the Lord's people do not see that giftedness, maturity, and calling; thus, God is not calling that person now.

"Members in good standing" is a term used in many churches to indicate those who have gone through the process their congregation, and any denomination of which they are a part, have established to discern whether those who want to join the church are—and remain—true believers in and followers of our only Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Thus, good standing also indicates their observable ongoing obedience to Christ's commands, to the rest of Biblical teaching, to faithful attendance in worship, and to maturing in Christ, including group and individual Bible study and identifying and using their spiritual gift(s) for the Lord's service. (Ephesians. 4:11-16) Also, and very importantly, they have a consistent track record of such commitment to Christ—indeed to our whole triune God—over considerable time.

The Calling of Church Elders

Nonmembers by definition denote and demonstrate lack of commitment to the church. Therefore, they are not “members in good standing” and—no matter how pleasant they may be—are hindered in any possible leadership by how members and others see their unwillingness to commit to the church and its authority.

Similarly, as Scripture states, new converts should not be selected. (1 Timothy 3:6) Trust, a prerequisite for relationships and respect, requires a track record.

Take time. Pray for God to indicate if and when a person should be contacted. Review related sections above and following in this program.

The Calling of Church Elders

1. As we observed above in our study of God's Word, He calls elders internally, giving them a desire in their hearts and minds to serve in this ministry. We saw that God also calls them corporately, by indicating to current elders, including especially the pastor(s), and the congregation the awareness and confirmation of whom the Lord wills be an elder to shepherd his sheep. Now we need to look specifically at how God works through us in this process of calling some in the church to be elders.
2. As each elder comes to know well all the church members assigned to him in his ECA (Elder Care Area), the elder should be looking for the above characteristics God has identified in his Word that the shepherds of his sheep should possess. Any potential candidates should be noted. The elder board should discuss periodically who should be watched for possible contact at a future time when more elders are needed.

The Calling of Church Elders

3. When that time arrives on the church calendar, the elder board should ask the congregation for recommendations and then add any others from their own meeting notes.
4. The board should discuss each name-–speaking the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15)—with the one criterion being the deciding factor: Does this person possess and use the gifts and characteristics God requires in his Word for being an elder?
5. Certain comments should proactively be prohibited. A simple prefatory announcement will suffice. Avoid the following examples and add others that apply:
   a. “I remember five years ago when he said….” Even if this objector’s memory is accurate, the potential elder could have repented of the act, matured in Christ, and thus what occurred then does not necessarily characterize him now. If not, he could be considered a candidate.

The Calling of Church Elders

5. b. “This person’s personality leaves a lot to be desired….” Personality characteristics should not be the deciding factor. God’s Word is the standard, and human feelings about people often change when relationships are built. Initial negative observations about someone frequently turn to favor when in the course of coming to know each other friendships develop, especially in Christ.

   c. Physical characteristics, popularity, socioeconomic status, and human connections, while sometimes helpful in God’s kingdom, are not at all of primary concern. “Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature…. For the LORD sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart.” (1 Samuel 16:7, cf. 17:45-47)

The Calling of Church Elders

6. As the discussion of candidates proceeds, include the following:
   a. Request the advice of the pastor(s), who have additional information concerning those being considered. Some of that information may be vital to know in decision making for whom to ask now.
   b. In addition to candidates' spiritual gifts, identify and list other qualities they have that the church needs.
   c. Of those candidates the elder board approves, if there are more candidates than needed, the board should pray for God's guidance and then vote to select the needed candidates. The remaining candidates' names should be kept in a special file in case any of the selected candidates cannot or won't accept the request to serve or for future consideration the next time one or more openings occur on the elder board.

The Calling of Church Elders

6. As the discussion of candidates proceeds, include the following:
   d. If the opposite circumstance occurs—that there are not enough candidates to fill the openings—use these guidelines.
      1) Continue to pray that God raises up the person(s) needed.
      2) Carefully in prayer review the process in this program to see if someone was overlooked.
      3) Discuss whether—at least temporarily—one or more elder care areas can be combined.
      4) NEVER ask someone because you can't get "anyone else to do the job."

The Calling of Church Elders

7. Next, each candidate selected should be contacted personally, much preferably in a face-to-face conversation.
   a. Biblically, the church is the visible manifestation of the covenant God has made with his people, importantly now the new covenant in Christ. Relationships are essential in the church and essential to facilitate. Interpersonal communication is by far the most effective. Avoid form letters, especially ones with typos and poor grammar. Phone calls are better but not nearly as effective as in-person communication.
   b. Discuss who will contact which candidates. The pastor is a key person to contact those selected. Yet, if one of the current elders has a relationship with a proposed candidate, the candidate will likely have an initial receptivity to consider the invitation, especially with the Holy Spirit's help.

The Calling of Church Elders

7. c. **Very importantly**, when asking the candidate to consider accepting this call to serve as an elder, it is essential to do the following, with words similar to these. It is much more effective to meet in person, e.g, for coffee+, or lunch, or in one's office, wherever you can talk <u>without interruptions</u>.

   1) "Thanks for meeting with me about an important matter pertaining to the ministry in our church."

   2) "As you know, our church needs another elder [or elders] to serve as a shepherd of Christ's flock."

   3) "Our elder board met last [Tuesday]. We prayed, asking God's guidance, discussed the spiritual gifts we perceive in several of our members, and we believe God is in the process of calling you to serve as an elder in His church, and here's why…."

The Calling of Church Elders

7. c. 4) “Specifically, we see you as having this (or these) gift(s)…. We see the need in our church for this (or these) gift(s).”

5) “We also see you as having these additional abilities, strengths we need to accomplish God’s purposes….”

a) Recall and reveal the specific characteristics, experience, and expertise of this person that were mentioned by the elders in the meeting.

b) Add, “So, obviously I’m not the only one to notice what the Lord has been doing in your life, and how what you have to offer is needed for our congregation to serve the Lord most effectively in this part of his kingdom.”

The Calling of Church Elders

7. c. 6) "Do you have any questions for me?" One might be, "I don't know much about being an elder; is there some elder training available?" You can now say "Yes!"

7) "We know you want to pray about this opportunity to serve in this high and holy calling from the Lord and also to talk with your family and maybe others.

a) Will you be able to let us know by [specific date]?

b) Do you want to call me on that date, or would you like me to call you?

c) If the person prefers to call you, and does not do so, follow up the day after the agreed-upon date to obtain the decision. Do so the next day to indicate importance: This is God's work!

The Calling of Church Elders

- What NOT to say to a prospective elder candidate: Do not try to downplay the time factor and the difficulty of the work. Do not make statements like, “This won’t take much time.” “It’s easy to be an elder.”
  - First of all, both of these assertions are untrue. Second, most people with the qualifications to be an elder know these statements are untrue. Third, and furthermore, such comments do not attract people with leadership capabilities; they value their time, and want to put their time to use in work that is important and where they can make a difference for the Lord.
  - Emphasize that this work is a ministry for the Lord who is issuing the call through his human servants; it comes with challenges that are vital to the extension and nurture of God’s kingdom; “and <u>we</u> (others too) see you as having the gifts the church needs to accomplish God’s purposes in and through this ministry.”
- Also, avoid guilt trips. “You haven’t been very active” does not motivate.

The Calling of Church Elders

8. When the acceptance(s) of the candidate(s), have been received, bring them to the congregation for prayer and a vote (see Acts 14:23, "having chosen," the original Greek word is χειροτονέω [*cheirotoneō*, choose, select, elect by raising the hand]). If your congregation chooses to use anonymous ballots, that is also an application of the Biblical principle of voting and may be done.
   - The applicable axiom in Biblical hermeneutics (interpretation) is to distinguish between <u>principle</u> (here: the congregation selects) and <u>application of principle</u> (here: the method of the selection in all the churches, as recorded in Acts 14:23 [raising hands], can be applied in ballot form as long as it is the congregation doing the selecting); that's what is Biblically required.

The Calling of Church Elders

How important is the recognition and selection of the most authoritative solely human leaders whom God is calling to serve as elders in his church? Listen to Lenski:

"The work of securing 'elders' was of the highest importance and was hence accompanied 'by praying with fastings' as was done in [Acts] 13:3. But we see that fasting was secondary to praying, 'with fastings' meaning as an aid to praying. On the general practice of fasting see 13:2; it was used as a spiritual aid on special occasions. Cooking and eating and all that these entail were set aside for the day in order to be entirely free for the higher things. The prayers were spoken before the vote and at the time of the ordination of the elders. The plural 'fastings' scarcely implies repeated fasts but fasts on the part of the disciples."*

* Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles*, p. 587.

