

The Essential Framework of the church

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Please turn with me in your Bibles to the third chapter of 1 Timothy. 1 Timothy 3. We are continuing a topical series on the church, departing from our normal practice of working book by book, chapter by chapter, through the Bible. We do feel the need to occasionally season that expositional preaching with topical series that relate to some of the things that the Lord is dealing with in our lives and one of the things that we felt really concerned about lately is just the understanding of the church and for us to be reminded of the significance and glory of the church, the value that he has placed upon this gathering, the gathering of the saints.

So we've been looking for a number of weeks at the doctrine of the church. We looked at the glorious possession of the church, that is, the truth; and we looked at the fundamental mission of the church, that is, to share the truth, the sure foundation of the church, a certain canon of Scripture. The last two weeks, we looked at the ultimate priority of the church, to worship, that that's what God wants us to be about, worship; and we looked last week particularly at the issue of God's prescribed pattern for worship, that he tells us how he is to be worshiped. He's given us in his word everything necessary for life and godliness and we saw the refrain last week "just as the LORD commanded. Just as the LORD commanded Moses. Just as the LORD commanded Moses." When they worshiped God according to the command and instruction of Moses, they saw glory of God. And God is the same yesterday, today and forever, and so he continues to give us the instructions we need into how the church should be structured. You think about it, Moses was given the blueprint and the architectural design for the tabernacle, the place that they would meet God. And then David was given the architectural design for the temple when the tabernacle became a permanent structure, the tent of meeting became a physical building where God would meet with men. He gave them, again, the design and it's not surprising then that in the New Testament when we see that the tabernacle and the temple are replaced first by Christ himself in his earthly ministry, he was the meeting place of God and man, that's why he said, "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it," because he was speaking of the body, his body as the temple of the Holy Spirit. But when he returns to heaven, ascends to heaven after his resurrection, he now calls the church the temple of God.

Ted read earlier before the service was beginning from Ephesians 2, one of the passages that pictures that the church, the body of believers themselves make up the temple, that

the church is not a building, it's a group of people and it is truly, in the truest sense today, the temple of God. It is where God chooses to meet with man to reveal his glory and his presence in the most extraordinary way. And so it's also not surprising then that the Lord tells us that the church, the temple of God, needs to have a certain foundation and structure just as the Lord commanded.

He's got specific prescriptions for how the church is to act, how the temple is to be built. It's built upon the foundation, the passage that was read earlier, of the apostles and prophets, that is, the proclamation of the word. The word of God is the foundation of the church. What we're going to see in the passage we're coming to today in 1 Timothy 3 is that we're going to look today, the title of the message is, "The Essential Framework of the Church." The essential framework of the church. The foundation is the word of God. The foundation, the ultimate foundation is Christ himself, the Word of God. He's the cornerstone and the apostles and prophets, that is, those who proclaim the word, who bring the word of God so that the word of God is the foundation, according to Ephesians 2:19-22, but what we're going to see now is you don't just need a foundation, you need a structure. You know, when you build a house, you build a building, there's a foundation and there must be the foundation is the most important thing. If the foundation is not right, it doesn't matter what you build on top of it. You build on a strong foundation first and we build upon the word of God and Christ himself.

But it's also essential that you build according to God's command, his design, and what he says is that the church has a structure, an essential framework, a prescribed way of building, and that is, it has a leadership structure. We're going to see that the essential framework of the church is the church is to be ordered a body of believers under authority of two key offices, the office of elder and deacon. And I'm going to show you from the Scriptures it's as clear in the New Testament this is God's design.

So the essential structure or the essential framework of the church and we're talking about really the necessity of qualified leaders. We're look at, as was mentioned earlier in the announcements, that we are nominating elders and deacons and we all have a role in that and you are to prayerfully consider the men in the church for these offices, to look at the responsibilities and to look at the qualifications and the qualifications are essentially are they becoming more like Jesus. That's the essential qualification for elder and deacon, are these men who can say to the rest of the congregation, "Follow me as I follow Christ." Are they out front in some way, is the direction of their lives exemplary, not the perfection but the direction of their lives.

What we're going to see is that God has so ordered his church that this must be in place, and we're going to see this in the passage 1 Timothy 3. We're going to read verses 1 to 15 but I want to start off actually a little differently. I'm going to read verses 14 and 15 first and then we're going to go back to 1 to 13. Verse 14 of 1 Timothy 3 says,

14 I am writing these things to you, hoping to come to you before long; 15
but in case I am delayed, I write so that you will know how one ought to

conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth.

Paul in writing to Timothy, this is a letter, one of the pastoral epistles, it's called a pastoral epistle because it was written by the apostle to a pastor himself. Normally the letters are written to the whole church. These were written to pastors, 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus written to pastors and that's why they're called the pastoral epistles. They're written to the pastor of the church to show him how to, as Paul says, conduct yourself, how are you to order things in the church of the living God.

