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Elders, Bishops And Overseers and Deacons. (2013)

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But also shows how you can know God for yourself.

Teach it, don't demand it.

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Elders, Bishops, Overseers and Deacons.

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INTRODUCTION: The church is the pillar and ground of the truth (1 Tim. 3:14-15) and as such has to have some form of leadership to oversee it. All communities whether Christian or secular need some kind of leadership overseeing them, so that they run in harmony and someone takes the responsibility of seeing that jobs that need doing get done.

Every organization needs leadership so that everyone knows what is going on and so that everyone has someone to go to should a problem arise and so that someone takes the responsibility to see that all functions of the group flow together and in unity. Those in leadership of the early church were called, elders, bishops and deacons. The following study takes a look at what qualities Christian leaders who were given these titles were to have.

Elders are Ordained in the Church.

Acts 14:23 ----- ²³when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord

Elder: comes from the Greek word (presbuteros) and means elderly, older, senior or the eldest (especially an Israelite, Sanhedrist or Christian presbyter).

Paul and Barnabas (Acts 14:12, 14, 20) ordain elders in the churches. During the New Testament churches were held in the homes and villages of faithful brothers and sisters. The elder's no-doubt travelled amongst the home churches in their town or village to oversee them, solve any problems that might arise and guide them in the word of God.

Elders go to the Apostles at Jerusalem.

Acts 15:1-6 ----- ¹certain men taught the brethren, and said, Except you be circumcised after the manner of Moses, you cannot be saved. ²When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question. ³And being brought on their

way by the church, they passed through Phenice and Samaria., ⁴And when they were come to Jerusalem, they were received of the church, and of the apostles and elders and they declared all things. ⁵But there rose up certain of the Pharisees, saying, That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses. ⁶And the apostles and elders came together for to consider of this matter.

The churches send Paul and Barnabas and certain other disciples to Jerusalem to visit the apostles and elders to ask about the question of circumcision and of Moses law. They arrive in Jerusalem and were received by the church and they all gathered together to discuss these questions. During the growth of the early church the apostles were obviously seen as the highest authority concerning the Gospel message since they lived with Christ, saw him crucified and saw him in his glorified resurrected body. Next to them was Paul and those who ministered and travelled with Paul and then of course were elders who faithful brothers and sisters recognized as faithful mature men of integrity who had a good knowledge of the Scriptures and an honest heartfelt faith toward the Lord.

This was important because churches were held in the homes of faithful brothers and sisters in Christ everyone gathered together in houses to study the Scriptures and learn from each other.

Since there were Jews who had been indoctrinated in the Levitical Law and the Law of Moses coming together with Samaritan Jews who had married foreign wife and adopted their pagan believes and pagan who believed in some kind of false god all their lives coming together and the fact they did not have Bibles available as we do today difficulties would arise in understanding certain teachings concerning the message of the cross, the grace of God and the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

When these difficulties came up in a house church could call on the appointed elders in their village or town and ask them and if they could not answer the questions they would travel up to Jerusalem and ask the apostles living there.

Acts 15:22 ----- ²²Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men from among them and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They sent Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas, leading men among the brothers,

The apostles and the elders, Paul and Barnabas, Peter and James, Judas (called Barsabbas), Silas and, leading men among the brothers and certain other disciples had gathered together at Jerusalem to discuss questions concerning the Law of Moses because certain men were teaching the Gentiles that unless they were circumcised and kept the law of Moses, they could not be saved.

After much discussion they all agreed that the Gentiles did not need to be circumcised nor did they need to kept the ceremonial rites and religious customs of the law of Moses, but they all with one accord agreed they should abstain from things polluted by idols, and from sexual immorality, and from animals that have been strangled, and from drinking blood. So they sent Paul and Barnabas, Judas (called Barsabbas) and Silas to visit the Gentile churches with a letter stating what the apostles, the elders and the brothers who had gathered at Jerusalem had agreed upon.

NOTICE: throughout the New Testament there is a lot of talking about churches and elders being appointed, but absolutely no mention of a church building, this is because almost all churches were at this time in the homes of faithful believers.

Acts 15:36-41 ----- ⁴⁰Paul chose Silas and departed, having been commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord. ⁴¹And he went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.

Paul and Silas travel through the towns and villages in which they had proclaimed the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and had established churches to strengthen and encourage the brothers and sisters in the churches and to see how they were doing (v36).

The Apostles and Elders Gather Together at Jerusalem.

