

Leadership in Biblical Perspective
“Selecting Leaders from Among Yourselves”
I Timothy 3:1–7
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We will be looking at a couple of passages in this study starting with Philippians 1 to set this up. This is the Word of God and God’s Word is the truth. Philippians 1:1–2 *says [1] Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons: [2] Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.* I wanted to start here because in this study we will talk some about church government. Presbyterian stands for church government but you don’t have to be a Presbyterian to get to heaven but why take a chance?

We are fully aware that church government is a matter of intermural discussion among Bible believers and we have come to some differing discussions, differing convictions and differing practices. We call this a secondary doctrine because it’s one of those doctrines in the Bible that if you get it wrong you can still be saved for its not necessary to get church government right to be saved. But having said that it is not an unimportant issue. There is nothing in the Bible that is unimportant. There are some things that are more important but nothing is unimportant.

The Bible says in II Timothy 3:16–17, *[16] All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, [17] that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.* Church government is taught in the Bible so it is profitable and it is to be understood. It is something we ought to give ourselves to. I have embraced the Presbyterian form of government not because I was born into it or because it was convenient. On the contrary, I actually had to leave the ministry for six months and redo my ordination in which I had already gone through one. There is a reason they call it the ‘trials of ordination’ because I had to go through it again. It was a point of conviction that had led me to embrace that system of government.

I also think the Lord’s way of governing the church is there for the well-being of His people. It is not an incidental issue at all. I don’t believe that any church government is right. I believe one either gets it right or they get it wrong. We can all be wrong but we can’t all be right. We ought to be looking to be right even on secondary issues.

Another reason why this is important is that sometimes you can make mistakes on secondary issues and the fact that you get the secondary issue wrong does not threaten the salvation that you have or claim to have or proclaim but you can make primary errors with the Scripture on secondary issues. That will eventually lead to the adulterating of your doctrine and will lead to the compromise of doctrine. So we want to work from the Scripture where Scripture interprets Scripture and try to arrive at some understanding of church government.

We are currently in the midst of a season of nominating officers. Why do we do this and why do we have two offices, one of elder and one of deacon? Why do we have multiple elders instead of one? Why do we have two categories of elders – teaching and ruling (shepherding) elders? Is this something that has been traditionally done or is it something we have arrived at by conviction because we believe this is how Christ, the Head of the church, has revealed in His Word how His church is to be rightly governed?

Out there vying for your attention and affection are basically three forms of government. One is the Bishopric system and it is kind of like a pyramid where you have the authority at the top (the pinnacle) and it works down into the base of the congregation or the mass of the congregation. England has this type of church government (Anglican) where at the top is either the King or Queen of England who is the care for the church through a Bishopric system. You may see a Bishopric system in the Lutheran church or the Episcopal church or the Methodist church which came out of the Anglican and Episcopal church. In this system those in authority are appointed by others in authority because of some sense of apostolic succession through the Bishopric offices or the overseers.

You may have a King James Bible that says from the Philippians 1:1 passage, *[1] Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons.* Now that translation has gone to another translation of overseer because that is really more accurate. It makes up two Greek words which are *ep-i* and *s' kop-os* where the first means over and the second means sight or to see. Deacons mean the ordained servants of the church.

The church at Philippi was the only church Paul allowed to support him as we see in his appreciation letter to them and in this letter he doesn't expect the saints in Philippi to be lone rangers but he expects them to be in the local church. In this letter he wants the overseers and deacons to especially pay close attention to what he has said.

Secondly, there is the Congregational system of church government and this system says that final authority is not in the leadership but in the membership, the fellowship. So the pyramid in the Bishopric system is basically turned upside down in this system of church government where the fellowship/membership is the final authority. In fact, in this system at the end of a service as a member you can raise your hand, call a meeting, a vote the preacher out right then. I have some brothers in the freewill Baptist church and you can get a turn around there in about an hour and half.

Thirdly, there is the Presbyterian system of church government and in this system there are elders and deacons who guide churches. They are also connected to other churches regionally and the regional church is the Presbytery. Then the Presbyteries are all connected to the national church. The elders populate the Presbytery and the General Assembly but they are identified, ordained and set aside in the local church.

