

LEADERSHIP and Membership part 1

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[0 : 00] Take your Bibles and go to 1 Timothy, or 1 Timothy, chapter 3.

If you're visiting with us, you can pull out that black Bible in the chair in front of you. And go towards the back and find page 163. 1 Timothy, chapter 3.

1 Timothy 3. I'm going to read the first 13 verses. We'll kind of launch in our study today and next week.

For today, particularly this passage, 1 Timothy 3. 1 through 13. It is a trustworthy statement.

If any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires. An overseer then must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach.

[1 : 15] Not addicted to wine or pugnacious, but gentle, uncontentious, free from the love of money. One who manages his own household well. Keeping his children under control with all dignity.

But if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God? Not a new convert, lest he become conceited and fall into the condemnation and cured by the devil.

And he must have a good reputation with those outside the church so that he may not fall into reproach and the snare of the devil. Verse 8.

James Comey.

James Comey. FBI director announced Tuesday that despite evidence Hillary Clinton was extremely careless, quote unquote, in her handling of classified emails on a private server, the Bureau will not recommend to the Department of Justice that criminal charges be brought against a former Secretary of State.

[2 : 54] That was the first statement in an article from last Tuesday. As some of you, most of you, if not all of you, are aware. Now whether you agree or not with what he's done, whether you think Mrs. Clinton was or is lying about this or other issues, everyone can agree on this.

Those in leadership should have, or must have, credibility and or character.

I mean, I think everyone can agree on that. They should have some sense of character and credibility. And you should define what that means.

Who does what and why. Which is why I decided over the next two weeks, I think the last time I preached on a message like this, like this today and the next Sunday, was six years ago.

Like a specific message about leadership and a specific message on membership was six years ago. So I'm like, oh, I probably should speak on that.

[4 : 14] Why do we believe this? Why do we have what says the title, Leadership and Membership Part One. Today we'll look at deacons and elders. What do we mean by this as a church?

Why do we believe this as a church? What are we looking for in these leaders? What should they have? If these guys are going to be leaders, What kind of leaders should they be?

All these different questions come about. And there's so much more we can go into. I mean, there's been books written on this. Fake books for that matter too. So we will just touch on this subject.

So we can get an idea. Whether you've been at this church for the past ten years, Since I've been here. Or whether you've been here for ten minutes.

I mean, whichever one. You'll see kind of where we're coming from as a church. And a good reminder for me. Since I am in this position of leadership. What do the scriptures say?

[5 : 21] It's our authority. So what does it say about leaders? Let's take first deacons. Deacons simply means servants. Well, that's pretty simple.

Sometimes it's translated as minister. The word refers to service in general. Caring for physical needs. The mark of a follower of Jesus Christ is one who serves.

Jesus described himself as a servant. As a deacon. Paul did. Even Timothy was called, described as a deacon. Those who serve.

So all Christians in some sense are called to deacon each other. To deacon one another. To minister to one another. To serve one another. But then you have this office.

This designation of this guy as deacon. What does that mean? Well, today. I mean, you look at what we read about deacons.

[6 : 28] You have elders and deacons. Today, a deacon in a church. You probably may know about this. Has evolved into some kind of executive office. Or financial body.

Particularly in congregations that no longer have elders. Often, these men would serve actively for limited time periods.

But really, the recognition of a deacon was permanent. I mean, when it first came, it was designated to me. Once a deacon, always a deacon. Right? So it was.

Is that scriptural? Is that biblical? Alexander Strauch said this in his book, The New Testament Deacon.

Diacons, quote, That's a short, pithy statement of what deacons are.

[7 : 34] What do they do? What are they all about? What I'm going to do for you, I'll kind of break it down as to what are biblical deacons. Number one, they care for the physical needs of the church.

And if you want to kind of see a deacon kind of in action, you go to the book of Acts chapter 6. And I'll give verses, and if you want to turn there, you can.

And I'll read from different verses throughout my message today. In Acts chapter 6, Disciples are increasing.

And a complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic Jews against the native Hebrews. Their widows were being overlooked. And the daily servant of food. There's a problem. Maybe there's ethnic, racial type conflict going about.

We don't know what that's like. The 12th Psalm of the Congregation of the Disciples. They said, It's not desirable for us to neglect the Word of God, nor to serve tables. But select from among you, brethren, seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task, but we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the Word, the statement found approved with the whole congregation, and they chose blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah.