Acts 16:4-5 ----- ⁴As they (Paul and Timothy) (v3) went on their way through the cities they delivered to them for observance the decisions that had been reached by the apostles and elders who were in Jerusalem. ⁵So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and they increased in numbers daily.

The decrees that were ordained of the apostles and elders that had gathered at Jerusalem were that the Gentile brothers and sisters did not need to be circumcised or keep the religious laws of Moses to be saved, but they should abstain from things polluted by idols, and from sexual immorality, and from animals that have been strangled, and from drinking blood (Acts 15).

Paul and Timothy and many other faithful disciples were travelling through the villages, towns and cities delivering this message to the Gentile churches. This is no doubt why it is stated the churches were established in faith (i.e., in contrast to adhering to ceremonial rites, holy days, and keeping religious customs and traditions to earn righteousness that leads to eternal life).

This is how the early church grew in knowledge and in faith, faithful brothers who were recognized as men of integrity and had a good knowledge of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ were ordained by the church as elders. These elders no doubt had a base church where they lived, but they would also travel amongst the others churches in their area and share the message of the cross, the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and the message of grace and in this way the churches were established in the Christian faith and grew in number.

Ten Thousand instructors, but not many Fathers.

1 Corinthians 4:15 ---- ¹⁵For though you have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have you not many fathers: for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel.

The word father in this context comes from the Greek word (pater) and means a father or parent. A father not only gives birth to children and cares, protects and takes responsibility for them, but also trains, disciplines and encourages them in the way they should go.

Paul recognises that in the churches there are many teachers, but not many Fathers. Paul saw himself not only as a teacher, but also as a father to those he brought to Christ through the Gospel. One only has to note the tender way he writes in his letters when talking of brothers and sisters in Christ.

Even when he speaks of the Corinthian brothers and sisters who he could not speak to as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ who he could only feed with milk (doctrines concerning right behaviour), not solid food (all other doctrines), because their behaviour was so bad since they were still of the flesh and acting in a human way (1 Cor. 3:1-4), yet he still writes with compassion caring for their well-being speaking to them as brothers and sisters in Christ and never questioning their salvation.

During Paul's era there were teachers who no doubt were in the ministry not because they cared about people's eternal salvation, but for the fame, the importance and the exaltation they received from their followers and because of the money they gained for themselves through teaching the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Grace to you from all the Bishops, Overseers and Deacons.

Philippians 1:1-2 ----- ¹Paul and Timothy, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops (overseer in ESV) and deacons ²Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

Deacon: comes from the Greek word (diakoneo) it means, to be an attendant, to wait upon (mentally or as a host or a friend), to attend to anything that may serve another's interest or to serve in the office of a Christian deacon. It carries the idea of ministering and serving others and figuratively a teacher. Though Paul and Timothy are elders they are referred to as servants of the Lord and by extension servants of the people whether one is given the title Bishop, Elder or Deacon all should see themselves as servants of the Lord and servants of his flock.

NOTICE: the New Testament writers use the title Bishops and Elders interchangeably; this is because they mean the same thing (i.e., an overseer).

To Desire the Office of a Bishop (Overseer) is to Desire a Good Work.

1 Timothy 3:1-7 ----- ¹This is a true saying, If a man desires the office of a Bishop (overseer in ESV) he desires a good work. ²A Bishop (overseer in ESV) then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach; ³Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous; ⁴One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; ⁵(For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?) ⁶Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil. ⁷Moreover he must have a good report of them which are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.

The word bishop comes from the Greek word (episkopos) and means overseer a superintendent, (i.e. a Christian officer in general charge of a church). It carries the idea of inspecting a person and selecting them for the relief of others and by implication it refers to a superintendent who not only has the responsibility of supervision, control and the management, but also to one who cares. The office of a bishop/overseer embraces the ministry of visiting for the purpose of relieving and protecting those they are visiting.

It is not wrong to desire to serve the Lord as an overseer, but whoever desires such a task must be: -

- Above reproach: meaning the secular world should not be able to bring any shameful accusation against them.
- The husband of one wife: some think this means that elders/overseers should only have ever had one wife meaning they should never have been divorced and remarried, but this idea would exclude men who had been divorced and remarried prior to being converted and that would be denying the power of God's grace in Christ's and the message of the Gospel which proclaims we are new creatures in Christ and all sins are forgiven so what does Paul mean?

