

The Church, part 7

(Assorted Scriptures)

(preached Pine Grove 7/30/17; Sunday PM)

Introduction

In 1944, Harry Truman was asked to run as Franklin Roosevelt's vice president..

Truman was reluctant to take the offer...

He wanted to run for Senate, but Roosevelt wanted Truman's popularity on his side in his bid for reelection...

Roosevelt won reelection but in April of 1945, less than 3 months after being sworn in, Roosevelt died..

So on the morning of April 12, 1945, the call came to Truman to come immediately to the White House..

As he entered the sitting room, he found Eleanor Roosevelt who informed him of Franklin's death...

Truman was shocked and stunned and could only manage to get his out of his mouth...

Mrs. Roosevelt, is there anything that I can do for you?

Mrs. Roosevelt shook her head and simply asked Truman...

Is there anything I can do for you?

You are the leader of the free world, so you are the one in trouble now.

Many people have a similar view of leadership....

Most would rather follow than lead..

Most see leading as bearing great responsibility that they aren't ready for...

Or would rather not have put upon their shoulders...

This is often very true in the church, as congregations struggle for men to lead...

Now, dont get me wrong...

There are usually plenty of people in the church with idea on which direction the church should go...

That is rarely a problem..

The problem is usually finding qualified men to lead...

Now, a lot of that stems from the lack of understanding of what church leadership actually is...

And the best way to describe church leadership is from a negative perspective...

Church leadership is not lording over people...

Leading the church is also not demanding blind loyalty from the people who follow..

Instead, church leadership is about serving the people of the church...

Biblical church leaders are those who see themselves as the lowest of the low in the church...

They are not marked by pride but humility...

Humility that they are qualified to serve and humility that they can be used by God to lead the greatest organization in the world...

Biblical church leadership is not a top down approach but a bottom up approach...

Jesus led the disciples by washing their feet...

So Jesus' under shepherds serve those who are their authority....

Church leaders who are boastful and prideful are not fit to lead the church...

Listen to how *1 Peter 5:1-5* describes the leadership style of those who lead the church...

1 Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, 2 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; 3 nor yet as lording it over [a]those allotted to your charge, but [b]proving to be examples to the flock. 4 And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading [c]crown of glory. 5 You younger men, likewise, be subject to your elders; and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble.

The relationship in the church are to be marked by humility...

The leaders of the church can't be filled with pride as they rule and the people of the church can't be filled with pride as they submit themselves to the authority of church leadership...

Now, we have been looking at church leadership for the last four messages...

And the reason for the the large amount of time we have spent here is that very few church understand the need for qualified leadership...

I was reading just this week about churches who are inviting disqualified men into their pulpits to preach and teach the word of God...

And the disqualifications of these men are hard to spot, yet churches continue to put them in the pulpit to preach..

God is not honored and all the church suffers...

So, I want us to be an informed congregation when it comes to church leadership...

It is such an important issue that we have spent 4 weeks looking at it in Scripture and our current bylaws....

Now a quick review of what we have seen is this...

The Bible describes two positions of leadership with the church...

The first is described in 1 Tim 3:1-7 and is the office of elder/overseer/or bishop...

The most common term used is the term elder, and traditionally Baptist churches have seen their pastor as the sole elder of the church...

The elder is described as having authority in the church...

The elders make decisions, ensure the health of the church financially and spiritually...

Then we moved to verses 8-12 where we saw the description of a second office within the church and it that of deacon...

We looked at those qualifications as well, and we noted that deacon simply means servant of the church...

This is not an office of authority or management but a place of official service to the church...

And though every church has those who serve the church, there are some who serve exceptionally and merit the position of deacon as an example to the rest of the church...

Now, once we looked the biblical description and qualifications of those two leadership roles in the church, we began to take a look at our leadership structure at Pine Grove...

And so we started with the bylaws that describe the pastor here at Pine Grove...

We looked at the duties, job description, qualification, recommendation, election, termination, and compensation of the pastor...

And I noted some minor things that could be tweaked and changed in our bylaws regarding the office of pastor, with the main one being that the pastor is not untouchable in his role here...

But rather, he serves with the other men in leadership here and he is under their authority...

Then last week, we began to look at what our bylaws say about deacons here...

And the first thing I noted in section 1 of the bylaws is that Pine Grove gives the deacons authority here...

Let's look at section 1 again from last week...

