

The Church, part 6

(1 Timothy 3:1-13)

(preached Pine Grove 7/23/17; Sunday PM)

Introduction

In 1968, the Food and Drug Administration of the United States ordered that any patient receiving a prescription for isoproterenol be given a warning sheet at the pharmacy when they filled the prescription...

The warning sheet was to alert patients that the drug which was given to help with asthma could actually cause other breathing problems if it was overused...

Then in 1970, another prescription was added to the list of required drug information...

In the years that followed, there were more and more drugs added to the list of prescriptions that must include a drug information sheet..

Eventually, the short information guide became a long multi folded piece of paper that even contains a table of contents to guide you to the right section...

In 2017, drug information sheets must contain a section that given the scientific makeup of the prescription, the date the drug was introduced to the general public...

The color and markings on the medication..

A toll free number of the drug manufacturer..

Warnings of any possible negative drug interaction..

Lists of medical conditions where the user should stop taking the drug...

A list of any side effect that should up in lab testing...

Warnings of possible addiction..

And then finally, there is a section on the size of recommended dosage...

Now, the question is this?

Who reads these things?

Though they are neatly folded in every prescription, I doubt very few people unroll them and read them from start to finish...

What do we do instead?

Well, we trust the doctor and the pharmacist to give us any information or warning that relates to the prescribed drug..

Well, it is much the same within the church...

Though churches all have constitutions and by laws that list on all the information about a church, we trust the people in leadership to deal with those things..

And look that is a good thing....

I think it is wise to and advised to trust the people that God has placed over you in the church to lead in a way that honors the Lord and serves the flock that God has given to lead the church...

I have reservations about any church where the people have a distrust of leadership...

Either the men who lead aren't qualified or the people are disobedient to honor those in authority over them...

Either one of those is a dangerous practice and churches who get either wrong usually find themselves in trouble...

So in one sense, ignorance of the bylaws isn't a bad thing...

It may simply mean that you trust those in leadership to lead the church according to those bylaws as they shepherd the flock..

However, on the other hand, there is a need for the people to be informed about the principles that guide the church...

So over the past few weeks, we have begun an intense look at the church...

And the things we have talked about apply to any church any where at any time in history because the Bible is always the guide for the church...

Therefore, you would expect any church to display these characteristics that we have started to look at...

Churches in Russia should have biblical preaching...

Churches in Mexico should have qualified leadership...

In other words, every church you would ever go to could be evaluated through these 9 characteristics in general...

But there are also traits of churches that are particular to their denomination or area of the world that also define them...

For example, Baptist churches have generally been the leaders in biblical preaching...

Some of the greatest and most biblical preaching have come from the Baptist churches...

In fact, that is one of the reasons that I wanted to pastor a Baptist church...

Baptists have generally honored the pulpit....

So, some of these characteristics of healthy churches are stressed in some denomination and not in others...

Therefore, we must be real careful not to overlook some characteristics of healthy churches just because we may be strong in one area...

And in my opinion, Baptists have not generally been strong in the area of qualified leadership..

In most Baptist churches, they put a premium on the pastor being qualified but they often lower the standard for other leaders in the church..

As you have seen, the Bible doesn't lower the standard for church leadership...

Regardless of if you call your leaders elders or deacons, the standard is essentially the same...

The only noticeable difference being the qualification to teach if you are an elder...

Yet many churches lower the bar for their deacons and elders, and that always leads to trouble...

So what we have done the past few weeks is look at the biblical standards for elders and deacons...

And then last week, I pulled out the drug information sheet and began dragging you through the fine print of what we have at Pine Grove...

And the point is not to make you go to sleep or make you an expert at our constitution and bylaws but to inform you of our structure here...

Now the purpose of this is twofold...

First, you need to know what you have to see how well it reflects the biblical model of church government...

The second reason is to help us address our church government going forward...

You see, we have to determine what kind of structure we want going forward here at Pine Grove...

