

Men's One-Day Study

"The Selection, Appointment, and
Duties of Elders"

Southside Church of Christ
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Session I:

The Selection of Elders:
Considerations on the Overall Point of the
Qualifications

Session I
Discussion Questions

1. What is the overall point of the qualifications?

2. Define the following terms: *scripturally organized*, *scripturally unorganized*, *unscripturally organized*, and *unscripturally unorganized*.

3. Which of the qualifications are *subjective*, and which are *objective*?

4. Which qualifications (*subjective* or *objective*) seem to give us the most problems, or are the basis of the most controversy? Why, do you suppose, this is so?

5. Was it easier to be “qualified” to serve as an Elder in Ephesus than it was in Crete? Why, or why not?

6. If the *unfaithfulness* of an adult independent offspring of a potential Elder disqualifies him from service, does the unfaithfulness of a church member disqualify the appointed Elders for the same reason? Why, or why not?

7. What has changed about the *abilities* of an otherwise qualified Elder if his wife precedes him in death?

8. What is the point of the “family” (wife & children) qualifications?

Session I Considerations

Any discussion of the qualifications of Elders- either candidates or those currently serving, seems to provoke controversy. It is not the purpose of this study to “fuel” those fires, but to instead help extinguish some of them so that God’s will of having scripturally organized churches may be met, cf. Titus 1:5a. Obviously, it would be naïve to think that this study, or any other similar to it, could alleviate all of the controversies this subject seems to elicit.

It is further recognized from the outset, that this particular effort will not answer all the questions that could be posed on the subject either- in fact, such is not even our purpose. Instead, we propose to look only at the individual qualifications **collectively**, with the exception of giving brief consideration to a couple of them that seem to be central to most contentions. Let’s face it, most brethren have heard numerous sermons on “the qualifications,” and could do sufficient word studies themselves to come to a legitimate understanding of what “*sensible, just, devout, self-controlled, etc.*” means. Thus, we will not expend our time on such pursuits. This does not mean that these qualifications are in any way less important than those which give us more difficulty- just that our efforts will not be centered on them so that we can hopefully focus on other more difficult, and in most cases less often considered, matters. Perhaps in this regard, we often fail to see the *forest* for the *trees*.

Nonetheless, it must be admitted that God intended congregations of His people in a given locale to be overseen by Elders, Acts 14:23; Eph.4:11; 1Pet.5:1. It thus behooves us to correctly understand and apply the Scriptures to these matters that God’s will be done in all things.

What’s the Point?

Any discussion of the qualifications of Elders should begin with a clear understanding of the point of “them”- meaning both the *qualifications* and *elders!* While “the point” of *elders* has been hinted at above (fulfilling God’s will), and will be more fully discussed in sections III and IV, let’s start our effort by being sure we understand the overall point of the qualifications.

While we (*local congregations* collectively) are perhaps too specific regarding the individual qualifications themselves (by giving undue weight to one above the others), we may also be too general regarding the point of the qualifications in the aggregate. The overall point of the qualifications is to enable faithful Christians to **identify** and **select and appoint capable** spiritual **leaders** for **their** congregations. Obviously, this statement has several integral aspects:

- **Identify-** to recognize, distinguish, detect, or discover. Careful consideration of the qualifications enables us to *identify* those men who have demonstrated leadership in various aspects of their lives that give us confidence in their abilities to lead the congregation.
- **Select and Appoint-** to choose and charge (or officially *commission*). Various *processes* have been both used and abused by churches as mechanisms to accomplish the task of vetting potential candidates, and then officially installing them to the office. While the *ordination* itself rarely causes problems, the processes used to get to that point sometimes, and shamefully, even divide congregations. Surely, there is a scripturally appropriate and honorable way to

accomplish this task that is fair to both the congregants and the candidate(s), cf. 2Cor.8:21.

- **Leaders-** to *guide, provide, and protect*. One of the most troubling hurdles to identifying and appointing elders is a general resistance to having them in the first place. Unfortunately, this attitude is present in some individuals and congregations. Statements such as “We’re getting along fine without them- why mess things up?” or, “Appointing elders will take away my ‘say’ in what goes on around here!” are the epitome of ignorance or arrogance- or both! How dare anyone claiming to be a Christian suggest that they know better than God how churches ought to be overseen and guided!
- **Capable-** to be *qualified, competent or able* to perform a specified task. It is as unfair to expect and appoint *unqualified/incapable* men to church leadership as it is to refuse to appoint and allow *qualified/capable* men to lead. In either case, the congregation is deprived, and God is displeased. Congregations with *qualified* men ought to appoint, support, and follow them. Congregations without *qualified* men ought to be working to develop capable leaders.
- **Their-** belonging to *them*. Ultimately, each congregation is responsible for selecting and appointing their own elders (or not appointing them, if none meet the qualifications). Such is not a task that can or should be performed by anyone who is not part of that local fellowship, Titus 1:5.

In total, these “qualifications” are given to help ascertain a man’s abilities to “*take care of the church of God.*”

Being Pleasing to the Lord

Faithful Christians (and thus, congregations comprised of them) desire to be pleasing to God in all things, Eph.5:10,17. This necessarily includes the *identification, selection, appointment, and following* of qualified leaders, Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5; Heb.13:17. However, such is not to say that every congregation should have elders. A local collectivity can be ***scripturally unorganized*** if they have no qualified men to appoint to the office. Likewise, a congregation which has qualified men should be ***scripturally organized*** because they have selected, appointed, and are submissively following them. By contrast, a congregation can also be ***unscripturally organized*** if they appoint men who don’t meet the qualifications; and can be ***unscripturally unorganized*** if they refuse to select, appoint, and follow qualified men. It is just as wrong for a congregation to refuse to appoint qualified men (*unscripturally unorganized*) to lead them as it is to appoint unqualified men (*unscripturally organized*) to do so.

Qualification Controversies

If faithful Christians in a given locale desire to be “*pleasing to the Lord*” by being *scripturally organized*, and the Spirit has given qualifications by which these leaders can be identified and appointed, then why is there controversy and division regarding these things?

As always, the *heart* has to be right. Do we really *want* to please the Lord, or ourselves in these matters? While it’s easy to say we want to please the Lord, how do we know if such is really true? Let’s take a perhaps indirect approach to the question.

Subjective is primarily defined as “not impartial; existing by perception;” while *objective*, by contrast, means “free of bias; based on facts; observable.” Note that some of the

qualifications in 1Tim.3:1-7 and Titus 1:6-9 are *subjective* (such as *temperate, prudent, respectable, etc.*) and some are *objective* (such as *the husband of one wife and having children who believe*). **It is indeed ironic that the qualifications whose determination is more *objective* seem to cause more controversy than those that are more *subjective*.** Such begs the question: **Why is this?**

It is not very flattering, but the truth is that it is much more difficult to *disqualify* a potential candidate from consideration with *subjective* requirements than it is with *objective* ones. Thus, if such is the goal, the otherwise *objective* qualifications become the primary focus of consideration. So, *objective* “family qualifications” become the battlefield. If this conclusion is doubted, consider this: How often is a candidate deemed “unqualified” because he wasn’t *temperate* or didn’t *love what is good*?

Sadly, these things force the *objective* “family qualifications” to become the de facto sole basis for qualification- both positively and negatively. For instance, those who want the congregation to have elders *find a way* to “qualify” a man for service if he can meet the “family qualifications” regardless of the more *subjective* requirements. Conversely, those who don’t want the congregation to have elders find it easier to “disqualify” a candidate on the *objective* grounds of his “family” than whether or not he is *temperate, hospitable, sensible, or prudent, e.g.* This is not only unfortunate, it fails to meet the goal of being pleasing to God!

Since the *objective* “family qualifications” are the primary area from which controversy over the qualifications arise, it seems fitting to suggest some considerations that might help to alleviate at least some the contentions.

