

The Importance of Elders and Deacons in the Church of Jesus

January 14, 2018

1Peter 5:1-7

1 Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as *your* fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed,

2 shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to *the will of God*; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness;

3 nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock.

4 And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.

5 You younger men, likewise, be subject to *your* elders; and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for ***GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE.***

6 Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time,

7 casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you.

God is the most "God-centered" Being in the Universe. *Nobody* wants God to have "first place" in all things more than God does. *Everything* that God "says" and "does", from Creation to Salvation, is deigned to exalt God and to make Himself look glorious. And that is wonderful news for us because, in radically changing us, by the miracle of the New Birth, we truly delight ourselves in God. Therefore, our desire to be happy and God's desire to be glorified are united in the Person of Jesus Christ.

Every single Command in the Bible for us to praise and magnify the infinite Worth of Jesus Christ, every Instruction for us to be holy, every Encouragement for us to utterly forsake the world and embrace Jesus as the Treasure of the Universe is a Command, Instruction, and Encouragement for us find and possess the fullness of Joy. So, there is no one who wants us to be happy and content and satisfied and fulfilled

more than God. And He knows, better than anyone else, that the only way that created humans can do that is by coming to the place where we genuinely *enjoy* God.

So, in His Wisdom, God created the Church to teach and instruct and to model this "Abundant Life" in Christ Jesus to the world, the only life that allows for God to be magnified and people to have the fullness of Joy. So, the Church exists to display God's Glory to a fallen and broken world. And because the Call to the Church is so important, God has seen fit to raise up qualified men to lead in the Church so that both of these things will come about.

And here, at the beginning of the fifth Chapter of **1Peter**, the Apostle teaches that one of the ways that God has to relieve the anxiety of His people and to show them that He cares for them is by raising up Elders over them to love and guide and shepherd them in living a life before God that will allow them to receive an unfading "Crown of Glory". And so, Peter instructs them to humble themselves to God by *subjecting themselves* to the rule of godly and loving Elders. So, we see that it is God's Will for His Church to have the leadership position of "Elders". And the Bible teaches that each local Church should have a *plurality* of these qualified men.

But while the Office of Elder has its roots in ancient Israel, the Office of Deacon is *decidedly* a creation of the New Testament. Soon after the Church was created in the first Prayer Meeting in the Upper Room, the need for an *additional* Leadership Office began to emerge. And Dr. Luke records that emergence in **The Acts 6**. So, Elders along with Deacons are God's Plan to lead His Church.

Today, we are so blessed to have an Installation Service for another Elder and three Deacons. Brother Reese Webb, and Brothers Jeff Bradley, Don Keyser, and Robert Calvert have all proven themselves worthy, and have been nominated by the people of this Church. The existing Elders and myself have met with each one and found them to be biblically, morally, and theologically qualified. Over the years, we have tried them, and we have watched with joy, as they would manifest their love for all of you and their Calling to lead. And at the conclusion of this Sermon, we will install them into these Leadership Positions.

So, where do we get the notion that the Church is supposed to be led by a plurality of Elders and Deacons? Well, we get that idea from

Scripture. So, bear with me as I go over the history of both Elders and Deacons.

Now, first of all, almost all ancient societies and religious communities were guided in some way by Elders, that is, by the older, experienced, wise men of the group. According to **Genesis 50:7**, many hundreds of years *before* Jesus was born, there were "Elders of Egypt", and according to **Numbers 22:7**, there were Elders in the nations of both Moab and Midian. So, there is nothing unique or unusual about having Elders in positions of authority. Elders are historic.

The early Church was born on Jewish soil. Its first members and leaders were all Jewish. Its Lord was Jewish. And it saw itself as the fulfillment of the Jewish Scriptures and as the true Jewish people of God. Therefore, it is understandable that the Church, as it emerged from Judaism, would in some ways pattern its life and structure on the life and structure of God's people in the Old Testament of which they were now the true posterity.

