

A Biblically Functioning Church

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This book is dedicated to my fellow Elders,
with whom it is a joy to serve.

A Biblically Functioning Church

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FOREWORD

I wish I would have read a book like this 27 years ago. It would have saved me a lot of trouble and heartache. I was a new Christian who was exposed to this teaching in the first year of my walk with Christ but sadly I quickly learned that many churches didn't believe or practice what is written here.

When I first read A Biblically Functioning Church, I felt my conviction was reenergized. It was like reading every biblical conviction I held about the church. It also gave me great hope and encouragement that there are some churches that really do believe and practice these truths. Having ministered with Pastor Keith Foskey and his precious people has given me the opportunity to

see these truths lived out on a daily basis. That is why I wholeheartedly recommend you read this book but don't read it just once, read it several times and let it sink deeply into your soul. Because what you are reading is the meaning of Scripture regarding the church.

Can we find churches today that supports a plurality of elders, deacons that serve instead of rule, congregations that use their gifts for edification rather than self-glorification? Can we find churches that truly practice all four steps of Jesus' words concerning church discipline in Matthew 18:15-17? Yes! It is possible but it first must be taught, implemented and practiced from the leadership down for that to happen.

So as you read A Biblically Functioning Church, commit yourself to live and practice what you read and you will be a biblically functioning part of the body of Christ called the Church.

Dr. Steven R. Hereford, Pastor-Teacher and Featured Speaker on "Changed By Grace," which can be heard locally on WAYR AM 550 and on SermonAudio.com.

Chapter 1

A Biblically Functioning Church: Why is It important?

Early in 2009, I began using a phrase that I hoped would become part of the vernacular of our church. More than a phrase, it was actually a statement of a vision. It is a vision that I have had for our church since I began as pastor. It is the vision of pastoring a Biblically Functioning Church.

This vision is not very popular in the world today. In fact, I have set out trying to find research materials, lecture notes, and books on this subject. Instead, what I tend to find are books on subjects like “Secrets to Church Growth” and “10 Mistakes Churches Make” which contain very little Scripture, and are instead filled with pragmatic solutions to spiritual problems. Not too many are concerned with being biblically functioning as much as they are with being numerically successful. What they have missed is that biblically, success is always synonymous with obedience. A church can be very large; yet, if the church is disobedient to the Word, it is NOT successful. Likewise, a smaller church cannot help but be successful, if it is obedient to God.

This book is an attempt to share the vision of what a Biblically Functioning Church looks like. I will begin by examining a passage of Scripture from the Epistle to the Hebrews.

“Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, on the day of testing in the wilderness, where your fathers put me to the test and saw my works for forty years. Therefore I was provoked with that generation, and said, ‘They always go astray in their heart; they have not known my ways.’ As I swore

in my wrath, ‘They shall not enter my rest.’” (Hebrews 3:7–11 ESV)

There are many common ways that we address the authors of the various books of Scripture. We call the letters of Paul the Pauline epistles. Or we might call the first five books, the books of Moses. Often, if we go to the Psalms, we will say, “The Psalmist writes...” or if it is one of David's Psalms, we will say, “David says...” But right away, something I noticed in this passage is that this is not how the writer of Hebrews addresses the author of holy Scripture. None of these typical phrases are used. The writer instead, opts for a very different expression when denoting the origin of the words that he is about to quote. In no uncertain terms, the writer of Hebrews describes the Holy Spirit as the author of these words. These words being a quote of Psalm 95:7b–11. This would have been physically penned by the great psalmist, David. But David is not given credit in this quotation. Instead, the Holy Spirit is called its author.

Some may ask, “Well, what makes this so important?” Why begin our study of a Biblically Functioning Church by looking at this verse? The reason why this deserves our attention is that this simple passage confirms for us one of the major tenants of our faith, namely, the “inspiration” of Scripture. We believe the Bible is “God-inspired.”

“All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.” (2 Timothy 3:16 KJV)

This term, translated “inspired” in the King James Version is the Greek term “theopneustos” This is a compound word: Theos, "God" (like in theology) and Pneumos, "Air", or "breath" (like in pneumatic). Thus, the term, in its literal rendering means “God-Breathed.” This is why the more modern versions of the Bible do not use the word inspiration, but rather say, “all Scripture is God-breathed.”

“All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.” (2 Timothy 3:16 ESV)

What this teaches us is that every word of the Bible comes from the mouth of God. The Bible does not contain the words of men, but the very Word of God. Only if this were so could the writer of Hebrews write, “The Holy Spirit says...” This tells us that, while the Psalmist was the instrument, the Holy Spirit was the author.

Here is one of the clearest testimonies in Scripture to its own divine inspiration. The writer of Hebrews is saying that the Holy Spirit was the author of Psalm 95, from which Hebrews 3:7b–11 is quoted. Inspiration is the Holy Spirit’s speaking through the minds of God’s human instruments. What the psalmist said was not his own opinion or his own choice of words. When he wrote these words the Holy Spirit was speaking. That is divine inspiration...The Holy Spirit was involved in the writing of every word of Scripture. That is why it is sin in the first degree, and opens the floodgates to every kind of heresy possible, to deny the absolute verbal inspiration of Scripture. (John

MacArthur, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Hebrews, 87.)

An important place this truth is expressed for us is from the very words of Jesus. In the twenty second chapter of Matthew, Jesus is debating with the Sadducees. They are discussing the subject of the resurrection, which the Sadducees denied (this is how you can remember the Sadducees from the Pharisees: the Pharisees believed in the resurrection, the Sadducees did not; so they were 'sad, you see'). Let us examine a section from Jesus' conversation with the Sadducees:

“But Jesus answered them, “You are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven. And as for the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was said to you by God: ‘I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’? He is not God of the dead, but of the living.” And when the crowd heard it, they were astonished at his teaching.” (Matthew 22:29–33 ESV)

Note the subtle phrase Jesus uses in v.31. He asks, “Have you not read what was said to you by God?” Now, that seems a bit odd. Normally, we would say, “Have you not read what has been written?” or “Have you not heard what has been said,” but here Jesus asks, “Have you not read what has been said?” In this, He gives a reference to the very nature of what Scripture is. He says, essentially, “if you have read Scripture, you have read what God has said.”

How did this miracle of inspiration happen?

Were the writers of Scripture automatons, who just went into a trance when it came time to write the Scripture? Were they like first-century fax-machines, simply transmitting the words onto the page without thought? No, this is not the way Scripture was written.

We see within the writing of Scripture the differing styles and various usages of languages by the various authors. Thus, we summarize that God did not take away the personality of Paul, or Luke or Moses when they wrote. Thus, David can make references to his personal feelings, and Paul to his own judgments. And we can rightly call them the Pauline epistles, and the Davidic psalms. Yet, the key is that their writing is still, ultimately, from God. What God did was “carry them” through the process, ensuring that His truth was being inscribed, and that they were being kept from error.

“Knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone’s own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.” (2 Peter 1:20–21 ESV)

We can get the visual of what Peter is saying. It would be easy to say that the Bible is just the writer's “interpretation” of God. And certainly many have done this. I cannot tell you how many times I have heard that Paul just wrote what he wanted. That he had his own agenda, and he was influenced by his Hebrew

background and he just wrote his own opinions and interpretations. So, as a result, his writings cannot be trusted. But Peter tells us this is not the case.

Peter says it was not Paul's, or anyone else's interpretation, that were inscribed in the Bible. No, the words of Scripture were not produced by the "will of man." Rather they came as the Holy Spirit "carried them along." Like a ship that undergirds its passengers from falling into the sea beneath, the Holy Spirit undergirded the writers, keeping them from falling into the vast sea of error.

This is why we say the Bible is "inerrant" and "infallible" because God supernaturally KEPT the writers of His Word from error. What we learn from this principle is that, not only is the Bible "inspired" or "God-breathed", but that it is also "infallible". The Bible is perfect. It contains no errors. Because it is a product of God. God is perfect, thus, His word is perfect.

Based upon this, believers should regard Scripture in the following ways:

WE SHOULD REGARD SCRIPTURE AS GOD SPEAKING

Allow me a simple question: Is the Holy Spirit God? The answer is obviously, "Yes." The Holy Spirit is not just a "force". The Holy Spirit is a Person, the third Person of the holy Trinity. Consider the story of Ananias and Sapphira: "But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property, and with his wife's knowledge he kept back for himself some of the proceeds and brought only a part of it and laid it at the apostles' feet. But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan

filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land? While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God.” When Ananias heard these words, he fell down and breathed his last. And great fear came upon all who heard of it. The young men rose and wrapped him up and carried him out and buried him.” (Acts 5:1-6 ESV)

This passage specifically tells us that the Holy Spirit is God. So, if the Holy Spirit speaks, is it God speaking? The answer, again, is “Yes.” When we read the phrase “The Holy Spirit said,” this is the same as saying, “God said.”

Consider these parallel passages.

“Brothers, the Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke beforehand by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus.” (Acts 1:16 ESV)

“And disagreeing among themselves, they departed after Paul had made one statement: “The Holy Spirit was right in saying to your fathers through Isaiah the prophet.” (Acts 28:25 ESV)

“David himself, in the Holy Spirit, declared, “The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet.” (Mark 12:36 ESV)

This is what is meant by “theopneustos”, from the very breath of God. The words which were written

by David, Isaiah, Paul, and Peter, were not their words.

They were the words of God. When the Scripture is read, it is God speaking. This is why many ministers humbly make this assertion: The only portion of the worship service for which we can claim absolute infallibility is when the Scripture is read.

WE SHOULD REGARD BOTH TESTAMENTS WITH THE SAME AUTHORITY

Note that this quote in Hebrews comes from the Old Testament. When the writer of Hebrews declares, "There, as the Holy Spirit says," he is about to quote from the Old Testament. He is making the important assertion that the Old Testament is Holy Spirit inspired. Now, why do I find that important? Because there are many today who only give heed to the New Testament.

Many times the Old Testament gets passed over at a glance, or not even discussed at all. There is a failure in our modern church which I have dubbed "red letter Christianity". Do you know what that is? Well, most of you know that some Bibles have the words of Jesus in red. And there are some who have said that these red letters are the only part of the Bible that really "apply".

"Red Letters" by DC Talk was a fairly popular Christian song in the mid 90s. Its lyrics were as follows: "There is love in the red letters, there is truth in the red letters, there is hope for the hopeless, peace and forgiveness. There is life in the red letters." And, of course, all of this is true. But the Bible is more than just the red letters.

In fact, if we say we love what Jesus said, and yet deny the Old Testament as being on equal footing with the Word of God, we deny what Jesus Himself said. Because it was He who granted such a place of prominence to Scripture in His ministry (which at the time included only the Old Testament). Much of Jesus' own words were quotations of the Old Testament. Therefore, the "red letters" in the New Testament are restatements of the "black letters" in the Old Testament. We must understand that the Old and New Testament are both equally God's Word - and both equally deserving of our attention and devotion.

WE SHOULD REGARD OBEDIENCE TO SCRIPTURE AS OBEDIENCE TO GOD, AND DISOBEDIENCE TO SCRIPTURE AS DISOBEDIENCE TO GOD

When the Bible tells us to do something, or to refrain from something, this is not just the whims of some person. This is not just Moses' feelings, or Paul's prejudices. This is God's commands. And to deny them is to basically look God in His face and say, "You are wrong". Just because this is a written word and not a spoken word does not make it any less God's word.

If my daughter Ashlee were home, and I had to go to work, and I left her a list of chores to accomplish while I was gone, the written list is my word. She doesn't have to hear my voice audibly if she has my letter. The letter is my word. If she obeys what I have written, she obeys me. If she disregards what I have written, she has disobeyed me. Likewise, if we obey Scripture, we are obeying God. If we disobey Scripture, we disobey God. God's Word is contained in the Bible.

We do not have audible voices, we have the written Word. And it doesn't change.

There was once a man who was committing adultery, and when confronted he said, "God told me it is OK". Do you know what I say to that? "NO, HE DID NOT!" God doesn't contradict Himself. And His Word has already declared "Thou shall NOT commit adultery." So many times the Bible gives us commandments, and prohibitions. If we receive them, we are receiving the Word of God. If we ignore them, or worse deny them, we have not just ignored or denied the words of men. We have been blatantly disobedient to God Himself. To look at what the Bible commands and say "No" is as if we have heard that God has audibly spoken, and we have said, "No".

Now, it would seem that, as people who call ourselves "Bible-believers", that such a chapter would not only be in keeping with our beliefs, but would be rather easy for us to accept. Sadly, however, for many folks, the Bible is seen as merely a book of traditional thoughts that can be accepted or rejected based upon how they fit into our personal desires.

This has been labeled by some as "Cafeteria Style" Christianity. When you go into a Cafeteria, you pick and choose what suits you, and you leave the rest. Likewise, many people pick through the Bible, taking what suits them, and leaving the rest. This has been devastating for the Church in the last century, as it has lead to major divisions, fierce debate, and even the advent of many cult groups. All of which who would claim the Bible as their book, but so many of which who obviously deny whole sections of Scripture in their

practice. Beloved, as a church we cannot afford to be “Cafeteria Style” Christians. We cannot afford to take the parts of the Bible that “taste good”, and leave behind those that do not. Because, as soon as we do this, we become no better than any other false religious group.

What makes a cult group or a false religion? To hear the Word of the Lord, and deny it. And if we hear God's Word, and deny it, we are no better off than those groups.

Why is it important to be a Biblically Functioning Church? Because, if we are not “biblically functioning”, then we are functioning unbiblically. We are cafeteria Christians. We are taking what we want, and jettisoning the rest. Beloved, this should not be. Instead, we should embrace the truth. We should hold to it. We should obey it. We should stand firm on the commitment that the Bible is God speaking---that when we read Scripture, we are reading what God has said.

Chapter 2

A Biblically Functioning Church: What is the Structure?

It seems natural that, for most folks, change (though inevitable) is often met with a degree of timidity, and sometimes outright rejection. Take for instance, the situation surrounding the invention of the telephone. In 1876, President Rutherford Hayes was given an advanced demonstration of Alexander Graham Bell's new invention. The President, though amazed, asked, "Who would ever want one?" But Hayes was not the only one to reject Bell's device. Bell tried to market his device to the premier communications service at the time, Western Union, which ran the nation's telegraph system. Yet, even they rejected his device, claiming that it had "too many shortcomings to be considered a serious means of communication."

Now, why do I tell this story? Because in the last chapter I talked about my vision for what it means to become a Biblically Functioning Church. And I know there are some who think the vision is too large. That the change is too much. There are those, like President Hayes who see no reason to change, and others like the Western Union executives who think the change will not work. But might I remind you that becoming a Biblically Functioning Church is what God has called us to be. In this chapter, I'd like to build on that foundation with a second question: What is the structure of a biblically functioning church? What does a Biblically Functioning Church look like regarding things like governance, authority, and order? 1 Corinthians 14:40 gives us a basis for a foundational principle when it comes to the way a church should be managed.

"But all things should be done decently and in order." (1 Corinthians 14:40 ESV)

Foundationally, the verse for this is based on a context of a church where there was a great deal of problems. From the opening passages of 1 Corinthians, we know there was division within the church. We find out, a few chapters later, that there was a sin that was going on and not being dealt with. Then we see there was the misuse of the spiritual gifts. Paul, as was his gifting, addresses each subject with a directive for the people of God. As a loving, yet bold shepherd, he directs them in the ways of righteousness. Then, as he ends his rebuke of the misuses of gifts that had been occurring, and his corrections, he gives this simple command: "All things should be done decently and in order."

Please note what the context of this is, the Church. All things that are done in church are to be done with these two specific principles in mind.

DECENCY

The Greek word translated as 'decently' is εὐσχημόνως (pronounced: yoo-skhay-mon'-ose) meaning: in a seemly manner, decently. All things in church are to be done in a way that befits the character of someone who claims the name of Christ. There is to be no shady business. There is to be no back-door politics. If it cannot be done above-board, it ought not to be done at all.

ORDER

The Greek word translated as 'order' is τάξις (pronounced: tax'-is) meaning 1) an arranging,

arrangement 2) order 2a) a fixed succession observing a fixed time 3) due or right order, orderly condition 4) the post, rank, or position which one holds in civic or other affairs 4a) since this position generally depends on one's talents, experience, resources 4a1) character, fashion, quality, style.

It is this second word that will be the focus of this study, as my goal for this chapter is to expound what the Bible tells us the “order” or the “arrangement” is for a church.

But before I do, I want to go ahead and address a common objection. There are those who have said, “The Bible does not give us an outline for the structure of the church.” And, if what they mean is that the Bible does not give us a specific list that says, “This is the way a church should be structured” then yes, they are correct. But, they are wrong if they believe the Bible doesn't teach how the church should be ordered. The issue is though, that the Bible teaches us by example on the issues of church structure and government.

“It must be admitted that the Scriptures contain very little in the form of direct precept relating to the order and government of churches. But we have no right to require that everything designed for our instruction in duty, should be made known to us only in the way of direct command. Judicious parents give much instruction to their children by example; and this mode of instruction is often more intelligible and more useful than precept. It was made the duty of the apostles to teach their converts whatsoever Christ had commanded, and to set churches in order. If, instead of leaving dry precepts to serve for guidance, they have

taught us by example how to organize and govern churches, we have no right to reject their instruction... Instead of choosing to walk in a way of our own devising, we should take pleasure to walk in the footsteps of holy men from whom we have received the word of life... We revere the apostles, as men inspired with the wisdom which is from above; and respect for the Holy Spirit by which they were lead, should induce us to prefer their modes of organization and government to such as our inferior wisdom might suggest.” (J. L. Dagg; Manual of Church Order, pg. 84)

Ultimately, while not by precept, the Bible does teach us, by example, what the structure of the church should be, and it is not ambiguous.

