

Church Leadership

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Well, in a church like ours where we have new people coming on a consistent basis, I always try to be mindful when I step into the pulpit of trying to be mindful of the shoes of those who walk in and are trying to become acquainted with our church maybe for the first time, and you wonder how does this church operate? Why does this church function like it does? What is it that would help me get settled in and understand the nature of things quickly so that I would be able to assimilate to determine whether this is the place for me to worship or not? And as well as, you know, seeking to feed the flock of God the word of God in the power hopefully of the Spirit of God, that are with us on an ongoing basis. So there's always that little bit of balance that is in mind and I guess I would just say this by way of introduction for what I have to say today, is that it's our desire and it's our commitment to the best of our ability, our desire is to structure our church according to the principles of Scripture and not according to the desires of the world. We're not trying to attract unsaved people with what we do. What I mean by that is to not let people who have no regard for the word of God, the Christ of God, the Gospel of God, who don't care about those things, we're not interested in making a place that they want to come to. That's not the purpose of the church, the purpose of the church is to be a gathering of the saints where the saints could be built up and instructed and then go out into the world. If unsaved people come, of course, we welcome them, we want them to be here, but it's not our primary desire, it's not our goal to make things according to what they would want in their unsanctified mind. Rather our desire and our intention and our commitment and our responsibility is to structure the church according to the principles of God's word, according to what he has revealed in his word. Christ died for the church. Christ died in order to redeem his people and he said, "I will build My church," and we believe here at Truth Community Church that the way he builds his church is through the teaching of his word and through honoring the principles of Christ in terms of how a church believes, how a church is led, how a church is to function.

So we come to the Scriptures in order to find those things and that is our desire, and we thank God that he's brought so many of you alongside and that you share in that commitment, that so many of you understand that and that that's what you want. What a wonderful blessing for us to be in the midst of the blessing of God like that. I'm very grateful for all of you that are a regular part of our church, grateful for all of you because I know that you pray for the work of the church, you pray for your elders. We pray for

you as well. There's just to gather around the word of God in the power of the Spirit of God is to experience the blessing of God and we are very grateful to be able to do that.

Now when you start to structure your church and you build a church that way, the matter of church leadership quickly comes to the fore; it comes to the front of consciousness about how a church is to be led and that's what we find as we open once again the book of Philippians, Philippians 1, which is our book for Sunday morning for the coming months and we have spent quite a bit of time already just in verse 1. It won't always be this way. I won't always be preaching four or five messages per verse. But there's so much in verse 1 that we wanted to spend time on to deal with carefully and today we come to the matter of church leadership as we read in chapter 1, verse 1. It says,

1 Paul and Timothy, bond-servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers and deacons:

The overseers and deacons, that's our focus for this morning because the overseers and deacons were the leaders in the church of Philippi and those terms, those offices, are God's pattern for leadership in a New Testament church, and that's what we want to consider here this morning. What is an overseer? What is a deacon? And how does it relate to the functioning of a church?

Now, I want to tell you that I believe some really good and some really exciting preliminary things happening in the life of our church. Just yesterday we had a meeting of men on church leadership and there were dozens and dozens of men, 40, 50 men or so that were there attending it. For a church of our size, that's almost unimaginable that there would be such a group wanting to come out early on a Saturday morning to hear a teaching on church leadership. I mean, what kind of topic is that to get out of bed for? Well, it's encouraging to me and I think it's a sign of life in our church, that we have so many men that are interested in that, and that want to understand and want to cultivate and to be a part of cultivating what we just said yesterday, cultivating a culture of biblical church leadership. Not every man should be a leader in the church. Not every man has to be. Not everybody should be. Not every man is qualified for church leadership. But every man in the church, and by extension the ladies as well, everybody in the church has a vested interest in godly biblical church leadership. It is in everyone's benefit just horizontally speaking, that there would be a clear basic understanding of what Scripture says church leadership is to look like, and so we all have a part in this and I am quite grateful to God to have so many men in our church that want to gather around and want to learn and want to embrace these kinds of principles.

What I said yesterday to the men was as we're teaching on these things, is that we're not looking at this in such a superficial way that we're simply trying to find another man or two or three to be the next elders in the church, and we're not looking to assign tasks to men who could serve as deacons. That's not the point of what we're going through in this season of our church. That's not the point at all. We're trying to do something that is more foundational, something that is more fundamental, something that is, frankly, more critical to the long-term health of Truth Community Church. As we look to the long-term

health and future of our church, we need to understand corporately, we need to understand together what God's standard for leadership is, what God wants from leadership.

