

What Is An Elder & A Deacon

By Dr. Dan Cheatham, www.devotional.net

Scriptural Basis For Elders & Deacons:

Philippians 1:1 KJV - Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to **all the saints** in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, **with the bishops and deacons.**

In the above scripture, Paul speaks of three categories of Christians, three functional groups within the local church. Saints, Bishops and Deacons. (Hopefully the Bishops and Deacons are Saints too! Ha!)

To understand what a true Elder is, one must let the bulk of scripture interpret and balance itself. No one scripture verse by itself completely defines what an Elder really is. Obviously the choice of words that is used in the New Testament for this spiritual leader automatically gives us an initial word picture. The fact that "elder" is used in the New Testament interchangeably to denote a Christian leader and also in other contexts to denote an older person, implies that a leader is someone with more influence via their experience, age, training, or anointing.

So I propose that the scripture makes very clear what an Elder truly is.

Elder = Bishop = Pastor = Overseer = Spiritual Leader = Ephesians Chapter 4 Five-Fold Minister = Ordained Minister = Preacher/Teacher:

From all the scriptures I read, there is no such thing as a "LAY ELDER." An "ELDER" is undoubtedly a CALLED and SEPARATED Man or Woman of God, upon whom the anointing of God to FEED and LEAD rests. Carefully consider these scriptures:

1 Peter 5:1 KJV - "The **elders** which are among you I exhort, **who am also an elder**, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed; **Feed the flock** of God which is among you (**NIV: Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care**), **taking the oversight** thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; 3 Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. 4 And when the **Chief Shepherd** shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away."

1 Timothy 3:1 KJV - "Here is a trustworthy saying: If anyone sets his heart on being an **overseer (NIV and NLT: elder, MSG: provide leadership in the church)**, he desires a noble task." 1 Timothy 3:2 NLT - "For an **elder** must be a man whose life cannot be spoken against. He must be faithful to his wife. He must exhibit self-control, live wisely, and have a good reputation. He must enjoy having guests in his home and must be able to teach."

1 Timothy 2:1,2 AMP - "THE SAYING IS TRUE and irrefutable: If any man [eagerly] seeks the office of **bishop (superintendent, overseer)**, he desires an excellent task (work). Now a **bishop (superintendent, overseer)** must give no grounds for accusation..."

Acts 14:23 KJV - "And when they had **ordained them elders in every church**, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed."

1 Timothy 5:17 NIV - "The **elders who direct the affairs of the church** well are worthy of double honour, especially those **whose work is preaching and teaching.**"

In the above verse, it does seem to allude to the fact that there are some elders whose work is NOT to preach and teach. This is about the only verse I can find that might justify one thinking that there is such a thing as a LAY ELDER. However, many elders' jobs in a local church may be more administrative or in counseling, so I lean towards thinking that this verse is referring to those leaders as opposed to a layman.

Now when I delineate between a LAYMAN and a CALLED MINISTER (commonly coined "clergy"), I am NOT drawing that difference as to whether they are in full time employed ministry as opposed to secular employment. Even Paul the Apostle was secularly engaged in his trade of tentmaking for periods of time while he was still in the ministry. Rather I am drawing the distinction between the two, not by employment status, but rather by THE CALL AND THE ANOINTING RESTING ON AN INDIVIDUAL THAT QUALIFIES THEM TO BE A LEADER AND FEEDER of God's people. A layman should NOT be in charge of governing a local church. A God-touched mouth is still the acid test of whether a person is called to the ministry. Of course, the scriptures also list character traits that either qualify or disqualify a person as well. But just because someone is a good leader in their secular profession DOES NOT qualify them to lead God's church. GOD HIMSELF decides whom to call and anoint to lead. To usurp and replace God's callings and giftings is a serious matter that can stunt the spiritual growth and direction of a local church at best, or cause God to withdraw His hand of blessing altogether, at worst.

Acts 20:28 NIV - "Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which **the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds** of the church of God, which he bought with His own blood."