Let us examine three truths from Scripture regarding the structure of the church:

THERE IS ONLY ONE HEAD IN THE CHURCH

This should be a simple question: “Who is the head of the church?” The answer, of course, is Christ. This language is used by Paul in his letter to the church in Ephesus.

“Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.” (Ephesians 5:22–24 ESV)

Now, if I were writing on the roles of wives and husbands, I would also speak of the mandate for

husbands to love their wives, which coincides to the wife submitting to the husband. But my focus here is on the language used for Christ. This very specifically says Christ is the head of the church. This is something for which there could be no mistaking. This was not up for debate. Jesus is the head of the church.

One of my seminary professors once did some interim work in a little baptist church. Upon entering, a man met him and said, "I just wanted you to know, I am the head of this church." To which my professor replied, "Okay. I thought Jesus was the head, so that's good to know."

When the Bible calls Jesus, "head" it's an important word. The Greek word, κεφαλή (pronounced kef-al-ay') in it's literal sense means a physical head, and it was a word used in cases of capitol punishment when someone would lose their head. But in it's figurative sense, as it is being used here, the word means "master" or "lord." Beloved, Jesus is the Lord of the church.

How does the Lord govern His Church?

He does this through His inspired Word. His Word contains His will for His church. A common objection to this is the question, "What about the Bible being interpreted so differently by so many people?" It is true that everyone looks at things differently, and when it comes to the Bible, there is hardly unanimity of thought. This is why God ordained **two** offices in the church. One of which is assigned the task of interpreting the word. Which leads us to the second truth.

THERE ARE ONLY TWO OFFICES IN THE CHURCH

Within the New Testament church, you will only find two offices in the church wherein the requirements are clearly given so that people can be examined for them: Elder, and Deacon.

THE ELDER

The Elders are a group of God-ordained, Scripturally qualified men whose job is to study the Scriptures, teach the congregation the Word, and ensure doctrinal purity. In most churches I've seen, there is only one person who holds this office, usually called "Pastor" or "Reverend." However, biblically, there is no precedent for the single-pastor model. In the Bible, the churches all had a group of men called "Pastors" or "Elders."

"This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you—" (Titus 1:5 ESV)

"And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed." (Acts 14:23 ESV)

"Now from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the church to come to him." (Acts 20:17 ESV)

Thus, based upon this model we learn some important principles. Biblical Eldership has two foundations: Plurality and Equality.

A **plurality**, in that no church should be governed by one man only. When this happens, you get into a situation of “pastor–rule” and this is unbiblical. The old saying goes “power corrupts, absolute power corrupts absolutely.” Thus, it is dangerous to give any one person the authority, especially when it is dealing with doctrines and governance in the church. I have personally seen this in some baptist churches where the pastor becomes like a 'mini–monarch' ruling the church, with no one to call him into Scriptural account. Thus, the eldership is to be plural.

Eldership is also to be **equal**. Now, again, I realize this may be new to some folks. And it really doesn't help that we use words like “senior pastor,” “associate pastor” and “Elder.” But in all reality, within the church, they're all in equality with the other Elders. I am no more a pastor than the other Elders of the church. There is no hierarchy among us.

Now, the reason why these two concepts are important to understand is because they assist in our understanding of the **role** and the **responsibilities** of the Elders. The commission given to the Elders in Scripture comes in Acts 20.

“Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.” (Acts 20:28 ESV)

There is a lot that can be learned from this verse, but the key word here is “overseers.” In Greek the word is ἐπίσκοπος (pronounced ep-is'-kop-os), meaning 1) an overseer 1a) a man charged with the duty of seeing that things to be done by others are done rightly, any curator, guardian or superintendent. God has made the Elders the “overseers” of the church.

How are they to oversee? By using the Bible to govern the church. You see, if Christ is the head, He mediates His lordship through the Elders who govern the church with His Word as their authority. This is why the one qualification that stands out in regards to Eldership is that, any man called to this office **must** be apt to teach.

This means he must have a working knowledge of the Word. How could any man govern with the Word if he doesn't know the Word? He can't. Therefore, he must be apt to teach.

THE DEACON

Let's examine the purpose of the Deacons. The best way I know how, is to look at when they were first chosen and why.

“Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, “It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute,

full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.” And what they said pleased the whole gathering, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands on them.” (Acts 6:1–6 ESV)

Note what is being said. It is not that the leaders of the church were too good to serve the members. It is that they had been commissioned to a more important work. They had the responsibility to study and preach the Word of God. This could not be set aside just because there were needs in the community of the faithful. So, what did they do? They chose qualified persons to do the work of ministry. These would later be called “Deacons,” which means “servants.”

Interestingly, if you examine the qualifications for Deacons, you will notice that these qualifications only differ from those of Elders in one point: Teaching. Deacons are not required to teach, nor must they have this gift. But they must have the same moral requirements of the Elders. Why? Because the Deacons are the hands of the Elders, they do the work. They implement the teaching that the Elders give.

The Elder **TEACHES** the congregation.
The Deacon **SERVES** the congregation.

As I made mention earlier, these are the only two offices that are outlined in the New Testament church.

There are no boards, nor committees. Only Scripturally qualified individuals fulfilling these two God-ordained offices. This brings up our next question.

What does the New Testament say about the congregation's role in the church? This is important, as the congregation makes up the church. Yet, there is an important issue that we do need to examine regarding the congregation's role in church government.

THERE IS NO EXAMPLE OF DEMOCRACY (member-rule) IN SCRIPTURE

THE CHURCH IS A THEOCRACY (God-ruled)

This third truth may come as a surprise to some of you. The concept of democratic government, one-man one-vote, may be very American, however it is not biblical. In fact, the idea of voting within the church came in as a result of the church becoming more and more Americanized. But you will not find in the Bible anywhere where the early church took a vote. It simply was not the practice of the church.

Why? Because right and wrong are never determined by majority opinion. Right and wrong are determined by God and God alone. Consider this scenario: Imagine if a group of people within the church started to petition for the church to accept homosexuals into membership without repentance. And they convinced a majority to this view. Would that make it right? No, because it is opposed to God's clear teaching that sin is not to be tolerated in the church. Righteousness is never determined by taking a vote.

Righteousness is determined by adherence to the Word of God.

Now, please allow me to clarify. Just because a Biblically Functioning Church is not democratic does not mean that the congregation has no voice. There are times when clearly the Scripture points to the congregation speaking. Such as in the process of choosing Deacons, the congregation was involved in seeking out qualified men in Acts 6. As well as in the process of church discipline, when someone has sinned and refuses to repent, Jesus tells us to take this person before the church.

But, even in the midst of these times when the church does speak as a whole, the Biblically Functioning Church is still **not** a democratic institution. It is a theocratic institution. It's head is Christ. It's governing document is the Bible. It's overseers are the Elders charged with interpreting the Bible.

Someone may say, "Well, entrusting the leadership decisions to Elders does not ensure that the Scriptures will not be compromised. They could still make unbiblical decisions." This is what the examination process is for. We are not just supposed to choose an Elder because he has been in the church a long time. We are to examine his fidelity to the Word. We are to choose Elders who have a high view of Scripture, to ensure that the decisions of the church are being made with Scripture as the authority.

In fact, there is a very rigorous set of qualifications laid out in Scripture for what kind of man qualifies for this office. It expressly teaches that, if he

should deviate from any of these requirements, he disqualifies himself from the position. The same requirements we use for choosing a pastor should be used for any Elder candidate.

The structure of the Biblically functioning church is rather easy to articulate: Christ is the head. His Word is interpreted by a group of Elders. This teaching is implemented by a group of Deacons. The congregation becomes equipped to minister one to another.

An important final thought on this subject is this: Elders are not the “ministers” of the church. Elders are the teachers. The members of the congregation are the ministers.

“And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ,” (Ephesians 4:11–12 ESV)

You see, the Elders teach, and the Deacons implement the teaching so that the congregation becomes equipped to minister. In this, we become a church that is not one minister seeking to minister to all, but instead we are a whole church of ministers, ministering to one another.

Chapter 3

A Biblically Functioning Church: How Does it Affect Membership?

The word “church” in the New Testament is often found in the book of Acts and in the Epistles. In fact, some have even argued that Jesus did not come to establish a “church”, but that this was a later invention of the apostles. They say this, however, in ignorance, as Christ Himself spoke of the church which He was going to build. As He does so in our passage for this chapter. The context of this passage is the confession of Peter at Caesarea Philippi.

“Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” And they said, “Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” Simon Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” (Matthew 16:13–18 ESV)

Now, this verse has been debated throughout the history of the church. The primary question in the debate is, “Was Peter the ‘rock’ on which the church was built?” This stance has been held by the Roman church which says the Pope is Peter's successor. But the Protestant view has held that, it is not Peter the man upon which Christ would build His church. It was the confession of Peter. The confession of Jesus as the Christ the Son of God, which would stand as the foundational stone upon which the church was built.

However, the key for now is not to deal with that debate, but to focus our minds on one specific part of Jesus' statement. He clearly said, "I will build my church." The Greek word we translate as 'church' is ἐκκλησία (pronounced: ek-klay-see'-ah). This is a compound word: 'ek' meaning 'out of' and 'kaleo' meaning 'to call'. The Greek dictionary defines this word as "a gathering of citizens called out from their homes into some public place, i.e. an assembly." The word "ecclesia" literally means an assembly of the called.

In the world, the church is represented in two ways. The Invisible Church and The Visible Church.

THE INVISIBLE CHURCH

The invisible church is the church that only God Himself can see. It is made up of all believers, everywhere, who are truly converted. There are members of the invisible church in every nation, and all of these believers share a common bond in the unity of their Savior, Christ Jesus.

THE VISIBLE CHURCH

The visible church, on the other hand, is the visible assembly of believers. Sovereign Grace Family Church is a "visible" church, along with any other physical church. We are not only known by God, but we (by our confession and expression of faith within a community) are known by one another as believers. We have made the good confession that Peter made, that we believe Jesus to be the Christ, the Son of God, and

thus we proclaim our faith publicly in the assembly of the faithful.

Here is the major distinction. The invisible church is known to God alone, and is the perfect Bride of Christ. The visible church is the local association of believers, made up of genuine converts, false professors, and sometimes even wolves in sheep's clothing. Now having said all that, allow me to now move to the subject of the chapter, which is Church Membership.

When a person is born again and comes to faith in Jesus Christ, he or she is right then made a part of the universal, invisible church and becomes part of the Bride of Christ. But this does not automatically mean that they have joined a local assembly of believers. In fact, there are many believers in the world who are not officially joined to any local assembly. It is that type of membership in which one commits to a local body of believers that is my focus here.

I want to answer three questions about church membership. We have seen that genuine faith in Christ makes us members of the invisible church. So, how does this relate to the visible church?

IS CHURCH MEMBERSHIP IN A LOCAL CONGREGATION EVEN BIBLICAL?

The reason why I want to begin here is that I recently was asked this very question, and the reasoning behind this question was justified. We certainly see local churches in the Bible. There is the Church at Ephesus, the Church at Corinth, the Church

at Thessalonica and many more. But, as the question was relayed, “Where do we get the concept of membership?”

To start with, I want to say that the modern concept of membership in many churches is far-removed from anything seen in Scripture. (We will deal with this further in the next two questions.) But, just because membership has been misunderstood in our day, doesn't mean that the concept is unbiblical.

The local assemblies in the New Testament did have members. How do we know this? Because there was a formal “exclusion” process. There was a process by which a person could be removed from the church.

“It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for a man has his father's wife. And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you. For though absent in body, I am present in spirit; and as if present, I have already pronounced judgment on the one who did such a thing. When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.” (1 Corinthians 5:1-5 ESV)

This is an act of what is commonly called “church discipline.” It was given by Jesus to ensure that the local church would have a method of maintaining purity. The sinner was to be put out of the church so as to recognize his sin, and possibly come to a place of

repentance. This was the act of grace to the sinner, and an act of maintaining purity within the church.

I mention this because a formal “exclusion” process denotes a formal inclusion process. Only if there was an organized body could it be assembled to perform such an act. Only if this body were made up exclusively of people who had professed Jesus Christ, could such an act have any foundation.

Based upon this, we know that church membership is grounded on the foundation of a statement of faith in Christ. This is why the man in I Corinthians 5 is being put out. He was a member of the body, indicating he had made a commitment to Jesus verbally. Yet his actions were sinful, and he was unrepentant, so as to make his confession void of any real meaning.

Furthermore, in dealing with the question of local church membership being biblical, allow me to address one other thought. The early church was meticulous when it came to recording its members.

“So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.” (Acts 2:41 ESV)

“And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.” (Acts 2:46–47 ESV)

“But many of those who had heard the word believed, and the number of the men came to about five thousand.” (Acts 4:4 ESV)

Now, I only mention these verses because it seems apparent that someone in the church was keeping a record. Someone was in charge of keeping up with how many professed faith. Perhaps this was the first church secretary, who knows! But the key is that the membership in the church was known and accounted for. This indicates a formal method of entrance (i.e. confession of faith, commitment to Christ).

Based upon these things, and other scriptural indications, I would say membership in a local church is clearly biblical. But, as I said, I do believe it has been misunderstood in western society.

HOW HAS THE PURPOSE OF CHURCH MEMBERSHIP BEEN MISUNDERSTOOD?

I mentioned in the last chapter that one of the problems in the Americanized church is that we are incurably democratic. We hold firmly to the “one-person, one-vote” principle. The reason for this is that we believe it is always our prerogative to have a “say” in what goes on. Because of this, church membership has really become about who has the right to vote in meetings.

Now, I am not the one saying this, there are many within the church who have seen this belief grow. I want to mention a statement made by Mark Dever on church membership:

“To many [people, church membership] is a simple formality that gives us the right to vote at the annual business meetings and might even give us a sense of ownership in the programs.”

Now, some of you may disagree that church membership is mostly about voting rights, but I want to challenge your thinking. In the church, what really changes when a person joins? If they have been coming for a while, they most likely have already been contributing. Likewise, they have probably become involved in the various groups within the church, such as the men's fellowship, women's fellowship, etc. In fact, in some churches non-members are allowed to teach Sunday School and lead worship. Furthermore, do we neglect prayer or any other act of mercy to a non-member? No.

So, what really changes when a person joins? They enter into the exclusive group that gets a “voice” within the church. They become “members” with voting privileges. Now, I can imagine there are some getting frustrated. And you want to scream out, “That is not all membership is for!” I know that. I am just telling you what membership has become in the minds of so many people. Membership has become about entitlement. “Once I join,” a person might think, “I’m entitled to a voice.”

I know many of you who have never felt this way, who joined the church simply because you wanted to serve Christ. But you know you could serve Christ without being a member of a church. So, I ask again, what is membership for? Is it about having a “voice”? Or is it about something more?

WHAT IS CHURCH MEMBERSHIP IN A “BIBLICALLY FUNCTIONING CHURCH”?

Church membership, in a biblically functioning church is not about **entitlement**, it is an act of **submission**. When you join a local assembly of believers, you are submitting yourselves to three things.

1. The Doctrinal Beliefs of the Church
2. The God-Ordained Leadership of the Church
3. Discipline of the Church

The Doctrinal Beliefs of the Church

When you join a church, that church has an established doctrine that it confesses (or it should). Thus, you make a choice, when you join, to uphold those doctrines.

For example, if I joined a church where I disagreed with their doctrine, and they asked me to teach, I would eventually teach something that would contradict the statement of faith of the church. And in doing so, I would be wrong. I knew what I was getting when I went in, and submitted to it.

Someone might say, “Well, wait a minute, you came to Sovereign Grace Family Church as pastor, and you are trying to change the church. Does that make you wrong?” Allow me to say this. Our (Sovereign Grace Family Church) first point of doctrine in our statement of faith is that we believe the Bible is the inspired and infallible Word of God. Thus, when I say my vision is that we actually begin to practice that, I'm

not attempting to change us. I'm attempting to keep us honest! If our doctrinal position says we believe the Bible is infallible, and it is our sole authority, then as pastor I want to drive us to live that out.

Recently I had a person come to me and say, "I do not believe the Bible is infallible." My response was, "This is not the church for you." Now, some may say that was too harsh. But I was just being honest, because the Church has declared what it believes. If he cannot support that, he should go somewhere where he can.

Someone else might say, "What if I was here before the statement was adopted? I mean, it wasn't brought into our Constitution until 2005, and many of us were here before that." I would remind you that, when we adopted the Statement of Faith, all had the opportunity for input and we all spoke. There were issues with the Constitution that were eventually resolved, but no one denied the Statement of Faith. Thus, the Church has spoken, we believe the Bible is the infallible Word of God.

So, when we join a church, we are submitting to the doctrines that are taught in that church.

The God-Ordained Leadership

When a person joins a church, it is in submission not only to the doctrinal statement, but also to its leadership.

“Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith.” (Hebrews 13:7 ESV)

Now, for many in the church, this is untenable. The word submission, especially to leadership in churches, is fraught with nasty thoughts of totalitarian, power-mad leaders who have no love for their people, but only exist to wield power. But the Bible doesn't give this command in vain.