Now one might be thinking that so far I have not read a single verse that says elder. It just says overseers/bishops so where are the Presbyteries overseers/bishops. I am one of those. The 75 ruling elders we have are our bishops or our overseers. Elder and overseer are two different titles for the same office. They are also called shepherds, pastors and stewards. Those are multiple titles referring to the same office. Why are there multiple titles? It is because it is a multi-faceted responsibility. Elders oversee people, processes, policies and integrity of the church. Ruling elders are to shepherd the flock. Elders are stewards of the Gospel, the mission, the vision and the ministry of the church. Let me show you this in the Bible. Let's look at Acts 20.

In this text Paul is getting ready to leave the church at Ephesus. Acts 20:17–18 says *[17] Now from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the church to come to him. [18] And when they came to him, he said to them:* Then Paul gives a charge to his elders before he is about to leave but for the sake of time I am not going to read all of it.

Acts 20:28 says *[28] Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for (shepherd) the church of God, which he obtained*

with his own blood. Here several terms are used for elders – pastor, overseer, shepherd. Because there are multiple titles it indicates there are multiple responsibilities in the position. Now let's look at Titus 1.

Titus 1:5–7a says [5] *This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint **elders** in every town as I directed you— [6] if anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife, and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination. [7a] For an **overseer**, as God's **steward**, must be above reproach.* Here this is not different offices in the church just different responsibilities being noted by different titles for elders and pastors and bishops are also added to this office. I believe this clearly stands the test of Scripture. Now let's look at I Timothy 5.

I Timothy 5:17–18 says [17] *Let the elders who **rule** well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in **preaching and teaching**.* [18] *For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain," and, "The laborer deserves his wages."* So, according to this passage, there are some elders who are worthy of double honor. Honor number one is the office. To serve as an elder or a deacon is not a right. It is a privilege. It is an honor.

Then there are some that get a second honor and that second honor is the privilege of financial support for the work they do in the office. There are special group of elder who get the double honor and according to the text they are those who work hard at preaching and teaching. I always have a hard time at how he pictures the pastor/teacher elders, the ministers of the Word because the metaphor is an ox. Why doesn't it say be sure to give grain to the stallions or the race horses or something like that? The picture of the ox is that he is going round and round treading out the nourishment for everyone else. Every once in a while he has to drop a little bit down for himself so he can keep going.

So why do we do that? It's not because they are more important than the other elders for that is not the point. The point is what they do is so important – the preaching of the Word. We are saved by faith and we grow by growing in our faith. Romans 10:17 says [17] *So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.* This is because of the primary means of grace being preaching joined with prayer but it's not the only means of grace for there is also the sacraments and fellowship. But the two primary means of grace are prayer and the Word and the leadership is to lead the church forward in prayer, Word and then to sacrament, therefore they need the time for it.

It takes me 22 to 26 hours in study for a Sunday morning sermon. Sunday nights for me are about 14 to 18 hours of study because Sunday nights are more teaching than preaching because it is easier to teach than it is to preach. You put all that together, throw in a Bible study, leadership responsibilities and this and that and there is not a lot of time to get another job if we want them to give attention to that job. Early in my ministry I was a bi-vocational pastor where one was a church plant and another a revitalization but I also umpired baseball games because the \$24,500 annual salary was not enough for me to support a wife and three children. But as the church grew what I deeply appreciate is that my elders wanted me to be unencumbered by the things he needed to do. It happened another time to me at a church in Miami but as soon as the Lord began to grow the congregation He allowed that to be my main vocation. It wasn't because I was important but it was what this office was responsible for is important. That's why time is given to this.

So here at our church we have the office of deacon and elder. The office of elder has two categories – teaching elders who shepherd and shepherding elders who teach. One is responsible

for prayer, Word and sacrament and therefore is given double honor and the other oversees all of that, the shepherding elders of the church. You might see that as not being that efficient. Here we have 75 elders with 14 teaching elders and we have 120 deacons. Jesus is saying that there is only one by himself who can lead the church and that's Him. If He sets up a system where there is only one person who is the focus of everything then before long it will be discouraging because with every man's strengths you get his weaknesses and sometimes the bigger the strength the bigger the weakness but if you have a plurality then you have strengths to cover weaknesses. Then there is the multiplicity of gifts and multiplicity of accountability instead of all the authority invested into one person.

