

Installation Service

Elders, Deacons, and the Congregation

Selected Texts

Rev. Freddy Fritz

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Elders, Deacons, and the Congregation

Scripture

It is our great joy today to install one man, who has been duly elected by the members of this congregation, into the office of Ruling Elder.

The church is a living community of people redeemed by Jesus Christ. No one is more visible to the watching world than those who are in leadership over the church. They are the ones the world will point to as examples of what Christians represent.

We've seen in past years how a handful of highly visible but disreputable men can tarnish the reputation of the entire church. Who can say whether some of these people are even genuine believers? Satan commonly sows weeds (false believers) among the wheat (true believers; Matthew 13:24-30; 36-43).

Therefore it is important to carefully evaluate someone's life before he can be put in a position of Christian leadership.

Lesson

This evaluation has been done, and today I want to make a few comments about elders, deacons, and the congregation.

I. Elders

Acts 14:21-23 records the ordination of elders in the early church:

²¹ When they [i.e., Paul and Barnabas] had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, ²² strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.

²³ And when they had *appointed elders* for them in every church,

with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

How does God reveal to the church who the elders should be so that the church can ordain them? This passage suggests that prayer and fasting are part of it.

But in the end, the church must determine whom God desires to serve as leaders based on a set of biblical qualifications that are clearly delineated in the word of God.

Elders are not primarily chosen on the basis of their knowledge of the business world, their financial ability, their prominence, or even their innate ability as leaders.

They are chosen because God has called and prepared them for the leadership of the church. The men whom God selects will meet the biblical qualifications.

And what are the biblical *qualifications* of an elder? 1 Timothy 3:1-7 lists what is required of an elder. As you think of the man you have elected, know that he has met these qualifications:

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.

What, then, are the *duties* required of an elder? Acts 20 gives us a look at the elders in Ephesus. In verse 28 Paul says, "Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God,

which he obtained with his own blood.” An elder who rules the church must evaluate not only his own life, but also the spiritual needs of his flock.

Our *Book of Church Order* (8-3) specifies the duties of an elder in the following words:

It belongs to the office of elder, both severally and jointly, to watch diligently over the flock committed to their charge, that no corruption of doctrine or morals enter therein. They must exercise government and discipline, and take oversight not only of the spiritual interests of the particular church, but also the church generally when called thereunto. They should visit the people at their homes, especially the sick. They should instruct the ignorant, comfort the mourner, nourish and guard the children of the church. They should set a worthy example to the flock entrusted to their care by their zeal to evangelize the unconverted and make disciples. All those duties which private Christians are bound to discharge by the law of love are especially incumbent upon them by divine vocation, and are to be discharged as official duties. They should pray with and for the people, being careful and diligent in seeking the fruit of the preached Word among the flock.

These, then, are the qualifications and duties of an elder.

II. Deacons

Acts 6:1-7 introduces us to a group who many believe to be the first deacons. Though these men are never specifically called deacons, they are certainly an appropriate model for deacons. Apparently, it was some time after this that the office of a deacon was officially recognized in the church. 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.

In the earliest days of the church, the apostles led the church at Jerusalem. Eventually it was necessary for them to delegate some of their responsibilities to other mature Christian men. That enabled the apostles to concentrate on prayer and teaching, while the deacons concentrated on meeting the people’s physical and material needs.

The *qualifications* for a deacon are set out in 1 Timothy 3:8-13:

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.

What are the *duties* of a deacon? Although the duties of a deacon are given in Scripture, and particularly in Acts 6:1-7, let me summarize the biblical duties of a deacon in the words of our *Book of Church Order* (9-2):

It is the duty of the deacons to minister to those who are in need, to the sick, to the friendless, and to any who may be in distress. It is their duty also to develop the grace of liberality in the members of the church, to devise effective methods of collecting the gifts of the people, and to distribute these gifts among the objects to which they are contributed. They shall have the care of the property of the congregation, both real and personal, and shall keep in proper repair the church edifice and other building belonging to the congregation. In matters of special importance affecting the property of the church, they cannot take final action without the approval of the Session and consent of the congregation.

These, then, are the qualifications and duties of a deacon.

III. The Congregation

For those of you who have been thinking, “That’s right, elders and deacons, get to work!”—now it’s your turn!

Whereas the basic task of church leadership is to teach sound doctrine and explain how it applies to daily life, the basic task of the members is to be Spirit-filled as they learn doctrine and then apply what they learn to their daily lives.

The congregation is the object of the leaders’ ministry. Perhaps some day as a result of that ministry, members of this church will become deacons, elders, or even missionaries and pastors.

We all start at the same point—somewhere in the congregation. Those who are faithful with small tasks can be entrusted with larger responsibilities.

The congregation is the part of the church that is to do “the work of the ministry” (Ephesians 4:12). Hebrews 13:17a identifies the general obligation of a congregation: “Obey your leaders and submit to them.” Assuming that the leadership of the church is Spirit-directed, the members of the congregation are to obey them because they are ministering on behalf of Christ as his under-shepherds. The congregation is to subject itself to their godly min-

istry, although they may not understand it all, and may even disagree sometimes with what the elders are attempting to do. The church's obedience is a living testimony to the world.

There are many things that hurt a church and destroy its testimony. The primary one is poor leadership or false teachers who fail to build the church on the Word of God.

Another thing that weakens a church is a congregation that won't follow its leadership. That causes church splits as well as other problems that are exposed to the full view of the world. Every church member must keep in step with the Spirit and be faithful and obedient.

Conclusion

I thank God for the men he has raised up to serve as elders and deacons in this church. Let me assure you that God has raised up excellent and godly men to serve him as officers here at the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church.

Will you pray that God would use them to serve him faithfully as Christ builds this church for his glory?

And will you also pray that God help you and every member of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church to keep in step with the Spirit and be faithful and obedient to Jesus Christ? Amen.

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and **membership** in his church family,
develop them to Christlike **maturity**,
equip them for their **ministry** in the church
and life **mission** in the world,
in order to **magnify** God's name.*

Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

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PRAYER:

Our Father, I thank you for raising up Officers who serve in the Church of Jesus Christ. I thank you for raising up Officers who serve him here at the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church.

O Lord, help our Officers to serve you faithfully.

I also pray, Lord, that you will help all the members to submit to the leadership and oversight of the Officers in this Church.

I pray that the relationship between the Officers and the members will be a shining example to the world of Jesus' rule in his Church.

And all of this I ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

CHARGE:

Go and glorify God in all that you think, do, and say! And as you do, may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.