Again, I use myself as an example. If I were to join a church, not being a member within leadership, I would be submitting myself to the leadership that was in place. It would be an act of trust, that these leaders were doing what God intended to be done.

Beloved, when we talk about submission to leadership, it is not about laying down your arms and giving up your ability to voice an opinion. It is about trust. Submission begins with trust. If you cannot trust the leadership within a church, and you cannot submit to that leadership, you shouldn't join it.

The Discipline of the Church

Now, in many churches, this is not even an issue. But in a church that seeks to be biblical, there are times when a person must be removed to maintain the purity of the church. For some, this is again untenable. I have heard the objections, “The Bible tells us to not judge, how then could we possibly put someone out?” Hear the word of God on this subject.

“I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people— not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one. For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? God judges those outside. “Purge the evil person from among you.” (1 Corinthians 5:9–13 ESV)

Do you see Paul's point? People who make no claim to faith are not to be judged, as they are simply acting in accord with their nature. Sinners sin; that is the way it is. But when a professed believer sins, and is unrepentant, he is to be separated from the church. Why is this? Because he is a danger to the church. This is one of the primary reasons for church discipline, to maintain the holiness of the church.

When we join a church, we submit ourselves to that. Even as a pastor, I am subject to this. If in my life, there is perpetual, unrepentant sin, not only can I be put out from the church but I also disqualify myself from ministry. Thus, we are all – Elders, Deacons, and congregation – in submission to the discipline of the church.

My main point for this chapter is that membership in a church is not about joining a club and getting an entitlement. Joining a church is an act of submission. And in this act of submission, we become – as noted in our last chapter – ministers to

one another. When we truly have a submissive heart, and we begin to release our desires for place and entitlement, we begin to truly serve one another.

And this is what a Biblically Functioning Church looks like. It doesn't look like a club, where membership dues entitle a right to vote. It looks like a body, where each member submits to working together for the good of the whole. A body where every member is important, every member contributes, and all follow the head, who is Christ.

Chapter 4

A Biblically Functioning Church: Does the Bible Distinguish Between the Roles of Men and Women in the Church?

In this chapter, we are going to begin the long process of looking at the requirements for leadership within the church. Over the next few chapters, we will break down terms that describe both elders and deacons such as “above reproach” and “husband of one wife”. However, first we are going to deal with a much more basic and natural concept—gender distinctions. Here we will seek to answer the question, “Does the Bible make a distinction between the roles of men and women in the church?” I believe, in the end, we will see that it does. Furthermore, if we are seeking to be a biblically functioning church, we ought recognize and apply these distinctions.

There are those who accuse the Bible of being ambiguous in the area of the distinction between the roles of men and women in the local church. Others, who may not accuse the Bible of ambiguity, might still accuse the Bible of “not being with the times” or “outdated” on this issue. Still others say that what the Bible says is just plain wrong, that it was written under a culture of male dominance, and that it has no place in the 21st Century Church. In response to all of these things I would say that I am both saddened and disturbed by how the modern church has literally ignored and/or put away a major principle in God’s Word. If the Bible is the Word of God, as it claims to be, and many Christians profess that it is, then it shouldn’t be twisted simply to satisfy a certain political or personal point of view. The principle that I believe has been put-away is this: Men and women are spiritually equal. But by design men and women are different.

These differences are inherent in our creationary make-up. And this is not just a biblical truth, but one

that is well known in the scientific community. There is a research scientist named Anne Moir who wrote a book entitled *Brain Sex, the Real Difference Between Men and Women*. In it, she describes how many scientists are afraid to note the discoveries of differences between men and women because they are not politically correct. She writes:

“Men are different from women. They are equal only in their common membership of the same species, humankind. To maintain that they are the same in aptitude, skill or behavior is to build society based on a biological and scientific lie. The sexes are different because their brains are different. The brain, the chief administration and emotional organ of life, is differently constructed in man and in women; it processes information in a different way, which results in different perceptions, priorities and behavior”. [Cited in *Different by Design*, p.9]

So, we see that the differences between men and woman are not only described by the Bible – but they are apparent in the world. In fact, what amazes me is that this is even a debate. Anyone with children knows that boys are different from girls. Well, this doesn't change when we grow up! Men and women remain different. Due to these differences God has assigned positions to both men and women in the home and in the church.

It should be noted that these are not positions that denote inferiority. Instead, they allow for the proper maintaining of God's design throughout the ages. My desire for this chapter is to look to the Bible and attempt to give clear, contextual, concise exegesis

of the most relevant passages regarding the issue of the different roles of men and women in the church. We will begin by examining one of the most relevant texts on this issue.

“I desire then that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling; likewise also that women should adorn themselves in respectable apparel, with modesty and self-control, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly attire, but with what is proper for women who profess godliness—with good works. Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness. I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. Yet she will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control” (1 Timothy 2:8–15 ESV)

Certainly this passage has been misused by people on both sides of this volatile issue because it doesn't fit with what some people 'feel' about this subject. But, regardless of what we 'feel' we want it to say, we need to be asking what exactly does it say?

First it says that men are to address the issue of anger and quarreling. Now, why do you think this is? Could it be that men are more aggressive, naturally, than women? And that, Paul's admonition to them is that they should use their hands to lift to God in prayer, rather than fighting one another.

Then, he addresses the women. He teaches that women are to be dressed modestly, and not in such a way that would call attention to their outward appearance. Peter echoes this in His epistle.

“Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives, when they see your respectful and pure conduct. Do not let your adorning be external—the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewelry, or the clothing you wear— but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God’s sight is very precious. For this is how the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves, by submitting to their own husbands” (1 Peter 3:1–5 ESV)

This seems simple enough, but it isn’t always. Many want to force Paul into a corner here and say that he is condemning, with specificity, things like braided hair. But what we must never do, when interpreting a passage, is confuse principle with example. The principle Paul is teaching that a Christian woman is to be dressed modestly – and then he gives the example of immodest dress in his day. Immodesty was marked by those things which he mentions. In today’s language, one might speak of revealing clothing or an abundance of jewelry as being immodest. Whereas the example may change, the principle always applies. (Such could also be said concerning I Corinthians 11 and woman needing head coverings. The issue in this passage is the authority of man to woman, and the usurping of this authority by certain woman. The principle is that God has set the standard for authority

in the church, and the situation in Corinth was a direct rebellion against that principle.)

After addressing two common gender related issues (aggressiveness in men, and clothing with women) the passage goes on to make a very important reference regarding the differing roles of men and women in the church. It teaches clearly that women are to be ‘learners’ in the assembly, and not teachers of men, nor to exercise authority over men.

Something that shouldn’t be missed is that Paul here is limiting the office of elder to men only. How? The office of elder has a two-fold responsibility: Teach and govern the church. Here Paul says that both responsibilities of this office are to be carried out by men only.

Some attack Paul here and say that he was particularly sexist. I cannot tell you how many people I have had made ugly comments about Paul regarding this passage. In doing so, however, they simply rail against the Holy Spirit, as He is the ultimate author of Scripture. Others say Paul was making his opinion known, but that this does not stand as the testimony to all churches of all time. One might do well, then, to compare his words in I Corinthians 14.

“For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all be encouraged, and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets. For God is not a God of confusion but of peace. As in all the churches of the saints, the women should keep silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be in submission, as the Law also says. If there is anything

they desire to learn, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church.” (1 Corinthians 14:31–35 ESV)

The “speaking” in church here refers directly (in context) to the speaking of prophecy (preaching) and tongues (revelation). These things were done in the assembly of the church but were not to be done by women in the presence of men. This does not forbid “conversation” in the church, as some have mockingly suggested, or even a woman speaking before the church. The words here are in the context of teaching (speaking prophecy and tongues), which is not to be done by women because this would be an act of authority over men.

We should take note that Paul uses the phrase “in all the churches of the Saints”. If this were simply a specific policy for a specific church, or even a regionally policy, or a custom of his day, it seems these words would not be right and the Bible would be in error. But because his words are not regional, but binding on Christians for all times, these words stand strong.

But why would Paul make this rule be binding on the church? Some suggest a sexist bias on his part. Others suggest a customary bias. But neither of these is appealed to by Paul. Instead he appeals to Scripture as His authority in this matter.

“For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. Yet she will be saved through

childbearing—if they continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control.” (1 Timothy 2:13–15 ESV)

Paul uses the issue of creation for his basis for the headship of the man over woman. But this does not mean that woman is not of any importance. In fact, she is of great importance. It is through her womb that new generations come.

Some are confused by v.15 because it says women are “saved” through childbearing. But this does not mean “saved” in the sense of salvation from sin. It means that women, who may feel a loss of importance because of their God-given role should not feel that they are unimportant. They are “saved” from any sense of unimportance in childbirth in that they maintain the most important role of all – caregiver and nurturer to the next generation of men and women in the world. Sadly our modern culture would say that this is insulting – relegating women to being ‘at home’ – but what a wonderful world it would be if children actually had their mothers in the homes with them rather than in the marketplace.

Ultimately 1 Timothy 2 (and 1 Corinthians 14) speak of the authoritative position within the church. Women are not to have an authoritative position over men simply because this violates the principles put forth by God in creation, and by the apostles in their teachings. It also makes the church out of sync with the home. In the home, the Scripture teaches that the husband has an endowed position of authority and with it comes responsibility. In the church, this positional authority remains.

As a husband, I have three primary responsibilities: protect, provide and pastor. But, if my wife were to be a pastor/elder, I could not be that for her. You see, when the roles in the church get confused, the roles in the home do as well. Now, over the next few chapters, I am going to expound on the qualification for elder. But, in keeping with our lesson, I want to make a few comments on 1 Timothy 3.

In 1 Timothy 3, Paul expounds upon the qualifications of an Elder – the governing authority in the local church. They are as follows:

“The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God’s church? He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.” (1 Timothy 3:1-7 ESV)

The most obvious thing mentioned here is the issue of an Elder (“overseer” in this translation) being the “husband” of one wife. But this has been accused of being somewhat ambiguous, so I will simply say that it seems obvious that a female would not qualify.

The more important focus, in my estimation, is that an Elder is suppose to “manage” his house well. The word here is from the Greek *Proistemi* and it means to “superintend, preside over” or as the King James Version says “rule”. One must at least concede that, according to God’s design, man is supposed to be the head of the house. If the wife is ruling the home this would be opposed to God’s design.

“Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.” (Ephesians 5:22–28 ESV)

Certainly if a woman were ruling her house, this would be out of step with Ephesians 5. And this is exactly what is called for the Elder to do in I Timothy 3. One may argue that a widow, or a single woman, “rules” her home, and may do so well. But the normative situation, of man and woman, is certainly in view here – especially since the marriage covenant has already been inferred in the issue of being a “husband of one wife”.

The point is that the position of Elder is one that is clearly a position assigned to men only. But, in light of the clear Scriptural testimony, what verses are used to dispute what has been clearly said? Most often there is an erroneous appeal to the verses that speak to the spiritual equality of all believers.

“For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” (Galatians 3:27–28 ESV)

And others may seek a creationary mandate as well and appeal to Genesis.

“Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.” (Genesis 1:26–27 ESV)

The argument goes something like this: “A woman is created in God’s image, she is also in Christ, so her gender should not be an issue when it comes to authority.” But this argument is fallacious from its very inception. First of all, the person is comparing apples to oranges. Spiritual equality and positional authority do not even begin to be in the same category. This is tantamount to saying that if you have a saved parent and a saved child then there can be no authoritative relationship anymore, because the two are equal in

Christ. What kind of homes would we see if that were the case?

This argument is also, in a way, an attack upon Christ. For the woman who says that her being under the positional headship of her husband somehow makes her “inferior” to her husband must look at Christ before she says this. Christ, when He came to this earth, was under the positional headship of the Father. Yet at the same time He was not inferior to the Father.

Finally, there have been appeals to Scripture passages wherein we see women apparently “teaching” men. The most notable being Priscilla and Aquila teaching Apollos.

“Now a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was an eloquent man, competent in the Scriptures. He had been instructed in the way of the Lord. And being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus, though he knew only the baptism of John. He began to speak boldly in the synagogue, but when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him and explained to him the way of God more accurately.” (Acts 18:24–26 ESV)

It should be immediately mentioned that Priscilla and Aquila are always mentioned as a team, sometimes with his name first, and sometimes with her name first, which indicates nothing save the writer’s preference of whose name to place first.

One thing is very apparent in this passage, and it is that Pricilla and Aquila “took” Apollos and taught him. Theirs was not a proclamation that was made before the church, but in a personal encounter. In no place do we see Pricilla acting in a way that would be usurping the authority of her husband. In fact, their ministry was likely very complementary. But I am sure that she also understood the inherent authority of her husband, and the positional authority of men in the home and the church. It is very much like when Jennifer and I used to host home Bible studies --- while we both participated, there was no usurping of authority.

Men and women are absolutely spiritually equal. But this does not deny the positional authority God has set up in the home and in the church. Ultimately what we must realize is that God’s church has been set in a specific order, which has been arranged by God Himself. When we question His arrangement, we are questioning His ability to make sound judgments concerning the governance of His people. Men and women are spiritually equal before God. But in His providence He has assigned roles for us to carry out in His Kingdom. Only when we see our roles, and seek to fill our roles, can we say that we are living in obedience to God and to His will.

Chapter 5

A Biblically Functioning Church: What are the Responsibilities for the Office of Elder?

Many years ago, I was sitting in the church fellowship hall during a general board meeting. For a while, God had been working on my heart over the idea that – perhaps – I should pursue “Pastoral” ministry. It wasn't as if he was speaking to me audibly. But there was a returning conviction in my heart, and in the heart of my spouse, that this was where God wanted me to be. This conviction was being echoed by others in the church who were recognizing my call to ministry.

During that meeting, something extraordinary happened. The chairman of the meeting began to outline the direction of the church for the next five years of ministry. And in that meeting God's calling of me to ministry was confirmed --- and the next morning I signed up for my first Seminary class on the Old Testament book of Numbers.

Now, I share that story with you because, I want you to know that when I entered school, I didn't know a lot about the ministry. I didn't know of the difficulties, the trials, the joys. All I knew, at the time, was that God had convicted my heart to pursue Him and preach His Word – and I obeyed.

But, over time, the understanding of the responsibilities and the requirements of the position of being a pastor began to really sink in. The more I learned about what God had called me to, the more overwhelming it all seemed.

Plus, I began to look at what the church was doing in the Bible, and what the modern church often does today, and I noticed that the two don't always

agree. So it began to really encourage me in the direction of preaching God's truth, from His Word, and accepting the responsibility of leading the church to being biblical. I knew, and still know today, that a truly biblical church must have biblical leadership. Mark Dever has noted that “If Christ gave Himself for the church, identifies with the church as with His own body, continues to care and provide for the church, and will ultimately take the church as His bride, those who shepherd it have a high and holy responsibility.”

You see, this is what I have learned in my short time in the ministry. This job – the job of pastor – is an immense responsibility. And what I have also learned is that I am not the only one who shares in this responsibility. God never intended that pastoral leadership be a “one-man-show”. The elders are all in a pastoral role in the church. So this responsibility of watch-care over the church rests, not in myself alone, but in the plurality of godly men whom the Scripture calls Elders.

Eldership is MORE than a simple board position, or a honorary title. It is a position of Pastoral leadership in the local church, shared by Godly men who are called by God to lead using His Word as their guide.

THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF AN ELDER

“The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task.” (1 Timothy 3:1 ESV)

The word “overseer” comes from the word “episkopos”. The root word means “investigation” or “inspection”. It has inherent within it the military idea of holding an inspection. Those who have served in the military certainly remember the days when your superiors would come in and ensure that your beds were made properly, your lockers were organized, and your uniform was properly pressed and put on.

Well, this is the idea that is at the root of this word. The idea of “seeing that things are done properly.” The word “overseer”, then, speaks of one whose job it is to “ensure that things are done properly”. A few chapters ago we noted that in the Church things are to be done two ways: “Decently” and “In order.” Well, this office is in place to ensure that this is done.

Within Scripture, “Episkopos” is synonymous with the word “presbuteros” which means elder, or one who presides over the assembly. Both words are used interchangeably by Paul.

"This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you— if anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife, and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination. For an overseer, as God’s steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain." (Titus 1:5–7 ESV)

Both words indicate the primary office of oversight in the local church; which is called simply the

office of “elder.” Some churches have seen these two words as being different offices, so they have Bishops (episkopos) that oversee an area, and presbyters (elders) in the church. But we see in this passage that clearly Paul indicates that the phrases can be used interchangeably. Presbuteros speaks of what the office holder is: He is an elder. Episkopos speaks of what the office holder does: He is to oversee. So, it is clear that the office of “overseer” and “elder” are one and the same office – thus most churches simply refer to the office as that of “Elder.”

But to truly understand the role of this office, it is important that we understand the biblical imagery that accompanies it. The imagery is that of a “Shepherd.” In Acts 20, Paul called the elders of the church of Ephesus together (Acts 20:17). In his address to them, Paul makes an important statement:

“Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.” (Acts 20:28 ESV)

The elders are not spoken of here as corporate executives. They are NOT CEOs. They are NOT pastoral advisors. The elders are SHEPHERDS. They are PASTORS! Thus, the primary responsibility of the elders is the oversight of the “flock” (the congregation). In this, an elder is responsible for three important duties.

