

In Search of Shepherds - The Deacons

REVIEW: We are back to our study of church government in the Bible. We have been looking at things chronologically to watch the development of the early church and how it established leadership of the church. We have been looking for things that are supra-cultural principles through this study - in other words, things that would be true for all cultures at all times.

And so far we have seen that the pattern has been that elders or overseers have been established in every church. Paul established churches in Asia Minor, stayed at the church at the end of the line for a year, travelled back the same route, and then established elders in those churches.

We have also seen that while eldership is the pattern, there is freedom within that pattern. In Jewish churches the leaders of the church were called elders. In Gentile churches they were called overseers. Same concept, and pattern for each, just different names due to the differences in cultures.

We have also emphasized the character of an elder, because the Bible emphasizes the character of elders. There were many qualities we look for in an elder - which is to say that it is a maturity profile for Christianity. Elders are not in some separate category - all Christians are called to this level of maturity. Paul is simply laying out in very clear terms the level of maturity a man should have reached if he is to be considered for eldership.

INTRO: Today we begin to talk about some of the other parts of church leadership, and issues surrounding it. We have talked about the elders throughout, but have only mentioned the Deacons in passing. So today we will turn our attention to what the Bible says about the Deacons.

- I. The year is 63 A.D.
 - A. You are out for a walk, dressed in your toga, walking the streets of the capital city of the Empire - Rome
 1. You pass by many vendors, hocking their wares
 2. Some are very pushy, some are so busy they can't be bothered to try to get your money - they have a line already
 - B. You turn down a lesser used street, walk about a quarter of a mile, and come to a small, nondescript house
 1. You knock on the door
 2. When the door opens you are standing face to face with a little man, hunched over so much that he has to crane his neck to look at your face
 3. Behind him you see two Roman Centurions, hands on their swords, ready for an nefarious activity at the door
 4. When he recognizes you, he throws open his arms to welcome you
 - a) You say, "Paul! It is so good to see you!"

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- b) You have just stepped into the home of the Apostle Paul himself
- C. This is the setting in which Paul wrote his letter to the Philippians
 - 1. Turn to Philippians for me - 1:1
 - 2. Paul says, “To all God’s holy people in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the **overseers and deacons.**”
 - a) This is the first mention of deacons since Paul has been establishing churches!
 - b) Odd, since early in the life of the church we see a group called together to serve in Acts 6 (c. 35 A.D.)
 - (1) One thing you need to note about Acts 6 - they were never called deacons
 - (2) The term came to be used because of the Greek word for service “diakonoi”
 - 3. Luke is most likely the one to appoint both elders and deacons in the church in Philippi
 - a) He stayed in Philippi and the surrounding region after Paul left
 - b) Acts 16 Luke includes himself in verse 16 saying “we” did this, but at the end of the chapter he says, “they left”
- D. Paul also used the terminology in his list of character requirements in 1 Timothy
- II. Before digging into 1 Timothy, we need to understand better the term “deacon”
 - A. The Greek words for “to serve,” “service,” and “servant” all come from that same Greek root
 - B. But what is more interesting is the words are all used to describe **the ministry all believers should have** within the Body of Christ
 - C. So turn to Ephesians 4:11-12
 - 1. So the people are to be equipped for works of service (same word as where we get the word for deacon)
 - 2. While there are those that serve the body in a special way, the reality is **ALL** people in the church are to be deacons (servants) so that the body of Christ may be built up.
- III. We have talked about the first occurrence of this special kind of service happening in Acts 6
 - A. The Grecian Jews (Hellenistic) were concerned that their widows were being overlooked in the food distribution
 - 1. They asked the apostles for help
 - 2. The apostles asked them to choose seven men full of the Holy Spirit and faith to oversee that ministry

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- B. The service that these men gave allowed the apostles to continue to concentrate on their primary responsibilities - namely prayer and the ministry of the word
- C. These seven men were never given the title Deacon, but this shows us why official leaders were appointed in other churches
 - 1. They assisted the apostles in meeting a unique need at the time
 - 2. They were helpers to the apostles so the apostles could fulfill the responsibility God gave them
 - a) Sound like anything else we have studied?
 - b) Women were given the role of helper to the man in his responsibility of ordering the world so that it may flourish
- IV. Now we dig in - looking for supra cultural principles and cultural ones (or ones that are bound to a particular culture)
 - A. If you remember, and I know I am asking you to remember church history which can get confusing really quick with names, places and dates, but if you remember, on Paul's first missionary journey he appointed elders in each church
 - 1. There was no mention of appointing deacons
 - 2. When Paul left Titus in Crete, he was to appoint elders - again no mention of deacons
 - B. So, do we conclude that deacons were never appointed?
 - 1. Of course not
 - 2. They came at a later date
 - 3. Just like the model of the Jerusalem church
 - a) The apostles led to start, and appointed deacons for a specific task
 - b) Later the elders took over for the apostles
 - 4. Elders are appointed first for two main reasons
 - a) All believers need shepherds that will feed them the Word of God
 - (1) This would be a supra cultural principle
 - (2) At the formation of a church you need to have leaders that will teach the rest of the people what God's Word says
 - b) Second, think about the illustration from Acts 6 again
 - (1) Deacons were not appointed until the church grew so large that the task was too great for the apostles alone to handle
 - (a) To handle the task meant neglecting preparations to feed the flock
 - (2) So in these towns, the churches were probably still at a small enough size that deacons were not needed right away
 - (3) As the church grew, so did the special needs, needs that might pull elders away from their primary tasks