The “Family” Qualifications

The congregation has three principal areas of the candidate’s life and experience on which to base their evaluations of his qualification and capabilities of leadership:

1. His conduct and reputation ***in the world***. That is, has he demonstrated leadership and honorable conduct among those *outside* the church, cf. 1Tim.3:7?
2. His conduct and reputation ***in the church***. Since his area of responsibility and duty *in* the office, if appointed, concern the congregation specifically, has he demonstrated honorable conduct and leadership (obviously on a limited basis) *in* and *to* the congregation, cf. 1Tim.3:2,6?
3. His conduct and reputation ***in the home***. Has he demonstrated honorable conduct and leadership in the area that most resembles the obligations for which he is being considered, 1Tim.3:4-5 (and cf. Eph.5:22-33)?

Obviously, in two of these three areas the congregation has limited information on which to base their evaluations. But even so, surely they have significant knowledge of his conduct and reputation in the community because they, ideally, live and work in the same general area; and, surely there is ample and obvious evidence of his conduct and leadership in the home also. Nonetheless, it is “in the home” that perhaps the most crucial demonstrations of his capabilities for leadership have been manifested.

Has he, therefore, had the *good judgment* to marry a godly woman who herself manifests the characteristics of 1Tim.3:11; and or, has he demonstrated the *leadership* necessary to help her become the wife and mother God expects her to be, cf. 1Tim.2:9ff; 5:10; Titus 2:3-5? Likewise, has he demonstrated leadership in his “*ruling*” of his house as a proper *head* after the example of Christ, 1Tim.4-5; Titus 1:6; Eph.6:4; Col.3:21? In other words, has he developed and demonstrated the qualities of being

self-willed and *quick-tempered*, or has he developed and demonstrated *temperateness* and *self-control* in the home, for example? *Who* and *what* he has been in the home gives clear evidence of *who* and *what* he will be as a leader in the congregation.

As stated previously, what should be the most *objective*, and therefore the easiest to assess, qualifications (the “family” ones) are typically the ones that typically produce the most difficulty. We’ve already considered *motivations* in this regard, but now we need to look at the texts themselves.

A telling question with regard to our view, and therefore our application, of the “family qualifications” is this: **“Was it easier to be deemed ‘qualified’ to serve as an Elder in Ephesus than it was in Crete?”** The basis of the question is, of course, the supposed distinctions between the lists in 1Tim.3 (Timothy was in Ephesus) and Titus 1 (Titus was in Crete). Paul’s list to Timothy does not include the “*children who believe*” (NASV), or “*faithful children*” (KJV), component as does his list to Titus.

If the “*faithful children*” qualification is taken to mean that the offspring must be *faithful to the Lord* (i.e. *Christians*), then the answer to the question would necessarily have to be “yes” since Timothy’s list does not include the requirement. Such is an untenable position. There is no basis of reason, logic, or scripture that would allow for such a geographic distinction in the qualifications. If, however, the “*faithful children*” qualification is understood to mean *faithful to their father* (i.e. *trustworthy* or *respectful*), then there is no disparity in the lists- Titus 1:6 then is saying the same thing as 1Tim.3:4-5.

Advocates of the *faithful to the Lord* meaning are quick to point out passages using *pistos* (the Greek word translated as “*believing*”) in an analogous way, such as, Acts 16:1,15; and 2Cor.6:15; but neglect to also acknowledge Paul’s usage of the term in the same contexts of the letters to Timothy and Titus which use the term differently, cf. 1Tim.3:1,11; 4:9; Titus 1:9; 3:8; and 2Tim.2:11. Let’s be fair. The Greek term *pistos* certainly *can* properly be translated to mean a *believer/Christian*, as it does in 1Tim.4:3,10,12; but can also be accurately rendered as *trustworthy*, 1Tim.4:9; Titus 1:9.

If we force *pistos* to mean *believers/Christians* in Titus 1:6, then we are also forced to admit the qualifications were easier to meet in Ephesus than they were in Crete. If we instead allow *pistos* to have its other meaning of *trustworthy* or *faithful* (to their physical father and his leadership), then the lists given to Timothy and Titus match in this regard. With this interpretation, the rest of Titus 1:6 also seems to make more sense, “*not accused of dissipation or rebellion*.” What sense do these make if *pistos* means “Christian?” Could a child be “Christian” and be a *rebellious profligate*? On the other hand, a *rebellious* child committed to *excesses* surely would surely not manifest a *well-managed household* in which the children are “*under control*,” cf. 1Tim.3:4. Incidentally, does not “*household*” (Greek *oikos*) refer to the *house* and those residing therein, cf. Acts 16:15,33? This question leads us to our next point of controversy with regard to the “family qualifications.”

When we assume that *pistos* must mean *believer* or *Christian*, then we are also confronted with questions of “time” and “control.” Let me explain. If the candidate’s offspring must be Christians, then does the requirement extend to adult children who are no longer a part of his *household*? Those who take *pistos* in this way, generally also say that his offspring must remain continuously faithful for him to be, or even remain (for those already appointed as Elders), qualified. There is a significant problem

with this view. It requires something of the candidate that is ultimately beyond his ability to control. Consider the following:

- Adult offspring living independently from the candidate's *household* are beyond his ability to control. Children living dependently *within* his household are still within his control. Thus, he is responsible for the latter, but not the former. God never holds anyone responsible for things that are beyond their control; and neither should we hold a candidate responsible for things or people that are beyond his ability to control. Thus, those *out* of his household are not the focus of the qualification. Whether with regard to his leadership *in the home*, or his potential leadership *in the church*, he is only responsible for those under his control, cf. 1Pet.5:3a.
- Prov.22:6 is often cited to prove that "if a candidate has done a good job of raising his children when they are at home, then they will remain faithful as Christians once they leave home." First, Proverbs is a book of *general truths* rather than *absolute dictums*. Prov.16:13 should well-illustrate this point. If "*righteous lips*" were *always* "*the delight of kings*," then John the Baptist would not have lost his head for telling Herod the truth about his unlawful marriage, cf. Matt.14:1-10! Second, wouldn't this logic and its application make God responsible for Ephraim's sin, cf. Hos.7:8,13,15? If we can see that Israel's apostasy was *in spite of* rather than *because of* God's leadership, why can't we see the same in regard to the candidate's adult independent offspring who choose to go against their father's leadership? The same point could be made with regard to Jesus and Judas, John 17:12 → Acts 1:25.
- If an adult independent offspring's apostasy *disqualifies* a candidate from serving as an Elder, **why doesn't the apostasy of adult independent church members disqualify appointed Elders?** Isn't the principle the same? If offspring going against their father's teaching and leadership nonetheless proves his unfitness for the office, why wouldn't church members going against the teaching and leadership of serving Elders likewise prove their unfitness for the office, cp. Eph.6:4 → Acts 20:28; 1Pet.5:2; Heb.13:17? It would, if the premise is correct- but it just isn't.

There is another aspect of the "family qualifications" that sometimes produces controversy: the death of a candidate's (or serving/appointed Elder's) spouse. The proposition is generally stated thusly, "It says, '*Husband of one wife*,' and a widower is no longer the '*Husband of one wife*.'" With this reasoning, then would an otherwise qualified man whose *children* had all died likewise be disqualified for the same reason, *i.e.* that he no longer had "*children who believe*"? Consistency would demand a "yes" answer, but are we willing to accept the consequences of our conclusions?

Consider the logic implied with the forced interpretation of "*husband of one wife*" as meaning that the candidate (or Elder) must be continuously married:

- It adds to the list of qualifications that he must keep his spouse (and children) alive to be able serve the congregation and the Lord in this capacity; or else die before them himself.
- Otherwise, it requires a candidate or Elder to withdraw and remarry to again become qualified. Thus, an otherwise qualified man's ability to serve is contingent upon his ability (and desire) to marry again after the death of his wife, cp. 1Cor.7:32-35.