Biblical Qualifications for and Vetting of Church Elders

Biblical Qualifications for and Vetting of Church Elders

As new elders are needed, in addition to their spiritual gifts, candidates for selection must have other qualifications also that the Holy Spirit inspired Paul to include in his first letter to Timothy. “[1]Here is a trustworthy saying: If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task. [2]Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, [3]not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. [4]He must manage his family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect. [5](If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God’s church?) [6]He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil. [7]He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil’s trap.” (1 Timothy 3:1-7)

Biblical Qualifications for and Vetting of Church Elders

In his letter to Titus (1:5ff.), in addition to those he wrote to Timothy, Paul includes some more qualifications as well as characteristics that render potential candidates unfit to serve as an elder. These qualifications are "[6]An elder must be blameless, the husband of but one wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient. [7]Since an overseer is entrusted with God's work, he must be blameless—not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain. [8]Rather he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined. [9]He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it." (Titus 1:6-9)

Biblical Qualifications for and Vetting of Church Elders

Notice the emphasis on elders being able to teach and also having the calling, courage, strength, and ability to admonish and refute all who oppose sound doctrine and who need correction in other ways as well. Throughout the Bible we read how all humans are sinful and fall short of the glory of God. (Cf., e.g., Leviticus 19:17; Romans 3:23; 7) As such, at times they depart from the holiness God requires. (1 Peter 1:15-16) At those times they need admonishment, for their own sake, for the sake of the church, and for God's glory and the accomplishment of his purposes. (See, e.g., 1 Peter 2:9-12.) *Thus, a key question to ask about potential elders is, "Does this person have the strength to admonish and receive admonishment as needed*?"

Yes, "and receive." The Bible's most realistic anthropology reveals, as seen above, that all humans are sinful and fall short of the glory of God, even elders. Thus, elders need to not only be open to corrective feedback but to initiate self-examination as to their accomplishment of all they are charged to do by God and the congregation through whom God has appointed them.

Biblical Qualifications for and Vetting of Church Elders

Later in his first letter Peter issues the Holy Spirit's command to the elders (*presbuterous* [5:1]). He writes, "[2]shepherd [ποιμάνατε (*poimanate*, shepherd; the mood of the verb is imperative, a command)] the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not by constraint, but willingly according to God; not in fondness for dishonest gain, but eagerly; [3]not as lording it over [< κατακυριεύω (*katakurieuō*, domineer, subjugate)] those in your charge, but being examples to the flock." (1 Peter 5:2-3, EDS trans.)

Biblical Qualifications for and Vetting of Church Pastors

In traditional denominations, those elders who are called to be pastors also appear before higher judicatories and denominational offices in the process of recognizing and vetting their calling.

1. This additional and very valuable safeguard for the church is a strength of traditional denominations, when it is used and used in accord with God's Word rightly interpreted.
2. Many large mega and other independent churches are very vulnerable to the human frailty of pastors and others when there is no higher level church agency to appeal to and adjudicate the resolution of teaching, moral matters, and other issues contrary to God's Word. Sometimes the highest decision-making body consists of immature people with personal agendas who are unaccountable and make unjust decisions that are unappealable.

Biblical Qualifications for and Vetting of Church Pastors

3. Even when churches do have the Biblical and historic church safeguards in place, they require elders who have the courage to engage in the process of resolving disputes in accord with the Bible and church polity.
   a. These Biblical and ecclesiastical safeguards have—when followed—worked well. Elders and pastors must give and receive corrective feedback as needed to assure they each function as to please God and do his will.
   b. However, since the latter part of the 20th century, these safeguards have not been employed as they have been historically, and much harm has come to the church and to its witness to the world. The world observes the unbiblical behavior (that it describes as hypocritical) and thus is repelled by—rather than receptive to—the church's message. *Therefore, the church **must** restore historic church discipline, and to do so it **must** have overseers with the strength to function accordingly.*

Biblical Qualifications for and Vetting of Church Elders

3. c. One of the key reasons for this development, mainly since the last quarter of the 20th century, is the failure to first desire pleasing God over human beings. (John 5:30; 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8; 2 Corinthians 5:9-10; Colossians 1:9-10; Romans 8:5-8; Ephesians 5:10)

   1) Too many people today are more concerned about pleasing other humans than about pleasing God. One reason for that change in my observation is that prior to the last quarter of the 20th century, it was common to speak of the justice of God and that we will be called to account and judged accordingly (e.g., Matthew 12:36); in the last half century, that concern has been replaced by an overemphasis on God's love to the extent of eclipsing and ignoring the Biblical teaching about judgment to come.

Biblical Qualifications for and Vetting of Church Elders

3. c. 2) One of the main reasons for this unbiblical reality is the failure of the church to teach historic Christian systematic theology with its Biblical basis. Thus, many people don't understand the Biblical teaching of who God is, what he is like, his authority, what he is doing, and what he will yet do. Then many conclude, "My god would never judge anybody!" In so doing, they are proclaiming a false god; the Bible reveals that false religion is a worship of demons. (1 Corinthians 10:20)

3) The implications are clear for selecting and overseeing the elders and other leaders of the church, the body of Christ: We must all commit to pleasing God as our greatest desire, objective, and accomplishment. Then proceed accordingly.

Biblical Qualifications for and Vetting of Church Elders

See also the following slides for other requirements for elders.

1. God takes very seriously the careful selection of his people's leaders, so that they teach—by words and deeds—and oversee the maturing in Christ that will enable the church to function according to its high and holy calling from God and through whom He is working out his plan to restore his creation, the consummation of which will take place when Jesus returns in his Second Coming.
2. It is necessary for the church to remember that we are in a spiritual war. (Ephesians 6:10-22) Once vetting is done carefully, love requires that we continue to care for our fellow Christians. People sometimes change.

Biblical Qualifications for and Vetting of Church Elders

3. In the sanctification process (believers growing in Christlikeness), good change is to be expected.
4. However, too often even church leaders, due to human sinfulness, or lack of thought, or stubbornness, or a multitude of other reasons, give-in to temptations to do something contrary to God's will and to the well being and mission of the church.
   a. That's when fellow believers must come alongside the errant leader and admonish him. (Leviticus 19:17; Matthew 18:15-17; Colossians 1:28; 3:16; Ephesians 4:15; 5:11; 2 Timothy 3:16-17) Notice the Greek in Ephesians 5:11, "Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them." (ESV) The verb "expose" is ἐλέγχετε (*elenchete*), and is in the imperative mood, thus a command, and it is further emphasized by being the last word in the sentence. Pertaining to such wrongdoing, we cannot "just let it ride" or "ignore it," lest we, too, share in that person's guilt. (Leviticus 19:17b)

Biblical Qualifications for and Vetting of Church Elders

4. b. This admonishment in the Bible is to come from fellow believers to other believers, including to leaders in the church. As is seen in this study, elders must admonish one another when necessary, including the elders who are pastors. Compare Paul's opposition to Peter in Galatians 2:11ff. Paul's admonishment of Peter was "in front of them all," since Peter's error occurred in a corporate context. All who have been negatively affected, contrary to God's Word, must be informed that the unbiblical behavior is wrong and not to be done; thus he also published it in his letter to all the churches in Galatia. Paul did not just take Peter aside and whisper to him, which would not have corrected the serious matter that had occurred in the church.

Biblical Qualifications for and Vetting of Church Elders

4. c. Corporate church discipline occurs when a matter has been made public. People know about it, and its resolution must be made public. However, depending upon the sin, the procedure for determining all of what occurred, who all were involved, and all the details of the proper resolution may not need to be made public, but the public must be informed that a just and fair resolution has occurred.

   d. Church discipline also occurs in private settings when the issue is limited to two or a small number of people.

   - A useful guideline for knowing when to address a matter publicly and when to do so privately is this well known mnemonic:
     - Sin in public, repent in public;
     - Sin in private, repent in private.

   e. *Look for elder candidates with strength and willingness to first please God, even if doing so displeases some people at times.*

Biblical Qualifications for and Vetting of Church Pastors

In traditional churches, those elders who are called to be pastors also appear before higher judicatories and denominational offices beyond the local church authorities.

1. They must do so in the process of the recognition and vetting of their calling. This process involves examinations for licensure to preach and for ordination as ministers of the Word and sacraments.
2. These judicatories also conduct trials when pastors are charged with teaching false doctrine, practicing immorality, or engaging in some other especially serious unbiblical behavior.

This additional and very valuable safeguard for the church is a strength of traditional denominations, when it is rightly used and not compromised by ecclesiastical politics or the sinful compulsion to please others more than to please God.

The Work of Church Elders

The Work of Church Elders

We've seen in the passages above that the work of church elders is not easy, but God gives us much joy as we see him working through us to accomplish his purposes. God's Word gives the elders several responsibilities in their servant-leadership of the congregation. In the sections that follow, we'll look carefully at what those responsibilities mean and ways to implement them. Further, this is not an exhaustive list of elder duties; however, it includes those required in the Bible.

To assist us in exercising our Biblical authority, the work to which God has called us as elders will be listed below in the form of questions to facilitate regular examination and evaluation of oneself, of the whole elder board, and of the whole church, whom God has called out to be holy to him (cf. 1 Peter 2:9) and to be salt and light in the world (Matthew 5:13-16). Questions are easily remembered, precisely focus on and define each matter, require decision-making, and motivate needed resolutions.

The Work of Church Elders

To assist in finding the true answers to these questions, consider the following.

1. We don't see ourselves as others see us. (1 Corinthians 13:12) For example, those who for the most part are mentally healthy can overrate themselves. Those who tend to look down on themselves often have an atypically negative view of themselves. And all of us come across in certain situations differently from how we perceive ourselves. "I didn't say that!" "I'm not that way!"
2. As we answer the following questions, it will help to ask someone who knows you best—ideally your spouse—to answer these questions with you, someone who has the strength to help by "speaking the truth in love." (Ephesians 4:15) It's important to hear both affirmation and to be informed by someone who loves us about areas on which we need to work. Start with affirming specific abilities and accomplishments; then improvements needed.

The Work of Church Elders

To assist you in finding the true answers to these questions, consider these possibilities.