[8 : 54] And then verse 6, And these were brought before the apostles, and after praying, they laid their hands on them, and then they took care of the thing. So what did these guys do? Number one, first, they cared for the physical needs of the church.

They're called to deacon the tables. They provide loving service to needy brethren. The apostles were focused on the Word of God and prayer.

Not on some administrative financial type stuff. No, that's not their responsibility. The deacons were to take care of that. That's the specific role that they have. To make sure they're taking care of the administrative physical needs of the people within the church.

Now, they didn't do all the work themselves. Most likely, these guys, they organized other believers and delegated it. And by the way, when they laid their hands on them, they commissioned them.

They didn't ordain them. We'll talk more about that later. But physical care is important, because it demonstrates Christ-like love toward others.

[10 : 02] That's important, right? And the apostles knew it was important. But like, well, we can't do everything. So they called these guys to care for others, which fostered unity, displayed love for others.

It's relieving the Christians who are suffering. It's practical, man. And if you see the result of this conflict, when there's conflict, there's disunity. Which leads to the second aspect of deacons.

They maintain the unity in the church. So they take care of the needs within the church, and they maintain the unity in the church. To edify and unify the church, that's their priority.

So deacons and their wives, for that matter, they should be the happiest people with the church. I mean, you've found that, oh, this is great.

You've got this and this. Oh, yeah. Wah, wah, wah, wah. You find out that guy's a deacon. You find out that gal, she's the wife of a deacon. They're the happiest people.

[11 : 09] They love the church. They love to be here. They praise the leadership. They praise the church. They praise the direction of the church. They're expressing things every way they turn with attitudes and actions as an example to other members.

One writer describes them as the shock absorbers. That's what they are. So you don't feel any of the ripples, any of the big bumps in the road. They're the shock absorbers.

They are builders of God's people, binding us all together with kindness, love, thanks, praise, and happy affirmations. That's a deacon.

They think about the whole, for the good of the whole, for the glory of God. These are the third aspect for deacons.

They support the ministry of the pastors, or elders. We'll get into that later. The apostles knew this was important, but they also knew they couldn't do it all.

[12 : 15] So they delegated this responsibility to this group of guys within the church to handle these things, to take care of these things. Deacons are servants who are the most supportive ones of the leadership.

They're the most supportive. They support the people. They want the people to listen to the leadership. They support them for the glory of the name of Christ within the community, within the church.

This is the type of guys we're talking about. This is a deacon. At this point, I'll give you some points as to what deacons are not.

I have one more what are biblical deacons, but let me just stop here and give you this is deacons are not type stuff. Deacons are not a one separate power block in the church.

They're subordinate to the overseers or elders or pastors. Deacons are not a group that disrupts the church. They're not a unit which does not support the pastor or the elders.

[13 : 29] They're not a body that gets people on their side. That's not a deacon. That's a false teacher. That's not a deacon. That's a guy you need to get out of the church because he's trying to create affection.

Titus chapter 3. Deacons are just the opposite. I mean, they want to support the leadership. They don't want to disrupt the church. They want to help the church and unify the church.

They're not trying to support the leadership. They're not going to get people on their side and say, hey, we're all on the same team. We're in this together. Those types of men, those guys are deacons.

Deacons. Which leads to the last point. I got four for deacons and four for elders. They're men of God.

They're men of God. And this is where I'll camp and kind of give some commentary, for lack of better terms.

[14 : 34] Here in 1 Timothy chapter 3, verse 8 through 13. And if you notice, they're men of God. They have the same characteristics as elders.

The difference though, is they don't have to be able to teach or be ones who are shepherding people. That's the difference. The two biggest differences.

They don't have to have the ability to teach and they're not in a position where they're shepherding people. Other than that, same thing. Dignity.

Or they're respected. They're not double-tongued. They say one thing to one person, another thing to someone else. Not addicted to wine. Not fond of sordid game. They're not greedy for money. Holding to the mystery of the faith.

In other words, they hold to the Christian faith. They live out the Christian faith in their lives. They're beyond reproach. Wife has integrity. They're one woman man. They're good manager of the children.

[15 : 34] They're responsible. Their home is not on the verge of collapse. You should test these guys. Just a side note.

It seems better in verse 11 of 1 Timothy chapter 3 to think of this as the wives of the deacons. Although some take this to refer to deaconesses, female deacons.

Which I don't think is a bad thing. We don't take that view. But other churches do. Which is not a bad thing. As long as a church, if that church has deaconesses, as long as that church establishes that these women, first, they do not have leadership over the church or over men.

