

## **The Biblical Qualifications for Elder – Floyd Nolen Jones, Th.D., Ph.D.**

In today's Church setting, the question of the woman's role regarding positions of authority and responsibility is constantly being addressed. The reason this issue never becomes settled is because modern Christendom will not submit itself to the Word of God – especially in this matter. Instead, the Church as a whole has compromised with society's secular views with regard to the rights and role of all women everywhere. Such says that women have the same authority and responsibility as men. Now this is disastrous for the family, the Church, and the world. Holy Scripture is absolutely clear about the issue.

But first, the fact that the Creator has chosen different responsibilities for men and women should not be seen as an inferior-superior relationship. It is merely that of different God intended roles – nothing more. And such should be obvious from the differences in the physiological makeup of the two. Moreover, God's decision that the wife was to be under the husband's authority has nothing whatsoever to do with IQ, education etc. Many wives are more intellectually gifted than their mate, but this has nothing to do with God's government.

The Lord's organization chart is simple and straightforward: "But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God" (1 Cor. 11:3, KJB. Note: these are titles, not proper names). This is enlarged upon elsewhere in the New Testament: "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as it is fit in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives, and be not bitter against them. Children, obey your parents in all things: for this is well pleasing unto the Lord" (Col. 3:18-20). Here, the child's proper position in the chain of authority is made clear. Common sense tells us that God got this part right.

But then it would seem that God really stirs up the pot for in Ephesians 5:22–24 He adds: "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the savior of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing." Note that all authority is given by God and is a consequence flowing from His wisdom and sovereign choice.

But "wives submit" and "the husband is the head of the wife" – the fallen nature of mankind (the body and soul without a live spirit that we all have inherited from Adam) is naturally rebellious against any and all authority being over us. Almost every woman that reads these words recoils from deep within. Indeed, the very word and/or concept of either man, woman, or child submitting to anyone is totally foreign and intolerable to this fallen nature. However, this is because almost no one understands or appreciates the wonder, wisdom, and majesty entwined in the God-given concept of "authority."

The person whose title appears above another's in the previous 1 Corinthians 11:3 passage has certain responsibilities to all that appear below theirs. As revealed all throughout Scripture, these mainly are "to protect and provide for in love" – and this is especially true with regard to the one whose title immediately follows theirs. Now this is wonderful! The man reads this and now understands that it's up to Christ to protect and provide for him (as well as those below him). Knowing this makes it far easier for the husband to submit to the savior's will and plan for his life. This doesn't mean he will always agree with or instantly obey as he should, but as this concept begins to sink in, rebelliousness slowly subsides and the man will begin to enjoy the benefits of authority rather than the flipside – its discipline.

Similarly, the man is obviously stronger, larger, and faster than the wife so that he can protect and provide for her. Undeniably, the woman's main needs are love and security. From the biblical standpoint, it's up to the husband to meet those needs. If these are done, it will be much easier for her to submit to his God-given authority.

Of course, a problem rears its ugly head up when anyone in the chain abuses this authority. This is especially noted when the husband (or teacher or boss, parent, judge, policeman, politician etc.)

discharges their authority in the manner of an oriental despot. Thus, we see that it takes faith, much faith, in God's plan as executed through His "organization chart" for the wife to submit – yet such is her *duty* (Robert E. Lee said duty was the most sublime word in the English language: although not true, it's close to it).

But now let's look at the other side of 1 Corinthians 11:3: "Husbands, love your wives, and be not bitter against them." As precious, adorable, and darling as girls are – why does our Lord find it necessary to have to command the husband to love the wife. Even more shocking, He knows the man must also be commanded to not be bitter toward her. And how can this be? Because it is precisely at this point the great Mexican standoff is encountered. Despite all that has been said above, it's hard – so very, very hard – for the wife to submit to her husband (she also had trouble submitting to her earthly father: that's the sin nature at work). At the same time, it's hard – so very, very hard – for the husband to love and not be bitter toward a non-submissive woman who is half his size, has half his strength but will not submit to his headship.

