

The Two Offices in God's Church

¹ This *is* a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work. ² A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach; ³ not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous; ⁴ one who rules his own house well, having *his* children in submission with all reverence ⁵ (for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?); ⁶ not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the *same* condemnation as the devil. ⁷ Moreover he must have a good testimony among those who are outside, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil. ⁸ Likewise deacons *must be* reverent, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy for money, ⁹ holding the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience. ¹⁰ But let these also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons, being *found* blameless. ¹¹ Likewise, *their wives must be* reverent, not slanderers, temperate, faithful in all things. ¹² Let deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling *their* children and their own houses well. ¹³ For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a good standing and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus. (1 Timothy 3:1–13)

Every five years, our country votes for national and provincial government and two years later, we vote for municipal councils. I think it is probably safe to say that in South Africa, people vote for parties, and not for persons, trusting that a group of people that make up a certain political party will bring about the kind of society they want. I think if you were to interview people going in or out of polling stations on election day, they would be quite surprised or nonplussed if you asked them something like this: “What are the qualities you look for in a member of parliament? What sort of person should be a minister, a mayor, a president?” I think many people would confess that they hadn't thought about it. They cared only for the promises made by the party, its supposed policies, but as to the personal character of the people they will vote in, I think many voters would regard that as irrelevant.

Neglecting the personal character of the people who lead is a foolish choice. Scripture warns, “When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice; But when a wicked *man* rules, the people groan. (Proverbs 29:2)”

Like a roaring lion and a charging bear /is a wicked ruler over poor people. (Proverbs 28:15)

Leadership is not simply about what a man does; it is also about who a man is. It is not just a man's abilities and aptitude, but his character, wisdom and integrity that make the real difference between a true leader.

When it comes to God's church, no believer should be guilty of the same neglect. You might choose to not vote in South Africa because of conscience, but if you are a member of a church, you have a biblical responsibility to choose the leaders in the congregation. And because of that responsibility, you should know what kind of man you are to choose.

But for many Christians, the concept of the qualifications of church leaders are foreign to them. They arrive in a church, decide if they like the music or not, listen to the preaching, and that's about it. In fact, many Christians don't even have a category for a biblically-qualified church leader, or even a biblically-disqualified church leader. They ask, “Can he preach?” and that's about where it ends.

But that kind of short-sightedness will bring the same painful consequences to churches as those endured by a country when it chooses leaders without regard to their character. And a church cannot really rise above the spiritual level of its leaders.

The “Law of the Lid” is a principle that John Maxwell espouses, which is generally true: the lid on how effective a country, a business, a church or even a family will be, comes down to leadership.

“The history of Israel and Judah points up a truth taught clearly enough by *all* history, viz., that the masses are or soon will be what their leaders are. The kings set the moral pace for the people.

Whatever sort of man the king turned out to be, the people were soon following his leadership. They followed David in the worship of Jehovah, Solomon in the building of the Temple, Jeroboam in the making of a calf and Hezekiah in the restoration of the temple worship...The truth is that for better or for worse religious people follow leaders. ...Today Christianity in the Western world is becoming what its present leaders are. ...The poor condition of the churches today may be traced straight to their leaders.”

So since Paul is writing 1 Timothy to help Timothy to know how one ought to behave in the house of God, how to order the doctrine, and the corporate worship, and the roles of men and women, he now comes to the crucial matter of church leadership. If you want a well-ordered church you need biblical offices of leadership, filled with biblically-qualified men.

So what we will see in this introduction to 1 Timothy 3 is two basic truths about church leadership that the Spirit of God wants us to have. First, he wants us to understand the meaning two offices of church leadership are. Second, he wants us to identify who belongs in those offices.

I. Understand the Meaning of the Two Offices

¹ This *is* a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work.

⁸ Likewise deacons *must be* reverent, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy for money,

Here Paul lists out the **two** biblical kinds of church officers, the first is in verse 1, the second is in verse 8, both are then described with their qualification. The first is that of bishop, as the NKJV translates it, which means overseer, and the second is that of deacon.

Now it's easy to be confused here. The Bible has many other types of spiritual leaders. We read about judges, priests, kings, elders, seers. Then certain charismatic theologians have told us because of Ephesians 4:11 there is a fivefold ministry made up of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. On top of those biblical titles, Christendom has invented a host of unbiblical offices: popes, cardinals, priests, acolytes, lectors, subdeacons, archdeacons, archbishops, altar boys, rectors. So that leads us with quite a bit of confusion.