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 contract, becoming aware of needs and ministry opportunities.

The most important thing to note here is that Pine Grove and many other Baptist churches for that matter see their deacons as more than servants...

In fact, the business of the church is put in their hands according to section 1...

They have the power to review, recommend and discuss and make decisions regarding the business of the church...

But we also see that deacons are also the ones who serve the families of the church...

They care for their needs, tend to their illnesses and show concern for their well being spiritually and physically...

So what we have here is normal for most baptist churches, but it is a mix of 1 Timothy 3:1-12...

In short, the deacons here have the authority of elders but also serve the families of the church...

Now, that has a couple implications...

First and foremost, since they hold authority over the church, it would prevent women from serving as deacons...

But second, it creates confusion of which qualifications apply to those who want to serve here...

Now, the good thing is that the qualifications for elders and deacons are very similar, with the exception that elders must be able to teach....

And we finished off last week, talking about the importance of deacons at Pine Grove being servants to the families here...

Now if you weren't here last week or at the business meeting last Monday night, we are going to try and help our families be served better by trying a new system of caring for families here....

When our 3 deacon candidates are ordained in the next few weeks, instead of rearranging and assigning them families of their own, we are going to go to a deacon of the week model...

Where the deacons will rotate in their service to all the families of the church...

In case you cant in touch with me or would prefer to speak to a deacon, one will be the deacon of the week and a point of contact for all the families of the church...

His number will be in the bulletin each week and he will be available for any needs/concerns you may have that week...

Now to be clear, that is not a substitute for my care of families and it doesn't mean that you can't contact another deacon if you prefer...

It is simply trying to expose all our deacons to all of the church...

And make sure each are given the blessing of serving the church during their week...

We plan to start that up after we ordain our 3 new deacons in a few weeks...

More details will come...

So that brings you up to speed on what we have been looking at in terms of church leadership, and even with regards to our leadership structure here..

Now, let's finish off Pine Grove's view of deacons tonight...

Section 2 gives the qualifications of deacons....

Section 2. Qualifications.

A. The qualifications for deacon shall be in accordance with those set forth in Scriptures found in Acts 6:1; 1 Timothy 3:8-12; 2 Timothy 2:24-26.

Specifically:

*Of godly wisdom- using biblical wisdom
in matters*

Honest- nor self-aggrandized

*“Full” of the Holy Spirit- spiritual
discernment*

Ministers (service-servants)

Serious minded in all church matters

*Not tattlers/tale bearers/saying one thing
to one and something else to
another- double tongued*

Not given to alcoholic beverages

Not greedy in money matters

Keeping faith with a pure motive

*Proven- not a novice- someone who has
had ministry responsibility and
prove to carry it out successfully-
a person who knows the scripture
and accepts responsibility to*

***“study to show yourself
approved...” Trained/Learned
Blameless- having a good reputation in
and out of the church***

Now, we have seen most of these and discussed these qualifications at length, so I hope they are clear by now...

Certainly, if you ever have questions about my qualifications or a deacon's qualifications, please make them known...

We all serve to protect the church from disqualified leadership...

Though I pray that no man who serves as a leader here become disqualified, I am not foolish enough to think it would never happen to me or anyone else...

Now, under the section of qualifications, the church at Pine decided in years past to add two more sections...

The first is section B of deacons qualifications and it reads...

Now, just a quick note here...

First, there is nothing wrong with adding this section, so I am not being critical of it, but the bottom line is that it

is unnecessary if the church abides by the qualification to not put a new believer in a position of leadership which is mentioned in 1 Tim 3:6 and 1 Tim 3:10...

Most likely, there had been some question about how long should a period of testing be, and so they chose 1 year as what we prefer here...

Again, nothing wrong with this...

One year is probably enough time to establish a pattern of faithfulness...

The third qualification is found in section C...

In other words, the church has narrowed down the list of candidates to first of all men, which is biblical since the position of deacon here carries authority with it...

The church also decided to limit it to men over 21, which is fine even though the Scriptures put no age limit in place...

Another Pine Grove qualification is that you must have been a member in good standing for 1 year, which seems appropriate just to make sure the church knows you and is able to see the qualifications lived out in your life...

And then anyone who has served as a deacon at another church can avoid the deacons training program, but he

still must be a member here for a year before being eligible to serve...

Which also seems like an appropriate qualification...

