

Elders and Deacons: Who Are These Guys? (1 Timothy 3:1-13)

GIST: *Elders and deacons are groups of exemplary Christians called & equipped by God to serve the local church under the leadership of Jesus by providing spiritual direction and meeting tangible needs.*

Why Are We Even Doing This?

1. God's Church Should Follow His Structure. Elders and deacons. (Side note, elders are also called overseers or bishops and pastors or shepherds in the Bible.) These are separate offices fulfilling distinct but complementary roles in the service of church unity and spiritual growth.

2. We need to make sure that what we call these servants and what we expect of them aligns with what the Bible teaches. If deacons are functioning as elders, both offices are being neglected, and the ministry to the church is impaired.

3. His structure supports His mission: Juan Sanchez from High Pointe Baptist Church in Austin, said : "The structure of the church supports the mission of the church." Our mission is the Great Commission. We've summarized that here under the categories of: Love, Equip, and Send. If we have proper leadership in place, the church will be more loved, better equipped, and more effectively sent.

4. We want to serve Jesus faithfully and effectively for the long haul. My heart's desire is that we become a *training church*—a church that raises up Godly church members and Godly leaders who pour into each other from generation to generation until Jesus returns.

"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. 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." (1 Timothy 3:1-13)

I. Elders and Deacons are Groups

Plurality.

"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--" (Titus 1:5)

"14 Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him..." (James 5:14)

"1 So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ..." (1 Peter 5:1)

"1 Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons:" (Philippians 1:1)

"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." (Acts 6:3)

There should be multiple elders and multiple deacons serving together in the places God has called them for the benefit of the church.

II. Of Exemplary Christians

We're told first and foremost that elders and deacons must both have a mature relationship with Jesus. This does not mean they will be perfect, (that is impossible), but they will be mature believers who are continuing to grow in Christ.

Alistair Begg put it something like this: "*The right structure with wrong people is more harmful than a silly structure with Godly men.*"

Note from the sermon I preached when you called me as pastor 8 years ago. I read a list of campaign slogans from over the years and then followed up with these remarks→

"These all have something in common: self-promotion. That's what a campaign is about. So, politicians are going to try and gain votes based on their personal merits or the difference they plan on making in the country. Sadly, sometimes that's how we approach choosing a pastor, too. Regardless of who God calls to this position, if you place your faith in a man, he will let you down. His sermons might be boring. His jokes might be cheesy. He might not always be available when you want him, or do things the way you wish he would. (And all this and more would undoubtedly apply to me.) In fact, if I *were* to come up with a campaign slogan, mine would be "Don't Vote For Me". In fact, that is my sermon title, but we didn't put it in the bulletin because people wiser than me thought that might send mixed messages :D. Since, I do in fact feel called to this position, I guess it would be better to put it like this: "If You're Looking For Someone To Fix All Your Problems And Fulfill All Your Expectations, Don't Vote For Me." But see, that's just a really long title :). But here's the deal: *Churches don't need charismatic, human heroes to lead them; they need Jesus. Period.* It's not about me. I never want it to be about me. It has to be all about Jesus all the time."

I think you'll notice this was never meant to be an exhaustive list, but rather a litmus test of sorts. Elders and deacons are meant to be individuals who take their walk with Christ seriously, and their lives have been visibly changed as a result of that→

Character of a Christian.

(Elder/Deacon)

Above reproach/Faithful in all things/Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil. Their relationship with Jesus, and ours, is meant to be marked by a reality that extends to all walks of life—in church, at work, in public, behind closed doors. Though we will still stumble, our lives will more and more reflect Jesus than the sin from which He has rescued us.

The husband of one wife/The husband of one wife. Ok, so this is the controversial one for sure. Several of you have heard me talk about this before, and I won't mince words. In certain church traditions, our own included, this has been interpreted to mean no man who has ever been divorced for any reason can be a deacon or a pastor. Then, inconsistently, it has also been used as a prohibition against unmarried individuals, as well. However, if this list reflects character traits of people changed by Jesus, then that interpretation does not fit. Let me break it down like this:

- If it means never divorced, it would also have to mean never sinful in any of these other ways, which would exclude all humans.
- Divorce is always the result of sin, but it is not an unforgivable sin. Remember, Paul, who wrote this, facilitated the murder of Christians before his conversion.
- Traditions that use this as the *only* criteria for determining deacon and elder qualification could end up allowing men otherwise unequipped for the office (and potentially sinful in many other ways) into these roles based on an arbitrary reading of these passages that makes the selection of elders and deacons more straightforward for them.
- God isn't calling us to ignore sin, but to examine hearts more thoroughly.
- This is a call to faithfulness to your spouse.
- This is a prohibition against polygamy.
- Divorce could disqualify you if it was recent and the result of unrepented sin, but, again, this is about character and the marks of God's work in your life.

