

CLASS 24

Understanding Church Government

Part II: *Roles of Elders and Deacons*

CLASS OVERVIEW

In this class we will review:

- Qualifications of elders and deacons/deaconesses.
- The need for and roles of individuals in these offices.
- Physical and spiritual responsibilities of BOTH offices.

Opening Group Question:

- What are some of the different roles and responsibilities of elders, deacons and deaconesses in God's Church today?

I. Introduction

From God's inspired word we learn about "offices" of leadership within the Church of God, the Body of Christ. God established these offices and their corresponding responsibilities to promote *order* and *unity* (1 Cor 1:10) in the Church, to eliminate confusion about roles and responsibilities (Titus 1:5; 1 Cor 14:40), and to make sure the needs of His people are met (John 21:15-17; Acts 6:1-6; Titus 1:9).

II. Background

Immediately after passing the test of being tempted by Satan, Jesus Christ began to call His disciples [learners or pupils] (Luke 5:1-11). Within a relatively short period of time, He selected twelve of His leading disciples, called them apostles (delegate, messenger, one sent forth with orders [*Strong's Exhaustive Concordance*]) (Luke 6:12-16) and sent them out to preach the gospel, heal the sick, and cast out demons (Matt 10:6-15). These men were taught directly by Christ and became the foundation of the New Testament Church. Ephesians 2:20 tells us that the Church was built on the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ being the Chief Cornerstone.

III. Ordinations**A. Church Elders**

The Apostle Paul told Titus (probably a Church pastor), to "set in order the things that are lacking, and *appoint/ordain elders in every city as I commanded you*" (Titus 1:5), just as the apostles had previously appointed elders in every congregation (Acts 14:22). We also see that individuals were appointed to this Church office by the "laying on of hands," just like deacons (1 Tim 5:22).

Group Questions:

- Off the top of your head, what ARE some of the qualifications of elders?
- WHY would God consider certain qualifications necessary in a person prior to ordination?

1. Qualifications of an Elder

Qualifications of Elders

1 Tim 3:1-7; 2 Tim 2:24-25, 4:1-2; Titus 1:5-9; 1 Peter 5:1-4

- Must be blameless (above reproach, no grounds for accusations)
- *Willing to serve*
- Husband of one wife
- Temperate (marked by moderation, not extreme)
- Sober-minded (serious)
- Of good behavior
- Hospitable
- Humble
- Able to teach (explain, exhort, convince, inspire, correct)
- Not given to wine
- Not violent
- Not greedy for money
- Gentle
- Self-controlled
- Not quarrelsome or quick tempered
- Not self-willed
- Not covetous
- Ruling well their own children and households (demonstrating Godly leadership in their family)
- Having children who are good examples
- Not new to the truth, but having a track record
- Having a good reputation among those outside the church
- A lover of what is good
- Just and holy
- Holding fast the faithful word as taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict.

2. The Elder's Responsibilities

- a. The office of elder is one of spiritual responsibility—given the task of shepherding God's flock in a loving and honest way (1 Peter 5:1-4). This person is to be a *spiritual leader* in the congregation and maintain spiritual responsibilities.
- b. He should be "grounded" in the truth of God and the Bible and be able to use God's word to teach and help keep others on track spiritually (Titus 1:9).
- c. He is to set a good example (1 Peter 5:3).
- d. He is to grow spiritually—not to "show off"—but in such a way that even his congregations can see the spiritual growth (1 Tim 4:15).
- e. He is to help unify the Church (1 Cor 1:10—be of same mind and judgment).
- f. "Church Elders" have responsibilities that typically pertain to a local Church congregation, rather than responsibilities over several congregations in several locations, like a pastor would (Titus 1:5—appoint elders *in every city*).

3. An Elder's Place Within the Government of God

All elders are ministers and have been placed in an office. Therefore, they have the authority, to speak, anoint, baptize, lay hands on, marry and perform funerals, *under the direction of the pastor or Church Headquarters*. All elders, as members of the body of Christ, are to submit to and serve each other (1 Peter 5:5). However, according to Scripture, *there are* different "ranks" within the ministry—and thus responsibilities to follow designated leaders, or superiors in Christ.

All Church leaders must understand their place within the government of God, and an elder is no different. A misunderstanding of this position may result in taking the role too "lightly" and

neglecting or overlooking one's duties. On the other hand, improperly understanding one's duties may result in an elder, assuming or usurping duties and responsibilities that are not his.

All Church members obviously fall under the authority of Jesus Christ—the head of the Church (Col 1:18). Ultimately Christ then gives authority to His human leaders. Local ministers are not given "free reign" over their local congregations by Christ. They must also be subject to human authority. We see an example of the "chain of command" outlined in 1 Cor 12:28—"First Apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that, miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues." Thus, the pastor is under the authority of a regional pastor/regional director, who is under the authority of the head of Church Administration, who is under the authority of the human head of the Church, currently referred to as the Presiding Evangelist. The act of "laying on of hands" sets an ordained person apart for further service to the Church.

The elder's loyalties must first and foremost be to Christ and to His headquarters on this earth, from which the pastor also receives his authority. In the unusual circumstance that a Church elder should have an unsolvable contention with the pastor, the regional pastor should be approached.

