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## Foundations of a Healthy Church

### Leadership

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### Questions for Discussion

- What are some of the misconceptions people have about church polity (how leadership in the church is organized and structured)?
- What are some of the forms of church government you have experienced?

### Biblical Foundations

- Overview of how we see Scripture address polity in the church
  - Jesus is head of church
    - **Ephesians 5:23** - *For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior.*
  - Each local church is autonomous, even as they associate and contribute collectively to mission
    - **1 Corinthians 1:1-2** - *Paul, called by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus, and our brother Sosthenes, <sup>2</sup>To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours*
    - **1 Thessalonians 1:1** - *Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:*
    - **Romans 12: 4-5** - *<sup>4</sup>For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, <sup>5</sup>so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.*
    - **Baptist Faith and Message, Article IV** - *A New Testament church of the Lord Jesus Christ is an autonomous local congregation of baptized believers, associated by covenant in the faith and fellowship of the gospel*

- Churches are planted with the goal of local leadership taking over
  - **Acts 14:21-23** - *When they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, <sup>22</sup>strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God. <sup>23</sup>And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed.*
  - **Titus 1:5** - *This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you—*
  - **1 Timothy 3** - *Timothy was sent to Ephesus, but was directed to identify Elders and Deacons to serve the church there.*
- Those local leaders are elders and deacons.
- Scriptural support for there being two offices: elders and deacons
  - No apostles, popes, etc.
    - **1 Timothy 2:5** - *For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus...*
  - Paul “appoints in every town” elders (Acts 14:21-23)
  - Deacons appointed to serve those individual churches (Acts 6:1-4)
- Leaders are gifts to the church by Christ
  - **Ephesians 4:11-13** - *And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds [or pastors] and teachers [or shepherd-teachers], <sup>12</sup>to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, <sup>13</sup>until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ*
- As such, our job is to discern who those gifts to the church are according to Scripture, not engineer from our own wisdom what a “good leader” is.
  - We also don’t want to push people through a track before they’re ready; we’re wanting to identify those who have the gifting.
  - Just because someone is a gifted businessman, that doesn’t necessarily mean he’s a good elder.
  - Just because someone is a seminary professor, that doesn’t necessarily mean he’s a good elder.
  - Just because someone is a gifted evangelist, that doesn’t necessarily mean he is a good elder or deacon.

- Others?
- Role of the congregation in both participating in the selection of leaders and holding them accountable.
- Importance of the plurality of leaders within the church (having only one pastor isn't necessarily sinful, but goal should be to see that leadership expanded).
- "A church in which the senior pastor is the sole elder or possesses the most authority among its leaders is in a very vulnerable position, exposed to the perils of power, personality, and conflict. One need only observe the course of many influential evangelical churches in recent years to see how true this is. In most cases, the eventual collapse resulted in part from a lack of shared authority among a group of elders." - Michael G. Brown (Tabletalk - August 2022)
- Four biblical and practical reasons that a plurality of elders is necessary:
  - First, **it provides the church with greater accountability.**
    - Followers of Christ are accountable for their doctrine and life. What they believe and how they live are to be in line with Scripture.
    - The elders of the local church have the weighty responsibility of holding the members of the congregation accountable.
    - **Hebrews 13:17** - *Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.*
    - This shared accountability helps protect the flock from the spiritual abuse and bullying that could more easily occur in a church where everyone is accountable to one man.
  - Second, a plurality of elders provides the church with **a greater chance of success in her mission.**
    - **Matthew 28:18-20** - *All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.*
- **Parkside Baptist Church: "We exist to glorify God by making disciples of Jesus Christ who obey the great commandments and fulfill the great commission."**

- When a local church has a plurality of elders, the ministry of the Word and the pursuit of this vision is not dependent on one man alone.
- **How have you seen this work (or not) in other churches?**
- Third, a plurality of elders provides the church with **greater preservation of the truth.**
  - **Acts 20:28-31** - *Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock . . . speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be alert.*
  - Ruling elders have the responsibility of maintaining the purity of the Word and sacraments in the local church. They must be vigilant to guard the gospel so that each generation can rediscover it.
  - We live at a time when people do not “endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions” ([2 Tim. 4:3](#)).
  - A body of elders in the local church helps ensure that the congregation stays on course doctrinally and does not become carried away by the theological whims and personal opinions of one leader.
- Fourth, a plurality of elders provides the flock of Christ with **greater pastoral care.**
  - In the Old Testament, a multitude of elders were appointed to assist Moses in caring for the people of God. The Lord gave a portion of the Spirit that was on Moses to seventy elders so that they would help carry this burden ([Num. 11:16-17](#)).
  - Likewise, in the new covenant church, elders share the responsibility of pastoral care with the minister.
  - Elders shepherd the flock through building and maintaining personal connection with church members. They assist in actively promoting the work of evangelism and missions. They provide biblical counsel and help minister to the sick and dying. In short, they ensure that the flock is healthy and that everything in the church is done decently and in good order.
  - No one man has all the gifts that are necessary to build up the church. Having a plurality of elders supplies the congregation with greater pastoral care by bringing men with different gifts into

