

I Timothy 3, Sermon #22

Turn in your Bibles to I Timothy 3

Now the theme of I Timothy – is sound doctrine for church conduct/behavior and the key verse is 3:15 – dealing with the church, specifically, church leadership

We need to remember when we talk about church offices – we are talking about positions of service to the Lord and to the congregation

A majority of the problems and sin we see in the church today – unbiblical leadership

I have entitled today's message "The Elders and the Deacons, God's Leadership Team for the Church"

I Timothy 3:8

Let us stand for the reading of God's Holy Word

I Timothy 3:8, 13-15

Let us pray

You may be seated

The Elders and the Deacons, God's Leadership Team for the Church

The two offices of overseers and deacons are meant to complement one another. One is the office of pastoral oversight; the other is the office of practical service to the church.

The word **deacon** is used often in the New Testament (around 100 times). It is based upon a word that means **to serve** or **servant**.

In the general sense of the term, all Christians are deacons, for all are to be actively serving Christ and His church.

Every Christian is to be involved in some form of spiritual service.

In I Timothy 3, it refers to the officially recognized responsibility of deacons.

The deacons work alongside the elders, implementing their preaching, teaching, and oversight/management in the practical life of the church.

The deacons are not to lead the elders – group of deacons telling the pastor what to do – backwards

Now, the only discussion of the office of deacon is in I Timothy 3:8-13, and it is mentioned in Phil.1:1.

Many Bible-believing churches have made the deacons the ruling board of the church when they have been designed to be the serving leaders

The elders are given the oversight of the church. They are to rule the church.

Obedience to Scripture does not come naturally, yet it is the indispensable basis of the local church's health, leadership and direction.

When we have a faulty leadership design – then the potential for poor leadership is great

The deacons need the guidance and support that only the elders of the church can provide.

Elders need the deacons to relieve them from the many practical ministries essential to shepherding a flock.

These two groups are God's tag team for leadership

In order to understand the role of the New Testament deacon – we must begin by understanding how the deacons in the church came about.

We think of the account in Acts 6 as giving the occasion when the office of deacon began in the early church.

Turn to Acts 6

We see a two-fold need for this office.

#1 To relieve the leaders so that they can give priority time and attention to the Word and prayer, and secondly

#2 To provide official, responsible care for the physical welfare of believers.

Relieve the elders and take care of the congregation

The origination of the office of deacon is found in Acts 6:1-4.

Acts 6:1-4

So, the church was growing quickly; this growth was good, people were being converted.

But, there was a break-down in the distribution of food.

Here was the congregation's first big test.

Something had to be done or the church would split apart.

You see, good leaders have the ability to skillfully confront troublesome issues and to be decisive.

Confronting problems is a major part of leadership responsibility.

Leaders who fail to confront problems have demoralized many churches.

So, problems become worse problems.

The Apostle's acted decisively and skillfully and avoided a potential disaster.

★This does not mean the apostles disliked getting their hands dirty – caring for widows,
nor does it imply that they thought they were too important for such work.

Not at all!

They had learned from Jesus to be merciful and compassionate.

They saw Jesus' burning compassion for the needy.

They gladly served the poor and the sick.

However, this care of the church body was not their first, God-given priority.

These good things had diverted them from their primary responsibility of proclaiming the
cross of Christ.

The Apostles felt strongly on this issue; they believed it was not right that they neglect
preaching the Word in order to serve tables (vs. 2).

They must not allow even this honorable service to divert them from proclaiming and
teaching the Word.

That would be disastrous for the church.

Many churches and religious organizations have done just that – become social
institutions – delivering food, clothing, but not delivering the Word of God –
transforming power.

The church's central ministry is the *proclaiming and teaching of the Word of God*.

When pastors neglect the Word of God, they sabotage the work of God.

The Apostles declare to the whole church their divinely appointed priorities: *“But we will devote ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word”* Acts 6:4.