Although Paul acknowledges that the office of elder is one to be desired (1 Tim 3:1), the real focus should be on serving the people of God, not on self promotion or "getting" a position of authority. Elders should be capable men who really care for God's people (1 Pet 5:2-3). The Apostles James and Paul both warned that not all who "desired" the office could handle it, or had the ability, or the proper attitude (1 Tim 1:7; James 3:1). In fact, James and Jesus Christ both warned about a stricter judgment for those who misuse the office and mislead others (James 3:1; Luke 17:2).

B. Deacons

Once the Church was established and the ranks grew, it became necessary to add new helpers.

Acts 6:1-7—Appointment of deacons BY the Apostles and *laying on of hands*

A separation now exists between the physical and spiritual needs of the Church. Deacons were ordained to do much of the physical work and organization of local Church congregations. Although the office of deacon and deaconess is primarily physical, we see from the qualifications necessary to fill the office, that there is also an important spiritual aspect. Deacons and deaconesses are to serve not only as physical but also as spiritual examples to the Church. We see this powerful spiritual example displayed by Stephen in the book of Acts (Acts 6:8-10). The physical and spiritual stability of local Church congregations usually reflects the physical and spiritually stability of the Church leadership, which includes deacons and deaconesses.

Examples of Physical Congregational Needs Include:

1. Organization of Church activities
2. Organization of the meeting hall and related resources
3. Ushering
4. Oversight of hall set-up, hall take-down, and overall congregation-related tasks
5. Helping widows or ladies with children
6. Assisting disabled or senior citizens needing help
7. Oversight of mothers room—deaconess often organizes
8. Oversight of taking up offering—Holy Day
9. Oversight of food-related activities
10. Helping with youth, singles, or other activities
11. Coordination of Church-related work parties or fund-raising events
12. Coordinating rides to services

The list could continue but we can see that the physical needs of God's people at services and also in their homes are important. We can also see that the area of helping is coordinated by the deacons. Deacons and deaconesses (as in the case of Phoebe, Rom 16:1-2) are chosen by qualifications/character traits.

Group Question:

- What are some of the qualifications of deacons and, by association, deaconesses?

Qualifications of Deacons (and deaconesses)

1 Tim 3:8-13; Acts 6:3

- Reverent (grave, honorable, honest)
- Not double-tongued
- Not given to much wine
- Not greedy for money
- Holding the mystery/hidden truth of the faith with a pure conscience (agreeing with what is taught)
- Not brand new to the faith, but having “proven” themselves over time
- Being found “blameless” (above reproach, no grounds for accusation)
- Of a good reputation
- Full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom
- Husbands of one wife (or wife of one husband)
- Rule well their own children and households (showing godly leadership in their family)
- Having respectable wives/spouses with the following attributes:
 - Reverent
 - Not slanderers or malicious gossips
 - Temperate (marked by moderation—not extreme)
 - Faithful in all things

Administratively, deacons and deaconesses should report directly to the pastor, unless designated by the pastor to report to another elder in the local Church area.

C. The Ordination Process:

- No ordination is (or should be) entered into frivolously. It must be approached with careful consideration, counsel, prayer, and fasting.
- For ordination to the office of **deacon** or **deaconess**, approval must come from the Regional Pastor or Regional Director.
- For ordination to **elder**, the Regional Pastor or Regional Director is once again consulted. The ordination request is then submitted to the Office of Church Administration (CAD) in Charlotte, NC for review by the Director of Church Administration and others. The request is ultimately approved by the Presiding Evangelist.

IV. Conclusion

God designated positions in His Church—Church offices – for the purpose of unifying, teaching, preparing and serving His saints. The offices of elder, deacon and deaconess are positions of service and spiritual leadership. To fulfill the responsibilities of these offices requires true conviction and conversion. God has clearly outlined qualifications that are necessary for these offices. To desire an office is a “good thing” if that desire is to more effectively *serve* God and His people (1 Tim 3:1). One should never desire the office for reasons of self-importance, authority, and self promotion. The opportunity to serve in one of these offices is truly a privilege, and honor, and a tremendous responsibility and should never be taken lightly. Ultimately this opportunity to serve today, will prepare us to serve and rule under Christ in Tomorrow’s World!

“Yes, Jesus Christ very soon is going to return to this earth. He is coming in power and glory. He is coming to *rule* all nations! But he is not going to do this ruling, supervising, all alone, by himself. He is coming to set up world government. It will be a highly organized government. There will be many positions of authority...The function of the church is not merely to convert the “firstfruits” – not merely to bring about salvation to those specially called out of the world and into the Church, but to prepare and train them for these positions of leadership in the kingdom when salvation will be opened to all the living”

Armstrong, H.W. (1985). *Mystery of the Ages* (p.271).

Handout 1—Class 24

Qualifications of Elders and Deacons

<p><u>Qualifications of Elders</u></p> <p><u>1 Tim 3:1-7, 2 Tim 2:24-25, 4:1-2;</u> <u>Titus 1:5-9; 1 Pet 5:1-4</u></p>	<p><u>Qualifications of Deacons</u> <i>(and Deaconesses)</i></p> <p><u>1 Tim 3:8-13; Acts 6:3</u></p>
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