So there it is. He won't love; consequently, she won't submit: then she won't submit so he won't love. To be sure, at this point the man is thinking: "but I can't, I've tried to reason with her, I simply don't know how; besides, how can I love a woman who resents my authority, is completely rebellious against all I say and do. How do I deal with a wife that will not submit to my God-given authority? This job assignment is impossible. Loving such a person is simply not me, it's not part of my makeup – I just want out."

At the same time, the wife is thinking: "there's no way under the sun that I can submit to a man who doesn't love me. I can tell he doesn't by the tone and disrespectful way he talks to me as well as all the demands he puts on me. He just seems to always undervalue me and put me down – and that's not love. Submit to this? What God expects out of me is just not what I'm all about. I just want out" (by the way, it's the woman who is told to "reverence" her husband, meaning respect, esteem, venerate; Eph. 5:33).

So what is the biblical solution? Who does God hold responsible for breaking this vicious circle. Who does He direct to make the first move? Of course, it's the one that is said to be "the head," the one who is higher up on the chain of authority, the one whose job it is to provide for and protect. The husband must be the one to assume the responsibility and be "the savior" of her body just as Christ Jesus saved His bride (cp. Eph. 5:23 & 28).

And how can this be done. Both have to come to the point where they realize that the above assessment is absolutely correct. They can't in and of themselves be the husband or wife that God demands. They must see that they were never intended to be independent creatures. They (we) must come to see that just as they were born totally dependant on their earthly parents they remain totally dependant creatures – only now it's upon God. All have to learn that God calls on us to do things *beyond* that which we are able to bring us to realize that we need, and will always need, Him. We must depend on Him for everything. He is above us on the authority chain; therefore He is the one we must go to for protection and provision. And with regard to our subject, we especially need Him to provide character traits such as trust, patience, a submissive attitude, forgiveness, love – things which we desperately need but find ourselves almost completely lacking. Yet such are necessary for making a good marriage, one pleasing to our Lord. All this is possible because we are under authority. Indeed, authority is the controversy of the universe.

Having come to grips with this, we can move forward with the problem of the woman's role in the Church. Otherwise, all else would prove futile, for surely it can now be appreciated that if the man is the head of the family it would be wholly illogical for us to suddenly place the woman as the head of God's family, the Church. That is, if the man has authority over his family, why would anyone ever expect God to change his chain of authority with regard to Church and thereby override his own Word at 1 Corinthians 11:3. Such is neither logical nor, as we shall demonstrate, will the whole council of Scripture support such a position.

Beginning with the Books of Moses, we observe that Adam was formed first, then Eve. All the patriarchs were men (Adam through Joseph). All the judges were men (we shall deal with Deborah presently). All the priests were men (the sons of Aaron). Beginning with the 40 year reigns of Saul, David, and Solomon and continuing for 390 more years, all the kings of both Israel (the northern kingdom) and Judah (the southern kingdom) were men (save for the six or seven that Athaliah interrupted the Davidic monarchy by murdering all the seed royal save Joash and usurped the throne, 2 Chr. 22:10–12). All those selected by God to write the 66 books of the Bible were men. When our Lord Jesus came, He chose the 12 – all of whom were men. And as we shall show, all the prophets were men. And after all this, suddenly in the last 100 years, we are supposed to believe that God finally saw the light and placed women in authority over his people. Really?

Moreover, in First Timothy 3:1–13 and Titus 1:5–9 God Himself gives the qualifications required for both the elders (or bishops, the word includes apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers – not pastor-teacher as some say: Eph. 4:11–13, cp. 2 Tim. 1:11). He also adds those for the deacons of His Churches. Verse two underscores that more is required of an overseer than merely a willingness to serve.

The honest seeker reading First Timothy 3:1–13 will clearly find that no woman, regardless of intelligence or schooling, can possibly meet these requirements (vs.1, a man; vs. 2 a husband etc. and note the masculine pronouns his, he). Also note that the word “likewise” in verse eight connects these qualifications directly to the deacons who also must be “husbands” (vs. 12).