3. If your spouse or trusted friend gives you some feedback that you question and find unable to accept, consider the following:
    a. The person you asked for feedback isn't with you at all times in all places and circumstances. It is possible you speak and act differently at different times with different people. Furthermore, he or she likely also has certain blind spots and limitations in his or her perspective.
    b. Therefore, if needed, seek a second opinion. Ask another trusted friend who has the strength to "tell it like it is" but in a loving and supportive manner. Ask him or her, "Do I really come across this way?" "Do I really do this?"

The Work of Church Elders

To assist you in finding the true answers to these questions, consider these possibilities.

3. If your spouse or trusted friend gives you some feedback that you question and find unable to accept, consider the following:
   c. In each case where you receive feedback you question and/or can't accept, ask this question: "Please tell me if I always respond this way or only sometimes. If sometimes ask, "Can you put your finger on when I do this? I'm wondering if I do it in certain circumstances, for example in specific contexts or pertaining to particular subjects."
   d. You are to be commended for trying to grow more in Christlikeness. You are teaching well by modeling a sincere attempt to follow Christ faithfully. You are also showing strength in so doing.

The Work of Church Elders Individually

<u>Modeling</u>

Christlike Behavior in Leadership

The Work of Church Elders: Individually

1. Am I functioning beyond reproach? (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:6) Such behavior does not mean sinless. It means am I walking with the Lord each day according to his Word, confessing my sins when they occur, and repenting of them (including committing to not repeat them)?

   The word Paul used, ἀνεπίληπτος (*anepilēptos*), means that the elder does not have a reputation shaped or, as Lenski says, "marked by any infamy that would lessen his authority." Lenski further explains in his commentary on the Timothy passage that the term above reproach means the elder "has a good and honourable reputation, and not chargeable with any remarkable vice."

   This and the other requirements in these verses are to be regularly reviewed by each elder in a rigorous self-examination. "Am I beyond any legitimate reproach?" i.e., not at all the false reviling Jesus referred to in Matthew 5:11.

The Work of Church Elders: Individually

1. Cont'd. Am I functioning beyond reproach? (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:6,7) The word Paul wrote to Titus on this matter is ἀνέγκλητος (*anenklētos*, irreproachable). The elder, and those being considered for serving as an elder, must be unaccusable of behavior contrary to God's Word. He must be blameless. No past or present possibly credible accusations should be circulating in the church and community (cf. 1 Timothy 3:7) about this elder. He must have a clean track record that will legitimize and facilitate his modeling and teaching in other ways the calling of God for the church to be holy. The absence of any legitimate ability to reproach the elder discredits and even nullifies any accusations of hypocrisy or other wrongdoing.

The Work of Church Elders: Individually

2. Am I the husband of one wife? Lenski observes that the text (1 Timothy 3:2; cf. Titus 1:6) says, “who is [the husband of one wife]” not “who has been.” Thus, with outstanding early church leader, John Chrysostom (ca. AD 347-407), archbishop of Constantinople, who emphasized marriage in much of his writing, Lenski interprets the text as explicitly condemning polygamy, which was commonly practiced among the Jews at that time.

   With today’s changing views of marriage, especially in Western culture, the church must carefully monitor this marital behavior among its elders. The term also means being strictly faithful to one’s wife, which we need to emphasize greatly today.

The Work of Church Elders: Individually

3. Am I temperate, sober-minded, respectable? (1 Timothy 3:2)
   a. Temperate (Greek: νηφάλεος [*nēphaleos*, {literally "to be free of wine"} also sober, clearheaded] means not only avoiding intoxication, but also figuratively, acting temperately spiritually, i.e., not carried away by such teachings as "myths and endless genealogies, which give rise to mere speculation" [1:4; cf. Ephesians 4:14]). As Lenski insightfully observes here and in reference to other letters of Paul, "We see from 1:3, etc.,…how all sorts of follies and errors tried to gain a foothold in the churches; in 4:1, etc., Paul warns regarding the future (Acts 20:28)…. Leaders of a temperate and sober mind were needed. They are needed today."* See more…

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* Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles to the Colossians, to the Thessalonians, to Timothy, to Titus and to Philemon*, p. 582.

The Work of Church Elders: Individually

3. Am I temperate, sober-minded, respectable? (1 Timothy 3:2)
   a. "Kretzmann points to modern results of science and of Bible criticism. Besides these we have all the religious fads, fancies, and fictions of unstable minds. We need pastors who will conduct their own persons and then also their congregations with a sane, safe, and steady mind in all matters of life and of faith."*

      Lenski could have written this today. (Ecclesiastes 1:9). I would add that the "science" he refers to is not the true science that reinforces and illustrates God's Word. (See, "Science: Distinguishing Between Sound and Flawed Science.")

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* Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles to the Colossians, to the Thessalonians, to Timothy, to Titus and to Philemon*, p. 582.

The Work of Church Elders: Individually

3. Am I temperate, sober-minded, respectable? (1 Timothy 3:2)

   a. Carefully exegeting and applying the original Greek text in this passage, Lenski warns: "A leader in the church who lacks these qualities would be dangerous, even a member who lacks them would be a liability."*

      Dangerous? Liability? Yes! This reality is easily seen when considered in the light of God's covenant with his people, the church, through whom he is working out his plan of redemption in Christ Jesus and restoring his creation. *As leaders of his people, we must vigilantly guard the church against worldly corruption* that would interfere with implementing God's wonderful plan. We have vital work to do!

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* Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles to the Colossians, to the Thessalonians, to Timothy, to Titus and to Philemon*, p. 582.

The Work of Church Elders: Individually

3. Am I temperate, sober-minded, respectable? (1 Timothy 3:2)
   b. Sober-minded (Greek: σώφρων [sō*phrōn*, also serious, self-controlled, sensible, behaving rationally]). This manner of elder functioning includes balanced judgment and the lack of flightiness and instability seen so commonly, including in those in the early stages of the sanctification process. We must hold off on placing them in leadership positions until they mature in Christ and display these behaviors. (Cf. Ephesians 4:12-16 and ff.)

The Work of Church Elders: Individually

3. Am I temperate, sober-minded, respectable? (1 Timothy 3:2)

   c. Respectable (Greek: κόσμιος [*kosmios*, also orderly, honorable, virtuous, modest]).

      1) Lenski explains that this aspect of an elder's character and behavior is NOT to be understood in the superficial sense of being "refined, courteous, polite…of good breeding" BUT in its broadest sense of denoting "a quality of mind and character which will then…manifest itself in…life."*

      2) Such behavior is Christlike and is necessary for portraying what sound psychosocial research refers to as an approach tendency, contrasted with an avoidance tendency. It's essential church elders are viewed as approachable to be effective in Christian ministry.

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* Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles to the Colossians, to the Thessalonians, to Timothy, to Titus and to Philemon*, pp. 582-583.

The Work of Church Elders: Individually

3. Am I hospitable? (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:8)

   d. Hospitable (Greek: φιλόξενος [*philoxenos*], literally friendly love of, i.e., kindness toward, strangers, aliens) This and the other Bible passages commanding hospitality to strangers refer to caring for strangers who are in Christ, who have received the new birth that regenerates human minds and hearts and begins the sanctification process of growth in Christlikeness.

      1) Lenski explains the New Testament background to this verse.

         "Christian hospitality is mentioned in Rom. 12:13; Heb. 13:2; 1 Pet. 2:9. It does not mean [in these passages] to entertain and to feast friends or even the poor but to take in Christian strangers or acquaintances when these are traveling, or when they are fleeing from persecutions and often are without means of any kind.

The Work of Church Elders: Individually

3. Am I hospitable? (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:8)

   d. 1) Lenski continues explaining the New Testament background to this verse.

> "[Consider the] conditions of that day. There was much travel everywhere in the empire, which helped the spread of the gospel immensely. Christian travelers would want to lodge with Christians and to receive their trustworthy aid in whatever business they had. Christian hospitality was a great blessing to them. Persecution made fugitives who were often in great need. Then other cases such as poverty, sickness, the need of some widow and some orphan would afford opportunity for hospitality. The elders in the church, to whom all these cases would generally come first, did what they could and then appealed to others. A man who was ever ready with his own hospitality had one quality for being made an elder."*

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* Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles to the Colossians, to the Thessalonians, to Timothy, to Titus and to Philemon*, p. 583.

The Work of Church Elders: Individually

3. Am I hospitable? (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:8)

   d. 2) Many similarities exist between New Testament conditions and those of today, especially in certain parts of the world.

      a) Persecution of Christians occurs somewhere each day, and much of it is tragic. Family members are killed, women and children are sold into slavery, and homes are burned. They need help, and the church is there for them, both the local church, and international church agencies (e.g., Samaritan's Purse and Voice of the Martyrs) that support the local churches being persecuted. In the last century, more Christians have been martyred than in all previous centuries combined.

The Work of Church Elders: Individually

3. Am I hospitable? (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:8)

   d. 2) Many similarities exist between New Testament conditions and those of today, especially in certain parts of the world.

      b) During World War II, Stalin killed up to 60 million Christians in the Soviet Union. Moreover, the Christian Holocaust continues to this day, in fulfillment of Biblical prophecy, and it is rising. The Global Christian Relief organization reported that nearly 400,000,000 Christians suffered persecution in 2024 alone. The American Center for Law and Justice, which works globally, has reported that "16 Christians are murdered EVERY DAY for their faith…over 100 will be killed this week."

