

INTRODUCTION

One of the great things about Jesus is that He deals with each of us as individuals. There is One God and One Mediator between God and man; Jesus who gave Himself as a ransom for all. To know that in order to come to the Kingdom of God one must be “born again,” this truth is the celebration of the rights of the individual. It is in Christ that everyone matters for everyone as an individual may know God. Every human being can be redeemed. Every one is important. However, the faith we enter into as individual is not one we are to practice alone. God calls His people to group up. He says we are to be one people, one flock, with one shepherd. He joins us together as close and as tightly as individual parts of a human’s body are connected. He calls this group that we join by coming to Him, the Church.

THE NEED FOR LEADERSHIP

And here is where the need for Leadership comes into the Church. If God never wanted anything more than a relationship between us and Him, we would not need Church leadership. But since He wants us to come together, to be “one as He is One with the Son,” then we have the need to organize and all organization takes leadership. Each local church requires some sort of organization and therefore it requires a leadership structure. Let me give you the principals of church leadership that I think make the most sense from the scripture:

1. We must do everything the Bible says clearly about Church government.
2. We have the freedom to invent needed forms of organization not covered in the Bible provided they:
 - A) Do not violate the Scriptures
 - B) Promote the health of the church

As a rule, I believe the government is best which governs least. In other words, if we must make rules, let’s make them. But lets have as few as needed so that our people feel as free as possible within the context of the Church. However, before a church even begins to think about how it wants to organize itself, it must first take care of principle number one by asking: Are we doing what the Bible says about church government. That is our subject for today.

OUR SITUATION AT HARVEST

Harvest is a young church. We about 13 years old now. When planting a church, everything is in its infancy. Church plants have only a few people, a little money, and a simple organization. But as they grow, the need to grow in organization grows too. Harvest’s first lead pastor, Bert Jones, is an evangelist and emphasized having world-wide vision, a heart for the gospel and for the lost, and promoting a desire to grow the Kingdom of God on earth. He left after 7 years, having completed his task of growing a church up from scratch to a few hundred faithful attendees.

When I came in, as the second lead pastor, my task was clear. Beyond the duties of preaching the word and attending to general pastoral care, the need to build the organization and the leadership structure was clear. The immediate need of adapting our financial organization to a model, that accommodates a growing church rather than a church plant, was attended to. God has blessed in this area.

At the same time, the need to organize childhood education to a structure that would sustain the number of families and children coming needed to be built. God has blessed in this area. At the same time, there was a need to organize the staff and other leaders of the church for effective church ministry. And it is here that we had to begin a bit of a Titus 1:5 ministry.

You see, in the Isle of Crete, Paul had planted some churches and others had worked there too. God had given them success, but they now needed to organize with homegrown leadership. Paul sent Titus to Crete to implement this leadership.

Titus 1:5 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-

The first step in putting things in order is to appoint elders in the local church. So, from my first month at Harvest, back in March of 2005, I began to work on the task of training our leaders on the nature of elders from a biblical standpoint. Within a year, we re-organized our leadership structure into an elder team that included both our staff pastors, whom we call vocational elders, and our lay-leaders, whom we call non-vocational elders.

Since that change was made, I have worked hard to continue to educate the team as to what it means to be an elder, and to pull us together in unity, and to build a process to create on-going leadership development. I believe, that after about 5 years, that project is going well. I would like to talk to you in detail about that, but it will have wait for another day. For now, let me summarize by saying that the term “elder” and the term “pastor” are synonyms for us. We have a plurality of elders (that means a team) that are themselves organized as seems best, and who share, using our individual gifts and our time, in overseeing and loving and caring for the flock as best we can. Our main text which speaks our qualification is as follows:

1 Timothy 3:1-7 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.

We are an elder-led church at Harvest. By the way, if you ever think God might be calling you to serve as an elder or if you'd like to enquire about it, feel free to contact me. Now, the elders' main job is to see to it that the gospel goes out and that the people are disciplined by the word of God, and to perform general oversight, so that the people of God can complete the ministry that God calls you to. We are here to enable you to grow in Jesus and do the work of service that God has called you to.