I will come back to the Ephesians 4:11 matter of apostles, prophets, evangelists and pastor teachers. But for the moment, let's eliminate every title or office that isn't found in Scripture. Once we do that, we are left with only these two listed here. Paul also gives them in the opening lines of Philippians : “Paul and Timothy, bondservants of Jesus Christ, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons (Phil 1:1)

Now let me explain those two. The first office is translated with the word *bishop*, because the KJV was translated by Anglicans under the pay of King James I of Scotland. The original Greek word is *episkopos*, and it means an overseer, a superintendent, a caretaker. In ancient times, it meant someone who was charged to be a guardian over something, and make sure things were done correctly.

Now when we look into the New Testament, we find that there are two other words used for this same position. The second word in the NT for this office is the word *elder*, or *presbuteros*.

⁵ For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you—⁶ if a man is blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of dissipation or insubordination. ⁷ For a bishop must be blameless, as a steward of God, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, (Titus 1:5–7)

A overseer, bishop, is an elder and an elder is an overseer.

We see that again in Acts 20, where Paul uses the third word.

¹⁷ From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called for the elders of the church...²⁸ Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. (Acts 20:17)

There Paul uses the verb form of shepherd, ποιμαίνειν. In Ephesians 4:11, he is going to use the title, ποιμένας pastor-teacher. Three words for the one office: overseer, elder, pastor. The apostle Peter used all three in one place.

The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: ² Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; (1 Peter 5:1–2)

Why three words? Each emphasises something a little different about the position and its responsibilities.

Overseer, bishop, caretaker, emphasises that he must take final oversight of the administration and structure of God's church. The burden of responsibility for how the whole church runs and functions must come back to him. This is probably a carryover from the man in Israel known as the ruler of the synagogue: he was in charge of all that took place within it.

Elder, emphasises the role of leader, counselor and judge. In Israel the elders were the experienced men who made decisions, served as adjudicators, and were supposed to be examples of wisdom and godliness.

Shepherd or *pastor*, this is the title God gave to spiritual leaders in Israel who taught people: the prophets, priests, kings in Israel. They were supposed to teach God's Word and guide God's people. Pastors must equip the saints to do the ministry (Eph 4:11-12).

In the Baptist tradition, we have preferred to use the word *pastor*, because of its emphasis on authority through teaching, leading through feeding. Some groups prefer to use the word elder, a very few use overseer.

So whether you speak of an overseer, an elder or a pastor, biblically you mean the same person, the same position. There is no such thing as five elders and one of them is the pastor, or three pastors and one is the overseer. A pastor is an elder is an overseer. In a church with multiple pastors, you may have leaders among leaders, you may have seniority, but each one, if he is biblically qualified is an elder, a pastor, an overseer.

Now consider the second office. In verse 8, we read of the deacon. The word deacon comes from a common Greek word which mostly means, an assistant, a helper, even an intermediary. It is used in the New Testament about 60 times to simply refer to a minister, a servant, a helper. That has led some people to make the faulty claim that there is no office of deacon, that everyone is a servant or a minister. But obviously, by listing out the specific qualifications of a deacon, and then requiring that they first be observed and tested before serving, Paul means this is a specific office that specific men serve in.

But unlike that of pastor-elder-overseer, the Bible doesn't give us as many clear texts on what deacons do. The closest we have is a section in the book of Acts.

¹ Now in those days, when *the number of* the disciples was multiplying, there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution. ² Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, "It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. ³ Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of *good* reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; ⁴ but we will give ourselves continually to

prayer and to the ministry of the word.”⁵ And the saying pleased the whole multitude. And they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch,⁶ whom they set before the apostles; and when they had prayed, they laid hands on them. (Acts 6:1–6)

Here the needs of a growing congregation began to overwhelm the leadership. A special feeding scheme for widows was neglecting the Greek-speaking Christians. The apostles realised that if they tried to solve this problem, to serve tables, as they put it, they would be leaving the Word of God. In order to give themselves prayer and the ministry of the Word (v4), they chose these men. Now they are never explicitly called deacons, but the verb form of *diakonos* is used in verse 2.

This may also be an early carryover from the synagogue. You had the ruler of the synagogue and then you had the servant or *chazzan* in the synagogue, who assisted in many ways. Deacons assist pastors wherever is needed. That can be anything: dispensing mercy and taking care of widows, overseeing the finances, administering property and assets, organising and administering ministry.