And they're not a ruling body in the church. So if you have deaconesses that are not in that position, then fine. I think biblically that's justifiable.

But whichever way you take this, a deacon's life should be dignified, not a malicious gossip, temperate, faithful and everything. By the way, that's a qualification for elders' lives too. So when you come down to it, these guys are faithful table waiters.

[16 : 53] You know, when you go to a restaurant, and you're in a restaurant, and you get a waiter, or even a waitress, but it's that waiter who comes in, he knows just when you need something, right?

But not intrusive. Sometimes you get to waiters, you know, they're just kind of intrusive, right? They're always interrupting. But this guy, he's coming. You're like, I need a, here's your fork.

Oh, how do you know I need a fork? You're about to get some more drink, you're like, oh man, I'm out of my, and he comes over and gives you another one. You're like, whoa, that was fast. Right? The waiter's just good.

Or the waitress, they're just, bam, bam, bam, bam. That's a deacon. Who are around when you need them, eager to serve, without being intrusive.

Don't those make the best waiters and waitresses? Those are the ones that make the best deacons. And I will attest to you, you have two men that definitely describe this.

[17 : 57] Travis and Michael are this. These guys, they do this. They are this. Hands down. I'm grateful for them.

Because they do this exactly. And wives display, their wives display this too. I appreciate them. So hopefully you know, without a shadow of a doubt, you have these guys that, they do this.

They're great table waiters. Faithful. So now, let me move into, as well. We're talking about leadership, deacons and elders. We're talking about deacons, we're not elders.

We're talking about elders. For some of you, it might be a new concept. Simple definition, elders, one of old age.

Some old dude. It doesn't say crusty old dude, it just says some old dude. No, I'm just kidding. In the Old Testament, interesting, elders were leaders that are associated with Moses in governing the nation of Israel.

[19 : 00] That's our elders. And so that concept of plurality that worked with Moses, it crosses over into the New Testament. This understanding.

In the New Testament, the word elder is used many times, but 20 times, it refers to elders in local churches.

20 times in the New Testament. So elders, really how you can define them, male elders, they pastor or shepherd a local church's overseers.

So notice the three terms I'm using. Elder, pastor, overseer. Overseer, what's another word for overseer? Bishop. Bishop.

Elder, pastor, bishop. It's the same thing. We're not talking about three different classes or three different types of guys. It's the same guy.

[20 : 01] Let me show you this. Now I'll put verses up here on the screen for you. And I'll read these. And you can write them down. You can look them up with me if you like.

Acts chapter 20, verse 17. And from Miletus, Paul sent to Ephesus and called him the elders of the church.

So he's talking to the elders and he says to them in verse 28, Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock among which the Holy Spirit has made you bishops to pastor the church of God which you purchased with his own blood.

So these elders were called as bishops to pastor the church. Same guys. Different terms to describe what they do.

Elders, pastor, they're bishops. Or overseer. That's what bishop means. The same manner designates elders, overseers, and pastors, or shepherds.

[21 : 09] And by the way, Paul says, the Lord Jesus died for his people, the church. And this is the idea is that the Lord Jesus loves and cares his people, cares for them so much.

Elders, you care, you pastor, you are overseers the way Jesus is an overseer of his people. The way Jesus loved his people. Because Jesus came, he lived, he died for sinners as a substitute for sinners and he resurrected from the dead.

Repent and trust in him alone. That is the gospel truth. And as God has displayed his love for his people in that way, he says, elders, that's how you display your love for God's people.

And if you're here this morning, you're not a follower of Jesus Christ, that's a message to you that you repent, you trust in Jesus Christ. Because Jesus lived and died on behalf of sinners and resurrected so that he might bring you to God.

That's a message for you to respond to. And that's how elders are supposed to respond to the people in the church. That's how they deal with them. Another place for you, another passage, Ephesians 4, verse 11.

[22 : 40] Again, the word pastor is used we saw elders in Acts chapter 20 and he gave some apostles, prophets, evangelists and some pastors and teachers.

Pastors and teachers, pastors and teachers, shepherds and teachers, they shepherd, elders shepherd. And then we read 1 Peter chapter 5 verses 1 through 7, Peter says, I exhort you as an elder to the elders, shepherd the flock of God.

elders are commanded to pastor God's sheep. Elders, pastor. It's not my church, it's God's church.

