

CHURCH.

LESSON 17

1	PRAYER
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Group leader. *Pray* for God's guidance through his Spirit, for awareness of his presence and for listening to his voice. Commit your group and this lesson about church building to the Lord.

2	SHARING (20 minutes) <i>[QUIET TIMES]</i> EPHESIANS 6 and PHILIPPIANS 1 - 2
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Take turns and **share** (or **read** from your notes) in short what you have learned from one of your quiet times out of the assigned Bible passages (Ephesians 6 and Philippians 1-2).

Listen to the person sharing, take him serious and accept him. Do not discuss what he shares. Take notes.

3	MEMORISATION (5 minutes) <i>[PREPARATION FOR CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE]</i> (5) MATTHEW 6:33
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Review two by two.

(5) Right priorities: Matthew 6:33. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

4	TEACHING (85 minutes) <i>[CHURCH CEREMONY]</i> COMMISSIONING OF CHURCH LEADERS
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Introduce. See Manual 3, lesson 34 (Bible study 1 Peter 5:1-7), Manual 4, lesson 47 (Teaching: The characteristics of a Christian leader) and manual 4, supplement 20 (Teaching: Deacons). This teaching is about the commissioning of Church leaders, that is, the commissioning (ordination, induction, consecration) of elders (including priests/pastors/reverends/church leaders). Remember, a congregation may consist of several house fellowships (house churches) functioning under a body of elders.

By appointing leaders "an office" is accorded to them. "An office" (the word is related to "a trade" in the Dutch language) in the Bible is a public task or ministry to which Christ and the elders of the church call and appoint (induct) a person. Examples of offices are: elder (priest), missionary (apostle), preacher (prophet), pastor (shepherd), evangelist, teacher, deacon, group leader, youth leader, etc. Besides the office of elder these offices are NOT the leaders of the congregation, but function in their tasks under the supervision of the body (board) of elders!

An office is a ministry to execute a particular task and to which responsibilities, authority and trust is accorded, with the obligation/expectation to be accountable. It is not a position above other Christians, because leadership in the Bible is always shared leadership and servant leadership in contrast to individuals who want to be authoritarian and controlling.

We will first summarise the compulsory requirements and tasks of the elders and then learn how they are to be chosen and appointed (ordained, inducted) as the leaders in the church.

A. THE BIBLICAL QUALIFICATIONS OF ELDERS

Read 1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:6-9.

Discover and discuss. What are the biblical requirements or qualifications for elders?

Notes. Men may only be chosen and appointed as elders when they fulfil the following biblical requirements.

The qualifications for elders may be divided into three parts:

1. His personal behaviour.

With regard to his desires, feelings and temperament, he must be self-controlled. With regard to money, he must be honest and not make the gathering of earthly possessions his goal.

2. His family life.

With regard to women, he must be an example of faithfulness to his wife. If he is unmarried, he must be an example of purity towards all women. With regard to his children, he must lead them to trust and obey Christ and to respect their parents.

3. His ministry abilities.

With regard to maturity, he must not be a recent convert or an immature Christian. With regard to the Bible, he must hold to sound Christian doctrine and be able to use the Bible to preach, teach and guide people.

B. THE BIBLICAL TASKS OF ELDERS

1. The first task of the elders is to be shepherds or pastors of God's flock.

Read Acts 20:28-31; 1 Peter 5:2.

Discover and discuss. What does it mean to be shepherds or pastors and overseers of the congregation?

Notes. The elders are appointed to be the pastors or shepherds (Greek: *poimenas*) and the overseers (Greek: *episkopoi*, bishops) of the church, just as Jesus Christ is the Good Shepherd, Chief-Shepherd and Overseer (Bishop) of the worldwide Church (1 Peter 2:25; Psalm 23). Together as a team the elders must shepherd (Greek: *poimainó*) and oversee (Greek: *episkopeó*) the members of the church, that is, feed, protect, care and lead them so that they thrive and grow. Together the elders are responsible for the weak and needy members (as the widows, orphans, refugees, and new converts) (1 Timothy 5:16). Together they pray for the sick (James 5:14-15). Together they guard against false teachers, authoritarian leaders and wolves who try to mislead the sheep of the flock (Acts 20:29-31). Every elder is also an overseer over the other elders (Acts 20:28). In this way all Christians, including the leaders stand in a responsibility and accountability relationship to one another. The elders must execute their task, not from a position that lords it over others, but as servants (cf. washing the feet in John 13:12-16). No congregation in the Bible had just one pastor. All the elders in the board of elders are shepherds/pastors with several different pastoral duties.

