

Biblical Expectations for Elders & Deacons

Elders must be exceptional in regards to family life and character (a devoted husband, good leader of his family with obedient children; not arrogant, quick-tempered, indulgent, violent, or greedy, but hospitable, suitable to teach, loving good, prudent, well-behaved, fair, gentle, peaceable, devout, temperate, and self-controlled).

I Timothy 3:1-5

It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do. An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not addicted to wine or pugnacious, but gentle, peaceable, free from the love of money. He must be one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity (but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?)

Titus 1:5-8

For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city as I directed you, namely, if any man is above reproach, the husband of one wife, having children who believe, not accused of dissipation or rebellion. For the overseer must be above reproach as God's steward, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not addicted to wine, not pugnacious, not fond of sordid gain, but hospitable, loving what is good, sensible, just, devout, self-controlled...¹

Elders must have experience and maturity in the faith and a good reputation in the world, so that they avoid the traps of the devil.

I Timothy 3:6-7

...and not a new convert, so that he will not become conceited and fall into the condemnation incurred by the devil. And he must have a good reputation with those outside the church, so that he will not fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.

Elders must firmly grasp biblical truth, so that they can exhort and refute others according to sound doctrine.

Titus 1:9

... holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict.

¹ Notice that the term 'elder' and the term 'overseer' are used interchangeably indicating a single position in the church.

Elders are empowered by the Holy Spirit to oversee and shepherd the church.

Acts 20:17, 28

From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church... "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood."

Elders should shepherd and oversee the church willingly, with pure motives, by example, and without seeking personal gain.

I Peter 5:1-3

Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock.

Elders deserve the respect of the church and are called to public accountability.²

I Timothy 5:17-20

The elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, "YOU SHALL NOT MUZZLE THE OX WHILE HE IS THRESHING," and "The laborer is worthy of his wages." Do not receive an accusation against an elder except on the basis of two or three witnesses. Those who continue in sin, rebuke in the presence of all, so that the rest also will be fearful of sinning.

Elders care for the needs of individual people in the church.

James 5:14

Is anyone among you sick? Then he must call for the elders of the church and they are to pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.

² This passage also seems to indicate a sub-category of elder that preaches regularly and receives a wage (what we call a pastor).

Deacons must be exceptional in regards to character, commitment to the faith, and family life (dignified; not insincere, indulgent or greedy; whole-heartedly committed to and experienced in the faith; a devoted husband and a good leader of his family).³

I Timothy 3:8-10, 12-13

Deacons likewise must be men of dignity, not double-tongued, or addicted to much wine or fond of sordid gain, but holding to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. These men must also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons if they are beyond reproach... Deacons must be husbands of only one wife, and good managers of their children and their own households. For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a high standing and great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.

Deacons serve the church by relieving the elders of those responsibilities which distract them from their primary concerns.⁴

Acts 6:1-4

Now at this time while the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic Jews against the native Hebrews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving of food. So the twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples and said, "It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables. Therefore, brethren, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word."

³ 'Deacon' is a transliteration of the Greek word 'diaconos' meaning 'servant.'

⁴ It should be noted, that the title 'deacon' is not used in this passage. Furthermore, apostles, not elders, are named as the primary caretakers of the church. Because of the early stage in the development of the church, the formal positions of elders and deacons were not yet in use. However, the situation is still informative by way of analogy.

Responsibilities of Elders

1. Elders will have final responsibility and authority to lead and shepherd the church.
2. Elders will determine and implement overall church vision, strategy, and plans.
3. Elders will fulfill all the responsibilities of their designated areas of ministry (i.e. life groups, hospitality, outreach, discipleship, etc.).
4. Elders will diagnose and treat the overall spiritual health of the church body and individuals, addressing areas of overt disobedience with biblical church discipline for the purpose of restoration.
5. Elders will support, foster, and articulate a correct understanding of biblical truth as stated in the Expanded Doctrinal Statement.
6. Elders will invest in purposeful relationships for the sake of accountability, encouragement, and stirring gifts.
7. Elders will commit to regularly pray for the needs of the church and individuals.
8. Elders will meet together at least once a month and an additional time each month with the Deacons.

Responsibilities of Deacons

1. Deacons will support the Elders in managing the ministry of the church.
2. Deacons will take part in implementing the church vision, strategy, and plans.
3. Deacons will fulfill all the responsibilities of their designated areas of ministry (i.e. finances, facilities, children, worship, etc.).
4. Deacons will commit to regularly pray for the needs of the church.
5. Deacons will meet at least once a month with the Elders and other Deacons.