And you see the issue is that the church must allow time for a man to exhibit all these qualifications on a constituent basis...

You see, unfortunately not all churches are created equal...

Some churches may have lowered the bar to ordain a man as a deacon and if we put in a place of leadership based on the testimony of another church, we could possibly be putting an unqualified man in charge of the church...

And another word of caution...

If a man comes into a church and is ready to get into leadership, red flags usually go up...

Anyone who wants to serve should certainly exhibit the patience to wait one year before being given that chance to serve...

Anxious, impatience, unsubmitive men who can't wait disqualify themselves before they even get started...

So, those are some additional qualifications that have been passed over the years here...

There are no major issues to be changed here, and really no major problems here either...

This is simply been the position of the church, and it serves a good purpose..

Now, let's move from qualifications to selection and election of deacons...

Now this really includes section 3, 4, and 6...

So I put them all together and the new can end with section 5 tonight...

So how has Pine Grove agreed to choose deacons in our church government structure...

Let me read all these sections and then we can go back and think through all of them...

Section 3. Appointment/Election. Deacons shall be appointed or elected by secret ballot vote of the church body in a meeting called for the purpose of electing deacons. The deacon candidate shall be recommended by the deacon board after a review of qualifications. The number of deacons shall be determined by the need of the church in order to successfully carry out

the ministry and mission of the church as assigned to deacon ministry.

Now let me read section 4 and section 6...

Section 4. Term of Service. Deacons are appointed to serve for three year term, after which a deacon previously serving will not be eligible to serve again on the active board for a period of at least 1 year. Deacons serve on a rotating basis.

Section 6. Election Dates. The election of deacons should be held no later than the first Sunday in August each year.

Now before I offer my comments on this election procedure, let me say this...

I have no problem with what is written in the bylaws and I don't consider it a sin to abide by it as written...

So that isn't an issue...

If the church decides this is the system they want, I will gladly follow the will of the church and we will follow this by the letter of what is written...

With that said, let me offer a little insight into this process of selecting deacons...

#1 - This is standard for most Baptist churches I have attended..

I have served as a deacon under a previous system that is almost exactly like this..

So I understand the saying, “well, this is how we have always done it.”

But I would remind you that traditions are just that..

Traditions...

And if there is a better and more importantly more biblical way to do it, the church should be open to it...

Now, let me give you a couple thoughts here, and again we aren't deciding anything tonight...

Just want to give you some options to the current system of selecting/electing church leadership here at Pine Grove..

Let's begin by looking at section 3 regarding the election of deacons...

The current bylaws here call for a secret ballot vote of the the church body...

Couple thoughts,...

One, secret ballot votes make positions of leadership popularity contests...

Sometimes men get elected by how many hands they can shake or by having enough family to vote for him...

This can be dangerous because leading the church doesn't go to the most popular but to the most qualified...

Now, I do agree that the current leadership should approve any man according to biblical qualifications before he is even on a ballot...

I have seen churches that put every male member's name on the ballot and the most votes win...

This is also dangerous because there is not way that everyone can know everything about every man in a congregation..

So, there is clearly a need for the current leadership to approve any man according to the biblical qualifications before he is put on any ballot..

An additional concern here is this...

If you put it to church vote, you bring in unsaved or even very immature members into something that requires a decision of supreme spiritual importance in a church...

I think we all seen the dangers and maybe even practiced the dangerous habit of not praying or talking to possible candidates and just circle a name on a hunch or how you feel that day...

Now, the alternative to elections by church vote is to allow the current leadership to select and appoint qualified men to positions of leadership...

For many people, this creates discomfort because it removes their voice from selecting the people that lead the church...

And I would add a caution here...

Selecting the leadership of the church should not fall into the hands of one man like the pastor...

IT must be a decision of all the leadership, which would prevent one man from only appointing his friends or associates...

Now, lets move to the number of deacons needed..

Our bylaws currently say that the number of deacons could change based upon the needs of the church..

I actually like this wording and would not want to limit the number of men serving...

You could have as few as two but three would be a better number and you could have as many as needed if the needs of the church grew....

The key to this number is that they all must be qualified...

So if you dont have but 3 qualified men in the whole church, the most you could ever have would be 3 leaders...

That brings us to section 4, which spells out the length of a deacon's term....

Pine Grove decided in year's past to limit a leader's term to 3 years and then they must go off for one year before they can serve again...

