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The Office of Deacon, Part 10

1 Timothy 3:8-13, “Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain. 9 They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. 10 And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless. 11 Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things. 12 Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well. 13 For those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.”

To address the ministry, function, or purpose of the church is to take on a serious topic. We know from Scripture that the church is Christ’s bride and constitutes His Kingdom on the earth (Luke 17:21) and the pillar and support of the truth (1 Timothy 3:15). To hinder the church and its ministry in any way is a serious thing. Paul warned:

1 Corinthians 3:16-17, "Do you not know that you are a temple of God, and *that* the Spirit of God dwells in you? If any man destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him..."

To this church the Lord has given servant/leaders whose job not only is to shepherd God's people that they might fulfill the call placed on their life and so arrive safely at the Promised Land upon their death (Ephesians 4:11-13), but to protect the body from the wolves the elders were charged this way:

Titus 1:9-11, "Holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, that he may be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict. For there are many rebellious men, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, who must be silenced because they are upsetting whole families, teaching things they should not *teach*, for the sake of sordid gain."

Now amazingly, when it comes to the selection of church leaders, God did NOT ordain a process involving revelation. RATHER, as we have seen, He deigned to select church leadership through the secondary means of a "show of hands"- which involves a process of:

- Nomination on the part of the body (Acts 1:26; 6:3a).
- Examination on the part of the leadership (Acts 6:6a).
- A vote of affirmation on the part of the body (Acts 14:23).
- And then ordination on the part of the leadership (Acts 6:6b).

In light of this, the body of Christ understood that they played a vital role in the selection of church leadership. As such, they cannot take the task lightly. In Ephesians 2 Paul spoke of leadership as a gift which God has given to the church, for the church office has the potential to be a source of great blessing to a local body. Yet because of their strategic position amongst the people of God, church leadership also can be the cause of untold difficulty to a local body. Alexander Strauch describes it this way:

Wrote this:

I have repeatedly observed that the big mistake many churches make when first seeking to establish a biblical eldership and biblical diaconate is to appoint the wrong men to office. In the end, the church is saddled with the wrong leaders and perhaps suffers years of problems... (Strauch, 1992, p. 88)

Dr. John MacArthur likewise postulated:

Since godly leaders have always been the backbone of the church, it is essential that they be qualified. In an unsuccessful church, the issue is all too often not poor programs or uncommitted people, but substandard leadership. (MacArthur, 1995, pp. 92-93)

So who ought we to select as officer's of Christ's church? Because we all have a say when it comes to those in leadership, on what basis ought we to select our leaders? I would like to suggest three categories of qualification. First they must be men who are doing the work already. Again, the vote

for church office is NOT a vote of determination, BUT a vote of affirmation. By voting a congregation affirms that the man in question ought to be an officer in Christ's church by virtue of his prior conduct and fruit.

1 Timothy 3:1, "It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires *to do*"

The term "aspiring" doesn't mean that the man has voiced a desire to serve in the office (many a false teacher and leader have done that, cf. 1 Timothy 1:7a). Rather, "aspiring" is reflected primarily in what the man does, how he lives. I know a football coach who has had a significant role in many boys life. I have noticed that early on his involvement is minimal until the day that he sees a kid "aspiring" to be a great player. How does he know? He knows when with minimal prompting a boy goes way beyond in doing what was needed in order to excel. When this happens, he knows that the boy is ready to be trained.

So it is in the life of a man aspiring to the office. Anyone can say, "I want to be a leader." But those who roll up their sleeves and dive in to the service of Christ's church, those who are driven and so serve NOT out of obligation, BUT on account of an inward passion and desire are ones who reflect an "aspiring" for the office. Paul describes this a little further with the deacon.

1 Timothy 3:10a, "And let these also first be tested..."

The word "tested" refers to a judgment based on previous actions. Truly the men whom we select for the office of deacon must be ones already doing the work!

Secondly, we would expect fruit when it comes to their work. Though speaking of false believers, what Christ says here can also be applied to many things including church office:

Matthew 7:16-18, "You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn *bushes*, nor figs from thistles, are they? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit; but the bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit."

Sadly, there are many unscrupulous men in the church who view church office as a prize to be gained (cf. Matthew 20:25). They learn what is necessary to be a leader in a local congregation and so jump through the appropriate hoops. Yet God has given us a wonderful tool that exposes unqualified leaders, the fruit of the person's ministry.

I've used this in the context of a woman's choice for a spouse. The man in marriage is called to be a shepherd of his wife's soul. This is what Christ is about in His kingdom work.

Ephesians 5:27, "...present[ing] to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she should be holy and blameless."

Well get this, this is nothing less than the man's role in marriage.

Ephesians 5:28, “So [in like manner] husbands ought also to love their own wives...”

All single Christian women that if they want to determine if a man is right for them, they need to ask these questions:

- Has the man encouraged me in my walk with Christ?
- Has the result of his time with me been a deeper hunger on my part for...
 - Holiness?
 - Service?
 - Worship?
 - The honoring of my parents?
 - Maturation in Christ?
 - Etc.