Ask this question instead: What has changed about his knowledge, wisdom, experience, or ability to lead should an otherwise qualified man's spouse die? If he is the man he's supposed to be, he will learn from the experience and become even more capable. Not to be crass, but wouldn't he, after the death of his spouse, have the ability to more fully comprehend and minister to those in similar circumstances who are surely part of those whom he oversees? Consider the following quote from H.E. Phillips on this point:

"Then it is said that if an elder's wife dies while he is in office, he is disqualified-if this is a positive requirement-because he is not now the "husband of one wife." There is a wide difference between a bachelor and a widower. Surely we know the difference between the development of experience and the demonstration to others of that ability of one who has been a husband and a father of believing children, and the one who has neither been a husband nor a father. There are qualifying experiences that come to a husband and father that a bachelor can never obtain, and these experiences are necessary to the duties of the eldership. The circumstances of developing a quality may, in some cases, be absolutely essential to that quality, while in other cases they are incidental. **Patience may be developed by extreme hardship or prolonged illness of some member of the family, but the illness need not continue in order to maintain the quality of patience. So (it is, PCS) in the case of "husband of one wife" and "having faithful children."** There is no scriptural way one can get the necessary experience of ruling a family well, and proving to the membership of the church his ability in rearing children in the way of the Lord to become Christians, except by being a husband and a father. But once that experience is obtained and demonstrated to others, he loses none of it in the death of his wife or children. On the other hand, a bachelor has no way of obtaining all the necessary experiences and showing proof to others of his ability in this respect. That mainly is the difference in a bachelor and a widower in this relation." ("Scriptural Elders and Deacons"; H.E. Phillips; pp.110-111; emphasis added, PCS)

To the "family qualifications" scenarios described above (adult independent offspring apostatizing; the death of his spouse), those demanding *disqualification* on these bases, when met with sound logic and reason, occasionally retreat to, "The congregation might not follow him because of these things." If such is the case, instead of just allowing another baseless objection to prevent his serving, the congregation needs to be taught how important it is to be scripturally organized, how difficult it is to meet the qualifications even when properly understood and applied, and how they ought to respect and submit themselves to qualified men. Please do not allow the process of selecting and appointing qualified men to serve as Overseers to become a popularity contest, nor allow it to be derailed by spiritually immature and weak members who can't find a legitimate reason to otherwise "disqualify" a qualified man from serving.

The Point of the "Family Qualifications"

- "Are his children faithful **because of** or **in spite of** his leadership?" And conversely, if necessary, "Are his children unfaithful **because of** or **in spite of** his leadership? If his children are faithful, but are so *in spite of* rather than *because of* him, does he still meet this qualification (at least in this interpretation of it)?"

- Has he developed and demonstrated leadership *in the home* with regard to his wife and children (those under his headship, 1Cor.11:3; Eph.5:23; 6:4) that provides confidence with regard to his potential leadership *in the local congregation*?
- Instead of demanding that his wife be living, and all his children “faithful” members of a “sound” congregation, ask, “What kind of leader has he been *in the home*?” Has he developed and demonstrated the ability to lead those under his direct control? This is, after all, the real point of the “family qualifications,” is it not? To otherwise make them an arbitrary set of requirements regarding things beyond the candidate’s ability to control surely misses the point of these qualifications completely!

Summary of the “Family Qualifications”

- A man must have *well managed* his household (wife and children; those under his direct control) to be qualified to *take care of the church of God*, 1Tim.3:4-5; Titus 1:6.
- Unless something occurs within *his household* (again, those under his direct control) that expressly diminishes his ability to lead, this qualification, once met, stands. The death of his wife, therefore, does not *disqualify* him unless he says he cannot continue to fulfill the duties of the office. Likewise, adult children who turn to the world *in spite of* his leadership, do not disqualify him anymore than faithful church members becoming unfaithful *in spite of* the leadership of the Eldership disqualifies them.
- Erring on the side of “being safe” is still erring if the candidate meets God’s qualifications, cf. Matt.25:24-28; 3John 9-10.

A Concluding Word on “The Family” Qualifications

I do not take the qualifications lightly- those with regard to the family, or any other qualification. They are all given for good and biblical reasons. But we should also use good and biblical reasoning in applying them to gain their true benefit to the local congregation specifically, and the Cause of Christ generally.

Session II:

The Appointment of Elders:
A Scriptural and Fair Process

Session II

Discussion Questions

1. Who selects Elders for congregations: the preacher, the current Elders (if available), or the members?

2. Do present-day preachers' responsibilities in the process of selecting and appointing Elders differ from those of Timothy and Titus? If so, why and how? If not, why not?

3. What are the responsibilities of Elders already serving the congregation in the process of selecting and appointing additional Elders?

4. Is there a specific process given in the New Testament for the selection and appointment of Elders? If so, what is it? If not, how then are we to proceed given that God expects scripturally appointed leaders in congregations?

5. Suggest a scriptural method for the process of selecting and appointing Elders which meets the following criteria:
 - a. Prevents the process from becoming a popularity contest/vote;
 - b. Encourages participation of every member of the congregation in the process;
 - c. Avoids the potential of accidental or intentional omission of a potentially qualified candidate;
 - d. Does not "pressure" a man into serving who does not "desire the office"; and
 - e. Allows for legitimate consideration of the candidates' qualifications in a way that is fair- both to the congregation and the candidates.

Session II Considerations

Who Selects the Elders?

This question has also spawned controversy in local congregations. Some say **the preacher** should select the Elders because Timothy and Titus were commissioned to do so in their respective congregation, 1Tim.3:1ff; Titus 1:5ff. Others say the **current Elders** (if there are any) should select additional men to serve with them since such would fall under their responsibilities as Overseers, Acts 20:28ff. Still others insist that **the congregation** should select its own Elders since they will be required to *submit* to and *obey* them, Heb.13:17. While there is perhaps some element of truth and wisdom in all of these answers to the question, none of them are exclusively correct. Please consider the following.

- Timothy, and especially Titus, were commissioned to **“appoint”** Elders, Titus 1:6 (see also Acts 14:23), but such is not necessarily the same as **selecting** them. The word **“appoint”** is translated from the Greek term *kathistemi*, which means *to make* or *ordain*. But notice also Acts 6:1-6 by way of comparison. In v.3, the Apostles instructed the congregation to **“select from among your, brethren, seven men....whom we may put in charge of this task.”** **“Select”** comes from the Greek word *episkeptomai*, which means *to look, examine, inspect, or select carefully*. But, also note that after the congregation *selected* these men, the Apostles would then *put them in charge* (*kathistemi*, to *appoint*) of the task at hand. While it surely must be noted that this passage pertains to the *selection* and *appointment* of men to serve tables rather than to serve the congregation in the office of Overseers, it cannot be ignored that *selection* is not the same thing as *appointment*. The congregation *selected*, and the Apostles *appointed* these men.

Did Timothy and Titus play pivotal roles in the process of *selecting* and *appointing* Elders in Ephesus and Crete respectively? Absolutely! They were the ones to whom Paul gave the Spirit-inspired qualifications, and they were both gifted with the Spirit as well, cf. 1Tim.4:14; Titus 1:5;2:15; 3:5-6. How could they not be integral parts of the process? They were to proclaim God’s word regarding the *need* of Elders, their *qualifications*, and their *duties*. But to assume that the lists of qualifications were presented to Timothy and Titus to enable **them** to both *select* and *appoint* Elders themselves is a conclusion neither warranted nor supported by the text. Thus, these “preachers” were given the task of *appointing* Elders (Titus 1:5), but the qualifications themselves suggest that the congregation was involved in the *selection* process. Paul is giving them instructions they are to proclaim to the congregation, 1Tim.1:15; 2:6; 3:9,16; Titus 1:13; 2:1; 3:8.