Protecting the Flock

“Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers,

to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish everyone with tears.” (Acts 20:28–31 ESV)

This is one of the most important roles of the Elder – to ensure that the flock does not get infested by FALSE teaching. They are to stand guard in the church, ensuring that whatever is taught is in accordance with the Word. Because if this role is not performed, the church can be open season to anyone with a strange doctrine they want to promote.

My best friend growing up was a fellow named Jaret Rice. Jaret went on to become a CPA, and me a minister. Jaret handles all of my finances, and helps to insure that, if and when I make an investment, that it is a good one. Now, why do I go to Jaret on issues of finance? Because he has devoted himself to knowing that field. I know some things about finance, but not at all what he knows – thus he is there to PROTECT me when the wolves come in and try to separate me from my money.

Now, I hope you see the connection. Elders are responsible to the church to ensure that when the wolves come in and try to separate people's minds from the true doctrine of the Bible, they are there to stand in the way. It is for this reason that the elders must be men who have a sound and strong knowledge of the Bible. A person in this role cannot have a simply

cursory understanding of Scripture. And he cannot be one who is unsure of his faith. He must be one who can not only articulate what he believes, but also can defend it when the wolves come.

A few years ago a book entitled “The Davinci Code” came out, and I asked for a week long teaching session on the dangers of it. Some accused me of being “paranoid” saying that it is not really that dangerous. But I set up the teaching anyway, because I believed it was my responsibility to let people know when false truths are being touted as truth. The opening pages of “The Davinci Code” stated 'the facts stated in this book are based on truth'. I felt like I had a responsibility to let the congregation know that this was a lie, intended by the author, to undermine people's confidence in their faith. You see, this is the job of the elder – to protect the flock.

“He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.” (Titus 1:9 ESV)

Sadly, in the church today, so often the idea of rebuke has been lost. We have become so afraid of confrontation that most pastors and elders just stand by as sin and false teaching infiltrates the church. Consider this analogy: I would not stand by and watch as someone broke into my house and stole my belongings – or tried to hurt my daughter. I would stand between her and any danger that may come through the door. Neither should the elders stand by and tolerate a person who is robbing the church of its purity. The elders, like a good father over his home,

are charged with the spiritual protection of the church. They must stand between the onslaught of error in the world, and the sanctity of the church and say, "You've come far enough."

Feeding the Flock

"Feeding" speaks of giving the congregation spiritual food for their nourishment. This food comes from the Word in the form of solid biblical preaching and teaching. This is another reason why an elder must know the Word well enough to teach it. You cannot feed with what you don't possess. Likewise you cannot teach what you do not know. An elder must know the Word, and be able to give its understanding to others. He cannot be a person ignorant of Scripture - He must have a grasp of the fundamentals of the faith. And he must be able to articulate it (not necessarily in the classroom, or from the pulpit, but in a way that instructs, even if it is one-to-one discipleship). Furthermore, he cannot just know and teach the parts that make us feel good, but the whole counsel of God.

"Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all of you, for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God." (Acts 20:26-27 ESV)

The word "shrink" (Gr. Hoopostello) means to "timidly withdraw" or "hide in fear". Paul said, "I wasn't AFRAID to preach it all." But why would anyone be afraid? Because there are parts of the Bible that are offensive. It is fearful to discuss it all, because people get upset. But the elders cannot have this fear. They

must be able to feed the flock from the whole counsel of God.

Some of the worst tasting stuff in the world is the best for you. My son hates the taste of medicine when he has a fever. But that medicine can bring him back to health, so he has to have it, and I have to be the bad guy who gives it to him. Now, a person watching, who didn't understand the value of the medicine, might watch me feed my child the elixir and say, "He is a mean parent." But a person who understands the reason for the medicine know that it is not being fed for spite, but out of love. An elder understands that true love of the flock means – at times – to proclaim truth, even when it is not tasty.

Leading the Flock

We have noted already in this series that Christ is the Head of the church. His Word is to be the governing voice of the church. And the elders bear the responsibility of interpreting that Word. They are then to lead the church using the Bible as the sole, infallible rule of faith and practice. That is how the Church structure works as a theocracy – Christ governs His Church through His Word which is taught and applied by the Elders. This is why the word "overseer" is used. The elders are to oversee the program of the church, and ensure that it is in accordance with Scripture.

Remember that the word "overseer" comes from the root word for "inspection" and "investigation." The Elders are to oversee the church, ensuring that it is in line with Scripture. This is also why the image of "shepherd" is employed. A shepherd is the one who

goes out ahead of the sheep, and leads them in the proper direction.

“So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.” (1 Peter 5:1–3 ESV)

In biblical language, shepherding a group of people means to lead or to govern. It was used of David, as he reigned as King in Israel.

“Then all the tribes of Israel came to David at Hebron and said, “Behold, we are your bone and flesh. In times past, when Saul was king over us, it was you who led out and brought in Israel. And the Lord said to you, ‘You shall be shepherd of my people Israel, and you shall be prince over Israel.’” So all the elders of Israel came to the king at Hebron, and King David made a covenant with them at Hebron before the Lord, and they anointed David king over Israel.” (2 Samuel 5:1–3 ESV)

“He chose David his servant and took him from the sheepfolds; from following the nursing ewes he brought him to shepherd Jacob his people, Israel his inheritance. With upright heart he shepherded them and guided them with his skillful hand.” (Psalms 78:70–72 ESV)

So, we see that David's role as King was described as a "shepherding" position. This, of course, is not to say that Elders are "kings." In fact, they are far from it! But they are shepherd leaders who are called by God to lead the Church. Another keyword used of Elder is steward.

"For an overseer, as God's steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain." (Titus 1:7 ESV)

The word Steward means "household manager". This is someone who has official responsibility over the master's belongings. Most of us are familiar with this word, as we talk about practicing "stewardship" over our finances, understanding that all wealth comes from God, as it is all His, and we are just managers of it. Likewise, the Elders are the managers of God's household. They have been given the responsibility to make sure that the church is managed properly. This is why there are such strict moral requirements for this office. An elder must be a person who can be trusted with a unique role of leadership within the church. An elder must not be person whose trustworthiness is uncertain. He must have the confidence of the church, and the other elders. Because together, the elders are to lead the church.

Furthermore, the man who accepts this role must understand that he will be accountable to God for how he leads it.

"Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will

have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.” (Hebrews 13:17 ESV)

Note that they will “give account” of how they watched over the souls of the people. How they protected. How they fed. How they led. All these will be a part of the judgment upon a man who is called to this office. This is why James says “Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness” (James 3:1 ESV).

Who are the primary teachers in the church? The elders; and they will be held to a higher standard. Thus, any man who feels called to this position must understand his God-given responsibility to lead properly. He must understand that he is opening himself up to a stricter judgment, as he will give account not only for how he managed his own life – but the life of the church. Any man not ready for that responsibility is not ready for the position of Elder.

Meeting the Flock's Practical Needs

As we will see in a future study, many of the needs of the flock are delegated to the deacons, the God-called servants of the church, so that the elders can devote themselves to the study and proclamation of the Word (Acts 6:1–6). Yet, there are still to come practical things that the elders are called to do. James teaches us that elders are to pray for and anoint the sick.

“Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.” (James 5:14 ESV)

Many of you have seen us do this – if one in the church is sick, we ask that they come and be prayed over by our elders.

Acts 20:35 also teaches that the elders are to help the weak. But who are the weak? I believe the “weak” could include:

The bereaved.

I have done many funerals in my short time as minister, and I can tell you that grief is something that everyone handles differently. An Elder is called to come along side these people, to minister to them, to comfort them, and offer words of encouragement at what may be the most difficult moment they have ever faced.

People in need of counsel.

An elder must be able to give counsel from the Word of God. This does not mean they are to be professional psychologists. It also does not mean they will always have the solution to every problem – in fact I personally have no problem referring people to a more experienced Christian counselor when a problem arises that I feel is beyond my scope. Ultimately, in counseling, what Elders do is they point people to the Word of God. They know the Word, so that they can

counsel with the Word. And they trust the Word to be the guide in all types of situations.

The suffering and afflicted.

This would include obviously those who are sick. But there are also those who are suffering under sin and are afflicted by a compulsion for some sinful desire. The Elder must bring the Word to bear in these situations. In one sense, the Word comforts. In another sense, it convicts. The Elder must know how to use it in either way.

Elders have a responsibility to all of these--to be able to take the Word to them and use it as God's voice of comfort or conviction. This, again, shows why an Elder must be one who can divide the Word properly. How can a man bring comfort and/or conviction with the Word if He doesn't know the Word? Simply stated, he cannot.

Now, when we look at these responsibilities, we realize that they are heavy to say the least. This leads to the important question, "How does an Elder fulfill his responsibilities?" An Elder is a man dedicated to three disciplines:

PRAYER

There are no words that can truly describe the importance of prayer in ministry. I wish I could describe some of the times that I have watched God move mountains in ministry in accordance with the prayers He had laid on my heart. Do you know why prayer is the first discipline of the Elder? It shows forth

where he places his dependency. It shows that he doesn't depend upon his own human wisdom to govern the church or to seek righteousness. But that He depends solely upon God. A.W. Pink wrote that "Prayer is not so much an act as it is an attitude—an attitude of dependency, dependency upon God."

PREPARATION

What do I mean by preparation? Well, we have learned so far that his primary responsibilities depend upon his knowing the Word. Thus, he must be a person who is in the Word, preparing Himself by gaining insight and understanding. It excites my heart when I get a call from a fellow elder who is having questions on a passage of Scripture, and wants to know what I think about it --- because this tells me that this person is in the Word at that moment! He is doing what God has called us to do, be in the Word, that we might know it.

PROCLAMATION

An elder doesn't learn and grow in the Word just to keep what he has learned to himself. His knowledge is not for self-gratification, but for edification of the body. He studies so that he might proclaim what he has learned to others, whether it be publicly through preaching and teaching, or privately through counseling or discipling. Again, he is not just a student of the Word, he is also a teacher. In essence, to fully fulfill his responsibilities as an elder, he must be dedicated to study, prayer, and preaching/teaching.

So based upon what we have seen regarding their responsibilities, it is obvious that eldership is not just a simple board position. It is not just an honorary title, or a position to pray publicly. It is a position of great responsibility within the church.

“When church eldership is viewed as a status or board position in the church there will be plenty of volunteers. When it is viewed as a demanding, pastoral work, few people will rush to volunteer.” (Alexander Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, p.7)

Someone might say, rather pessimistically, that I am expecting too much of the office of Elder. One might think, “You can't expect laymen to rear their families, work all day, and shepherd a local church.” But if you think about it, many men rear their families, work, and still are able to give substantial time to community service, clubs and athletic activities.” In fact, some of the largest cults have built their ungodly empires on nothing but volunteer effort. My son's football coach gives at least twenty hours a week of devoted time to the team, with a full time job and three children. The truth is it is positively amazing what one can accomplish when he is motivated to work toward a goal they love. That's what Eldership must be, a labor of love.

In the final analysis, Biblical eldership is a pastoral position. It is not simply a board position. It is a position of shared pastoral leadership. It is the group within the church whose job it is to protect, to feed, to lead and to meet the needs of God's people. This is done through dedication to prayer, preparation, and proclamation of the Word. A lofty (yet, as the Scripture

calls it 'noble') task, indeed. One that every Elder candidate must be called to fulfill. When we, as a church, ordain a man to this role, we should feel confident that he understands the depth and breadth of his responsibilities; only then will we be a biblically functioning church.

Chapter 6

A Biblically Functioning Church: What are the Requirements for the Office of Elder?

If the elder is essentially a pastor in the church, then the moral requirements that we have for him should be no less stringent than those we use to choose a senior pastor. Allow me to reiterate that: The same requirements used for choosing a senior pastor should apply to any elder candidate. Sadly, however, this is often not the case. Jerome, in his writing to a young elder named Nepotian (AD 345–419) wrote “many build churches nowadays; their walls and pillars of glowing marble, their ceilings glittering with gold, their alters studded with jewels. Yet, to the choice of Christ’s ministers, no heed is paid.”

We cannot afford, as a church, to be lackadaisical in our qualifications for the role of elder. Their positions cannot be seen as simply “honorary” or “board-like”. This position must be kept for those who meet the requirements.

But what are the requirements we should expect in every candidate for eldership? The Scripture describes three types:

The moral / character requirements

The ability requirements

The motivational requirements

These requirements are found outlined succinctly for us in Paul’s first epistle to Timothy.

“The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled,

respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church? He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil." (1 Timothy 3:1-7 ESV)

THE MORAL / CHARACTER REQUIREMENTS

An elder is to be morally above reproach. This phrase means to be "unrebukable". It does not mean to be "perfect" as if it did, no one would qualify. This means to be in a position where no one is able to lay hold of him or assail him because of his lifestyle. For an analogy, it is helpful to consider the difference between a flagpole and a coatrack. A flagpole is a smooth rod upon which nothing can be hung. But a coatrack has all these pieces sticking out, made to hang things upon. This is what it means for an elder to be above reproach - he is to be like a flagpole, which no accusation of sin can be hung upon. This does not mean that he will not, at times, receive accusations, but the elder is one upon whom these accusations have no place to hang, and inevitably fall away.

In 1 Timothy 3, Paul doesn't just say "above reproach", but after this he gives us an outline of a few examples of what this means. He gives positive and negative examples.

Positive Examples of Being Above Reproach:

1. Husband of One Wife

- Literally this is a “one woman man”
- Gr. Mian Gunaikon Andra
- The primary thrust of this is that the elder candidate be a “faithful” husband.
- He is not to be promiscuous, or polygamous.
- Ultimately, a man's commitment to his marriage is a good indicator of his commitment to Christ – thus the requirement to faithfulness in marriage.

2. Sober–Minded

- Gr. Nephaleos
- The thrust of this word is the idea of being “temperate”
- Other translations use the word “vigilant”
- An elder is not to be a man who is “watchful”
First over himself.
Second, over the flock.
- He is not to be one who allows his senses to be dulled or deceived by carelessness.
- He is ever focused on being alert to the situations facing the church, and then deal with them soberly.

3. Self–Controlled

- Gr. Sophron
 - This word means essentially to be “prudent”
 - It is VERY close to the one preceding it.
 - Ultimately, it speaks to wisdom.
- An elder must be characterized by being both reasonable and straightforward.
In his judgments, he must show that he is wise.
- A person who is fickle or unstable or who lacks sound judgment would not qualify here.

4. Respectable

- Gr. Kosmios
- Literally it means to be “well arranged”
- It literally means that an elder must have his life in order.

The word “integrity” comes to mind.

A person of integrity is a person who “has it together”

To lack integrity is to “disintegrate”

- Thus, a person whose life is disintegrated, or simply a mess, would not qualify as elder.

5. Hospitable

- Gr. Philoxenos
- Literally this means a “lover of outsiders”
- Elders are not to be cold towards strangers or visitors.
- They are to be first to extend the warm hand of fellowship, in a way that is gracious, friendly and loving.
- A person who is unreceptive to outsiders would not be qualified to be an elder.

Negative Examples of Being Above Reproach:

1. Not a Drunkard

- Gr. Paroinos
- Literally means to not be addicted to wine.
- Some translations say “given to wine”
- This is a person who is enslaved to his drinking.
- A description is found in Proverbs 23:29-35

2. Not Violent

- Gr. Plektes
- Literally it means “ready for a blow / punch”

- This speaks of a person who loses control easily and is ready to throw punches.
- Certainly a man who is abusive towards his wife or children would be immediately disqualified.
- But it also describes one whose ability to control his anger is not in check, since uncontrolled outbursts often erupt in violent behavior.
- Paul actually gives the opposite characteristic here, which is 'gentleness' so as to remove all doubt what type of character is being described.
He is to be NOT violent
Instead he IS to be gentle.

3. Not Quarrelsome

- Gr. Aamachos
- Literally it means to be “not invincible”
- It puts the picture in the mind of an “immovable” person.
- This is a person who is always finding a fight, even when there isn't one.
- He is the perpetually negative voice, always finding a reason to disagree...and never allowing himself to budge an inch.

4. Not a Lover of Money

- Gr. Aphilarguron
- This is literally a person who “loves silver”
Philos is Greek for love.
Argur is Greek for Silver.
- It is the foundation of the idea of being “greedy”
- This is a person who allows the desire for financial gain cloud out his desire for spiritual gain.
- Anyone whose primary goal is prestige, power, control, or even flattery is after “base gain” and would not qualify as an elder.

So, we see a man who is above reproach is one who is faithful to his wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable and hospitable. He is also not a drunkard, not violent, not quarrelsome and not greedy. All of these, together, make up a person who is “above reproach” which is the first moral and character requirement. The second is that he be spiritually mature.

“He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil.” (1 Timothy 3:6 ESV)

The Greek here is “neofuton” and it means “newly planted”. One of the most dangerous things you can do is take a spiritually immature believer and place him in charge of the spiritual life of others. Paul says here that he runs the danger of becoming “puffed up”. The Greek also means “clouded” or “blinded”. If a new Christian were suddenly placed in responsibility to an entire congregation, the ease of being blinded by the authority of his position and falling into the cavern of pride would be very easy. Only a person who has been a believer long enough to exhibit spiritual maturity should be called to this office.

This does not refer specifically to age. A person can be old physically, and still be young spiritually. Spiritual maturity comes from length and breadth in the Word. So, we see the moral / character requirements are two-fold: An elder must be above reproach and spiritually mature.

