

## Leadership in the Church - February 6, 2022

I want to talk about leadership. Now we know God works through leaders - He has instituted all kinds of authorities necessary for society to properly function - and they are to lead, protect, and influence those under them in a good and positive way. There are parents for families, employers for workers, and kings for countries. But today, I want to focus on leadership in the Bible.

Throughout history, God has raised up godly leaders. In the Old Testament, we read about Adam, Abraham, Joseph, Moses, Joshua, Gideon, Samuel, and David and many, many more. And we read about leaders who were judges, priests, prophets, and kings. But there's another kind of leader who leads in a country, a city, or a community. We read about "*the elders of Israel*", "*elders of the city*", the "*elders of the town*". Ruth 4:2. Now this word elder appears 120 times in the Old Testament.

Let me mention some things about these elders:

1. The word elder is the general term for an older person. And the word elder referred to a person who was typically physically older, and more mature and wise.
2. These elders would lead, would make decisions in a family, village, or city.
3. These elders were men - they were not women.
4. These elders were from among the people, from their own group - they were not from the outside. They would give advice, solve disputes, and make decisions.
5. There was always a plurality of elders; and as a plurality, as a team, these elders would work together in leading, in ruling the people. Exodus 19:7-8

Then in the gospels, we read about the elders. These elders are the same kind of people talked about in the OT - they were leaders of families, cities, and countries. And in most cities in Israel, you had a Sanhedrin, a body of 20-23 men comprised of elders, and they would make the spiritual, moral, and political decisions in the cities. But many of the "*elders*" spoken of in the gospels were ungodly, and many were instrumental in stirring up the crowd against Jesus and having Him crucified.

Now the men Jesus appointed as leaders of the church at that time were the 12 apostles. But then we read about the Holy Spirit empowering the believers and the church begins.

- Acts 14:21-23. Paul and Barnabas are appointing elders in every church. But this word elders is now designating godly men, Christians who are leaders in the church.
- Acts 15:2, 4, 6, 22, 23. These vss. speak of apostles and elders. The apostles were leaders overseeing the churches and worked with elders who were leaders in the churches.
- Acts 20:17. Paul calls the elders of the church, and they were Christian men who were recognized as church leaders from all these different churches in that area.

Phil. 1:1. In this letter, Paul addresses the Christians, and the overseers and deacons, who are the leaders of the church. And what is God telling us here?

1. These words, overseer and deacon, are referring to the leadership offices in the church.
2. There are, I believe, just two offices in the church, overseers and deacons.
3. The word “*elders*” isn’t used in the book of Philippians; and it doesn’t need to because these overseers and deacons are the elders. And the word “*elders*” refers to all the leaders in a church. And so the elders are the overseers and deacons in a church.
4. The word overseer comes from the Greek “*episkopos*”, which means to look over, to watch over, to care for the church. And the primary way the overseer cares for the church is by teaching the church.
5. The word deacon is from the Greek *diakonos*, and it means servant or minister. And the deacon is a servant in a church and deacons could serve in a variety of ways.

1 Tim. 3:1, 8. The words overseer and deacon spoken of here are the exact same two words used in Phil. 1, underscoring, and emphasizing their importance.

2. These two words are referring to the two kinds of leaders God wants in a church. Shepherd of Hermes - “*The direction of the congregation is in the hand of a college of elders - to this belongs overseers and deacons.*”

3. The word overseer is singular, and is referring to the person who is primarily the teaching elder. And it says that the overseer must have the ability to teach.

4. The word deacon is used in the plural sense, and this would mean there would be a plurality of leaders, which would give more wisdom, protection, and encouragement.

The fact that there’s more than one deacon, this plurality, makes it easier to meet the needs in the church. Indeed, there are many ways deacons can serve in a church. 1 Peter 5:1-3

5. The character qualities of the overseer and deacon are listed here, and this is important when considering whether to recognize someone as an overseer or deacon in a church.

1 Timothy 5:17-22. This tells us more about the leadership in the church.

1. These verses are talking about the elders, the collective leadership of the church, that is, the overseer and deacons spoken of in 1 Tim. 3. This further substantiates that both the overseers and deacons are elders. And Paul doesn’t need to use the words overseer and deacon here because the word elders is referring to both of them.

2. It says that the elders are to rule well, and this means that all elders, both overseers and deacons are to be involved in ruling, in leading, in making decisions, in managing the church.

