

WHO LEADS

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JESUS, THE ULTIMATE AUTHORITY OF THE CHURCH

Jesus lived, died, and arose to reconcile sinners both to God and to one another as the church (Eph. 5:25). Jesus is the ultimate authority and head over the church (Eph. 1:9, 19-23, 4:15-16, 5:23). Jesus is the apostle that plants a church (Heb. 3:1). Jesus is the leader who builds the church (Matt. 16:18). Jesus is the chief Shepherd that rules the church (2 Pet. 5:4). In addition, it is ultimately Jesus who closes churches when they have become faithless or fruitless (Rev. 2:5). Therefore it is vital that we as a local church love, obey, imitate, and follow Jesus at all times, remembering everything is about Jesus (Col. 1:15-20).

How do we know if we are following Jesus as the ultimate authority in our local church? We know we are obeying Jesus as we hold to the scriptures as the final rule for faith and practice. We believe what we believe because of what is written. We do what we do because of what is

written. We must study, pray, and meditate on the scriptures, asking God's help to understand and apply the truths therein. This is how we obey Jesus as a local church (1 Tim. 3:16-17).

HUMAN LEADERSHIP, UNDER JESUS' AUTHORITY

Human leadership in local churches is little more than qualified believers who are following Jesus and encouraging others to follow them as they emulate faithfulness. Church leaders must be good sheep who follow their chief Shepherd faithfully before they are fit to be shepherds leading sheep. This is in large part what the Apostle Paul meant as he wrote,

"Be imitators of me as I am of Christ."

(1 Corinthians 11:1)

Serving under Jesus in formal local church offices are pastors (also called *elders* and *overseers*) and deacons. In the opening his letter to the church at Philippi, Paul well illustrated church structure when he wrote,

"Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the pastors and deacons." (Philippians 1:1)

Packed into this one verse we discover the three kinds of believers that take responsibility for the health and progress of the local church: members, pastors, and deacons.

PASTORS, THE QUALIFIED AND ENTRUSTED LEADERS OF THE LOCAL CHURCH

PASTORS MUST BE QUALIFIED MEN

Pastors, also called elders and overseers in the New Testament, are the godly male shepherds of the local church (1 Tim. 3:1-7). The Apostle Paul teaches that godly men are those who have strong prayer lives (1 Tim. 2:8), are a clear example of being a servant (1 Pet. 5:2-3), and are practically responsible in leading their homes as well as leading in the public square (1 Tim. 3:4-7). The following is why we believe that scriptures teach that only the best of Jesus' men should serve as pastors:

1. God made humanity male and female, which means that men and women are equal yet different (Gen. 1:26-27).

2. The senior spiritual leadership of God's people in the Old Testament was comprised of male priests.
3. Jesus chose twelve men as his apostles. Although he befriended, loved, taught, honored, healed, and included women in his ministry, he did not place them in a senior position of leadership.
4. In 1 Timothy 2:11-3:5, Paul first states that women should learn doctrine and theology. This was brand new in the days of the early church. Apparently the women in Ephesus were behaving in a disrespectful fashion during church gatherings. They were much like their Christian sisters in Corinth (1 Cor. 14:33-35) whom Paul likewise commanded to be respectful toward church leadership. Paul added two requirements for the Ephesian women who wanted to learn theology and doctrine: quietness and submissiveness.
5. Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, emphatically commanded that women should not "teach" men nor "exercise authority" over men in the church (1 Tim. 2:12). Simply, this rules out women for the position or function of pastor. Serving or functioning as a pastor includes such things as ruling and leading the church, managing the church, rightly exercising authority in the church, teaching the Bible correctly, preaching, teaching sound doctrine and refuting false teachings, leading the disciplinary process concerning unrepentant Christians within the church, and developing other leaders and teachers. These are just a few of the qualifications which are impossible to carry out without having authority over some and being able to teach them. Therefore by the clear testimony of God we are firmly convinced that only Jesus' best men are to be or function as pastors in the local church.

