

What in the World Is the Church to Be?, Part 2

Scripture: Selected Scriptures

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INTRODUCTION

All believers in Jesus Christ are a part of His church. Every Christian is positionally united in the Body of Christ by the Spirit of God. The church is a living community of people redeemed by Jesus Christ. However, individual Christians aren't always visible to the world because they obviously aren't marked by a tag identifying them as true believers. Satan commonly sows tares (false believers) among the wheat (true believers; Matt. 13:36-43). Therefore it is important to carefully evaluate someone's life before putting him in a position of Christian leadership.

Although spiritual life is essentially invisible and therefore difficult for the world to detect, God has designed the church to be visible to the world by its collective testimony to the power of the gospel. Tragically, it isn't as visible as it should be and many who appear to be believers actually aren't. Therefore the church often presents a confusing picture to the world, which has been Satan's plan all along. The church's testimony must be clearer for it to shine as a guiding light in the midst of the world's confusion.

REVIEW

I. THE FOUNDING OF THE CHURCH

Acts 2:47 says that the Jerusalem church found "favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved." The visible church in Jerusalem had a dynamic impact. It was a local assembly of believers who met together for study, fellowship, communion, and prayer. Then they went out spreading the gospel of Christ.

II. THE MINISTRY OF THE CHURCH

Many churches today don't fit the biblical pattern, having created inflexible traditions out of non-specific biblical passages. They find themselves in a mold that is unadaptable to the day in which they live.

III. THE LEADERSHIP OF THE CHURCH

A. The Categories of Leadership

1. Elders

a) Their responsibilities How Are Church Leaders to be Chosen? Acts 14:21-23 records the ordination of elders in the early church: "When [Paul and Barnabas] had preached the gospel to that city, and had taught many, they returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium, and Antioch, confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God. And when they had ordained elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed. "How does God reveal whom the leaders should be so the church can ordain them? Prayer and fasting are part of it, but in the end, the church is to base its decision on the qualifications clearly delineated in Scripture. Elders are not chosen because of their knowledge of the business world, financial ability, prominence, or even their innate leadership abilities. They are to be chosen because God has obviously called and prepared them for the leadership of the church. b) Their qualifications(1) As

listed in 1 Timothy 3 Lesson(2) As listed in Titus 1 Besides writing to Timothy, Paul also wrote to Titus about the requirements for an elder: "For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee" (Titus 1:5). Note that in the New Testament the evangelist ordained the elders. Today there are very few church-planting evangelists. Today's evangelist is often much different from a biblical evangelist, who was responsible for ordaining elders that met certain spiritual qualifications. In Titus 1:6 Paul says that men being considered as elders must be "blameless. " That doesn't mean they have to be perfect. If that were true we'd all be disqualified. It means there shouldn't be a great blot on a man's life that would provoke criticism by others. Furthermore Paul said that an elder should be "the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of profligacy, or unruly" (v. 6). He must give evidence of having been effective in communicating his faith to his own family. Certainly you don't expect to see complete sainthood in the children, but they should be following their father's faith with a measure of godly conduct. Verse 7 says that the bishop or elder "must be blameless, as the steward of God. " He must realize he doesn't own anything but merely manages the affairs of God for the Body of Christ. Also he must not be "self-willed, not soon angry, not given to wine. " (v. 7). About the only thing people could drink in New Testament times was wine because pure water was difficult to obtain. The Greek term pictures one who stayed beside his wine a long time, giving evidence that he had a problem with alcohol. Also an elder should not be "violent" or "given to filthy lucre" (v. 7). He doesn't react with his fists or pursue money as his primary goal. On a positive note, verse 8 says that an elder should be "a lover of hospitality. " He must be willing to open his home to strangers. And he will be able to because his household is well-managed (1 Tim. 3:4-5). An elder's home should display what Christian living is all about. Furthermore he is to be "a lover of good, sober-minded, just, holy, temperate, holding fast the faithful word" (vv. 8-9). An elder should know his priorities and practice self-control as he lives by the standards of God's Word. c) Their obligations Acts 20 gives us a look at elders in Ephesus. (1) To examine themselves In verse 28 Paul says, "Take heed, therefore, unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over which the Holy Spirit hath made you overseers" (2 Cor. 13:5). An elder who rules the church must evaluate not only his own life, but also the spiritual needs of his flock. We need to take note of everyone in the flock God has given us so we can recognize and specifically pray for their individual problems and needs. (2) To feed the church Paul also exhorted the Ephesian elders "to feed the church of God" (v. 28). What is it that the church must feed on? The Word of God (1 Pet. 2:2; 1 Cor. 3:2). To be in control of doctrine and discipline in the church is a serious responsibility. Consequently it is an office of great honor and reward. Peter said, "The elders who are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight of it" (1 Pet. 5:1-2). When a sheep was injured, the shepherd would care for it. Likewise, the spiritual shepherd needs to care for the flock of God. Peter further said that the overseeing the flock should not be done "by constraint [and] not for filthy lucre but of a ready mind" (v. 2). An elder shouldn't serve as though his responsibility were a distasteful task, but willingly because it is a privilege. His motivation shouldn't be to minister to rich people to receive a reward, but to minister eagerly to everyone. Verse 3 says, "Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being examples to the flock. " The best way to lead is not by being a dictator, but by being an example. If you try to lead people without setting a pattern that they can willingly follow, they will resist your leadership. Leading by example has a wonderful reward: "When the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away" (v. 4). And the worthy leaders who receive them will be able to cast them at the feet of Jesus Christ--the One to whom they really belong (Rev. 4:10).

