“How Should Elders Be Appointed in the Church?”

In the biblical point of view who is supposed to appoint a person to become an elder? Is it the pastor, the board of elders or the congregation?

First, let me recommend an excellent resource on the topic of leaders and leadership in the church. Dr. Gene Getz has written a book titled Elders and Leaders: God’s Plan for Leading the Church (Moody Press, 2003). It is his view, and mine, that God has given us considerable freedom in how we govern our local congregations, both in organizational structure and in the number and the appointment method of elders/leaders. Far less flexible, or perhaps I should say far more important is the character and maturity required for someone to be considered qualified to be a leader in the church.

The Bible uses two terms interchangeably to describe the leadership position in the early church. In the earliest days of the church, the Greek term *presbuteroi* (elder) was consistently used. This is the same Greek word used by the Jews to describe elders within the Jewish community. By the time of Christ, every Roman city with a significant number of Jews had a council called the Sanhedrin composed of twenty-three elders. There was also a “Great Sanhedrin” in Jerusalem comprised of priests, scribes, Pharisees, and Sadducees. Although the term “elder” was borrowed from the Jewish community, the role of “elder” in the church was quite different from an “elder” in the Jewish faith. Later, the term *episkopoi* (overseer/bishop) is used by the Bible to describe leaders. This term was more familiar to Gentile believers. The Romans used the title to refer to a superintendent or leader of a colony. When there were both Jewish and Gentile believers present, the Bible uses both terms (elder and overseers) to

signify the leadership function.

The key is not the term used, but the function that these men served in the church. How these men were selected also varied. In some cases they were chosen directly by Paul and Barnabas. Timothy and Titus are given instructions by Paul regarding how they were to select elders and what qualifications were to be used. Apollos is another example of one who most likely appointed elders/overseers in the churches. Beyond these early examples of Apostolic appointment by Paul and those he approved of, we have no clear model for the selection process. Both the appointment method by existing leaders and forms of congregational selection coexisted into the future. There are some indications that self-appointed leaders existed in the early church as well. Titus 1:11 mentions an example of a leader that was causing problems by teaching things he ought not to teach.

I believe that both appointed and congregationally chosen methods are permissible as long as the qualifications for elder/overseer are taken seriously. The form of selection and the name or title given leaders is secondary to the function that they are to perform.

Don Closson

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"I Have Some Questions About Women in the Church"

Dear Sue,

I have read your answer to email "Should Women Be Pastors?"

and have a few questions for you.

- **Do you believe a woman can teach a man under any circumstances?**
- **Do you believe women can be preachers?**
- **Do you believe women can be elders?**
- **Do you believe women can be deacons?**
- **Are there any limitations for women in scripture?**
- **Do you belong to any church (congregation)?**

Hello _____,

> *1. Do you believe a woman can teach a man under any circumstances?*

If a pastor or the spiritual leaders of a congregation ask a woman to come in under their authority and address a topic on their behalf, and if she maintains an attitude of submission and humility in the process mindful of the restrictions of 1 Tim. 2:12 ("But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man"), I think a case can be made for it. Also, if a woman is teaching women and a man wants to come in and listen, I think that's fine since the scriptures do not prohibit a man from learning from a woman. The problem, as I understand it, is for a woman to be in a position of spiritual authority over men.

I like how the Council for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood puts this: "The teaching inappropriate for a woman is the teaching of men in settings or ways that dishonor the calling of men to bear the primary responsibility for teaching and leadership. This primary responsibility is to be carried by the pastors or elders." (www.cbmw.org/Questions-and-Answers)

> *2. Do you believe women can be preachers?*

Absolutely—to other women. The Women of Faith conferences are a good example of that.

3. Do you believe women can be elders?

No. 1 Tim. 3:2 states the requirement of elders being the husband of one wife. It is limited to men. The biblical pattern of spiritual leadership and authority in the church is of male leadership.

4. Do you believe women can be deacons?

Yes, but this is not a hill I'm willing to die on. Romans 16:1 commends Phoebe as a servant of God, which can also be translated "deacon." It also seems to me that 1 Tim. 3:8-13, which describes the qualifications for deacon, can and does include women.

Even if they're not called deacons, a lot of women serve the Lord through serving the church. This is how much of the work gets done, and since we are all called to service in one way or another, the needs of God's people are met. People hung up on titles are focusing on the wrong thing; if we're focused on loving and serving Jesus, it doesn't matter if someone else puts a label on it. Personally, I believe a lot of women will receive the reward of "Well done, good and faithful servant" from the Lord regardless of whether they were ever called deacons or not.

5. Are there any limitations for women in scripture?

1 Timothy 2:11-15
restricts women from teaching or exercising authority over men.

1 Corinthians 14:34-36
says that women are to be silent in the churches in a spirit of submission. My understanding is that this protects the orderliness of the worship and teaching times from the disruptions of inquisitive and verbal women. It also helps us

to maintain an attitude of submission to the Lord and to the church leadership. However, 1 Cor. 11:5 permits women to pray and prophesy, so TOTAL silence is not what the above passage is prescribing. This call to silence is about not dishonoring the role of men as leaders of the congregation.