The "Elders of Israel" are referred to in the Old Testament from the beginnings of the nation in Egypt (**Exodus 12:21**) down to the period of the rebuilding of the Temple after the Babylonian exile (**Ezra 6:7**). They seem to first be mentioned when Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, gave him counsel:

Exodus 18:17-24

17 Moses' father-in-law said to him, "The thing that you are doing is not good.

18 "You will surely wear out, both yourself and these people who are with you, for the task is too heavy for you; you cannot do it alone.

19 "Now listen to me: I will give you counsel, and God be with you. You be the people's representative before God, and you bring the disputes to God,

20 then teach them the statutes and the laws, and make known to them the way in which they are to walk and the work they are to do.

21 "Furthermore, you shall select out of all the people able men who fear God, men of truth, those who hate dishonest gain; and you shall place *these* over them *as* leaders of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties and of tens.

22 "Let them judge the people at all times; and let it be that every major dispute they will bring to you, but every minor dispute they themselves will judge. So it will be easier for you, and they will bear *the burden* with you.

23 "If you do this thing and God *so* commands you, then you will be able to endure, and all these people also will go to their place in peace."

24 So Moses listened to his father-in-law and did all that he had said.

In **Ezekiel 7:26**, the Elders are grouped together with Prophets and Priests, each group having its own special responsibility:

... then they will seek a vision from a prophet, but the law will be lost from the priest and counsel from the elders.

In **Leviticus 4:15**, the Elders have a *representative* function in certain worship practices. In **Numbers 11:16**, they are described as Officers over the people.

In the Judaism of Jesus' day, the Elders of Israel were still dominant. The most frequent use of the word "Elder" in the New Testament refers to the Jewish Elders, who opposed Jesus during His Lifetime. Within the Gospels and **The Acts** "Elders" are most often viewed as forming a closely knit group with the "Chief Priests." Again and again we read of "the Chief Priests and Elders of the people" (**Matthew 21:23; 26:3, 47; 27:1**, etc.). The term "Elder" was *probably* very broad and would include members of the Scribes as well as the Pharisees and Sadducees (cf. "traditions of the Elders" **Matthew 15:2; The Acts 22:6**).

Therefore, it is evident that the Judaism, out of which the early Church emerged, was one in which Elders played a distinctive and well-known leadership role. This familiar role in Jewish society was no doubt where the early Church got the title "Elder." But just what the character and function of the early Christian Elder was can only be determined by studying the New Testament itself. It would be wrong to assume that the Jewish concept was taken over with no modifications, because the Church is not simply a carbon copy of Judaism or of Old Testament Israel.

But, it is worth noting that the Office of Priest, that was so prominent in the Old Testament, was *not* carried over into the early Church. Prophets and Elders (cf. **Ezekiel 7:26**) have their counterparts in the Church and these titles were used. But there is no official counterpart to the Priest, for, as the New Testament teaches, the entire Church is a "**holy priesthood**" (**1Peter 2:5**), and a "**royal priesthood**" (**1Peter 2:9**). We, who are in Christ, have all "**been made priests to his God**" (**The Revelation 1:6**). Each individual believer in the Church now has access to

the Holy of Holies, God's Throne of Grace, because of the once-for-all atoning Death of Jesus Christ. But no Officer in the Church has the function of mediating between the believer and God. That is reserved solely to Jesus.

The Elders of the early Jerusalem Church appear in three situations in **The Book of the Acts of the Apostles**. The first reference is in **The Acts 11:30**. The disciples of Antioch had decided to send relief funds to the Church in Jerusalem:

And this they did, sending it in charge of Barnabas and Saul to the elders.

... no mention is made of either Deacons or Apostles here. So, the Elders are apparently the older men responsible for the general welfare of the Church. We know nothing about how they became Elders, and we can only surmise that the reason they were Elders at all is because of the pattern already set in Judaism.

The second situation where we meet the Elders is at the Jerusalem Council of **The Acts 15**. They are mentioned five times, verses 2, 4, 6, 22 and 23. Some heretics had gone to Antioch preaching that a believer had to first be circumcised before he could be saved (15:1). So, the issue was one of "Legalism". Can a believer "do something" to earn his Salvation, including obedience to the Law? Paul and Barnabas debated with them until:

... *the brethren* determined that Paul and Barnabas and some others of them should go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders concerning this issue.