A man can't fake these things. The man either has been a catalyst for growth in your walk or he has not! You can fake God-speak. You can fake a love for the Lord. You can fake a desire to be in a church and serve in God's Kingdom. But you can't fake spiritual fruit! And so it is in the ministry of God's Kingdom and leadership: They either are a proven minister and so a servant in your walk or they are not. You can't fake this fruit.

Hebrews 13:7, “Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith.”

- Men have “aspired” to the pulpit on account of their “great love of teaching” yet they couldn't teach themselves out of a phone booth!
- Men who have “aspired” to the office of elder, yet have evidenced no fruit when it comes to discipleship or counseling!

The standard for church leadership is not what a person says or even does, but it is the result of their ministry.

Matthew 7:16, “You will know them by their fruits...”

This is why Paul in 1 Timothy 3 links a man's ministry in a congregation to his ministry in his home.

1 Timothy 3:4-5, “*He must be* 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)?”

Truly, when it comes to the choice of those who would minister to us, we must choose only those who have a proven track record of fruit! We see it in relation to the deacon.

1 Timothy 3:12, “Let deacons be husbands of *only* one wife, *and* good managers of *their* children and their own households.”

Finally church leaders must be men of high moral character.

1 Timothy 3:1-2: "It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires *to* do. An overseer, then, must be above reproach..."

The word for "above reproach" could be translated as "not able to be held" or "not able to be accused." It is a broad word in the Greek and therefore is best taken here NOT as the first of many qualifications, BUT a summation of everything Paul is saying in his list of qualifications. The man who is "above reproach" cannot "be held" as if he were a criminal; there is nothing for which to "accuse him."

As such he will be, "the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not addicted to wine or pugnacious, but gentle, uncontentious, free from the love of money, etc..." (1 Timothy 3:2-3). After giving quite an extensive list as to what constitutes being "above reproach" in the context of the elders, Paul said this:

1 Timothy 3:8, "Deacons likewise *must be* men of dignity, not double-tongued, or addicted to much wine or fond of sordid gain"- the adverb "likewise" indicates that the high moral qualifications placed upon the office of elder is "likewise" incumbent upon the office of deacon. And so Paul continues...

1 Timothy 3:10b, "And let these also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons if they are beyond reproach."

Truly, when it comes to those who would oversee the care of God's covenant treasures, His people, there can be no compromise. Accordingly David wrote these words:

Psalms 101:6b, "...He who walks in a blameless way is the one who will minister to me."

- Is this your standard for who you allow to minister to your soul?
- Is this what you will demand of your elders and deacons?
- Or will you, like so many, opt for the spirit of relativity so pervasive in our day and downplay a man's sin? *"Hey, no one's perfect! How could I demand of a leader anything beyond my own spiritual attainments?"*

Listen when it comes to ministry in Christ's Kingdom, the standard is nothing less than being "blameless"- that is, "not being able to be held or accused!"

This begs the question: What does this look like? Certainly the standard isn't perfection. So what will a qualified man for service in God's Kingdom look like?

Around the years 32-33 A.D. a Pharisee by the name of Saul was converted to Christ (Act. 9:1-19). We learn later that this man had been:

Galatians 1:15, 16, "...set apart, from his mother's womb...that he might preach Christ among the Gentiles."

Paul immediately began preaching the glorious news of Jesus Christ. Eventually he was accepted by the Christian leadership and so sent with Barnabas to Antioch where together they oversaw a Gentile church. After many years, God deigned to send Paul and Barnabas as heralds of the good news. Acts describes this church in Antioch this way:

Acts 13:2, “And while they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’”

This the early church did and Paul began the first of five/six journeys throughout which he faithfully proclaimed the gospel.

- His First Missionary Journey lasted from 47 A.D. to 48 A.D. and focused on the Roman region in Asia Minor known as Galatia. After this journey, Paul wrote one epistle: Galatians.
- Following a brief visit to Jerusalem, Paul began His Second Missionary Journey which lasted about two years (50 A.D. to the spring of 52 A.D.) and focused on Greece. During this journey Paul wrote 2 epistles: 1 & 2 Thessalonians.
- Immediately Paul set out again on a Third Missionary Journey (A.D. 52 to the early summer of A.D. 57). This time the focus was on strengthening the churches which were planted on his second missionary journey. Accordingly, Paul wrote three epistles: Romans and 1 & 2 Corinthians.
- Following his third missionary journey, Paul headed for Jerusalem. Everywhere he went he received word from God that bonds and imprisonment awaited him there. Sure enough, when he arrived in the city around A.D. 57, he was arrested and put in jail on account of his preaching. In total he spent around 5 years in two different prisons (one in Jerusalem and one in Rome) awaiting a trial that never occurred. During this time he wrote four epistles from Rome: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon.
- Eventually the charges against Paul were dropped and Paul was released from his Roman imprisonment around 61 A.D. Immediately the apostle assumed the ministry of an itinerate preacher and possibly served for a time in Spain.
- Eventually, Paul and Timothy re-visited a church which had become dear to their hearts, the Church in Ephesus.