2. The second task of the elders is to be stewards of God's household.

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:12-15; 1 Timothy 3:5; 5:17; Titus 1:7.

Discover and discuss. What does it mean to be stewards of the congregation?

Notes. The elders are appointed to be the leaders (Greek: *prohistamenoi*) and the managers (Greek: *oikonomoi*) of the church. Together as a team the elders direct and manage (Greek: *prohistémi*) especially the activities and possessions of the church as a household (Greek: *oikos*). This is the task of the elders and not of the deacons.

- In Thessalonians and Timothy, the task of the elders is described as “to rule, direct or manage” in the sense of “to lead by going in front” or “to set the example” (Greek: *prohistémi*).
- In Titus, the task of the elders is described as “to be a steward, manager or administrator” (Greek: *oikonomos*) of a household (Greek: *oikos*).

However, the leadership style of elders may not be one of lording it over those entrusted to them. They must lead by example (1 Peter 5:2-3). If an elder does not manage his family well (1 Timothy 3:4-5) or his wife or children need more attention, then he should change his priority or resign as an elder in order to give his family what they need. There must be a balance in his life with respect to all his responsibilities.

The following functions with regard to people and activities fall under the leadership and management of the elders. Of course the elders will have to delegate some tasks to church members, but the elders remain responsible for these tasks to the Lord and to the council of elders!

(1) The elders lead the meetings of the church.

They promote and lead the weekly gatherings such as the worship service and the smaller gatherings in groups for Bible Study, prayer and fellowship (Acts 2:42). They promote and lead also the special meetings such as baptism and the Lord's Supper, the church festivals, marriages, funerals, house visitations and meetings to equip the members.

(2) The elders lead the missionary task of the church.

They stimulate the members to pray for people in the world (1 Timothy 2:1-2), to have good influence in society (Matthew 5:14-16) and to do evangelism, within the family and beyond (Matthew 10:32-37; Acts 5:42). They promote missions to other provinces and countries. They support churches that are oppressed and persecuted and other Christian organisations (Romans 15:23-24; Philippians 1:5; 4:15-16; 3 John 5-8) (Read 2 Corinthians 8).

(3) The elders lead the training programmes of the church.

They lead the group preparing people for confession and baptism. They take care of all follow-up of new believers and see to it that all the members in the church are made disciples of Christ and are equipped to do different kinds of service in the worldwide Body of Christ (Ephesians 4:11-14). They take care of the training of leaders in the following groups: evangelism, disciple making, missions, Sunday schools, teenager and youth clubs, pastoral care and poor relief and other groups.

(4) The elders see to it that the members function well.

They spur members on to love in relationships, good works in activities and faithfulness in the mutual gatherings (Hebrews 10:24-25). They urge members to take on a task which Christ assigns and fits their talents and spiritual gifts. They help members to discover their talents and spiritual gifts and to serve others with these. They are responsible for the conduct of the members and for order in the use of gifts (Romans 12:3-8; 1 Corinthians 12:4-7; 14:26-40; 1 Thessalonians 5:19-21; 1 Timothy 4:14; 2 Timothy 1:6; 1 John 4:1). They stimulate personal help to members (Acts 18:24-28). They warn, admonish, correct and encourage members patiently and through education (2 Timothy 4:1-5;

Titus 2:15). They organise the necessary pastoral care within the church (1 Thessalonians 5:12-15). And they take care of church discipline (Matthew 18:15-17; cf. 1 Corinthians 5:9-13).