The Work of Church Elders: Individually

3. Am I hospitable? (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:8)

   d. 2) Many similarities exist between New Testament conditions and those of today, especially in certain parts of the world.

      c) Anecdotal accounts exist in abundance; I receive them daily from such organizations as Voice of the Martyrs (VOM). VOM describes accounts such as in Nigeria where Muslim Fulani Herdsmen go house to house and pull Christians out into the street and tell them to recant their faith in Jesus Christ. When they refuse, they are forced to kneel and are killed. One account I read recorded this occurring where a man's wife and their 11 children stood outside the door of their home and watched as their husband and father had his head chopped off because he refused to deny his faith in Christ Jesus. Homes are burned, families are forced to flee; they need hospitality from Christians in churches elsewhere, and they have it.

The Work of Church Elders: Individually

3. Am I hospitable? (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:8)

d. 2) Similarities between New Testament conditions and those of today, are growing throughout the world.

d) An article in Prophecy News Watch offers details. "For hundreds of millions of Christians, persecution is not an uncomfortable conversation or an occasional insult on social media. It is the daily cost of following Jesus.

"International Christian Concern's…2026 Global Persecution Index examines persecution in more than 20 countries and warns that the forces threatening Christians are not retreating. They are spreading, cooperating and becoming increasingly sophisticated. Meanwhile, Open Doors estimates that more than 388 million Christians—approximately one in seven believers worldwide—now face high levels of persecution or discrimination because of their faith.

The Work of Church Elders: Individually

3. Am I hospitable? (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:8)

   d. 2) Many similarities exist between New Testament conditions and those of today, especially in certain parts of the world.

      d) "Behind that number are real people.

      "They are mothers who have watched militants burn their homes. They are pastors who disappeared into prison systems. They are converts rejected by their families. They are children growing up in refugee camps because terrorists decided Christians no longer belonged in their ancestral communities."*

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* Staff, "Christian Persecution Is Spreading--Will the West Wake Up? *ProphecyNewsWatch*, July 24, 2026.

The Work of Church Elders: Individually

3. Am I hospitable? (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:8)

   d. 3) Exercise Christian hospitality in the light of the Biblical teaching that all humans have a sinful nature. Guard against evil exploitation of Christian hospitality. For example, the good Samaritan took the Jewish victim who was beaten and robbed so badly to a public facility, to an inn, a caravansary (Luke 10:34-35), not to a private home. The good Samaritan did not know the victim for whom he was caring. Thus, how could he trust that the person he was helping was not a criminal who would harm him when he recovered his health? It was wise to take him to a public venue in which the Samaritan could provide him the care he needed but to do so safely. Consider the tragedy Angel Gonzalez experienced due to sinful human nature.

The Work of Church Elders: Individually

3. Am I hospitable? (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:8)

   d. 3) In Connecticut, the *Hartford Currant* reported that Tyree Smith was sleeping on the second-floor porch of a building when a man, 43-year-old Angel Gonzalez, invited him to the third floor to bring him in out of the cold winter day. Smith later admitted that he then beat the man with an ax so severely that he was able to remove an eye from his victim's head along with pieces of brain matter and a piece of his skull. He then went to a cemetery and cannibalized the eyeball—which he said tasted like an oyster—and some of Mr. Gonzalez's brain.*

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* Staff, "Cannibal Who Killed Man With An Axe And Ate His Brain And Eyeball Has Been Granted Conditional Release," *Truth*, 2/22/25 (Accessed 2/24/2025) Quoted in "Homelessness: What Does the Bible Say about Hospitality?"

The Work of Church Elders: Individually

3. Am I hospitable? (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:8)

   d. 4) Some people in and associated with the church become wayward, though not anywhere near the killer in the preceding story. Elders—who find young people, and also older people, who've made bad choices and have identified with "the wrong crowd," groups whose lifestyles are unbiblical—may be able to identify people in the church who have the gift of hospitality, or who would be willing to be hospitable to those who need a friend in Christ, whose caring and kind love can help guide the wayward onto the way of the Lord. As they feel Christian love and caring; sense they are wanted by the Lord and his church; are included in a group that offers affection and whole-some and enjoyable times together; and observe good models as examples to follow, corrective change does occur, as God works in and through what his people are doing to facilitate such transformation.

The Work of Church Elders: Individually

3. Am I able to teach and am I doing so? (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:9-2:1)
   a. See the preceding and following slides for more information about the elder's teaching ministry.
   b. Am I doing the teaching God wills that I do as an elder?
      1) Am I teaching misinformed, rebellious, and inquiring individuals in private conversations?
      2) Am I teaching classes and Bible study groups as needed?

The Work of Church Elders: Individually

3. Am I able to teach? (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:9-2:1)

   c. Do I need help in teaching more effectively? If so, am I seeking that help? Such resources include, but are not limited to the following:

      1) Am I attending Bible study and other Christian education classes myself for my own sanctification; to model the need the others in my ECA have to do so, indeed, that all Christians have to keep learning God's Word; and also to learn how other good teachers teach?

      2) Who are others in the church, who teach well, whom I can ask for help?

      3) What teacher education classes are offered that I can attend?

      4) For further help, see teacher education documents such as "Christian Education Goals and Objectives with a Focus on Level III Objectives: How to Be Sure Your Students Are Understanding and Doing What You Have Taught Them" and other resources on this Christian Education page.

The Work of Church Elders: Individually

3. Am I not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle (ἐπιεικής [*epieikēs* {adj.}, no exact English equivalent but includes sweet reasonableness, considerate, noble grace and gentleness, courtesy, yielding in not always insisting on one's legal rights]? See more on the next slides.), not quarrelsome, not a lover of money? (1 Timothy 3:3; Titus 1:8)

   a. Such behaviors speak much more loudly than words as to the values, lifestyle, and character of the person. An elder must not exhibit such behavior that is the opposite of Christ Jesus.

   b. Consider the impact of an elder whose life contrasts with drunkenness, violent behavior, quarrelsomeness, and loving money. That elder will draw people's attention, respect, and receptivity to the Gospel of Christ Jesus, to Christ's church, and to experiencing the blessings of being sober, gentle, pleasant, and generous.

The Work of Church Elders: Individually

3. Lenski further explains *epieikēs*. "God and Christ exhibit what is meant. God deals so leniently with men, he remembers that we are dust, he withholds justice so long. Christ is gentle, kind, patient, more than only fair….

   "Yes, this is not the yieldingness of a slave or of an inferior but of a superior [that comes from his or her relationship with Jesus Christ] in a noble and generous spirit. The Christian keeps his high nobility, he condescends; he considers the weak and the needy and also the pitifulness of the world's haughty and tyrannical. He has that purest and noblest grace which few are able to resist. All of this lies in this term *epieikeia* [noun]. Let it shine out from your joyous hearts!...

The Work of Church Elders: Individually

3. Lenski continues. "Here the great point is the connection: we who live in constant expectation of the Parousia [Jesus' Second Coming (Matthew 24:3; 1 Corinthians 15:23; 1 Thessalonians 5:23)], of our resurrection ([Philippians] 3:11), of our glorification (3:20, 21), we, filled with abounding joy, cannot but show this noble gentleness, this generous yielding to all men. Those who live for time alone, for this life alone, who ever mind only earthly things (3:19), they will act meanly, selfishly, rigorously, or with false, hollow gaiety,…"*
   - Do I respond to matters with *epieikēs* gentleness?
   - Am I willing to model this kind of behavior, asking God for his help to do so?

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* R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles to the Galatians, to the Ephesians and to the Philippians* (Columbus, O.: Lutheran Book Concern, 1937), pp. 876–877.

The Work of Church Elders: Individually

3. Am I not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle (ἐπιεικής [*epieikēs*]), not quarrelsome, not a lover of money? (1 Timothy 3:3; Titus 1:8)
   c. Am I not contentious (ἄμαχον [*amachon*, peaceful, not quarrelsome])? Am I not looking for a "fight"? In conflict situations, do I listen carefully to all sides and try to facilitate amicable resolution in accord with God's Word? Can I distinguish between Biblical matters where there must be no compromise and "disputable matters" (Romans 14:1) where we can permit different interpretations of and perspectives on Scripture?
   d. Am I not a lover of money (ἀφιλάργυρον [*aphilarguron*, not loving money])? Am I not mercenary, not stingy? Am I generous with my money? Am I a cheerful giver? (1 Corinthians 16:2; 2 Corinthians 9:7)

The Work of Church Elders: Individually

4. Am I managing my family well and seeing that my children obey me with proper respect? (1 Timothy 3:4; Titus 1:6)
   a. Many people in church congregations, and many who serve in church leadership positions, lack leadership knowledge and skills.
   b. Such leadership begins in marriage and family relationships. Sound sociological research shows that the family is the basis of society, and, solely humanly speaking, that is a key reality in the church as well, as the original Greek clearly shows in this verse (3:4) and in the following verse. Both verbs (προϊστάμενον [*proistamenon*, managing, superintending {family}] and ἔχοντα [*echonta*, having {children ἐν ὑποταγή [*en hupotagē*, in subjection, obedience]}]) are participles, the objects of which are placed forward, a means the Greek uses to indicate emphasis. This is important!

The Work of Church Elders: Individually

4. Am I managing my family well and seeing that my children obey me with proper respect? (1 Timothy 3:4; Titus 1:6)

   c. The elder's ability to manage, superintend, is especially evident in his doing so with his children. Typically, any organization looking for a leader wants to see a candidate's track record. What evidence exists that the person will likely function well in the area of leadership needed? In 1 Timothy 3:4 and 5, we see that the father-child relationship is an indicator as to whether a potential elder has leadership knowledge, wisdom, and skills.