At this point, we are not in exact compliance with our bylaws, and we need to decide as a church what direction we want to go..

Though we will discuss it and address it at our business meeting, I simply want to use our time on Sunday nights to teach about church government...

And to expose you all to the Bible and what we have here...

So far, we have completed our brief look at the NT description of church leaders, and last week we began our look at our current church leadership structure here at Pine Grove....

And our bylaws simply speak of a pastor who I assume is seen as the single elder..

And then the deacons, who are deacons not in the sense of church servants in 1 Tim 3:8-13, but more in the sense of the overseer in 1 Tim 3:1-7...

So, we began our look at the office of pastor according to the bylaws of Pine Grove Baptist...

We got through 5 sections on our bylaws about the pastor...

WE looked at section 1 where the pastor was called to be the spiritual leader of the church, which is clear in the Scriptures...

But I also suggested that he leads along with the men around him as well...

It is not the pastor's church but the Lord's church that he leads along with the other men who have been called to lead alongside him...

Here, that would include the deacons...

Then we looked at section 2 which lists the duties of the pastor, followed by section 3 which deals with the election of a pastor...

And then came section 4, which is the most important section since it describes the qualifications of the pastor...

You see, regardless of how a man looks or what he says, he isn't a pastor unless he is biblically qualified...

And we talk about the fact that our bylaws are actually the interpretation of the words of 1 Timothy 3:1-7...

Nevertheless, they are what we have at the moment...

Then we finished last week looking at the part that a search committee plays in locating a new pastor...

And though it isn't a perfect system, it is the best we have as long as the people on the search committee know what the Bible says about a pastor...

That leads us to section 6 of our bylaws that describes the termination of the pastor...

I have put it on the screen for us to look at, but there are also copies available if you prefer that...

But section 6 of our bylaws reads this...

Section 6. Termination. The termination of a Pastor is a very serious event and carries with it serious consequences. The termination of a Pastor should never be made on a whim due to personality conflict, or a frivolous disagreement.

Dismissal of a Pastor can cause inestimable harm to a congregation and community if such dismissal is not Scripturally mandated (such as immoral or unethical conduct, improper Biblical teaching, etc.).

Though an opening section like this shouldn't be necessary when it comes to the termination of a pastor, it is due to the numerous pastors who have been dismissed for silly reasons...

There have been pastors fired due to his clothing or his choice of carpet for the sanctuary...

Though pastors are not untouchable, they are also not disposable...

Let me read the rest of this section which deals with the nuts and bolts of dismissal...

Upon request to terminate, the Pastor shall have a maximum 30 day notice of termination by the church. The resignation will become effective on the date that the notice is given by the church. The Pastor then has 30 days to vacate the parsonage and satisfy all incurred relevant expenses (i.e., telephone and utility expenses). The Deacons will attend to these matters as appropriate and final payment of any monies due shall be paid to the Pastor. Except in instances of gross immoral conduct, the Pastor shall be compensated with no less than one twelfth of his total annual salary.

Let me make a few comments about this section...

#1 - There are times when pastors and churches need to part ways for various reasons..

However, let me say this...

Partings between pastors and churches should reflect the Lord of the church...

In cases where pastors disqualify themselves, they should step aside and the church should make sure that the pastor is cared for and is repentant...

In cases where the pastor is called away to another church, the church should trust the Lord's plan and send the pastor on with their blessings...

In situations where there is no disqualification and the church is ready for a change, the pastor should trust the Lord's plan and leave blessing the church...

But let me also add this...

There is way too much of this in our current church culture...

Pastors use churches to climb the church ladder of success and churches trade pastors like they trade cars because the new one looks shinier...

It really is a horrible witness to the world...

Now, I want to be clear by repeating myself from last week...

Pastors who disqualify themselves have to leave the pulpit...

Churches and pastors cannot afford to let disqualified men lead the church...

The consequences are too serious...

Though it is never a good witness to the world for pastors to leave churches, it is a worst witness to let disqualified men serve...