THE ABILITY REQUIREMENTS

A man must exhibit certain abilities to qualify for the office of Elder. They are:

The Ability to Manage his Family.

“He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil.” (1 Timothy 3:6 ESV)

The Puritans referred to the family as a “little church”. The family, not the corporation, is the model for the church. The elder is not to be the CEO. He is to be like a father, who manages his household well. Being a good businessman does not always make one a good elder.

The Ability to Teach

“Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach.” (1 Timothy 3:2 ESV)

The Greek word translated “able to teach” is Didaktikos, and it means to be skillful in teaching. This is one requirement that, for the elder, stands above all else. This does not mean that he must be in a position of formal teaching or preaching. But what it does insist is that he have a strong knowledge of the Word – that he is one who has the ability to use the Word in his administrative duties within the church. A man who is unskilled in the Word is not qualified as Elder, even if

he were to fulfill all other requirements. That he be a person skillful in handling the Word is paramount.

The Ability to Defend the Faith

Not only must an elder be able to teach, but he must also be able to recognize and rebuke false teaching.

“He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.(Titus 1:9 ESV)

Simply stated, an elder is to be a man who can fight away the savage wolves who teach false doctrine. This, again, goes back to knowledge of the Word. A person who has but a surface knowledge of Scripture could not possibly fulfill this requirement. The elder is to be both the teacher and the guardian of sound doctrine in the local church body.

THE MOTIVATIONAL REQUIREMENTS

There are certainly many reasons why someone might seek the office of elder. But the one who does should realize two things regarding motivation:

It is a God-called work

“The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task.” 1 Tim. 3:1, ESV)

The word aspire is the Greek word Oregetai, and it means to reach out after something. Desire is the Greek word Epithymei, and it means to set the heart upon. Noble is the Greek word Kalos, which means beautiful, excellent, admirable. So, if anyone 'reaches out after' eldership, he has 'set his heart' upon 'excellent work'. This indicates that the desire for the office of elder begins in the heart of the person. God has placed within their heart a “burning desire” to proclaim His Word.

Someone may ask, “Boy, with all these responsibilities and requirements for elder, who in the world would ever want this job?” The answer is, the God-called person. Furthermore, it will not just be a desire. It will be a burning in the bones. He will be like Jeremiah who said, “If I say, “I will not mention him, or speak any more in his name,” there is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot” (Jeremiah 20:9). That burning desire to lead God's people with God's Word is the call of God.

I have heard some say that if a person 'wants' to be an elder, then that should disqualify them. What they mean is that if a person is constantly seeking positional authority and personal gain then they are not qualified for the office, and they are correct in that respect. But a desire for the role is not a prohibition, but rather a prerequisite! A man must be called of God, and recognize that call with an internal desire.

It is a voluntary work

“Shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly.” (1 Peter 5:2 ESV)

No one should be forced or coerced into the position of elder simply to “fill a spot”. Nor should someone remain in this role who is not there willingly. This is because no one who views the spiritual care of the congregation as an unwanted burden will be able to fully and biblically fulfill his duties.

Ultimately, what we should understand is that biblical eldership is a qualified plurality of pastors who shepherd the church of God as a team. They are the God-ordained overseers of the church. Which is why such stringent requirements must be both met and maintained by those called to that position.

Chapter 7

A Biblically Functioning Church: What are the Responsibilities and Requirements for the Office of Deacon?

The title “deacon” seems to have as many different meanings and connotations as there are churches who bestow it. In some churches, the deacon's function as the official managing board of the church. In others, the deacons function like elders, as the primary spiritual leaders of the church. Still in others, the title deacon is strictly honorary, and it has no real responsibilities attached. In these churches, the title is likened to a badge of honor. And most anyone who has been attending church regularly becomes a deacon, but in the Bible the office of deacon is not like any of these modern usages. In the Bible, the title deacon does not describe a person who is in authority. Nor does it describe a person who simply “attends” worship. No, the biblical role of the deacon is one of dedicated service. The Greek word for deacon is “diakonos”, which means one who serves. So, it is apparent that to fully understand what it is to be a deacon, one must understand what it is to be a servant of Christ and to His Church. In this chapter, we are going to examine both the responsibilities and the requirements for this sacred role of servant in the local church.

THE RESPONSIBILITIES

To understand the responsibilities of the deacons, it is appropriate that we look at how and why this office was originally established. We see this in Acts chapter 6, even though there is some debate as to whether these are the first deacons, or an example of a 'committee' that was established to fulfill a duty. I would argue that, even if this story doesn't use the title deacon for these men, that this is a wonderful example of what deacons do (i.e., their primary responsibilities).

“Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, “It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.” And what they said pleased the whole gathering, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands on them. And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.” (Acts 6:1–7 ESV)

Now, what is in view here? There is a complaint about service in the church---who is getting service and who is not. The twelve, which were the apostles (the leaders of the church), called to the assembly and made an important statement. Effectively, they said that they have an important job to do. What was that job? The preaching of the Word. I hear many people jokingly say how good it must be to be a preacher, because you only work two days a week, but this isn't true. The ministry is a daily task - primarily one of study and preparation. The leaders were saying that they could not step away from this PRIMARY role of Bible teacher to be a table server.

Now, some may take that as being prideful, as if they believe themselves to be “too good” to serve tables, but this is not the case. They did, however, see their work as Bible preachers to be more important than anything else, and they refused to allow anything to impede it. As a result, the assembly was to nominate seven men to be examined and commissioned to serve the congregation, but they were not to be just people chosen at random. They were to be (1) of good reputation, (2) full of the Spirit, and (3) wise. These only would qualify as those who would be able to serve the church in lieu of the elders.

This is where the responsibilities of the deacons begin to come into focus, when we start to see their relationship to the elders. In previous chapters, we learned that the elders have the responsibility to protect, feed, lead and meet the needs of the flock. Any one of these would be a demanding task, and the elders must fulfill them all.

So, then, how does the elder accomplish all that needs to be done? Through the ministry of the deacons of the church. You see, the deacons are the ministers of the church. Their job is to be willing and able to serve the church under the direction of the elders. And in doing so, they provide the elders the ability to oversee the church and administer the Word. As a result, to make a list of deacon responsibilities is difficult because the responsibilities of the deacon is the service of the church.

The church is a living body, not a lifeless entity. The needs of the church grow and change over time. There will always be a need for hospital calls, but there

may come a time when that need is greater, and other times when it is not so great. The building will always need maintenance, but there will be times when it needs more maintenance than others. There will always be a need to assist those in the congregation who have needs, but there will be times when this is greater than others.

Ultimately, the responsibilities of the deacon are not as clearly enunciated in Scripture as those of elder, and I believe this is by design. I do not think the Lord wanted this position to be pigeonholed. I believe that the position is clearly stated in the broad title: servant. The deacon is to serve the church wherever and however the church needs to be served. They are the “need-fillers” of the church. When there is a need for a person to be visited, they fill the need. When there is a need to prepare assistance for a grieving family, they fill the need. When there is a need to mop a floor or trim a tree, they fill the need. This is why I believe that a person has to be just as gifted to be a deacon as an elder, just in a different way. Because a servant-heart is a gift from God, the God-inspired desire to fill the needs of the church is an indication, in my mind, of a call to the role of deacon. Service, to Christ and the Church, is the primary responsibility of the Deacon.

THE REQUIREMENTS

“Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain. They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless. Their wives likewise must

be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things. Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well. For those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.” (1 Timothy 3:8–13 ESV)

What we should immediately recognize is that the list mirrors the requirements for elder in many ways. In fact, the only primary difference in the requirements is that the deacon is nowhere commanded to have the gift of teaching, as the elder does, because the role of deacon is not an authoritative, teaching role. It is a role of service.

Furthermore, it is wrong to think that these requirements are any less binding than those for elder. Notice that the passage uses the term “likewise”. This connects what is said about elders to what is said about deacons. And it shows us that deacon requirements are just as binding as those for elder. Like the office of elder, I want to break these down into categories. We will look at the personal and spiritual character that is necessary for this office.

Personal Requirements

The first word used is "dignified", which in the Greek is *semnos*. It could literally be rendered as reverend. This speaks of honorable character---a person worthy of both honor and respect. He must be serious about the things that are important and he must be held in high esteem by the congregation. This is very close to the statements in Acts 6 where the the

people are told to find men of good reputation. What we are seeing here is that the person chosen for this office of servant must be a person whose manner and conduct has been such that the congregation affirms it. Any person whose actions or character would be not be worthy of admiration and respect, would not qualify for this position.

The second requirement is that he be not double tongued. Here, the Greek word is dilogos, which means two-worded. It has within it the idea of saying one thing to one person then the opposite to another. It is the Greek equivalent to the english expression, "He talks out of both sides of his mouth". A deacon must not be a person who says one thing and means the opposite. This is a prohibition against playing politics. He must not be a person who panders or deceives with his speech. He must obey the words of Jesus.

"Let what you say be simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything more than this comes from evil. (Matthew 5:37 ESV)

Ultimately, a deacon must be known as a man of truth. Duplicity, double-dealing, or deliberate deceptiveness would disqualify a person from being a deacon. This also forbids gossip, as he cannot speak nicely to a person to their face and then poorly of them behind their back.

The next requirement is that he be not "addicted to much wine." The Greek phrase means "not given over or devoted to much wine". It holds a very similar connotation as to the phrase "not a drunkard" given in the requirements for elder. Again, it speaks of a

person who is enslaved to their drinking. Someone might say, "But isn't this a standard for all believers?" The answer is yes, as are most every standard for both elder and deacon. The issue here is that this person who is being considered for deacon has been tested, and his life is NOT governed by any addiction. Ultimately, a deacon must have self-control, and not be controlled by the intoxication of strong drink.

The next requirement is that he "be not greedy for dishonest gain." Here the Greek term is *ai scroxrerdeis*, and it means shameful gain. A deacon must not be a greedy person, set on personal, shameful gain. There is a right way to attain what is needed for life. But a person set on shameful gain is not concerned with right or wrong, they are only focused on gaining something for themselves. This is similar to the admonishment to elders to not be "lovers of money." Ultimately, money is not an evil thing, but the love of money is.

"For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs." (1 Timothy 6:10 ESV)

A person who is obsessed with material gain or advantage would not qualify for this office. This office is about service to others, not gain for oneself.

The deacon must also be the "husband of one wife." Literally this Greek phrase is a "one woman man", the exact same requirement as given to elders. The primary thrust of this is that the deacon candidate be a "faithful" husband. He is not to be promiscuous,

or polygamous. As we learned when studying this requirement for eldership, a man's commitment to his marriage is a good indicator of his commitment to Christ, thus the requirement to faithfulness in marriage.

Another requirement is that deacons be "good household managers." A good rendering of the original is that he be an excellent manager of his own home and children. A person who cannot properly manage his home ought not be given responsibilities in the church. This is simply prudent. Why would the church assign a deacon to ensure responsibilities be performed in the church, when the duties of the home are being left unfulfilled. This would not only be a potential problem within the church, but it is also not putting the importance of the home where it needs to be. If a person only has time to administer in one area, the home should come first. If they cannot do that, they certainly cannot administer service in the church.

Spiritual Requirements

Concerning his spiritual condition, the Bible declares that the deacon must "hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience." Now, what does this mean? What is the "mystery of the faith?" At the end of 1 Timothy 3, Paul refers to the mystery of godliness when he writes in verse 16, "And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen by angels, preached among the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up in glory." In this verse, Paul uses the phrase "the mystery of godliness" to refer to the Christian faith. Ultimately, what this is saying is that a

deacon must hold to faith in Christ as the only forgiveness for sins – the very object of the Christian message. He must also live in accordance with that faith. His faith must be with a clear conscience. This means his faith must be sincere. He cannot be a believer in word only, his deeds must match his profession. What this reminds us is that, though a deacon is not required to be a teacher, he must also not be ignorant of his faith. Deacons must be sound in their doctrine, holding their faith without any reservation. A person filled with doubt and uncertainty would not be a person fit for this office.

A deacon must also be tested to be "blameless." This Greek term is *anegklaitos*, means a person who cannot be called into account for sin. Unrebukable is the idea. The same idea that is given for elders in verse 2, when it says they are to be "above reproach." Remember, it does not mean to be "perfect." If it did, no one would qualify. This means to be in a position where no one is able to lay hold of him or assail him because of his lifestyle. He is a "flagpole" not a "coatrack".

John Calvin comments that a deacon "ought not to be marked by any disgrace that would detract from his authority. There will certainly not be found a man who is free from every fault, but it is one thing to be burdened with ordinary faults that do not hurt a man's reputation, because the most excellent men share them, but quite another to have a name that is held in infamy and besmirched by some scandalous disgrace. Thus, in order that the bishops may not lack authority, he gives charge that those who are chosen should be of good and honorable reputation, and free of any

extraordinary fault. Also, he is not merely directing Timothy as to the sort of men he should choose but he is reminding all who aspire to the office that they should carefully examine their own life”.

Note also that this must be "tested". The person must prove, over a period of time, that this is the true condition of his life. We are not to install a deacon, and then see if he is blameless. This should be determined before he is installed. Any person whose life is not consistently lived in a manner befitting the office, would not qualify.

The responsibilities of the deacons are to be the servants of the church in whatever capacity it needs. The requirements of the deacons is that they be examples both personally and spiritually to the congregation.

Chapter 8

A Biblically Functioning Church: How Does it Handle Discipline?

A short while back a church in Jacksonville made national news because of a scandal. Now, this scandal was not a pastor who was publicly caught in adultery, or a church financial secretary who was caught embezzling. No, this scandal was much, much worse. This church made national news because it decided to actually practice something called Church Discipline. Church Discipline is the Biblical process of removing a member publicly who has been found to be in habitual, unrepentant sin – had been given the opportunity to repent – and refused to do so. Now, it is not really scandalous for church to practice it. In fact, it is biblical. Yet this church and its pastor were dragged head-log through the mud by the media because of their commitment to this Scriptural practice. The reason is because in our world today, it seems that no one wants to be kept accountable for anything; especially for their sins.

Throughout the history of the church, discipline has been the method used for ensuring that the church be kept from sin and from false teaching. If a person were found teaching falsely, or in habitual sin, they were asked to repent. If they refused, they were removed. And in doing so, the church was protected.

Sadly, however, Church discipline is a concept that is not practiced much anymore. As a result, many (if not most) churches have become very much like the world outside. They harbor and allow all kinds of blatant sin in their midst, while either turning a blind eye or outrightly accepting the sinful behavior. In fact, for some, the very idea of a church that would call its membership to account regarding sin sounds awfully

legalistic and terribly out of vogue in this new age of “tolerance”.

Yet, if a church claims to be a biblically functioning church, and yet does not practice discipline among its membership, it is lying. This is because discipline is one of the commands given in Holy Scripture. In fact, it was so important, that Jesus Christ gave us the clearest presentation of its practice and purpose in His preaching ministry. In this chapter, the goal will be to show both why and how this practice is to be conducted in the church. My ultimately purpose being that we see that this is not just an option, but is a command for the biblically functioning church. We will begin our study in the book of Joshua.

“But the people of Israel broke faith in regard to the devoted things, for Achan the son of Carmi, son of Zabdi, son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took some of the devoted things. And the anger of the Lord burned against the people of Israel. (Joshua 7:1 ESV)

It might surprise some of you that I have decided to preach a sermon regarding church discipline from a text in the Old Testament. I mean, the OT is focused upon Israel. We do not even see the word “Church” until the New Testament. Furthermore, there are so many passages in the NT that address this subject specifically (i.e. Matt 18, I Corinthians 5, Titus 3). Why, then, would I begin this message in the Old Testament? Because today, my goal is to show you both sides of church discipline.

Church discipline is rightly view by most scholars as an act of grace. It is concerned, primarily, with the

restoration of the offending part. This, of course, is what both Jesus and Paul teach. And, throughout this message, I will expound upon the texts that describe how an offending brother is to be restored. But I wanted to begin the message today by explaining that the purpose of church discipline is actually two-fold. It is not only about the restoration of the sinner. It is also about the protection of the flock. Because of this, I wanted to begin in the OT with a narrative about how “sin in the camp” created a problem that ended up affecting the entire nation of Israel. Now, we began this morning by reading only a verse from Joshua 7. What I want to do is read the entire story and make comments as we go.

The context of this story is that the nation of Israel had just experienced a miraculous victory in the battle of Jericho. When the walls of Jericho fell, the command was that the “things devoted to destruction” not be touched, or else there would be trouble brought upon the entire camp of Israel (Josh 6:18). This was a clear and specific warning to the people, and it included the consequences for disobedience. Yet one man, Achan, did not heed this warning.

“But the people of Israel broke faith in regard to the devoted things, for Achan the son of Carmi, son of Zabdi, son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took some of the devoted things. And the anger of the Lord burned against the people of Israel.” (Joshua 7:1 ESV)

Note, first of all, that the sin of one has brought reproach upon all. This may seem unfair of God to do this. But what it teaches us is that every person shares a responsibility to the group as a whole. Often I hear it

said, “What business is it if I get drunk, get high, or engage in sexual sin etc.; I am only hurting myself”. But this is not true. Sin never hurts just the sinner --- sin reaches beyond the one person and affects entire families, entire communities, and even entire churches. You see, one person sinned here, Achan, but his sin ended up affecting the entire nation.

