

The Qualifications of Leadership – Part 1

Introduction

a. objectives

1. subject – Paul instructs the church through Timothy about the qualifications of elders and deacons
2. aim – to cause us to seek out and support proper biblical leadership in the church
3. passage – 1 Timothy 3:1-13

b. outline

1. The Realities of Church Leadership
2. The Qualifications of Elders (1 Timothy 3:1-7)
3. The Qualifications of Deacons (1 Timothy 3:8-13)

c. opening

1. the **continued thought** of Paul re: the health of the church (at Ephesus)
 - a. in **chap. 1**, Paul outlines the main problem at the church: the teaching of false (or improper) doctrine (**i.e.** heterodoxy)
 1. his **indicative**: the church is *defined* by its doctrinal boundaries – any teaching or practice “outside” of the apostolic and orthodox message of the gospel threatens to “undo” the church
 - b. in **chap. 2**, Paul notes the first thing that needs to be done: lead the church to be praying for opportunity to preach the gospel to every class of people, without losing track of the role each person in the church plays in that mission
 1. his **first imperative**: the church is to be *humbly praying* people, with each person willingly submitted to the mission of the church as more important themselves
 2. **BTW**: this solves heterodoxy problems – there is no room for “power struggles” of false doctrine if everyone is humbly submitted to the *real* mission of the church
- c. (**now**) in **chap. 3**, Paul extends this message: establish a proper leadership of qualified men
 1. this flows naturally from his discussion of the role of women – women are not to take the role of pastoral leadership, so that implies that there should be *solid leadership by men*
 - a. or (says the woman), “we wouldn’t have to lead if the men would ...!”
 2. his **next imperative**: **the church is to be led by men who are properly qualified and utterly committed to the on-going health and mission of the church**
 - a. so, we will address this imperative: 1) an overview of proper church leadership, 2) the qualifications and roles of elders, and 3) the qualifications and roles of deacons

I. The Realities of Church Leadership

Content

a. the definition of ecclesiology

1. ecclesiology = the study of the church; the branch of theology concerned with the structure, polity, and on-going mission of the church as established by the working of the Holy Spirit
 - a. or, the proper application of “*sound doctrine*” to the church itself (**what Paul was doing here**)
 - b. a Scriptural analysis and application of how the church is to be organized
 1. over against tradition, inertia (**i.e.** how everybody else does it), or apathy (**i.e.** who cares?)
 - c. **a common misconception held by many in the church is that the Bible has little to say about church polity, and thus we are free to organize ourselves in whatever way “works” for us**
2. the Baptist concept of ecclesiology
 - a. the early English Baptists embraced much of the same things regarding doctrine as the other English Protestants when formed in the 17th C. (**i.e.** the Presbyterians and Congregationalists)
 1. the Forward of the *1689 London Baptist Confession of Faith* makes proof of this concept
 2. **e.g.** the *1689 Confession* was virtually a “copy” of the Westminster Confession – the Calvinistic soteriology therein was adopted almost without qualification into the Baptist document
 - b. however, the Baptists differed from the other Protestants on two **organizational** points:
 1. **#1**: baptism is reserved for those who (can) profess repentance and faith and demonstrate the genuine fruits of conversion in their lives, as visible to both themselves and others

“Those who do actually profess repentance towards God, faith in and obedience to our Lord Jesus, are the only proper subjects of this ordinance” (LBCF, chap. 29, “Of Baptism”, para. 2)

- a. thus, the title “Baptist” = the position that this rite was to be applied only to those who will consciously express their trust in the completed work of Christ
- b. not those who “potentially” would belong to the church family by virtue of a “family covenant”
- 2. **#2:** churches are utterly autonomous from any “magisterial” oversight, such that each local congregation is free to establish its own leadership (and application of doctrine)
 - “To each of these churches thus gathered, according to His mind declared in His Word, He hath given all that power and authority, which is in any way needful for their carrying on that order in worship and discipline, which He hath instituted for them to observe; with commands and rules for the due and right exerting and executing of that power” (LBCF, chap. 26, “Of the Church”, para. 7)
 - a. thus, the concept of “congregationalism” = the local church is free to establish its own leadership, and that the leadership is to exist in a **synergistic** relationship with the congregation, mutually submitting to and being accountable to one another

