

(T) Welcome to **Discipleship training On The Air**. In this teaching series you may learn to become a disciple of Jesus Christ. Two teachers will teach from the Bible what is a disciple of Jesus Christ. As you listen to this programme, make notes in a notebook or record the programme. Today's teaching is: A DISCIPLE UNDERSTANDS THE CHARACTERISTICS OF A CHRISTIAN LEADER. We will concentrate on leadership in the local church in the New Testament. We will consider the foundational leaders of the Church, which are Christ and the apostles as well as the institutionalised leaders of the Church, which are the elders and only sometimes also deacons.

(S)      **POINT 1. THE LEADERS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH**

**First. Jesus Christ.** According to Matthew 16:18 and Ephesians 1:22, Jesus Christ is the Founder, Builder, Owner and Head of the Christian Church. He is the Head of the Church worldwide and of every local church. He exercises his authority in the Church through the Bible, the Holy Spirit and the body of elders in each local church. Christ gave the Church its constitution, that is, fundamental teachings according to which the Church should be governed. These teachings are embodied in the New Testament.

**Second. The apostles of Christ.** According to Ephesians 2:19-20, the apostles of Christ were a unique group of people, because they were chosen, called equipped and sent forth by Jesus Christ. They were the eyewitnesses of his death and resurrection. They were endowed with a special measure of the Holy Spirit in order to proclaim the truth in the beginning of the Church history, to record this truth in the New Testament books they wrote and to plant the first local churches everywhere. They were given authority to include or exclude people from God's kingdom, to formulate doctrine for the whole Church and to appoint the first institutionalised leaders of the local churches among the non-Jews (Gentiles). The apostles of Christ consisted of the eleven disciples of Jesus Christ and the apostle Paul. They have no successors, because nobody in the following ages would qualify according to the requirements stated in Acts 1:21-22.

(T)      **Third. The body of elders. One. Elders in the Old Testament.** Elders led already God's Old Testament people. They were originally selected on the basis of their capability, their fear of God, their trustworthiness, their hatred of dishonest gain (Ex 18:17-26), their leadership (Num 11:16-17), their wisdom, their understanding and the respect that they commanded (Dt 1:9-18). Their tasks were to be officials over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens of the people and especially to serve as judges for the people at all times.

**Two. Elders in the Jewish Christian churches.** In the New Testament period, after Pentecost, as the first band of disciples became a new community of God, that is, a local Christian church, the Christian elders were most probably selected from the same class of men as during the Old Testament period, namely, the heads of families and other men of influence. 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 the local Christian communities or churches. The primary tasks of elders in the local Christian community were prayer and the ministry of the Word.

**Three. Elders in the Gentile Christian churches.** According to Acts 14:23 and Titus 1:5 the apostles and their co-workers founded new Christian churches in the non-Jewish (Gentile) nations, just like modern missionaries and church-planters do. Because the Gentile communities did not have elders, the apostles and their co-workers appointed *elders* in every local Christian church. The elders were appointed for leadership of the local Christian community or church, as the writings of the apostles clearly teach. There was never just one elder in a church, but always a group of elders, called a *body of elders* that directed the affairs of the local Christian church (1 Tim 4:14). Today we might call such a body of elders a *board of elders* or a *council of elders*.

(S)      **Four. Terminology.** According to Acts 20:17,28, Titus 1:5-7 and 1 Peter 5:1-4, all the *elders* were called *overseers* and *shepherds*. This clearly shows that in the New Testament the three words *elders*, *overseers* and *shepherds* referred to one and the same group of leaders, namely, *the body of elders*. In later centuries, these three words developed into a hierarchy of leaders in which the *overseers* or *bishops* were placed over the *elders* or *priests* and the *deacons* formed the lowest rank. However, in the New Testament, there was no hierarchy of leaders! The term *elder* expresses the leader's spiritual maturity and experience as well as the greater respect he commands. The terms *overseer* and *shepherd* describe the nature of the elder's tasks. All the elders in a church should be *pastors* or *shepherds* as well as *bishops* or *overseers* of the church! All the elders have pastoral, teaching and managerial functions.

(T)      **POINT 2. THE QUALIFICATIONS OF THE ELDERS**

According to 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:6-9, the elders had to meet certain requirements.

**First. The personal behaviour of elders.** With regard to his desires and temperament, an elder must be self-controlled. With regard to money, he must be honest and not make gathering earthly possessions his goal.