3. The third task of the elders is to be teachers of God's Word.

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:12; 1 Timothy 3:2; 5:17 and Titus 1:9.

Discover and discuss. What does it mean to be teachers of God's Word in the congregation?

Notes. The elders are appointed to be the teachers (Greek: didaskaloi) in the church. Together as a team they use the Bible to preach, teach, advise, warn and encourage.

(1) The responsibilities of the body or council of elders is to use the Bible:

- to preach God's Word to non-Christians and Christians alike (1 Timothy 5:17).
- to discuss Jesus Christ with non-Christians and Christians alike (Acts 17:1-4,11).
- to instruct the members of the church in the whole will of God as it is revealed in the Bible (Acts 20:20,27).
- to teach the members to obey the commandments and teachings of Jesus Christ (Matthew 28:20).
- to imprint God's Word in the minds and hearts of members, to admonish believers, to encourage the timid, to warn those who are idle and to gently instruct those who oppose them (Colossians 3:16; 1 Thessalonians 5:12-15; 2 Timothy 2:23-26).
- to formulate doctrine (Acts 15; 2 Timothy 1:13)
- to refute false teachings (Titus 1:9). Etc.

(2) Elders are not necessarily trained in a theological institute or appointed to be fulltime.

The elders in the New Testament were generally not full-time pastors, preachers or teachers. Nevertheless, elders "must be able to teach" (1 Timothy 3:2) and "must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it" (Titus 1:9)!

Some elders in the New Testament were mainly preachers and teachers (1 Timothy 5:17), but the Bible does not say that they were appointed fulltime! The Bible knows nothing about modern phenomenon of theological seminaries and Bible schools. The Bible does not teach that only the elders, who have received a formal training in a theological seminary or Bible school, have authority or competence to preach and teach the Word of God. All Christians are exhorted to teach God's Word to others and admonish one another (Colossians 3:16; cf. Matthew 28:19).

Although some Christians regard people like Timothy and Titus to be like modern fulltime pastors of a congregation, they were more than that. They travelled widely with the apostle Paul and were much more his co-workers or missionaries than pastors! Even Timothy and Titus were not trained in modern theological seminaries or Bible schools, but received an on-the-job-training from the apostle Paul, just like the apostles had received an on-the-job-training from Jesus Christ!

(3) Elders that are young in age have authority.

Although a submissive attitude is necessary for both older and younger men towards one another in the (1 Peter 5:5), based on their office the younger elders have received the responsibility and authority to teach, correct and rebuke all the members in the congregation, the elderly and, if necessary, the elders that are older in age (1 Timothy 1:3-5; 4:11-13; 5:20; 2 Timothy 2:22-26). Nevertheless, all elders must treat one another with respect (1 Timothy 3:2; 5:1-2; Titus 1:7).

4. The fourth task of the elders is to be servants of God and people.

Read. In Matthew 20:25-28 Jesus teaches, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you, must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave – just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many." And in 1 Peter 5:1-3 the apostle Peter teaches, "To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow-elder. ... Be shepherds (Greek: poimante) of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers (Greek: episkopountes) – not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over (Greek: katakurieuó) those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock."

Discover and discuss. What is the responsibility of the elders in the church?

Notes. The elders are appointed to be servants (Greek: diakonoi) and not to be rulers over the church. Together as a team the elders are an example of being servants, of people *willing to do the lowest tasks in the church* (as washing the dirty feet) *and to voluntarily do the tasks which others do not want to do or cannot do*. They are eager to carry out tasks for the wellbeing of others.