So, though churches must be careful not to terminate men over silly reasons, pastors also bear the responsibility to be and remain qualified men...

This leads to section 7 of our bylaws which describes a vacancy in the office of pastor...

Section 7. Vacancy. The church may declare the office of Pastor vacant during a called business meeting for that purpose. In the event the vacancy of a Pastor is due to termination, the church shall terminate the Pastor by 75% recommendation by secret ballot.

This is an unfortunate section that deals with the termination of a pastor according to a percentage of the congregational vote...

Again, the parting of a church and pastor should be mutual in order to preserve the witness of the church to the world...

But in extreme cases, this church has set numbers for how many people must be in support of a pastor being dismissed...

Now, let me add a word of counsel here...

When you put it to a church vote, you leave open the possibility of a church not being fully informed of all the details, which makes a vote almost impossible..

And then you add in the fact that unbelievers could be part of the vote as as members who are no longer active, and you see that congregation votes on the dismissal of a pastor are to the best idea...

Yet, that is what this church has adopted so it stands for now...

The final section of our bylaws that deal with pastor is a section on salary...

Section 8. Salary. The Pastor shall be paid a salary in the amount approved by the church body and shall be entitled to two weeks paid vacation. The amount of salary shall be reviewed annually and adjustments be made as appropriate and approved by the church body. The Pastor shall be allowed two weeks away from the local church for revivals and/or other special conferences related to ministry.

Salaries of pastors are sources of uncomfortableness for all involved....

The principle to guide paying a pastor should clearly come from Scripture...

The issue is that financial support for a pastor would come out of the overflow of the hearts that he ministers to..

The Bible speaks of showing double honor to pastors/elders/overseers who do their jobs with excellence...

The idea is that the ox shouldn't be muzzled while he is working and the fact that a laborer is worth his pay...

We will talk more about this in the section on generous giving, but paying a pastor should be a pleasure for a church and not a burden....

This section also deals with time away from the pulpit for the pastor which is clearly a priority in any church...

People need rest and relaxation...

Our bodies are weak and fallen and time away is even something that the disciples of Christ enjoyed as Jesus led them away from the crowds on many occasions..

Pastors are no different and time away is a good thing for both the pastor and the church...

Now that ends the section in our bylaws on the pastor...

I would say this...

For the most part, it is a good and necessary section of the bylaws..

However, if we decide to revise this section, it could be much shorter with fewer details in most of these sections..

Let me give you a few thoughts to sum up pastors..

If I were simply a church member, here are some things that I would consider most important in a pastor that would need to be spelled out...

First and foremost, he would need to be a biblically qualified man and remain a biblically qualified man as long as he pastors...

Second, he would need to major in bible teaching and preaching...

Third, he would need to be cared for financially to the best of the church's ability..

Fourth, he would be under the authority of other overseers in the church and would lead along with them and not out in front of them...

Fifth, he would have the freedom to study, teach, and preach as HE walks with the Lord and grows spiritually...

Now, let's shift gears and move to the second section on church leadership in our bylaws...

And that is the section on deacons, which is Article VII...

Section 1. Duties. The Biblical duties of a Deacon are ministerial as outlined in Acts 6:1-4. However, the deacons may also be appointed to serve in reviewing, discussing, and recommending matters of business, and presenting their recommendations to the church body in a regularly called business meeting. Final decisions for acceptance or rejection of such business matters are left to the church body and not the elected deacon body. All families of the church will be divided into the number of serving deacons and each deacon will have responsibility for those families in their division. The deacon will minister to such families in ensuring a constant contact, becoming aware of needs and ministry opportunities.

Alright, let's go to Acts 6:1-4 for a moment..

I do not believe this is a section on the office of deacon in the church...

Let me read it and then I will explain to you why this is not a good text to find out what deacons do..