Now what's interesting is that's the purpose of the letter of 1 Timothy. He's just given you the purpose of why he wrote. What's interesting is he didn't say this at the very beginning. A lot of us, you know, we were taught in, you know, high school, college, when you write an essay, you lead with your thesis; your purpose statement is right upfront either first sentence or at the end of the first paragraph, different ways of doing it but basically that's generally the pattern. Well, Paul doesn't lead with his purpose statement, and often he doesn't. Scripture doesn't necessarily tell us right upfront what the purpose is, we have to discern it as we read it, but here is a clear statement, a purpose, but it comes at this point. It didn't come at the end. Sometimes you could say, well, you know, an inductive kind of thing would lay out all the points and, "Here now I've come to show you why I wrote. Here it is." He didn't do that. He brings it up in the middle. Why here? I think it's because as he talks about what he talks about immediately before this, it presses home the point of why he wrote and the Spirit leads him to say, "Here's the purpose." And it's because this, what he just said, is so fundamental to his purpose statement. Everything he says, of course, is essential, all Scripture is essential. Everything Paul says in all six chapters is essential but something about what he said in verses 1 to 13 prompts him to state his purpose. "You must know how to conduct yourself in the church. You must know how to lead the church." And what he tells him right before this is, "If you're going to lead the church well, you must have godly leaders in place." That's the point.

Look at verse 1 now, we'll read verses 1 to 13.

1 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. 8 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. [Then he says,] 14 I am writing these things to you, hoping to come to you before long; 15 but in case I am delayed, I write so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth.

Let's pray together.

Our Father, we come to Your word and we come always in need of grace, so grateful that You have spoken with such clarity in the Scriptures but aware of the hardness of our own hearts, the darkness of our own minds, the alienation of our affections and will that sin has brought. We thank You for the new hearts that You grant to those who are in Christ but we still know we need grace to receive, to believe, to repent, to obey Your word. So give us grace this morning, speak, Your servants are listening. We want to do Your will for the glory of our Savior. We pray in His name. Amen.

The essential framework of the church. The essential framework of the church. One of the things that's interesting in the New Testament and you have, as in all of Scripture, you have balancing doctrines and one of the things that happens is truth out-of-balance always leads to heresy. There is in the Scriptures a sense that this is one of the beauties of expositional teaching that we normally do is that expository preaching forces you to face all that God has to say in a particular book. You can't skip over a passage as you're working through it because, "I don't really like this one." You have to hear it as well. And so you see Scripture tends to balance itself. In Romans, preaching through Romans 9, you see the sovereignty of God in election without apology and confronting our pride, but then in Romans 10, you have Paul say, "How will they hear if someone doesn't go preach to them?" The idea is if we don't do what God's called us to do, people will not be saved. Do you see that, that's tension, that's divine sovereignty in chapter 9, human responsibility in chapter 10. These things are in tension. We must hear the word of God to be in tension. One of the things that the Scripture, another antimony, in a sense, that the Scripture presents to us, antinomy, that is, this tension between two, at times, almost apparently contradictory realities but that are not really contradictory at all, they're complementary. Another one of these kinds of tensions is the tension between authority of us to live under authority, at the same time the fact that we're all priests, the priesthood of the believer, which is one of the essential New Testament teachings, that we are all equal in Christ, that we are all priests of the living God, that we need no mediator. "There is only one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus." You go directly to God every single one of us who knows him from the smallest child to the oldest adult, male, female, everyone, we go directly to God through Christ.

So that's why the pastors in the church, no one is called priest because we're all priests. In fact, 1 Peter 2:9 says, "you are a chosen nation," I mean, "you're a chosen race, a holy nation, a royal priesthood," a people belonging to God. So that's what all Christians are. We're priests, that is, we now have direct access to God and we stand between God and the unbeliever because the unbeliever doesn't yet know God and we mediate God's presence to them in the proclamation of the gospel. But every Christian is equal before God, in fact, just turn over a few books toward the front of your Bible past Ephesians to Galatians and you see this brought out so beautifully, this reality of the equality that we have in Christ in Galatians 3:26-29. Paul says there in verse 26 of chapter 3, "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ." Look what he says next, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise." There's a sense in which to come to Christ abolishes, in one sense, any distinctions. There is no distinction. God is not a respecter of persons. We all come the same way to God and yet it does not mean that he does not still work through authority. This is the tension.

We also have a verse like Hebrews 13:17. Turn back past 1 Timothy, you want to keep your place in 1 Timothy, we're going to come back there time and again, but we're going to move around a lot. Hebrews 13:17. Here the writer of Hebrews is exhorting believers whom he has told can now go directly into the Holy of Holies because of the blood of Christ in chapter 4, that we all have access to the very throne of God, we don't need a mediator anymore. Jesus is our mediator. There's no other human mediator necessary. But he says in verse 17, "Obey your leaders and submit to them," this is Hebrews 13:17, "Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you." It's a strong sentence. There are two commands, two imperatives: obey and submit. I mean, one would have been enough but he doubles it up. Obey your leaders and submit to them, place yourselves under their authority.

