

# Elders and Deacons

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] That chapter, or most of what we read there, that speaks of the qualifications for elders and deacons. Okay, the word elder isn't mentioned in the first seven verses. We'll see that that's deliberate.

Chapter 3 that begins, the saying is trustworthy. If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. Therefore, an overseer must be above reproach. And then the following qualities that we find there of the elder.

In verse 8, deacons likewise must be dignified and so on. Yes, in a few weeks' time, we'll have concluded our election of new office bearers.

New office bearers for this congregation. It happens every so often. And this is the right time to elect new office bearers for Livingston Free Church.

But always remember, always remember, it's no light thing. It's no casual thing to elect men to high office in any church.

[ 1 : 1 1 ] Why? Because, as we see here, it has the authority of Scripture. It's God-ordained to have men in positions of leadership in the church, as we see required and specified in God's Word.

The role of the elder. The role of the elder. The elder. And our present, in our immediate context, what we call a ruling elder.

Now, because there's two kinds of elders. There's the teaching elder or the minister. But when we're thinking of the elders, generally, those who we term as ruling elders. And then the role of the deacon.

These are positions of high honour. Because they're positions of service. And they're positions of service that carry responsibilities in the church. And above all, responsibilities under God.

And so this evening, it seemed appropriate that we'll look at what Scripture tells us. About both offices. Now, I know in the past we've looked at one evening, looked at elder.

[ 2 : 1 6 ] Another evening looked at deacon. But for reasons of practicality this evening, we'll look at the two together. And I think that's important. Even here, Timothy puts the two, as it were, together in the same chapter.

So, we need to know what's happening. What we're doing in such an election. We've got to be clear about who exactly it is who's going to hold office.

These particular offices in the church. And what these particular offices involve in service.

In service to the Lord. So that you who will be choosing, and praying about this obviously, who will be choosing a man or men who will be suitably qualified, you'll be doing so with those who are suitably qualified, according to the criteria laid down in God's Word.

So that when we consider prayerfully what we find in God's Word, we'll be coming before God, asking Him to lead and guide our thoughts, lead and guide our actions according to His Word.

- [ 3 : 29 ] And I think even before we come to this passage, even specifically here, let's just be absolutely clear what we're talking about when we're talking about office bearers.
- As we said, ruling elders. Elders. Elders. Men who are given that responsibility of the spiritual oversight of the congregation. And of course it goes without saying that every elder, of course a deacon as well, has to be a Christian.
- Has to be a Christian. And that might seem so obvious to say, but believe me, in the wider church that is not always the case. Every office bearer must be someone, a man who's given his life to the Lord Jesus Christ.
- Deacons. Okay, traditionally, traditionally deacons have had a more practical role in the administration of church resources.
- But I think as we'll see as we go through even this passage here, a deacon's far, far more than simply somebody who's got responsibility over the resources of the church.
- [ 4 : 35 ] We're not talking about superior office, inferior office. No. The responsibilities of elder and deacon, well, they may well be different in many respects, but the work has the same end in mind, the same purpose.
- Of course it has to be the glory of God and the furtherance of his kingdom, even within the context of a local congregation. So, that being said, let's look at the passage here.
- Let's firstly look at the qualifications and the role of the elder. You've got the bullet points there in your notice sheet. Well, I think at the start, the policy doesn't use the word elder here.
- In fact, you've got to go to chapter 4, verse 14, and again chapter 5, verse 17, before you actually see the specific word elder, the word that we get presbytly from, the presbyter word.
- But if you look here in verse 1 and 2, Paul is a different word. He uses the word overseer, the word that we get our word episcopal from. But when we look at scripture and we compare scripture with scripture, we'll see that these two words, the episcopal word, the presbyter word, they're actually two names for the same office.
- [ 5 : 52 ] And there's reason for that. This overseer word here, it's a word that speaks of, well, a word that speaks of managing, of managing.
- The word that was used for city officials at that time. City officials who watched over the affairs of the city. So, obviously, Paul's going to use this word in the congregational context, in the spiritual context, to speak of the work of watching over souls.
- The work of caring, caring for the flock. But then, of course, we don't really talk about episcopals in our own church content.
- We use the word elder. And that's a word that more speaks of dignity, the dignity of the office. It's actually an old word, it's a Jewish word. In the Old Testament, you read of the elders of Israel.
- These elders who were men who were considered capable of leading the community, men who by their experience and by their age were considered suitable, relevant for that office.
- [ 7 : 03 ] In most cases, you see the plural word, elders, so that we're talking about a group of men, a group who were given this responsibility. So, when Paul comes to write his scripture in this New Testament context, when he, in chapter 4, for example, when he writes of elders, he's speaking of a group of men who collectively share the responsibility of caring for those who are under them and caring as spiritual leaders.
- So, overseer, the context of managing, of watching over the spiritual life of the congregation. Elder, this word that speaks of the dignity and the privilege of the office.

it's a privileged office. It's a dignified position. You know, there's this particular work of leadership in having a spiritual care over the congregation.