The Work of Church Elders: Individually

4. Am I managing my family well and seeing that my children obey me with proper respect? (1 Timothy 3:4; Titus 1:6)
   c. Cont'd.: The prepositional phrase, "with proper respect," refers to the manner in which the prospective and present elders manage their children. Infants and other little children cannot be expected to demonstrate such respect. If we parents want to receive respect from our children, it is necessary to treat them with and model respect, which is easy to do when we always keep in mind that they are loved by God; they bear his image; and they are with us as children only for a short time.
   d. As we interpret and apply this passage, we must not conclude the text requires all elders to be parents. It is not indicating that an unmarried person cannot be an elder. For further evidence of that interpretation, see such passages as Matthew 19:11-12 and 1 Corinthians 7:32-35.

The Work of Church Elders: Individually

4. Am I managing my family well and seeing that my children obey me with proper respect? (1 Timothy 3:4; Titus 1:6)

   e. Lenski offers an accurate summary of 3:4 and 5. "The sense is: 'in subjection to the father, with dignity on his part.' 'Subjection' has the passive sense and implies the father as the subject. We may translate: 'holding such children as he has (anarthrous) in subjection (imposed by him) with all dignity.' He acts in a dignified way when he secures due obedience."*

   f. One way to secure that obedience is to remind children of God's commandment to "Honor your father and your mother…." (Exodus 20:12) When they disobey, gently—but firmly—ask, "Is that honoring Mom and me?" Disobeying is not honoring one's father and mother or God.

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* Lenski, The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles to the Colossians, to the Thessalonians, to Timothy, to Titus and to Philemon, p. 586.

The Work of Church Elders: Individually

4. Am I managing my family well and seeing that my children obey me with proper respect? (1 Timothy 3:4; Titus 1:6)

   g. Also, notice that God gave no end date for honoring one's father and mother, e.g., 16, 21, 40, 65. The honoring takes a different rationale and form when children become adults themselves; then they honor their parents primarily to obey God, not to obey their parents, since their relationship with their parents has changed, now that they are adults. Nevertheless, as adults they are still the children of their parents, one of whom is an elder or being considered as an elder. If the adult child is in, or known to, the congregation and he or she is "bad-mouthing" his or her father or mother, that disobedient (to God's commandment) behavior casts a negative view upon the elder or potential elder. Do we not also honor, e.g., by speaking well of, our parents after they have died? Even if one's parents miserably failed, saying nothing negative about them is possible and it doesn't reopen previous psychological harm.

The Work of Church Elders: Individually

5. Am I able to manage my own family, so I can care for God's church? (1 Timothy 3:5; Titus 1:6) Lenski offers more help.

   "Ill-trained, bad children reflect on any pastor, [or other elder] not merely because they are hurtful examples to the children of the members of the church, but still more because they show that the father is incompetent….

   "This is elementary logic, concluding from the less to the greater: one who does not know how to superintend…'his own house,' how will he handle the great responsibility of caring for 'God's church'? If one cannot even 'superintend' his little family, how will he attend to the far greater task of 'caring for' all those in God's assembly (ἐκκλησία [*ekklēsia*, church] is here used with reference to a single congregation)? Δέ [(*de*) for, but] says that this is the point of the requirement presented in v. 4."*

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* Lenski, The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles to the Colossians, to the Thessalonians, to Timothy, to Titus and to Philemon, pp. 586, 587.

The Work of Church Elders: Individually

5. Am I able to manage my own family, so I can care for God's church? Do my children believe in Christ and are any accused of debauchery or being rebellious? (1 Timothy 3:5; Titus 1:6)

Since elders typically—but not always (1 Timothy 4:12)—are older, their children usually are older, and are expected to be believers in the—and our—only Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. They're also expected to not be debaucherous or rebellious. Such family matters can render the elder not above reproach; as can his being arrogant; quick-tempered; a drunkard; violent; and greedy for gain, which can and does involve dishonesty (Titus 1:7); all of which keep him from being an elder, or require removing him from that ministry if he is already serving in that capacity, unless he were to repent and make the needed corrections.

The Work of Church Elders: Individually

6. Am I a recent convert to Christianity; am I new to faith in Jesus Christ? (1 Timothy 3:6)

   a. The word translated recent convert is νεόφυτον (*neophuton*), literally "newly planted," i.e., new convert or novice. This person lacks the knowledge of God's Word and God's wisdom that develops over time in reading the Bible, prayer, walking and worshiping with other believers in Christ, especially observing those who are mature, and learning how the body of Christ should function individually and corporately.

   b. Church leaders who are having difficulty obtaining volunteers must refrain from placing a new convert in a position of leadership. We cannot disobey God's Word.

The Work of Church Elders: Individually

6. Am I a recent convert to Christianity; am I new to faith in Jesus Christ? (1 Timothy 3:6)

   c. Also, a recent convert placed in a position of authority in the church would be strongly tempted to be prideful, seeing himself as equal to those who are mature. Such pride characterizes the devil, Satan, and condemns him. God does not want us to subject a new believer to such temptation that could result in the same judgment that Satan has and will ultimately receive.

   d. Such a person prematurely placed in an authoritative ministry could easily mislead others. Even unintentionally misleading others can produce the same results as the one(s) misled intentionally.

The Work of Church Elders: Individually

7. Am I seen as having a good reputation with outsiders? (1 Timothy 3:7)

   a. Verses 2-6 of 1 Timothy 3 are all one sentence in the original Greek and flow from the verb, εἶναι (*einai*) to be ("[2]Now the overseer must be [*einai*]…."). These verses all identify a quality that characterizes who the elder is; that is why these questions all begin with "Am I …."

      1) God's Word is here indicating the direct connection between ontology (one's being, essence) and ethics (application of Biblical, including moral, principles to one's behavior). Let's examine who we are to much better understand our behavior and the meaning of our call to be holy (*op cit*.).

      2) Recall Jesus' disclosure of the Pharisee's true nature: "You brood of vipers, how can you who are [ontology] evil say [ethics] anything good? For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks." (Matthew 12:34)

The Work of Church Elders: Individually

7. Am I viewed as having a good reputation with outsiders? (1 Timothy 3:7)

   b. Lenski insightfully points out that verse 7 begins "δεῖ (*dei*, It is necessary) δὲ [*de*, but]," the conjunction, *de*, indicating "what may be termed the conclusion of the whole. It thus reverts to the very first predicate that an overseer in a congregation must be 'irreproachable,' he must be that, as we are now told, even as far as outsiders are concerned."*

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* Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles to the Colossians, to the Thessalonians, to Timothy, to Titus and to Philemon*, p. 589.

The Work of Church Elders: Individually

7. Am I viewed as having a good reputation with outsiders? (1 Timothy 3:7)

   c. The following Greek words indicate that the outsiders, that is, non-Christians, offer a "testimony [μαρτυρίαν (*marturian*)] excellent [καλὴν (*kalēn*)]" regarding the elder as he is living now, i.e., not referring to—or holding against him—how he lived before becoming a Christian.

      1) Paul's wording does not require that all outsiders have to speak well of the elder. Paul refers to fair-minded non-Christians who don't have a bias toward the elder, e.g., for personal or ideological reasons.

      2) Speaking through Peter, the Holy Spirit informs all Christians as to who we are and to behave in accord with our holiness. (1 Peter 1:14-21; 2:9-12) "Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us." (2:12)

The Work of Church Elders: Individually

7. Am I viewed as having a good reputation with outsiders? (1 Timothy 3:7)

   d. The necessity (*dei*) that an elder "have a good reputation with outsiders so that he will not fall into disgrace [ὀνειδισμὸν (*oneidismon*, reproachment, reviling)] and into the devil's trap," is not the same interpretation pertaining to the devil as in verse 6, where the devil and a novice who is not truly committed to Christ will be judged.

      1) In verse 7, we are informed that Satan lays a παγίς (*pagis*, a snare, trap), and those who are Christians in name only, e.g., those who do not have a good reputation with decent outsiders, are vulnerable to falling into the trap. Recall also the Holy Spirit's command: "Be self-controlled and vigilant. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour." (1 Peter 5:8)

The Work of Church Elders: Individually

7. Am I viewed as having a good reputation with outsiders? (1 Timothy 3:7)

d. 2) The world is watching us carefully. Many are actively watching to detect hypocrisy, of which they love to accuse us, that—when true—is a negative witness for Jesus Christ and counterproductive to his commission of us to disciple all nations. (Matthew 28:19-20)

3) Such behavior should not characterize or be done by a church elder. It is dangerous for him and for the mission of the church.

The Work of Church Elders: Individually

8. Am I vulnerable to reproach (see with 1 Timothy 3:2 discussion above) as being arrogant; quick-tempered; a drunkard (see with 1 Timothy 3:3); violent (see with 1 Timothy 3:3); or greedy, including dishonest for gain? (Titus 1:7; see with 1 Timothy 3:3)
   a. The adjective, αὐθάδης (*authadēs*) means arrogant; self-willed; self-pleasing; self-serving rather than other-serving; prioritizing "What's in it for me?" "What do I get out of this?"
   b. The adjective, ὀργίλος (*orgilos*) means quick-tempered, inclined to anger, irritable, passionate. Am I "always up for a fight?" "Do I 'fly off the handle' easily and quickly?" "Would anybody say I'm "easy-going?" See also James 1:19-27.