Serving is not only a task/responsibility, but also the characteristic attitude and life-style of the elders of the church (1 Corinthians 3:5)! The word "servant" is a summary of all his responsibilities and must always remind the elders to carry out their responsibilities as shepherds of the members, as managers of their activities and as teachers of God's Word, not from a position of lording it over others, but from a position of being their servants! Jesus Christ is the Chief-Shepherd and Bishop of the worldwide Church (1 Peter 2:25), the Master and Ruler of every Christian (John 13:13) and the King of all kings in the world (Revelation 19:16). Yet, he gave to his apostles, to all other leaders in the Church and

to all leaders in the world the example of being the humblest Servant, so that they all would do what he did for them (John 13:14-15)! Serving (that is washing feet) is a summary of the life-style of elders and is precisely the opposite of the leadership style of the leaders of the world. The elders are the willing, voluntary and eager servants of God to people! Jesus Christ as well as the apostle Peter forbids the leaders among Christians to lord it over the people God has entrusted to them. Instead of leading them by giving commands to them, the leaders among Christians must lead by walking in the front and by setting the example. Instead of demanding that the members serve the leaders, the leaders must serve the members so that that they can be their best for Christ and give their best to Christ (Mark 10:45; Luke 22:25-27).

C. THE APPOINTMENT OF ELDERS (INCLUDING PASTORS)

Introduce. Every congregation should follow the principles of the Bible in choosing and appointing elders (including church leaders, pastors, priests, reverends, directors/managers, teachers and other church leaders).

1. The basis for choosing elders.

Read 1 Timothy 3:14-15; 3:1-7.

Discover and discuss. On which basis must elders be chosen?

Notes. Elders must be chosen on the basis of the Bible and their performance in the church.

(1) The Bible.

The selection of elders must be based on the biblical qualifications and abilities to do the biblical tasks (1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9; 1 Peter 5:1-4).

(2) Demonstration.

The men, who are already demonstrating their leadership abilities by the way they live and serve (Luke 16:10) and by the way God blesses their ministry (2 Corinthians 10:18; Philippians 2:22), are the best candidates for the office of elder. Nobody may appoint himself as an elder (or pastor) in a church. A brother may volunteer to serve as an elder, but he must qualify and the congregation must be willing to choose and appoint him (1 Timothy 3:1).

2. The choosing of elders in the New Testament Jewish churches.

Read Acts 2:42; Acts 6:1-4; 1 Peter 5:1; 3 John 1.

Discover and discuss. How were the elders of the New Testament Jewish churches chosen?

Notes. In the New Testament period after Pentecost, the first band of disciples developed into the first local church in Jerusalem. More churches came into being among the Jews and Samaritans (Acts 8:4-5; Acts 9:31; Acts 11:19; James 1:1; 5:14). The first elders in the church of Jerusalem were most probably selected from the same class of men as during the Old Testament period, namely, from the heads of families and other men of influence in Israel. They were most likely chosen by the believers just as the deacons were chosen (cf. Acts 6:1-7). Luke (Acts 6:4), Peter (1 Peter 5:1) and John (3 John 1) make it clear that the apostles of Jesus Christ definitely functioned as *elders* in local churches. They functioned as “fellow-elders” (1 Peter 5:1) and not in any position above other elders. The primary tasks of elders in the local churches were prayer and the ministry of the Word (Acts 6:4).

3. The choosing of elders in the New Testament non-Jewish churches.

Read Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5.

Discover and discuss. How were the elders of the New Testament non-Jewish churches chosen?

Notes. The Jewish Christians before 34 A.D. (Acts 8:4; 11:20), the apostle Paul since 37 A.D. (Acts 9:30; 15:12; 14:23) and the apostle Peter since 40 A.D. (Acts 10) and their co-workers founded the first churches among the non-Jewish nations. Compare this with modern missionaries and church planters. The writings of the apostles clearly teach that elders were chosen to lead the churches (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5). In the New Testament there was never just one elder (priest, leader, pastor, reverend, teacher, etc.) in a congregation, but always a plural number of elders, a council of elders that directed the affairs of the congregation (1 Timothy 4:14). The elders also had to keep watch on one another’s lives and ministry (Acts 20:28).

(1) The appointment of elders in new churches.

In new churches that were established, the apostles and their co-workers (the missionaries) appointed the first elders (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5).

(2) The appointment of elders in established churches.