Now some will argue that many of the pronouns here have no Greek authority to support the masculine rendering of “he,” “man,” or his.” Therefore such does not rule out women filling these offices. The general lack of Greek authority is acknowledged; however, the single unmistakable Greek word which translates “husband” (vs. 2) dismisses the pronoun argument as totally vacuous. Are we actually supposed to believe that all the many translators of the many translations made over several centuries were all ignorant of *Koiné* Greek – that they all have missed the context and thereby translated incorrectly? Really?

Indeed, in verse five Paul (while under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit) makes an analogy between being the head of the home and being the elder of a church. His obvious point is that the leadership skills required to govern a home are the same as those needed to successfully oversee the church family. The man’s personal family is his “on the job training” arena, and failure there indicates a lack of ability for him to lead a congregation.

For those who are still doubtful, we add that in Acts 6 the apostles ordered that seven *men* be selected for that task of “deaconing.” Further, to offer 1 Tim. 5:9–10 as an argument for women deaconesses is completely unworthy in view of the context.

Here we return to the Old Testament. Even among biblical scholars, seminary professors, and pastors, much misunderstanding exists as to the nature and duties of biblical judges. Hence, at the onset a definition based solely upon the internal content and context of Scripture must be formed. Scripture does not portray these individuals in the same light as the judges with whom we are familiar.

The judges were raised up by the Lord, especially during the times of spiritual decline or backsliding in Israel. During these periods, God would bind Israel over to an enemy for the purpose of bringing her to her senses, causing the nation to acknowledge her sin in forsaking the Lord (which invariably involved the worship of other gods) and to again rely upon Him. A rather general definition as to the essence of biblical judgeship is:

Nevertheless the LORD raised up judges, which delivered them out of the hand of those that spoiled them. And when the LORD raised them up judges, then the LORD was with the judge, and delivered them out of the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge...(Judg. 2:16 and 18a).

The scriptural qualifications for the judgeship were that they be Hebrew men who revered Jehovah, were able, had wisdom and understanding in the ways of the Lord, were truthful, hating covetousness, and well known throughout the Twelve Tribes for those attributes (Exo. 18:21–22; Deut. 1:13–17).

Although the nature of the function discharged by the judges is not distinctly defined by the above, a more thorough description is readily ascertainable from within the course of the various narratives. For example, even though some fathers did appoint their sons as co-judges and successors, the “office” of judge was not hereditary as was the priesthood. It was normally conferred upon the chosen individual by God himself.

At the time of his call from God, the judge’s primary function was to bring the people to judgment. This was done by the judge and/or a prophet (or prophetess) confronting the people so as to bring them to judge their sins with God’s viewpoint. This having been done, the people were called upon to repent and return wholeheartedly to following the living and true God with singleness of heart.

Once the people judged their sin (cp. 1 Cor. 11:31–32), the Lord would then use that judge as His instrument of deliverance. The judge then became their savior-deliverer, leading the people to victory over their sin and then over their oppressors. In so doing, they served as types of our Lord Jesus, the Savior-Deliverer over sin, Satan, and all his hordes.

This pattern may be noted throughout the book (Judg. 3:7–10; cp. Neh. 9:26–28). This definition is further substantiated in the Book of 1 Samuel which discloses that Samuel was not referred to as anything other than a prophet until chapter 7 whereupon, acting as outlined above, he became a judge (1 Sam. 7:6: Samuel *judged* Israel at Mizpeh, after calling on the people to repent, vs. 3 ff.).

Moreover, this is the exact pattern we find in Judges 4 relevant to Deborah and Barak. In verse 4 Deborah is clearly said to be a prophetess, not a judge. As in the above, she “judged Israel” in the sense of bringing the people to repent (see Judg. 5:2), nothing more. This is borne out by the fact that she does not meet the previously given qualifications and is confirmed by Hebrews 11:32. There Barak is listed as being among the Judges in God’s “hall of fame” chapter, not Deborah!