2. Deacons

a) Their responsibilities Acts 6 introduces us to a group whom many believe to be the first deacons. Although these men are never specifically called deacons, they are certainly an appropriate model

for deacons. Apparently it was sometime after this that the office of a deacon was officially recognized in the church. In the earliest days of the church, the church at Jerusalem was led by the apostles. Eventually it was necessary for them to delegate some of their responsibilities to other mature Christian men. That enabled them to concentrate on prayer and teaching (v. 5). Verse 1 says, "In those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration." One of the church's responsibilities was taking care of widows. Contention arose because some Greek Christians thought that most of the daily provisions were going to the Jewish widows. Therefore "the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not fitting that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables" (v. 2). It was important that they concentrate on studying and communicating the Word of God. They understood what their priority was. The apostles then said, "Wherefore, brethren, look among you for seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business" (v. 3). The men were responsible for handing out financial support and various provisions to Christians in need. That way the apostles were able to give themselves "continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word" (v. 4). b) Their qualifications First Timothy 3:8-9 gives some basic qualifications for deacons: "In like manner must the deacons be grave [serious minded], not double-tongued [telling one person one thing and another something else], not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre, holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience." The "mystery of the faith" is that God and man are one in Jesus Christ (1 Tim. 3:16). Therefore "holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience" means living in a Christlike manner. Furthermore Paul said that deacons should "first be proved; then let them use the office of a deacon, being found blameless. . . . Let the deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well. For they that have used the office of a deacon well purchase to themselves a good standing, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus" (vv. 10, 12-13).

B. The Congregation They Lead

Whereas the basic task of the church leadership is teaching sound doctrine and explaining how to apply it, the basic task of the people is learning doctrine and then applying what they learn. The congregation is the object of the leaders' ministry. Perhaps someday as a result of that ministry, members of the church will become deacons and deaconesses, elders, or even evangelists and pastor-teachers. We all start at the same point: somewhere in the congregation. Those who are faithful with small tasks can be entrusted with larger responsibilities. God might lift you to a place of leadership, possibly even to the point where you might be martyred for your faith in Jesus Christ.

1. General duties

The congregation is that part of the church that is to do "the work of the ministry" (Eph. 4:12). Hebrews 13:17 identifies the general obligation of the congregation: "Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves." Assuming that the leadership of the church is Spirit-led, we are to obey them because they are ministering on behalf of Christ, who is the Chief Shepherd (1 Pet. 5:4). The congregation is to subject itself to their godly ministry although they may not understand it all and may even disagree at times with what the elders are attempting to do. The church's obedience is a living testimony to the world.

There are many things that hurt a church and destroy its testimony. The primary one is poor leadership or false teachers who fail to build the church on the Word of God. Another thing that weakens a church is a congregation that won't follow its leadership. That causes church splits as well as other problems that are exposed to the full view of the world. Every church member must follow the design of the Spirit and be faithful and obedient.