the church's leadership so that they can complement the pastor's strengths and compensate for his weaknesses.

## Deacons

- What is a deacon?
  - The Greek word for deacon is *diákonos* (διάκονος). It means "servant"
    - **Matthew 20:26** - *But whoever would be great among you must be your servant*
    - **Mark 9:35** - *And he sat down and called the twelve. And he said to them, "If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all"*
    - **John 12:26** - *If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him.*
    - **Acts 6:1-4** - *Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. <sup>2</sup>And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, "It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. <sup>3</sup>Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. <sup>4</sup>But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word."*
  - Serving the church already!
    - **1 Timothy 3:8-13 (CSB)** - *Deacons, likewise, should be worthy of respect, not hypocritical, not drinking a lot of wine, not greedy for money, <sup>9</sup>holding the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. <sup>10</sup>They must also be tested first; if they prove blameless, then they can serve as deacons. <sup>11</sup>Wives, likewise, should be worthy of respect, not slanderers, self-controlled, faithful in everything. <sup>12</sup>Deacons are to be husbands of one wife, managing their children and their own households competently. <sup>13</sup>For those who have served well as deacons acquire a good standing for themselves and great boldness in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.*
- What do deacons do?
  - Contribute to the unity of the church by meeting needs
    - Notice the immediate need in Acts 6 passage – unity!
  - Deacons serve the church in specific ways

- Not teaching/preaching; administrative and service-oriented
- Our current Deacons:
  - Derek Stenner
  - Tim McArthur
  - Luke Tomlinson
  - Brenda Ellison

## Elders

- What is an elder?
  - What do elders do?
    - “Prayer and the ministry of the Word” (Acts 6)
    - Teach, preach, pray, shepherd, etc.
    - **1 Peter 5: 1-3** - *So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: <sup>2</sup>shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly <sup>3</sup>not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.*
  - Elder, Pastor, and Overseer are all interchangeable titles highlighting different aspects of the role.
    - Pastor: poimain, Elder: presbyteros, Overseer: episkopos
    - See Titus 1:5-9, Acts 20:17, 1 Timothy 3:1-7, 1 Peter 5:1-5, Hebrews 3:17
- Qualifications of elders
  - **1 Timothy 3: 1-7** - *The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. <sup>2</sup>Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, <sup>3</sup>not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. <sup>4</sup>He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, <sup>5</sup>for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church? <sup>6</sup>He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. <sup>7</sup>Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.*
  - **Titus 1: 5-9** - *This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you—*

*<sup>6</sup>if anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife, and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination. <sup>7</sup>For an overseer, as God's steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, <sup>8</sup>but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined. <sup>9</sup>He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.*

- 1 Peter 5:1-9 (this type of man)
- **What character attributes do you see in these qualifications?**
  - Shouldn't these character attributes be true of all followers of Christ?
- **What differences do you see between the qualifications for Deacon and qualifications for Elder?**
  - Note: Women cannot fulfil this role according to 1 Timothy 2:12. Since preaching and teaching is integral to the role of the elder, this prohibits women fulfilling this role.
- Our current Elders:
  - Chase Jenkins
  - Wes Treadway
  - Brian Ellison

## **Role of Church Members in Leadership**

- Pray for and encourage our Elders and Deacons
  - Pray for wisdom
  - Pray for protection – for them and their families!
- Identify church members who might be qualified to serve in these leadership roles in the future and encourage them to carefully consider if God is calling them to serve.
- Be careful not to let the prevailing cultural mindset toward authority poison the life of the church.
- Mark Dever – “A humble recognition of rightful authority has benefits. In a church when authority is used with the consent of the congregation for the good of the congregation, the congregation will benefit as God builds his church through the teachers he gives to his church. Satan's lie is that authority is never to be trusted because it's always tyrannous and oppressive.”

## **Questions / Comments?**