“Joshua sent men from Jericho to Ai, which is near Beth-aven, east of Bethel, and said to them, “Go up and spy out the land.” And the men went up and spied out Ai. And they returned to Joshua and said to him, “Do not have all the people go up, but let about two or three thousand men go up and attack Ai. Do not make the whole people toil up there, for they are few.” So about 3,000 men went up there from the people. And they fled before the men of Ai, and the men of Ai killed about thirty-six of their men and chased them before the gate as far as Shebarim and struck them at the descent. And the hearts of the people melted and became as water.” (Joshua 7:2-5 ESV)

Joshua and the people had just won the battle of Jericho. So they felt confident that the Lord was with them. So much so that they could take a smaller than usual army to fight against Ai. What they did not realize was that this time God was not with them. Their expectation of victory was not to be met, because there was sin in the camp.

“Then Joshua tore his clothes and fell to the earth on his face before the ark of the Lord until the evening, he and the elders of Israel. And they put dust on their heads. And Joshua said, “Alas, O Lord God, why have you brought this people over the Jordan at

all, to give us into the hands of the Amorites, to destroy us? Would that we had been content to dwell beyond the Jordan! O Lord, what can I say, when Israel has turned their backs before their enemies! For the Canaanites and all the inhabitants of the land will hear of it and will surround us and cut off our name from the earth. And what will you do for your great name?" (Joshua 7:6-9 ESV)

Joshua, like many leaders, is confused and discouraged. Why is it that the battle of Jericho was so decisively won by God's hand, and this city of Ai is to now be the insurmountable obstacle? Any pastor who has been in the ministry for any length of time knows something of the feeling Joshua is having. They begin strong. Ministry is flowing. Victory is occurring in so many areas. But then, as if some unseen block is put up, it seems that victory is stopped. And the question is, "What has brought about this defeat?"

"The Lord said to Joshua, "Get up! Why have you fallen on your face? Israel has sinned; they have transgressed my covenant that I commanded them; they have taken some of the devoted things; they have stolen and lied and put them among their own belongings. Therefore the people of Israel cannot stand before their enemies. They turn their backs before their enemies, because they have become devoted for destruction. I will be with you no more, unless you destroy the devoted things from among you." (Joshua 7:10-12 ESV)

Consider that last phrase: "I will be with you no more, unless..." I will be with you no more, unless you purge the sin from among you. Beloved, consider what

God is saying. He places the anointing of His victorious Holy Spirit upon His people. Yet, when unrepentant sin is in the camp, God's victorious Spirit is removed. In this, what do we learn? God refused to bless His people when they harbor unrepentant sin. God's command is that we REMOVE the sin from the camp. If this is not done, how could we expect to have the blessing of the Spirit's power?

“Get up! Consecrate the people and say, ‘Consecrate yourselves for tomorrow; for thus says the Lord, God of Israel, “There are devoted things in your midst, O Israel. You cannot stand before your enemies until you take away the devoted things from among you.” In the morning therefore you shall be brought near by your tribes. And the tribe that the Lord takes by lot shall come near by clans. And the clan that the Lord takes shall come near by households. And the household that the Lord takes shall come near man by man. And he who is taken with the devoted things shall be burned with fire, he and all that he has, because he has transgressed the covenant of the Lord, and because he has done an outrageous thing in Israel.” (Joshua 7:13-15 ESV)

God is here showing Joshua the method for taking care of the problem. God is laying out the pattern for purging the sin from the camp. Later we are going to examine the New Testament pattern for purging sin in the church. We will see what steps are to be taken for church discipline. But, for now, I want to make this note about this Old Testament passage: Because the sin has resulted in the deaths of others, the sin has become a capital offense in the eyes of God. We need to understand the gravity of the offense

to fully understand the gravity of the punishment God is about to give. Also, for those who think this is an example of God being different in the Old Testament, just remember that in the New Testament, Ananias and Sapphira suffered a very similar fate.

“So Joshua rose early in the morning and brought Israel near tribe by tribe, and the tribe of Judah was taken. And he brought near the clans of Judah, and the clan of the Zerahites was taken. And he brought near the clan of the Zerahites man by man, and Zabdi was taken. And he brought near his household man by man, and Achan the son of Carmi, son of Zabdi, son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, was taken. Then Joshua said to Achan, “My son, give glory to the Lord God of Israel and give praise to him. And tell me now what you have done; do not hide it from me.” And Achan answered Joshua, “Truly I have sinned against the Lord God of Israel, and this is what I did: when I saw among the spoil a beautiful cloak from Shinar, and 200 shekels of silver, and a bar of gold weighing 50 shekels, then I coveted them and took them. And see, they are hidden in the earth inside my tent, with the silver underneath.”(Joshua 7:16–21 ESV)

Hidden in the dirt below Achan's tent was the source of Israel's defeat. You know, we all try to cover our sin, as to hide it from others. Surely Joshua, and the other leaders did not know of Achan's stash of sinful materials. But two people knew: God and Achan. Perhaps Achan believed that by burying the stash, that even God would not see it. But God always knows about our sin. Sometimes only two people know about our private sins; ourselves and God. We fool only ourselves when we believe that God cannot see our sin.

We fool ourselves even more when we believe that our sins affect only ourselves.

“So Joshua sent messengers, and they ran to the tent; and behold, it was hidden in his tent with the silver underneath. And they took them out of the tent and brought them to Joshua and to all the people of Israel. And they laid them down before the Lord. And Joshua and all Israel with him took Achan the son of Zerah, and the silver and the cloak and the bar of gold, and his sons and daughters and his oxen and donkeys and sheep and his tent and all that he had. And they brought them up to the Valley of Achor. And Joshua said, “Why did you bring trouble on us? The Lord brings trouble on you today.” And all Israel stoned him with stones. They burned them with fire and stoned them with stones. And they raised over him a great heap of stones that remains to this day. Then the Lord turned from his burning anger. Therefore, to this day the name of that place is called the Valley of Achor.” (Joshua 7:22–26 ESV)

Someone might say, “Oh, what a terrible thing. How could God be so unmerciful?” But have we really considered the gravity of the sin before asking that question? Have we considered that multiple lives were lost in battle as a result of Achan's sin. At least 36 families were grieving. Multiple children were left fatherless. Multiple wives widowed. Multiple families destroyed. All because of this sin in the camp. Before we look to God as unmerciful in His punishment, our more appropriate gaze of disapproval should fall upon Achan. You see, Achan knew that what he was doing was sinful. And he was told there would be consequences. One might argue that he didn't

recognize the potential fallout from it; how could he know that his actions would bring about the deaths of so many? But this does not make his action of sin better, it actually makes it worse. You see, most people who practice sin have no real idea of how it will affect those around them, neither do they have genuine concern. Their primary concern is for the fulfilling of their own desires. Remember what Achan said: “when I saw among the spoil a beautiful cloak from Shinar, and 200 shekels of silver, and a bar of gold weighing 50 shekels, then I coveted them and took them” Achan followed the pattern of sin seen all through the bible. It begins with a look, then with a take, then with a disaster. We see this with Adam and Eve. We see this with David and Bathsheba. We see this here with Achan. Sin is all about satisfaction of the flesh, no matter the consequences.

You know I have never met a drug addict who, when sober, would not agree that drugs are bad for their health and hurt their family. There is a show called Intervention wherein people with drug addictions are brought before their families for help. In the interviews, almost without fail, the addict will say, “I know this hurts them; I know it is unhealthy”. But, when the desire for the “high” comes, all the concern for these things go away. This is how powerful sin is. It can capture a life and not let it go.

Ultimately, Achan was captured by the desire for his sin. He desired what his eyes saw without any real consideration for the consequences that would befall himself, or his family, or his nation. And they all suffered as a result. Here we have a very vivid and graphic picture of the disastrous potential of there

being sin in the camp. And it is one of the reasons why I believe that church discipline is so absolutely necessary. Habitual, unrepentant sin in that is left to fester in the church and not dealt with robs the church of being able to experience victory in ministry. Sure, the church may survive while harboring sin. But eventually that sin will eat its way out like a cancer. It will be like leaven, that will eventually leaven the entire lump. And this should be of no surprise, as we see its affects all the time. Churches split everyday. And with every church split, almost without fail, there can be found within whatever led to that split a place where church discipline was not practiced. There are many thing that cause churches to divide. But generally, what I have seen is that there is a person who is behaving sinfully, and he/she begins to get a group rallied around themselves and their cause (perhaps it is a disagreement about the color of the walls, etc.). Quickly the group begins to “sow discord” in the church. Soon that group is a loud voice within the church. Finally you have a divided church.

Now, why do I bring up a split church? Because, as I said, I believe that most churches split because sin is not dealt with. Imagine the difference of what would have happened if that person who was behaving sinfully was called to repentance and put out before he/she was allowed to sow discord. This would have been (1) biblical and (2) practical. Biblical because it is the command of Scripture. Practical because now the church is not experiencing the pain of a split because it chose to cut the problem off at the source. Again, my purpose in this chapter is to show you the two-fold reason for church discipline, and the first reason is for

the protection of the Church. Only by purging out the leaven, will the lump be protected.

But, as I said earlier, the second reason for church discipline is the restoration of the sinner. We see this in two places in the NT.

“If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.” (Matthew 18:15–17 ESV)

Notice the key to the first act: “you have 'gained' your brother” This should be the desire of all believers, that when a person sins, he will repent of it. That he will be “gained back” into true fellowship. This is what we desire. We do not want a person to stay in sin. We want them to repent. But if they refuse, they cannot stay in the church. Paul gives a picture of what this looks like even further.

“It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for a man has his father’s wife. And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you. For though absent in body, I am present in spirit; and as if present, I have already pronounced judgment on the one who did such a thing. When you are assembled in the name of the Lord

Jesus and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.” (1 Corinthians 5:1-5 ESV)

You see, Paul teaches us that even in putting someone out of the church, it is an attempt at restoration. You see, it is the most radical way of showing them the danger of their sin to themselves and to the church. I want to mention the show intervention again, because I think this is a good illustration. In the show, the family member who is the addict is brought before the entire family and friends and asked to go to rehab. And here is what the family is instructed to tell the person: “If you refuse, we will have nothing more to do with you”. Now, I realize this is a secular example. But it does follow a biblical pattern. If a person is in sin, and refuses to repent, the church must say to them, “We will have nothing more to do with you” Not because we want them to continue to sin. But because this may be the only way to show them the dreadful consequences of their sin. The church cannot tolerate habitual, unrepentant sin because of the danger to both the church and to the person.

Ultimately, the practice of church discipline is two-fold, as I have said. We must do it for the protection of the church. We must do it for the restoration of the sinner. We must do it, because it is prescribed for us in Holy Scripture.

But, I know what some are wondering: “How do we practice it?” Thankfully, we have a biblical pattern (note: here the message will become very practical).

Biblically, there have been recognized over the years as being four steps to Church Discipline:

1. Private Rebuke
2. Private Rebuke with witnesses
3. Public Rebuke before the church
4. Excommunication from the church

Though this is the normative pattern, what we must realize that not every situation can be handled the exact same way. The obviously more desirable way to handle sin in the church is that, if a person sins, he be rebuked privately by a single person first. This is the model Jesus gives us. It is certainly best because it keeps the sin private, and if the person repents, no one will be aware of it. The best part of this is that there is no potential for gossip. But, however, it is not always possible to do this. Imagine a person standing in the midst of the congregation and saying, "I am living in sin and refuse to repent". Would that person then be afforded a private rebuke? How could he, his sin is already public? Thus, he must then receive a public rebuke. The point is, though there is a pattern set up, because everyone behaves differently, at times the sinner himself will skip a step that he might have been afforded otherwise.

One thing all churches which practice discipline need to realize is that just because there is a clear biblical pattern does not mean it will be easy. In fact, there will be nothing harder than performing this if and when it ever comes time. The church may be threatened with media disapproval, public gossip, and even lawsuits. In this modern time, there is nothing

more volatile than a sinner who has been called out, and refuses to repent.

But what we must understand is that, even though it may not be easy, it is biblical. It has a two-fold purpose: Restoration and Protection. By the practice of discipline, we seek that the church be what God has intended it to be: Holy. Furthermore, through discipline we maintain our commitment to being a Biblically Functioning Church.

Chapter 9

A Biblically Functioning Church: How is Ministry Performed?

A Biblically Functioning Church relies on the gifts of all its members working together as a whole body to be truly successful. So far we have learned so much regarding the structure and foundation of what this entails. In this lesson, we will be looking at the mortar that holds it all together: God's people, gifted to serve one another, in the ministries God has assigned.

One of the things that I am truly convicted about is the belief that the reason why so many churches stall in the area of true ministry, is because they do not practice gift-based ministry. Instead of finding what God has equipped people to do, and placing them in those positions, we often just find the first available candidate. And this is not always the fault of the leadership. So often, it is because that so few in our day feel an obligation to the ministry of the church. What we often fail to realize is that, as a church, we are all in this together. God has not only brought us all together, but he has also granted to each one of us a spiritual gift that is designed to be used for His service. And only when these gifts come together, and form a cohesive unified force, will we be really accomplishing all God has called us to do as a church. When this happens, we will not be looking to simply place the first willing person into ministry positions, but instead we will look to see ministry accomplished by people who are gifted by God in that area.

In this chapter, we are going to begin by looking at 1 Corinthians 12 and breaking it down. We will see that it explains the relationship between our gifts, our service, and our activities in the church – and what each of these means. Then we are going to see how all of these work together to create a unified body.

“Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.” (1 Corinthians 12:4–7 ESV)

We see here a breakdown of three foundations for understanding how work in the church is accomplished.

First, in the variety of **GIFTS**
Second, in the variety of **SERVICE**
Third, in the variety of **ACTIVITIES**

One thing we should point out immediately is that each of these are from God. The same Spirit, same Lord, same God is a redundant statement to remind us from whom our spiritual abilities come. It is also an interesting nod to the reality of the Trinity.

What we need to understand first is that Paul is not here trying to establish three individual and separate foundations. Instead, what we see here are three foundations that build upon one another.

The **GIFTS** are the internal motivations that drive our service.

The **SERVICE** is the ministry of the gift within the body.

The **ACTIVITIES** are the manifestations of those ministries.

Another way of understanding is as follows:

The **MOTIVATION** is the gift in which God has given.

The **MINISTRY** is how that gift is applied within the body.

The **MANIFESTATION** is the visible outworking or the gift.

Let us imagine a person is given the gift of “Mercy”, which is their motivation. This person may join (or begin) a church hospital visitation ministry. As a result, those who are suffering in the hospital see the visible manifestation of God's Spirit working in and through that person. This is just one example of how “gift-based ministry” works. And it is an example of how the church was designed by God. What we are going to do now is examine how a motivation would become a ministry and would result in a manifestation of God's Spirit.

Examine the Various Types of Gifts [Motivations]

“For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching;

the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.” (Romans 12:3–8 ESV)

What we see here is a listing of overarching gift categories.

Prophecy (Proclaiming Truth)
 Service (Meeting Needs)
 Teaching (Researching and Clarifying Truth)
 Exhortation (Building Up)
 Contributions (Giving and Sharing Resources)
 Leadership (Administration)
 Mercy (Empathy)

And what is miraculous concerning these gifts is that, when seen working as a unit, all the needs of the congregation get met. Imagine a dinner party wherein a person was invited that represented each one of these gifts. Now, imagine that during the party the hostess came walking into the living room carrying a dish of pastries, and she tripped and toppled over, sending the pastries scattered about on the floor and herself onto the ground. How would each one react, according to their gifts?

Prophecy would immediately begin by announcing that the host has fallen, and reminding the group that all have responsibilities.

Service would begin to pick up the dropped items, and grab some cleaning utensils from the kitchen.

Teaching would begin to examine the cause of the situation to see if it could be remedied and not happen again.

Exhortation would offer words of encouragement to the fallen person, and aid in building her up.

Giving would immediately pull money out of their wallet and go and purchase more pastries so the party could continue.

Administration would seek to ensure that things were back in order properly and all that needed to be done was being done.

Mercy would empathize with the embarrassment of the host and offer words of comfort to her.

In this fictional illustration, everyone of these spiritual gifts was not only present, but also active. And because of this, all that needed to be taken care of was taken care of. From the restoring of the needed food items to the restoring of the feelings of the host, because everyone exercised their gifts, the dinner party continued virtually uninterrupted – even though a bad situation had occurred and had the potential of ruining the party.

This is how ministry should work. We all exercise the gifts that God has given to us. So that, when things need to be done, the team (congregation) comes together and ensures that nothing is left “undone”. This is “gift-based” ministry. Each person is motivated

by a God-given drive. No person is unneeded, as every gift has its complimentary place in the overall work of the ministry.

This is why self-examination is so important. We should look at ourselves, and see what God motivation God has placed in our heart.

+ **Are you motivated to reveal sin and proclaim truth?** Perhaps you have the gift of prophecy.

+ **Are you motivated to demonstrate love by meeting the practical needs of others?** Perhaps you have the gift of service.

+ **Are you motivated to research Scripture and clarify truth?** Perhaps you have the gift of teaching.

+ **Are you motivated to stimulate growth in others?** Perhaps you have the gift of exhortation.

+ **Are you motivated to share your assets to further another's ministry?** Perhaps you have the gift of giving.

+ **Are you motivated to coordinate and delegate to achieve long-term goals?** Perhaps you have the gift of administration.

+ **Are you motivated by a desire to identify with and comfort those in distress?** Perhaps you have the gift of mercy.