It is noteworthy that while funds were sent only to the Elders (11:30), a *doctrinal* issue was sent to the Apostles as well as the Elders. So, the Authority of the Apostles was recognized, but even this Authority was not demonstrated without an effort to persuade and unify through a "Church Council".

So, when Paul and Barnabas arrived in Jerusalem:

they were received by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they reported all that God had done with them.

Here we see three groups:

1. The Church as a whole
2. The twelve Apostles
3. The Body of Elders

The issue of whether a Gentile believer had to become a “good Jew” *before* he could become a “good Christian”, by adherence to the Law, surfaced soon enough (15:5), and the result was that, according to verse 6:

The apostles and the elders came together to look into this matter.

In the debate that followed, Peter, then Barnabas and Paul, and finally James spoke in favor of *not* requiring circumcision. So, apparently, the discussion, at least initially, was confined to the Apostles and Elders. It is probable that members of the Congregation were present, in view of the reference to the “multitude” (KJV, πληθος) in verse 12, and in view of the fact that when all was said and done verse 22 says:

Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church

... to send a letter to the various Gentile Churches about their decision.

Verse 28 adds that it also seemed good to the Holy Spirit that circumcision *not* be required. When the Letter was delivered, for example in **The Acts 16:4**, Dr. Luke comments that the decision about circumcision had been reached by both the Apostles and the Elders. This confirms 15:6 which says that:

The apostles and the elders came together to look into this matter.

So, the picture in chapter 15 is that the Elders, along with the Apostles, have the responsibility, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to make decisions regarding ethical (15:29) and doctrinal matters. We may assume that these significant decisions were laid before the whole Church at some point where they were approved (15:22).

So, in seeking guidelines from this incident for today’s Church, we would have to keep in mind that the “Office of Apostle”, being linked to the personal witnessing of Christ’s Resurrection, was an *unrepeatable*

Office. Therefore, the *irreplaceable* function of the Apostles remains for us now in the "Apostolic Word" which we have in the New Testament. Thus, the *doctrinal* leadership of the Church, after the death of the Apostles, using only the Jerusalem model, would be a collection of Elders under the Holy Spirit in humble agreement with the "Apostolic Word" (the New Testament).

The third situation in **The Acts** where the Elders appear is Paul's final visit to Jerusalem (21:18). Paul goes in to James (the Lord's brother), and with all the Elders present, he lays before them what God has been doing among the Gentiles through his ministry. Then the Elders urged Paul *not* to give offense to the Jewish Christians, he accepted their advice and purified himself and entered the Temple.

Here, the function of the Elders was to receive the distinguished Apostle and hear his report. They take pains to see that there is a "good rapport" between Paul and the whole Church. It is interesting to note that James, who was not an Apostle (James the Apostle was killed in 44 A.D., according to **The Acts 12:1-3**), is mentioned separately, *apparently* as the main leader. This could be due simply to his unique status as the "Lord's brother", or it could suggest that from the early days as the Apostles dispersed and died off, a central figure emerged among the Body of Elders who was recognized as the "main leader" or "administrator".

We know nothing about how the Elders of Jerusalem were chosen unless we equate the seven of **The Acts 6:3** with the Elders. But there is no good reason to do that. We may *assume* they emerged "naturally" from within the community because they were taken for granted in Jewish society. They were apparently responsible for the general welfare of the Church (11:30), and with the Apostles, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit (15:28), they made decisions respecting the Doctrine and Morals of the Church (15:6; 16:4). These decisions then met the approval of the whole Church (15:22).

Now the term "Elder", as a title for a Church leader, occurs in the Epistles attributed to Paul only three times: **1 Timothy 5:17, 19**, and **Titus 1:5**. Obviously the title, as such, was *not* of great importance to Paul. It could well be that he may not have even used the title in his work until near the end of his life when he wrote the Pastoral Letters, except that they presuppose some prior acquaintance with the term.