I think it's an ingenious system because we do have one head of the church and His name is Jesus. It is Jesus who uses senior pastors and pastoral staff under the leadership of elders served by deacons to carry forth a congregation and move it forward. That is the system that God has put and then these churches are not independent. We don't believe in independent churches any more than we believe in independent Christians because all the gifts are never in one church. We are interdependent and accountable to other churches and that's called a Presbytery. Then the Presbytery unites with other Presbyteries and are accountable to them. That is called a national church. Our elders meet together in Presbyteries.

There was a man named James Madison who was disciplined by a Presbyterian pastor named Jonathan Witherspoon and they just borrowed our whole system of church government and it's in the United States now. There is a Presbyterian government that is supposed to be working in our government. Here is why I count it so precious. Not only do you have a plurality but you also have accountability. Another reason I think it's precious is because it preserves the focus to be upon Christ and not any one leader in the church. I think that is invaluable for God's people.

Another reason is that every time I looked in the Bible elder was plural and church was singular. It was never the 'elder' of the church but it was always used in the plural. Paul called for the elders (plural) of the church (singular) at Ephesus. Paul calls for the elders (plural) in every church. The plurality of leadership is the system that is laid out in the Bible. There is another reason that I chose to be under this church government. This was the only system that I saw where every Christian, every leader and every church is accountable to somebody. In the Bishopric the higher up is not accountable and in the Congregational I have never seen sheep lead a shepherd for that system ends up leading to an unofficial Bishopric system where someone gets control or even the preacher gets control but it doesn't work when supposedly the congregation is leading the leaders. This Presbytery system does match up to some Biblical truths of accountability, plurality, parity, responsibility and somewhere where everybody can be submissive to somebody.

The question now becomes how do you get these elders and deacons? We know the Apostles went around and established elders in every city, so where do we get the deacons? The deacons come about in Acts 6. Acts 6:1-7 says [1] *Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution.* [2] *And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, "It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables.* [3] *Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty.* [4] *But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word."* [5] *And what they said pleased the whole gathering, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and*

Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch.
[6] *These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands on them.*

[7] *And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.*

So looking at this text we see that this church is getting a lot of alms offerings. Hellenists notice that they have a large number of these offerings but the mercy ministry is only distributing this to the Hebrew widows. The Hellenists widows were of mixed background including Greeks and they were not being cared for. They are giving them a charge of racism, of partiality. The elders tell them they are right and they agree they are not doing a good job for it's not an equitable distribution, but the problem isn't that it's racism. This church by now is probably about 18,000 to 20,000 people with 12 leaders leading all these people in teaching, discipleship etc. All 12 Apostles are also Hebrews so it's only natural they would know these widows that had needs. So they realize they need to do a better job of finding out about all the needs that are out there but if they did that they would have to neglect the preaching of the Word and prayer.

If they neglected the preaching of the Word and prayer there wouldn't be any resources to give or a heart to minister or an opportunity for that matter. So they decided to appoint 7 deacons and they give the qualifications and the congregation says 'great idea.' So they choose the 7 and the church keeps growing because they handled the problem Biblically and they realized that church government was important for the well-being of the church functionally. So now we see the first deacons who assist the elders so they can do what they're supposed to do.

We have a ministry at our church called Embers to a Flame and when we go into churches one of the problems that we have is the pastor is not preaching as he ought to and it's not because he doesn't want to but it's because he is doing so much other things that the elders ought to be doing. What are the elders doing? Most of them are doing what the deacons ought to be doing. What are the deacons doing? They are just kind of doing.

Why do we ordain deacons? We ordain them to oversee 'the tables' the Scripture says but that's another word for banks or finances. Jesus turned over the money tables in the temple. So the deacons had responsibility for the stewardship of the church, the resources of the church and to lead the mercy ministry. That freed up the elders to shepherd the flock and the teaching elders to give themselves to prayer, Word and the sacraments. So this isn't a non-important issue. It is a secondary issue where you can get it wrong and still be saved because you know the Gospel but it's not a non-important issue.

So how do you get those elders and deacons? There is one of two ways. You either have an Apostle to appoint them or would designate someone to appoint them. Our problem with that system is that we don't have any Apostles. An Apostle was someone who was with Jesus from His baptism to His resurrection and the Apostles were here to give us the New Testament. Now we are all apostles with a small 'a' because we are all sent ones. As the Father sent Me so send I you (John 20:21). We are built upon the foundation of the New Testament Apostles and Old Testament Prophets with Christ being the Cornerstone.

