

Of Authority, Leadership, And The PC Police

A sermon series by Pr. David Johnson (Week 7)

Today we wrap up this brief series on God's design for roles, authority, and leadership. We've covered a lot of material, and a significant amount of Scripture and Biblical history. We've seen God's design deteriorate from Genesis 1 through 3, and observed how mankind has moved away from God's ideal, to a homogenization of godly principles and secular paradigms. And we've watched as the people of God actually followed Satan's first temptation; grasping more autonomy for themselves and devouring the fruit of independence.

But as I said, though sin may have forever tainted the hearts of mankind, it couldn't compromise God's ideal for roles and leadership. As the years passed throughout human and Biblical history, that ideal continued to show itself to the church as seasons of revival came to Christ's Body. But sadly, we are currently in a season of ebb, when much of the Church has moved away from God's defined plan, choosing instead a combination of business and compromised religious paradigms.

With that said, we press on to see God's standard continue from Old to New Testament. And to understand this progression, we need to take a brief look at God's adapted instructions to His people; as they moved from Theocracy, to a "2-kingdoms" format, with a temple-based form of worship.

God details the church's governing structure

Soon after Israel is released from Egypt, God lays down some very detailed instructions for how the temple, His house of worship, is to be run. He stipulated the proper forms for worship: sacrifice, offering, festivals, and even authority. These practices not only had spiritual significance, but also involved many practical guidelines for human interaction (*i.e. the Ten Commandments, Hygienic, ceremonial, and moral laws, etc*). And when one followed these instructions, not only was there spiritual health, but also social stability. Even America's founding fathers understood this wisdom and included many of these principles in our own national documents.

Nevertheless, by the time we get to the New Testament, with all the compromises and abuses that had gone on over the centuries, you might think that God would start all over again. But He doesn't. Instead, our all-wise God brings many of His original principles to light, but packaged in a way that appears new.

In the Old Testament temple, things weren't run by a democracy or majority. God delegated and assigned the men of the tribe of Levi with the oversight for the spiritual matters of the nation. It was both their responsibility and their inheritance. It was from Levi that the priests were chosen, and from that group would come the High Priest. The rest of the Levites had various duties spread throughout the programs and practices of the "church."

Likewise, once we get to the New Testament, we see God adapt this same structure, but with some different applications. He would assign oversight to a select group of men (*like the OT Priests*), who in turn would delegate responsibility for the day-to-day duties to the others (*like the OT Levites*). Which is where we are today.

Elders

Where the temple system had priests and a High Priest, the NT speaks of Elders. Though the OT also speaks of "elders" (*meaning the older, the wise, the seasoned*), God gives an official capacity to that title in the NT. It is the Elder (*along with the early Apostles*) who would carry the responsibility of leadership, decision-making, and vision casting. (*see Acts 14:23; Acts 15:2,4,6,22; 1 Tim. 5:17,19*)

presbuteros (4245) *elder, of age, a term of rank /office. The NT uses bishop, elders, and presbyters interchangeably.*

- Strongs Concordance

episkopos (1985) *an overseer. A man charged with the duty of seeing that things to be done by others are done rightly, the superintendent, elder, or overseer of a Christian church.*

- Strongs Concordance

This group of men carried the sobering task of directing the ministries of the church (*Acts 20:28*), praying for the sick (*James 5:14*), and shepherding the flock with oversight (*1 Pet. 5:1-3*).

Acts 14:23 (*Speaking of Paul and Barnabas*) **When they had appointed elders for them in every church, having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.**

The credentials for elder were not based on education or business success, but rather on matters of character, spiritual maturity, family, and tested godly wisdom.

