

Paul's stated purpose for writing to Timothy is contained in verses 3:14 & 15.

These things write I unto thee, hoping to come unto thee shortly: 15 But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.

Accordingly in chapter 3:1-13 Paul continues his instructions regarding the normal conduct and activities of brothers and sisters in Christ in the assembly setting. He focuses on necessary guides and helps for the saints in the local assembly. These men and women are not listed among the spiritual gifts of the Spirit any more than there is a gift for prayer. They may have spiritual gifts but that is not what qualifies them for their work.

ELDER, BISHOP, OVERSEER, SHEPHERD are all different terms for the same person and activity. Three Greek words are used for these persons. God has provided these to guide, guard, lead and care for the flock and the individual sheep that comprise it. They are always mentioned in the plural. There are to be more than one in each assembly and they mostly act within the confines of the local assembly. Luke, in The Acts, records that apostles went about appointing **elders** in the various Gentile assemblies they visited. The apostle Paul also delegated this responsibility to Titus on one specific occasion in a specific country, Crete. Though he presents scriptural qualifications and disqualifications for overseers he does not authorize or request Timothy to appoint elders over the assembly. Neither does he authorize or suggest the assembly itself appoint overseers/elders over themselves. Then how did men become elders/overseers? Through the Holy Spirit!

Acts 20:28 Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. [or: blood of His Own]

He moves brothers to desire the oversight as 1Timothy 3:1 indicates. Reading the description of an overseer there, they themselves will know pretty well if they are qualified or are unqualified. They also will feel very inadequate for the job. But such are to pursue it by faith relying on the Lord. The Spirit makes evident to the godly who their local overseers are. These godly brothers have earned the respect of the assembly and are recognized by their diligent care and concern for the flock. The norm seems to be that any man should, as he grows older in years, also grow in Christian maturity and grow progressively into the role of

spiritual elder in a local assembly. Sadly some believers grow older but remain immature spiritually. Others mature spiritually but have somewhere along the way become unqualified to be an overseer/elder. The need for local oversight is certainly not lacking.

DEACONS and deaconesses (Romans 16:1) are those needed to serve the earthly, physical needs of the local assembly and to carry out the decisions of the assembly regarding these needs and the needs of individuals that have become of concern to the assembly. They provide such "menial" services as waiting tables, janitorial duties, setting up chairs, repairs, providing for accommodations and meals for out of town guests and the like. Those who take responsible custody and accounting of funds received by the assembly and distribution of funds as directed by the assembly are deacons. (Two or more should handle this task to avoid accusations of impropriety.)

The local assembly seems to be free to invite/request the voluntary services of one or more persons to serve it as **deacons and deaconess'**. These are to prove themselves capable, trustworthy and faithful. Faithfulness in even menial service can lead to greater faith and action. Stephen, who was among seven chosen to give out food to widows in the local assembly in Jerusalem, later became a bold witness and the first martyr for Christ.

13 For they that have used the office of a deacon well purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.

The descriptions given of these saints (deacons and overseers) for service is what every believer would yearn to be. And many turn out to be so. All should. But sin and failure can mar a person's reputation for life even though forgiven, accepted, and considered by all to be in good standing in the assembly. He may be fully at liberty to participate in the various meetings and to minister the word and preach the gospel. But he is not to be a overseer or a deacon.

The marks of an overseer and a deacon are quite similar and largely self explanatory. Godliness faith, faithfulness, trust, respect, reliability, caring, experienced, moderate, peaceful, self denying, they addict themselves to the care of the assembly.

1Corinthians 16:15 I beseech you, brethren, (ye know the house of Stephanas, that it is the firstfruits of Achaia, and that they have addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints,)

1Timothy 3:2 A **bishop** then must be:

1. blameless,
2. the husband of one wife,
3. vigilant,
4. sober,
5. of good behavior,
6. given to hospitality,
7. apt to teach,
8. not given to wine,
9. no striker,
10. not greedy of filthy lucre,
11. patient,
12. not a brawler,
13. not covetous,
14. one that rules well his own house,
15. having his children in subjection with all gravity;
16. not a novice,
17. have a good report of them which are without.

Matthew 25:23 *His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.*

The **elder**'s reputation within the assembly and in the outside world is to be not only blameless (nothing in their lives that someone can accuse them of), but credible, respectable and admirable. Gentle but firm. Someone worthy of confidence with matters of a personal nature. Someone who has walked with the Lord and can bring experience and the scriptures to bear. An elder is not only someone to whom you can bring a question or problem, but one to whom we should give the liberty to seek us out with encouragement or an admonition. He deals with believer's souls and their spiritual needs, growth and protection. Aspire to the oversight. If younger make this one of your life goals, in addition to developing and using what ever spiritual gifts the Lord has given you.

3:8 Likewise must the **deacons** be

1. grave,
2. not doubletongued,
3. not given to much wine,
4. not greedy of filthy lucre,
5. holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience,
6. found blameless,
7. sober,
8. faithful in all things,
9. husband of one wife,
10. ruling their children and their own houses well,
11. first proved; then allowed to serve as deacons.

Their wives

1. grave,
2. not slanderers.

Romans 16:1 *I commend unto you Phebe our sister, which is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea: 2 That ye receive her in the Lord, as becometh saints, and that ye assist her in whatsoever business she hath need of you: for she hath been a succourer of many, and of myself also.*

1Timothy 5:9 *Let not a widow be taken into the number under threescore years old, having been the wife of one man, 10 Well reported of for good works; if she have brought up children, if she have lodged strangers, if she have washed the saints' feet, if she have relieved the afflicted, if she have diligently followed every good work.*

The **deacon's (and deaconess')** reputation is of a more practical nature eliciting trust and confidence as to his motivation and motives. He takes people and responsibilities seriously and treats others well. Selflessly helpful, reliable, thorough, prompt and competent for the work undertaken. A personal life that is godly and blameless comes first. Unsaved people might mistakenly attend a church and devote themselves to helping there as a means to get to heaven. The assembly is to guard against accepting persons as deacons who are merely using their work for the Lord to earn salvation, approval of the Lord or of men. Colossians 3:23 *And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men;* There is much to do and many hands make light work.