There are two references in **The Acts** to Elders in the “**churches of Paul**” (the churches that Paul was used by God to begin). Let’s look at these one at a time.

- 1) In **The Acts 14:21**, Paul begins to head back to Antioch of Syria, retracing the steps of his first missionary outreach to the Churches of southern Galatia: Derbe, Lystra, Iconium and Antioch of Pisidia. While visiting each of these Churches, which Paul had recently founded, where he was:

The Acts 14:22

strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying, "Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God."

Then, Dr. Luke tells us, in 14:23, that Paul and Barnabas:

... appointed elders for them in every church, having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

Concerning the Elders, we may note first that it does not say Paul called them “Elders”. This may be Luke’s word for a Church leader to which Paul may have given no name at all, except perhaps “**the ruling ones**” (1**Thessalonians 5:12**) or “**the overseers**” (**The Acts 20:28**). But whether Paul called them “Elders” or not, Luke saw them filling the same function as what he knew as Elders.

It is interesting to note here that the installation of Elders was by “appointment”, *not* “election”, a feature we will find true to Elders throughout the New Testament. Also, nothing is said here about the actual *function* of the Elders. So, evidently, Dr. Luke *assumed* that in his day the Office of Elder was so common that it needed no explanation.

- 2) The second reference to Elders in Paul’s Churches in **The Acts** comes in **The Acts 20:17**, where Paul is on his way to Jerusalem at the end of his third missionary journey. He stops off at Miletus, just south of Ephesus, and:

“called to him the elders of the church” of Ephesus.

... and when they came down to him, Paul gives a very moving farewell address. In verse 28, Paul admonishes them with these words:

Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.

Concerning the Elders here, again we note that Paul does not call them "Elders", but rather "**Overseers**" (v. 28). The Greek word is *επισκοπους* (*episkopous*), which literally means *Overseer*, and is translated as "Bishop" in some English versions. So, the Elders are entrusted with the task of "Spiritual Oversight". This vital task has immediate relevance because the next verse warns of "**wolves that will come, not sparing the flock**". So, it is obvious that, for Paul, the term "Overseer" is virtually synonymous with "Shepherd," since the Congregation is pictured as a "flock". This gives clear foundation for our use of the term "Pastor" and "Pastoral Staff," since "Pastor" means "Shepherd" (cf. **1 Corinthians 9:7** and **Ephesians 4:11** for Paul's only other uses of the Shepherd metaphor for Church Leader).

In addition, the *responsibility* of the Elder/Overseer is to "**feed the Church,**" no doubt in the sense in which Jesus said to Peter,

John 21:17
Feed my sheep

And, in context, the "food" that they are to feed the sheep with is:

The Acts 20:32b
... the word of His grace, which is able to build *you* up and to give *you* the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.

or

The Acts 20:27b
... the whole purpose of God.

... therefore, the Elders/Overseers are "Ministers of the Word".

Finally, we should note that the Elders had been "set as Overseers" by the Holy Spirit. This fills out the picture somewhat when

we add to it the fact that Paul *appointed* Elders in all the Churches. The "appointment", no doubt, occurred after the manner of Paul's *own* appointment by the Prophets and Teachers in **The Acts 13:1-3**.

So, through prayer and fasting, the Holy Spirit makes plain who shall be appointed, and then the leaders lay hands on them and "appoint" them.

From these two texts in **The Acts**, we can see that from the earliest times in the Churches of Paul, there have been "appointed leaders" who function as "Overseers of the flock", to guard it, feed it, while helping to also supply its physical needs. Luke applies the term "Elders" to these and makes plain that there were several in each Church, and apparently at Ephesus a large number (cf. 20:25).

Within the inspired Letters of Paul themselves (13 Epistles), the term "Elder," as a designation for a Church leader, occurs only three times, **1 Timothy 5:17, 19** and **Titus 1:5**. We will look at these in reverse order. And as we do, we should keep in mind the unique character of the Pastoral Letters (**1&2 Timothy** and **Titus**): they are the last letters Paul wrote and reflect a situation fifteen to twenty years after Paul's first Missionary Journey. And, unlike all his other letters, they are addressed to individual Church Leaders and spell out some of their duties.