The Apostles were to steadfastly and singlemindedly give themselves to prayer and the ministry of the Word.

Acts 6:4 is one of the most important verses in the Bible regarding pastors.

Pastors are easily sidetracked.

So many good things demand time and energy: visitation, building construction, counseling, programs, meetings.

Thus the pastor’s time for prayer, Bible study, and teaching the Word of God is slighted.

So, Tuesdays – home office

We must remember that the true priorities of church leaders are always under attack.

There will always be too much to do.

One of the greatest barriers to the church becoming what it should be is the lack of focus from the elders and deacons.

Elders must radically insist on a schedule that affirms the spiritual priorities of prayer and the ministry of God’s Word.

The deacons of the church, also, need to fix these priorities firmly in their minds.

If the leaders are wrongly focused, then the church will be misguided.

Tragically, many a preacher is a jack of all trades, the master of none.

Courageously, the apostles assumed full responsibility for the problem.

Since they were responsible for the pastoral oversight of the congregation, they recognized that they could no longer give the time and attention required.

As the church increased in size and complexity, so did their workload.

Something had to be done to relieve their expanding workload.

They summoned the congregation (vs. 2) and presented a plan for solving the problem (vs. 3)

The plan called for the formation of a body of seven men to whom they could hand over responsibility.

They asked the people to select the men (vs. 3).

★They also gave qualifications to guide the congregation in the selection process.

Not just any Christian could do the job.

The task demanded skilled men of high moral character who could be trusted to fulfill the responsibilities with integrity and ability.

The wrong men could create worse problems and frustrate the apostles even more than the existing situation.

That is why the qualifications are important – finding the right kind of men to serve in this ministry is vital to the local church.

The apostles were to devote themselves to prayer and to the proclamation of the Word. Hence, their work was primarily a verbal ministry.

The newly appointed deacons were to give themselves to a ministry of deeds—to provide loving service to the widows.

The Bible speaks often of words and deeds – defines them as speaking and serving.

Colossians 3:17 – *“And whatever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by Him.”*

I Peter 4:11 – *“If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth, that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion forever and ever. Amen.”*

Luke 24:19 – *“And they said unto him, concerning Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet, mighty in deed and word before God and all the people.”*

Acts 7:22 – *“And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and in deeds.”*

You see, most of us are stronger in one area than the other.

We must understand that the work of Jesus Christ demands both kinds of people.

Both are essential to the work of God.

When the apostles said in vs. 4, they didn't mean they would exclusively spend their time teaching and never again help.

Their good works were hindering them from doing the primary job of proclaiming Christ.

Although their primary duties are to teach and govern, they are to be concerned for the needy, too.

So it is not only the deacons' responsibility to help the needy, although they are the official church coordinators.

Every Christian is to be concerned about serving.

If any organization is to maintain integrity and effectiveness, good management is essential.

The principles of delegation are clearly taught in both testaments.

The account in Exodus 18:13-26 closely approximates that of Acts 6.

In it, we find Moses overwhelmed by the needs of the people.

Turn in your Bibles to Exodus 18:13-26

He is, in fact, responsible to meet them, but in reality, incapable of meeting them.

The weight of all the people's need rested on him.

It is obvious that as the number of people with needs increases, the weight intensifies.

The solution to Moses' problem was presented; and it involved the delegation of responsibility over groups of individuals to others who could, in effect, lengthen the hands and thus lighten the load of the leader.

It can be seen that as the number of people increases, the number of those delegated to oversee their needs increases.

This makes possible unlimited growth without limiting the quality of care that is available to those within the congregation who have legitimate needs.

This is a reason why some churches do not grow.

The elders do not delegate or they will not delegate.

They will not give authority to qualified persons in the church.

For this principle to be put to use in leading a church, it is essential that several matters be made clear—the first being that the objective of the deacons watchful care is to free the hands of the pastoral leadership to enable them to provide proper leadership

Disorganization multiplies problems and frustrate people.