I've told the men a number of times, I think I've said it here once or twice, it's time to say it again apparently, is that church leadership starts with a very basic fundamental recognition and that is this, that the church belongs to Jesus Christ. Speaking broadly about the church universal and even a true local church, the church belongs to Christ. It doesn't belong to men. It doesn't belong to a pastor. It doesn't belong to the elders. A Church belongs to Christ and it's very easy to understand that. Who owns something? How did you come to own your car? To own your house, if you own a house? Or to own whatever it is of your possessions? You paid the price for it, right? There was a price paid and you acquired ownership rights over what you now possess. That is what Christ did with the church, he paid for the life of the church in his own blood, and because Christ bought the church, he could rightly say, "I will build My church," first person singular. The church belongs to Christ because he bought it with his own blood.

Now, another aspect that we said yesterday and I'm sure the men don't mind if I review this briefly as we talk about these things, is that with Christ and the church, it wasn't simply that he paid an economic price, that he paid the price that was necessary as though it were a business transaction that he could take or leave as you know, we go to the grocery store, who cares, you buy what you want and you go off and you're really not invested in that. Well, with Christ and the church, it's something very different. Christ bought the church, Christ paid for the church with his own blood. Why? Because he loves the church. Because Christ loves his people. He wanted his people to be saved from their sin. He wanted his people to be with him in heaven forever. He wanted to purchase from every tribe, tongue and nation men and women who would be brothers to him throughout all of eternity in worship of his Father. So there's this great love that motivated Christ to redeem his people with his own blood.

So he owns the church because he paid for it but, beloved, let us never lose sight of the fact that this was an act of God in love toward his people that led to that acquisition, if I can put it that way. You know John 3:16, " God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, so that whoever believes in Him would not perish, but have eternal life." Those of us who believe in Christ are on the receiving end of a prior act of love by God to bring us into and to appoint us for that relationship with him. So Christ owns the church, Christ loves the church.

Now, that has serious implications for church leadership. One of the things that I've said to the men on multiple occasions and I'm just going to keep saying it and saying it until guys are repeating this in their sleep and they're dreaming about these things because it's so embedded in their minds, that's how important it is, is that in church leadership, then, what you must have, what men who are developing aspirations and qualifications for church leadership, they must have that perspective on the church themselves. A man fit for church leadership understands that he's not coming in to take charge and to take over, rather he's serving under the Lordship of Christ whose church it is. And along with that

we said that a true leader in the church, a man serving with responsibility in the church, is going to be someone who shares the love of Christ for his people. Christ was looking out for the benefit of his people when he died on the cross. Christ was sacrificing himself for the sake of his people when he died on the cross and he died on the cross in order to purchase the church with his own blood, Ephesians 5 says. Well, then, what we must understand is that a man in church leadership is walking in the path, he's following in the footsteps, he is doing so in the Spirit of Christ himself. Church leadership is a means for a man to serve the Christ who saved him and to look out for the well-being of others that Christ loved and gave himself up for.

With that in mind, keep your finger in Philippians and just turn over the John 21 for a moment just to rehearse and remind you of something really critical along these lines. John 21, and remember what we're doing here is we're cultivating a culture about church leadership, we are developing a mindset about church leadership that helps us understand how it should function and what men in leadership should have as their central motivating desire in holding an office. Long before you ever get to the actual office, what is it that the man is looking to do with his life and what does he care about and what does he love? In John 21, you'll remember that our Lord is now resurrected and he is speaking to Peter after his resurrection. You'll remember that Peter denied him three times before our Lord was crucified and the Lord is now restoring him to ministry and look at what he does. He questions Peter about his love and then he assigns a task to Peter to do, and so love and task are mingled together here in the way that we are trying to express this morning.

John 21:15, "when they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these?' He said to Him, 'Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.'" What did Jesus tell him to do? "He said to him, 'Tend My lambs.'" Verse 16, "He said to him again a second time, 'Simon, son of John, do you love Me?' He said to Him, 'Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.' He said to him, 'Shepherd My sheep.'" Then in verse 17, "He said to him the third time, 'Simon, son of John, do you love Me?' Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, 'Do you love Me?' And he said to Him, 'Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You.' Jesus said to him, 'Tend My sheep.'" Notice a couple of things here. Jesus brings out before Peter is recommissioned into his apostolic ministry, he brings out three times to correspond to the three prior denials that Peter loves him above all else, and so the love of Peter personally for the Lord is established. The loyalty of his affections are established that they are vertical and that his loyalty and allegiance and love belongs to Christ and to Christ alone, and on that basis Christ commissions him.

And what does he do? Notice that he does not tell Peter to go out and to change the social and political structures of the Roman Empire as they then existed. Christ didn't come to die for the Roman Empire, he came to die for his people. He didn't send Peter out primarily to feed the poor. He sent him out with a different purpose. Christ sent him out and commissioned Peter to do something that was uniquely related to Christ and that which belonged to him.