PASTORAL QUALIFICATIONS

According to the Bible, formal theological training is not required for pastors though such training can indeed be beneficial. A salary is also not required though pastors are worth an honorable wage (1 Tim. 5:17-18). Ultimately, the Holy Spirit appoints men as pastors. Paul tells the Ephesian elders,

"the Holy Spirit has made you overseers."

(Acts 20:28)

If a man desires the task of overseer (1 Tim. 3:1), he should submit himself to the oversight of his current pastors and church members for examination to see if he meets the qualifications.

There are two major passages in God's word that set forth the qualifications for pastors, 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9. Primarily, these passages are dealing with the pastor or would-be-pastor being a faithful Christian who follows Jesus in every aspect of his life, bearing fruits in keeping with repentance. This is what all Christians are commanded and empowered to do, though

"we all stumble in many ways"

(James 3:2)

Before appointing a new pastor, the current pastors as well as church members should examine the pastor in training and then agree to appoint him to the office. This should not be done hastily or flippantly because God says through the Apostle Paul,

"Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands, nor take part in the sins of others; keep yourself pure." (1 Timothy 5:22)

PASTORAL DUTIES

The duties of pastors laid out in scripture at least these:

- Prayer and the study of scripture (Acts 6:4)
- Ruling and leading the church (1 Tim. 5:17)
- Managing the church (1 Tim. 3:4-5)
- Caring for the members of the church (1 Pet. 5:2-5)
- Living exemplary lives (Heb. 13:7)
- Rightly using the authority God has given them (Acts 20:28)
- Teaching the Bible correctly (Eph. 4:11; 1 Tim. 3:2)
- Preaching (1 Tim. 5:17)
- Praying for the sick (James 5:13-15)
- Teaching sound doctrine and refuting false teachings (Tit. 1:9)
- Working hard (1 Thess. 5:12)
- Rightly using money and authority (1 Pet. 5:1-3)
- Protecting the church from false teachers (Acts 20:17-31)
- Overseeing the discipline of unrepentant members (Matt. 18:15-17, Gal. 6:1-5)
- Obeying the secular laws as a legal ruling body of a corporation (Rom. 13:1-7)
- Giving account to God for the church (Heb. 13:17)

- Training other leaders and teachers (Eph. 4:11-16; 2 Tim. 2:1-2)

FIRST AMONG EQUALS

The specific responsibilities of the team of pastors will vary according to gifting and personality. We believe there should be one man who is the leader of the pastors, a first among equals. We see this in scripture by the role that Peter fulfilled among the Apostles (Acts 1:15-22; 2:14-40; Matt. 16:18). Many resist seeing leadership as a team effort, while others resist believing leadership within the pastor team is biblical. We believe that for any pastoral team to function effectively, it must have a called, qualified, gifted, devoted, humble, and competent man who leads the pastoral team and helps guard the gate for new pastors joining the team to ensure unity and faithfulness. To do his job, that man must not be offered blind obedience or given complete unaccountable authority. Rather, he must have the freedom, trust, authority, respect, honor, and support of the other pastors and church leaders to actually lead the church. As a general rule, we think the best person to hold the position of first among equals is the primary preaching pastor. Paul says to Timothy,

“Let the elders who rule well be considered of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching.”

(1 Timothy 5:17)

DEACONS, THE APPOINTED LEAD-SERVANTS OF THE LOCAL CHURCH

The word deacon (*diakonos*) means “servant; attendant; minister; waiter; one who serves food and drink; one that runs errands” and it is both masculine and feminine. Unlike pastors, the New Testament says very little about the function of deacons.

A PROBABLE START

We believe that the first deacons were appointed by the Apostles of the early church in Acts 6:1-6. In Acts 6:2 Peter says “It is not right that we should give up preaching the Word of God to serve tables.” That word serve (*diakoneo*) is the verb form of deacon. Much as our verb form of servant is serve. We know that part of the definition for a deacon is “one who serves food and drink,” thus we conclude that this is the birth of deacons, who are “appointed servants of the church.”

WHY DEACONS?

As the early church outgrew the oversight of the Apostles in Acts 6:1-6, discrimination of the widows began to occur inadvertently. The Apostles could have given their time to that need and organization, but only if they neglected essential pastoral duties, particularly time for prayer and Bible study. Therefore lead-servants were appointed by the Apostles to serve alongside pastors and to focus on the care for the church—especially the widows and the poor. We believe it is clear in scripture that deacons are to work alongside the pastors to make sure the church is loved and cared for.