Look back at Acts 6:5

The congregation presented these men to the Apostles for official approval (vs. 6).

The Apostles commissioned them in an official and public way, by the laying on of hands and prayer.

This “putting of hands on” was an appointment to an official position. It was the giving of authority.

This visual demonstration would be responsible for placing the seven men in charge of the church's ministries.

Vs. 3e “. . . whom we may put in charge of this task”

So the congregation chose the seven men and the apostles officially installed them.

That is exactly how we operate here.

We put before the people – the qualifications.

The congregation selects – then we examine.

By the way, this is the first recorded example of the laying on of hands in the Christian community.

The primary idea seems to be that of conveyance or transference.

They were given official status to handle the important work of caring for the churches needy.

The Seven formed a separate but complementary ministry to that of the Apostles.

As long as the deacons enable the elders of the church to carry out their primary duties, and as long as the deacons minister to the congregation's needs—you will have a healthy leadership team for the local church

Folks, this was not just volunteer work that was open to everyone in the community.

It was an official position.

If we want to understand who the New Testament deacon is and what he does, we must begin with an understanding of the overseers of the church.

If we misinterpret the identity of the New Testament overseers, we will most likely distort the identity of the New Testament deacons.

In fact, in many churches today deacons act as if they are church overseers, which is not Biblical.

The important point is that deacons are, in actuality, to serve the people.

In too many churches, deacons merely sit on an executive board and make decisions.

They are board-deacons, not servant-deacons.

As most churches know, conflict between elders and deacons is not uncommon and can arise from both sides.

Indeed, any organization with two or more groups holding official responsibilities will face tensions.

The better we understand the difference between elders and deacons, the more able we will be to avoid conflicts.

When we don't understand these differences, power struggles and misunderstandings raise their ugly heads.

The work of pastors and deacons frequently overlap.

They must make joint decisions, pass information back and forth, and seek help from each other.

In many churches, deacons misunderstand their role.

It is plain from everything we have studied that deacons are subordinate to overseers.

In the New Testament, deacons are always associated with overseers, yet are subordinate to and distinct from them.

We must also understand that elders can perform all the functions of deacons, but deacons cannot perform all the functions of elders.

Elders are responsible for the overall leadership, supervision, and teaching of the congregation.

This includes handling and overseeing the church's funds (Acts 11:30; I Peter 5:2).

In the sense that elders oversee the entire church, they also oversee the deacons.

Therefore, deacons are not independent of the leadership oversight of the elders.

If elders provide poor pastoral leadership for the church, they will frustrate the deacons.

Deacons are often strong and influential men who care deeply about the people's welfare.

Sometimes deacons are more competent and aggressive than overseers.

They get things done. They work hard.

Before long, they may become critical of the elders, and the elders, in turn, may become intimidated or aggravated by the deacons.

Therefore, good coordination between elders and deacons is vital to a smooth working relationship.

Elders and deacons can implement many practical, organizational procedures to avoid conflict and misunderstanding.

God expects them to use the creativity and intelligence He has given to conduct their lives effectively and orderly.

As Scripture commands, *"Let all things be done decently and in order"* I Corinthians 14:40.

Now, let's see what happened when the deacons were established and properly functioned.

Acts 6:7

The Elders and the Deacons, God's Leadership Team for the Church

Let us stand for closing invitation.

People, we need to recognize the elders and deacons amongst us and allow them to do their work.

We need to support this work – by prayer and service.

Share the Gospel of Jesus Christ – the central message of the church

Jesus Christ died for sinners.

The first deacons were appointed to be assistants to the apostles. In a local church today deacons relieve the pastors/elders of other tasks so that they may concentrate on the ministry of the Word, prayer, and spiritual oversight.

It was then a wise decision on their part to delegate this responsibility to “men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom,” which would allow them to “give themselves continually to the Word of God and prayer.”