In the established churches, the existing council of elders led the church members to appoint the new elders. Because the members of the church took part in making proposals for the choosing of an apostle (Acts 1:15-26) and in actually choosing the deacons (Acts 6:1-7), it seems probable that they also took part in the choosing of the elders. This already happened during the Old Testament (Deuteronomy 1:13; Numbers 11:16-17). However, the existing council of elders guided the choice of the members by calling attention to the necessary qualifications and tasks required by the Bible (Acts 6:2-4).

(3) Appointment of elders that are bearing fruit.

In the New Testament, it was the apostles, their co-workers and the members of the local congregation who recognised those who had already been raised up and qualified by the Holy Spirit to perform the functions of elders (Acts 20:28), and who had given evidence of this in their lives and service (2 Corinthians 10:18; Luke 16:10-12).

- In Luke 16:10 Jesus says, “Whoever can be trusted with very little (one or a small responsibility) can also be trusted with much (more and larger responsibilities)”
- In 2 Corinthians 10:18 Paul says, “It is not the one who commends himself who is approved, but the one whom the Lord commends.”

(4) Appointment of elders not by democratic voting.

Elders were chosen, not by (democratic) voting, but in accordance with:

- the biblical requirements for elders
- the biblical skills to carry out the biblical tasks
- and how their lives and ministries within the church is already functioning and a blessing for others.

They were chosen with general approval and agreement of the members of the congregation with respect to these principles and appointed (inducted) by the existing leaders (initially the missionaries and later the existing council of elders)

In Acts 14:23 the elders were “chosen by raising hands” (Greek: cheirotoneó) as was done in the legislative assembly of Athens. But the word “chosen” cannot mean “democratic voting” (one man one vote), because only Paul and Barnabas were the two subjects here, just as only God was the subject in Acts 10:41! The word does not mean more than “appoint”. In Titus 1:5 the word means “appoint (Greek: kathistémi) to the office of an elder” The word does *not have a formal ecclesiastical ordination in mind*, but the appointment to an office with responsibility and authority, with trust and accountability that is acknowledged by church members in every city.

4. The commissioning of elders.

Read Acts 14:23; 1 Timothy 5:22.

Discover and discuss. How were elders commissioned in the New Testament?

Notes.

(1) Elders must promise to be faithful to the sound doctrine.

Titus 1:9 says: An elder “must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.” Before the laying on of hands and the speaking of a prayer of blessing over the newly appointed elders in the presence of the whole congregation, the elders should be able to give an answer to the following questions:

- Do you confess Jesus Christ as your Saviour and Lord?
- Do you believe that the Bible is God’s Word and the absolute standard for Christian doctrine and life?
- Do you believe that Jesus Christ called you to this office of being an elder?
- Do you promise to do your task faithfully and in dependence of Jesus Christ?
- Are you willing to submit yourself to the Lord Jesus Christ, to the Bible, to the regulations or statutes of the congregation, to the council of elders and, if necessary, to the discipline of the congregation?

Every newly appointed elder should be able to answer these questions positively.

(2) Elders are entrusted to God’s care and protection by prayer and the laying on of hands.

The laying on of hands does not cause the transmission of a spiritual gift, because only the Holy Spirit himself distributes spiritual gifts as he pleases (1 Corinthians 12:11). The laying on of hands symbolises the transfer of authority and spiritual gifts that are needed to perform their responsibilities (cf. Acts 6:6; 1 Timothy 4:14; 2 Timothy 1:6). But the Bible warns against the over-hasty laying on of hands (appointment of elders)!

5. The term of office for elders.

Read Acts 6:3-6; 8:4-5 and 21:8.

Discover and discuss. How long should every elder’s term of office be?

Notes.

(1) The Bible.

The Bible relates that the apostles Peter and John were not elders in the Jerusalem congregation for their whole lives. However, the Bible makes no mention about how long the elders stayed in office. Therefore, each local congregation may make a wise decision about the length of the elders’ term of office.

(2) Practical.

However, in order to safeguard against the abuse of this office, a limited term of office is advisable. This practise protects the congregation against wrong leaders who do not want to resign; it gives the hardworking elders an opportunity to rest for a term; and it gives other believers with different leadership abilities a chance to serve as elders in the congregation.

