

What is an overseer?

Philippians 1:1

Paul and Timothy, slaves of Christ Jesus: To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers and deacons. (Phi 1:1 CSB)

Acts 20:28

Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among whom the Holy Spirit has appointed you as overseers, to shepherd the church of God, which He purchased with His own blood. (Act 20:28 CSB)

1 Timothy 3

This saying is trustworthy: "If anyone aspires to be an overseer, he desires a noble work."² An overseer, therefore, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, self-controlled, sensible, respectable, hospitable, an able teacher,³ not addicted to wine, not a bully but gentle, not quarrelsome, not greedy--⁴ one who manages his own household competently, having his children under control with all dignity.⁵ (If anyone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of God's church?)⁶ He must not be a new convert, or he might become conceited and fall into the condemnation of the Devil.⁷ Furthermore, he must have a good reputation among outsiders, so that he does not fall into disgrace and the Devil's trap.

Titus 1

⁵ The reason I left you in Crete was to set right what was left undone and, as I directed you, to appoint elders in every town:⁶ someone who is blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of wildness or rebellion.⁷ For an overseer, as God's manager, must be blameless, not arrogant, not quick tempered, not addicted to wine, not a bully, not greedy for money,⁸ but hospitable, loving what is good, sensible, righteous, holy, self-controlled,⁹ holding to the faithful message as taught, so that he will be able both to encourage with sound teaching and to refute those who contradict it.¹⁰ For there are also many rebellious people, idle talkers and deceivers, especially those from Judaism.¹¹ It is necessary to silence them; they overthrow whole households by teaching for dishonest gain what they should not. (Tit 1:1 CSB)

Acts 15

Some men came down from Judea and began to teach the brothers: "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom prescribed by Moses, you cannot be saved!"² But after Paul and Barnabas had engaged them in serious argument and debate, they arranged for Paul and Barnabas and some others of them to go up to the apostles and elders in Jerusalem concerning this controversy. (Act 15:1 CSB)

²³ They wrote this letter to be delivered by them: From the apostles and the elders, your brothers, To the brothers from among the Gentiles in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia: Greetings.²⁴ Because we have heard that some to whom we gave no authorization went out from us and troubled you with their words and unsettled your hearts, (Act 15:1 CSB)

Mark 10

⁴² Jesus called them over and said to them, "You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles dominate them, and their men of high positions exercise power over them.⁴³ But it must not be like that among you. On the contrary, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant,⁴⁴ and whoever wants to be first among you must be a slave to all.⁴⁵ For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life-- a ransom for many." (Mar 10:1 CSB)

Conclusion

There seems to be a clear distinction between overseers and deacons. The word episkopos may be translated bishop, overseer or manager. Like the word pastor, it seems to refer to the same office as elder (Acts 20:28, Titus 1). An overseer clearly has governing responsibilities – his care is expressed in managing. (Titus 1:7, 1 Tim 3:5, Acts 20:28) The elders in Jerusalem, for example were appealed to for judgements and attached their authority as elders to decisions alongside the apostles.

An overseer then is a leader over the church of God, but Jesus' words remind us that a leader leads by serving.