Ephesians 4 lists five ministries that are commonly known as the FIVE-FOLD MINISTRY: Apostles, prophets, evangelists, **PASTORS** and teachers. Below is a lexicon definition of the Greek Word translated "PASTOR."

"Pastor - 4166 ποιμην ποιμεν ποιμανε'; TDNT-6:485,901; AV-shepherd 15, Shepherd 2, pastor 1; 18

1) a herdsman, esp. a shepherd

1a) in the parable, he to whose care and control others have committed themselves, and whose precepts they follow

2) metaph.

2a) the presiding officer, manager, director, of any assembly: so of Christ the Head of the church

2a1) of the overseers of the Christian assemblies

2a2) of kings and princes

++++

The tasks of a Near Eastern shepherd were:

- to watch for enemies trying to attack the sheep - to defend the sheep from attackers - to heal the wounded and sick sheep - to find and save lost or trapped sheep - to love them, sharing their lives and so earning their trust.

During World War II, a shepherd was a pilot who guided another pilot whose plane was partially disabled back to the base or carrier by flying alongside him to maintain visual contact."

Pastoral Leaders (Elders) may be male OR FEMALE: Examples are Deborah who was the Judge of Israel (Leader), Esther a Queen, Anna The "Prophetess" of Luke 2:36, Priscilla a Co-Pastor with her husband of their church, found in 1 Corinthians 16:19. Modern Examples are Aimee Simple McPherson, Kathryn Kuhlman, Marilyn Hickey, Joyce Meyers, Elaine Hollmer, and many others. The Bible clearly states in Acts 2:38 that God will pour out His Spirit on all flesh, on His SERVANTS (men) and HANDMAIDENS (women) and that "THEY" (Both the men and the women) would prophesy (preach, teach and move in the gifts of the Spirit).

What is a Deacon?

Here is the Easton's Bible Dictionary expansion of the Deacon: "Anglicized form of the Greek word diaconos, meaning a "runner," "messenger," "servant." For a long period a feeling of mutual jealousy had existed between the "Hebrews," or Jews proper, who spoke the sacred language of palestine, and the "Hellenists," or Jews of the Grecian speech, who had adopted the Grecian language, and read the Septuagint version of the Bible instead of

the Hebrew. This jealousy early appeared in the Christian community. It was alleged by the Hellenists that their widows were overlooked in the daily distribution of alms. This spirit must be checked. The apostles accordingly advised the disciples to look out for seven men of good report, full of the Holy Ghost, and men of practical wisdom, who should take entire charge of this distribution, leaving them free to devote themselves entirely to the spiritual functions of their office #Ac 6:1-6. This was accordingly done. Seven men were chosen, who appear from their names to have been Hellenists. The name "deacon" is nowhere applied to them in the New Testament; they are simply called "the seven" #Ac 21:8 Their office was at first secular, but it afterwards became also spiritual. Both Philip and Stephen, who were of "the seven," eventually preached and later became leaders; they did "the work of evangelists."

So we see that the word "Deacon" really means a "RUNNER", or a "SERVANT." Deacons are NOT then, called to GOVERN the local church, but rather to assist the pastoral staff (elders, or what is commonly called in the New Testament, a "presbytery") in carrying out the work of the Gospel. Deacons then, are NOT to be the decision makers in a local church, but rather key helpers, assistants, and department heads who carry out the vision of the senior pastor and pastoral staff. Deacons are GO-FORS, not GOVERNORS. Deacons obviously may be decision makers in their own respective areas of responsibility, but they not the overarching guides of the local church congregation. It is wrong for a lay "Deacon Board" to run a church; this is unscriptural. Likewise is it wrong for a similar arrangement called an "Administrative Board", to govern the local church.

Deacons may be male OR FEMALE:

Romans 16:1,3,12

Phil 4:2,3

1 Timothy 3:11

1 Timothy 5:9,10

Titus 2:3,4.

In these passages it is evident that females were then engaged in various Christian ministrations. The early church father, Pliny, makes mention of them also in his letter to Trajan (A.D. 110).