Now, let's talk about this for a second...

First and foremost, the Bible never gives term limits for elders or deacons...

Now, that doesn't mean they aren't a good idea, but don't think that 3 years comes from 1 Timothy..

So where did it come from?

Well, it was the creation of the church..

Some people see term limits as good in the sense of men need a break from serving...

Some see it so that men do not get power hungry and feel untouchable and indispensable to a church...

My position is this...

If God has called you to a position in the church and you remain qualified to lead and have a desire to continue to lead, who is a church body to tell you it is time to go...

Let me just say this...

There is much benefit to a church in having faithful continuous leadership...

Turnover in leadership is not always a good thing...

I have seen churches elect certain deacons in order to get their pastor fired...

The rotation of new deacons often meant a new pastor, and that is very sad and tragic and a horrible witness to the world...

When I look at the new testament, I see Jesus calling men to permanent positions of leadership...

The disciples didn't follow Jesus for 3 years and preach the gospel and serve the church and then rotate off...

No, the position was a lifetime position....

The same is true for Paul and Barnabas...

When Paul went to church, he appointed elders...

The churches didn't elect them and it appears that those those elders served the church for their lifetimes..

Now, that is not to say that fresh leadership is a bad thing...

But that is why you leave it open to add more men as the Lord provides...

And that is not to say that leaders have lifetime appointments...

Churches should recognize that men may need to take a break and care for their families or businesses or simply take a break to recharge their batteries...

And they should allow that at any point in a man's life...

Now, we will talk about these issues and our desires at the next business meeting because we need to set the course by either abiding by what we have or changing our bylaws to something we desire as a church...

You simply be thinking about it...

Asking your questions...

Sharing your concerns with me or any of the deacons over the next few weeks...

But let me end with this final section of our bylaws regarding deacons...

Section 5...

Section 5. Termination. Deacons shall be terminated from serving as deacons in the event of immoral or unethical behavior. Only after a period of repentance and reconciliation can a terminated deacon regain his deaconship, that period determined by the active deacon board at time of reconsideration. A deacon may resign at will from serving on the deacon board by written resignation to the church body. In the event of a deacon resignation, the church shall elect a replacement to fill the term of the resigning deacon. In the event of a deacon resignation to a previously serving deacon may be recalled to serve in that position.

This is always a sad but necessary part of church leadership bylaws...

But it is a necessary part due to the fallenness of man...

Clearly, a man who disqualifies himself must step aside or be removed from a position of leadership...

This is simply a repeat of the section on pastors..

Deacons likewise need to be removed if they violate the standards of 1 Tim 3:1-2....

Now in this section is an interesting sentence that I need to address and that is the reinstatement of a deacon who became disqualified while serving...

Look, I think the Bible encourages repentance and reconciliation to church leaders who fall into sin...

Our role as people is not to beat on dead horse...

Yes, you sinned.

Yes, you must be removed to protect the church..

But yes, you can and should repent and still be a part of the church...

You simply can't serve in a position of leadership for the time being...

Now how long is that time?

It lasts long enough for evidence of true repentance to be evident to the world for an extended period of time..

If that is 6 months or 1 year or even 5 years, that is for the people most affected by the sin to decide..

But it is clear that it is a longer period of time than a shorter period of time..

Church leaders who disqualify themselves, whether a deacon or elder/pastor, need to step aside and they need to be patient and respect the decision of those over them who are looking in their life to determine if they are truly repentant and fit to lead again...

Men who fall into sin and then are in a rush to get back into leadership demonstrate a lack of repentance in my opinion...

Sin should humble you not give you a sense of entitlement...

Yet, many church leaders fall into it and then push their way back into leadership, and that is unfortunate to say the least...

I am all for restoration...

It needs to occur and it should occur in healthy churches...

I have no desire to kick people when they are down, but everyone must understand that sin has consequences...

It doesn't mean you are unsaved and left to die...

But it does mean that you can't lead, at least for a while...

Let's end there for tonight...

Conclusion

As always, if you have any questions about deacons and elders and pastors and church leaders, come see me....

Love to listen to your concerns, suggestion....

My goal is doing this series is not to convince you of a better way to structure church leadership....

My goal is to expose you to what the Bible says about these things and then help us get to a place where we all feel like our church has a leadership process that is most God honoring....

So, be thinking on these things and we will talk about them more in the days ahead...

Let me pray for us tonight...