



Church leadership shapes the growth of Christ's church, the people he's rescued from sin. Like the Apostle Paul declared to the Ephesian church, Jesus gave "the shepherds and teachers to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:11–13). The church's maturity depends on qualified leadership.

The Bible mandates several qualities for the two primary church offices—elder and deacon. While these qualifications are crucial for their selection, they are certainly not above the normal expectations for all Christians. Rather than super-human, a church's elders and deacons should be exemplary for believers at any stage of sanctification.

### Elders

Generally speaking, Paul lists the basic qualifications for elders in 1 Timothy 3:1–7 and Titus 1:5–9. According to the Bible, the office of elder is a "noble task" to be *desired*, not simply nominated or recommended. If a Christian man seeks this responsibility within the church, he must then meet certain requirements.

In particular, "an overseer [elder] 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" (1 Tim. 3:2–3). Additionally, because the position carries such weight leading Christ's people, he must "manage his own household well", not as a "recent convert" to guard the office from prideful tendencies, and "well thought of by outsiders," that is, with a good reputation among those outside the church.

Paul wrote to his protégé Titus that an elder "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" (Titus 1:9). More than preaching, which an elder should be willing and able to do, this means an elder is expected to be doctrinally sound and capable of teaching members correct doctrine while refuting false doctrine.

The importance of eldership also means that churches can and ought to have multiple elders. Mark Dever gives several reasons for having a plurality of elders: "It balances pastoral weakness...It diffuses congregational criticism...It adds pastoral wisdom...It indigenizes leadership (in non-staff members)...It enables corrective discipline...It defuses 'us vs. him.'"<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Mark Dever, *Deliberate Church* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2003), 134.

Elders collectively bear much responsibility in the local church, but they are not ultimately the focal point of a church's leadership—Jesus is. The Apostle Peter encouraged a group of elders at one church to “shepherd the flock of God that is among you...and when the chief Shepherd appears you will receive the unfading crown of glory” (1 Peter 5:2, 4). In this way, the church submits to its elders while the elders submit to Christ.

Acts 6:1–7 sets the precedent for elders' primary responsibilities, preaching and prayer; consequently, churches need some who will alleviate other pressing physical needs within the church.

## **Deacons**

Deacons serve the church in this capacity. According to 1 Timothy 3:8–13, they “must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain,” holding “the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience.” As the husband of one wife, they must manage their households well like elders, but they are not required to teach like elders are.

We see the prototypical deacons in Acts 6:1–7, in which the apostles appoint seven men to literally serve food to widows within the church. Beyond this example little instruction is given for exactly how deacons work within the church. This allows local churches to meet their unique needs with flexibility.

Deacons are men or women with specific gifts relevant to their tasks, but above all they possess the character necessary for humble service within the local church. In this way, a man or woman with high competence in a certain area might not be as well suited for serving the church as one with a willingness to learn and serve the church so that elders can shepherd their people without distraction or conflict.

The reward for faithful service as a deacon, then, is not recognition or applause but “a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus” (1 Tim. 3:13).

## **How Does CrossPointe Select Elders and Deacons?**

The process of adding more elders should not be rushed for the sake of immediate need, but carefully considered. Elders must be called by God. A man sensing the call for eldership should go to the current elders for counsel, confirmation and testing. The existing elders then examine the man's life and gifts in addition to the church's needs before presenting the man to the congregation for confirmation.

Regarding deacons, CrossPointe has hesitated to use the title “deacon” because this word is often misunderstood. Since CrossPointe's beginning, many people have held deacon-type responsibilities; however, the elders determine what areas need deacon oversight and appoint qualified members accordingly.