- Are the current Elders supposed to *select* and *appoint* additional men to serve? Obviously, this scenario is only possible when additional men to serve as Elders are under consideration, but is not available when an eldership is first being established. While there is no doubt that current Elders, as we saw with preachers, are an integral part of the process- especially in pointing out the *need*, *teaching* the requirements and duties of the potential candidates, and *guiding* the process utilized to accomplish the task, the real question before us is: “Is it the *sole responsibility* of current Elders to select and appoint additional Elders for the congregation?”

Surely, their knowledge, experience, and wisdom are extremely beneficial to the process of selection and appointment of additional Elders. But, a related question needs to be asked and answer on this point: “Were the Apostles, because of their knowledge, experience, and wisdom *better qualified* to select and appoint men to serve the congregation in Acts 6?” Of course they were! And yet, because these men would serve *the congregation* rather than the Apostles, *the congregation* was given the responsibility of selecting them. To this notion it might be objected that, “Those men were only *deacons* (if that), and we’re talking about Elders.” This is true, obviously. But isn’t there a principle involved? If the congregation is going to be required to *submit* to and *obey/follow* (Heb.13:17) these men, shouldn’t they be allowed to choose them?

Surely, existing Elders can use their knowledge, experience, and wisdom to *guide* the process, and to *ensure* its adherence to the Scriptures, but if the Spirit-inspired Apostles did not *select* men for the mere serving of tables, should Elders choose additional men to lead the congregation? Isn’t such ignoring the process by which they themselves (as *original* Elders of the congregation) were appointed? If the congregation was trusted to select them, will they not trust the congregation to select others to serve with them? In my judgment, “yes” is the best answer to this question.

- If neither the *preacher* nor the *Elders* (again, only if available) have the exclusive responsibility of *selecting* Elders, then surely the **congregation** must shoulder the task, right? Not entirely. While it does seem scriptural, prudent, and logical for the congregation to select those who will oversee and shepherd them from all that we’ve noted above, they would be indeed *unwise* to engage in the process without input and guidance from the *preacher* and the current *Elders*. But there is yet another necessary consideration in these matters.

The underlying truth to all of these potential *selectors* is that **God makes the choice- or at least should be allowed to do so, Acts 20:28!** Think about it: Does God *select* those who will be Christians/saved? Yes, by giving the criteria/qualifications for such, Acts 13:48; Rom.8:29; Eph.1:5,11; Titus 2:11-12.

Additionally, did God *select* those who would be Apostles? Yes, both by direct appointment, Matt.10:1-4; Mark 3:13-19; and by, again, providing the criteria/qualifications, Acts 1:21-22. Whether “*they*” in v.23 refers to the 120 brethren from v.15 or the current Apostles from v.22 (“*us*”) is more or less irrelevant because God gave the qualifications, vv.20-22.

Think about one more example: Who really selected the *servants* in Acts 6:1-6? Was it not God, by providing the Spirit-given criteria/qualifications for those who would fill the position, cf. v.3?

Of course the fact that God actually does the *selecting* (cf. Acts 20:28) does not remove the preacher, the current Elders, or the congregation from the process, for they must accurately teach and administer the criteria/qualifications God has provided. But, the fact that God chooses the men should unquestionably restrict the interjection of *personal* preferences and opinions into the process by any man! Therefore, the preacher, the Elders, or the congregation should not seek to eliminate any man from serving who meets God’s qualifications on any basis. If the candidate meets God’s requirements, personal opinions and preferences must not be allowed to prevent his appointment to the office. To do so is to create artificial qualifications, and circumvent

God's will in the matter. Of course, utilizing personal preferences and opinions to *appoint* a man who does not meet God's qualifications also circumvents God's will. Perhaps a better way of looking at and describing the process is that **the preacher, Elders, and congregation must *identify* those whom God has *selected* through the proper applications of the standard He has provided.**

All of this leads us to the next important consideration in this process- the question of *how*, or *by what mechanism* or *process*, this identification of qualified candidates is to take place. Though no one process is mandated by the text, God did not leave us without principles and examples to guide us in these matters.

New Testament Examples of the Process

It is unfortunate that the God-given qualifications have become such a controversial issue that congregations sometimes wind up dividing over them. But, it is equally, if not more, troubling that congregations also divide over **the process** by which these qualifications are utilized in an effort to identify, select, and appoint approved men to the office. Surely, as brethren in Christ, we are called to, and can do, better!

It is tempting to say that the process would not cause so many problems in churches if God had just specified a step-by-step mechanism for us. Be careful with such thinking and statements! They sound like an indictment of the wisdom of God, and doubt in His ability to provide ample instructions for us to carry out His will in the matter! Instead, perhaps we should be asking: Why God, in His wisdom, did not mandate a step-by-step process that we apparently (in *our* wisdom) crave? Surely, God does nothing without reason; and when He does not act, there is likewise a reason. We should not, therefore, blame God or question His wisdom for our failures to utilize what He has given us in the inspired text to carry out His will in the matter of *identifying*, *selecting*, and *appointing* Elders! What, then, are the ways and mechanisms which brethren have put forth to accomplish this task?

Processes Used to Appoint Elders

Here are some (surely not all!) processes that have been put forth and utilized to *identify* and *select* candidates for the Eldership:

1. The current Elders (if available), in their knowledge, wisdom, and experience, put forth names to the congregation of men whom they feel meet the qualifications. Then, the congregation selects from among those men whom they wish to serve.

Advantages: This process utilizes the wisdom and experience of those most qualified to choose additional Shepherds. It also allows at least some input from the congregation regarding those to whom they will submit and follow.

Disadvantages: It opens the existing Eldership up to charges of "cherry-picking" (presenting only their personal favorites, thus allowing the potential for their own opinions and desires to govern the process), nepotism, and "*lording over the flock*" (1Pet.5:3) by exercising "top-down" control over the process and the congregation. Additionally, it seems to ignore the principle of the congregation selecting their own representative leaders from Acts 6:3. Surely, the Apostles, in their wisdom, experience, and inspired insight knew which men could best serve the congregation, but did not select them. And, as previously suggested, it ignores the fact that the congregation was trusted to select the original Elders, but does not trust them to select additional men to serve with them.

2. The congregation selects a group of men determined by populous vote, and then the Elders (if available) select specific men from that group to serve with them.

Advantages: The congregation is allowed greater input into the process of selecting men to whom they will submit and follow. It further utilizes the knowledge, wisdom, and experience of the current Eldership to *safeguard* rather than *dictate* the selection process to ensure qualified men are appointed.

Disadvantages: Anyone who has been through the process of selecting Elders will tell you that names are put forth, usually by immature and uninformed members of the congregation, that in no way meet the qualifications. Thus, “He’s a nice man and I like him,” or, “He’s successful in business” becomes the de facto criteria. The congregation then overlooks qualified men in the list of candidates that is presented to the Elders because they have not given due diligence to the process. The qualifications are based on spiritual leadership capabilities, not popularity; but this method often ignores that fact. Any process that utilizes voting and/or percentages of votes runs the risk of turning the selection into a popularity contest. Additionally, it allows the immature, the uninformed, or the just plain lazy an equal say in the process. If a church is governed by the judgment of these kinds of members, nothing but trouble and God’s displeasure is ahead.

3. The congregation selects the men based on approval percentages from voting.

Advantages: The congregation is at least given input into the choosing those who will oversee them. Beyond this, I see no additional advantage.

Disadvantages: Someone still has to determine the baseline of approval percentage below which a man will not be considered for appointment. Who will make this determination, and how will it be assessed? Furthermore, this process does not allow the “safety net” of the existing Eldership’s (if available) involvement. See the disadvantages given in the previous scenario above, since most of them apply here also.