So, in case I have been unclear, could divorced men who are now walking faithfully with Jesus be considered for these positions? Yes.

Sober-minded/Sober-minded. Sensible, reasonable, clear thinking. This comes from having a mind focused on the Lord and not muddied by the influences of this unstable world.

Self-controlled/Disciplined. Not giving into sinful impulses. Taking up his cross daily and choosing to follow Jesus and not his own desires.

Respectable/Dignified. The root is the same as modesty. This is about being visibly His. Again, if Jesus defines us, it will show in the kind of people we become.

Hospitable. People who reach out to other people. Deacons and elders will work to foster unity and community amongst God's people. They won't isolate from the congregation, but be models of living Christianity together as the family of God.

These next few seem self explanatory. *You don't want a feisty drunk who yells at you, takes your money, and punches you in the nose as an elder or deacon!*

Not a drunkard/Not addicted to much wine. Though not inherently sinful, it is inherently unwise. In fact, this is a call to a character that abstains from any addictive behaviors that alter your state of mind. Elders and deacons, despite changing cultural norms and pressures, are called to exemplify this.

Not violent but gentle. Not physically abusive.

Not quarrelsome/Not double-tongued/Not slanderers. Deacons and elders are ambassadors of Christ and peacekeepers, just like all of us are meant to be.

Not a lover of money/Not greedy for dishonest gain. Neither of these positions will make anyone rich by honest means. In fact, aside from the head pastor, none of these are ordinarily paid in a church our size (at least right now). However, both of these positions will put these individuals in contact with the church's money. It is vital that they are good stewards of that responsibility.

He must not be arrogant. Christ came as the ultimate example of humility. If He was humble, what do we have to be puffed up about?

A lover of good. Joyful cheerleader of all that God does – not a stick in the mud!

Upright/Holy/They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. Both offices are to be held by people who know the Bible well and live by its teachings.

He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil/And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless. We'll talk about these more in the specific discussions of each office, but there is an expectation that there is a time of testing to ensure this faith is real.

Expectations of Family Interactions

He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church?/Managing their children and their own households well. Who you are at home is who you are most unfiltered.

Gifting

Only after giving these character expectations are we introduced to a gifting expectation, and this only for elders. It is, in fact, the primary distinction between the two offices→ **Able to teach/give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.** Again, what this teaching could look like and in what contexts...etc., will be discussed next time. But it is worth noting that this distinction only matters if the man also has a Godly character.

III. Called & Equipped By God

What God calls us to, He equips us for. These are not positions you force yourselves into or positions the church just tells you to do. This is a personal calling God works in your heart and prepares you to walk into.

IV. To Serve The Local Church (By Which They Are Recognized)

We see it modeled in Scripture then that local churches will recognize and appoint these leaders who will then serve them.

"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--**" (Titus 1:5)

"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."'" (Acts 6:2-4)

V. Under The Leadership Of Jesus

Jesus is the Chief Shepherd. These are not kings of the church. These are servants of Jesus entrusted with the care of His flock. "1 So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: 2 shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; 3 not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. 4 And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory." (1 Peter 5:1-4)

VI. By Providing Spiritual Direction And Meeting Tangible Needs.

This is really the subject for the next couple weeks because it is in this that we see the clearest distinctions between these two roles. However, so as not to end cryptically, let me just show you the

graphic I put together for the first meeting we had as a quick (though imperfect) overview of these distinctions.



TAKEAWAYS

Elders and deacons are groups of exemplary Christians called & equipped by God to serve the local church under the leadership of Jesus by providing spiritual direction and meeting tangible needs.

- Examine your heart. These lists are meant to define us all.
- Pray for Godly leaders to be raised up.
- Pray that we are a church that prioritizes spiritual growth and discipleship.
- Pray that God's work here will result in souls being saved and lives being forever changed.