"Wait, God says that we're all one in Christ, that there's neither slave nor free, male nor female, what do you mean?" Well, these are two complementary truths. The ground is level at the foot of the cross and yet God so orders his church as he chooses and he has done it this way. And it's not surprising that there is this tension or this balance between the complete equality of the individual and yet the functional role of authority in our relationships. It's essentially what we're saying. Husbands are the head of their home according to the New Testament and when the argument is made from 1 Timothy 2 that husbands are the head, Paul goes back to the creation. Not to the fall, it's not a function of the fall, that's one of the lies that's going around today. Male authority in the home is not a function of the fall. It was the created order. Paul points it out in 1 Timothy 2 the reason men are the head is because Adam was created first and then Eve. Adam was created first, given the commands not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil by himself. Then God made the woman because he had to then teach his wife. This is a part of what God has done and we want to order our lives just as the Lord commanded. It's not up to us to make it the way we want it.

So the church, there is authority in the church. Go beyond that, there is an authority structure within the Trinity of God. Father, Son and Holy Spirit, three persons equal in power and glory, equal in every way, equal in holiness, equal in righteousness, equal in dignity, equal in glory, and yet there is clearly within the economy of the Trinity, that is, the ordering of the house, that's what actually economy means, it's two Greek words, oikos, nomos, law of the house, house law, that's the way that that word comes out. So the law of the house is the Father is the one who administers and you see this in creation and redemption. Write this down, the Father administers, the Son accomplishes, and the Spirit applies. It's true in redemption. It's true in creation. God creates, the Father creates by sending forth the word, John 1:1-3; Colossians 1, all things were created through him. The Father creates through the Son, that is, the Father speaks and it happens. He creates through the word and so that's why John can say in John 1, "In the beginning was the Word, the Word was with God, the Word was God, the same was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him and apart from Him nothing has come into being that has come into being." So the Father sends the Son but there is implied authority in that, and then the Son lives his life on earth completely doing the will of the Father. He says, "I'm doing the will of Him who sent Me." Then the Father and the Son send the Spirit. It doesn't change the fact that they're equal in power and glory.

There is a structure of authority within God himself. This is what makes rebellion such an evil blasphemous assault on God; to act like authority is evil is to say God himself is. 1 Samuel 15:17, I think it's verse 17 when Samuel comes to Saul and Saul has not obeyed his command to wipe out the Amalekites, he tells him obedience is better than sacrifice. It's better to obey than to offer a sacrifice. Obedience is true worship. And he says this, "For rebellion is like unto divination." Rebellion is like divination, like unto witchcraft, that to rebel against authority is like unto witchcraft. It's like the seeking of the power of evil and the unleashing of it in your life. It's because it's rebellion, rebellion is the essence of who Satan is. Rebellion against authority is the essence of what sin is. We're going to come back to that in a moment.

So the outline this morning, there's three points. The first is the necessity of leadership. The necessity of leadership. I just want us to see this real clearly from the text of Scripture. Back to 1 Timothy 3, it's made clear by what Paul says when he says, "know how one ought to conduct himself." The idea here is of turning things back up, it's like things have been upside down and now you're turning things right side up. You're putting things back into place. That's what it means to conduct one's self. It's to turn again. The verb, that's what it means, and so how one ought to behave, some translations say. This is how we need to act in the church. It's interesting, so you have two offices there, you have the office of elder, the office of deacon. This is how we need to act. This is how we need to set up the church. This is how we need to make things right.

Turn over a couple of chapters or a couple of pages to Titus 1. You have 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, and then Titus, another pastoral epistle, Paul writing to Titus who's the pastor of the churches on Crete. And he says in verse 5 of Titus 1, "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," you need to set in order what remains, you need to straighten out what's been left undone, that's literally the idea of this word that's translated "set in order." It has at its root the word orthoo, we get orthodontist, orthopedic from that. Orthodontist straightens your teeth. Orthopedist straightens your bones. This has the idea of straightening out again, straightening through the situation, to make everything straight.

So Paul says, "Listen, you need to straighten out everything in those churches," and the first thing he mentions after that is "appoint elders," plural, "in every city." The church needs leadership. "Titus, if you're going to shepherd those churches, you've got to make sure that they have leadership in place." In fact, turn over to Acts 14:23 just to show you how this runs through the New Testament. This is Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey taking the gospel to the Gentiles and we're told about, you know, how they were received by some, opposed by many, and they make their way back over some areas they'd been before and in verse 23, Acts 14, it says, "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." Paul would go in, preach the gospel, plant a church, and then seek to develop and cultivate leadership and then leave the church in the hand of the leaders, in the hands of the leaders, the God-ordained leaders, the elders.

Now there again you have elders, plural, in every church, singular. We believe that the Bible, the New Testament pictures a model of leadership where you have a plurality of elders leading the local church. It seems to be what we're seeing in the New Testament. It's not one man in charge, and in charge, there's a clear play of authority and humility and interaction and we're going to see that in a moment because we're going to see it's not just about the necessity of leadership, leadership is to be tested and proved continually and you have a right as a Christian to question anything that you see according to the word of God, and a responsibility to do that. But the clear thing here is the necessity of leadership. Paul knew they were okay when he was able to put them in the hands of leaders, there were elders who were leading them.