It's God's flock. Pastors are elders who shepherd the people. And then one more passage which we read just a few moments ago as well, back to 1 Timothy.

Excuse me. If any man aspires to the office of overseer, bishop, is a fine work he desires. Overseer from the word episcopal which means bishop.

[23 : 52] Mark Dever says this, quote, clearly the New Testament refers to elders, shepherds, or pastors, and bishops or overseers in the context of the local church interchangeably.

Male, elder, elders, pastor, or shepherd a local church's overseers. That's what we believe. That's what we believe the scriptures teach.

Some other points for you to make mention before we get into the actual what are biblical elders. Notice I'm saying elders is plural. Why plural?

Each local church is called to have a plurality of elders to shepherd God's flock. I read to you Acts 20, verse 17, the elders, plural, of the church in Ephesus.

One church, many elders. Acts 14, verse 23, it says, Paul went back to the churches and we appointed elders, plural, in each church, singular.

[24 : 59] You should have a plurality of elders. That is best. That's what's most beneficial. Each elder is committed to working together by the power of the Holy Spirit and humble, Christ-like love for each other and God's people.

another question. Elder rule or elder led? Do elders rule or do they lead?

What's the answer? Yes. What do you mean? Biblical elders do not appeal outside the congregation to some other authority as the final stop.

That's Presbyterians. Presbyterians, they have elders in the church and then from all the different churches there's this group over here and then from all these guys there's another group and so it goes down the pike.

No. That's not what we believe. It's elders in one local church. Biblical elders, they lead, they direct, they govern and it says in 1 Timothy 5.17 that they do at times rule but final authority rests with the congregation.

[26 : 19] You as members in the church, you have the final authority not the elders, not a small group of men. That can be dangerous and I'll talk more about this congregationalism talk more about that next week because how does that fit into everything and membership, how does that fit into everything?

That's important. Okay, so now we've asked these questions, we've talked about these things, so now let's kind of put it together. What are biblical elders? What do they do, so to speak?

What are they all about? Number one, they're shepherds of God's flock. They pastor, protect, guide, lead, nurse, comfort, educate.

How? Preaching and teaching the word of God. That's what elders do. Number two, they are overseers over the congregation.

They direct and govern, manage, oversee. Servant leadership, not dictators, not ruling as dictators, servant leaders is what they are. Number three, they are guardians guardians over God's people.

[27 : 37] They take care of their spiritual needs. Visiting, biblical counseling, praying, loving. They protect the church from false teachers and false teaching that can rise up.

They hold fast the word, says Titus in Titus chapter one. So they're shepherds, they're overseers, they're guardians.

I gave you four for beacons, here's four for elders. Last number four, they are also men of God. Men of gracious character, not perfect, but they set the example.

They should engage in daily prayer and scripture reading on their own. The flock will follow their leaders, right? Like priests, like people.

They're men who love and proclaim the gospel. Specifically, taking 1 Timothy three and even throwing in some Titus chapter one. Above reproach, a one woman man, temperate, in other words, they're self-controlled.

[28 : 55] Prudence, of good judgment. Respectable, they're orderly. They're hospitable, they share their life and home. They're able to teach, a knowledge of God's word.

They're not addicted to wine, not pugnacious, not fighters. They're gentle, they're willing to yield, uncontentious, they're peaceable. They're free from the love of money. They're good managers.

Of their household, their children are faithful, not rebellious. And I would take it that it doesn't mean that a pastor or an elder has all his children have to be saved.

I do not believe that. I believe the children should be faithful, not walking in rebellion, but I don't think it says that they should be ones who believe.

How can you guarantee that? You wouldn't guarantee it for your kids. Why should you guarantee it for mine? Not a new convert.

[29 : 58] He has a good reputation with the unsaved. He's not self-willed. He wants to be a team player. Not quick-tempered. He's not a hothead. He's a lover of what is good. He wants to help others. He's sensible.

He thinks rightly. He's just. He conforms to God's ways with others. He's devout. He's pious towards God. He's self-controlled.

He holds fast the faithful word. He studies. He knows. He lives the gospel. So now we've looked at what elders are.

We've looked at what deacons are. Some other things have kind of come up which I say I'll mention more next week, but another question that may come up is what's the relationship of elders to the congregation?

I'll speak more about this next week, but the congregation is called to obey their leaders. Hebrews 13, 17, yes? Yet this does not mean that leaders are infallible.

[31 : 00] The leadership will have to give an account to God. We're not in some elevated status. And that goes for not just elders but also deacons.