Paul writes to the young Pastor on the island of Crete:

Titus 1:5-11

5 For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city as I directed you,

6 *namely*, if any man is above reproach, the husband of one wife, having children who believe, not accused of dissipation or rebellion.

7 For the overseer must be above reproach as God's steward, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not addicted to wine, not pugnacious, not fond of sordid gain,

8 but hospitable, loving what is good, sensible, just, devout, self-controlled,

9 holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict.

... and then he told him *why*:

Titus 1:10&11

10 For there are many rebellious men, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision,

11 who must be silenced because they are upsetting whole families, teaching things they should not *teach* for the sake of sordid gain.

So, we see right away that Paul here uses the term "Elder" and "Overseer" (or Bishop) with reference to the same persons. Verses six and seven can be paraphrased, "*Elders shall be irreproachable*" (anengklētos):

... for an overseer must be irreproachable (anengklētos)."

The function of the Elders is thus summed up as oversight just as it was in **The Acts 20:17, 28**. Also, as in **The Acts**, the emphasis falls on the ministry of the Word; the Elder/Overseer should be well-grounded in doctrine (*didachē*, verse 9), and:

"able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict.

... beyond this nothing is said about the task of the Elders.

Verses six to eight give the requirements one should meet in order to be an Elder/Overseer. In his community relations he should be irreproachable, and his marriage and family should be exemplary. His own personal character should be one of spiritual maturity which fits him to help others.

The other two places where the term "Elder" occurs in Paul's letters is **1Timothy 5:17** and **19**. In **5:3-16**, Paul describes the procedures to follow in caring for widows in the Church. "*Real* widows," that is godly, older women who have no relatives to care for them, are to be supported by the Church (5:3, 9, 16). They are thus to be honored. Then in verses 17 and 18 Paul says:

1Timothy 5:17-18

17 The elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching.

18 For the Scripture says, "*YOU SHALL NOT MUZZLE THE OX WHILE HE IS THRESHING,*" and "The laborer is worthy of his wages." [Deuteronomy 25:4 and Luke 10:7]

This text raises a number of questions: What does the "honor" consist of in verse seventeen? Verse eighteen makes it plain that financial support is in view, at least partly:

"the laborer (those who "labor in the Word," verse 17) **is worthy of his wages."**

So, the term "**double honor**" in verse seventeen must mean at least double pay. But this raises the question, Exactly *what* is to be doubled? When Paul says that Elders who "rule well" are to be accorded "double honor", does he mean that Elders who rule *poorly* are to get \$5,000 a year and the Elders who rule *well* are to get \$10,000 a year? This is doubtful, since Paul says nothing about honoring Elders who rule poorly; in fact, in verse twenty he speaks of "rebuking" an Elder who persists in sin.

Another question is raised by the phrase:

"especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching" (verse 17).

... this seems to imply that there are *some* Elders, who labor *exclusively* in the Word and teach, and some who *don't*.

Now there are two new features about the Ministry of Elders that emerge from **1Timothy 5:17-22**. Here, their work is described as "ruling". And the Greek word means: *to stand before (proistemi)*. And it was used by Paul in **1Thessalonians 5:12&13b**, when he said:

12 But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction,

13 and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work...

... so, three ministries:

1. They labor among you

2. They have charge over you
3. They give you Instruction

And the key to understanding this comes from **1 Timothy 3:4, 5**, and **12**, where the word is translated “manage” (RSV) or “rule” (KJV) and refers to the function of a father in the family. Thus, the Elders are to the Church what a Father is to his family. He:

1. Leads
2. Manages the affairs
3. Supervises

A second feature of the Ministry of Elders which we have not seen before is that they are apparently ordained by the laying on of hands. After telling Timothy how to handle an Elder who persists in sin, Paul warns Timothy not to “**lay hands on anyone too hastily**” (**5:22**). In other words, do not set a person into the Office of Elder in haste. (For Timothy’s own ordination by the laying on of hands, see **1 Timothy 4:14; 1:18; 2 Timothy 1:6**.)