Look at it with me. In verse 15 he said, "Tend My lambs. Shepherd My sheep," verse 16. "Tend My sheep," in verse 17. He says, "Peter," and he's using these terms of lambs and sheep obviously metaphorically to refer to his people, to refer to his disciples, and he says, "Peter, now that your love for Me has been established, I send you out to care for My disciples and I want you to care for them," and the book of Acts records how Peter and later Paul undertook to do that along with the rest of the apostolic circle. For our purposes today as Christ was sending out Peter, he said, "Peter, you've got to love Me and, Peter, your job is to tend sheep." And notice that as he describes the sheep, he uses the first person singular possessive pronoun, "These are Mine. These are My lambs. These are My sheep that I'm sending you out." So he delegates Peter to go out and in a sense be the hands and feet of the Lord and to be the mouthpiece of the Lord as he ministers to these people, anticipating the absence of the Lord after his ascension. Love for Christ and the job is to tend the lambs, not to tend the politics, not to tend the social matters of earthly temporal life. So this is the model, this is the pattern established as Christ begins to build his church after his resurrection.

Now with that in mind, we come back to the book of Philippians. I know your finger was probably tired and cramping waiting for me to get back to Philippians but here we are, we're back in Philippians and Paul is writing to a church in a city called Philippi. We've reviewed all of this. There's not time for review nor is there need for it. Paul here in writing to these Philippians was writing to a supportive church, a church that had proven their love for Paul again and again and again. He tells them in this letter that he's grateful for their Gospel partnership and yet he calls them to greater spiritual growth, growth in unity, and growth in truth. Growth in unity amongst the church body and growth in truth and doctrine, all of which were under attack and which were starting to crumble under the existing circumstances of the time. So Paul writing to people that he loves, writing to the sheep of Christ, writing out of his own love for Christ and his own duty before Christ, writes to this church in order to tend to their needs, in order to shepherd them according to their spiritual needs in that day.

He addresses them, let's look at verse 1 again, keep the text fresh and crisp in our mind. "Paul and Timothy, bond-servants of Christ Jesus," they're slaves of Christ Jesus, "To all the saints in Christ Jesus," those who have been set apart, and so right from the beginning we see even more, beloved, as we've considered these things in the past, who is a slave except one who is committed and required to render absolute obedience to his Lord? Set apart, there is no other Master for a Christian. Christ is our Lord and we serve him accordingly. A saint, one who is set apart to serve the expectations and the interests of Christ. So there is this great sense of the church being set apart for the purposes of Christ right from the start and leadership, therefore, is simply a reflection of that overall perspective that Christ has as Lord over his people, and so as slaves and saints, they are to follow Christ with pure devotion and now we see that there is leadership in the church as well.

Look at it again with me, "To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers and deacons." The overseers and the deacons. Paul singles them out. He mentions them in part to endorse their authority to the rest of the church because it'll be

the overseers and deacons who are responsible to see that what Paul's instruction is, is carried out in the life of the church. Now he doesn't refer to them again in the rest of the letter but from the start he is recognizing, not bypassing, he is recognizing the position of these men in the church. And who are the overseers and deacons, that's our simple task this morning to clarify these things. Overseers and deacons are the leaders who have different spheres of responsibility in the church. They would be responsible to implement Paul's correction in the letter and in seeing their role mentioned at the start of Philippians, we are introduced to the biblical terms that guide church leadership even to the present day.

Let's look, first of all, at the overseers. If you're taking notes, you just make this your first point: the overseers. Who are the overseers in a church? And when we ask that, we're not asking for the names of individual men, are we? We're saying what does this office of overseer, what is its task, what is its responsibility, what is the spirit in which it is to be done? What are the characteristics of those that would hold the office of overseer? Well, let's consider it this way, the word "overseers" comes from a Greek term, episkopos. You know of the Episcopalian Church, perhaps it's a reference to the way they view church order. The word "episkopos" means this, it refers to one who engages in oversight with a focus on the role of a guardian in a caring mode. That's a formal definition from one of the lexicons that's in my library. The overseer is somebody who has responsibilities of oversight, has a role acting as a guardian, carrying that role of guardian out with a perspective of care toward the ones under their oversight.

Now this word, overseer, prior to the writing of the New Testament was used in a way that helps us see the meaning of it. It was used in pagan writers to describe a deity who had responsibility and watched over a country or a people. This deity was an overseer of his territorial responsibility. That's not a New Testament definition, we're simply looking to get a feel and a sense for the meaning of this term "overseer." In other writings, it was used as a term of state, official business, to refer to judges, to treasurers or to military strategists. It was a religious term used to refer to temple officials. You start to get the idea, right? It's a guy who has a position of leadership. It's a term that refers to someone with leadership responsibility to exercise care and to look out for the interests of those who are under the sphere of his responsibility. That's what the term "overseer" refers to. So when Paul says, "to the overseers and deacons," he's recognizing that there is a recognized group of men in the church of Philippi who have this responsibility of oversight for – watch it – has this responsibility for the well-being of the church. That is the responsibility of the overseer according to the nature of the term itself. An overseer is responsible for and accountable to God for the well-being of the church in which they find themselves leading.