The Work of Church Elders: Individually

8. Am I vulnerable to reproach (see with 1 Timothy 3:2 discussion above) as being arrogant, quick-tempered, a drunkard (see with 1 Timothy 3:3), violent (see with 1 Timothy 3:3 or greedy for gain? (Titus 1:7; see with 1 Timothy 3:3)
   c. Someone being considered for ministry as an elder must not have any of these attributes and must never act on them.
   d. It is good for those of us who are elders to periodically reflect on them to make sure we haven't started doing any of them. In addition to prayerful and honest self-examination, it would help to ask others with the courage to give us feedback on these matters, doing so "speaking the truth in love."

The Work of Church Elders: Individually

8. Am I vulnerable to reproach (see with 1 Timothy 3:2 discussion above) as being arrogant, quick-tempered, a drunkard (see with 1 Timothy 3:3), violent (see with 1 Timothy 3:3 or greedy for gain? (Titus 1:7; see with 1 Timothy 3:3)
    e. Another way to facilitate such feedback is to give some people a short survey questionnaire like the one I've used to ask my family and friends to let me know how I'm doing in living according to God's Word pertaining to loving others. The survey can be accessed here: How Loving Am I? Survey Questionnaire and Template. It can easily be used for obtaining feedback on other subjects by just changing the wording accordingly.

The Work of Church Elders: Individually

9. Paul now cites seven positive qualifications for elders to possess. Again questions for each elder to ask in self-examination:

   a. Am I hospitable? (Titus 1:8; see above with discussion of the same matter in 1 Timothy 3:2)

   b. Am I one who loves what is good? (Titus 1:8). The Greek term is all one word: φιλάγαθος (*philagathos*), "lover of good." It is composed of two Greek words, "φιλέω (*phileō*, love in the sense of having affection for) and ἀγαθός (*agathos*, good, especially that which is wholesome, morally good). The meaning is that the elder is to have an affection especially for that which is spiritually and morally good.

The Work of Church Elders: Individually

9. Paul cites seven positive qualifications for elders to possess. Again questions for each elder to ask in self-examination:

   c. Am I self-controlled? (Titus 1:8) See above comments pertaining to 1 Timothy 3:2.

   d. Am I upright (δίκαιον [*dikaion*, just])? Am I able to listen carefully to all sides of a matter and make a decision on what is right being in accord with God's will in his Word and do so without considering what other people, even my friends, think? Do I have the desire to please God more than other people and the strength to make and maintain an unpopular decision, but one that is right, just, in accord with God's Word and his will? (Titus 1:8) Does God come first in my life? (Cf. Jesus' question to Peter in John 21:15)

The Work of Church Elders: Individually

9. Paul cites seven positive qualifications for elders to possess. Again questions for each elder to ask in self-examination:

   e. Am I holy? (Titus 1:8) In his first letter Peter writes, "As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. [15]But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; [16]for it is written: 'Be holy, because I am holy.'" (1:14-16) The term, holy—Greek: ἅγιος (*hagios*); Hebrew: קָדוֹשׁ (*qādôsh*)—essentially means separate from that which is evil. God, who is holy, holy, holy—the Hebrew way of saying most holy; since Biblical Hebrew grammar contains no superlative, the way it conveys the concept of greatest or most is to repeat the word three times, as we see in Isaiah 6:3; Revelation 4:8—has called the whole church to be holy to him, so we can serve in and with him. (See also 1 Peter 2:9-12.) The church's leaders, the elders, must set an example and be especially conscious of, and attend to, their holiness.

The Work of Church Elders: Individually

9. Paul cites seven positive qualifications for elders to possess. Again, questions for each elder to ask in self-examination:

   f. Am I disciplined? (Titus 1:8) The Greek word is ἐγκρατής (*enkratēs*), in full control of oneself, disciplined. It means a Godly control of one's ability to make decisions and act on them in accord with God's will and to accomplish his purposes, for the care and nurture of the church, feeding Christ's sheep. Elders must have resolute ability to plan and carry out those plans for accomplishing God's redemptive purposes in and through the body of Christ.

The Work of Church Elders: Individually

9. Paul cites seven positive qualifications for elders to possess. Again, questions for each elder to ask in self-examination:

   g. Am I "holding firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that [I] can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it"? (Titus 1:9)

      1) The verb translated "holding firmly," ἀντέχομαι (*antechomai*), means to, hold fast. This is what elders need to do in order to "encourage others by sound doctrine," to teach others in their work as church elders, and to "refute those who oppose it."

The Work of Church Elders: Individually

9. g. 2) *Holding firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught must also include oversight of all the teaching in the church to establish and maintain sound doctrine throughout the congregation*. Careful studies on the beliefs of <u>evangelical</u> Christians have revealed that many hold pagan concepts that are <u>contrary</u> to the Biblical teaching on essential Christian doctrines. Here are only a few alarming examples:
   - 61% of evangelicals believe—contrary to the First Commandment and the rest of the Bible—that God accepts the worship of all religions.
   - 61% believe that Jesus is a created being contrary to John 3:16 (KJV), *et al*.
   - 55% believe the Holy Spirit is an impersonal force, not the third Person of the Holy Trinity, thereby denying the Trinity.*

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* Jeffrey J. Ventrella, "Mirror, Mirror on the Church Wall: Paganism in the Pews." The Aquila Report, May 6, 2025.

The Work of Church Elders Individually

Serving Christ Jesus

Individually in Each Elder’s Care Area

The Work of Church Elders: Individually

1. The elders are to "…pay attention to yourselves and to all the flock…" (Acts 20:28 Greek, EDS trans.) and "shepherd the flock of God that is among you…." (1 Peter 5:2 ESV), two more commands ("pay attention" and "shepherd"). In his commentary on Acts 20:28, Lenski offers insightful and vital analysis of the text; let us read and heed it carefully.

   The verb προσέχω [*prosechō*, pay attention] "is our 'to take heed', and the present imperative is used to express constant heeding. He who is to take heed of others must first take heed to himself. Be clean yourself before you try to cleanse others. Be taught yourself before you try to teach others. Be light yourself before you try to give light to others. Be near to God yourself before you attempt to bring others near. So Paul did, so he bade these elders do, and that pertains to you.

The Work of Church Elders: Individually

“Paul uses the beautiful figure of ‘the flock’ which Jesus himself used in John 10:11, etc.; Luke 12:32. It harks back to the Old Testament. But we must get the full force of the figure as it is contained in the relation of the shepherd to his own flock. We see it in David who fought a lion and a bear at the risk of his own life in order to save only one sheep of the flock. Jesus has intensified and even glorified this figure. He is ‘the good Shepherd,’ John 10:11; ‘the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls,’ I Pet. 2:25; ‘the great Shepherd of the sheep,’ Heb. 13:20. See how he reinstates Peter in John 21:15, etc.

The Work of Church Elders: Individually

“The church is a body, a united flock, and not a large number of individual sheep—a great fact for Christians as well as for pastors….Sheep as a flock are precious, follow the shepherd, depend on him; it is a crime to be a hireling, to abuse the confidence of the flock; it is the devil's work to scatter the flock. All this and more lies in the word ποίμνιον [*poimnion*, flock; only used five times in the New Testament, all metaphorically, once referring to some of Jesus’ disciples and the rest to a local church], diminutive from ποίμνη [*poimnē*, flock], but only in form, not in sense. ‘All’ the flock—Paul binds every sheep upon the hearts of these elders. ‘All’—not merely the pastor's friends, a faction he has allowed to form that clings to him, the well-to-do, neglecting the poor and the unassuming. The true shepherd knows no dividing line, no factions, loves every sheep, especially the weak and the needy. The lambs as well as the sheep—how often these are neglected! If your heart is not big enough to embrace ‘all the flock,’ it is not big enough to shepherd any of the flock.

The Work of Church Elders: Individually

“Paul brings out the sacred obligation and trust connected with the pastorate: ‘in which the Holy Spirit did set you as overseers.’…

“In the Greek ποίμνιον [*poimnion,* flock; flock of sheep, herd] and ποιμαίνειν [*poimainein*, infinitive, present, active] are cognate, the infinitive is the object of "take heed" "To shepherd" is broad and includes the entire work of the pastor: leading, feeding, guarding, etc. In John 21:15, 17 Jesus used also βόσκειν [*Boskein*], "to pasture" or to feed, which refers especially to teaching, this being the chief feature of the task. Neither Paul nor Jesus know of a flock that leads and manages itself and has a shepherd only to feed it. These inventions plague the church today.”*

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*Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 846-850.

The Work of Church Elders: Individually

1. The elders are to "pay attention to yourselves and to all the flock" and "shepherd the flock of God that is among you…." (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:1-3)
   a. First, more self-examination is required: Do I read God's Word and pray every day? Am I living according to God's Word—at home, at work, at church, in the neighborhood—and am I shepherding those under my care? Do I pray regularly for all in my elder care area (ECA)?
   b. Then, elders must come to know, regularly relate to, and observe how their members are following God's Word. In gatherings with, and/or periodic written communications to, my ECA, do I urge my people to grow in their love for, and zeal to serve, the Lord?
      - At such times, help them understand what that question means and how to know they are doing so, by citing and explaining John 14:21. With the great pastor, theologian, and prolific author John Stott, ask them to memorize and often recite John 14:21.