We have not looked at all the texts where Paul uses the term “Elder.” But since we have noticed both from **The Acts 20:17, 28** and from **Titus 1:5, 7** that “Elder” and “Bishop/Overseer” are sometimes interchangeable, we should perhaps look at two other texts where the Bishop is mentioned.

In **1 Timothy 3:1-7**, Paul gives the qualifications for one who “aspires to the office of Overseer” (episkopēs). They are similar to those listed in **Titus 1:5-9**. The task of teaching is again mentioned (verse 2), and the function of the Overseer is summed up in verse 5 as:

“taking caring of the church of God”

The second and last text where Paul refers to the Bishop is **Philippians 1:1**:

Paul and Timothy, bond-servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers and deacons:

The chief value of this reference, historically, is to show that the technical terms of "Overseer" and "Deacon" are not restricted to the Pastoral letters, which some scholars say Paul did not write.

Now we can try to summarize what we have learned about Elders in the Churches of Paul. Their role can perhaps best be summed up in the phrase "overseeing", and hence, the term "Elder" or "Overseer" or "Bishop" are sometimes used interchangeably (**Titus 1:5, 7, The Acts 20:17, 28**). This oversight of the Church involves guarding the flock spiritually, like a shepherd guards his flock from wolves (**The Acts 20:28**), and "feeding" the flock the Word of God. The feeding happens as the Elders "labor in the Word and teaching" (**1Timothy 5:17; 3:2, Titus 1:9; The Acts 20:27, 32**). But **1Timothy 5:17** may mean that there were ruling Elders who were not involved in Preaching and Teaching. In addition to the spiritual ministry, the Elders were also responsible for certain physical needs of the flock (**The Acts 20:35**).

In the New Testament Elders attain their position by appointment either by Paul or Barnabas (**The Acts 14:23**), or by Timothy (**1Timothy 5:22**), or by Titus (1:5). The Holy Spirit was active in these appointments so that it could be said that he had made them Overseers (**The Acts 20:28**). But this Divine Guidance did not short circuit the normal assessment of a person's character since according to **1Timothy 3:2-7** and **Titus 1:5-9**, the Elder/Overseer had to have an exemplary family, a spiritually mature character, and an ability to give sound teaching. The appointment was a kind of Ordination to a sacred Calling which was performed by the laying on of hands (**1Timothy 5:22**; cf. **The Acts 13:3**).

Finally, it is apparent that each city Church had several Elders rather than just one. Probably at the beginning being an Elder was not a full-time job and was performed in addition to one's vocation. But by the time Paul wrote **1Timothy**, the Elders in Ephesus were to be paid for their labor.

Now there are a number of uses of the term "Elder" *outside* of Paul's writings. For example, in **The Book of the Revelation**, the term occurs twelve times with reference to the twenty-four Elders in Heaven. There is no agreement among biblical scholars who these people represent. **2** and **3 John** begin with the designation,

"The Elder to..."

... apparently the author is so well known to his readers that he need not even give his name, but only call himself "The Elder." In **James 5:13-15** we read:

13 Is anyone among you suffering? *Then* he must pray. Is anyone cheerful? He is to sing praises.

14 Is anyone among you sick? *Then* he must call for the elders of the church and they are to pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord;

15 and the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him.

The only thing new we learn here is a specific illustration of the kind of *practical* ministry the Elders were to have in the Churches of the Dispersion (**James 1:1**). And in **1Peter 5:1-4**, that Brother Andy read to us, Peter refers to himself, not only as an Apostle, but also as an Elder. Now that does not mean that an Apostle is an Elder, but rather that, in the early Church, the Apostolic Office overlapped with that of Elder.

Peter refers to this Elder status to illustrate the very point he is making, namely, he does not want to "lord it over the other Elders", precisely because he was an Apostle, but by example and exhortation to help them fulfill their Calling. So, he draws attention to Christ's suffering and glory, which meant something to the other Elders who were called to take the lowly role of examples to the flock and to await the unfading crown of glory which only Christ can give (verse 4).