Now in the New Testament, this term "overseer," is used interchangeably with another term that we use and that here at Truth Community we use more often than the term "overseer." In the New Testament, the word "overseer" is used interchangeably with the term "elder." With the term "elder," an elder having a sense of, again of a leader in the church referring to, you know, it has an idea of someone older in the original meaning of the term, and I just want you to see in what we're about to look at, I just want you to see

that these terms are used interchangeably in Scripture so that we see that when we read about an overseer and we read about an elder in our Bibles in the New Testament, that we're reading about the same office, the same people.

So with that in mind, look at the book of Acts 20 with me. The book of Acts 20, and as you're turning there, let me make a little side comment here. In 1 Corinthians 14, Scripture says that the things that are done in a local church are to be done decently and in order. There is to be a sense of order in a local church. There is to be a sense of structure and that things are done according to planning and things are done according to a sense of direction that is given. A local church should not be a place of bedlam where you just come in and there's just chaos everywhere. You should be able to come into a local church anywhere, a biblical church, and come in and to be able to identify a sense of order. Part of that is because of the way that God has structured a church is that it is actually to be led, that there ought to be men in charge and giving direction to the life of a church, and you see that as we'll look at these passages. Leadership, proper biblical leadership, lends itself to a sense of order in the church.

Now in Acts 20, all we want to do is see the interchangeability of the term "overseer" and "elder." In Acts 20:17 it says this, "From Miletus [Paul] sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church." He called to him the elders of the church and beginning in verse 18, he begins to recite some history with them and then give them instruction for what they are to do after his departure.

Look at verse 25, he says, "now, behold, I know that all of you, among whom I went about preaching the kingdom, will no longer see my face." All of a sudden this leadership is going to be really important. Paul's apostolic authority is going to be removed from the church, by which I mean he's no longer going to be physically present with them and it is going to fall on these men who he referred to as elders in verse 17 to provide leadership after he has left the area.

He says in verse 26, "I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men. I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God." Remember he's speaking to the elders here. Now in verse 28 he says, you "Be on guard for yourselves and for 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."

What I want you to see is this, first of all, he calls the elders "overseers," showing the interchangeability of the terms. We need to understand that aspect of it. And as he is giving them this charge, what is he saying to them? Well, remember that an overseer, we said, was one who engages in oversight as a role of a guardian in a caring mode; someone who cares for those that are under his guardianship, under his sphere of responsibility. And you see this brought out with trumpet clarity, if I could put it that way, this is a trumpet call to what an elder is supposed to do. He says, "First of all, you be on guard. You have oversight responsibility. You have people under your care. You need to be on guard not only for them but for yourself."

He says, "The Holy Spirit is the one who made you an overseer," and what are they to do? They are to shepherd the church. What does a shepherd do with sheep? What does a shepherd do? He cares for the sheep. He protects them. He makes sure that they are fed. He provides for them. That's what a literal shepherd does with literal sheep and what Paul says, he says, "You elders, you overseers, you are to provide and protect and care for this flock that I am leaving in your care." And who does this flock belong to? You see everything that I introduced with stated in this verse, the church of God. It's God's church. It's not yours. You are to shepherd it but it is God's church and it's a reference to Christ as seen in the fact when he said he purchased it with his own blood. The church belongs to Christ because he purchased it. The church is the loving recipient of the Savior's love and leaders, therefore, are to be loyal to Christ and extend love to Christ by exercising an oversight role of protection, provision, and guarding to the flock in which they have been placed by the Holy Spirit. This is really clear, this is really basic, and so you see the terms are used interchangeably. You see that the church belongs to Christ and that overseers, elders, are serving under the authority of Christ to carry out the desire of Christ for the care of the sheep of Christ. That's what overseers do. That's what elders are to do.

Now let's just step back for a moment, if we can, and recognize that when it comes down to it, that's a pretty weighty responsibility. We're talking about Christ having died for his sheep in accordance with an eternal plan of God in order to purchase these people. The great eternal Son of God, these sheep belong to him and an elder has responsibility to provide care for them, well, this gives you the sense that this is a weighty area of responsibility, to be in a position of church leadership, responsible to care for that which belongs to someone else and not just anyone else but belongs to Christ, church leadership is a matter of significant responsibility in the eyes of Christ. It may not matter to the world outside, you may not find people of the world caring much about what a pastor or elder has to say or what he does, but to Christ it's really important. He made it a point to Peter through his Apostle Paul, he made it a point to the elders at Ephesus here in Acts 20, and as you read on in Scripture, you find that Christ's concern for this office is expressed in the qualifications that he requires a man to meet before he can enter into that office.