Paul says the husband of one wife whereas the Church of Rome says the husband of no wife, but from the beginning God had never designed this to be. Marriage is an ordinance from which no profession nor calling in life, prevents, even the apostle Paul could have taken a wife had he so chosen (1 Cor. 9:5). Forbidding, to marry is one of the erroneous doctrines of the antichristian church (1 Tim. 4:1-3).

Paul is not saying that ministers must be married (i.e. Paul was a single man) this is not what he means; but rather if a man does have a wife he must only have one at the same time and be faithful to her in every way.

Neither does it mean that he might not be married to more than one wife successively, but, being married he must have but one wife at once, not two or more, according to the common practice of those times, by a corrupt following of the practice of the Old Testament patriarchs who not only had many wives, but also many concubines. Paul in this discourse is saying this is not to be so in the Christian church. No bishop or elder can copy the ways of the patriarchs nor can they be a bigamist as the early Mormon Church taught (and may still do in some regions).

- Sober-minded: in this context means to be clear minded and clear in his thinking in contrast being given to fantasies, fables, myths speculations, assumptions and suppositions.
- Self-controlled: meaning they have the ability to control their own behaviour, especially in terms of reactions and impulses and is not given to showing any strong emotions such as anger or violence.
- Respectable: meaning well-thought by others.
- Hospitable: meaning they should be welcoming, friendly, generous, kind and sociable.
- Able to teach: they do not need to be a brilliant orator or public speaker, since they most likely will have others in their midst who they can use but they certainly should know the word of God and have some skill in teaching it since much of their ministry is visitation.
- Not a drunkard; obviously means they should not be given to drinking an excess of wine.
- Not violent but gentle: meaning they should not be forceful or aggressively severe toward others, but instead treat people with kindness and tenderness.
- Not quarrelsome: meaning they should not be argumentative, difficult, confrontational or hot-tempered.
- Not a lover of money: meaning they must not crave after worldly wealth, today this would apply to materialistic possessions, excessively expensive homes and gold watches, top of the range cars, designer cloths and such like things.
- Manage their own household with all dignity: meaning with self-respect and goodness toward his wife and children.
- Keeping their children submissive: meaning obedient and law abiding.
- They must not be a recent convert: no newly saved person should be given such tremendous responsibility for two reasons firstly to place so much honour and responsibility upon a new convert there is a very real danger that they will become puffed up with self-importance and a sense of superiority and secondly they have very little experience within the Christian community and the many problems that can arise and should they fall they give occasion to those outside God's Kingdom to speak against the Christian faith thus the reason it is not wise to appoint a new convert to the position of overseer of God's family(v6).

The words: -

- Fall into the condemnation of the devil (v6).

Clearly does not refer to some evil demonic creature as portrayed by traditional religion and Hollywood movies, but to the unbelieving world. The Bible calls the devil the father of lies, it is humans that lie, mostly for their own gain and lying stems from self, ego and pride etc., and is manifested outwardly in speech therefore the word devil is a name that embraces in its meaning everything humans do that is opposed to what is good and right and that brings shame to God and the name of Christ.

Thus "The condemnation of the devil" (v6) in this context refers to the condemnation and accusations those outside the Kingdom of God would bring against the church because of the disgrace the bishop, overseer or elder has brought upon themselves and the family of the Lord.

For further information concerning the devil, see the title: -

- Devil in, Satan and his Family (ON WEBSITE MENU).

The Overseer of God's Household.

The words: -

- If someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church? (v5).

A bishop/overseer is not just a teacher he is the shepherd of the flock, who is not only responsible for training God's children in the right way to go, but also for their care and protection from spiritual harm thus the reason there is such high standards placed on a bishop/overseer.

NOTE.

Since the principle under the Gospel is one of submitting one to another in love and in the light of the following statements of Jesus and Paul it is clear that a bishop/overseer is not to dominate or see himself as superior and thereby lord it over those he oversees, but rather to view himself as a humble servant in submission to those he shepherds as they willingly submit themselves to him.

Jesus when teaching his twelve disciples said: -

- You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them, but it should not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be as your servant, even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many (Matt 20:25-28) (Mark 10:42-45).

Added to this Paul in his letter to the Corinthians wrote: -

- Not that we lord it over your faith, but we work with you for your joy, for you stand firm in your faith (2 Cor. 1:24)

And to the Ephesians he said: -

- The will of the Lord is that every brother and sister in Christ filled with the Spirit would submit to one another out of reverence for Christ (Eph. 5:18-21).

Clearly no-matter what our position or how talented or gifted we maybe we should all be submitted to each other as under the Lord.

The Character of a Deacon.

