

## Descriptions and Qualifications of Elders

Core passages: 1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:1-9

Those who serve Christ's church by leading, teaching and preaching the Word are called elders, bishops, shepherds and overseers. These names are interchangeable. By doing this they protect the church from false teachers, exhort and admonish through sound theology, pray for the sick and judge doctrinal issues. They are men who are in good standing with those inside and outside the church and must exhibit the qualifications set forth by God in Scripture. <sup>1</sup> They exhibit servant leadership or else they sin (Luke 22:24-30).

Elders operate in **plurality** and not singularity. See Acts 14:23; 15 and 20:17-38; 1 Timothy 5:17; Philippians 1:1; Titus 1:5; 1 Peter 1:1; 5:1. Becoming an elder is multi-faceted: Acts 20:28 (**anointing**); 1 Timothy 3:1 (**aspiring**); Titus 1:5 (**appointing**). They are distinct from deacons (Philippians 1:1, 1 Timothy 3). It may be said that they operate more in the ministry of the Word and Prayer (Acts 6:4)

**Overseer** (episkope) is used interchangeably with elder (Titus 1:5, 7). This shows that the elders look after, consider, and examine the flock.

**Above reproach:** all encompassing qualification.

**Husband of one wife** (mias gynaikos andra literally means "a one woman man") Devoted.

**Temperate:** not lead by emotions and lusts, not rash.

**Self-controlled:** good judgment, common sense, a sound mind

**Respectable:** a well-ordered life, not a chaotic life

**Hospitable:** love strangers, not cliquish, example of Christian love, "open home, open heart."

**Able to teach:** must have enough knowledge to be ready to refute, encourage and teach.

**Not addicted to wine:** seeking relief, comfort or pleasure above God

**Not pugnacious:** to strike     **Gentle:** willing to yield when yielding is possible

**Uncontentious:** not quarrelsome     **Free from love of money:** to not desire money more than God

**Manages his own household well:** stand before, to rule, to be spiritual leader of family

**Keeping his children under control with all dignity:** to cause children to obey in a graceful manner. See also Ephesians 6:4; Titus 1:6.

**Not a new convert:** not a baby Christian

**Good reputation with those outside the church:** one who is known and is respected for their faith with unbelievers and not just good civic or business personalities; demonstrates integrity in workplace; works hard; tries to know and be known; real about faith and life.

---

<sup>1</sup> Darrin Patrick's article *Developing Elders, Deacons and Members* was helpful. Alexander Strauch's *Biblical Eldership* is the most thorough and thoughtful analysis of eldership and its attending issues I've come across in all my studies. Patrick's article uses Strauch for helps.

## Description and Qualifications of Deacons

Core passages: Acts 6: 1-7; 1 Timothy 3:8-12

Those men and women who serve the church in the ministry of mercy by giving personal help to those in need within the ministry of the church are called deacons. They are distinct from elders and serve as assistants of the elders, allowing the elders to focus on the ministry of the word and prayer. The earliest deacons were selected for their spiritual qualifications and not their civic or social mindedness (Acts 6:3, 5, 1 Timothy 3:8-13). Through meeting the needs of people in practical ways they have a mindset of service and theology. The work of deacons advances the unity of the church and the cause of evangelism, which is explicit in Acts 6:7.<sup>2</sup> The only difference in qualification from elder is that an elder has to be able to teach. They exhibit servant leadership or else they sin (Luke 22:24-30).

Scripture shows us the qualifications of a deacon.

**Dignified:** worthy of respect; worthy to be imitated **Not hypocritical:** not double tongued

**Not addicted to much wine:** speaks also for addictions at large

**Not greedy for money:** will be handling money; needs to be trusted;

**Holding to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience:** character is at issue here

**Tested first:** don't just install them and find out faithfulness, but incrementally

**Blameless:** all encompassing characteristic

**“Wives too/Women too”:** In Greek there is no possessive pronoun (his wife, their wives, deacons' wives) or definite article (the wives of the deacons). Paul gives no qualifications for elder's wives, so why would he give qualification for deacons' wives? The feminine form for “deacon” didn't exist, so the masculine form (diakonos) was used of men and women, for example Romans 16:1. The rule in Greek is that an adjective must take the same case, gender and number as the noun it modifies. So Romans 16:1 shows us this unique aberration in Greek.<sup>3</sup> Thus, using the term “Woman” was the only way Paul could distinguish them from the male deacons. Three extra qualifications: **Not slanderers**  
**Self-controlled:** sound thinking, common sense **Faithful in everything** (true in service and theology).

**Husband of one wife:** one woman man, like elder.

**Managing their children and household competently:** same as elder; notice that it is men, in Scripture, who are judged by how the household is managed.

---

<sup>2</sup> For a brief theological and historical reflection on the evolving role of deacons in the Church, see Derek Gentle's article *The Biblical Role of Deacons*.

<sup>3</sup> See Marvin R. Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1946 and John MacArthur's *Different By Design* and Graeme Codrington's superb article, *The Issue of Women Leaders in the Church, in Relation to 1 Timothy 3*.