In this church there is a lot of potential. We are now the church where between 6 and 7 hundred people identifies us as their home church. We can do a lot of good work in our world in the name of

Jesus. You are doing that in your individual lives I hope. But we also can do work in an organized fashion. However, the ability to manage all the work that needs to be done cannot be carried out just by the elders. There are not enough of them, and they must stick to the task of the ministry of the word and oversight as the Bible assigns them.

So what do we do? We could use another leadership position that serves under the authority of Jesus through the elders, is equal in importance to the elders to the task of ministry, but does not have to do the same work as elders. Where are we to get these people? Well, the Bible doesn't have just one office for church leadership. It has two. One is Elder. The other is listed in Philippians 1:1.

Philippians 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:

Now, an overseer is another word for Elder. So this office was established in the church when Paul wrote this letter. But there is another office mentioned –deacon. The word deacon means servant. How is a deacon different from the elder? First, by process of elimination, they do not do the work of Elders. They are not responsible to design the method of bringing the education of the Word of God to the people. Secondly, they are not responsible for overseeing the entire organization of the church in a global sense.

Deacons then are responsible for leading other Christians in the church in accomplishing necessary ministries of the church. The Elders of Harvest have been at work at this position for the last 2 plus years. We began with appointing a group of people we called “Team Leaders.” But this term became confusing. So we are not using it anymore. Now we are using the biblical term “deacons.” We have improved the training of the deacons (and we will continue to do so) and have continued to think through how to define their roles.

So, today, we are going to be introducing you to a group of leaders in the church that fulfill the second office mandated in the Bible. As these deacons begin to function, you can help them by serving them when they call on you, and supporting them and encouraging them. For now, let's take a look at most detailed text in the Bible regarding deacons.

TEXT

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.

THREE OBSERVATIONS TO NOTE ABOUT DEACONS:

1. The Spiritual Character of the Deacon is His First Qualification (not his leadership skills)

A deacon has to be saved. But more than that, he need not only profess that he is a Christian, his lifestyle must prove it beyond doubt. In his home he lives like a Christian. He raises his family as a Christian would. He is not hooked on drink or drugs. He's not greedy and doesn't lie. He holds the mystery of the faith. That means he is a proponent of the gospel. He believes that Jesus died for sinners and mankind has no other hope. He himself believes this and lives it and runs hard after Jesus. His tongue isn't used for lies and gossip, but he is faithful. By the way, this means that the life of a deacon is really the life that all Christian men and women should aspire to.

2. A Deacon can be a Man or a Woman

You might wonder how I make this observation from this text. So let me explain! First, the Bible teaches that the job of Elder is restricted to men only. Explicitly in 1 Timothy 2 comes the prohibition saying, "I do not allow a woman to teach or have authority over men." The functions of the elders are to oversee the church as a whole and to insure the proper teaching of the Bible to the entire church. It is shepherding with the word. Women can participate in shepherding with the Word, but it is not proper for women to take authority over them and their discipleship. This has nothing to do with value, but with roles that God has set out.

We at Harvest hold to this and restrict our elder team to men alone. If you are new to Harvest and haven't heard any explanations regarding this and you have questions, feel free to ask, and even to object if you like. You can talk to me personally, or go on our website where you can find more information on the subject. But with deacons, since they are not responsible for the overall ministry of the Word nor the global oversight of the church, their tasks are not those prohibited to women in the church. A deacon is a leader role. We expect our deacons to get their work done by including other people through organizing and delegating. But we are not assigning the tasks of the elder to the deacons.

Now, let's look closer at the text. Which verse speaks to the issue of women allowed to be deacons? My answer is verse 11. Let's look at it again.

11 Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things.

