



Date: March 22, 2009

Title: "Who leads the church?" (Part 4 of the Church series)

Text: 1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9; 1 Peter 5:1-5

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*(*Due to technical difficulties, first portion of message was not recorded*).*

Intro: The question we're tackling in this fourth message of the Church series is "Who leads the church?" In an age of distrust and cynicism towards authority, the church's ability to structure itself biblically is of utmost importance. There are several reasons why this topic is challenging to teach on:

1. Some instinctively think this is topic is boring.
2. Many church people have had negative experiences.
3. The biblical words of "elder" and "overseer" and "bishop" are hard for us to relate to.
4. There has been very little biblical teaching on this issue in most circles.
5. General cynical or negative view of authority and institutions.

In the New Testament, these four words are used interchangeably:

ELDER—BISHOP—OVERSEER—PASTOR

Three Questions:

I. What are the qualifications of an elder?

1 Timothy 3:1-7

1. aspire: a man must be called, he has to want to serve and lead.
2. above reproach: he's not the shady dude. All his dealings are above the table.
3. husband of one wife: he's a one-woman man, not a flirt. he lives his life with a high degree of sexual integrity and all his sexual and emotional energy is directed solely at his wife.
4. sober-minded: clear-headed, not too high, not too low.
5. self-controlled: a guy who can delay gratification.
6. respectable: people look up to him, a man that others can follow.
7. hospitable: he invites people into his life.
8. able to teach: he knows his bible. Doesn't mean he necessarily is a preacher from the pulpit, but he can disciple people and explain the faith to them and understands doctrine.
9. not a drunkard: doesn't have an addictive personality.
10. not violent but gentle: he doesn't fly off the handle. Can handle stress.
11. not quarrelsome: not the argumentative man who has to win every argument.
12. manages his own family: he can pastor his home before he pastors the church.
13. not a recent convert: He has some gravitas and experience in life.
14. well thought of by outsiders: people don't scratch their heads when they hear he's an elder at this church.

Titus 1:5-9

This list reads very similar to 1 Timothy 3:1-7, but expands the idea of his ability to teach and handle doctrine appropriately. It says he must "hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it."

So, he absolutely has to be a man who can handle his Bible. He's not just the good businessman in the church. He's the man who can explain the deeper truths of the faith to those inside the church and guard the church from contrary truths.

Additional thoughts on qualifications of an elder:

A). Not some special forces, elite paratrooper Christian. These lists and characteristics are things we want to see in every man.

B). The difference is that an elder has three important characteristics that not every other man who is pursuing Christ necessarily will have:

- 1-Must be called by God (aspire).
- 2-Must be able to teach.
- 3-Must be a Leader.

II. What does an elder do?

1 Peter 5:1-5

Peter points out two essential responsibilities of elders:

1). Shepherd the flock: They give spiritual care to the sheep. They teach, correct, nurture, feed, and protect the church from wolves that come to destroy God's people (Acts 20:28-32).

2). Exercise oversight: they lead and govern the church. However, unlike a worldly view of authority, they do so in a humble, Christ-like, self-sacrificial way, not as ones lording their authority over the church, but as shepherds willing to lay down their life for the church.

Many governing church boards / councils major on the oversight, governance. This is out of balance! Elders should not just be the stoic men who met in a boardroom, but rather they are also the shepherds who get their hands dirty serving the sheep, caring for them, laying down their lives for them.

III. What should it look like for us?

1. A plurality of Elders: The idea of a "senior pastor" on top of the pyramid works well in some situations but is not particularly biblical. The authority of eldership should be shared amongst a group of men. It is not just for one man. The lead pastor / elder may be the leader of the elders but he should be accountable to a group of elders that together lead the church in humility.

2. A mixture of permanent/vocational and lay/rotational Elders: There are a variety of models that churches use. We are moving towards a mixture of men who are the vocational Elders employed by the church who serve continually and a rotation of laymen from the church who serve terms.

3. Slow implementation: It is better for us to move slowly in the appointment of Elders rather than to move too quickly and make a man an elder when he is not ready or qualified.

Conclusion:

Why is this so important? What's on the line?

1. Our structural health greatly impacts our ability to be stewards of the Gospel to our community.
2. Our sanctification (healthy growth) as individuals and a church.