And surely that in itself should direct us to prayerfully consider whom we elect as a new elder. because it's got nothing to do with popularity. But it's got everything to do with someone who satisfies the criteria of this overseer that Paul is speaking of here, this spiritual manager.

This person who's going to dignify the office of elder and doing so with the qualities that Paul spells out here in these first seven verses. And before we actually look at the qualities, one other thing to mention.

[ 8 : 43 ] Just scan your eyes down that first section. And you notice a little word there, must. Must. The qualification, must.

In other words, what we're seeing here of these qualifications is essential. These are the essentials. It's not just a helpful guideline. What we're seeing here are qualities that are mandatory in the work of an elder.

These are God's required requirements for the office of the church that God has set out, down for the church's good, for God's glory, even the way that a church is managed.

So, what do we find here in this first section on elders? Well, firstly, obviously, an elder has to have the heart for the work. Verse 1, the saying is trustworthy if anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task.

An elder has to aspire, aspire with all his heart in this work of spiritual oversight of a congregation. Yes, we know we're so unworthy.

[ 9 : 52 ] Yes, we know that we, in and of ourselves, we don't have that strength, that we know that the heart of the matter is that we desire to serve and to serve even in this, this great work of the kingdom, even in this congregation.

So, the man who's to be elected, or those who are to be elected, it's not to have a title. It's not to have prestige in being an elder.

And it's certainly not to wield any kind of power over a congregation. No, it's the work that a man has set his heart on for doing the Lord's will, for doing the Lord's work.

And Paul says here, that work is noble. Literally, it's a good work. A good work. So, there's this inner desire, inner desire to do this good work.

And of course, there's that outward call of God, the call of God in a man becoming an elder. So, that inner calling that confirms the outer call of God that leads someone to becoming an elder.

[ 10 : 59 ] Now, of course, you have your part to play. Those who are members of the congregation, you have a part to play. You have to seek God's will regarding the choosing of a man for eldership.

It's the church's responsibility to call, to prayerfully consider this matter. And that's why we come back to this word overseer.

Because we need to know the kind of work that you're calling a man to do. Because he's going to be a man who'll be a leader of men. He's going to be a man who's going to work hard for the kingdom.

He's going to be a man whose heart's desire is that the flock is well fed. That the congregation is well led. That the work that he desires to do is to build up the souls of those who are in the congregation.

So, of course, that involves accountability. Every elder, every elder, every office bearer even, every elder is accountable to God and accountable to you as a congregation for the work that he's been given to do.

[ 12 : 09 ] Because he's there to feed souls, to nourish souls, to show forth the Lord Jesus. So, what else do we find here? And we're going to go through this fairly quickly.

I mean, there's so much content. But let's just see if we can try and pick out the salient, the main points here that Paul brings out. We'll try and sort of compress these different qualities under various headings.

And, of course, the next heading is godliness. An elder has to have qualities of a godly character. You see that in verses 2 and 3 and the overseer must.

See, there's the must word. Must be above reproach. The husband of one wife. Sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money.

There's a whole lot there. So this man who desires a noble task, who desires this good work, he himself has to be noble and to have that goodness of God within his heart, this godly character.

[ 13 : 17 ] Then you might ask, well, what does that character look like? Well, Paul tells us. Paul tells us in very practical ways what the kind of character that's seen within an elder.

Notice here that, very generally speaking, of course, he has to be above reproach. In other words, his character, his conduct is such that, you know, he doesn't have a kind of lifestyle that's going to open him up to any kind of public scandal.

Now, of course, it doesn't mean this as we see, as we know. In fact, even the very quotation that I put in your notice sheet shows us that a man who's an elder isn't perfect.

He's not faultless. But he is to have that blameless reputation. That blameless reputation that's described here in particular detail.

And if he's a married man, of course, he's someone who's going to be faithful to his wife, the husband of one wife. And he certainly can't be accused of any kind of potentially impropriety that's going to lay him and the church open to public criticism.

[ 14 : 30 ] So, above reproach with the various aspects of that that Paul lists there. But then, look at the next three aspects where it begins, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable.