Second. The family life of elders. With regard to women, an elder must be an example of faithfulness to his wife as his one and only marriage-partner. 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 respect parents.

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

**(S) POINT 3. THE TASKS OF THE ELDERS**

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

This is taught in Acts 20:28-31, 1 Timothy 5:16, James 5:14-15 and 1 Peter 5:1-4. As pastors or shepherds, the elders are entrusted with *the task of shepherding the PEOPLE of the local church*. They have the responsibility to oversee the local church just as Jesus, the Good Shepherd, oversees the whole Church in the world. Together the elders feed, protect, care and guide the members of the local church with a view to their spiritual growth and well-being. Together the elders have the duty to show concern and loving care to the really needy members of the local church, like orphans, widows and new converts. They visit and pray for the sick. Together the elders are wide-awake against false teachers and sheep stealers. Every elder oversees or keeps watch over the other elders as well as over the members of the local church. In this way, both members as well as elders stand in an accountability relationship to somebody else. The elders as pastors should exercise their task, not as a matter of assuming a position, but rather as a duty. Also there should not be just one pastor (or priest) for every local church. Everyone of *the body of elders* should be a pastor or shepherd.

**(T) The second task of the elders is to be *stewards* of God's household.**

This is taught in 1 Thessalonians 5:12-15, 1 Timothy 3:5, 1 Timothy 5:17 and Titus 1:7. As stewards, the elders are entrusted with the task of *directing and managing the ACTIVITIES AND POSSESSIONS of the local church*. The elders, and not the deacons, should direct the affairs of the local church. 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 give direction by example*. In Titus, the task of the elders is described as *to be a steward, manager or administrator* of a household. However, the leadership style of elders may not be one of lording it over those entrusted to them, but one of leading by example. If an elder does not manage his family well or his wife or children need more attention, then he should 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.

**(S) The body of elders should direct or manage the following functions or activities.**

**One. The elders should manage the functioning of the local church in its own meetings.** They promote and lead both the regular and special meetings. The regular meetings are for example the worship services on the Lord's Day and the meetings in small groups for Bible study, prayer and fellowship (Acts 2:42). The special meetings are for example baptism and the Lord's Supper, festivals like Easter, marriages and funerals, visitations, caring and equipping meetings as well as meetings for spiritual warfare against the kingdom of darkness.

**(T) Two. The elders should manage the functioning of the local church in the world.** They promote and lead the following activities. They encourage the church members to do evangelism in their own families and neighbourhood, to have a Christian witness in the local culture and institutions, like schools, societies and government (Matthew 5:13-16; 10:32-37; Acts 5:42) and to pray for all kinds of people in the world (1 Timothy 2:1-2). They support missionary work to other provinces and nations, Christian organisations with special goals and needy churches in other places (Romans 16:23-24; Philippians 1:5; 4:15-16; 3 John 5-8; 2 Corinthians 8).

**(S) Three. The elders should manage the functioning of the training programmes in the local church.** They promote and lead the following activities. They organise the making of disciples in their church. All the members ought to grow to maturity in Christ. They organise the equipping of all the members for their different works of service (Ephesians 4:11-16). They organise baptism classes, teaching classes for children, youth, adults and the elderly and workgroups for evangelism.

**(T) Four. The elders should manage the personal functioning of the members as Christians.** They promote and oversee personal help. They urge all the members to have love in their relationships and good deeds in their activities (Hebrews 10:24-25). They correct, rebuke and especially encourage the members with great patience and careful instruction (2 Timothy 4:1-5; Titus 2:15). They organise the counselling of all members who have problems and hurts (1 Thessalonians 5:12-15). They exercise discipline towards all members who commit grave sins (Matthew 18:15-17).

**(S) Five. The elders should manage the personal functioning of the members in their different tasks.** They promote and lead the following activities. They encourage all the members of the local church to function in different works of service, in accordance with the tasks that Christ assigned and the spiritual gifts that he has given to each of them. They help them to discover their spiritual gifts or abilities and give them opportunities to function with their tasks and gifts. This includes stirring up to life (fanning into flame), discerning, testing, limiting and overseeing the orderly functioning of the spiritual gifts according to the teaching of the Bible (1 Tim 4:14; 2 Tim 1:6; 1 Thes 5:19-21; 1 Cor 12:10; 1 John 4:1; 1 Cor 14:26-40).