1 Corinthians 11:2-16
teaches male headship in the marriage relationship and male leadership in the church.

6. Do you belong to any church (congregation)?

Yes, I'm a member of Watermark Community Church in Dallas, Texas.

Sue Bohlin

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See Also *Probe Answers Our E-Mail:*
• Should Women Be Pastors?
• So Are All Women Pastors Deceived and Going to Hell?
• Your Position Against Women Pastors Is Outdated

"What Is the Job Description of a Deacon?"

Greetings! I would like to receive some godly insight as to the job description of a deacon.

I have heard from the pulpit of my church that a deacon has the duties of counseling others within the church, as well as teaching. Is this biblical? Please give scriptures. The preacher stated the deacon is ordained but the Bible says that a deacon is appointed. The preacher stated that a deacon can counsel people, making reference to Jethro appointing men to help with counsel to free up Moses… These men, were't they elders and not deacons?

Thanks for your question! The term "deacon" comes from the Greek term *diakonos*, and simply means "minister" or "servant". It is used often in the New Testament in the general sense of one who serves. However, in a few passages it is used to refer to those occupying a particular position of service in the early church (see Phil. 1:1 and 1 Tim. 3:8-13).

The qualifications for serving as a deacon in the church are spelled out in 1 Tim. 3:8-13. Neither counseling nor teaching are specifically mentioned as duties of deacons, nor is the ability to do so stated as a requirement for becoming a deacon. While an elder must be able to teach (1 Tim. 3:2), this requirement is not specified of deacons. Nevertheless, since deacons were to hold "to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience", it seems that a certain amount of biblical and theological knowledge may have been required to serve as a deacon. This may indicate that, if necessary, a deacon should be both intellectually and spiritually prepared to minister in such a capacity. However, this is not explicitly stated.

Some believe that the office of deacon originated in Jerusalem by order of the Apostles (Acts 6). Although the Greek term *diakonos* is not used of the Seven in this passage, they do seem to have performed at least some of the duties typically associated with the office of a deacon (e.g. the distribution of food in vv. 1-3). If the office of deacon originated in Acts 6, there may be some basis for official ordination to this office in v. 6. The dictionary on my desk defines ordain, at least in part, in this manner: "officially appoint or

consecrate as a minister in a Christian church". Thus, depending on how one defines the terms "ordain" and "appoint", they could be used somewhat interchangeably.

Also worth noting, if Acts 6 does refer to the appointment of the first deacons, there were two who had ministries which were much more extensive than may have been required of deacons. Stephen was quite a teacher, preacher and debater (Acts 6:9-10 and Acts 7), while Philip was quite an evangelist (Acts 8:4-5, etc.). While such gifts may not have been required to serve as a deacon, it seems clear that one who possessed gifts of teaching, evangelism, counseling, etc. could serve as a deacon. Since the requirements to serve as a deacon were primarily moral in nature, anyone meeting these requirements could serve as a deacon, whatever their spiritual gifts might have been.

As for the account of Jethro counseling Moses in Exodus 18, my own view would be as follows: First, while Jethro did counsel Moses (v. 19) to appoint judges to assist him in handling disputes between the people (vv. 21-26), he is actually described as a "priest" (v. 1) and not a deacon. Second, in my opinion, the Church (including its offices of elder and deacon) did not formally begin until the Day of Pentecost as described in Acts 2. While the men appointed by Moses to help judge the Israelites may have had moral qualifications similar to those required of both elders and deacons in the New Testament, nevertheless, strictly speaking I do not think that they should be understood as such in the context of Exodus 18. It makes sense that there should be similar moral qualifications required of those who would lead God's people, but I do not think we should view the "judges" in Exodus 18 as "elders" or "deacons" in the New Testament sense. The former were leaders of Israel; the latter are leaders of the Church. There are certainly similarities between the two, but there are differences as well.

In summary, let me briefly answer your questions this way:

First, while a deacon may be competent both to counsel and to teach, neither are specifically required of deacons in the New Testament. Second, there could be evidence for the ordination (or appointment) of deacons to their official task in Acts 6:6. Finally, while the example of Jethro, Moses, and the appointment of judges in Exodus 18 certainly offers some important principles for understanding the necessity of appointing spiritually and morally qualified leaders to assist in the effective ministry of the Church, nevertheless, I personally do not think we should equate the ministry of these "judges" of Israel with that of elders and deacons in the local church. Strictly speaking, if the church began on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2, I think we should primarily glean our understanding of the qualifications and requirements for serving as elders and deacons in the local church from those New Testament passages which specifically address this issue (e.g. 1 Tim. 3:1-13; Tit. 1:5-9; Acts 6; etc.).

Hope this helps. God bless you!

Michael Gleghorn
Probe Ministries