

BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS FOR ELDERS & DEACONS

HARBOR CHURCHES

THE OFFICE OF ELDER

An elder is one who “*shepherds the flock of God*” (1 Peter 5:1-4), exercises oversight, leads (Hebrew 13:7), has charge over the church (1Thessalonians 5:12), and one who will give an account to God for the members of the church (Hebrews 13:17).

The New Testament affirms the truth that the church is led by a plurality of qualified leaders who with unity and equality shepherd the local church. So critical is this spiritual office of leadership, that it is essential to clearly understand both the qualification and function of an elder/overseer.

THE QUALIFICATIONS OF AN ELDER

The leader who serves in the office of elder must be so qualified that the church will willingly follow their leadership (see 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9).

What must an Elder be?

Above Reproach. A person with a righteous reputation. Blameless, not being guilty of gross misbehavior unbecoming to leaders. One whose lifestyle is such that it affords no opportunity for a valid accusation of wrong doing. Consistent character.

Temperate. Calm, cool, and collected. Remains steadfast, stable, and a clear thinker. Disciplined and not self-indulgent.

Prudent. Wise, discerning, mature, and sensible. A person who has sound judgment and demonstrates self-control.

Respectable. One who models a lifestyle that exemplifies the teachings of the Bible. A person who is orderly.

Not Given to Wine. Not characterized by a belligerent negative temperament and quarrelsome attitude that is associated with drunkenness.

Not Pugnacious. A person who is not physically or verbally abusive.

Not in Love with Money or Sordid Gain. One who is not preoccupied with amassing material possessions or involved in questionable business practices.

Not in Love with Money or Sordid Gain. One who is not preoccupied with amassing material possessions or involved in questionable business practices.

Not Contentious. Not argumentative or quarrelsome.

Not Quick-tempered. Does not “fly off the handle” or have a “short fuse”.

Not Self-willed. One who is not stubborn or insensitive to other people or their ideas. Not trying to always have their own way.

Committed to Spouse. Devoted completely to only one spouse.

Manages Own Household Well. Manages one’s family with love, sacrifice, wisdom and firm leadership. A person who is a model leader to their children who are orderly and believing.

Hospitable. An attitude of sharing blessings, especially desiring to open up one’s home to others.

Good Reputation Outside the Church. A lifestyle of such integrity that one’s behavior is unquestioned even among the lost.

Lover of What is Good. A person who has a desire to do good and not evil.

Not a New Convert. One who has been saved long enough to demonstrate a level of maturity in lifestyle.

Just. Fair-minded, impartial, and objective. Makes decisions based on principle, not prejudices. Does not show favoritism.

Holds Fast the Faithful Word. Stable in one’s faith, obeying the Word of God. Not hypocritical – teaching one thing and living another.

A Working Knowledge of Scripture. Able to show one’s knowledge of the Scripture in casual conversation. Uniquely gifted with the ability to communicate the Word of God, publicly and privately.

THE FUNCTION OF AN ELDER

The elder is primarily to shepherd the flock of God, the church (Acts 20:28, 1 Peter 5:1-4). The job of the shepherd is more than merely guiding the sheep to

good pasture to feed. According to *Psalm 23*, the shepherd must also lead, protect, guide, and comfort.

Therefore, the task of an elder is that of paying close attention to the people under their care with a view of fulfilling the functions of a shepherd (see *John 10 for positive aspects of a shepherd, and Matthew 23 for negative aspects of shepherding*).

The elder is to take care of the church of God as a father would take care of his own family (*1 Timothy 3:5; Luke 10:35*). The elder is aware of the present spiritual needs to the church and responds by seeking to meet those needs with an earnest sincere desire and a servant's heart.

The elder is to lead the church (*1Thessalonians 5:12, 1 Timothy 5:17*). To lead means to preside, to direct, to protect, to represent, and to care for. The elder leads with the Word of God as the authority in the church and through the example of a godly life (see *Hebrews 13:7, 17, 24*).

THE OFFICE OF DEACON

A deacon is one who is "charged with the temporal affairs of the church". The apostles ordained them in *Acts 6:1-6*. The Greek word translated "deacon" signifies servant, and is so translated in *John 12:25*. It is also translated "minister" (*Mark 10:43, 1 Corinthians 3:5, 1Thessalonians 3:2*). Stephen and Phillip are two of the clearest examples of a deacon in the Scriptures (*Acts 6:8-8:2, 8:26-40, 22:20*).

THE QUALIFICATIONS OF A DEACON

The leader who serves in the office of deacon must be so qualified that the church will willingly follow their leadership (see *1Timothy 3:8-12, Acts 6:1-7*).

What must a Deacon be?

Dignity. This quality is found in a person who possesses and manifests a dignity (*worthy of respect*) founded on high moral distinction and seriousness of purpose. They are held in high regard by others and know the importance of living the Christian life.

Not Double-tongued. A double-tongued person is one who will say one thing to one person and then turn around and say another entirely contradictory statement to another. By making different representation to different people about the same thing credibility is destroyed. A deacon must be

sincere and consistent in what he says. (*Proverbs 6:16-19*).

Not Addicted to Much Wine. This requirement is not total abstinence but rather prohibits misuse leading to dependency on wine (*1 Timothy 3:3, 5:23, Proverbs 20:1, 23:29-35, Romans 14:13-15:3*).

Not Fond of Sordid Gain. Legitimate gain becomes sordid or dishonest gain when wealth is made the prime objective rather than seeking to glorify God. An improper focus would disqualify a person from giving genuine service to God. (*Proverbs 13:7, Mark 8:36, 1 Timothy 6:6-10*)

Holds to the Mystery of the Faith with a Clear Conscience. The "mystery of the faith" is the revealed truth of the gospel. A deacon, in order to be able to minister spiritually, must have a full understanding of the revelation of the Bible to the that they are fully and unfailingly persuaded of its truth and to give spiritual support to believers (*1 Timothy 1:5, 3:16, Matthew 13:11*).

Tested and Found Beyond Reproach. Before being given the responsibility to serve as a deacon, a leader must be examined or tested and proven spiritually stable. The test is not a formal questioning but rather an observation of one's life to see if the qualities of a deacon are displayed. When examined and found to be without accusation of violation, they are approved to serve as a deacon.

Committed to Spouse. Devoted completely to one's spouse.

Good Manager of Household. The way in which a leader cares for home and family is an excellent indicator of the ability to care for God's church. If proper love is not exhibited in the home, it will not be found elsewhere.

THE FUNCTION OF A DEACON

Deacons are called by God to be leaders in the ministries of service. They help in ministering with compassion and mercy and assisting those in need. They are charged with overseeing the financial, material, and temporal needs of the church.