Now let me just mention this and you can study this, I don't have time to unpack it like I'd like to, but essentially the New Testament, you may remember in 1 Timothy 3 it said the overseer must be, some translations, King James says the bishop. It is the word episkopos in Greek, like episcopal comes from that, the Episcopal Church is basically a transliteration of this word. Episkopos, skopos epi, that is, to scope upon, to look upon, to oversee is what it literally means. It's a manager, a leader. What I want to share with you is that when you read the New Testament you see that the New Testament uses these words interchangeably, three words: elder, overseer and pastor. They're the same office, elder, overseer and pastor. In 1 Timothy he says an overseer must be, and he gives all those qualifications in chapter 3. In chapter 5, he's going to talk about how you test elders, how you deal with the sin of elders. He's talking about the same office because you see he uses it interchangeably. Paul uses it interchangeably in other places.

Let me give you an example. Make a note of this, we're not going to turn there but Acts 20:17, Paul sends for the elders of the church and the word elder is the word presbuteros which we get Presbyterian from. The Presbyterians focus on that word. The

Episcopalians focus on the other word. We Reformed Baptist folks on all the right words. [laughter] No. But seriously, so you have the elder, overseer, presbuteros, episkopos, and then you have the word "pastor" which is essentially from a Greek word poimen which means shepherd and these words are used interchangeably and you see it like in Acts 20:17. Listen to this. Paul sent for the elders of the church at Ephesus to meet him at Miletus. He stops on the coast. He sends word to bring the elders of Ephesus, he wants to have a meeting with them. So they're all, they come this distance of several miles to meet with Paul and he says to them in Acts 20:28, "Listen, you must shepherd the church of God," that is, the verb form of shepherd, "You must actively shepherd the church of God among whom the Holy Spirit has made you overseers," episkopoi. "You see, you're elders, you must do the work of shepherding because you are overseers." It's just clearly it's three words for the same office. Elder = overseer = pastor = shepherd. So you could add a fourth then. Pastor actually means shepherd. Pastor comes from Latin which is the way that they said shepherd in Latin we in English get the word pastor and the word shepherd as a bonus. Anyway, we have extra words. But we have all the right words, as I said earlier. No.

So anyway elder = overseer = shepherd. So what Paul is saying back to Acts 14:23, what we're seeing in Paul's ministry is he knew the church needed to have leadership in place, that you can't just have the right foundation, you must have a framing, you must have a framework for the people of God to flourish and thrive. And we also see back in 1 Timothy the development of the role of elders and so I want to show you also the necessity of elders and the necessity of deacons. I covered the necessity of elders, the necessity of leadership has two subpoints. That's the first main point, the necessity of leadership, the first subpoint which we covered was necessity of elders. I forgot to tell you that. That was 1A. 1B is the necessity of deacons and that's from 1 Timothy 3:15 also when he says this is how you must conduct yourself. He didn't just tell them you need elders but he said you also need deacons. The word deacon means servant. The office of deacon is the office of a servant. The office of elder is an office of a shepherd.

So the church needs the leadership of shepherds and servants, and we see the necessity of it also from Acts 6, the necessity of the office of deacon is made clear in Acts 6 in the very early days of the New Testament church. There are some extraordinary things going on in the early church, you know, Peter preaches that sermon and 3,000 people are saved in a single day. It's at Pentecost. It's the time where Jews from all over the Roman world, it's one of the three pilgrimage feasts. In the Old Testament God had given them under the old covenant three times a year where every adult man was supposed to appear in Jerusalem before the Lord. The first was Passover, spring of the year. The second was Pentecost in the early summer. And the third was the Feast of Tabernacles in October. And they were to come wherever they lived they were to come to Jerusalem and they often would bring their whole families like you see, this is why, remember in Luke 2 when Jesus goes into the temple and his parents lose him, they don't realize they've lost him, they're heading back to Nazareth. Well, they came to Jerusalem for Passover and Jesus gets lost in the temple, or he gets away from them because there's a whole group of them have gone together. It's kind of like everybody that, you know, it's like if we all went somewhere, it's kind of like you guys do, many of you do for the camping trip. You

all go and you may not know exactly where your kids are because they're playing with the other kids, and so, well, hopefully you'll find them before you actually drive away, but in this case they were thinking, "Well, they're with somebody else. We're all walking anyway so they can't be that far behind." They find out Jesus is gone. Well, it was a pilgrimage feast. They all had to make the pilgrimage. So they leave where they live and they go to Jerusalem for a number of days, the entire Passover, Feast of Unleavened Bread, probably staying 10 days to two weeks.