Look at 1 Timothy 3 with me. In 1 Timothy 3:1, it says that, "It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do." Of course it's a fine work. This is a work that is special and important to Christ and so to work for Christ in this way is a fine work for a man to do, Scripture says. And it goes on and says in verse 2, "An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach," and it goes on through verse 7 outlining other requirements, character requirements that are required before a man can enter into the office of an elder.

What's my point here in drawing this out? One is just to say simply that not every man should be an elder, not every man can be an elder according to Scripture. We're going by what Scripture says. There is a subset of men within the Christian realm that are called to be elders. If everybody's a leader, then nobody is a leader, right? If we're all chiefs, then

where are the Indians, so to speak? Can I even say that now in the 21st century? I don't mean anything bad by it. I don't know if I can even say that anymore without getting arrested. But an overseer is marked by a character of being above reproach and so Christ places a premium on this and sets forth qualifications of how an elder is to be identified before he is installed into the office there in verse 1 using the term "overseer."

Look at chapter 5, verse 17 with me, again just to see the interchangeability of the terms. The elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching. Overseers who are supposed to be able to teach, elders who are actually teaching, you see these terms being used in an interchangeable way. One more term that I would have you look at, one more passage text, I should say, is in 1 Peter just after the book of Hebrews. 1 Peter, after Hebrews and after James, I should say. In 1 Peter 5:1 and 2 it says this, Peter writing and so you see it from the Apostle Peter, you see it from the Apostle Paul in addition to the words of Jesus in John 21; there is a sweet consistency between Scripture in these matters. Chapter 5, verse 1 of 1 Peter, it says, "Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, shepherd the flock of God," the flock that belongs to God, "among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock." He calls them elders, he addresses them as elders, and then he uses the verb form of "oversee" in verse 2, he says, "Elders, you exercise oversight in the way that I am prescribing for you to do, and you prove to be examples to the flock," this flock that belongs to Christ. Elders exercising oversight. Overseers. You see the interchangeability of the terms.

Now that just allows us to summarize the nature of this office. The elders in a church, the overseers in a church, are the men who have the responsibility to lead a local church. They have the authority to lead a local church. They have the responsibility to lead the local church, to make decisions that shape the life of a local church. That's what oversight means, it means that there is a circle of men, there is a plurality of men to which the responsibility to lead and to teach and to provide for the spiritual care and nurture of a church, that responsibility is uniquely assigned to them with a sense of ultimate responsibility for what is happening. The elders, then, in their oversight means this, it means that the elders are the ones who are directing the work and they have pastoral responsibility to care for the souls of those who are in the local church. That's their job. It's a spiritual responsibility that is given to these men.

Sometimes the man may find his living in the work as what we tend to call pastors do. 1 Timothy 5:17 referred to providing for them in that way and I'm grateful for the way that this church provides for me and my family, but it's not necessarily a paid position. But what do the elders do? Let's bring the cookies down and just put them right on the bottom shelf, so to speak. I know I won't get arrested for saying that unless it's people that are like sugar-free, gluten-free in their diets. I'm going to get attacked from everybody for what I say here today and I'm just trying to use illustrations, that's all. What are elders responsible for? They're responsible for the teaching of a church. They are responsible,

therefore, to guard the doctrine of a church. They are to exemplify Christian living. They are to look out for the spiritual well-being of those that are under their care. I could say more about that.

You do see this in yet another passage of Scripture. Turn back to Hebrews for just a moment, Hebrews 13, and I realize that I'm going through something really important fairly quickly here. There's a reason for that. In Hebrews 13:7, the writer of Hebrews writing to these believers says this, he says, "Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith." These men led you, that's oversight. These men spoke the word of God to you, that's teaching. Imitate their faith, that is their example. And he goes on in verse 17 and he says, "Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you." To cause grief to those who keep oversight of your soul wouldn't even be profitable for you, let alone the grief that it causes to them, he says. So he emphasizes the reality, the role that we've been talking about, they are keeping watch over your souls.

So an elder has this responsibility, has these responsibilities of oversight, of teaching, and exemplifying Christian living, and that position, mind you, comes with a direct accountability to God. God will hold elders accountable and God will require an account of the stewardship that he gave to them, and one day elders and church leaders will stand before God and give a fearsome accounting of what they did with the responsibility and the souls that were entrusted to their care. So while it is a noble work that a man desires to do, Scripture would caution a man not to rationally pursue after the office until he's counted the cost of the fact that there is a great accountability that's going to come as a result of being in that position.

Now let me just say this, that out in the lobby on that circle table we have a couple of CDs that reflect in greater depth our prior teaching on elder leadership. If you're new to our church, I'd encourage you to pick those up. What I've said here today is a bit of a summary and a bit of an expansion of the things that are on those CDs and I would just encourage you to get those to get an even more biblical account of the nature of the office of an elder.