In fact, they begin, ten characteristics. We'll look at them briefly. Look at sober-minded, for example. The idea of someone being vigilant, someone who's alert, somebody who's clear-minded, but in what sense clear-minded relating to doctrine, church doctrine and practice.

Doctrine and practice in relation to the truth of God's word. In other words, somebody who's alert, somebody who's alert to the dangers that any church faces.

You know, shepherds look after their flock from the danger that wild animals pose against them. And so, for the elder, it's his responsibility to be alert to every kind of danger that can come upon a particular church of the Lord Jesus.

And so, that means that an elder has to be somebody who's got a very clear mind about the truth that we find in God's word. He's got to be somebody who even can discern the time.

[ 15 : 44 ] Somebody who knows truth from error. Somebody who knows the needs of the congregation. So, sober-minded. Yeah, and we can sort of weld that into the next word.

Self-control. Somebody who's not sort of always self-seeking. Somebody who's not drawing attention to himself. Someone who, by example, doesn't go for the excesses in life.

You know, someone who's not subject to uncontrollable lusts. lusts. Someone who, in his position of leadership, is a man of grace. A man of kindness, even.

Somebody who will have such a disposition that others will be attracted to the cause of the gospel, to the work of the gospel. Someone who's respectable in bringing this third word into this three-part equation.

someone whose lifestyle shines. Shines with such a godly character that he's honoured, that he's respected. That he's a man of humility, a man of love, a man of grace.

[ 16 : 54 ] A man who's walked with the Lord, has seemed to be close simply because of his demeanour, his words, his actions, his relationships. Someone who has that sanctified life, who's devoted to God.

someone who has that desire to be that pastoral overseer. So, godly character. Then, look at the particular gift that Paul mentions, or two particular gifts that Paul mentions, as he goes on in the passage here.

Firstly, the gift of hospitality, and then the gift of teaching. Look at this briefly. Hospitality. I'm sure a whole sermon could be preached in that one word, hospitality. That doesn't, of course, just mean provision of food.

Of course not. Surely it means the provision of a welcoming home. A home where Christians feel comfortable to gather together for prayer, for Bible study, for worship, for fellowship.

A home where visitors can feel the welcome of a believer, someone who shows the love of Christ even in the context of home.

[ 18 : 06 ] And then there's the gift of teaching. Able to teach, we're told here. Now, that's not the same thing as saying that an elder has to stand in a pulpit and preach a sermon. Absolutely not. Surely what we're seeing here is that an elder has to have that ability to convey God's truth to others.

The very words that he uses, even in discipling others. It may be in his one-to-one relationship with others. It may be even in leading small groups, even in the home.

So, somebody who's able to teach surely has to be somebody who has that knowledge to teach. Of course, the knowledge of the Word of God, the things of God, the right doctrine, right practice.

Somebody who's well-versed in Scripture. Somebody who's eager to learn. Because, you know, as I know, that the best teachers are always the most avid learners.

So, able to teach, able to teach, that desire to instruct others in the Word of God. Let's move on. What do we find in verse 3?

[ 19 : 17 ] We find a particular temperament, not given to drunkenness, not violent, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. So, we talked about self-control.

This is surely the practical outworking of self-control. Somebody who's, for example, for example, moderate, moderate in his drinking habits.

Somebody who has that self-control, so that he can think clearly, wisely, in his role as elder. Somebody who's gentle in his manner with others.

Somebody who's not going to react violently to any brother or sister in Christ, whether in this congregation or any other congregation. Somebody who doesn't see his work as an elder simply to grow rich.

This is somebody who's the total contrast to the false teachers that Paul speaks of in chapter 6. Those who are puffed up with conceit, understand nothing, who have an unhealthy craving for controversy, quarrelling about words, envious, slanderous, and so on.

[ 20 : 26 ] So the temperament that Paul speaks of here is again so important in the work of an elder. Then verses 4 and 5, the home. Somebody who manages his household well, with all dignity, keeping children submissive.

Or if someone doesn't know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church? We're a family here in Livingston. We're an extended family, a gathered family.

But you know, if an elder's been tasked to lead our church family, then he's got himself to know what it means to conduct his own family well.

And that leadership quality will be seen in the home. How is he in the home? How is he with his wife? How is he with his children? How is he with children? Because what he is in his own home will have such a bearing in how he is in his spiritual home.

Because if he leads well in his family home, then it follows that he'll lead well in his church home. But if he's so lax and uncaring, doesn't really care about his family's spiritual welfare, then it's going to follow that he's going to be lax and uncaring for the spiritual welfare of the wider church.