The elders' duty is to provide instruction and loving care for the congregation, a burden for which they are answerable to God: "They watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief; for that is unprofitable for you" (Heb. 13:17). There are easier

things to do than rule the church of Christ and care about spiritual problems. Those who do face problems twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. Nevertheless leaders shouldn't have to labor in grief.

2. Specific duties

a) Of the men What are the responsibilities of the men in a local assembly of Christians? Paul identified some of them for Timothy: (1) To their family First Timothy 5:8 says, "If any [man] provide not for his own [dependents], and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an [unbeliever]." If you can't show the world you are faithful to do your most basic duty, then you are denying the very basis of what Christian love is all about. There are times when men get laid off from work, but that should only be a temporary condition. God expects a Christian man to work so he can provide for his family--not be on welfare unless he has some kind of a physical incapacity. The church should care for a family in such a situation rather than letting it be supported by a mother with young children. (2) To their employer (a) 1 Timothy 6:1-2--"Let as many servants as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honor, that the name of God and His doctrine be not blasphemed" (v. 1). Poor work habits discredit your Christian testimony. You need to serve your employer with honor whether he deserves it or not for the sake of how the world views Christianity. Verse 2 says, "They that have believing masters, let them not despise them because they are brethren." If you have a Christian boss, that doesn't mean you can goof off. Rather, "do them service because they are faithful and beloved, partakers of the benefit." That means you should work all the more diligently--don't take advantage of his graciousness. (b) Titus 2:9-10--"Exhort servants to be obedient unto their own masters, and to please them well in all things, not answering again [talking back]; not purloining [stealing], but showing all good fidelity [honesty], that they may adorn the doctrine of God, our Savior, in all things." When you live a godly life in front of your employer, God becomes more beautiful to him because he can see Him manifest in your life. (3) To each other Titus 2:2 tells older men to be "sober-minded, grave, temperate, sound in faith, in love, in patience." Older men in the church are responsible to teach the younger ones. They should be serious and dignified, know their priorities, and be self-controlled. They should also be strong in faith, love, and patience--attitudes directed toward God, others, and troubles, respectively. Older men are to reflect many of the same qualities that the elders and deacons display in their lives. Paul told Titus to exhort young men "to be sober-minded, in all things showing thyself a pattern of good works; in doctrine showing uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity, sound speech, that cannot be condemned" (vv. 6-8). It's easy for young men to say things that are not worth saying. They need to consider their words carefully before they speak. Young men are to be a pattern of God's standards. Paul told Timothy to be "an example [to] the believers" (1 Tim. 4:12). (4) To God First Timothy 2:8 says that men should "pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting." Men are to be in constant prayer, an important reminder since it's so easy for men to be distracted by things of lesser importance. b) Of the women (1) To be modest First Timothy 2:9 deals with a woman's clothing and appearance, which is as applicable today as when it was first established: "In like manner . . . women [should] adorn themselves in modest apparel." That is a basic principle for any believer. The issue is modesty. The Bible doesn't say there is a three-inch-above-the-knee rule! But some things are obviously immodest. Christians are to dress modestly, but that doesn't mean if you bring an unsaved friend to church who is immodestly dressed that the ushers are going to ask her to leave. The guideline in 1 Timothy is for believers. (a) With godly fear Women are to dress modestly "with godly fear [lit. , "with a sense of shame"]" (v. 9). The modern idea that we don't need to be ashamed of our bodies is not biblical. Ever since sin came into the world, we have had a right to be ashamed of the corruptness of our flesh. Paul was not talking about extreme psychological trauma; he was saying that a woman--or a man for that matter--should have just enough shame to be modest. (b) With sobriety The idea of "sobriety" (v. 9) is to avoid extremes. There's no place in the church for showing off one's apparel. That distracts from what the