The same thing is true of Pentecost. That's why there were so many Jews there who did not speak Hebrew or Aramaic. They'd come from wherever they lived across the Roman Empire, many of them Greek speaking. They come to Jerusalem, they're planning to stay just a week or so, maybe two weeks depending on their financial resources, but then God pours out his Spirit on the day of Pentecost and they get saved, 3,000 of them, and the apostles are ministering the word. This is why they stay longer. This is why there's such a need for financial support. They only brought so much money and they've stayed longer because they wanted to be discipled in this new faith. Their lives have been transformed and God's plan was to have basically, you know, several months of instruction under the apostles, and then they'd go back to all of their various places as missionaries.

Well, what happens in Acts 6 is that an extraordinary blessing, when you read chapter 2, 3, 4, 5, you see how the power of God is at work among the people in extraordinary ways. They're all staying there, they're all in one accord. People are selling their property. Why? Because there's all these people that need to be fed, all these new, the whole church, much of the new church is out of money and so they're selling their property to keep... It's a short run kind of situation, a short run problem because the Lord's going to send them back to their homes eventually. But what happens in Acts 6 is there begins to be some strife. This glorious unity, this glorious evidence of God's blessing upon his people is about to be upset by some envy and some lack of organization. There's some structural needs that need to happen that aren't being addressed. Some of the Hellenistic Jews are being ignored in the distribution of food.

Look with me at Acts 6:1, "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. 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. 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. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.' The statement found approval with the whole congregation." We'll stop there for a moment. So you see there is real practical needs that need to be addressed. The 12 are functioning, in a sense, like proto-elders. It's going to become clear this is the evolution of God, I mean, I use that word in the best sense that it can be used, God is evolving his plan and so at this point he's beginning to show what the church is going to be. And so he says, "You're going to need two offices there. You need those who are shepherds." What do shepherds do? They feed the sheep. "If you love Me feed My sheep," Jesus said to

Peter. That's what elders do. That's what shepherds do. They feed and they lead, but you also need servants.

He says, because the apostles said, "We can't stop failing to study the word and to pray so that we can take care of this practical need. This is a really important practical need but we can't neglect what's most important for this. Our calling requires that we find some men to address this issue." And so they choose for themselves those who are the first servants, deacons, as it were. And he goes on to say in verse 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. And these they brought before the apostles; and after praying, they laid their hands on them." And look what happens when they get this right, when they get the structure in place, when they address the practical needs they need to address with new people doing it, people now the division of labor is set. Look what happens in verse 7, "The word of God kept on spreading; and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith." Even wrestling through this practical danger that happened, a complaint arose, there's now grumbling, there's division beginning to happen. Man, that's a bad situation. Go back and read Numbers, when they start grumbling, that's the beginning of problems. But they address it biblically. The Spirit gives them wisdom and they say, "We need an office of deacon. We need servants." It comes from the idea of waiting on tables, to serve tables, in verse 2, in order to serve tables, that's the same word, diakoneo, from which deacon comes from, it means to wait on tables; to serve; to practically minister. The word can be used often in extrabiblical context of public servants. It can be leadership service, a public servant, you know, a politician calls himself a public servant and if they're really trying to do that, and praise God for that, right, so that's what they should be doing.

So the Lord intends for the church to be led by shepherds, elders, and servants, deacons. Now think about the beauty of this. I said, "Follow me as I follow Christ." Who is the chief shepherd? Jesus. Who is the ultimate servant? Jesus. He's the shepherd, he's the servant, and God raises up men who are following him and advancing and basically you can say to the congregation, "Follow me as I follow Christ," and all of us are called to shepherd one another and we are called to serve one another. We're to be like Jesus and so God has ordered his church in such a way that he set this up. We're all equal before Christ, yes. We all have the same calling. Shepherd one another. You can't stop shepherding, you're supposed to shepherd those around you. If your brother sins, go to him.

I love that, Matthew 18:15, we're going to talk about that in a few weeks, church discipline. It can be a frightening topic for some of you who have been around places where it's been abused but it's a beautiful gospel reality when it's handled properly. And when you understand that the passage on church discipline, Matthew 18:15-17, "If your brother sins go to him, if he doesn't take one or two others with you, if he doesn't tell it the church, if he doesn't treat him as a pagan or a tax collector," the four steps in verses 15 to 17 follows right after verses 12 to 14 where Jesus says this, the context is so

important, "What man among you if he has 100 sheep and he loses one does not leave the 99 and go after the one and searches for it until he finds it and he celebrates over that lost sheep that he's recovered?" Then he says, "If your brother sins, go." Do you see that? Jesus was saying, "I care about My sheep, one sheep that strays. I care about them and I love them enough to go and the way I go is one of you going and confronting sin. That's Me shepherding My people." He goes on to say, "Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there I am in the midst of them," that is when you hear two or three believers telling you you need to do something, you need to understand that Jesus Christ is in their midst telling you himself. Unless you can prove it from Scripture that they're not, you should submit to that.

This is why when someone won't do that after they've been told by two or three, then the church has called them out, you're to treat them as a pagan or tax collector. God is saying, "Listen, a true believer can't sit there and reject Jesus to His face again and again and again." A true believer won't do that. Now he says treat them as a pagan or a tax collector. We don't ultimately know and many times people reject and reject and reject that but then they come back. The true believer God will discipline and bring him back. But discipline itself is loving. We're all called to shepherd one another, that means when your brother or sister sins, when I sin, you have a responsibility to shepherd me by confronting me in love, in humility.