So when the Apostles don't appoint how did they do it? They looked to the congregation and said 'now you are responsible to select them.' That's why we call you to do that. We see the qualifications for a deacon in Acts 6. The qualifications for an elder we will end on in this study in just a moment but now you are to go out and select from among yourselves. As you do that we put them through the appropriate training as elders and deacons because the Bible says let these first be tested. Then they are brought back to you and you affirm them. The text says they found approval in the congregation. That is your responsibility and

why we have those elections two Sundays in a row. Whom do you see as gifted as elders and deacons? Then the training and testing takes place and then you approve who should be a deacon or elder.

The qualifications are found in I Timothy 3. Here Satan had done what Paul had warned them he would do and that is that he had infiltrated this church at Ephesus. So Paul sent Timothy back to get the leadership back to where it should be.

I Timothy 3:1–7 says *[1] The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. [2] Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, [3] not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. [4] He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, [5] for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church? [6] He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. [7] Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.*

Now we get into the qualifications of an elder. The first question is do they aspire to the office? Do they have an internal call? You are about to see if they have an external call through the Spirit of God to the church but first do they have an internal call from the Lord to serve His church as an elder or deacon. Also, it's not be a deacon for two or three terms and then go be an elder although that happens because gifts are not static but deacons are not the junior training board for elders. About 18 years ago three of our elders resigned because they had thought that since they had been deacons they were supposed to then become elders and what we realized is that this is a matter of gifting, not process. They were gifted to be deacons and so basically they became deacons again because that is what they were gifted in doing. So we are looking at someone who sense a call to one of these offices.

Then the text says that leadership is a noble work or task he is called to do. Thirdly, it is one in which they are to be above reproach in four areas. One is in their personal life which includes his marriage and we see that in I Timothy 3:2–3. He is to be a one woman man. A single man can also be an elder if he has the gift of singleness but in the normal course most men are married and therefore he must be a one woman man which doesn't just mean that he doesn't practice polygamy. That means he only has eyes for one woman, his wife. This primarily is a qualification of sexual purity within the bounds of marriage. He is to be sober-minded, not given to intoxication. He is to open up his home. He is not to be pugnacious, doesn't settle things with his fist or as a bully. Also he is not to be controlled by money.

Then it moves from his personal life and marriage to his family. We see this in I Timothy 3:4–5. Then he moves to a third area which deals with his reputation in the church and we see this in I Timothy 3:6. We do this all the time not always formally but informally. Someone is a movie star or a famous athlete or famous politician who get converted and we start treating them as spokesmen for the church within the next six months. Because of their reputation in the world we think that they ought to be leaders in the church and that's not what this is saying. New converts should not be put into positions of leadership for we are doing them a disservice. They are not ready and we would be putting them into positions they are not ready for personally and for the sake of the church.

Lastly, Paul says in I Timothy 3:7 that he must be well thought of by outsiders so as not to fall into a snare of the devil. In other words, he has a good reputation outside the church in the community in their social and business relationships. So now let's move to the deacons.

I Timothy 3:8–13 says [8] *Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain. [9] They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. [10] And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless. [11] Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things. [12] Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well. [13] For those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.*

Deacons likewise must be above reproach and they must say what they mean, mean what they say and they are not mean when they say it. Deacons are handling the resources of the church so they must not be greedy for dishonest gain. They are to be faithful to our confession and what we believe, a clear conscience. Then Paul goes into how the wives of elders and deacons ought to be as well.

This has just been an overview and we don't have Apostles so this is why we are selecting in this season. Then we will have a season of discipling and testing. Then there will be a season after that where you will give your approval of those whom you sense the Lord has called to lead His church. It is a sacred responsibility that you have as a member so please engaged in it and pray for. No church, the exceptions only prove the rule. Churches don't go beyond their leaders. So select from among yourselves through these filters those whom God has called.

I do want to tell you that it has been a great privilege for the last 18 years to serve with the deacons and elders of this church. I thank God for the legacy of it which started long before me and the privilege to see it advance but this is a stewardship given to you as members. Select them prayerfully and carefully and then once they are ordained give them the right hand of fellowship. Then pray for the elders and deacons as those who keep watch over your soul. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the time we could be together in Your Word and for the privilege to study it, know it and grow in grace. Thank You Father for the privilege You have allowed me to go into issues like this that we can share it with others and have a congregation that understands our mission to the world but also understands the ministry within the church that we might be a Gospel healthy and vital Spiritual alive congregation. I pray that for Jesus' sake, Amen.