4. The preacher either selects, or puts forth potential selections to the congregation. (Although I’ve never known of any congregation utilizing this method, surely some might suggest it is based on Paul’s instructions to Timothy and Titus.)

Advantages: I know of none, unless the Holy Spirit directly inspires the preacher, as He did Timothy and Titus. Since such no longer occurs (cf. 1Cor.13:8-10; Acts 8:18-19), this is probably the poorest of all suggestions. However, in many congregations that don’t have Elders (and unfortunately, some of them that do), the preacher is the person most knowledgeable in the Scriptures within the congregation. To completely exclude him from the selection process based on some perceived “itinerate” status he is suggested to hold is equally unwise. Preachers with knowledge, wisdom, and experience may well be the one pushing a congregation that has potentially qualified men to begin the process of becoming *scripturally organized*. Surely, such a man should be utilized to guide the process, rather than being excluded from it! But to turn the process of selecting men to serve over to one uninspired man is unfair to him, the congregation, and the candidates.

Disadvantages: The “preacher” could be a well-meaning and vigilant young man who lacks the knowledge, wisdom, and experience to take on such a responsible

task for the congregation. Then too, if the preacher, regardless of age and experience, decides to move to another location, are the Elders he “selected” then disqualified? The congregation might well remove or refuse to follow them, whether the preacher stays or goes, since they did not select them.

What should be gleaned from all of this is that the *preacher*, existing *Elders* (if available), and *congregation* must work together to *identify* and *appoint* those whom God *selects* through the proper use of the qualifications, and the principles and examples left for us in the New Testament, cp. Acts 15:22. After all, God did not leave us an impossible task, nor did He leave us without sufficient information to accomplish it.

Is There a Better Process or Way?

It would be either cowardly or neglectful to point out failures in the methods listed above without suggesting at least a potentially better one that still meets the necessary criteria, and eliminates some of the disadvantages of the others. What *mechanism* or *process*, then:

- Prevents the process from becoming a popularity contest through voting by the members;
- Encourages participation in the process from every willing member in the congregation without giving undue weight to anyone;
- Avoids the possible accidental or intentional omission of a potentially qualified candidate;
- Does not “pressure” a man into serving who does not “*desire the office;*” and,
- Allows for legitimate consideration of the candidate’s qualifications in a way that is fair- both to him and the congregation?

Here’s my suggestion: (after sufficient teaching has been presented on the *scriptural need* of Elders, their *qualifications*, their *duties*, and the *duties of the congregation* both to the process of selecting Elders and to *submitting* and *following* their leadership after the process)

- 1. Announce to the congregation the following process; emphasize and encourage the participation of each member in the process; pray publicly for the process; and encourage private prayer for the process.**

This allows the congregation to understand the process, and their involvement in it, from the outset. It also entreats the Father’s guidance and blessing in the matter. It has the added benefit of underscoring the propriety and importance of what they are about to do to the congregation, cp. Acts 1:24; 6:4; 14:23.

- 2. Compose a list of every male member in the congregation.**

This ensures that neither prejudice nor oversight eliminates any man from consideration.

- 3. Take the compiled list to each of the men individually, and allow him to either:**

- a. leave his name on the list if he desires the office, and thinks he may be qualified to serve; or to,**
- b. remove his name from the list.**

Since most men will typically judge themselves as unqualified, or decide that they do not desire the office, most of the names will be removed from consideration before the congregation ever sees the list. This eliminates undue effort and evaluation being wasted on those who deem themselves unwilling or unqualified to serve in this capacity.

- 3. Publish a new list to the congregation composed of the remaining names of those who are willing to serve, and consider themselves (at least potentially) qualified.**

If there are no names remaining on the list, obviously the process is halted until sufficient time has passed to reconsider the matter.

- 4. Clearly instruct the congregation that it is their responsibility to consider men from this list who will serve as Elders for them- if, of course, any are deemed qualified to serve.**
- 5. Clearly instruct the congregation that it is their *individual* responsibility to *privately* and *personally* discuss any potential concerns or objections they might have to his qualifications with the candidate.**

If the member is unable or unwilling to do this, then they necessarily remove themselves from the process of selecting Elders. This eliminates the uninformed, uninterested, or lazy member from holding up the process unnecessarily, or from attempting to derail it *from afar* with unsubstantiated objections.

- 6. If the member becomes convinced, through actually discussing the objection with the candidate, that he is indeed qualified, his name remains on the list.**

This protects the candidate from baseless objections, or at least gives him the opportunity to answer them. It also allows the opportunity for members to assess his abilities based on how he deals with questions regarding his own qualification. It further protects the objector from *public* embarrassment if the objection is discovered to be unfounded.

- 7. If the member convinces the candidate that he is indeed unqualified, he can then remove his own name from the list.**

This prevents unnecessary *public* scrutiny or embarrassment for the candidate.

- 8. If an agreement cannot be reached between the member and the candidate on his qualification, then they (together, cf. 2Cor.8:21) can take the matter to the current Elders (if available), or to a group of mutually respected men of the congregation (or all of them) to decide the issue. Again, if he is deemed qualified, then his name remains on the list; and if not, he can remove his name from it.**

- 9. Under no circumstances should any member be allowed to bring an objection to the preacher, the current Elders, or the congregation without it having been first taken to the candidate with no resolution being reached.**

If the member does not feel strongly enough about the matter to discuss it with the candidate personally, he should not discuss it with anyone else, cp. Matt.18:15ff.

10. After a sufficient and predetermined time has been allowed for members to talk with the candidates regarding any objections has been fulfilled, those men whose names remain on the list can then be appointed.

Obviously, if there are current Elders serving the congregation, they can be of tremendous assistance in guiding and safeguarding the process. For instance, what do you suppose would have happened had the congregation in Acts 6 put forth men who did not meet the qualifications given? Surely the Apostles would have intervened; and so should Elders today if the congregation is attempting to select men who obviously do not meet the qualifications, whatever the motivation. But, in my judgment, the Elders should emulate the Apostles by laying out the qualifications, and directing the process, but otherwise allowing the congregation to select those to whom they will submit. The predetermined and specified time element of this step prevents unnecessary delays from dragging the process out until it is eventually abandoned altogether.

Obviously, much disparity exists in “the processes” utilized from congregation to congregation because no specific steps are dictated by the Scriptures. Whether the process above is utilized or not, we should endeavor to meet the objectives of being *scripturally acceptable* and *fair-* to both the candidates and the congregation. The process utilized should also encourage the active participation of every member in selecting those who will lead the congregation without giving undue license or weight to anyone.

How Do You “Appoint” Elders

Having now delineated the differences between *identifying* those men who are qualified, and *selecting* them to serve by an approved and acceptable process, the matter remaining is that of *appointment*. It is much simpler, however.

If we understand that *appointing* Elders is the act or ceremony by which they are officially presented to the congregation, ordained/declared to be their Elders, and commissioned to begin their work, it only remains to determine exactly how such is to be accomplished.

At least three passages shed light on the matter: Acts 1:26 (the *numbering* of Matthias with the eleven); and Acts 6:6 (the *ordination* of the seven servants by the Apostles); and Acts 13:2-3 (the *commissioning* of Barnabas and Saul by the Holy Spirit and the church at Antioch).

It is readily admitted that none of these passages deal *directly* with appointing *Elders*. But, it is also suggested that they do provide potentially helpful information. For instance, from:

- Acts 1:26 we learn that there was a *numbering with* the current Apostles. In other words, before Matthias was a disciple, while afterwards he was both a disciple and an Apostle.
- Acts 6:6 we learn that though the congregation *chose* the men, the Apostles evidently approved and commissioned them to the work by *praying* and *laying hands on them*. *Laying hands on them* need not necessarily imply the imparting of spiritual gifts, cf. Acts 13:3; 1Tim.5:22; though it certainly may have meant just that also, cf. Acts 8:18; 1Tim.4:14; 2Tim.1:6.