And again, this amazing tension. It's not that you come like a referee to say, "You got out of line. Throwing the penalty. Blowing the whistle." Don't you just love referees? I mean, we need them, don't we. No game would work without referees but nobody likes to hear, you know, you fouled or whatever. But the reality is it's not like a referee. You're not coming like that. You're coming as a servant. You're coming as a shepherd. You're coming to bless those who are hurting.

One of the most beautiful pictures I think of what we're supposed to be like when we confront another brother is what Jesus does on the night before he's crucified when he washes the disciples' feet. What is the foot washing about? Is it so we're supposed to have foot washing? No, it's not about that. He's teaching us in a metaphor what it means to forgive your brother, to confront your brother and forgive your brother. When your brothers sins, it's like having the dirty feet. We all have dirty feet. We all need our feet washed spiritually. What does that look like? It looks like another Christian girding himself in humility and coming as the lowliest servant to get into the much and mess of whatever's going on and to clean it up by love and humility. That's what it is to confront your brother or sister in the spirit of Christ.

Now that also, though, doesn't mean that you don't say, "Thus says the Lord." When they act like they're not sinning and you're convinced that they have, someone is saying, "It's okay for me to leave my spouse and marry someone else, I know, I prayed about this." You say, "No, the Bible says you are wrong." But you do it from an attitude of love and care. That's not you saying it. You're not putting yourself above it. You're saying, "Listen, you are arguing with God. That's a dangerous thing to do. Only fools argue with God and I know because I, at times, do it myself. Stop arguing with God, brother. Submit to Him."

So we need leadership. We need elders. We need deacons. That's a necessity of leadership. 2. The rejection of leadership. The rejection of leadership. It is the nature and essence of sin to reject leadership. This is in the DNA of our flesh, our old man. Every unsaved person, it's in the very fiber of their being to reject God's authority. You see this in Ezekiel 28 and Isaiah 14. I want to show you this because it's important to see that this is really the essence of who Satan is. Ezekiel 28 and Isaiah 14 and I'll tell you what's happening in both these passages. God is sending prophetic oracles through his prophet Ezekiel and Isaiah, to kingdoms of this world and to particularly two kings themselves, to particular men who are in their audacious pride exalting themselves and thinking they're like God themselves, okay? They're not accepting their station. They're not humbly fulfilling the role of a servant/leader. They're audacious in their pride, the king of Tyre in Ezekiel 28, and the king of Babylon in Isaiah 14. But what God also does in this, I think and you see it so clearly in Ezekiel 28 and I think it's also happening in Isaiah 14, is it's like the prophet is speaking to the man, like he's speaking to Nebuchadnezzar. He says, "You have exalted yourself to the place of God," and then he turns and it's as if he looks right behind Nebuchadnezzar and he starts speaking to the spirit that is behind Nebuchadnezzar's wicked rebellion. He does the same thing to the king of Tyre. He says to the king of Tyre, "You think that you are God Himself," and then he starts talking to the spirit behind him.

You can see it real clearly in Ezekiel 28:1, "The word of the LORD came again to me, saying, 'Son of man, say to the leader of Tyre, "Thus says the Lord GOD, 'Because your heart is lifted up And you have said, "I am a god, I sit in the seat of gods In the heart of the seas"; Yet you are a man and not God, Although you make your heart like the heart of God.'"" You see, the king of Tyre thinks he's God and the prophet Ezekiel is pronouncing a judgment, an oracle on him. But look what happens at verse 11, "Again the word of the LORD came to me saying, 'Son of man, take up a lamentation over the king of Tyre and say to him, "Thus says the Lord GOD, 'You had the seal of perfection, Full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. You were in Eden, the garden of God; Every precious stone was your covering: The ruby, the topaz and the diamond; The beryl, the onyx and the jasper; The lapis lazuli, the turquoise and the emerald; And the gold, the workmanship of your settings and sockets, Was in you. On the day that you were created They were prepared. You were the anointed cherub who covers, And I placed you there. You were on the holy mountain of God.'"" Who is he talking to? He's talking to Lucifer. He's talking to the highest created angel and look what he says next, "You walked in the midst of the stones of fire. You were blameless in your ways From the day you were created Until unrighteousness was found in you. By the abundance of your trade You were internally filled with violence, And you sinned; Therefore I have cast you as profane From the mountain of God. And I have destroyed you, O covering cherub, From the midst of the stones of fire. Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty." Satan was so glorious that he fell in love with himself and he wanted to be like God.