The Work of Church Elders: Individually

1. The elders are to "pay attention to yourselves and to all the flock" and "shepherd the flock of God that is among you…." (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:1-3)

   c. As I carry out my calling and responsibility to shepherd my flock (those in the church in my ECA), which includes helping them mature in Christ (Ephesians 4:13), do I observe the members of my ECA exhibiting the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23; cf. Matthew 7:15-23)?

   d. Do I proclaim and remind Jesus' sheep he has placed in my care of his Gospel?

      1) Do I look for opportunities to include the Gospel in conversations, e.g., when I talk with people who are ill or worried?

      2) When I talk with those who are struggling with guilt, faith, salvation, and related matters, do I use the keys of God's kingdom that he has given his disciples, to unlock the door into the kingdom where Christ's sheep in my ECA who repent can find Christ's cleansing?

The Work of Church Elders: Individually

1. d. 2) a) Lenski explains the powerful message we have for those in our flock who desperately need what Christ has provided that we need to give them.

(John 20:23) “The gift of the Spirit as here made by Jesus is to enable the disciples to exercise the right, authority, and power with which he now clothes them in their sending. **If of any you dismiss the sins, they are dismissed; if of any you hold the sins, they have been held**…The functions here described go naturally with the sending or commission bestowed upon the disciples by Jesus and with the endowment of the Spirit which he has added. In fact, these two functions form the two supreme acts for which the disciples are sent and equipped. Through the disciples as his church on earth Jesus wants the remission of sins dispensed to sinners, excluding only those who refuse remission…All this is now concentrated and brought to a focus in two weighty statements by which Jesus bestows upon his disciples the great power he has so far exercised himself. They are now to act in his stead, and he will act through them.

The Work of Church Elders: Individually

1. d. 2) a) Lenski explains the powerful message we have for those in our flock who desperately need what Christ has provided that we need to give them.

"The verbs are highly significant: ἀφιέναι τὰς ἁμαρτίας [*aphienai tas hamartias*] = to dismiss, to send away the sins…The sins are removed from the sinner, and this completely, as far as the east is from the west (Ps. 103:12), into the depths of the sea (Mic. 7:19), blotting out the transgressions so that the Lord himself will not remember them (Isa. 43:25). The English words 'to forgive' and 'forgiveness' are too indefinite and must be vitalized from the Greek. The opposite is κρατεῖν, 'to hold fast with strength,' 'to retain.' The sins are held fast upon the sinner, fixed upon him so that he cannot escape from them now or ever. Judgment finds him thus, and he is doomed. The moment a sin is committed that sin with all its guilt adheres to the sinner, and no human effort can possibly free him. He may think he has freed himself in some way, but he is mistaken; he is held. Only one person is able to remove that sin, so remove it as though it had never existed (1 John 1:7).

The Work of Church Elders: Individually

"…The two functions are not identical. In both of the cases the sins have been committed, and the respective sinners appear with their sins and their guilt. In the one case this wonderful thing is done: the disciples remove the sins as though they had never been committed: "they are dismissed," namely by the disciples' act of dismissal. Jesus says so. Hence this act counts for him. "This is as valid and certain, also in heaven, as if Christ, our dear Lord, had dealt with us himself." Luther. In the other case the sins are held by the disciples. This is no mere litotes, meaning only that the sins are not dismissed. The act is positive, the sins are held fast and fixed upon the sinner. He may do what he will, they are upon him, and he must face Christ with them. But now Jesus uses the perfect tense, "they have been held." This means: from the start, from the moment of their commission onward. Jesus has already held them, the disciples join Jesus in this, add their verdict to his, and so for all time to come (this is the force of the intensive perfect…) they continue to be held. Luther's word applies also here.

The Work of Church Elders: Individually

“Jesus here bestows on his disciples what has aptly been called “the Power of the Keys,” Matt. 16:19; 18:17–20. It is true, God alone can forgive sins, Mark 2:7. Nor has God (Christ) abrogated this power of his or turned it over to the disciples (the church). It is still Jesus who dismisses and who holds sins, yet by his act which empowers the disciples he makes them his agents—he acts through them. They are thus also by their very commission bound to dismiss and to hold sins only in accord with the will of Jesus. They can dismiss, yea, must dismiss, the sins of all those who repent and believe; they cannot and dare not do otherwise. To attempt to do so is to forfeit their commission and their power. They can, yea, must hold the sins of all the impenitent and unbelieving; they cannot dismiss them unless they would lose their authorization. All this does not mean that Jesus enables the church to look into men’s hearts with direct and infallible vision and thus to expose also all hypocrites. The disciples deal [see next slide]

The Work of Church Elders: Individually

“with the confession of sinners, their confession of lip and life, and pronounce accordingly. This they do, and every sinner they deal with is to know that they do this in conjunction with Jesus, hence always conditional on his infallible finding. The effort has frequently been made to reduce the authorization Jesus here gives to a mere general announcement that Jesus forgives the penitent and holds the guilt of the impenitent, much like the general gospel proclamation. But this view alters the words, “you dismiss,” “you hold.” It also alters the two τινῶν [*tinōn*], “of any,” “of any,” which indicate two distinct classes. This view also misconceives the function of the disciples (church), which is to do more than to preach, teach, and make known the contents of the gospel in the world of men; they are also personally and directly to deal with individual souls. Compare 1 Cor. 5:3–5 and 12; James 5:15 and 20; 1 John 5:16.

The Work of Church Elders: Individually

"…Do I hear, then, that I may hear confession, baptize, preach, give the Sacrament? No! St. Paul says, 'Let everything be done decently and in order,' 1 Cor. 14:40. We, indeed, all have this power; but no one is to make bold to exercise it publicly except he [e.g., an elder] be chosen thereto by the congregation. Privately, however, he may well use it. As when my neighbor comes and says, 'Friend, I am distressed in my conscience, say an absolution to me'; then I may freely do this, preach the gospel to him and tell him how he is to appropriate the works of Christ and is firmly to believe Christ's righteousness is his, and his sins are Christ's. This is the greatest service I may render to my neighbor! Who can fully set forth what an unspeakable, mighty, and blessed consolation this is, that with one word one man may unlock heaven and lock hell for another!"*

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* Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. John's Gospel* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1961), pp. 1375–1378.

The Work of Church Elders: Individually

1. The elders are to "pay attention to yourselves and to all the flock" and "shepherd the flock of God that is among you…." (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:1-3)

   d. Do I proclaim and remind Jesus' sheep he has placed in my care of his Gospel?

      2) When I talk with those who are struggling with guilt, faith, salvation, do I use the keys of God's kingdom that he has given his disciples, to unlock the door into the kingdom where Christ's sheep in my ECA who repent can find Christ's cleansing? What great food for his sheep!

         a) We must offer those who desperately need what Christ has provided that they can find nowhere else. What a vital ministry!

         b) We live in a time of skyrocketing mental illness, much, if not most, if not all is due to not knowing and not appropriating the Gospel of Christ that heals and provides health no other source can offer. We elders are called—and have responsibility—to proclaim that Gospel.

The Work of Church Elders: Individually

1. The elders are to “pay attention to yourselves and to all the flock” and “shepherd the flock of God that is among you….” (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:1-3)
   e. Do I see each member of my ECA in worship regularly? Do I talk with any who have been gone for several weeks, beginning by asking, “Are you and your family OK?”
      1) If they are well but offer no good reason for not attending, follow up on what he or she says with a comment such as, “We missed you; please keep in mind our need to worship God, to honor him, to draw closer to him, and to experience his special work in our lives to prepare us for what is ahead in our lives and to serve him more effectively.”
      2) If problems are mentioned, inform the pastor. Note them for follow up and for future reference if you receive other such concerns that should be attended to by the board of elders.

The Work of Church Elders: Individually

2. Do I exercise pastoral care of those in my ECA?
   a. Do I pray for those who are ill or have other needs?
   b. Do I visit those who are in the hospital?
   c. When I become aware of any especially serious needs, do I seek the pastor's help with church resources?
   d. Do I contact and offer to visit those whose loved ones have died?
   e. Do I contact others in my ECA as needed by phone, text, email, and/or in person?
   f. When an individual shares with me his or her deep distress over, and repentance of, a sin he or she has committed, do I extend to him or her Christ's forgiveness and assure him or her that the Lord has forgiven him or her?

The Work of Church Elders: Individually

2. Do you exercise pastoral care of those in your ECA?

    g. Do I have lunch or dinner with those in my ECA, have an outing with two or more families at a time, come to know their uniquenesses and their needs?

    h. Do I keep in mind that the church belongs to Jesus; it is his body (Ephesians 4:12)? Our pastoral care ministry is part of Christ's ministry to his church. The church doesn't belong to us; we're elders called to serve Christ and his church, and we'll have to give account to the Lord for what we do, and don't do. Yet, thanks be to God, he will be gracious to and forgive his faithful people.

The Work of Church Elders: Individually

2. Do you exercise pastoral care of those in your ECA?
   i. Do I "honor widows" who are genuinely in need, giving proper attention to those who are all alone and have no family or other support? (1 Timothy 5:3) The church is the primary means through whom God is answering those prayers. (5:5)
   j. Do I give people the instructions in 1 Timothy, including God's will for providing for relatives, so that no one may be open to blame? (5:7-8,16)
   k. Am I constantly watching (προσέχετε [*prosechete* {imperative and present tense: constant}]) for savage wolves from both outside and inside the church who will distort the truth and try to draw disciples away? (Acts 20:28-30)
   l. What means of Christian education does each member in my ECA use to mature in Christ? (E.g., attend classes? Bible study groups)?
   m. Does each member (including all in my family) read God's Word and pray only to our triune God every day individually and with his or her family?