I want you to trust your English translations of the Bible. However, in this instance, I think you will gain more understanding if you see the original language. So I am going to show it to you. Here is verse 11 in Greek:

Gunai/kaj w`sau,twj semna,j(mh. diabo,louj(nhfali,ouj(pista.j evn pa/sin□

Now that probably wasn't much help. So let me transliterate those words into our alphabet so that you can try to pronounce them:

Gunaikas hosautos semnas, meh diabolous, nehphalious, pistas, en pasin.

Now, that's a little better. At least we can pronounce the words. But that doesn't help much unless we know what they mean. So, let's look at that:

Gunaikas [women] hosautos [likewise] semnas [dignified], meh [not] diabolous [gossips, the devil], nehphalious [self controlled, temperate], pistas [faithful], en [in] pasin [all things].

Or:

“Women, likewise, dignified; not gossips, self controlled, faithful in all things.”

Now we’re getting somewhere. That is the exact translation of the Greek words without adding anything or taking anything away. Now, here is how the ESV translates that, by comparison:

ESV 1 Timothy 3:11 Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things.

“Women, likewise, dignified; not gossips, self controlled, faithful in all things.”

And the King James

KJV 1 Timothy 3:11 Even so must their wives be grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things.

“Women, likewise, dignified; not gossips, self controlled, faithful in all things.”

You might be wondering: “Why does the King James and the ESV translate the word “women” as “wives?” The answer is that the Greek language uses the same word for both, but you must decide which is with by the context. So the translators of the King James, in the 1600's decided to say this is wives. So did the translators in the 20th century who translated the ESV.

But what I am saying to you is that I and the deacons believe that this verse would better be translated as women and not as wives? Let me give you three reasons:

1. Because there is no corresponding instruction for elders’ wives.

This text, starting in verse one, gives the qualifications for the elders, then the qualifications for the deacons. There is no mention of the qualifications for elders wives. Therefore, when we come to verse 11, if we interpret this word as wives, then we must assume that Paul wanted deacons’ wives to be put the test, but elders’ wives, apparently, had no test put the them at all. Another way to look at it is that since elders are restricted to men, there was no need to put qualifications for female elders, but since deacons can be men or women, Paul felt it necessary to point out qualifications that were general to all and specific to women also –as generally men and women are tempted to sin sometimes in different ways.

2. Because the deacon does not perform the duties prohibited to women in chapter 2 of Timothy.

In other words, the responsibility for teaching and overseeing the church as a whole is the job of the elders and restricted to men. Deacons are not to duplicate that function. The job of leading and organizing and completing tasks with teams is not restricted to men.

3. Because of Phoebe.

In Romans 16:1, a strong case can be made that Paul is referring to the office of Deacon when he says he commends sister Phoebe to them, who is a deacon (servant) in Cenchrrea church. If Phoebe is a deacon then there is reason to believe that the original office of deacon is not restricted.

For these reasons, we find ourselves agreeing with the translators of the NASB who render 1 Timothy 3:11 like this:

NAS 1 Timothy 3:11 Women must likewise be dignified, not malicious gossips, but temperate,

faithful in all things

“Women, likewise, dignified; not gossips, self controlled, faithful in all things.”

3. Deacon is a position worthy of honor and respect.

Paul says that those who are deacons gain a good standing. Within the church, members are to honor their leaders and respect them. This is what the Lord wants. This is not restricted to one's favorite preacher or elder, nor to one's friends, but all the leaders. Imperfect though they are, they are given to you by God for your benefit. (Some, unfortunately, think that honor is reserved for church leaders only when they see things your way or do everything perfectly. Not so).

The deacon position in this church, like the Elder position, requires a great deal of commitment. We ask both to re-set their priorities so that after caring for family, Church comes next, before other things. We ask deacons, as elders, to put themselves last and you first. We ask deacons, like elders, to take criticism in stride and keep loving and serving. We ask deacons to do what it takes to fulfill the mission of God's church for the sake of Jesus. With this in mind, I encourage you to honor and support the leadership of those who hold the office of deacon, for the sake of Christ and the sake of your well-being. Join me in encouraging them in their ministries as we welcome the following deacons.

Pray for deacons.