So, the main point of these verses is to instruct the Elders just *how* to exercise their Authority. Peter uses three pairs of admonitions:

- 1. Not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to *the will of God***
- 2. Not for sordid gain, but with eagerness**
- 3. Nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock**

So, Peter tells the Elders, "*Don't lead like that, lead like this!*" So, the single most important quality that Elders must possess, besides a genuine love of God, is an equally genuine love for the people. So,

especially in the business of leading the flock of God, Love must reign supreme. Because without that love constantly governing their actions, simply “telling people the Truth” only makes people a Pharisee. It is a Truth that people don’t care what you know until they know that you care. People will receive even the *harshest* rebuke from an Elder whom they are convinced genuinely loves them. And it is that love that will change the *way* the Elders shepherd God’s people.

And this genuine love also guides the Deacons. The entire Ministry of Deacons was originally established so they would be:

The Acts 6:3b

... put in charge of this task...

... of caring for the people in the Church who might otherwise be neglected. This tells us that God is very concerned, not only with the *spiritual* needs of his people, but their *physical and natural* needs as well. It is true that what determines a Church’s standing with God is in how they treat their *weakest* members.

Neglecting widows and orphans, and the weak, aged and sick is a sure sign that the Church does not possess the Truth that it claims. It is *not* one or the other. Truth and Love are simply two sides of the same coin. The Bible teaches clearly and repeatedly that if you do not love, it is because you do not really have Truth. And if you have Truth, you will love.

Also, the Deacons are to engage in *this* important practical Ministry, so that the Elders might...

The Acts 6:4b

... devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.

Now it should never be thought that Deacons are “almost Elders, but not quite”. Both Deacons and Elders “serve the people”. So, in *that* sense, their Ministry is the same. The *main* distinction between Elders and Deacons is that Elders are *primarily* concerned with the spiritual needs of the people, while the Deacons are *primarily* concerned with the *physical and natural* needs. That doesn’t mean that Deacons *can’t* teach or that Elders *can’t* make sure that a widow woman is cared for. They *can*, and they *should*.

But Elders *must be* “able to teach” (1Timothy 3:2). So, in addition to being *morally* qualified as godly men, Elders *must be* “able” to understand Biblical Truth and articulate it to the people. They *must be* “able” to spot false teaching a mile off and understand why it is false. And Elders *must be* “able” engage in spiritual counseling. So, by *extension*, there should be *ongoing* training in the life of an Elder that is simply *not* required of Deacons. However, if a Deacon is especially gifted at Teaching and Preaching, and has a firm grasp on deep and profound theological issues, then he is demonstrating that he is probably being called to the Office of Elder.

Now, unlike the many American Corporations and other business models, the Banner that waves over the Church is not *efficiency*, but love. So, in the Church that has Jesus as Head, all of the Leaders are *not* to pattern their positions after the lost, pagan world, but after the many examples given in the Bible, and those godly examples given in the Church over the last 2,000 years. Jesus Himself said:

Luke 22:25b-27

25 ... "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who have authority over them are called 'Benefactors.'

26 "But *it is* not this way with you, but the one who is the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like the servant.

27 "For who is greater, the one who reclines *at the table* or the one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines *at the table*? But I am among you as the one who serves.

... so all who lead in the Church must possess a kind, tender, and loving heart, so as not to “lord it over” the people.

We need to always keep in mind that one of the very early martyrs of Christianity was the Deacon Stephen (**The Acts 6:5; 7:59**), who had a *powerful* Ministry, and who had a complete grasp of the history of Redemption, beginning with Abraham all the way through Jesus (**The Acts 6:8; 7:2- 53**). So, Deacons are *vital*ly important, and have, historically, been used by God *mightily*.

So, we are blessed by God today, to have so many men, who are qualified, and who have proven themselves worthy to step into this Leadership position, so let us see to it!

Amen
Let's pray.

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The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. Be watchful and quicken your pace. Soli Deo Gloria. For the Glory of God alone.