Spirit of God wants to accomplish in our lives. (c) Without fancy apparel The end of verse 9 says that women should not adorn themselves "with braided hair or gold, or pearls, or costly array. " In Paul's day women wound all kinds of pearls and gold in their hair. You can imagine a man sitting in church with the rest of the believers when some lady sits down in front of him with a whole treasure chest on her head! He would be thinking how much her jewels were worth instead of worshiping God!. That doesn't mean Christian women can wear only cheap pearls and earrings. The point is there's no place for a showy display in front of people who are trying to worship God. We are to be modestly attired so we don't distract others from what God wants to do through His Spirit and His Word. A Christian woman shouldn't be adorned with immodest, extravagant apparel. (d) With godly concerns Verse 10 tells us that a godly woman is characterized by "good works. " If you're a godly woman, you will look like someone who cares about godly things, not someone who cares only about showing off. A godly woman isn't concerned about putting herself on display. (2) To learn in submission First Timothy 2:11 says, "Let the women learn in silence with all subjection. " Should the church have women preachers? No. That's exactly what that verse forbids. In the public service, women are not to teach. Verse 12 is even more specific: "I permit not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. " There is no biblical justification for women preachers who lead and shepherd a congregation. However, the women in the church are more than welcome to teach other women and children (Titus 2:3-5; 1 Tim 2:15). (3) To live righteously Titus 2:3 says older women should be "in behavior as becometh holiness, not false accusers. " The Greek word translated "accusers" means "scandalmongers. " It's easy for older people who have more time to get caught up in talking about what's going on, especially in these days with the telephone. Information that begins as an innocent rumor can become a real problem. Unfortunately, more churches have been split by scandals than any other single thing I can think of. (4) To teach others Women are to be "teachers of good things, that they may teach the young women to be sober-minded, to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed" (Titus 2:3-4). The pastor is not responsible to teach everyone everything. That's the congregation's responsibility as God directs them to minister to others. Many young women wonder why their children are hard to discipline and have problems. A major reason is that many of them are never home with their children, teaching them spiritual principles that are basic patterns for the rest of their lives. A godly woman will have her priorities in order, teaching her own children.

Focusing on the Facts

1. Why is it important to carefully evaluate someone's life before they can be put in a position of Christian leadership?
2. What is the tragedy of the invisible church? Why does the church present a confusing picture to the world?
3. Many churches today don't fit the biblical pattern of what they are to be. Why?
4. What preparation did Paul and Barnabas make before selecting elders in Acts 14:21-23?
5. What two things did Paul encourage the Ephesian elders to do in Acts 20:28? Explain them.
6. Describe how Peter said that an elder should lead (1 Pet. 5:1-3).
7. What will elders receive who lead properly, according to 1 Peter 5:4?
8. To whom did the Apostles delegate some of their responsibilities? Why?
9. According to 1 Timothy 3:8-9, what are some of the basic qualifications for deacons?
10. Compare the basic tasks of church leadership and the congregation.
11. What are the general duties of the congregation, according to Hebrews 13:17?
12. What are two things that hurt a church and destroy its testimony?
13. Why is a man who doesn't provide for his family's needs considered "worse than an [unbeliever]" (1 Tim. 5:8)?

14. How should Christian employees treat their employers? Why? If your boss is a Christian, how should you work (1 Tim. 6:1-2)?
15. How can a Christian employee "adorn the doctrine of God" (Titus 2:10)?
16. How should Christian women dress? Explain.
17. Why should extreme clothing styles be avoided in church?
18. What things should young women be taught, according to Titus 2:3-4? Who should be teaching them?

Pondering the Principles

1. If you are a Christian man, read Titus 1:5-9. Although you may not believe you're capable of serving as an elder, measure your life by the high biblical standards that are established for one. What weak areas do you need to strengthen to qualify you for service as an elder? Do you have a desire to be responsible for the spiritual nourishment of the church? Could your life be a suitable example to the believers in your church? Recognize that your faithful service now will be rewarded with "a crown of glory" from the chief Shepherd (1 Pet. 5:4).
2. Read Hebrews 13:17. How would you rate your submissiveness to the leaders of your church? Are you quick and willing to obey them, or is your resistance a cause of grief for them? Think of some things you could do that would bring joy to your church leaders. Be sure to implement them.
3. Review the Christian's responsibility to his employer (see p. 8). What type of relationship do you have with your supervisor, foreman, or employer? How do you honor him? Do you argue with him or privately resent his leadership? Have you ever prayed for him? Can he tell that you are a Christian by your work habits? If not, determine what you need to change so that your daily work can "adorn the doctrine of God" (Titus 2:10).

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