b. the proper leadership in ecclesiology

- 1. the definition of “elder” (or “overseer” or “bishop” KJV)
 - a. “overseer” (**Phil. 1:1; here**) and “elder” (**Acts 20:17; Titus 1:5**) are used interchangeably
 - 1. *episkopes* and *presbuteros* = a position of responsibility; a leader; lit. a visitation; someone who “visits” for the purpose of accountability (**i.e.** in faithfulness, in discipline, in growth, etc.)
 - 2. here, the word is used in the *singular* because it is describing the office itself (or someone who fills it); elsewhere, it is typically used in the *plural* when referring to the work of elders
 - b. **a group (or body) of men whose responsibility is to spiritually shepherd the church**
 - 1. elders oversee the spiritual condition of the flock and administrate the church to that end
 - 2. (**again**) pastors are “shepherds” (**Eph. 4:11**), but there is no direct correlation between the roles established in that passage vs. the **office** established here
 - a. **LOW:** elders are not just “pastors” or “shepherds”; it is a different *concept* entirely
 - b. true, someone who is acting in the role of a “pastor” may certainly be an elder, but the *office* of elder is **greater** than the role of pastor – the “confusion” is a modern one (**see below**)
 - 3. deacons (then) are “ministers” called to acts of mercy in the church (**i.e.** widows; **Acts 6**)
 - a. they serve the *physical* needs of the congregation, rather than the *spiritual*
- 2. the contrast of “elder” with a presbyterian or episcopal form of church government
 - a. there is *scant evidence* in the N.T. that Paul intended for elders to rule over *multiple* churches or to *carry* their authority from one geographical location to another
 - 1. **note:** it didn’t take long for this to change after the close of the N.T., but it is easily explainable by examining human nature and the inherent desire for power (already visible in **1 Tim. 1**)
 - 2. **note:** the SBC *is not* an authority over individual churches – individual churches are free to “cooperate” with the SBC (as they see fit), but Nashville does not “govern”
 - 3. **LOW:** Episcopalian is *utterly top-down*, Presbyterian is *locally top-down*, Baptist is *bottom-up*
 - b. an advantage of congregationalism is that it *insulates* local churches from being “infected” by forms of heterodoxy introduced from the top (**e.g.** Baptist churches typically retain a much more orthodox view of theology than do those governed from above)
 - 1. **i.e.** a N.T. picture of eldership = a group of men protecting the local church from heresy

c. the current problem of eldership

- 1. **note:** *nowhere* does Paul argue for the **existence** of elders (**esp. Titus 1**)
 - a. the church at Ephesus was (probably) more than 10 years old (note **Acts 20**; ~10 years prior)
 - 1. and, there were already elders in place then (maybe Paul had established them?)
 - b. so, Paul instructs Timothy on the *qualifications* of elders, not whether they should *exist*
 - c. thus, it can be assumed from the N.T. teachings on elders that the proper polity of a church should include a *plurality* of men *from the congregation* who serve in the role of spiritual shepherd
- 2. **question:** why the disappearance of elders from the Baptist church?
 - a. Baptists clearly believed in the concept of eldership at their origination
 - “A particular church, gathered and completely organized according to the mind of Christ, consists of officers and members; and the officers appointed by Christ to be chosen and set apart by the church (so called and gathered), for the peculiar administration of ordinances and execution of power or duty, ... are bishops or elders and deacons.” (LBCF, chap. 26, “Of the Church”, para. 8)
 - 1. and, paragraph 9 refers to the laying on of hands by **preexisting** elders
 - 2. elders could be found in Baptist churches into the late 19th C. – Baptist publications were still referring to church leaders by the title of “elder” well into the 20th C.
 - a. note the change between the 1925 and 1962 SBC BF&M (“pastor” replacing “elder”)
 - b. so, why did eldership *as an office* disappear from the modern Baptist church?
 - 1. the frontier church – the explosion of churches in the W limited the number of qualified men
 - 2. the inattention to Scripture – tradition solidified the office of “pastor” over time
 - 3. the downgrade of theology – a “higher” view of the self (**esp.** in soteriology) led to a sense of the superiority of the individual (and his “authority”) over those to whom he should submit

3. **question:** so why is it important that churches be led by qualified elders, and not just a *single* pastor?
 - a. to provide spiritual support for the flock, including listening to the spiritual needs of the people
 - b. to administrate the church not as an end unto itself, but with the purpose of spiritual growth
 - c. to extend pastoral care in the church (**i.e.** beyond the pastor or “staff”)
 - d. to provide accountability for all levels of leadership in the church
 - e. to prevent the burn-out and “fall” of the pastor as the *singular* source of all spiritual effort
 - f. to discipline the flock when it goes astray (**i.e.** to apply church discipline)
 - g. to support deacons in their role of mercy to those in need
4. **question:** why should *you* care about this office and its qualifications (if you never serve as one)?
 - a. **it should be the desire of every follower of Christ to be held accountable to spiritual growth and maturity, and be protected from every form of heterodoxy, by the very means that Christ himself has implemented in his church**
 - b. **thus, the desire of every faithful member of the church should be leadership by men who are fully qualified to serve as elders, and to hold them accountable to doing what they are called and gifted by Christ to do**