Here is what is great: I believe God gives the church people who express each of these gifts so that the church will be able to function. I believe that if we studied this church, and the gifts that we all have, that we would find that each of these gifts are represented. The question, however, is are we using our gifts? You see, it is without doubt that the gifts are represented. But it is also as certain that there are those who are not using the gifts God has given them.

Examine the Various Types of Services [Ministries]

Let's examine two places in Scripture where types of ministries are listed.

“And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.” (Ephesians 4:11–12 ESV)

“Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, helping, administrating, and various kinds of tongues.” (1 Corinthians 12:27–28 ESV)

So, Scripturally, we see some of the ways that the gifts become ministries...

Apostle	(One sent forth)
Prophet	(Proclaimer of truth to believers)
Evangelist	(Proclaimer of truth to unbelievers)

***Shepherd** (Pastor, one who oversees and leads the flock)

***Teacher** (One who clarifies and preserves truth)

Miracles (One who can visualize the goals of God in prayer)

Healer (One who enters into the suffering of others to heal others)

Helpers (One who provides practical assistance in meeting needs)

Administrator (One who organizes activities)

Tongues (One who communicates God's message in a language unknown to the speaker)

*Shepherds and Teachers are likely to be put together as one office, which could be called the office of "Pastor-Teacher". How does a pastor lead the church? By teaching the Word of God.

Down through the history of the church, there has been heated debate over issues regarding the various ministrations of gifts. The question has been, "Were there certain ministries in the early church that were for its establishment, but are not longer active today?" This is not an easy question, but I will tell you that I believe the answer is "yes". I do believe certain "offices" and "sign ministries" were given to the early church for the establishment of the church. One of these is the office of apostle. Certainly, any God-sent minister could be called a "sent-one". Yet, at the same time, we understand that there was a special group in the New Testament called "the twelve". Later the apostle Paul would be added to this group (but as one

that was “born out of season”). These men spoke, wrote, and taught with “apostolic authority”. And it was required that they all had seen the Lord's work from the beginning (Acts 1:21–22). Thus, we know this office could not be filled today, as no one in the 21st Century has literally seen Jesus' ministry. It just seems clear that there were ministries that were designed to compliment the founding of the church, to give credibility to the authority of the apostles, but that were not intended to continue. I further believe that much of what is often called “charismatic” worship today is not really practiced according to Biblical precepts. However, this is not the scope of this work. I have given the gift of Tongues a larger treatment in another work. In this work, I want to focus on what we see happening in these passages. We see the gifts [motivations] becoming services [ministries]. We see the God-given desire finding its outlet in the workings of the local church.

An important reality is that one gift might find its outlet in different ways. Two people may have the gift of prophecy. One person may find the outlet for his gift in evangelism. The other in becoming a pastor-teacher. In my early years in seminary, I thought God was calling me to be an evangelist. Yet, as I grew, I learned that I was better equipped to teach the Word in a pastoral setting than I was to be an evangelist.

Likewise, two people could have the gift of mercy. One might find its outlet for this gift in a prayer ministry. Another might find that grief counseling is where God has called them. Consider if two people had the gift of administration. One might make a good church treasurer. While the other might become a

sunday school superintendent. What if two people had the gift of service? One might become a deacon. The other a church secretary. The list goes on and on.

The point is simple: We all have a gift [a motivation] from God. The Holy Spirit has sovereignly and supernaturally granted one to each of us. And these motivations become ministries within the Church, when we put our gifts into practice.

Examine the Various Types of Activities [Manifestations]

“To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.” (1 Corinthians 12:7 ESV)

The keyword here is “manifestations” (Gr. Phanerosis). You see, once a gift [motivation] becomes a service [ministry] it is then active [manifested] before the Church. And, in turn, the Spirit of God receives the glory, because it is He who gave the gift in the first place.

Fred Zaspel wrote, “Just what is it that is manifested? What is made visible? It is the Holy Spirit Himself! A spiritual gift is a “manifestation of the Spirit” (1 Cor. 12:7, italics added). This is how the Holy Spirit is seen -- in the exercise of spiritual gifts. One of the greatest displays of the Holy Spirit is a church in which the members are exercising their gifts for one another. A church functioning as a gifted body is a beautiful display of the Spirit. So a spiritual gift is not only an ability to serve; it is the channel through which

the Holy Spirit ministers to the body. This puts the discussion on a much higher level of importance! When you exercise your gift in the service of other believers, it is to be recognized as the manifestation, the display of the Spirit of God. God has chosen to minister to his people through us! Few things can match the blessing of knowing and experiencing that.”

You see, this is what we should be after! Becoming a church where God's gifts are used in ministry, and as a result the Holy Spirit's work is manifested before us. This is what being a biblically functioning church is all about!

In 1 Corinthians 12:7, Paul tells us that this manifestation of our gifts will all work towards our “common good.” In the Greek, this is one word “Sumpheron”. This word speaks of “bearing together at the same time”. This goes back to the story of the dinner party. There was a situation wherein all the gifts were manifested to “bear at the same time” the problem and see it resolved. There is a “common good” that results when the Spirit's gifts are made manifest. After he says this, Paul lists some of these manifestations for us.

“For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who

apportions to each one individually as he wills.” (1 Corinthians 12:8–11 ESV)

This list gives some of the manifestations of the gifts – the out-workings of them. But, it is important to note that this list is not “all-encompassing”. When considered, the variety of gifts [motivations] and services [ministries] could be manifested in an almost infinite amount of ways. The key is having people in place who understand their gift, and who are devoted to using their gift in the ministry of the church. From this comes, quite naturally, a manifestation of the gift.

I hope that you see how finding your spiritual gift, and then applying it to a ministry in the church, brings about a manifestation of the Holy Spirit of God. Now, I want to conclude by referring to an important statement made by Paul concerning the gifts:

“For the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you,” nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.” On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and on those

parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unrepresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.” (1 Corinthians 12:14-27 ESV)

This passage teaches us a truth that we so often forget in the church: The power of harmony. The power in understanding our unity in the midst of our diversity. You see, this is how the Church is to work; all the members working together as the body of Christ. And when this happens, you will see some very miraculous things:

MUTUAL FUNCTION – all the parts will work together for the “common good”

MUTUAL IMPORTANCE – no part will be considered greater or lesser, as all will be using their gifts given by God.

MUTUAL EDIFICATION – a mutual care and concern for one another will emerge, which will be come mutual upbuilding.

MUTUAL DEPENDENCE – the whole will depend upon the parts, and vice versa, as all will be

using their gifts interdependently, trusting each one to pull the load as a team.

Finally, The American spirit has always been about rugged independence. This may be good for politics. But this is not good for the church. We are to be dependent upon one another, each having different gifts, and each using those gifts in the service of Christ and His Church. Then, and only then, will we be a truly biblically functioning church.

Chapter 10

A Biblically Functioning Church: How is it Supported?

Over the course of this work, we have been addressing the subject of becoming a “Biblically Functioning Church”. In the beginning, I spent a great deal of time talking about the structure of leadership, and the responsibilities of those who would have these roles within the church. Then we moved in the direction of our responsibilities as a congregation. In this chapter, we are going to look at one of the most basics of our responsibilities to the local church: The Offering. My desire in this chapter is to show that the Bible gives us some very important principles for giving. And that when we apply these principles of giving together as a body, we all have a part in the ministry of the church.

There are two different types of giving described in the Bible. The first, is **compulsory** giving. This is giving wherein the giver had no choice about when or how much. It is giving that is demanded of him. Taxes are a type of compulsory giving; and the Bible teaches us that (however much we might not like it) we should pay our taxes.

“Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, for he is God’s servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God’s wrath on the

wrongdoer. Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience. For because of this you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing. Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed." (Romans 13:1-7 ESV)

Now, in the Old Testament, another type of compulsory giving was the tithe. The tithe was the practice of giving 10% of one's increase to God. "Tithe" literally means "10%", and it was not optional, it was commanded that it be given. The first tenth was considered to be holy to God, and it was devoted to Him. It could not be held back, it was a compulsory offering.

But what most people do not understand is that, because of the nature of Israel in the Old Testament the tithe was very similar to the paying of taxes. Israel was a theocracy. The Levites made up the holy priesthood, and this priesthood performed many of the duties of civil government. This government was financed through the tithing of the people.

Another thing many people do not understand is that, though Israel was commanded to tithe, it was not like what many people practice today. Most today who practice tithing give 10% of their annual income. But in Israel there were actually two separate tithes:

The Levitical Tithe (Leviticus 27:30-33)

The Festival Tithe (Deuteronomy 14:22-29)

There were also smaller amounts required of the people by the law (Leviticus 19:9–10; Exodus 23:10–11).

In the end, the total estimated annual giving of the Israelites was not 10%, but was more in the range of 23%. This revenue was used to operate the nation, to maintain the civil government, and to aid in meeting the needs of the poor. And, as noted, this giving was compulsory. It was stipulated regarding when and how much was to be given. And the people could not choose to not give, it was a command.

The second type of giving described in the Bible is **voluntary** giving. Voluntary giving is based upon the desire of the giver. It involves a choice in both how much is given and when it is given. It is described in the Old Testament in a few places:

“The Lord said to Moses, “Speak to the people of Israel, that they take for me a contribution. From every man whose heart moves him you shall receive the contribution for me.” (Exodus 25:1–2 ESV)

“Then the leaders of fathers’ houses made their freewill offerings, as did also the leaders of the tribes, the commanders of thousands and of hundreds, and the officers over the king’s work. They gave for the service of the house of God 5,000 talents and 10,000 darics of gold, 10,000 talents of silver, 18,000 talents of bronze and 100,000 talents of iron. And whoever had precious stones gave them to the treasury of the house of the Lord, in the care of Jehiel the Gershonite. Then the people rejoiced because they had given willingly, for with a whole heart they had offered freely

to the Lord. David the king also rejoiced greatly.” (1 Chronicles 29:6–9 ESV).

Note that in both cases what is emphasized is that the gifts were given “from the heart” indicating that they were given “willingly”. The focus being that these were not compulsory, but rather voluntary, gifts. So, scripturally, there are two ways of giving described: Compulsory and Voluntary. Now, my point in differentiating the two types of giving in the Bible is that the only type of giving ever described in the New Testament in regards to the church is voluntary giving. The New Testament never describes a compulsory gift or amount regarding the New Testament church.

But what about the tithe? Some of us were taught from very early on that 10% was what God “commands” us to give to the church. Now, what I want you to understand immediately is that I do not have a problem with someone who gives 10%. In fact, I encourage people to give 10% – and my wife and I practice it ourselves as a simple basic unit of giving. But what I do not want us to confuse is the compulsory requirements of the Old Testament with the voluntary nature of the New Testament. There are those in which 7% is a large portion of their family's income, and a substantial contribution by comparison. And there are others which 10% is very small in comparison to their income, and they could afford to give 15, 20, 30 and even 50 percent to the work of the Lord. What we see in the New Testament is not a command to meet a certain “percentage” requirement, but rather to be faithful stewards with all that God has given us – our time, our talents, and our treasures.

But what about the passage that teaches that those who do not tithe are “robbing God”. It is true that the Bible taught in the Old Testament that those who held back their tithes were, in fact, robbing God.

“Will man rob God? Yet you are robbing me. But you say, ‘How have we robbed you?’ In your tithes and contributions.” (Malachi 3:8 ESV)

Based on this, many pastors have taught that a person who doesn't tithe to the local church is, in fact, a “God-robber.” But what we must immediately understand is that the church is not what is in view in this passage – and context is always key. Furthermore, to always make an exact parallel between the New Testament Church and Old Testament Israel can create a great deal of interpretive problems. The tithes and contributions (better translated “offerings”) described here were a part of the compulsory giving of the nation of Israel. Thus, the holding back of these would be considered theft from God because of His command to the nation. This is much the same way as a person today who would get penalized if he was caught evading his taxes – he would be considered to be “robbing” the government. Furthermore, the “contributions” (offerings) here would have included animal sacrifices, which are no longer needed within the New Covenant. The point is simple: Every passage sits within a context, and this passage regarding a person who robs God sits within the context of OT compulsory giving.

Another might ask, “But wasn't there a practice of tithing before the Law, and if so doesn't that prove that the tithe is God's commanded standard for

giving.” First, it is true that we see tithing occur before the Law was given by Moses. Abraham tithed to Melchizedek in Genesis 14. Likewise, Jacob promised a tenth to God in Genesis 28. It is apparent that the idea of 1/10 was a standard unit of measurement to be considered an offering. But what we must see in both of these offerings that came before the Law was that neither of these were **compulsory** gifts. Nowhere in these texts does it say that either Abraham or Jacob were commanded to tithe. This was a gift that they chose to give, as God had led them. Thus, the amount is of secondary importance when compared to the motivation.

My point in this lesson is not to say that a person shouldn't tithe. If God has put upon your heart 10%, then by all means give just that. Likewise, if He has placed 20% give that, and if 7% give that. My point is that New Testament giving to the church is always voluntary, and never compulsory. We give, not because we are trying to meet a minimum standard percentile. And not because we feel an external obligation. Rather, we give because God has shown us that everything we have belongs to Him, and He deserves an offering as a symbol of our love and devotion. Thus we give, not under compulsion, but in gratitude and love.

This is how New Testament giving differs from the Old Testament tithe: One is based on a compulsory system. The other, a purely voluntary system.

Now, having said all that, I want to address the concept of giving in the Church. All that I have said may be leaving you with some questions about “how” and “how much” we are expected to give in the New Testament

church. As a result, I want us to look at what the New Testament says regarding the amount of our giving, the purpose of our giving, the manner of our giving, and the motivation for our giving.

THE AMOUNT OF OUR GIVING

We have been addressing the fact that the compulsory “tithes” were a part of the Old Testament Law. But often when I point that out, people will ask “Well, how much should I give then?” Let's examine three texts and see what the New Testament says:

“Now concerning the collection for the saints: as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you also are to do. On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so that there will be no collecting when I come.” (1 Corinthians 16:1-2 ESV)

Note that the amount given was determined by the amount had. The command was to give proportionately, as each had prospered. Those who had more would obviously be able to give more.

“Now in these days prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. And one of them named Agabus stood up and foretold by the Spirit that there would be a great famine over all the world (this took place in the days of Claudius). So the disciples determined, everyone according to his ability, to send relief to the brothers living in Judea. And they did so, sending it to the elders by the hand of Barnabas and Saul.” (Acts 11:27-30 ESV)

Notice here a very similar verbiage, “according to his ability”. Again, those with more gave more; those with less gave less. We do not see any minimum standard here, or even a percentile standard given. What we see are amounts based upon the individual's means.

“Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.” (2 Corinthians 9:7 ESV)

Here is where we see an obvious principle laid before us. In this passage, there is no fixed percentage mentioned, or minimum requirement sought. Each one must make up his own mind what he is to give, as he had decided in his heart. And there should be no guilt or shame that leads to this decision, as this would steal the joy that is supposed to accompany the gift. In the end, what these passages teach us is that, while we should give in proportionate to our prosperity, the amount that we choose to give is between us and God. We cannot allow someone to “guilt”, “manipulate” or us into giving more, as such would destroy the entire idea of a “voluntary” gift. There can be no compulsion in our giving; the amount is left to us.

THE PURPOSE OF OUR GIVING

While there is great freedom in the New Testament concept of giving, what we also need to understand is that generous giving is essential because of the reasons why we give. I want us to consider three reasons why we give according to Scripture:

1. Meet the Needs of the Brethren

"But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth." (1 John 3:17-18 ESV)

"And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up. So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith." (Galatians 6:9-10 ESV)

Now, giving is not spoken of here, yet we can see how the "doing good" would include assistance in meeting needs. In fact, in the early church the people sold what they had and pooled their collective finances so that no one were without.

"There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold" (Acts 4:34 ESV)

Wouldn't it be an awesome thing to know that there was never a needy person among us, because we were so generous with one another? This is the model given us by the early church; we give to meet the needs of the brethren.

2. Meet the Needs of the Poor

We are called to be a philanthropic institution – to seek to love and meet the needs of people and in doing so to display the love of Christ. This is why the vast majority of charitable organizations that have

been started in the world have been started by the church. Consider what Paul says regarding the reason for hard work.

“Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need.” (Ephesians 4:28 ESV)

Why do we labor? Is it to amass great fortunes for ourselves, giant homes and expensive garments? No, it is that we might have more than we need, and then be able to help meet the needs of someone who is without. And our responsibility is not just to one another, but even to the poor in the world because in showing them love and mercy in meeting their needs, we are exemplifying Christ who “while we were still sinners died for us”.

3. Meet the Needs of Christian Workers

In addition to meeting the needs of the brethren and the poor in general, we also have the responsibility to those who labor in the ministry.

“Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, “You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain,” and, “The laborer deserves his wages.” (1 Timothy 5:17–18 ESV)

Honor, in this passage, is not just esteem or respect. It is speaking of providing for the needs of the elders whose primary job is laboring in the Word. In

our modern language, we call these “vocational” elders. He is compared to an ox who is allowed to eat while threshing. It speaks of the responsibility to support the laborer or the Word while he is working.

I do want to mention one thing that should be considered at this point. The Bible doesn't talk about meeting the needs of a church building, because in the first century most believers met in homes. But it is important for us to remember that a portion of our giving is used for the maintaining of a place for us to come together and worship. Yet, at the same time, the building should never be our primary focus in giving. We were not put here to build elaborate structures. The church building is not the temple of God; the believer is the temple of the Holy Spirit. We do have a responsibility to keep up the building, but this is not our goal. Our goal is the meeting of needs of the brethren, the poor, and those who labor in the ministry of the Word.