This is what an overseer is. This is what an overseer does. An overseer is a leader of the church. An elder, an overseer has responsibility for teaching, responsibility for spiritual care, has responsibility for exemplifying Christian living, and that's a lot of responsibility. You know, it's no wonder in light of that that you can find the Apostle Paul saying in 1 Thessalonians 5, saying, "Brethren, pray for us. Brethren, pray for us. The responsibility is great and I'm just a man of clay, so pray for us that God would help us and strengthen us in order to do what we've been assigned responsibility to do." It's no wonder that Scripture warns in James 3:1, "Let not many of you become teachers, for as such you'll face a stricter judgment." Beloved, it's no wonder and I speak from a measure of sympathetic understanding when Paul said in the Corinthian letters, "Who is adequate for these things?" Who is adequate for a responsibility like that? Who is adequate for an

accounting like that, that will come? Who is adequate to deal with the diverse needs of people that are before him and the wisdom that it takes to discern what is right and proper in a particular situation? Who is adequate? Who is adequate to divide the word of God rightly and to be able to stand and to stand for Scripture and to be able to resist the pull of false doctrine as it subtly insinuates itself? There's a lot of responsibility to the office of an elder and so the man who undertakes the office when he understands that, is just realizing, "Oh man, I must be on the receiving end of grace here. I must be dependent on grace. I insist on the help of the Holy Spirit here because in myself I am not able to do this." And yet this is the pattern that Christ has established.

So a biblical church has biblical elders. Along these lines, I would say this, beloved, I can say this easily and warmly to a congregation like this because what I'm about to say is already being manifested by the people that are consistent and regular in church. A biblical church recognizes that office and within the congregation, if I could say it that way, has a sympathetic concern for its leadership that expresses itself in consistent prayer for its leaders, recognizing and saying, "Look, I know these guys. I know they're not equal to what God has given them to do. Are you kidding? I've been in his house, I know what he's like. I see his failures. I know his history. I know how he stutters when he speaks." That doesn't become a grounds for criticism or disdain for the man or the office, rather it becomes a ground for sympathy, "Oh, this man needs my prayers, then. This man needs our help and support if he's going to be called to such responsibility and he so inadequate and I can see that with my own eyes, then what I want to do is I want to lend my support. I want to pray for him. I want to be alongside to strengthen him. I want to hold up Moses' arms, so to speak." I'm not comparing myself to Moses, or elders to Moses, it's just an illustration. The arms get tired and someone comes alongside and holds them up, that's the sense. And what God is developing at Truth Community Church is a congregation that's doing that lovingly, consistently, faithfully in a way that's a great encouragement to your unworthy elders, and so I'm grateful to God for that.

My point here today is not to ask for support in any way but simply to help us recognize what Scripture says about church leadership, and as I said to the men yesterday, for us together to come together and to build a culture of church leadership where everybody is on the same page, recognizing what Scripture requires and people are moving in the same direction, not at cross purposes with what Scripture would have us to be because, beloved, and as I said to the men yesterday, you say, "Why didn't you just say what you said yesterday today? It would have saved you having to say it twice." I don't know. I should have been more efficient, I guess. Who is adequate for these things? What I said yesterday is this, you know, when I think about our church, I'm not thinking specifically about what's happening in any given day or what's going to happen next week. I mean, you deal with that stuff but my real heart, my real concern, the real burden of my mind is where is Truth Community Church going to be in 10 years, and in 20 years, and in 30 years, you know, and there's going to be a time where I'm not around for that, you know, just in the natural course of life. I'm going to go to heaven one day. I like being with you guys but when I can go and be with Jesus, I'm going to go do that instead and I'll bid you farewell and see you later, so to speak. You know, my concern is where will the church be down the road 20, 30 years from now? Well, the way that a church, and you can't

guarantee any of these things, but how a church stays on the biblical trajectory that it's trying to set in its early years as we've tried to do here, is to have a congregation-wide culture that embraces what Scripture says about church leadership and there's a mutual embracing and a mutual accountability of these things so that there is a strength in the congregation that provides the center of gravity for these things so that you're not so subject to a smooth talker coming in off of the street and leading you in a completely different direction. That happens. I can't guarantee that it won't happen but I know this, that if we don't talk about these things, if we're not embracing these things as the culture of our church, I know that it's going to be easy for another guy to come in and lead this dear church in a different direction than what we've tried to lay down. The protection in my judgment about that down the road, is that there is an established culture that says, "What elders do is they teach the word of God according to established doctrine. They provide care for the church. They exemplify Christian living." And when that is the common mindset, then you're less likely to follow a man who just wants to come in and give you as song and a dance and lead you in a different direction because it's what seems shiny at the moment.