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- C. This gives us a broad perspective about church leadership
 - 1. For the elders, certain broad, supra cultural principles are spelled out in Scripture
 - a) They are to oversee, teach, admonish, pray, and delegate
 - 2. The deacons, however, serve in a variety of ways that are never clearly spelled out - in fact, their manner of service is usually defined by the cultural needs of the time
 - a) So, for example, in Acts six, the need was that food was being distributed, and a segment of the population was being overlooked
 - b) So the deacons were formed to meet this need: food distribution
 - c) Do we live in a time when food distribution to our church members is needed like the way it comes across in the story?
 - (1) No
 - (2) So we don't define the deacons work by the cultural need (food distribution)
 - (3) We define their work by what they did for the apostles - taking care of a need that arose at that time and place so the apostles could focus on prayer and God's Word
 - (a) Just a side note, I have seen some Pastors use this as a means of saying they never have to be involved in physical labor - their only job is prayer and God's Word
 - (b) That is a wrong interpretation
 - (c) The apostles were involved in other areas of the church until the problem was so large it would take them away from their main focus
- D. So what about the title? Is the title "deacon" the only title?
 - 1. No.
 - 2. Considering the title came from the task, anyone holding this position could be called: servant, ministers, helpers
 - 3. The title just described what they did - it was culturally defined, and is not a supra cultural principle
- V. Turn to 1 Timothy 3:11 - we have another sticky issue to tackle - women deacons
 - A. There is a phrase here that I think gets too quickly overlooked - "In the same way"
 - 1. The Greek word is hosautos and it is a marker of similarity that marks identity
 - a) In other words, there is a similarity, and that similarity goes to the identity of what is being talked about

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2. Let me give you an example: keep your finger in 1 Timothy, and turn to Luke 22:20
 - a) In the same way, Jesus took the cup
 - b) Same as what? The way He took the bread
 - c) These two items are being used for the same purpose - there is a similarity, and both items are being identified with this special moment
 3. So, after Paul lists the qualifications for elders, in verse 8 he says “in the same way, deacons”
 4. And then again in verse 11, “in the same way, women”
 - a) All three of these are connected
 - b) All three of these have the identification as some official capacity of leading or serving the church - elders, deacons, and women
- B. Here is where it gets a little weird - and even Greek scholars differ some
1. Paul used a word for women that can mean adult women, a married woman, a single woman, or a widow or divorcee
 - a) Because of this, translators have to figure out from the context what Paul meant
 - b) Some translations have it as “wives” - but very few accept this translation
 - (1) It makes sense that Paul is not referring to deacon’s wives
 - (2) If the elders are the primary leaders of the church, strange that Paul would not address their wives, and have requirements for them, and yet he would for the deacons
 - (3) Does not make sense
 2. Due in large measure to one man’s translation, some have thought this to be a separate office of the church called “deaconess”
 - a) Williams translated this as “deaconess”
 - b) One problem, that word does not exist in Greek - Williams coined the phrase
 3. In the end, we really are left with one conclusion: Paul was referring to women deacons (servants of the church)
 - a) First he lists requirements for male deacons, and second for female deacons
 - b) All tied together by “in the same way”
 - c) This is corroborated by other passages like Romans 16
 - (1) “I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the church in Cenchreae. I ask you to receive her in the Lord in a way worthy of His people and to give her any help she may need, for she has been the benefactor of many people, including me.”