1 Timothy 3:8 -----⁸Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain.

Deacon: means to run on errands, it carries the idea of an attendant, a waiter at table or in other menial duties (especially a Christian teacher and pastor) technically a deacon or deaconess denotes a servant and minister.

The character of a deacon should: -

- Be dignified: meaning they should be honourable gracious and respectable.
- Not be double-tongued: meaning they should not teach something that they do not do themselves or make promises and not keep them nor should they be living a hypocritical life of pretence.
- Not be addicted too much wine: notice it does not say never drink wine, but not addicted to wine which would also include drinking to excess.
- Not be greedy for dishonest gain: meaning they should not take bribes or do underhanded deals to raise money for themselves or the church no matter how good the cause maybe.

Deacons must Hold to the Mystery of the Faith.

1 Timothy 3:9 ----- ⁹They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience.

Mystery in a biblical sense carries the idea of silence imposed by initiation into religious rites. In ancient times the word mystery meant something unknown, but only unknown by those who were not initiated, like the 'Masons' they have all sorts of mysteries that the initiated know, but those outside the sect don't. The mystery that deacons are to hold fast to is that Jews and Gentiles are now united and saved to eternal life in Christ as the following verses show: -

- The mystery of Christ which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel (Ephes. 3:3-6).
- The mystery hidden for generations but now revealed how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you (the Gentiles) the hope of glory (Col. 1:26-27).

Deacons must Prove themselves Blameless.

1 Timothy 3:10 ----- ¹⁰And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless.

Here is wisdom in promoting anyone to a position in any organisation especially those in the House of God, Paul says, "Let deacons be tested then serve as deacons." This means watch them as they go about their daily life and the duties they have been assigned to, observe how they treat people, how they respond under pressure their faithfulness to the task they are given and the attitude they do it with.

Then if after observing these traits over time they have proved themselves faithful and reliable it is (in most cases) certain they will bring honour to the position they are being promoted to.

The word blameless in this context does not mean without sin if it was possible for anyone of us to achieve this glorious state while in this mortal and fallen body then Christ died for no purpose. Rather the word blameless as used here, means living a lifestyle that honours God and the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Bible says: -

- Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation and he walked with God (Genesis 6:9) (Gen 7:1).

Blameless in this context does not mean that Noah was without sin before God it simply means that he was a decent man, who only did good.

God Himself said: -

- "There is none like Job a blameless and upright who fears God and turns away from evil?" (Job 1:8) (Job 2:3).

Today we don't use the word blameless in this context, we would simply say, Abraham and Job were very good men, meaning they were kind, decent and treated others with fairness, compassion and justice. There has only ever been one man who walked on earth without sin before God and his name was not David or Job, but the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Character of a Deacons Wife.

1 Timothy 3:11 ----- ¹¹Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things.

- Dignified: means they should be honourable gracious and respectable.

- Not slanderers: means they must not be a backbiter or one who demeans and speaks degradingly of others. In colloquial language it means they must not be mudslingers.
- Sober-minded: in this context means to be clear minded and clear in their thinking in contrast being given to fantasies, fables, myths speculations, assumptions and suppositions.
- Faithful in all things: means they should be authentic, truthful, loyal, devoted, trustworthy, dependable, reliable, dedicated and committed.

Let Deacons each be the Husband of One Wife.

1 Timothy 3:12 ----- ¹²Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well.

The husband of one wife: (see the notes following the title, Bishops and Overseers following (1 Timothy 3:1-7) (above).

- Managing their children and their own households well: a deacon's wife should be a responsible and loving mother to her children and able to keep her house in order.

NOTE.

If we wait for people to fulfil these requirements to perfection before we appoint anyone to the position of bishop, overseer, elder or deacon we will struggle to find anyone that qualifies for the positions since no-one (male or female) is going to fulfil these requirements perfectly because we are all full of sinful dysfunction and aberrations within our fallen and corrupted body.

The idea is that we promote those who most closely fulfil the guidelines Paul has given to Timothy and thereby lessen the chance of them bringing disgrace not only to God and the name of the Lord, but also to the reputation of the Christian faith.

Those who serve as Deacons Gain a Good Standing.

1 Timothy 3:12 ----- ¹³For those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.

During the early church era those who were appointed as deacons to help faithful overseers of the church were well respected by their brothers and sisters since it meant they were prepared to sacrifice their own leisure time for the well-being of the body of Christ.

The reason Paul says: -

- Deacons gained great confidence in their faith.