- Acts 13:3 we learn that periods of *fasting* (special dedication to and consideration of spiritual matters, cp. 1Cor.7:5, KJV) and *prayer* were typically associated with the commendation of men to a particular task.

From these, a suggestion can be made for the *appointment* of Elders. Bring the *selected* men before the congregation; clearly indicating their names (though surely each is well-known by the group who has selected them); offer a special prayer of thanksgiving for their abilities and selection; and, entreat the Father on their behalf and that of the congregation for a divinely-pleasing and productive work together for the Cause of Christ at that place. Then, the current Elders (if available), the preacher, or representative men of the congregation can *lay hands on them* (by the current common custom of a handshake), and present them to congregation as Shepherds from that day forth.

Since specifics for *fasting* are not given- such as length of time, or what foods or drinks are included and excluded, its inclusion is obviously up to the individual congregations.

Session III:

The Duties of Elders:
What Elders Should Do For the
Congregation and Its Members

Session III Considerations

Elder Duties

While much attention is usually paid to the *qualifications*- both in reference to emphasis in preaching/teaching, and in our collective consciences, comparatively little is devoted in either area to the *duties* of Elders. It is true that truly *qualified* men, if appointed, already know or will be able to discern the responsibilities themselves from the text, and subsequently fulfill their obligations. But unfortunately, the general neglect of this aspect of the overall subject of “Elders” produces at least two unintended effects:

1. It fails to give younger men the necessary information to begin preparing themselves for the office, if that is their ultimate objective (which is a great aspiration!). And,
2. It fails to educate the congregation regarding what they *can* and *should* expect from their Elders, and conversely, what they *cannot* and *should not* expect from them.

So, our treatments of the ***duties of Overseers*** will also, and necessarily, include the subsequent ***responsibilities of the congregation*** toward these men. After all, no one can *lead* those unwilling to be led, or can *watch/oversee* those unwilling to be seen!

There are four primary N.T. texts in these regards: Acts 20:17-35; 1Thess. 5:12-13; Heb.13:17; and 1Pet.5:1-3. However, we will only *directly* consider Acts 20:17-35, and will utilize the other passages *indirectly* in support and further explanation of this text.

Duties of Elders from Acts 20:17-35

It seems that much of what Paul says about his personal experiences to these Ephesian Elders, whom he has called to himself at Miletus as he hurried to Jerusalem, was to be taken as an example for them to follow. Thus, we will examine these things, as well as the more direct statements he made to them in the passage.

- **Humbly declare the whole gospel, vv.18b-21.** Paul said he withheld nothing “*profitable*,” v.20. This obligation includes within its scope all of the Scriptures, cf. 2Tim.3:16-17, since they are that which “*is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified*,” Acts 20:32. The point of Paul’s use of this aspect of his example was that they should, in turn, hold nothing back from the gospel message, but instead declare it all.

This duty also underscores the necessity of the qualification that the Elder be “*able to teach*” (Greek, *didaktikos*), 1Tim.3:2. True education has three essential requirements: 1) a *Subject* worth teaching/learning, which the Scriptures surely are; 2) a *Teacher* capable of instructing, which Elders surely are to be; and, 3) *Students* interested in and capable of learning, which Christians surely must be.

- **Do your job- finish the course of your ministry, vv.22-24.** Elders are not appointed to *honor* or *extoll* them, but for them to *serve*- to accomplish the vital task of *shepherding/leading* the congregation to heaven. So, Paul uses his own dedication and devotion to *his* ministry to emphasize the importance of these (and all other) Elders manifesting the same type of constancy to the completion of *their* task.

However, lest zeal for this goal be taken to the extreme, the Elder must always remember that he is to be a *shepherd leading sheep* rather than a *cowboy*

driving cattle, 1Pet.5:3! The true Shepherd *knows the sheep, calls them by name, leads them safely to pasturage and through (or around) dangers, and they follow*, because they recognize and respect his knowledge, wisdom, and experience, cf. Psalm 23 and John 10:1-5. This imagery emphasizes not only the duties of the Shepherd, but also underscores the obligations of the sheep.

- **Be innocent of the blood of all men, vv.25-27.** Obviously, this duty is closely related to the previous two obligations of the office. Paul was “*free from the blood of all men*” precisely because he had faithfully fulfilled his ministry in declaring “*the whole purpose of God*” to them, cf. vv.24,27. For the Elder, and the Eldership, “*all men*” must be taken in a limited sense of applying to those of “*the flock of God among you*” who are “*allotted to your charge,*” 1Pet.5:2,3. Nonetheless, regarding the fulfillment of his duties to the congregation, the Elders should likewise be “*free from the blood of all,*” Heb.13:17.

These things certainly imply some reciprocal responsibilities of the congregation with regard to those who dedicate themselves to the ultimate salvation of the collectivity. 1Thess 5:12-13 enumerates the following: 1) *appreciate* them; 2) *esteem* them *highly*; and, 3) *live in peace with one another* (to make their job easier, and obviously, to be pleasing to God).

- **Be on guard (take heed, KJV) for yourselves and all the flock, v.28a.** With this duty of Elders, we transition from those that were *implied* by Paul from his own example, to those that are more directly stated. Being “*on guard*” (Greek, *prosecho*- *be alert for, consider carefully, give attention* to) references the *alertness* and *watch-care* responsibilities of the Shepherd toward himself and the sheep. He cannot protect and provide for the sheep if he, as a Shepherd, cannot first be vigilant toward protecting himself. Thus, constant *self-evaluation* and *self-awareness* necessarily precedes his awareness and evaluation of the sheep, and the potential dangers they face, 2Cor.13:5. Additionally, since Paul predicts that “*from among your own selves men will arise speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them*” (Acts 20:30), the need for vigilance is paramount, v.31.

Elders hold a position of authority within the church (words like *rule, charge, submit, and obey* make this clear, cf. Heb.13:17; 1Thess.5:12-13). Therefore, the need for constant vigilance over *self* is even more critical for them.

However, this is not to say that there is no other system of *checks and balances* for them either. 1Tim.5:19-20 makes it clear that, even given their position of authority, Elders are still subject to scrutiny by those under them. So, rather than *absolving* the congregation of any responsibilities related to vigilance, this duty *enforces* the need for such.

- **Be overseers, v.28b.** The term *overseer* is translated from the Greek term, *episkopos*- “a man charged with the duty of seeing that things done by others are done rightly” (Enhanced Strong’s Lexicon). This does not mean that Elders must *do everything* in the congregation- or even possess the abilities to do so, but rather that they must *see* that everything is done correctly. Such does not require *micro-management*.

The Apostles saw the need for others to perform more *physically-oriented* tasks that they might continue to devote themselves to their own more *spiritually-oriented* responsibilities, cf. Acts 6:2-4. Therefore, those men selected by the

congregation, the Apostles put *in charge* (given authority to organize and administer their appointed task) so that they could better see to their own responsibilities. Think about some implications of these things:

1. Elders are not responsible to do all the *feeding* of the flock (though qualified to do so, 1Tim.3:2), but are responsible to see that it is done appropriately.
2. Elders are not responsible to “keep the checkbook/bank account,” but are responsible to see that it is done appropriately. Sadly, in many people’s view, the Elders *mind the money* and the preacher tends to the *spiritual matters* of the flock. This is surely wrong on both counts!
3. Elders are not responsible to determine or administer every case of benevolence, but are responsible to see that it is done appropriately.
4. Etc. Etc. Etc.

Elders who will avoid the temptation to *micro-manage* every work in the congregation will find they have more time and energy to concentrate on the *spiritual* safety, provision, and well being of it.