So every one of you, I ask you, I plead with you to embrace these things even if you have no desire for church leadership. You have a part to play in the culture of church leadership that we're trying to establish here by saying, "I recognize and understand these biblical principles. That's what I want. More importantly, that's what Christ wants for His church and therefore in whatever sphere of influence and responsibility and conversation that the Lord gives to me in my part in the church, I'm going to uphold that. I'm going to stand for that. I'm going to support that and not undermine or cut against it or just be willfully ignorant about it." We're all in this together and when we're all in this together, it serves Christ, we all benefit from that common mind on church leadership. So the fact that your area of responsibility may not be public, may not be platform, is no less strategic because it's a smaller realm. Dads, as you're talking to your kids. Moms, as you're teaching your kids. Siblings, as you're talking to one another. Single people, as you're looking for relationships within the church that you might spend your life with. To have these things in mind as an aspiration, as a goal of something that is worthy to be understood and protected. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. That's how important church leadership is and we all play a part in protecting and upholding it. That's my point and so I commend those things to you.

That's the overseers, what about the deacons? What about the deacons? Turn back to Philippians 1. As we return to the book of Philippians, Paul also refers to Philippians. Look at Philippians 1 with me. Philippians 1:1 again, "To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers and deacons." The overseers and deacons. Here we find another office in the church, the office of deacon. The word "deacon" comes from a term in the Greek, *diakonos*. It simply means a servant. It has the idea of being a servant and a servant in this sense, you know, we were talking about slaves, this is a different word, and servant here is not emphasizing that idea of subordination of a slave to his master, it's a different word emphasizing something else. It has a more general sense of someone who takes care of a need, someone who looks after a need and makes sure that it is done. Well, the deacons in Philippians were probably assistants to

the elders who took care of physical needs and daily tasks in a way that mirrors something that we see in the book of Acts 6.

Look at Acts 6 with me quickly, if you will. Acts 6, beginning in verse 1. This is the first hint of a deacon-type role in the New Testament. These men were not necessarily deacons in a formal sense but we're looking at them for the role that they played in the midst of the ministry of the apostles. Chapter 6, verse 1, "Now at this time while the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic Jews against the native Hebrews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving of food. So the twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples and said, 'It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables. Therefore, brethren, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task.'" Notice the task oriented nature of the assignment. "'But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.' The statement found approval with the whole congregation; and they chose Stephen," and then they list out six others. Verse 6, "And these they brought before the apostles; and after praying, they laid their hands on them."

What did these men do? I'm going to treat this quickly here, I hope. These men freed the apostles to do their specific responsibility, their unique responsibility. They said, "We cannot neglect the word of God to do these things. The word of God has the priority in the role that has been given to us. We need to be men of prayer. We need to be men of the word." That doesn't mean that the other needs were unimportant, it just meant that there needed to be other men to step up to do them so that the apostles were free to conduct the spiritual ministry of the proclamation of the word and prayer. So they're working together as a team. Everybody is working together, so to speak, to make possible the clear and accurate proclamation of the word of God, and what these men were doing was taking care of needs as it was delegated to them so that the mind and time of the apostles were free to focus on what was uniquely given to them to do. The apostles said, "We will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word. We need people to take care of these other things that need to be done as well."

That's the idea of the role of a deacon. They serve in a church. They serve and they meet particular needs in the church and they are critical, critical I say, to the functioning of a healthy church because the delegation, the division of labor allows the support of the preaching of the word. I can tell you that if we did not have deacons that were taking care of financial and facility matters within the church, taking care of audiovisual and taking care of security in the church, taking care of music in the church, if all of those things were falling on your elders, this place would be a fraction of what I hope that it is. These men who serve in the role of deacons in Truth Community Church are absolutely essential to what we do. They provide for the physical care of the church. They provide for spiritual care in the body of believers. They provide for our music. And all of these things are done in a way that lets other people do what they need to do.

The office of deacon, like the office of elder, is reserved for those who are spiritually qualified. Look at 1 Timothy again real quickly with me, 1 Timothy 3 says this in verse 8

after in seven verses he's given the spiritual requirements for the office of overseer, he says in verse 8, "Deacons likewise," likewise, tying to the qualifications that he had just been discussing in the first seven verses, he says, "Deacons likewise must be men of dignity, not double-tongued, or addicted to much wine or fond of sordid gain, but holding to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. These men must also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons if they are beyond reproach."