[ 21 : 46 ] It may well be, I don't know, but it may well be that Paul was thinking here of Eli. Remember not so long ago we looked at the early life of Samuel, even the context of Eli, there, Eli the priest.

Remember Eli didn't restrain his sons, even though he knew about the wickedness of his sons. And if you, we have this office of elder, then surely it's for each elder to have that good management in our own home as the basis of good leadership in the church.

And then fifthly, an elder has to be a spiritually mature man. You see in verse 6, he mustn't be a recent convert or he may become puffed up with conceit, fall into the condemnation of the devil.

An elder has to be somebody who's mature in his faith, somebody who's spiritually mature, someone who knows the word of God, somebody who can apply that word in his life, somebody who can lead others to live a life that honours and glorifies God.

A young convert? No, that's why in our own church it practice, someone who's an elder has to be at least 21 years of age, but certainly not somebody who's been a recent Christian.

[ 23 : 07 ] Otherwise, there's that danger of arrogance. A young man becoming an elder is so often a recipe for, well, maybe not use the word disaster, but certainly for pride coming into that office.

And Paul said, no, we can't have pride in the work of the church. Pride is the enemy of a spiritually healthy and growing congregation.

No, an elder has to be somebody who's spiritually mature, a man who doesn't draw attention to himself, but a man who points others to the Lord Jesus Christ. And then, finally, finally, an elder has to be a man who has the respect of outsiders, the respect of those who are outside the church.

He must be well thought of by outsiders so that he may not fall into this grace, into a snare of the devil. Why does Paul say this? He says this, of course, whether it's writing 2,000 years ago or for us today.

Why? Because the world is watching. And the slightest public indiscretion, even a whiff of scandal, even if a church leader, an office bearer, is guilty of some public indiscretion, then the devil is happy.

[ 24 : 29 ] The devil set the trap and the devil has caught his snare. Sadly, of course, we see this in the wider church, even in the past year in our own denomination.

I'm certainly not going to rehearse these tragedies. But you see, we have to be so vigilant. And it's back to what we were saying right at the start, that even in our own Christian lives, we can't allow the world to accuse us of hypocrisy.

How much more? For our leaders and our churches, who much is given. Much is required. Church leaders, you have a responsibility to guard your life well.

You have a responsibility to protect the integrity of the gospel. Because there are those out there who are so delighted to discredit the church when any church leader disgraces the name of the Lord Jesus.

God's love. So you're choosing a man, an elder, someone to be an elder who bears these responsibilities, who bears these qualifications.

[ 25 : 43 ] I'll say it again probably for the third time this evening. He's not going to be a perfect man. He's going to be a man who has his sins and his faults like any other believer. But he'll be a man who's devoted to God.

He'll be a man whose desire is to grow in holiness. He'll be a man who loves the Lord Jesus as a saviour, a man who's willing to undertake the noble task that God gives him for the sake of the gospel.

He'll be a man whose delight is to see the congregation grow spiritually. So pray about this. Pray. You who have the position of electing, pray.

You who don't, who maybe are not elders, you know you love the Lord, pray about this. Choose well and give glory to God that God has in this congregation men who are willing to be elders, who have this aspiration to the office of overseer, who desire that noble task.

Elders. But then deacons, deacons, and read again from verse 8 down to verse 13. I'm not going to read every word, but look at even the first few words.

[ 26 : 59 ] Deacons likewise must be dignified. Deacons likewise. Two words that have immense meaning. Look at the first word there, deacons.

In other words, servants. The servant word. Those who serve. Those who serve and follow the Lord Jesus. The one who came to serve, to give his life for others.

So the office of deacon is an honourable office in the church. The deaconess is a man who serves, who serves in the name of Jesus. As I said, there's not any kind of superiority, inferiority aspect of the work of office bearers.

In fact, twice, verse 10, verse 13, you see the word serve, because this service indicates the kind of work that deacons do and indicates the manner of that work, the servant heart, somebody who gives himself in service for the sake of the kingdom.

And as we said at the start, okay, that work of service, of course it necessitates the various practical aspects of the church, the resources, the building, the finance, and so on.

[ 28 : 23 ] But the work of a deacon goes way beyond finance and building. There's the practical care of the poor, for example, practical care of the needy.

In fact, those who are in any particular need. So there's a pastoral element in the work of deacons, a pastoral element in that work of care. Even in any very aspect of visiting, deacons should visit as much as elders should visit.

Like coming alongside others in their need. Deacons will assist elders even in that work of spiritual oversight. It's a great office, the office of deacons.

It's a great office in the advancing of the kingdom of God and glorifying God in the name of Jesus. It's an office with dignity just as the office of elder is an office of dignity.