6 Now [a]at this time while the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint arose on the part of the [b]Hellenistic Jews against the native Hebrews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving of food. 2 So the twelve summoned the [c]congregation of the disciples and said, “It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables. 3 Therefore, brethren, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task. 4 But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the [d]ministry of the word.”

Ok, when you see Acts 6, you know this right away...

It was early in the history of the church...

The church was just beginning to grow under the 12 disciples who had listened to Jesus and were out making other disciples..

The church was growing and as the church grows, people always get upset...

This time, it was the Hellenistic Jews....

Hellenistic Jews were Jews that had been scattered all over the known world but had come back to Israel to live there...

Let me give you an example..

Let's say a boy grows up in Fairview and heads off to college and then New York and Los Angeles to pursue a career...

Eventually after 20 years, he makes his way back to Fairview and builds a house here...

In some ways, he is still the boy from Fairview but people would view him differently than someone who grew up here and never left...

It is just the sinful nature of people to do that...

Well, the Hellenistic Jews and the native Jews of Israel had that kind of relationship...

Well, that animosity eventually made its way into the church as it began to grow...

And the Hellenistic Jews began to complain that their widows were being overlooked in the Meal in the Wheels program...

So, they began to complain to the 12 disciples...

Well, the disciples were not inconsiderate men, but they also didn't have the time to settle minor disputes, so they told the early church to select some men to handle this dispute...

And the simple reason is this...

They needed to be studying and praying and teaching and preaching...

So the church go together at the first business meeting and elected 7 men to handle this task of making sure the Hellenistic widows got their meals on wheels...

Now, many people and especially many Baptist have taken this passage as the election of the first deacons...

And that is why some churches have exactly 7 deacons regardless of the size of their congregation...

This is why so many churches have put the selection and election of deacons into the hands of the people....

When all throughout the NT, elders were selected and elected by Paul and other mature leaders only...

A lot of issues that I don't think are helpful have come from this section in Acts 6, which I would suggest to you is nothing more than the early church picking a few men to serve the widows...

This isn't the beginning of the office of deacon...

This is the church getting together and forming a committee to go and paint the church to take that burner off the pastors...

And let me tell why I believe that....

#1 - You never hear of this group again in the book of Acts, which is a history of the early church..

It would seem that if the disciples were creating an office in the church here, that they would have been mentioned as the church began to grow...

#2 - This is not the description of a local church...

The twelve were not the pastors of a local church, so these 7 men were not their deacons but simply a group of men to handle a church problem...

So, I don't think this is the description of what deacons do but rather a description of what occurred..

Yet, many churches have justified their selection of deacons by popular vote by this view of the passage..

When later in the book of Acts, Paul and Barnabas were the ones appointing elders and overseers in the church rather than the people voting for them....

So, I would suggest to you that Acts 6:1-4 is not the place to get a job description....

It is much better to go to 1 Timothy 3:8-13 to learn about what deacons do...

Then in this section, we also that deacons serve as more as overseers than servants because our bylaws read that deacons here have the authority over business matters...

WE have seen that 1 Tim 3:8-13 simply sees deacons as servants that hold no authority over church business....

That is why our church bylaws are written in such a way that deacons are seen as more than servants and more like overseers who make decisions and exercise authority over others...

And then we see that deacons are called to serve the families of the church by ministering to them...

Clearly, this would be part of the what the deacons of 1 Tim 3:1-7 would do....

So this is a fine ministry...

Now as I mentioned in the business meeting, we are going to try better ways to minister to our families here...

Instead of assigning families to each deacon, we are going to assign each deacon to a week of service for our families...

We will provide more details about this, but we take caring for our families seriously...

And we all agree that it is of utmost importance to us...

Let's stop there for tonight...

We have more to look at next week, and we will....

Conclusion

Let me end in this way...

I cannot stress enough how important church leadership is....

And the issue is not mainly concerned with the form that it takes, but really how it functions..

Give me qualified men who desire to serve the church and are humble and teachable and that is really the combination to have a healthy effective church...

Let us pray...