The Work of Church Elders: Individually

3. Am I well able to teach? (1 Timothy 3:2) Such instruction would include teaching individuals as needed and, if needed, to teach groups.

   a. As we saw above, in 1 Timothy Paul emphasized that "the elder must [δεῖ (*dei*, It is necessary)] be…skillful in teaching [διδακτικόν (*didaktikon,* well able to teach)]." (1 Timothy 3:2)

   b. Importantly, *didaktikon* does <u>not</u> mean <u>willing</u> to teach; <u>but</u> it means <u>able</u> to teach.

   c. Do you teach individuals as you have opportunity in conversations, e.g., adding information from the Bible to what is being said and correcting people who say something contrary to God's Word? One way to do the latter is to say, "Now wait a minute; I want to hear all you want to tell me, but first we have to talk about what you just said, because I know you don't want to be wrong. Do you know that what you just said contradicts what the Bible teaches?" Then say and explain what the Bible says.

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3. c. Lenski explains further:

"'Are all teachers?' 1 Cor. 12:29. No, not all. Those who still need much teaching and are themselves incompetent to impart knowledge should not be given [a ministry] in which some proficiency in teaching is needed. When we read in [1 Timothy] 5:17 that honor is to be accorded 'especially to those laboring in the Word and teaching,' we take it that the elders divided the work among themselves, and those who were most able to teach attended to most of the teaching and the preaching. This does not imply that the others could not teach at all…. Ability to teach means not merely a fair natural aptitude but the qualification of having been taught…. The more a faithful teacher teaches, the more will he feel the need of acquiring more and more knowledge of the blessed truth he is to teach."* (2 Tim. 3:14; 2:2)

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* Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles to the Colossians, to the Thessalonians, to Timothy, to Titus and to Philemon*, p. 584.

The Work of Church Elders: Individually

3. c. Cont'd.: If a potential elder, isn't able to teach but has the other Biblical qualifications, that person can be taught to teach, if willing. If he is not willing to teach, he should not be an elder. (1 Timothy 3:2, *et al*.)

    1) 1 Corinthians 14:1 indicates that one who does not have a certain spiritual gift, can pray for it.

    2) Many people for many decades have told me that they don't know enough about the Bible or the Christian faith to teach. Here is how you can prepare to teach God's Word effectively:

        a) Use the resources on the Christian Education page of my free and secure website, such as "Bible Digest" and "Curriculum Development and Lesson Planning for Teachers and for Teachers of Teachers."

The Work of Church Elders: Individually

3. c. If a potential elder, isn't able to teach but has the other Biblical qualifications, that person can learn to teach.

   2) Here is how you can prepare to teach God's Word effectively:

      a) Use other resources on the Christian Education page, such as "Christian Education Goals and Objectives with a Focus on Level III Objectives: How to Be Sure Your Students Are Understanding and Doing What You Have Taught Them" (Sentence PowerPoint Tutorial).

      b) Use the resources on the Christian Theology page of my website, especially "Essential Christianity: Historic Christian Systematic Theology—With a Focus on Its Very Practical Dimensions, Including Answers to Our Great Questions of Life…." This document will help you to answer most if not all the questions you will be asked from those in your ECA and others.

The Work of Church Elders

Serving Christ Jesus

CORPORATELY AS A BOARD OF ELDERS IN OVERSIGHT OF THE LOCAL CHURCH

The Work of Church Elders: Corporately

1. Do you meet with all the other elders, including the pastor or pastors, as a board on a regular basis, at least once per month?

2. Do you begin your meetings by reading and reflecting on a passage in God's Word, *especially one related to a subject that will be discussed at that meeting or which informs you more about your ministry as an* elder?

3. Do you begin your meetings with prayer, seeking and asking God for his guidance so the decisions you make in your meeting are in full accord with his will and pleasing to him? Consider singing a cappella at least a verse of an applicable and well-known psalm, hymn, or spiritual song. (Ephesians 5:19)

4. During your discussion of the subjects before you in your meetings, do you refer to the Bible for God's will pertaining to those subjects as needed?

The Work of Church Elders: Corporately

5. Do you receive and review reports from the deacons or executive council and the other ministries you oversee in the life and work of the church? Do you act on those reports, either accepting them or calling upon them to make any changes needed for the extension and nurture of the church and the kingdom of God?

6. Do you—or will you—individually and corporately as an elder board, if and when necessary, rebuke a church member's, including an elder's, persistent sin that has become known and with witnesses? (1 Timothy 5:19-20)

7. Can you prayerfully and objectively evaluate and then support or oppose other elders and/or church members who want a pastor to leave the church? Are you willing to insist on hearing all sides of such a dispute and trying to fairly and justly resolve the matter by agreement on changes to be made—that includes a monitoring mechanism to assure compliance to the agreed upon changes that need to be made—before considering dismissal?

The Equipping of Church Elders

The Equipping of Church Elders

In the section above, “Biblical Qualifications for Church Elders,” we saw the emphasis in God’s Word on elders being able to teach and also having the calling, courage, strength, and ability to admonish and refute all who oppose sound doctrine and who need correction in other ways as well.”

We next studied what God has presented in his Word on the origin and authority of church elders.

Then we looked closely at the Biblical instruction pertaining to the work of church elders.

All these aspects of this special calling God gives to certain people for leadership in his church, do not come automatically. They need to be identified, taught, and nurtured, which requires elder education. What do elders need to be taught?

The Equipping of Church Elders

An elder education program that will equip the leaders whom God has called to serve him and his church should include the following components.

1. The preceding “Biblical Qualifications for Church Elders” should be presented and discussed as a reminder for the elders of what qualities they have and any they may yet need to have. Each should reflect on what must be worked on for improvement. (See also your answers to the questions in “The Work of Church Elders: Individually.”) As each qualification is discussed, future potential elders in the congregation should be considered and noted for personal contact and recommendation to the congregation as needs arise.

2. The Biblical teaching on the origin and authority of church elders should be studied with a discussion of the implications for what they should be doing.

3. The Biblical instruction pertaining to the work of the elders should be studied and discussed.

The Equipping of Church Elders

4. The timeframe of this elder education program (EEP), should occur when the elders are most willing to meet. People's schedule constraints vary; different churches will find which timeframe works best for them. A two-fold format for the EEP would be most beneficial for the elders and for the congregation.
   a. An initial series of sessions may be held on a Friday night-Saturday morning or at some other time of the week when all can come and spend the needed time in study and discussion. The Sunday School hour is likely a time when all the elders could most easily be present.
      1) The subject matter would be the Bible's teaching on what God's will is for the elder leadership in the body of Christ. The contents of this tutorial can be the curriculum.
      2) Any additional information for elders specified in the church's constitution, bylaws, and denominationally required materials that are in accord with God's Word can be added.

The Equipping of Church Elders

4. A two-fold format for the EEP is most beneficial.

   b. Following the initial introductory course, additional learning should occur in a continuing education format as needed and with schedule constraints taken into consideration. Schedule according to needs, but a possible time for the continuing education sessions (CES) could be a brief presentation and discussion preceding the business part of the regular elder meeting. Consider coming half an hour early for the CES.

      1) In both the introductory series and in the CES, it is very important that all the elders have the opportunity to have their questions answered and develop more understanding and skills.

      2) When new elders are selected, they should take the initial course and also participate in the continuing education sessions.

The Equipping of Church Elders

5. Sound human learning research has shown that adults prefer and benefit most when their class session format includes an initial presentation followed by informed discussion. A helpful percentage of presentation to discussion is 60%-40%, but that guideline should be flexible according to needs.

6. Especially when time is limited, this Tutorial for Elders should be read at home prior to class sessions.

7. Who should teach the Introductory EEP and the additional CES?
   a. Ideally, the lead pastor, or education pastor, would teach these sessions.
   b. However, another staff or retired pastor could be asked to teach.
   c. Also, an especially mature and highly regarded present or former elder, who has served well, could teach and teach the class very effectively.

Resources

- Edward D. Seely, A Study of Biblical Texts Pertaining to Prophet, Priest, and King: Are these Roles an "Office," a "Vocation" or a "Function?" Similarly, the church eldership is a ministry rather than an "office."

- _____, Christian Education Goals and Objectives with a Focus on Level III Objectives: How to Be Sure that Your Students are Understanding and Doing What You Have Taught Them PowerPoint Presentation

- _____, Essential Christianity: Historic Christian Systematic Theology—With a Focus on Its Very Practical Dimensions, Including Answers to Our Great Questions of Life—for Now and Eternity (PowerPoint)

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Resources

- _____, How Loving Am I? Survey Questionnaire and Template

- _____, Leadership and Administration in the Church, Balancing Two Key Dimensions of Leadership: Task Accomplishment and Caring PPT The present church elder tutorial is an excerpt from this Leadership and Administration in the Church course. For important additional information, see that larger program on both my general and academic websites.

- Also see more about these and other subjects addressed in this elder education program on the author's websites at https://fromacorntooak12.com/ or www.edwardseely.com and https://seelyedward.academia.edu. Both websites are free and secure.

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