Many congregations limit the term of office for elders to about four years. About once a year a quarter of the elders stand down and new elders are chosen and appointed in their place. This practice guarantees continuity within the council of elders. Of course, an elder serving well may be re-elected for a second term.

D. OTHER IMPORTANT MATTERS THAT CONCERN THE ELDERS

1. The special honour and financial support of elders.

Read 1 Timothy 5:17-18; 1 Corinthians 9:14; Galatians 6:6; 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13.

Discover and discuss. What does the New Testament teach about the special honour and the financial support of elders?

Notes.

(1) Elders may not demand financial support.

The Bible teaches that “The elders who direct the affairs of the church well, are worthy of double honour, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching”. This means, that they must not only receive respect and honour, but also have the right to receive financial support if necessary. However, no elder (pastor) may demand financial support, because he should serve willingly and not be greedy for money (1 Peter 5:2). Lay elders and fulltime elders that have been exempted from earning their own support, must serve the church willingly and voluntarily without a hint of loving money.

(2) Give financial support to elders who do their task well.

Nevertheless, a church must support an elder who is doing his task “well” and needs support (1 Corinthians 9:14; Galatians 6:6). However, 1 Timothy 5:17-18 does not justify the modern distinction between fulltime elders (pastors, priests, reverends, leaders) who have received an education at a Theological Seminary or Bible School and have therefore received a higher status (position) (and a salary) on the one hand and lay elders that have not received such an education on the other hand! This Bible passage distinguishes between elders (including pastors, church leaders) who do their task “well” (sic!) and elders (including pastors and church leaders) who do not do their task well! Only those who do their task well, have the right to receive support. But even though they have the right to receive support, they may not demand support from the church, because they should be dependent on Christ and not on people, also for their support (James 1:17).

2. The authority of elders.

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13; Hebrews 13:7,17; 1 Peter 5:1-6.

Discover and discuss. What does the New Testament teach about the authority of the elders?

Notes.

(1) The authority of elders originates with God.

All seven authority–submission relationships have been instituted by God. A person who rebels against such an authority, rebels against God and will bring God’s judgement on himself (Romans 13:1-2).

The church members of the congregation should obey the elders, but only in the areas of their tasks (1 Thessalonians 5:12-13; Hebrews 13:17).

(2) The authority of elders is limited.

There are seven institutions with authority in the Bible:

- God has absolute authority over everyone and everything (Revelation 1:5; 19:16).
- Man has authority over the creation (Genesis 1:28).
- Men have authority over women in the area of marriage (Ephesians 5:22-24) and in the church (1 Timothy 2:11-12; 1 Corinthians 14:33-36).
- Parents have authority over their children (Ephesians 6:1-4).
- The government has authority over its citizens (Romans 13:1-7).
- Employers have authority over their employees (Ephesians 6:5-9).
- The elders have authority over the members of the church (1 Thessalonians 5:12-13; Hebrews 13:7,17).

All institutions of authority, except that of God are limited (Isaiah 9:6; Philippians 2:9-11). Elders have received authority from God, but only in the areas of their biblical tasks. The authority an elder really has, is dependent on the example of how he lives, of his faith and his ministry of the Word (Hebrews 13:7). The members of the church may not obey an elder (pastor, church leader) who abuses his authority (2 John 1:10-11; Acts 4:19-20; Acts 5:29)!

The authority to save (deliver) (John 3:17), to transform (2 Corinthians 3:18), to use (Acts 9:15) and to bless (John 15:5) people, belongs only to Jesus Christ! Likewise, the authority to guide people through the Word (Psalm 119:105; Ephesians 6:17) and the Spirit (John 16:13), to give spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 12:11), to assign specific tasks inside the congregation and in the worldwide Church (Mark 13:34; 1 Corinthians 3:5-6) and to call to specific ministries (Galatians 2:8-9), ultimately rests with Jesus Christ and not with the elders.