Deacons are mentioned in two specific places in The New Testament, both times in relation to pastors. This is further evidence that suggests the two groups of leaders work so closely together for the good of the local church. Practically, pastors and deacons work together like left and right hands, with pastors specializing in leading by their words and deacons specializing in leading by their works. It is worth noting that the qualification list for deacons is nearly identical to the pastors (minus the teaching and preaching abilities). They must clearly know doctrine and hold it with a clear conscience (1 Tim. 3:9). Finally, deacons are to be appointed only after they have proven themselves to the pastors and other church members as faithful and mature church members (1 Tim. 3:10).

WHAT ARE THE DUTIES OF DEACONS?

While the duties of pastors are clearly articulated throughout The New Testament, the duties of deacons are not. The first deacons were appointed to serve the widows and to care for the physical needs of the church body, but other than that we see no clear duties. Therefore in light of the literal translation of deacon being “servant,” etc. and allowing that God has not given us specific duties for them to perform, we believe the specifics should be left to each local church’s members and pastors. The specific duties will, by God’s grace, be ever-changing as a church grows larger and more people come to worship Jesus together.

WHO CAN BE A DEACON?

There is much dispute as to whether a woman can become a Deacon. Much of this debate centers on Paul’s qualifications for Deacons in 1 Timothy 3:11. Paul begins the list by speaking of the greek word “*gune*.” This Greek word is translated either “women” or “wives.” Various translations of the English Bible opt for one or the other, usually with a footnote that explains the

other option. We believe it is best translated as “their wives.” This is further clarified by 1 Timothy 3:12 when it states, “Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well.” Therefore, it is our position that only qualified men should serve in the office of deacon.

MEMBERS, THE COVENANT BODY OF THE LOCAL CHURCH

In addition to pastors and deacons, within the church are members. These church members take responsibility to ensure the local church’s health and growth. Church members are Christians whose eyes are capable of seeing beyond themselves to the wellbeing of the whole body. They realize Jesus died not just for them but also for their church (Acts 20:28). They also realize that he calls them to selflessly give of their money (2 Cor 8:8-15) and abilities in order to build up their church (1 Cor. 14:12) just as Jesus has selflessly given his riches and abilities to redeem us.

WHO SHOULD BE A CHURCH MEMBER?

Some Christians question whether they need to have a church home in which they participate as official members. The illustrative imagery of the church through The New Testament leaves no room for non-membership. The imagery used includes the fact that Christians are to work together as a family (1 Tim. 3:15; 5:1-2) or as the parts of a body (1 Cor. 12:16-17). The early church had a notion of membership that included numerical records (Acts 2:37-47), records of widows (1 Tim. 5:3-16), elections of deacons (Acts 6:1-6), discipline (Matt. 18:15-20; 1 Cor. 5; Gal. 6:1), accountability (Heb. 13:17), and an awareness of who was a church member (Rom. 16:1-16).

We believe obedience to New Testament teaching requires that a Christian be an official member of a local church. When the Bible speaks of church membership it does not take it lightly, but does so with all seriousness in relational terms. Christians are to work within their particular church for the cause of the gospel (Rom. 12:4-5; Eph. 2:18-19). Church members must be trained and released to use their gifts and resources in various ways so that they too are serving the church, behind the pastors and deacons, so that all may be doing “the work of the ministry” (Eph. 4:11-12). Inside the church and outside the church, members are to serve believers and unbelievers by telling the gospel of God concerning Jesus, by the power of the Holy Spirit. In addition, all members are to serve their church and the world by loving others as themselves. The church, purchased by Jesus, empowered by the Spirit, reconciled to the

Father, works together as ministers of the same reconciliation of the gospel of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 5).

CONCLUSION

In the church, Jesus is the ultimate authority, pastors are the entrusted leaders, deacons are the appointed lead-servants, members are the covenant body; all are ministers of the same reconciliation,

“a kingdom and priests to our God”
(Rev. 5:10)