1 Timothy 3:1-7 **It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do.** ²

An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, ³ **not addicted to wine or pugnacious, but gentle, peaceable, free from the love of money.** ⁴ **He must be one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity** ⁵ **(but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?),** ⁶ **and not a new convert, so that he will not become conceited and fall into the condemnation incurred by the devil.** ⁷ **And he must have a good reputation with those outside the church, so that he will not fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.**

Titus 1:5-14 ⁵ **For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city as I directed you,** ⁶ **namely, if any man is above reproach, the husband of one wife, having children who believe, not accused of dissipation or rebellion.** ⁷ **For the overseer must be above reproach as God's steward, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not addicted to wine, not pugnacious, not fond of sordid gain,** ⁸ **but hospitable, loving what is good, sensible, just, devout, self-controlled,** ⁹ **holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict...**

Deacons

diakonos (1249) (*to run on errands*); *one who executes the commands of another, especially of a master, a servant, attendant, minister. A deacon, one who, by virtue of the office assigned to him by the church, cares for the poor and has charge of and distributes the money collected for their use.* - Strongs Concordance

Where the OT priests had the Levites to handle the day-to-day tasks of ministry, sacrifice, and service; the NT Elders have Deacons. These are the people from within the church who have been assigned the tasks carrying out the decisions of the Elders. They are, you could say, the hands and feet of the operation; the servants of the Elders. It is the deacon who frees the Apostle/Elder from the demands of the routine to spend time in prayer, study, preaching and teaching, and direction (*Acts 6:1-6*)

Acts 6:1-6 Now at this time while the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic Jews against the native Hebrews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving of food. ² So the twelve summoned the 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 ministry of the word." ⁵ The statement found approval with the whole congregation; and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch. ⁶ And these they brought before the apostles; and after praying, they laid their hands on them.

The early church understood that the deacons worked alongside the elders/overseers, leading the congregation in the service side of a churches outreach (in much the same way as the wife is helpmeet to the husband). As one reference observed, "(Deacons) have charge of certain administrative work, notably that of assisting the servants of the Word in governing the church, taking care of its charitable endeavors, and otherwise occupying a leading position of service in the congregation (*Christian Cyclopedia*).

Because of the importance of this role of assistance, the qualifications for deacon were similar (*though not identical*) to those of elder. Issues of character and spiritual maturity were still paramount, but the depth of experience; while the assumption of a male gender was implied, but not absolute.

1 Timothy 3:8-13 Deacons likewise must be men of dignity, not double-tongued, or addicted to much wine or fond of sordid gain, ⁹ but holding to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. ¹⁰ These men must also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons if they are beyond reproach. ¹¹ Women must likewise be dignified, not malicious gossips, but temperate, faithful in all things. ¹² Deacons must be husbands of only one wife, and good managers of their children and their own households. ¹³ For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a high standing and great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.

Romans 16:1-2 I commend to you our sister Phoebe, who is a servant (deaconess) of the church which is at Cenchrea; ² that you receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and that you help her in whatever matter she may have need of you; for she herself has also been a helper of many, and of myself as well.

Philippians 1:1 Paul and Timothy, bond-servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers and deacons:

It is thought that part of the reason for a broader application of gender for the role of deacon may have been the concern of intimate associations between the sexes. As the *Christian Cyclopedia* observes, "*Functions of deaconesses in the early church were to instruct female catechumens, assist at the baptism of women, care for sick or impoverished women, minister to women martyrs and confessors in prison, and act as ushers for women in church.*" This understanding of the unique function of male and female deacons wouldn't conflict then with passages like 1 Cor 14:34-35; 1 Tim. 2:11-12; Titus 2:3-5.

God still leads His Church

God's desire from the beginning was for relationship, a relationship with His creation that mirrored the relationship that already existed within the Godhead. He wanted that same image to be replicated in the human interaction between man and woman. And He desired that He would direct His people through His chosen vessels; and that desire hasn't changed.

Oh, Satan still nips at our heels, tempting us to pursue the fruit of independence and autonomy. And the curse of the fall forever tempts us to strive with each other for power and domination. This consequence of sin's reality will be with us until Jesus returns.

But the Triune God continues to show us His ideal, drawing us to follow, and empowering us to act in accordance with His will. Jesus Christ, the seed of Genesis 3, has dealt with the Serpent and broken the bondages of sin. The Father wants to be our God, and He wants us to follow His direction with honor and gratitude as we submit to his assigned leadership. May this be our desire and commitment, as we seek to follow His example.