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- (2) Male chauvinists over the years have done hermeneutical gymnastics to try to make this not say that Phoebe was a deacon.
- (3) But integrity to God's Word makes us have to let the verse say what it says

VI. So now we can finally dig into requirements for deacons

- A. Many of these match requirements for elders, so I will not go into great detail when they match up - 1 Timothy 3:8-13
- B. "Worthy of respect" - This is found in verse 8 and verse 11 - it means dignified
- C. "Sincere" - the word means honest in communication - so the person does not speak out of both sides of their mouth
- D. "Not indulging in much wine" - as with the elders, maturity in Christ requires that Christ is the only thing you are addicted to
- E. "Not pursuing dishonest gain" - deacons may be tasked with handling money in the church - so they should never be dipping their hand in the till
- F. "Keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience"
 1. During this time period there were people that were using biblical truths to pursue dishonest gain
 2. They would manipulate people into giving money
 3. Not unlike the prosperity gospel preachers of today
 - a) If you send in \$100 God will give you a special blessing
 - b) God wants me to have a new plane for ministry - so if you will all give just \$300
 4. This was way outside the boundaries, and Paul said that servants of the church should never behave this way
- G. "They must first be tested"
 1. Paul never gives us a method for testing deacons
 2. Which displays this "freedom in form" concept
 - a) Paul gives us the big principle
 - b) Yet he leaves its outworking to individual churches
- H. "Not malicious talkers" (v. 11)
 1. Paul has shifted his thoughts from deacons in general and is speaking about women specifically
 - a) The way the whole of the NT reads, this seemed to be a widespread problem in the culture
 - b) Titus 2:3 "Likewise, teach the older women to be reverent in the way they live, not to be slanderers..."
 - (1) Timothy is in Ephesus
 - (2) Titus is in Crete - 618 miles apart and they have the same issues

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2. Now, let's be clear, Paul is NOT teaching that women are gossips and slanderers and men have no such issues
3. I want you to see this, because it is so cool, and it ties more of this series all together
 - a) Look at 1 Timothy 3:2 - elders are to be above reproach
 - b) An elders is to be faithful to his wife
 - c) Keep a finger here, we will flip back and forth - Titus 1:6
 - (1) An elder is to be blameless (same word in Greek as above reproach)
 - (2) An elder is to be faithful to his wife
 - d) Keep a finger in Titus and flip back to 1 Timothy 3:11
 - (1) Women deacons are to be worth of respect
 - (2) Women deacons are not to be malicious talkers
 - e) Back to Titus 2:3
 - (1) Women are to be reverent in how they live (sounds like worthy of respect)
 - (2) Women are not to be slanderers
 - f) One last verse: 1 Timothy 3:12 - A male deacon is to be what???
Faithful to his wife
4. Look at me now - does this not sound like what we talked about when we talked about God's design for men and for women
 - a) Men's achilles heel tends toward sex (especially in that culture) and even in our own
 - (1) We talked about men and selfish aggression with pornography, or even adultery could fall in this category
 - (2) Men's weak point as a gender is sex
 - (3) This does not mean that women are never tempted sexually
 - b) When we went over God's design, what did I tell you about women - their greatest weapon is their words
 - (1) Better to live on the corner of a roof than in the house with a contentious woman
 - (2) Women have a handle on language that men don't have
 - (a) That's why we sound like cavemen and you ladies sound like well spoken orators
 - (b) This does not mean that men can't cut people down with words
 - (c) Paul is just zeroing in on women's achilles heel - the use of their words
- I. Next qualification - "temperate", which means having a clear focus
 1. It is being contrasted with malicious talk

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2. You are not sticking your nose in to other places and talking all about it - in fact the next word plays into this too
- J. “Trustworthy”
1. When someone tells you something, it says with you
 2. There are a number of ladies in our church that are very good about this
 - a) You talk to them in confidence and they keep things to themselves
 - b) OR they follow the right protocols for talking to others - namely asking permission to speak to someone else first
 3. That is the idea behind trustworthy
- K. Then Paul is focused on men specifically - “Faithful to his wife”
1. The emphasis is on moral purity
- L. AND “He manages his children and his household well”
1. So if he is a family man, he should be able to manage his home well
 2. If he can’t, how can we expect that he will manage the church well
- VII. So when it comes to deacons, servants of the church, they really are to be as qualified as the elders
- A. This is a maturity profile for leaders
- B. It is not a perfection checklist - but the standard manner that man or woman lives their life
- C. These qualities in the list, because they are a maturity profile are really goals for each and every Christian
1. Don’t think, “That’s all great Pastor Keith. I’ll look for all of this in our church leaders”
 2. Yes, look for it in the leaders, but look for it in yourself too
 - a) This is a checklist of maturity for you too
 - b) This is your goal to living up to a mature life in Christ

CONCLUSION: Next week we dive head long into the topic of women roles in ministry. I have already stated that eldership is for men. But where does that leave women? What can they do in the church? Which by the way, is the right question. For years the focus was on what we prevent women from doing - the right question is - how do we tap women’s strengths, how do we use their gifts, their talent, their abilities for the glory of God and the building up of the saints. Next week.