And you see this, turn back to Isaiah 14 now, a couple of books toward the front of your Bible, and here he's talking to the king of Babylon. Verse 4, Isaiah 14:4, "that you will take up this taunt against the king of Babylon, and say, 'How the oppressor has ceased,

And how fury has ceased!" Look at verse 12. He's been talking to the king of Babylon and here he says in verse 12, "How you have fallen from heaven, O star of the morning, son of the dawn! You have been cut down to the earth, You who have weakened the nations!" I think it's a double entendre. I think he's talking to the king of Babylon and he's talking to Satan. And look at what was in the king of Babylon's heart, what is in Satan's heart. Verse 13, "But you said in your heart, 'I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God, And I will sit on the mount of assembly In the recesses of the north. I will ascend above the heights of the clouds,'" here it is, "'I will make myself like the Most High.'" That is the essence of the rebellion of Satan himself. "I will be like God. I will not submit to God and accept my station under His authority. I will rebel against His authority and make myself equal to Him."

Now what was Satan's temptation to Eve? What did he say? "You eat of this fruit, you will be like God." That's the essence of sin, to not accept your station as a creature submitted to a holy God who has, as your Creator, all rights and authority. It's only reasonable that you and I should submit to him at every point, at every time, in every way, and yet it's in the fundamental wiring of the human heart because of sin, ever since Adam and Eve fell, we want to be like God. We want to do it our way and, listen, we have an aversion to authority in the natural man. You see it in a little two-year old, don't you? The terrible twos, what's going on there? The two-year old is figuring out he's not in charge and he is furious about it. Some of them do a good job of being a little more compliant than others, they're trying to work and gain the system. Seriously. That's kind of the way my sin pattern was. "Hey, it doesn't work out to just directly challenge authority, I'm going to try to maneuver around it and get everybody to do what I want to do my own way because I still will be God." But some are more direct in just challenging and challenging and challenging. The strong-willed child. When you get one of those, nothing is more humbling.

But the reality is that's the human heart and so think about the spirit of the age in which we live, the war on authority that we see in the culture. Do you understand that so much of what we see before us today is the spirit of Satan being just made clear and open and evident. The rejection of authority in every way. Reject governmental authority. Reject the authority of the family. They want to dismantle the family. They want to say that it's not a husband and wife, family is whatever you make it. No, God has said family is this: a husband, a wife, and children. Children obeying their parents. The husband as the head of the home. That's what God says and that settles it for us and it should settle it for every single person who wants to have any measure of blessing in their life. You ignore God's authority structure to your own destruction. Do you hear that? If you rebel against authority, you are destroying yourself. You were made to live under authority. I was made to live under authority. Every one of us. In the spirit of the age, we must recognize this and come out from them and be separate. We will not be a part of this nonsense that's going on. You know, we lovingly, graciously speak the truth, yes, because they're in the dark but, listen, our anger is not at the human beings that we see, it is at our enemy, the spiritual world. We don't struggle with flesh and blood but we struggle with angels, principalities, authorities, and the lies, and we come against those with forcefulness and boldness. We speak the truth, we speak it in love. We speak it so that these people can be

delivered from the reign of darkness and come into the freedom of the kingdom of God's Son. It's the kingdom of God's Son. You want to be free, you have to bow the knee to King Jesus. That is the essence of freedom and everyone who tells you different is a liar. They're just doing what their father does, lying continually, and but for the grace of God we would be there too, still lying and still loving our lies.

So the rejection of leadership, it's a serious thing. We are to be humble and submitted to one another. This is why, listen, one of the most important things that is true of every leader is that every leader in our church also must be submitted to the other leaders. If I'm not submitted to the other elders, I am unfit to be an elder. If they have concerns and they come to me and I'm going to say, "No, you don't know what you're talking about," and I can't go to chapter and verse Scripture and make it clear from the Bible, I am in serious danger. God help me. Every single person is to live under authority and our desire to not live under authority must be crucified by the one who was the preeminent, most glorious of all, the Lord Jesus Christ who dwells in unapproachable light yet when he came to this world he lived a life of humility and service, submission. He said, "My meat and My drink is to do the will of My Father." That's Christ-likeness. We're to be like that.

Third point: the testing of leadership. The testing of leadership and we'll have to hit this kind of quickly. On the front end, leaders are to be tested and approved. 1 Timothy 3:10 says, "Let deacons first be tested, then let them serve." 1 Timothy 3:6 says, "Don't make an elder a new convert." 1 Timothy 5:22 says, "Don't lay hands on too quickly and thus share in their sins. Be slow about elevating people to these offices. Test them. Make sure they're there." And those qualifications that we read, 16 to the elder, seven to the deacon in 1 Timothy 3. There's another 17 in Titus for elders, another three in Acts 6, that these are the qualifications to look for and you're to put leaders in according to their character, not their skill. The only one skill that's talked about is skill in the word. That's one of the qualifications for an elder, one of those 16, one out of 16 "able to teach." The other 15, character.