Therefore, it was not in the civil sense of the word that these people were referred to as judges during the first phase of their service. It was not like Moses and others that “sat on the bench” (Exo. 18:13–27; Deut. 1:15–18) that this term is to be understood. Two different shades of meaning are seen to apply to the word “judge” at this period of Israel’s history.

Of course, after having restored the people to the Lord and delivered them from their oppressors, he would thereby be established as the spiritual Shepherd, overseeing the children of Israel. Quite naturally, during the remainder of his lifetime the judge would be that individual to whom the people would resort for direction, leadership, and counsel. Thus, he served in different capacities, initially as a preacher, then a warrior and finally as an administrator of civil and ceremonial justice by the application and enforcement of the Mosaic law until the time of his death (1 Sam. 7, especially vv. 15–17). Reflection upon the biblical narratives with regard to the individual judges will substantiate the correctness of our definition and reveal that it is neither an artificial contrivance nor a private interpretation.

Moreover, the Scriptures state that Moses was a judge and the incidents recorded therein clearly depict that he and Joshua functioned as previously described. Hence, both are to be included as part of the period of the judges and not merely those men whose exploits are given in the actual Book of Judges. Moses performed according to the above biblical definition in bringing the children of Israel out of Egypt and also during the 40-year trek in the wilderness as did Joshua throughout the time of the conquest of Canaan and the subsequent division of the land among the 12 tribes. Indeed then, Moses functioned in two distinct and diverse roles, yet both bore the single title – judge.

Finally, we must clarify between prophet and prophetess. There are two Greek words used with regard to this in the New Testament. They are *dōrea* (*dwrea*, , also *dōma* = *doma*) and *charisma* (*carisma*). Although both translate “gift” in English, the difference between them is very significant.

*Dōrea* always denotes a spiritual or supernatural gift (Eph. 3:7). In Ephesians 4:7–8, it refers to the various ministries or offices: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. These are the *dōrea* gifts to the Church “for the perfecting of the saints” etc. (Eph. 4:11–13). Moreover, they are the gift of Christ. Indeed, the *dōrea* gift is the gift of Christ Himself ministering in and through these men (vs. 7).<sup>1</sup>

We have already seen from 1 Timothy 3 that women do not meet the requirements for such titles or offices and that no prophetess authored even a single book in the Bible. Still, a few women in Scripture are called prophetesses. What of them? To answer this we must better understand the other Greek word for gift – *charisma* (*carisma*). This is a grace (*charis*) gift from God and, unlike the *dōrea* gift, no qualifications are necessary to receive such. Most of the *charismata* (*carismata*) gifts are given in 1 Cor. 12:1–12. So as not to become entrenched in too much of a treatise, we will try to be brief.

These gifts are supernatural enablements. There are three revelatory gifts: (1) the word of wisdom, (2) word of knowledge, and (3) the discerning of spirits. A “word of knowledge” is the miraculous imparting of information or facts to an individual which they otherwise have no way of knowing. The word of wisdom solves a problem that there is no solution to; it answers a question for which there is no answer.<sup>2</sup>

Then there are three “power” gifts: (1) faith (not faith for salvation but a supernatural impartation of faith from the Holy Spirit, they are His gifts—not ours, whereby one can believe God for the miraculous), (2) the gift for the working of miracles, and (3) a gift of supernatural power to heal disease. Finally, there are three gifts of utterance: (1) a supernatural utterance in a language known by the speaker. Such is called prophecy. Then there is (2) the gift called *divers* tongues or languages which is a supernatural utterance in a real earth language that the speaker has never learned.<sup>3</sup>

The last of the utterance gifts is (3) that of interpretation. This involves one being able to supernaturally give the explanation and meaning to an utterance given in a language the interpreter does not know. These last three gifts are normally intended to edify the born again in a Church meeting but may also edify the speaker (1 Cor. 14:1–5). Depending on which of the three is being given, God also may use them as a sign to convict the lost (e.g., Pentecost in Acts 2) as well as to speak to the body of Christ.