As you see that in the second order, likewise, likewise, in other words, as was the elder, so was the deacon. This is a man who's to be someone of godly character.

[ 29 : 27 ] And when you look at these first four qualities that you find in verse 8 there, you see this high bar of godliness that's required. It's required of somebody who's going to be a deacon.

So there's this dignity, this dignity in this, a man of honour, somebody who's respected by others. Why? Because of his godly character.

Somebody who's not double tongued, in other words, somebody who's not a hypocrite, saying one thing and doing another. Someone who's insincere in his words. That's not the work of a deacon, that's not the quality of a deacon.

And then you'll see that there are similarities, parallels, not addicted to much wine. Again, somebody who's able to be clear in his thinking. somebody who's self-controlled in all things.

He doesn't have his judgments clouded by excess alcohol, for example. Somebody who's not greedy for dishonesty. Again, back to what we said of the elder. There's somebody who's not a lover of money, such that he sees his office as some kind of means to financial advancement.

[ 30 : 37 ] No. Ask with the elder, so with the deacon. There's a responsibility, responsibility, a responsibility in church leadership for these men to be alert at all times.

Because our congregation, as much as any other congregation, any other church, we're going to come under spiritual attack. We have come under spiritual attack. And it can happen within a church, it can happen outside a church.

So we have to have men in positions of leadership, men who are equipped with these necessary qualities to resist these attacks, to withstand these attacks.

Because the devil is active. The devil does go around like a roaring lion, seeking humility of power, even within the context of a congregation. So deacons, as with elders, have a heavy responsibility, a weighty responsibility, that responsibility of care within a congregation.

And as we see here in that second passage, this passage on deacons, somebody who's been tested first before he's given this office, we're doing that already, aren't we?

[ 31 : 50 ] We're weighing up prayerfully according to scripture, who we're to elect in the office of deacon, holding to the truth of God's word.

You know, we live in a world where there are so many false teachers out there, so many opponents of the truth out there, and as in Paul's day, so in our own day, we pray for servants of God who'll be given these high offices to protect the church from the wiles of the devil.

Now, we could continue, of course, we must, we look at the remainder of what Paul says here of the qualities of deacon and notice when we were reading these qualities, how so much they resemble the qualities of an elder.

For example, as we saw there, somebody who's faithful in his marriage, somebody who has a godly supportive wife, a wife who also holds to the truth of God's word, somebody who's well respected by outsiders, see the similarities.

Let's just sum up everything here. We have a forthcoming election, now under the process of election, men, for the office of elder and deacon, we must do so according to scripture, we do so in the light of God's word, because it's God's word ultimately that guides that election.

[ 33 : 19 ] And we do it with that hope and that prayer that every man who enters into the work of leadership in the congregation, there is a man who's willing to give of himself for the work of the kingdom.

One more thing before we finish. Think of honour, think of the honour of service. We have to bring that in relation to the Lord Jesus, because it's service in Christ's name, none of us should forget that, because well, our elders, our elders are falling in the footsteps of the Lord Jesus.



Peter elsewhere described the Lord Jesus. as our overseer. And Paul himself, in using this word deacon, well, Jesus himself referred to himself as a servant.

So, we're choosing men. Yes, in conformity with God's will. Men who will be Christ-like, men of service, men who will desire to follow the Lord Jesus Christ, men who will do so for the good of the church, yes, for the good of others around us, and for the glory of God's name, for the furtherance of his kingdom.

These are exciting times in this congregation. These are challenging times in this congregation. We pray that as God raises up men for this work of service, that we rejoice in the goodness of God towards us, even in this small corner of our land.

[ 34 : 56 ] Amen. Let us pray. Lord, we pray for your guidance, your direction, your leading. We pray, Lord, that the men whom you choose will be men of godly character, men whose aspiration it is to serve you, and to serve you willingly, to serve you selflessly, to serve you for your glory, for the good of your name, and the glory of your kingdom.

Lord, we pray that you will give us discerning hearts in this matter, and for those who are already elders and deacons, we pray for them even now.

We ask, O Lord, that in their weakness, in their trials, that they will know your hand upon them, and that where there are aspects of the work of office that they find even difficult, even find in themselves to be unworthy, that they will know your strengthening hand, that you will build them up, that they will know your hand upon them, strengthening them, enabling them to do your will in the work that you give them to do.

So bless this church, we pray, in the days, the weeks, the months, the years that lie ahead, that we will know that this is a congregation, the Lord Jesus Christ, that he is head of his church here, and we pray that we will so serve him gladly and willingly.

we pray all these things, in Jesus' name, Amen.