The body of elders may ask any believer to prayerfully consider taking up a task in the congregation, but may not force him or appoint him against his will. But all members must fulfil their specific calling and task within the church under the council of elders.

3. The responsibility and accountability of elders.

Read Acts 14:27; 20:28; 1 Timothy 5:19-22; Hebrews 13:17.

Discover and discuss. What does the New Testament teach about the responsibility and the accountability of the elders?

Notes.

(1) Elders are responsible for:

- how they walk with God (Genesis 5:22; Psalm 16:8; Psalm 27:4; believe and obey God’s Word (Acts 13:22)
- how they behave in their family, congregation and society
- how they execute their God-given tasks as shepherds (overseers), stewards, teachers and servants.

(2) Elders are accountable to:

- to Jesus Christ (Hebrews 13:17)
- to one another in the body of elders (Acts 20:28)
- to the whole congregation with regard to the tasks assigned to them by the general meeting of the church (Acts 14:27).

Elders, who sin, must be disciplined (1 Timothy 5:19-20).

4. The priorities of elders.

Read Proverbs 23:4-5; Ecclesiastes 3:1; 8:5-6; John 15:5; 1 Timothy 3:4-5; Titus 1:6.

Discover and discuss. What about priorities and order?

Notes.

(1) Elders must have priorities and stick to them.

The Bible teaches that there is a time for everything. Elders have more responsibilities than merely responsibilities in the congregation. They have a personal responsibility to fellowship with and learn from Jesus Christ. They have the responsibility to earn their daily support, but with restraint with respect to working overtime or making money. They have a personal responsibility to manage their own families well. The tasks of the elders within the congregation must never become so time consuming or burdensome that the elders neglect their other God-given responsibilities! Moreover, the elders should watch one another’s lives (Acts 20:28) and if an elder is not functioning as he should, he should be helped or resign. If he refuses to resign, he should be discharged (fired).

(2) Elders must see to it that everything is done in an orderly way.

Elders are taught to lead the church in the sense that all the God-given tasks in the church are sufficiently and orderly carried out (1 Corinthians 14:40). The council of elders consists mainly of lay elders, but one or two of them may function as fulltime elders. The Bible determines their qualifications and tasks. All elders share the responsibilities of being shepherds (pastors) of the members, the directors/managers of the activities within the church and the preachers and teachers of God’s Word. It is wise to limit the number of responsibilities and tasks of the elders, to limit his term of office and to see to it that he takes off a few years before he may be appointed again.

E. THE APPOINTMENT OF DEACONS

According to the New Testament not every local church needs deacons (cf. manual 4, supplement 20).

5	PRAYER (8 minutes) <i>[REACTIONS]</i> PRAYER IN RESPONSE TO GOD’S WORD
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Take turns in the group to pray short to God in response to what you have learned today.
Or divide the group into two’s or three’s and pray to God in response to what you have learned today.

6	PREPARATION (2 minutes) <i>[ASSIGNMENT]</i> FOR NEXT LESSON
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(Group leader. Give the group members this preparation for at home in writing or let them copy it down).

1. **Commitment.** Be committed to make disciples and build Christ’s Church.
2. **Preach, teach or study the teaching** of “Commissioning church leaders” together with another person or group of people.
3. **Personal time with God.** Have a quiet time from half a chapter of Philipians 3 – 4 and Colossians 1 – 2 each day. Make use of the favourite truth method. Make notes.

4. Memorisation. Review series F: "Christian preparation for marriage".
(1) Both believers (2 Corinthians 6:14); (2) Same life-goals (Amos 3:3); (3) Self-control (1 Thessalonians 4:3-5);
(4) The right time (Ecclesiastes 8:5b-6a); (5) The right priorities (Matthew 6:33).
5. Bible study. Prepare the next Bible study at home. John 7. Make use of the five steps method of Bible study.
6. Prayer. Pray for someone or something specific this week and see what God is doing (Psalm 5:3).
7. Update your notebook on building Christ's Church. Include your notes on personal time with God, your memorisation notes, your teaching notes and this preparation.