3. There are those who work hard at teaching, and I believe Paul is referring to the overseer, but that does not mean that deacons cannot teach. Acts 7 - Stephen

Now today I want to mention two men that Bruce, Steve, and I are thinking and praying about recognizing as deacons. They are Jovany Gray and Ralph Mann. And now I want to look at 1 Tim. 3 and go over the character of a deacon, for we want you to be confident of the kind of character they need to have, that Bruce, Steve, and I believe they do have.

Now the character of a deacon is similar to that of an overseer, but he is not typically going to have the same role or responsibility as an overseer.

- The first character quality of a deacon is that he is to be a man of dignity. This word dignity means *"grave, serious, sober minded"*. The deacon's speech, his lifestyle, and the way he conducts himself is dignified. He's above reproach; he has no obvious glaring sins that would disqualify him from being a deacon. And so he's respected.

- Next, the deacon is not double-tongued. He's not deceptive or hypocritical in his speech. A deacon is ministering to the Christians, and is caring for people's needs. Therefore, he must be honest, sincere, and consistent in his speech. Prov. 10:13, 20

Next, the deacon is not addicted to much wine. This means he is not controlled by or dependent on liquor or drugs or anything like that. The deacon does not turn to alcohol or drugs as a means of escape, pleasure, or contentment, but rather, he is dependent on God. He is not drunk with wine but is *"filled with the Holy Spirit"*. Eph. 5:18, Acts 6:5

- Next the deacon is not fond of sordid gain. The deacon loves God; he doesn't love money. He's honest in his financial dealings. He earns money in a righteous way, and has nothing to do with making money in a corrupt way. He's *"free from the love of money."* Heb. 13:5

Next, the deacon holds to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. Faith is speaking of what is believed, and what we believe is God's Word. The word *"mystery"* refers to truth previously hidden in the Old Testament but then revealed in the New Testament, truths like the Incarnation, being born again, and the indwelling of the Spirit. And the deacon must believe and be convinced of the basic truths, truths about God, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, man, salvation, the word, the church, and eschatology. And the deacon doesn't waver about these truths but holds them with a clear conscience.

Then it says the deacon is tested. This is talking about the tests of life, tests in areas of faith, humility, hope, love, and holiness. The deacon has passed these tests and continues to pass them. These tests may specifically relate to relationships, trials, and being faithful with people, ministry, and money, as well as just persevering through the years.

- Next, the deacon's wife has good character. Now vs. 10 and 12 talk about the deacon's character, and this is referring to his wife, and the character God wants her to have. Now the husband, the deacon, is helping his wife have this kind of character - being *"dignified, not malicious gossips, but temperate, faithful in all things."* Eph. 5:25-26

Next, the deacon is the husband of one wife. That is, the deacon is devoted in his heart, mind, and soul to his wife. He loves his wife with an agape love, and is committed to her. And he maintains sexual purity in his thought life and conduct.

- Finally, the deacon is a good manager of his children and household. His children are behaved, courteous, pleasant, and obedient, and they are under control. The deacon is a good leader in his marriage, leading his wife, his children, and his entire household. And so there's harmony, order, and peace in his home.

The person with these qualifications can serve as a deacon, for he's above reproach. This doesn't mean he's perfect, but there are no obvious sins or sinful defects in his life, he can't be accused of some sin. There's spiritual stability, consistency, and faithfulness in his life. Nothing prevents him from serving as a deacon in the church.

- Then there are promises for the deacon who serves well, there's a high standing before God. First, God blesses and exalts the deacon who serves well. *"He who exalts Himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."* Luke 14:11

- Second, the deacons who serve God well by serving the saints will grow in assurance, boldness, and confidence in the faith. They will experience God's grace in their lives in even a greater way, and in even greater service to the Lord.

Now as I said, we're considering Jovany and Ralph to be elders in a church, specifically as deacons. We believe they have the character that's listed in 1 Tim. 3, and that they are true servants of God. But we wanted to let you know what we're thinking, and want you to take this week to think and pray about it, for it is a serious and important decision. And if you have any questions or concerns, please call us and share that with us.

It's good to know that Jesus Christ is the leader of the church, that He Himself is building this church. Let's be praying for His continued shepherding, feeding, protection, and leading, and that He leads us in this decision we are considering at this time.

- Acts 20:28 – *"Be on guard for yourselves and all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God, which He purchased with His own blood."*

- Matt. 16:18 – Jesus - *"I will build the church and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it."*