Is because to be appointed as a deacon they had to be recognised by men of God who were already proven to be faithful to the body of Christ, it would be like having Moses, Daniel or Elijah promoting a person to be their right hand assistant instantly they would feel they are approved of by God, it is in this sense that Paul says, the deacon's faith is strengthened.

Do not Rebuke an Elder.

1 Timothy 5:1 ----- ¹Do not rebuke an elder (older man in ESV), but encourage him as you would a father. Treat younger men like brothers.

The word elder in this context does not refer to a man who has been appointed as an elder, but to one who is of old age. Paul is saying that every brother and sister in the global Christian family should treat those of an older age with respect. The underlying thought in this verse is that every faithful brother and sister in Christ

whether young or old, male or female should see themselves as belonging to a local and global family and treat others in this family as we would treat our own brother and sisters and our own mothers and fathers.

Let Elders be Considered Worthy of Double Honour.

1 Timothy 5:17-18 ---- ¹⁷Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honour, especially those who labour in preaching and teaching. ¹⁸For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain," and, "The labourer deserves his wages."

Elders and those who have the oversight of the church and who serve the Lord in preaching and teaching are deserving of double honour and being paid a wage, so that they are free to spend as much of their time as possible serving the Lord in caring for the church and in preaching and teaching the word of God so that brothers and sisters in Christ would be encouraged and grow in the faith and others would be added to the family of the Lord.

You shall not Muzzle an Ox: oxen were used to crush grain they were strapped to rods that kept them walking in a circle over the grain so that their hoofs would crush it, as they laboured in their work they were left unmuzzled (if their masters weren't greedy for gain) so that they could freely eat the grain.

Paul in these verses is likening those who serve the Lord as an overseer, preacher or teacher of his word to oxen. Paul is teaching that in the same way that oxen were supported by their work so to should those who faithfully labour for the Lord as the oxen laboured for their masters.

Worthy of Double Honour: the statement, "Elders who rule well should be considered worthy of double honour" (v17), does not mean that they should be exalted above those they oversee but that they should be highly respected, appreciated and valued neither does it mean that they are worthy of double wages as some religious leaders teach today.

Throughout my many years in Christianity I have heard ministers of churches compare themselves to the C.E.O. of mega million dollar worldly companies who have the oversight of their workers and because of this identification these ministers believe their wages should be on an equal par to the C.E.O., but this attitude is not only a gross offense to the Lord and the Christian faith, but also shows that the heart is full of self-importance and is greedy for gain.

To serve the Lord as an elder, overseer, preacher or teacher is an honour and privilege since the work they are doing is reconciling sinners to God through the Lord Jesus Christ and saving them to eternal life, there is no other work on earth that can even be compared to such a privilege.

NOTE: having said that I should point out that most ministers do consider it a privilege to serve Christ, some are faithfully serving the Lord on a wage that allows them to support their families and live without stress others are on very low incomes while many have no income at all.

A Bishop (Overseer) as God's Steward must be above Reproach.

Titus 1:7-9 ----- ⁷For a bishop (overseer in ESV), as God's steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, ⁸but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined. ⁹He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.

The word elder in this context does not mean that the overseer must be an aged man, but it does mean that an elder should be one who is experienced in life, mature in spiritual matters, full of the fruits of the Spirit and has a good knowledge

of the Scriptures. During the early church most who were coming into the Christian faith were Gentiles who had no understanding of the Christian life or of Christian teachings therefore those who were appointed into positions of authority were mostly older men.

But, today we have men who are raised up as Timothy was from birth and have amazing insights and understanding of God's word and are mature in their nature since they have been raised by Christian parents, to stop these younger men from holding a position of authority simply because they are not old in age I personally think would be missing the Spirit of what Paul is saying. Especially when I look back over my forty-years in Christianity and have observed faithful young men reach and communicate with groups of people far better than many of my generation are able.

Bishops/Overseers should not be: -

- Open to any charges of wickedness corruption or rebelliousness, but law abiding.
- Arrogant, conceited egotistical, full of self-importance or men who feel superior to others.
- Quick-tempered quarrelsome, argumentative, difficult and confrontational.
- A drunkard, obviously this means they should not be given to drinking an excess of alcohol, but it also carries the idea of being sober minded meaning clear minded and clear in their thinking in contrast to being given to fantasies, fables, myths speculations, assumptions and suppositions.
- Greedy for gain (i.e., not a lover of money) they must not crave after worldly wealth and possessions.