As we’ve seen with other duties of Elders, they necessarily imply a reciprocal responsibility on the part of the congregation. If Elders are to *oversee*, then members must be willing to not only be *seen*, but also *overseen*. That is, church members have the obligation to make themselves available to the Elders, and be willing to work under their oversight.

It is good for Elders to know not only *where* each member lives, but also *how* they live. Elders and members alike typically fail in this regard. This kind of personal contact will allow for opportunities to discuss individual *abilities* and *capabilities* so that member can be better utilized to the benefit of the congregation. It will also allow a more private setting for the discussion of the individual member’s *limitations* and *needs* so that he can be specifically assisted to overcome them- again, to his, and the congregation’s benefit. Admittedly, such interaction is difficult and time-consuming, but, if Elders will commit themselves to the work, and members will allow them access to their personal lives, the benefits can be exponential for the congregation and its work.

- **Be *shepherds*, v.28c.** *Shepherd* is translated from the Greek term *poimaino-* to *tend, guide, help, feed, rule, or govern*. In my judgment, there is no other term that more completely outlines the duty of spiritual leadership than this one. The role of a biblical *Shepherd* is so abundantly demonstrated through the images conjured by several texts (e.g. Psalm 23; John 10; *et al*), and by the personal example of the Great Shepherd, 1Pet:5:5ff, that one would be truly negligent to miss the obvious duties implied by the term. Therefore, let’s consider at least some of the more critical ones:
 - *Compassion and genuine concern* for the sheep, Matt.9:36; John 10:10-13; 1Pet.5:2;
 - *Feeding and/or providing sustenance* for the sheep, Acts 20:31-32; Psalm 23:1-2; 1Thess.5:12b; Titus 1:9a;
 - *Protection and guidance*, Acts 20:28a; Heb.13:17; Psalm 23:2b-5; Titus 1:9b-11;

- *Example and leadership*, 1Pet.5:3; 1Tim.3:4-5;
- *Support* (administer to the sick) and *admonish*, Acts 20:35; Jas.5:14ff; 1Thess.5:12ff; and in general,
- Faithfully and earnestly *tend* the flock for the *Owner*, John 10:10ff; 1Pet.5:2ff.

As with the other duties of Bishops, the obligations of a *Shepherd* necessarily imply some reciprocal obligations of the *sheep*:

- If the *Shepherd* is to have and manifest *compassion* and *genuine concern* for the *sheep*, they, in turn, should *appreciate* and *esteem* them because of their work, 1Thess.5:12-13;
- If the *Shepherd* is to *feed* and *provide sustenance* for the *sheep*, they, in turn, should *desire to eat* and *grow*, 1Pet.2:1-2; Heb.5:12 – 6:2; Eph.4:11-16;
- If the *Shepherd* is to *protect* and *guide* the *sheep*, they, in turn, should *trust* and *submit*, 1Tim.3:1-6; Titus 1:6-9; Heb.13:17;

There is a common misconception that it seems appropriate to here address. The misconception is that members should only submit to Elders in “matters of faith”- those things clearly spelled out in the Scriptures. While Elders should never take advantage of their position and its incumbent authority to *lord* their opinions in matters of judgment over the flock, it is also true that these men are qualified by, and appointed because of, their wisdom and judgment. Such should surely be *esteemed*, *valued*, and *followed*. It must be understood that *submission* (Greek, *hupotasso*) is literally to *arrange* (oneself) *under* the control of another. If there is agreement- as there certainly should be in “matters of faith,” *submission* is not really an issue. It is only when there is disagreement- as in “matters of judgment,” that *submission* is tested, and in turn, proven.

- If the *Shepherd* is to be an *exemplary leader* for the *sheep*, they, in turn, should *heed his example* through *emulation* and by *following*, 1Thess.5:12-13a → 13b-22;
 - If the *Shepherd* is to *support* and *admonish* the *sheep*, they, in turn, should not *hide their illnesses/needs* and be willing to receive *admonishment* gracefully, Heb.13:17b; cp. 1Tim.2:11; and,
 - If the *Shepherd* is to *faithfully* and *earnestly tend* the *sheep*, they, in turn, should likewise be *faithful* and *earnest* in their dedication to their fellow sheep, their Elders, and the Cause of Christ, Eph.4:11-16.
- **Be properly motivated, vv.33-34.** Being elevated to a position of authority always makes the Elder vulnerable to “*thinking more highly of himself than he ought to think*,” cf. Rom.12:3. Then too, if one is being compensated financially for his work in the office, (which 1Tim.5:17-18 says is entirely acceptable and appropriate), there is the added risk of being tempted to utilize the office for personal gain, cp. Matt.10:8-10 and 1Tim.6:5; or to *tickle the ears* of those under his control, cp. 2Tim.4:1-4. All of which underscores the importance of the Elder

being properly motivated by *genuine concern* for, and *selfless dedication* to those allotted to his care, cf. John 10:12-13.

As the Elder must take care that he is properly motivated to discharge the duties of the office, those under his leadership should be equally concerned with their own motivations. Are they, in thought, emotion, and action, truly concerned for the *good of the body* of Christ, or their own *personal interests*, Phil.2:1-4; 1Cor.12:4-31 → 1Cor.13:1-7?

- **Be diligent, v.35.** The office of Presbyter is not an honorary title, but a work of service that must be characterized by *diligent* and *hard* work. Those considering whether or not they truly “*aspire to the office*” (1Tim.3:1) would do well to seriously note this fact in their deliberations and personal assessments.

Personally, as one who has served as both preacher and Elder for a few years now, I am often asked what it is like to wear both “hats.” My typical response is, “You get less sleep!” (Additionally, when a church member comes to me for advice or counsel, I usually begin the conversation by asking whether they are coming to me as their *friend* and *brother*, their *preacher*, or one of their *Elders*, and then respond accordingly.) While even the *properly motivated* and *diligent* Elder does not equally share Paul’s “*daily pressure...of concern for all the churches*” (2Cor.11:28), he does have a deep and abiding concern for ***all the members of the congregation that he serves!*** If he is unwilling or unable to meet that emotional, physical, and decidedly spiritual responsibility with the necessary diligence to shoulder it, he should not serve. In short, it takes *dedicated diligence* of heart, mind, and body to serve in the office of an Elder. Thus, waiting until a man has “one foot in the grave” to decide he is qualified is unfair, both to him and the congregation.

We have noted several times previously the reciprocal responsibility of the members under the Elders’ leadership to *appreciate* and *esteem* them highly “*because of their work*,” 1Thess.5:12-13. Elders who are indeed qualified, would ask primarily that the members of the congregation reciprocate this dedication and diligence.

While these things probably do not comprise a complete list of the duties of the office, hopefully they do provide a basis or framework for additional consideration and investigation of the subject.

Session IV:

The Duties of Elders:
What Elders Can't Do For The
Congregation and Its Members

Session IV Considerations

Scriptural Leadership and Problems

A congregation being scripturally organized through having *identified, selected, and appointed* qualified men to serve as Elders has a great advantages.

Obviously and firstly, it means that the congregation is mature enough to not only have perceived the *need* for Elders, but that it is also advanced enough to have *appointed* them. This indicates that the congregation understands the wisdom of God (cf. Acts 14:23) in this matter, and is willing to work to be pleasing to Him in this and other regards, Eph.5:10.