These are the two biblical offices in the church. The pastor-elder-overseer who serves by leading, leadership by spiritual oversight and teaching. The deacons who leads by serving, servanthood by spiritual administration and member care. If you are in a biblical church, those are the two offices, no others.

Now let me take a quick detour and explain Ephesians 4:11.

¹¹ And He Himself gave some *to be* apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, ¹² for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, (Ephesians 4:11–12)

Now you will hear some people, especially of the charismatic or Pentecostal variety, who will say that these verses teach a five-fold ministry for today: apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor and teacher. Now first, that's a misreading of the original language. There is a construction here using two prepositions, *μεν* and *δε* which occurs four times, not five; pastor and teacher and linked in a way that means it is one man, pastor-teacher.

The second thing to see is that two of these gifted men belonged to the foundation of the church, not its maturity.²⁰ having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief *cornerstone*, (Ephesians 2:20)

Apostles and prophets were gifted men who gave the early church its revelation, which became the New Testament. The apostles were limited to the twelve men who saw the risen Christ; the prophets were gifted people who supplemented Old Testament Scriptures with special revelation for that transitional time of the apostles. There are no longer apostles or prophets, because the church is no longer in its foundational stage.

The second two gifted men are evangelist and pastor-teacher. The evangelist is the one gifted to go to places where there are no churches or where Christ is not named, and preach and teach so that churches are established. The pastor-teacher is the one gifted to come and teach and equip those churches and establish them in the faith. But notice, these are not offices as much as they are gifts to the church. It is not a position; it is an ability. Christ gives to the church men gifted as evangelists, and men gifted as pastor-teachers, but they are not offices or positions in the church.

An elder-overseer-pastor should be gifted as a pastor-teacher. We'll see that when Paul makes one of the qualifications that of “able to teach”. He might even be gifted as an evangelist. Or you might find a man gifted as an evangelist who goes as a missionary to plant a church. He should have the qualifications of a pastor-elder-overseer, because he will be the first one in the church he plants, but

evangelist is not a position in the church, it is a gift, or a gifted man.

Two kinds of gifted men are still given to the church, but they are not positions or offices. The two offices in the church are pastor-elder-overseer and deacon.

Now the second responsibility that Paul gives believers reading this book is this:

II. Identify the Men Who Should Be Those Officers

Look at that list again, and what you are seeing is a kind of checklist that members should use in comparing the men in their church against this list. Church members must select their leaders.

Maybe that surprises you, and you thought that the leaders in a church choose the next leaders. And certainly the current leaders do provide leadership in helping the church decide. The Bible does not teach that leaders in a church are to be chosen by a self-perpetuating board of elders. Instead, the Bible teaches that churches govern themselves under Christ. Pastors lead, deacons serve, but the church decides. The church corporately selects its leaders.

Where does the Bible teach this? In many places. The Jerusalem church, not the elders, was asked to select the seven servants who administered the daily distribution (Acts 6:1-6).

The same *congregation* sent Barnabas to Antioch (Acts 11:19-24). Later, the *congregation* at Antioch sent Paul and Barnabas to investigate doctrinal deviation at Jerusalem (Acts 15:1-3), and the Jerusalem congregation authorized both the response to this investigation and the messengers who delivered it (Acts. 15:22). Later still, the congregations of Macedonia elected a brother to travel with Paul to oversee the offering for Jerusalem (2 Cor. 8:18-21). The church chose its leaders.

This is not pure democracy. Congregational churches govern themselves under Christ through the leadership and service provided by pastors and deacons. But it is the church that is responsible to selecting its leaders.

And that is one very important reason for the text in front of you. Paul wrote to Timothy to guide him in establishing the church in Ephesus. Timothy had to know what to look for. But Timothy was obviously going to read this letter to the whole church in Ephesus. Why? So they would know who to look for, because it was not Timothy alone who would be choosing and installing these pastors and deacons. The church needed to know.

Likewise you need to know. You need to know what the leaders in a church are, and what their qualifications are meant to be. If you are a member of this church, then that means at some point, you will be required to choose pastors or deacons. In a church, leaders come and go with time, just like members, and it falls on you to make the choice of new or additional or replacement leaders.