Recall the wonderful visit Paul had with the elders of this church prior to his being imprisoned in Jerusalem (cf. Acts 20). At that time they wept together and prayed together. It was quite moving! Yet this time the visit was anything but peaceful. For in the time that Paul had been away from Ephesus, false teachers had infiltrated the church and so were corrupting the faith and practice of this body. In fact, in order to stop these teachers from totally undermining the church’s life and doctrine, Paul had to take radical action. Accordingly, he excommunicated two of the leading perpetrators, Hymenaeus and Alexander. Paul exhorted the church in his letter to them a little while later.

1 Timothy 1:19-20, “Keep... faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith. Among these are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have delivered over to Satan, so that they may be taught not to blaspheme.”

For unknown reasons, Paul then left Ephesus to minister in Macedonia. However, he left Timothy behind to help the embattled church.

1 Timothy 1:3-4, “As I urged you upon my departure for Macedonia, remain on at Ephesus, in order that you may instruct certain men not to teach strange doctrines, nor to pay attention to myths and endless genealogies, which give rise to mere speculation rather than *furthering* the administration of God which is by faith.”

Paul left Timothy at Ephesus to deal with the false teachers! Now Paul knew that Timothy faced a difficult assignment! False teaching and false teachers are not easily rooted out of a church. And they weren't at Ephesus. In fact, according to 1 Timothy 6:3-5, 20 we know that these false teachers were fiercely argumentative! Accordingly, Paul wrote a letter to Timothy, 1 Timothy, for the joint purposes of (1) reminding him of his calling, (2) encouraging him in the spiritual battle, and (3) telling him and the church formally how the church ought to function. Alexander Strauch wrote this:

The church at Ephesus urgently needed reforms. False teaching had confused and disrupted church life. Christians were acting improperly toward one another. They forsook apostolic principles of church life. Senseless, unhealthy doctrines were being taught. Unqualified people seemingly had become shepherds, and good shepherd-elders were not properly cared for. Some women flaunted their riches and knowledge in church. Exclusive ideas and fighting among men adversely affected the church's prayers. Widows were selfishly forsaken by their families and forced to rely on the church for support. Sin was ignored. (Strauch, 1992, p. 85)

Such were the problems which faced Timothy and for which Paul wrote this epistle.

1 Timothy 3:14-15, “I am writing these things to you, hoping to come to you before long; but in case I am delayed, *I write* so that you may know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth.”

Because of the multiple problems facing Timothy in Ephesus, Paul laid down the principles for biblical structure and order in the family of God. He wanted everyone in the church to know how a Covenant Community was to function. In fact, the word for “conduct” (ἀναστρέφω [anastrephō]) references ones “behavior” or “manner of life and character.” Paul's concern in writing 1 Timothy was so that the body of Christ might learn how to behave as a people of God NOT just on Sunday, BUT every day of the week!

Now as Ephesus was being assaulted by false leaders who had “crept in unawares” (to use an expression Jude coined in Jude 4), Paul went into great detail in his description of the qualifications for church leadership warning Timothy not to lay his hands on any man hastily (cf. 1 Timothy 5:22). In all, he devoted well-over an entire chapter to the subject- giving us:

- The Marks of a False Leader in 1 Timothy 1:4, 6-7, 19-20; 4:1-3; 6:3-5, 9-10, and
- The qualifications of a Genuine Leader in 1 Timothy 3:1-13.

If you look at the latter, the qualifications of a genuine leader, 1 Timothy 3:1-13, you will note that both lists deal exclusively with the character of those who would fill church office. Paul says nothing

here about their duties not because they are not important, but in the context of a covenant body, they are obvious. The focus and emphasis when it comes to those who would minister to us in the church is a high standard of godliness and devotion to the Lord. In his advice to Moses as to the leaders he ought to select to help him in the ministry, Jethro said this:

Exodus 18:21, : “Furthermore, you shall select out of all the people able men who fear God, men of truth, those who hate dishonest gain; and you shall place *these* over them, *as* leaders of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties and of tens.”

This is exactly what Moses did in fact, reflecting back upon this history Moses recalled his words to the people at the time: He said this:

Deuteronomy 1:13-15, “Choose wise and discerning and experienced men from your tribes, and I will appoint them as your heads. And you answered me and said, ‘The thing which you have said to do is good.’ So I took the heads of your tribes, wise and experienced men, and appointed them heads over you, leaders of thousands, and of hundreds, of fifties and of tens, and officers for your tribes.”

Listen to God’s standard of leadership at the time of the exile:

Ezekiel 22:30, “And I searched for a man among them who should build up the wall and stand in the gap before Me for the land, that I should not destroy it; but I found no one.”

When it comes to leadership, God wants men of prayer who would take responsibility for the people of God! We see it in Peter who exhorted the church leaders this way (notice the implications for qualification):

1 Peter 5:2-3, “Shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to *the will of God*; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock.”

David set the standard as those whom he would look to as a leader.

Psalm 101:6b, “He who walks in a blameless way is the one who will minister to me.”

And the Hebrew writer agreed when he exhorted us this way:

Hebrews 13:7, “Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith.”

So when it comes to the church and her leaders, Paul was very specific in our text. We must choose only those who are men of God who love the Lord more than life.

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About the Preacher

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