We're not in some elevated status. Pastors are sheep too. I need you to minister to me too. I'm not above that.

Most people think that though, don't they? All responsibilities and obligation that elders or pastors or bishops possess has been given to them.

By whom? The congregation. I mean, is that not what you do as members? Members say, and I'm going to talk more about this next week.

Members say, we see the biblical characteristics. These men or this man does that. So we say, you are in the position of pastor. So we push in that position.

[31 : 59] So lead us and direct us from God's word. The call is confirmed by the congregation. And once the people confirm the calling of an elder, elders, they should then appoint, trust, and obey their leaders with God-fearing trust, especially in significant and unclear matters.

Because that's what they're meant to do. That's what you ask them to do. By the way, this is for free. elders are appointed, not ordained.

You have this whole like freaky, mystical type, woo-hoo, ordination type thing. There's this modern church ordination concept that you special anointing and stuff.

No, it's just appointed. It's just pretty simple. Every member of Cottonwood Bible Church is a priest of God. All sharing the responsibilities and obligations of Cottonwood Bible Church and then you just so happen to say, we want these men to lead us and to direct us from God's word.

That's what you're doing. I'll speak more about this next week when we're talking about congregationalism. What does that mean? How do you fit into this whole picture as a member?

[33 : 25] One last question. How does the pastor fit into all this? Well, he's the pastor, but wait, what? I thought there's elders, but how does the pastor, how does that all fit?

Well, since elders are called pastors, it would actually be biblical for all the elders in the church to be regarded as pastors. A personal preference that I have, not to say it's bad, but a preference that I have is that I not be called the senior pastor.

Jesus is the senior pastor, right? He's the chief shepherd. Yet having said that, when you have different elders, it's probably wise to have one as the main pastor or elder who function as a leader among leaders.

The first among equals is what it's called. And that's where the pastor would come in and give leadership to the leaders. A first among equals.

Because of their different gifts and ability, this elder pastor has more gifts in this way versus this one in that way. Maybe this one is more gifting in terms of preaching and teaching. This one is more gifting in terms of one-on-one counseling.

[34 : 40] Which is good. That's great. So we looked at all this, deacons and elders. Leadership as a church.

I was just browsing through Thibidi Amnobili's book Searching for Godly Men, I think is the name of the book. I'm probably butchering the title.

But in the beginning of his book he says this, let me read you this quote to kind of close our time. He says this, quote, A church without godly leaders is an endangered church.

A church that does not train leaders is an unfaithful church. Without godly, faithful, replicating leadership, churches suffer deeply.

Paul understood that. That's why he said to Timothy, the things that I taught you, you train and teach godly men so they can pass on to other men.

[35 : 49] We need gracious, godly, faithful, replicating men, don't we? We need that. When you see a world like the things in Louisiana, Minnesota, and Dallas, when you see that stuff, it should just push us even more as a church.

This is a type of church we need to be. This is a type of people we need to be. There's such a call. Oh, there's such a call to have character and leadership, isn't there?

Isn't there? There's such a call for that. There's a need for that. Let's be a church that has gracious, godly, faithful, replicating men.

And I praise God for these two guys who, by the way, they do pretty good teaching too, don't they? I appreciate that too. They do a good job teaching. They probably say, we're not able to teach.

You guys do a good job. We appreciate it. And it helps me too. Praise the Lord. Let's pray. Father, we thank you for the men that you've given to us.

[37 : 08] We thank you specifically for Travis and for Michael. And we pray for them. They'll keep taking care of the physical needs of the church and unifying us as a body.

They'll support, and I thank you that they support me. And they have such a love for your people. And we pray they'll continue to be men of God.

Men of character and integrity. Credibility. And we see the politics. Ugh.

We just see this in our government. It just sickens us. Which is why we pray that you will continue to raise up men. You will build us as a church.

It's been ten years, Lord. So now, build. So now, begin to build us as a church.

[38 : 21] to be solid, strong, gracious, loving, fearless, and yet soft.

If you would, take a few moments to ponder and think what we've seen from God's word, and even take time to pray for us as a church.

For those that God has placed in leadership in this church and that God will raise up more men to lead his church.

And after a few moments, we'll have our time of giving. Sing in our last two songs. Take a few moments and think and ponder. Be simple with the change and think and ponder.

with the next question. Think and ponder. Remember all the things of peace in this church and this work in this church and to help us and help us protect us and remember them.

[39 : 39] Thank and ponder.