Bishops/Overseers should be: -

- Hospitable, meaning they should be welcoming Friendly Generous Kind Sociable
- Self-controlled, (i.e., restraint) meaning they must have the ability to control their own behaviour (especially reactions and impulses) it means they do not show any strong emotions such as anger.
- Lovers of good, meaning they love what is right and get joy from seeing people being blessed and treated with justice (i.e., fairly).
- Disciplined, meaning they are well-organized methodical and well prepared.
- Trustworthy, honest, dependable, reliable and responsible.
- Able to rebuke and reprove when a brother or sister is acting in a manner that is dangerous to their faith or is bringing a bad testimony to the name of Christ and the Christian faith. An elder must in a spirit of love and gentleness be able to warn, caution and reprove that brother or sister for the sake of their faith, for the good testimony of the Lord and for the reputation of Christianity.

The Shepherd and Overseer of your Souls.

1 Peter 2:25 -----²⁵you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Bishop (Overseer in ESV) of your souls.

The ones who were going astray refers to the exiled Jews Peter is writing to, but by extension can apply to anyone who has gone astray since the Lord Jesus Christ is the Shepherd and Overseer of the heart, mind and life of us all. Jesus is the perfect testimony and example for all bishops, elders, overseers and deacons, he not only committed no sin, showed compassion, kindness, grace and mercy to everyone

who came to him, but also never responded with any form of unkindness when he was verbally attacked and abused nor did he call for revenge on those who crucified him, but rather surrendered all judgment to his heavenly Father who judges all without favouritism.

Peter a Fellow Elder and a Witness of the Sufferings of Christ.

1 Peter 5:1-5 ----- ¹So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: ²shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; ³not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. ⁴And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. ⁵Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."

Peter was naturally an elder esteems elders of the churches to: -

- Feed the flock of God from a willing heart.
- Take the oversight, management and administration over the church.
- Be an example to the flock and always be ready to teach.

Elders are not to: -

- Coerce, pressure or control the flock of God
- Serve for money or Lord it over God's heritage

When Christ returns elders who have served the Lord and the flock of God faithfully will receive an eternal crown of glory.

The words: -

- Younger people submit yourselves unto the elder (v5).

Does not mean submit to every elder, if an elder is coercing or using pressure to control the flock of God by cleverly distorting and twisting Scriptures or serving the Lord for money and his own gain or Lording it over God's heritage he should not be submitted to, but exposed for the deceitful and dishonest man he is (but this should be done in the right way and the right spirit).

Naturally those who are young especially new converts should submit to every faithful elder not only because they understand the word of God, but also because they have experienced the trials and troubles of life and therefore have a maturity and wisdom that a younger person as yet lacks.

Now the glory and beauty of Christian fellowship is seen in the following words of Peter: -

- All of you clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble (v5).

No brother or sister no matter how important they maybe in the world or how esteemed they are in the church should ever esteem themselves to be more important than any other faithful brother or sister in Christ. It matters not to God whether we are born a Hebrew or a Jew or of any other nation, whether we are of noble blood or lowly, whether we are rich or poor all are valued and precious in Gods sight so much so that He gave His only Son that we would not perish, but be saved to eternal life and everlasting glory.

SUMMARY: of a Bishop, Elder Overseer and Deacon.

Deacons are only twice mentioned in Scripture, their duties and ministry in the body of Christ is to relieve those who oversee the church and those who teach from the domestic duties of the church and to see that the sick, the poor and those in need amongst the flock are being cared for.

An bishop, elder and overseer is not just a teacher they are the shepherd of the flock, who is not only responsible for teaching God's word and training God's children in the right way to go, but are also called to care and protect the flock from spiritual harm thus the reason there is such high standards placed on a bishop, elder and overseer.

NOTE: since the principle under the Gospel is one of submitting to one another in love a bishop, elder and overseer is not to dominate or see themselves as superior and thereby lord it over those they oversee, but rather to view themselves as a humble servant in submission to the Lord and to those they shepherd.

Jesus when teaching the twelve apostles said: -

- You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them, but it should not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be as your servant, even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many (Matt 20:25-28) (Mark 10:42-45).

Added to this Paul in his letter to the Corinthians wrote: -

- Not that we lord it over your faith, but we work with you for your joy (2 Cor. 1:24)

And to the Ephesians he said: -

- The will of the Lord is that every brother and sister in Christ filled with the Spirit would submit to one another out of reverence for Christ (Eph. 5:18-21).

Clearly no-matter what our position or how talented or gifted we maybe we should all be submitted to each other as under the Lord.

End.