Being scripturally organized also means that the congregation has men of knowledge, wisdom, and experience leading it, and watching for the souls of those within that fellowship. The “men’s business meeting,” which otherwise typically prevails as a substitute for a scriptural Eldership, has a very difficult time fulfilling these roles. This is because a “men’s business meeting” is comprised of men of varying degrees of knowledge and abilities, but who all nonetheless “get a vote” in the direction, management, and control of the church. It is a sad reality that men who attend worship and bible study services only sporadically, and are involved in the actual work of the congregation only as it is convenient to them, often make a decided effort to attend all these meetings to “get their say” in, and wind up unduly influencing the overall direction (or lack thereof) of, the body. So, without the leadership of qualified men, the congregation usually *aims at no real spiritual goal, and invariably hits it every time!*

But, having *selected and appointed* scriptural Elders does not eliminate all of the problems a congregation may face which are inherent with any group of people. Why? There is a simple reason: **Having a scripturally appointed Eldership absolves no one of their individual responsibilities to God, or one another.** Thus, failures in these areas will still cause problems and conflicts within the local church. Having scripturally qualified men leading a congregation does not eliminate all problems, but it does provide the advantage of having men of wisdom and experience to help resolve them! Certainly good leadership from qualified men can help the congregation to avoid many pitfalls and problems, but will not eliminate them all.

It seems appropriate, then, to also include in our considerations the necessary *limitations* of an Eldership so that they, or the congregation, aren’t led into misguided expectations.

What Elders Can’t Do for a Congregation, or Individuals in It

Though there likely are several worthy considerations under this heading, we will consider only three, with some sub-points under them.

1. Elders cannot *disobey God* for anyone.

This may seem (and even *be*) a strange place to start, but the same Book binds Elders as it does everyone else. It cannot, therefore, be *bent* or otherwise *set aside* for anyone- the Elder, or any other member.

The Elder’s first duty is always to maintain *personal purity and devotion* to God, Acts 20:28a. Like everyone else, he must constantly *examine* himself in the *mirror of God’s word*, 2Cor.13:5; Jas.1:23-25. He also has the added responsibility of being

an “*example to the flock*,” 1Pet.5:3b. If these things are not done, he is of little benefit to anyone else.

It necessarily follows that the Elder (or Eldership) cannot disobey God’s word *for* anyone else either. This means that there must be no preferential treatment, or *rule bending*, for his family, his fellow Elder(s), the preacher, the Deacons, or any member of the congregation (whether he is particularly close to them or not). *Impartiality* is not specifically named among the qualifications of an Elder, but it is certainly implied by, and required in, several of them and in his duties, cf. Jas.2:2-10. Therefore, Elders must be, and must work to be, everyone’s Elders- not just the Elders of the faithful, the influential, friends, or family, but everyone.

It also seems appropriate here, since we are discussing the impropriety of an Elder disobeying God *for* someone, to mention another related matter. **Elders are not, and neither are they required to be, *sinless*.** 1John 1:8 applies to Shepherds as it does to everyone else. Certainly, these men are to be exemplary in all aspects of their faith and conduct, but should neither be required nor expected to be “sinless.” The qualification of being “*above reproach*” (1Tim.3:2) means that the Elder (or candidate) should have no *lingering* or *on-going* issue with a particular sin. The word (*anepileptos*) basically refers to being *irreproachable*, or *not open to censure* because of *continual* sin, cf. 1Tim.5:20. In this regard, he is no different than Deacons, preachers, widows, or any Christian, cf. 1Tim.3:10; 6:13-14; 5:7; 1Cor.1:8; and Col.1:22 (where all are commanded to be “*above reproach*”). Elders are still men, and as such, will surely make mistakes *individually*, and perhaps even *collectively*. They will need encouragement then too, as they, like everyone else, strive to repent and do and be better.

2. Neither can Elders obey God for anyone.

Being in a congregation that has the notable benefits of having scripturally appointed men to serve, and even being in proper subjection to these men, does not absolve any member of their personal responsibilities toward spiritual *growth*, *maturity*, and *reproduction*, or *helping fellow members* toward the same. Think about it:

- Submission to *parents* does not remove personal responsibility, Eph.6:1-3;
- Submission to a *husband* does not remove personal responsibility, 1Pet.3:1-6; 1Cor.7:12-16;
- Submission to *government* does not remove personal responsibility, 1Pet.2:13-17; Acts 5:29; and
- Submission to *employers* does not remove personal responsibility, 1Pet.2:18-20.

So why would anyone assume that having qualified and appointed men to serve the congregation somehow absolves anyone of the same personal responsibilities to obey the Lord in all things that they had previously, cf. Rev.3:4; 3John 9-10→11?

Members still have the same responsibilities toward one another, even in regard to *spiritual/sin* issues, whether they have appointed Elders or not, Matt.18:15-17; Gal.6:1-4; 1Thess.5:12-13→14.

Thus, Elders will not (and in fact, *cannot*) obey God for anyone, nor do they absolve anyone from their own personal responsibilities, Gal.6:5; 2Cor.5:10; Matt.25:31-46. They should, however:

- Help members by providing a *proper church environment* that is conducive to growth, 1Thess.5:15. However, this only helps if the individual avails himself of those opportunities through diligent attendance and active participation.
- Help members by providing *essential nutrients* from God's word as fuel for growth, 1Tim.3:15. But again, the individual member must be willing to *eat, digest, and exercise* to attain the benefit.
- Help members by providing *personal encouragement* through example, wise counsel, and even discipline, Heb.12:11-16. These efforts will avail little, however, if members do not desire growth and discipline individually.

No one can be forced to obey God, or will be dragged into heaven against their will. Elders must remember that their purpose is to *lead sheep* rather than to *drive cattle*. Jesus did not beg or force people to follow Him or obey God- good Elders will take this to heart.

3. Elders cannot study God's word for anyone.

This point is certainly connected to the previous one, and may even be somewhat redundant to it. But the diligent *study* of God's word is the foundation of true knowledge; and *true knowledge* is the basis of faith, Rom.10:17 → 2Pet.1:2-4.

However knowledgeable and wise an Eldership may be in the Scriptures, such in no way should be taken as an excuse for the membership under them to take the "ostrich" approach of sticking their heads in the sand. Spiritual *growth, maturity, and reproduction* never occur by mere osmosis (gradual absorption through a membrane {or in this case, a *member's brain*} typically from a higher to a lower concentration to produce some state of equilibrium).

We all need to learn the lesson of Prov.14:4,6 in this regard. The point is that it requires considerable effort to care for an ox, but the ox, when properly cared for, can produce *much increase*. Don't get ahead of me on this point- Elders are not the *oxen!* *Knowledge* is the *ox*, v.6. If one will give due diligence to study the word of God to gain knowledge and wisdom, *much increase* will result from the effort, 2Tim.2:15.

Though good Elders can greatly assist the process, personal *growth* is still directly tied to personal *knowledge* of God's word, which in turn, is directly linked to personal *study* of God's word, and personal *commitment* to its application. Elders simply cannot "do" any of these for any member, but should obviously help just the same.

Conclusion

Certainly, members should rightfully expect to be benefited by the wisdom and experience of the men they *select* and *appoint* as Shepherds. But, this does not absolve them of personal responsibilities toward God, each other, or the Elders. Elders can't be Christians for anyone else, or replace their consciences, nor can they lead *sheep* to the *green pastures* of heaven against their will.

It is perhaps a vast oversimplification to say that the job of the Elders of any congregation is to *move the flock toward heaven*, but this seems to best encapsulate their primary duty. How much more pleasant the task is when *the sheep* truly want to go, and are willing to follow their *Shepherds* there, Heb.13:17; 10:19-25.

The primary goals of this study were to:

1. Help alleviate at least some of the controversy and division over the qualifications by which Elders are *selected*;
2. Provide a scriptural, logical, reasonable, and fair *process* by which Elders could be *selected* and *appointed*; and,
3. Shed some light on the oft-neglected aspect of the *duties* and *limitations* of Elders.

To what degree these objectives have been reached is, as always, largely determined by the student. May God help us all to be logical in our interpretations, reasonable in our applications, and scriptural in all things.

Appendix

The following compilation of the qualifications from 1Timothy 3 and Titus 1 was either found or (I think) created and provided by our beloved brother, **Kurt Martin**, to assist in this study.

Our grateful appreciation for his contribution is hereby tendered, though unfortunately, it is done so posthumously.