Look at verse 2 with me, "An overseer, then, must be above reproach." Verse 10, a deacon must be "beyond reproach." You see, there are moral qualifications for the office of deacon as well. You can't have a half-drunk, cigarette smoking guy standing outside the door of a church and think that there is a guy that could be a deacon, a guy who is just carnal in all of his behavior. No, you know, I've been in churches long long ago back in my childhood where maybe it was like that, you know, and then they finish up with church and then they go to their Masonic meeting. Yeah, I said that too. This is not a picture of a New Testament deacon. A New Testament deacon is a godly man whose moral life is reflecting the same characteristics that are required by the office of an overseer, the only difference is that a deacon is not required to be able to teach, he does not have to have that ability. Everything else parallels what is required of an elder. In character, deacons must be above reproach just like elders. They are to be men with spiritual convictions and – mark this – proven faithfulness to their families and their wives.

Truth Community Church's friend, John MacArthur, says this about deacons and I quote, he says, "Although a deacon's primary function is not teaching, they are no less spiritually qualified, honored or respected. They relieve those who are more skilled in teaching to be free to pray and to study to teach." He goes on to say, "It is a role of service, of sacrifice, and of commitment to others' needs. The reward of the deacon's office is not the temporal glory that comes from human praise but rather the eternal blessing that comes from living a life of spiritual service to the glory of God." They serve. There are a lot of needs that make a local church function, a lot of things that have to be done, and deacons see those things and gladly embrace them.

Providentially, not by plan, in today's bulletin our deacons are listed in today's bulletin and I just want to say plainly on behalf of all of the elders that I'm grateful for those men. I thank you, men, for what you do and I say plainly that we could not do as elders without what you do in that role. The deacons aren't the only ones who serve. We have other men and women who serve in the functioning of the church but the office here is set forth.

Deacons are simply servants, glad servants, morally qualified, spiritually qualified servants, and here's the beauty of it all as I'm bringing this plane in to land, beloved, here's the beauty of it all: Jesus Christ himself, our Lord, our Master, described himself as a servant. Look at Matthew 20. There is high dignity in being like Christ and being a slave and a saint of Christ, of being like Christ in your attitude toward service, and Christ says in Matthew 20:26, he says, "whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave; just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for

many." Beloved, in your spiritual need, your sin, your spiritual deadness, your course of your former life that was going to lead to your eternal destruction, can I remind you that while you were like that, Christ as it were, put on the robe of a servant, girded a towel about himself as a servant literally and metaphorically, and served your need, doing that which only he could do when he offered his life and shed his blood as an atonement for your sin at Calvary. With all of his dignity of person, with all of the dignity of essence of being the second person of the Trinity, the eternal Son of God, he became a servant to our need and lay down his life for our sins. Christ saw your need, served your need, and met it. Let there never be a question about within the local church of the glorious position of being a servant. Our Lord was the ultimate servant and when men step into that role and serve in a local church like that, they are following in a noble path that one far greater than them has first served in.

So what do we say about church leadership as we close here this morning? Church leaders come from men who see the worth of Christ. They understand that the church belongs to Christ. They want to love Christ by loving his people.

Final thought, hard thing to get your mind around maybe, in describing all of these characteristics of church leaders, if you're not in church leadership I want you to know something really important, there's not a double standard. It's not that leaders have one standard and then there's a lesser standard applied to the congregation. No, Scripture calls all of us to follow the example of godly leaders. It's not just men, it's women as well. We're all called to follow and to imitate the example of Christ and to be Spirit-filled Christians. This is what's true for everyone in terms of the character requirements.

So let me just say this on behalf of the other elders as well, we're grateful for all of you that serve, men and women alike. You serve in big and small ways. It is routine for me to encounter people that are serving in our church and to be met with a kind of sweet-hearted gentle spirit that, to me, exemplifies what Christian living looks like, when people serve like that without a title, serve that way out of love for Christ and a love for his people, and our congregation is filled with people like that, what a blessing that is. I believe I'm biased, I'm really biased but I believe that our church is on a good track as I see those things and I would just encourage you all that true Christians don't wait for a title and then begin to serve, true Christian serve because they love the Savior who first loved them.

Let's pray together.

Our Lord, we thank You for Your service to us. We thank You for Your wisdom in structuring the church. We acknowledge that we fall short in so many ways and, therefore, Father, we come not boasting in ourselves but humbly asking for grace to become more like You would have Truth Community Church to be, to have elders that were more like Christ, to have deacons that were more like Christ, to have a congregation that having started well would excel still more. Grant us grace to that end that this church might become more and more what You would have it to be and that 10 years, 20 years, 30 years, 50 years from now, O God, the culture, the foundation that we

lay in these early days in Philippians would be that which a generation of believers yet to be born could come and stand on and find shade under the tree that we are planting even now. Help us all to embrace that, to love the opportunity of that, and to rise to the occasion of it in our personal lives, to grow in Christ together, to see others come to a saving knowledge of Him, Father, ultimately so that all of our names would fade into the background to be forgotten and the name of Jesus Christ, the only One who is worthy to be remembered and exalted here on earth in this place and then ultimately in heaven forever more. We pray in Jesus' name and in love for Him. Amen.

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