So we're to test them on the front end and one of the things we do is we ask you to nominate and then we carefully examine each candidate. We talk to them. We talk to their wives. We talk about how are things at home? Are you managing your own household well? Both offices must be able to do that. Are you a one-woman man? Both offices must be that. You're to test them during their ministry. Acts 17:11, the Bereans were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica. Why? Because they searched the Scriptures daily to see if what Paul was saying was true. I love that. They were supposed to receive the word of the apostle as the word of God and yet the Bereans, and God is commending them through Luke who writes Acts, he's writing Acts, God is saying, "Listen, what they did was exactly what you're supposed to do." They had the Apostle Paul preaching and they were looking at their Bibles and checking after, they went back through their notes and they said, "Is what he said true?" God says that's what you're supposed to be like.

So you don't just listen because an elder says it, a pastor says it. No, you check it out right here. This is what the only authority is, the word of God. And you have a responsibility,

we all do to hold one another to the standard. I love this. The newest believer has the authority with the word of God to rebuke the most mature oldest elder. I mean, John MacArthur, 81 or 82 years old, 82 years old. What a man of God. The newest believer at Grace Community Church if John says something, it would be hard to find anything he's going to mess up on, but if he did the newest believer can go to John and I know John's character, I mean, I don't know him but I know his character in watching him and hearing about him, he would be like, "If you're right, show me in the word, yeah, I'll correct that." That's the way it should be. I mean, Peter got corrected by Paul. Look at Galatians 2. Paul corrected him very sternly because of the need of the moment. Peter.

So we test the leaders. Jesus says, in fact, we're to test the leaders so much that you're to look for false teachers and false prophets. And how will you know false teachers or false prophets? They claim to have authority but you're not to submit to them because you will know them by their fruits. You'll know them, do they have the fruit of the Spirit? Are they like Christ? Are they humble servant leaders? Are they willing to be taught? Or are they lording it over? You'll know them by their fruits.

In fact, 1 Peter, well, 2 Peter, we're going to jump onto Jude, last passage, well, next to the last passage. Jude verses 4 to 11, the last book before Revelation. It's the tiny epistle of Jude. The New Testament warns about false teaching again and again and again and Jude tells us about the character of false teachers and it's interesting, he shows us that false teachers, one of the things you'll see about them is there's no humility, there's a sense, an authoritative sense, an authoritarian nature about them. Look what he says, Jude, verse 4, "For certain persons have crept in unnoticed," he's talking about false teachers are now in the church, "those who were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation, ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ." Skip on down to verse 8, he's talking about the same people, "Yet in the same way these men, also by dreaming, defile the flesh, and," look at this, they "reject authority, and revile angelic majesties." The characteristic of the false teacher is they reject authority and they revile angelic majesties. Then he says, "But Michael the archangel," verse 9, "when he disputed with the devil and argued about the body of Moses, did not dare pronounce against him a railing judgment, but said, 'The Lord rebuke you!'" He's saying Michael when he was dealing with Satan himself did not make a railing judgment against Satan himself. He didn't say something directly to him, he said, "The Lord rebuke you!" He was submitted to God even as he rebuked Satan. Verse 10, "But these men revile the things which they do not understand; and the things which they know by instinct, like unreasoning animals, by these things they are destroyed. Woe to them! For they have gone the way of Cain, and for pay they have rushed headlong into the error of Balaam, and perished in the rebellion of Korah."

Numbers 16 is a powerful picture of what happens when we're not satisfied with our place in God's economy and I encourage you to read it. I'll just summarize it for you. Korah was a Levite and there were two other guys, Dathan and Abiram who were from the tribe of Reuben. They came to Moses and said, "Look, it's not right for you to be above us. It's not right for Aaron to be above us. You guys have gone too far. We're all equal. We're a kingdom of priests." Well, what ends up happening is God swallows up,

the ground opens up and swallows up their tents. Korah, Dathan, Abiram and all their families are swallowed up into the earth and it covers them back over because they would not, they rejected authority. God is a God of authority and if we're going to be like Christ, we must be submitted to authority.

And the last thing I want to mention to you is what Paul says about Jesus in Philippians 2. Leadership in the church and all Christians are called to this, have this mind in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although he existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but he emptied himself, and he took upon himself the form of a servant and became obedient as a servant even to the point of death, even the death of the cross. That is our Savior and that is our calling to be like him and that's where life is. And you know, what God did to Jesus, he exalted him, he gave him the name above every other name because he humbled himself, he humiliated himself at the obedience of God to save sinners and when you and I humble ourselves, he exalts us. And that's what leaders are to be like, they are to be people who humble themselves, not to be people who are seeking and asserting authority. It doesn't mean they don't use it but they're not seeking it. May the Lord help us to have in our lives that kind of heart and in our churches those kind of leaders.

Let's pray.

Father, we come knowing how much we need You and Your grace. We love You and we thank You for all that You've done for us in Christ. We pray that You would help us, Lord, to be more like Jesus. We thank You that He was willing to empty Himself, to lay aside the prerogatives He had as God, not to stop being God but to lay aside his prerogatives and to enter into humanity and to die in our place on the cross, to be treated as if He'd lived our wicked filthy lives so that we might be treated as if we lived His perfect and righteous life. Thank You for the gospel. And Lord, build Your church, build Your church so that the gates of hell will not prevail against it. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.