**(T) The third task of the elders is to be teachers of God's Word.**

As teachers, the elders are entrusted with the task of USING THE BIBLE *to preach, teach, advise and admonish people*. 1 Timothy 3:2 says, "An overseer ... must be *able to teach*." 1 Timothy 5:17 says, "The elders ... especially those whose work is *preaching and teaching*." And 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*." This task includes every task that involves the Bible. As teachers, the elders should use the Bible to instruct the members of the local church in the whole will of God (Acts 20:27) and in anything that would be helpful (Acts 20:20). They should teach them to obey all that Jesus Christ has commanded (Mat.28:19). They should *admonish or imprint* God's words in the minds and hearts of believers (Col 3:16). They should *teach, encourage and warn* Christians (1 Thes 5:12-15). They should *discuss and decide doctrinal issues* and *refute* false teachings (Act 15; 2 Tim 1:13). And they should also *preach and teach* God's Word to non-Christians (Acts 17:1-4,10-12).

**(S) The fourth task of the elders is to be servants of God and people.**

This is taught in Matthew 20:25-28 and 1 Peter 5:2-3. As servants, the elders are entrusted with the task of serving God and people willingly, freely and eagerly. As servants, the elders carry out tasks for *the benefit of others*. To serve is not only *a task*, but also *a distinguishing feature* of the elders. It summarises God's required leadership style for elders. The leadership style of all the leaders in the church should be radically different from the leadership style of the leaders in the world. The elders should serve willingly, freely and eagerly. Both Jesus Christ and the apostle Peter forbid the leaders in the church *to lord it over* the people, whom Jesus Christ entrusted to them. Instead, the church leaders should be examples to the believers in the church. Instead of leading the members by commands, the elders should lead by walking in front of the believers. Instead of demanding to be served by the members, the elders should serve the members (Mark 10:45; Luke 22:25-27).

**(T) POINT 5. THE APPOINTMENT OF ELDERS**

When a church needs elders, how should they go about in selecting and appointing these elders?

**First. Selection of elders.** The selection of elders must be based on the biblical qualifications and requirements to do the biblical tasks. Those who are already demonstrating their leadership abilities by the way they live and serve are the best candidates.

**(S) Second. Appointment of elders.** For new churches, the missionaries who planted the churches appointed the elders. For the established churches, the existing elders together with the believers appointed elders. Because the believers took part in making proposals for choosing of an apostle and in actually choosing deacons, it seems probable that they also took part in the choosing of elders. However, the existing elders guided the choice of the believers by calling attention to the necessary qualifications and tasks required by the Bible. Elders were chosen, not by voting, but in accordance with the biblical instructions and with general approval of the members of the church. The church never made decisions by democracy, but by consensus (general approval and agreement)!

**(T) Third. Honour and wages of elders.** 1 Timothy 5:17-18 says, "The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honour, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, "Do not muzzle the ox while it is treading out the grain", and "The worker deserves his wages." This passage does not justify the modern distinction that *full-time seminary trained pastors* have a higher status than the lay elders, because the issue is not position or training, but ruling with excellence.

**(S) Fourth. Term of office for elders.** There is no mention in the Bible about how long the elders stayed in office. Therefore, each church may make a wise decision about the term of office. However, in order to safeguard against abuse of this office, a limited term of office is advisable. This also gives other leaders with different strengths a turn to serve.

**(T) Fifth. Commission of elders.** Elders were entrusted to the Lord's care and protection with prayer and laying on of hands, symbolising the transfer of authority and spiritual gifts.

**(S) Sixth. Authority and accountability of elders.** Elders have authority in the areas of their tasks, as assigned by God in the Bible and Christians should obey them. However, elders have limited authority, because the authority to save, change, use and bless people, to guide through the Word and the Spirit, to give spiritual gifts, to assign specific tasks and to call to specific ministries, ultimately rests with Jesus Christ and not with the elders. Moreover, the authority of elders is dependent on their way of life, their faith and their ministry of the Word. Christians should not obey elders or pastors who abuse their authority. Elders are directly accountable to Christ and to one another. Elders who sin, must be disciplined.

**(T) POINT 6. ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK**

**First.** If you are a leader, then evaluate your qualifications and tasks with what the Bible teaches.

**Second.** See the workbooks "Go and make disciples" and Internet on www. Etc.

**Third.** Listen on short wave radio every SATURDAY to WEDNESDAY to "Discipleship training on the air".