Having set forth the difference between the *dōrea* gifts and the *charismata* (*carismata*) gifts, it is most important that we do not confuse the two. Although under rare circumstances one may disqualify himself through blatant sin, the *dōrea* gifts are intended to be a permanent calling and possession (“the gifts and calling of God are without repentance,” Rom. 11:29).

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<sup>1</sup> Compare 2 Cor. 9:15 where the context concerning God’s “unspeakable gift” is Christ Himself. Also see Acts 2:28 where the clause “the gift of the Holy Ghost” means the gift of the Holy Ghost Himself.

<sup>2</sup> For example see 1 Ki. 3:16–28. To which of the two prostitutes does the baby belong. There must be two or more witnesses and the only two that were present are giving different accounts. How can Solomon make both women’s stories reveal the truth? A NT example is Mat. 22:15–22. They actually had our Lord trapped. The Jews would not believe a Messiah would say that they should finance an oppressive pagan government, but if Jesus says not to pay the tax the Roman authorities will have Him for treason. What an answer!

<sup>3</sup> For example Acts 2:1–11. Note: they were not using this gift to preach the gospel. Peter did that beginning at vs. 14. They were telling of “the wonderful works of God” – that is, they were praising the Lord.

To the contrary, the charismata are but temporary and individual gifts. For example, were someone's father sick someone could importune God for a gift of healing. If granted, the infirmed would immediately be made whole (remember, the charisma gifts are supernatural *grace* presents – they are neither earned nor deserved). That gift has been used up and is no longer available. The person selected by the Holy Spirit to deliver the gift (such as by the laying on of hands or by verbal proclamation: i.e., Dad, in the name of Jesus be healed) no longer has that gift – it was only temporarily theirs. As they were not sick, they didn't need that gift. In fact, it was never “their gift.” All are the Holy Spirit's gifts.

There is no place for pride in this explanation. They were merely the bearer of that gift to the person that was ill. Should someone else become sick, another gift from the Lord will be necessary – and He may say “no.” He may even say “yes, but not now.”

With this understanding, we are prepared to explain “prophetess.” In the Old Testament, not all were priests. Only Aaron's sons could minister in that capacity, but now in the New Covenant all believers so function. All, men and women, may go to God directly for themselves to worship, praise, or present their petitions. All are priests, but all are not qualified to minister in the body of Christ as apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, or teachers. By virtue of the Great Commission all may minister to the lost as such – but not all are eligible in the Church. There, God wants order.

Moses' sister Miriam was said to be a prophetess (Exo. 15:20), as was Deborah (Judg. 4:4) and Huldah (2 Ki. 22:14); however, from all that has proceeded it should be obvious that no woman in either testament was able to meet the qualifications for any *permanent* office. Hence, none of these three godly women were called to a *dōrea* ministry. Rather, they ministered with temporary charisma gifts to the people of their day. Indeed, a clear distinction is made in the NT. Phillip the evangelist had four virgin daughters who prophesied, yet when the prophet Agabus arrived, the Holy Spirit used him to deliver the warning concerning Paul's impending imprisonment at Jerusalem – not any of the four women. The permanent office took precedence over the temporary gift.

Were I to replace my windshield wipers or replace a battery in my car, that would not qualify me as an automobile mechanic. More requirements are needed, and someone in authority has set them down in writing. So it is with the issue before us. And this is even true concerning the men. For example, the twelve men from Ephesus began to prophesy when Paul laid his hands on them (Acts 19:6). It should be obvious that these men were certainly not prophets in the same sense as Moses, Elijah, Jeremiah, and Daniel. These latter were real prophets operating under a *dōrea* ministry, the 12 simply received a temporary charisma gift.

God, in His pleasure and manifold wisdom as King of the universe as well as the heavens, has chosen to set up a kingdom both here and above that operates under laws and governmental principles. In so establishing, He has put in place positions of authority. To not yield to His governmental appointments is most serious, and one has but to read the Bible to learn of the dreadful consequences of any rebellion against any in His chain of authority. When properly understood and applied, there exists great power and blessing in godly submission, because the one above you is honor bound to protect and provide for you – in love.