At some point, you may be in another church, and you need to know what the church offices should be, and what kind of men should occupy those positions. One of the things you should look for in a biblical church is not just sound doctrine, but biblically qualified leadership. If the men are not qualified according to a biblical list, if the church has a bunch of officers that are not found in Scripture, or lacks those that it should have, then that church shouldn't be your first port of call.

You also need to know when leaders should not be in those positions. Often enough people languish in churches where men who are not qualified or disqualified from leadership continue to lead. Now those people who have taken on spiritual leadership will face a stricter judgement we are told in James 3. But the person who sits under that will not be blameless or innocent. Why? Because 1 Timothy 3 has been in the Bible for nearly two thousand years, and any believer willing to look can

see for himself what the qualifications of leaders are. So when someone fails by this test, and a person keeps sitting under that leadership, that person has himself to blame. I feel sorry for people who are led astray by bad or false leaders, but I also realise those people are themselves disobeying this Scripture by staying in churches led by unbiblical leaders. After all, the qualifications are right here, not hidden away in some secret vault of the church's personnel department. And the qualifications, as you'll see, are all publicly verifiable things. They don't have to do with a man's thought life, or hidden motives, which you can't see or know, but with things that are visible and therefore capable of verification.

So how does it happen? How does someone end up serving as a pastor or a deacon?

1) A man grows in desire to serve in this way.

If a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work.

¹³ For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a good standing and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.

A man begins to desire not the position, or the status, or the recognition. But he does begin to increasingly desire the usefulness in God's church. He desires to live a life of eternal significance. He gains pleasure from teaching the Word, discipling others, counseling. He enjoys seeing the church thrive and flourish and be orderly. He loves being there when the church meets and finds a growing inward pressure to feed others and lead others and serve others. He is not after a title; he is in pursuit of the health of God's church.

2) He and others can see the qualifications of verses 2 through 11 in his life.

Notice, with the one exception of the ability to teach, every qualification is a character qualification: his temperament, his moral life, his personal life, his family life. The question is not merely, "can he preach?" or "Does he have a theology degree?" or "Is he a manager at work?" "Is he a successful businessman?" "Is he a dynamic, clever communicator?" Those are very carnal, and fleshly ways of looking for or choosing a leader, and if those are the criteria of selecting church leadership, then a church will get what it deserves: carnal, immature leadership. Instead, as we'll see, the qualification have to do with mature, godly Christianity.

3) He is mature, active and faithful within the local church.

⁶ not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the *same* condemnation as the devil.

¹⁰ But let these also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons, being *found* blameless.

He should not be a novice, that is a new Christian, newly in the faith. Nor should a deacon. They should have been tested, watched and examined for a time, to see that their lives, their families, their walk with God is stable. They are mature Christians, and they are there when the church meets and they look for ways to serve the church.

The best testing ground for a future leader is the local church. A man who is going to shepherd the church must already be acting like a shepherd, teaching and feeding souls. A man who is going to serve the church should already be serving, looking for ways to assist.

If he is going to be considered for leadership, he cannot be less faithful than other men. He cannot skip the services and meetings that other men attend, and yet be eligible for leadership.

4) They are unanimously recommended to the office by the current pastors and deacons to the church.

Do not lay hands on anyone hastily, nor share in other people's sins; keep yourself pure. (1 Tim. 5:22)

The laying on of hands here has nothing to do with healing; it has to do with identification, the church ordaining leaders. Leaders recognise new leaders and lay hands as a physical gesture of acceptance, inclusion, transference. Timothy is to lead the way in identifying and presenting to the church those men to be considered as pastors or deacons.

The church is not a place where random names get put in a hat, and then people campaign to get positions. Instead, the leaders select those who seem most ready to take up those positions and begin discipling them before recommending them to the church.

5) The church votes together to accept a man to serve in one of these offices.

We saw in Acts 6 that it was the church that selected the seven men who became deacons; the church selected its missionaries, its leaders. And what criteria do you use to make that decision? Well, you trust the recommendation of your current leaders, but then you compare them to the lists in 1 Timothy, which we'll consider next week and following.

Now what will happen in churches that follow this procedure? What will happen in churches where the members understand the two offices, and identify the men who should be those officers? Those churches will be protected from the worst situations brought about by immature, unqualified leaders. Instead, they will exist in a safe, healthy, spiritually mature environment where they grow in the Word and become more like Christ.

Don't be like most South African voters and blindly place your faith in churches the way people place their faith in political parties. Be a Berean: open the Word, choose and submit to leaders that meet these qualifications, and so enjoy life in a healthy church.