THE MANNER OF OUR GIVING

The Bible describes four ways in which we are to practice giving:

1. We should give Anonymously

We are not to proclaim our gifts before others, but rather give them privately.

“Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven. “Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet

before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.” (Matthew 6:1–4, ESV)

Our giving should never be made in order to impress or to receive praise from another person. I remember very clearly “twice” being told that I needed to make sure I seek to make the biggest contributors happy in the church. Happily, I told both of these people “I don't know who they are!” We give anonymously so as not to fall into the trap of spiritual pride.

2. We should give Sacrificially

Consider this question: Who was the most celebrated giver in all the Bible? Is it the person who gave the greatest amount of gold, silver and precious stones? No, it is the person who gave the equivalent of two pennies. But why was this considered by Jesus to be the greatest gift? Because it was a sacrifice. This is our example in giving – not only to give proportionately to our income, but sacrificially, putting the needs of others before even our own. Ask yourself: Does my giving really cost me anything? Am I really making a sacrifice when I make my offering to God?

3. We should give Cheerfully

Our opening text tells us that God “loves a cheerful giver”. One of the most amazing texts on giving is found in Paul's second letter to Corinth.

“We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints— and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us.” (2 Corinthians 8:1–5, ESV)

Notice that they “begged” for the opportunity of giving. They knew the wonderful privileged that it was to share what they had with others in need. This is the joy we are to have in our giving. We should ask ourselves: Do I feel joy in my giving? Or am I giving reluctantly?

4. We should give Voluntarily

This, of course, is the crux of today's message. All of our giving to the church is voluntary giving. No one stands above us, forcing our offerings into the place. No one is twisting our arms, or seeking our bank account numbers. We are called to give a gift from the heart, not out of compulsion, but voluntarily. It is not about meeting a minimum percent. Rather, our

motivation is a genuine love for Christ and His Church, and a desire to see His name glorified in the world.

Final Thoughts on Giving

If what you get from this chapter is “I don't have to tithe”, I want you to know that you have missed the point by a mile. This lesson today was not to encourage you not to tithe, but rather to show you the proper motivation for giving. We don't give because of compulsion. The New Testament teaches instead that we are to be generous and sacrificial and cheerful with our gifts. My question is “Does that describe you?” Are you both generous and sacrificial with your gifts to the Lord? And do you give them cheerfully?

One day a father wanted to do something special for his son, so he offered to take the son anywhere he wanted to go eat, and he would buy him whatever he wanted. The boy said he really wanted McDonald's french fries. The father immediately drove the boy there and ordered him a super-sized order. Then they sat together as the boy began to enjoy his food. The father was happy to see his son enjoying the fries, and he decided he wanted to eat one of them, so he reached over to get himself a few. Just then, the son wrapped his arms around the fries and said, “Mine!”. The father was confused, and a bit taken back. Didn't the boy realize that he was the source of those fries? Didn't he realize that the father could go purchase as many fries as he wanted? Didn't he realize that the father, at 6 ft tall, has the power to take all his fries away despite his arms acting as a barrier? Of course, the father realized that two-three french fries will not

make the world stop turning. But the situation did cause him to consider what his son was thinking.

Many of us, if faced in that situation, would have a few thoughts of our own. We might be thinking, "Well, how selfish!" Or we might think, "What a greedy child" In any event, we likely wouldn't applaud the boy for his actions.

Sadly, however, this little illustration mirrors the attitude displayed by many of God's people when it comes to giving to Him a portion of what He has so generously given us. Many do hold back their gifts and offerings from God. According to the Barna Research Group, one out of every six born again Christians (16%) gave no money to his/her church during 1999. Another survey showed that, of all who identify themselves as Evangelicals, only 4% actually gave a tenth or more to the Church. So, while many would probably argue that tithing is a New Testament command, it is apparent that not many actually obey it as one.

Again, what I want us to understand is that giving is not our obligation, it is our blessed opportunity to worship God through sacrifice. It is not something we should feel weighted down by, or feel guilty about, or feel forced to do. Giving is not compulsory in the church, it is voluntary. It is the natural result of a heart that has been changed by God to see that everything we have is simply the extension of His gifts to us. It is the result of seeing that He deserves for us to voluntarily return a portion of what He has given back to His Church, so that it might do the work of the ministry.

As a believer, we do not give simply because of a command; or to meet some percentile standard. We give out of a heart that longs to see God glorified in every thing we do.

Chapter 11

A Biblically Functioning Church: Two Years Later

It has been said that turning a church is a lot like turning an ocean liner. If you move too quickly, everything will fall into the sea. If you move too slowly, the momentum will keep you in the direction you were already headed. Well, it has been two years since this series of messages was first presented to the congregation and while we have yet to reach perfection (which will never happen in this life, but should always be our goal) we have seen some wonderful transformations in both individuals and the church as a whole.

First, our entire governing structure was reviewed and we brought it into alignment with the biblically functioning model. Whereas before the church had been a congregational model which put everything to vote through majority opinion, now the church has affirmed the role of the elders as the leaders of the church. As such, our eldership has become our primary decision-making body. We still have certain times in the year wherein we seek congregational affirmation, such as in the adoption of a budget or the ordination of a deacon or elder, but the responsibility for the day-to-day operating authority of the church is vested in the Session of Elders. Along with the elders we have also established an Executive Committee whose

primary responsibility is to be stewards of the financial aspects of the ministry.

Second, we have stopped being focused on committees and started focusing on the role of the deacons in the church. As we have seen in the lessons contained in the previous chapters, deacons are not called to be decision-making leaders in the church, but instead they are called to be servants of the congregation. In keeping with this biblical model, we have structured our diaconate to work towards serving the church as ministers within the body attending to the needs of the congregation and individual members. Our deacons now provide guidance to our men's and women's groups, seeking to lead by example in the area of service. They also have taken the responsibility of visiting the sick and attending to the needs of the hurting. A portion of the annual budget is managed by the deacons for the sole purpose of providing assistance to any member of the church who finds themselves in a difficult financial situation. Whereas the elders provide guidance and oversight within the body, the deacons provide service and ministration seeking to ensure that no need within the congregation goes unmet.

Third, in an attempt to encourage every member of the church to be actively involved in ministry, we have spent many months teaching on the subject of spiritual gifts. We do not want people simply serving anywhere in the church, but rather we want people to serve where they are gifted by God to serve. We want them to exercise the gift which God has given them and use it for the building up of the body. As such, we provide every member with lessons and written

material and even one-to-one counseling to help discover his or her spiritual gift. The ultimate goal is for this is to encourage people not just to serve anywhere in the church, but to serve specifically where God has gifted them to serve.

Finally, along with our new structure and new constitution, we also chose to give the church a new name. In 1958, the church began as Forest Christian Church, Disciples of Christ. It was a member of the denomination called Disciples of Christ, which was an outgrowth of what is known as the Restoration Movement which began under the leadership of Barton Stone and Alexander Campbell. Over the years, as the church grew and began to understand better the truths of Scripture, it began to separate from the teachings of the Restoration movement. In 1999, the church chose to drop the association with the Disciples of Christ and became simply Forest Christian Church. However, as time went on we began to realize that folks were still associating us with the Disciples of Christ even though we no longer held to their theology or structure. We noticed that some folks would come to the church expecting a DoC church and would be disappointed. Others would not come because they believed us to teach their doctrines and they did not agree with them. Because of this, the Elders decided to propose that the congregation adopt a new name to accompany its new direction. The name which we chose reflected both our faith and our governmental structure. The new name was to be Sovereign Grace Family Church.

Sovereign Grace Family Church was chosen for multiple reasons. First, we teach Reformed Theology which is focused on the absolute sovereignty of God and His authority over every aspect of life, in particular

His grace. God is the one who chooses how and when He will dispense His grace, as such He is sovereign over it. Also, we chose the name Family Church because we wanted to reflect that our ministry is not focused on one demographic or age, but it is focused on the entire family from the very young to the very old. As a “family church” we also did not want to continue the trend of age-segregation which is so often seen in churches today, but instead we wanted to encourage the role of parents as the primary disciplers of their children and encourage families to worship together and not be segregated into youth groups children’s church groups, etc. If a young person comes into the church and is not with their mom or dad, we encourage a father and mother in the church to “adopt” them into their family and encourage their spiritual growth within the Body of Christ. This “Family Ministry Model” has been one of the most positive practical changes we have made, encouraging families to grow stronger in their spiritual unity and in their common faith in Christ. We believe this model is much more effective in combating the problem of young people leaving the church (a problem which has grown exponentially over the years) than the segregated church model used in many churches where the children are separated from their parents for both worship and instruction. We encourage families to fellowship, worship and serve as a unit. Thus, we call ourselves a family church.

It is easy to say that, while we have seen many victories in seeking to become a Biblically Functioning Church, we have not fully arrived. This is because we are still imperfect people which make up the church. We have been justified by faith and we are being

sanctified by the Spirit, but we are not yet made sinless and as such we still face difficulties as all churches do. However, even though we have not become a perfect church, we do believe we have grown immensely because of having adopted the Biblically Functioning Model. By simply applying what the Bible says about church governance and polity we have seen massive growth in the spiritual lives of our people, and we believe this is only the beginning.

If you are reading this and you are in a local church which you believe needs to be brought back to Scripture, we encourage you to take this information and pass it on to your pastor and other leaders. It certainly has been a blessing to our congregation, and we believe it could be the same for others.

For His Glory, Amen.

APPENDIX: Constitution And ByLaws

CONSTITUTION AND BYLAWS

Sovereign Grace Family Church, Incorporated.

Article 1 – Name

The name of this church shall be Sovereign Grace Family Church, Incorporated, located in Duval County, Florida.

Article 2 – Purpose

Our purpose is to be a Biblically Functioning Church in all that we say and do; so that we bring glory to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

Article 3 – Statement of Faith

All teaching at this church of the Lord Jesus Christ shall be in accord with the following points of doctrine.

1. God. We believe in one (Deut. 6:4) eternal (1 Tim. 1:17), knowable (Heb. 1:1ff), sovereign God (Dan. 4:34–35). He knows all things (Psalm 139:1–4), and providentially oversees all things (Mt. 10:29–31). He is merciful (Exod. 34:6) and just (Acts 17:31), loving (1

John 4:8) and holy (Rev. 4:8), great in power (Psalm 147:5) and good in purpose (Rom. 8:28). His glory is our chief concern (1 Cor. 10:31).

2. Trinity. We believe in one God who exists in three Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Mt. 28:19). All three are uncreated, coeternal, and equal in power, glory, and honor. They are rightly worshiped as the one true God—three in one, and one in three (see Rev. 22:13; Acts 5:3–4).

3. Scripture. We believe, that while God has revealed Himself in His creation, He has spoken to us most clearly in His word (Psalm 19; Rom. 1:18–20). The Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are breathed out by God, holy, complete, and entirely without error in the original manuscripts (2 Tim. 3:16; John 10:35; 2 Peter 1:20–21). The Bible is our final authority in life, doctrine, and godliness (Mt. 4:4; 2 Peter 1:3–4).

4. Creation. We believe God created the entire universe out of nothing (Gen. 1:1; Heb. 11:3). Man and woman were the crown of God's good creation, being created in His own image (Gen. 1:26–27). As image-bearers, we were created to worship God and reflect Him in true knowledge, righteousness, and holiness (Eph. 4:22–24; Col. 3:9–10).

5. Fall. We believe that Adam and Eve, our first parents, rebelled against God and plunged themselves and all their offspring into ruin (Gen. 3). Because of Adam's sin, we are all guilty sinners (Rom. 5:12–21). We come into the world with corrupt natures through and through (Psalm 51:5). We are unable to come to God

unless He first draws us (John 6:44; Rom. 3:10–18; Eph. 2:1–5).

6. Person of Jesus Christ. We believe Jesus of Nazareth was and is the Christ, the Messiah, the Anointed One. We believe He is also the Son of the Living God (Mt. 16:16). He is fully man and fully God (1 Tim 2:5; Titus 2:13). He was born of the virgin Mary, lived a perfect life, taught the way of God's kingdom, worked miracles, suffered, died, and bodily rose again (1 Cor. 15:1–8).

7. Work of Jesus Christ. We believe Jesus Christ lived a perfect life and died a substitutionary death that we might be counted righteous and forgiven of our sins (2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Peter 3:18). He redeemed us, removed our guilt, and satisfied the wrath of God (1 John 1:8–2:2).

8. Salvation. We believe that we are justified—declared righteous before God—through faith alone in Christ alone by grace alone (Gal. 2:16). The only way to be adopted into God's family is through union with His Son Jesus Christ (Eph. 1:5).

9. Holy Spirit. We believe the Holy Spirit, working through the word, supernaturally converts (regenerates) the hearts of God's people by making alive what was spiritually dead (Titus 3:5; 1 Peter 1:23). The Spirit causes us to grow in holiness (2 Cor. 3:18), seals us for the day of redemption that we might be assured of our salvation (Eph. 1:13–14), and equips us with spiritual gifts for the building up of the body (1 Cor. 12:7).

10. Church. We believe the church is the communion of God's people drawn from every tribe, language, people, and nation (Eph.2:11-22; Rev. 5:9-10). This invisible body, of which Christ Jesus is the head, exists locally, and imperfectly, as the visible church.

11. Ordinances. Jesus Christ has given His church two ordinances: Baptism and the Lord's Supper (Mt. 28:19-20; 1 Cor.11:23-26). The ordinances of Baptism and the Lord's Supper are for believers only. The Lord's Supper will be a regular part of corporate worship.

12. Marks and Mission. We believe God's people should be marked by Christlikeness (Eph.5:1-2), prayerfulness (Rom. 12:12), joyful obedience (John 14:15), love of God, and love of neighbor (Mt. 22:37-40). We believe the mission of the church is one of word and deed (1 Peter 4:11). As salt and light (Mt. 5:13-16), we seek to reach the lost (1 Cor. 9:19-23), make disciples (Mt. 28:19-20), work for righteousness and justice (Amos 5:24), and care for the hurting and needy (1 John 3:16-18). The Church must take care to uphold the Word of God, and not engage in moral compromise or affirm any sin such as sexual immorality, idolatry, adultery, homosexuality, stealing, greed, drunkenness, slander, swindling, murder, strife, deceit, malice, gossip, witchcraft, hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, factions, or envy. God's people are called to holiness in all aspects of life, with the goal of being conformed to the image of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (Matthew 28:18-20; John 3:16-18; Romans 12:2; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10; Romans 1:21-32; Galatians 5:19-21; Galatians 5:22-25; Romans 8:29).

13. Last Things. We believe Jesus Christ will return to earth personally, visibly, and bodily as King of Kings and Lord of Lords (Acts 1:11). At His appearing the dead shall be raised and the living and the dead will be judged (1 Cor. 15). The wicked and unbelieving will be consigned to hell, a place of eternal conscious punishment (Rev. 20:10, 14–15). Those belonging to Jesus will have eternal life in the new heavens and the new earth and live in ever-increasing joy to the glory of God (Mt. 25:21; Rev. 21–22).

Article 4 – Church Governance

PART 1 – Authoritative Structure

Section A – Structural Overview

This church of the Lord Jesus Christ will be governed in the following way:

(1) Authority over the day-to-day leadership decisions of the church program will be vested in the Session of Elders. These responsibilities include, but are not limited to:

The ensuring of the doctrinal purity and Scriptural obedience within the church program. The examination of all Elder and Deacon candidates.

The examination and installation of all teachers.

The oversight of all ministries and/or committees.

The management of all employees.

(2) Financial responsibilities of the church will be maintained by the Executive Committee. These responsibilities include, but are not limited to:

- Maintaining the proper liability insurance.
- Keeping an accurate accounting of funds.
- Overseeing the distribution of funds.
- Performing an annual audit of funds.
- Presenting an annual budget to the congregation for approval.

(3) Decisions needing congregational affirmation will be taken before the congregation in a congregational meeting (see Article 4 Part 3 Section A). These decisions include, but are not limited to:

- The affirmation of officers and executive committee members.
- The adoption of an annual church budget or an increase in the church budget.

Section B – Church Officers

Holy Scripture institutes two (2) offices in the church: Elder and Deacon.

(1) The Elders are responsible for the oversight of the overall church program and the ensuring that it is faithful to the Scripture. These are the overseers of the church.

(2) The Deacons are responsible for ensuring that all ministry needs are met including acts of mercy, service, assistance and needs. These are the ministers of the church.

Qualifications and procedure for ordination to these offices are found in Article 4, PART 2.

Section C – Church Committees

The Elders maintain the authority to establish and abolish committees (with the exception of the Executive Committee) as needed for the fulfilling of the mission of the church.

(1) The Executive Committee is comprised of the representatives of the church corporation. This group is made up of the following members:

Chairman / Trustee Assistant Treasurer / Trustee Vice-Chairman / Trustee Secretary / Trustee Treasurer / Trustee All Elders

Regarding Trustees: The Chairman, Vice-Chairman, Treasurer, Assistant Treasurer and Secretary will act as the church trustees which are the legal agents of the congregation in all business matters, under the direction of the Elders and subject to the approval of the congregation. They shall hold title to all property as representatives of the congregation, handle all business transactions related thereto, and perform such duties as required by the laws of the state of Florida. They shall be responsible for the safety of all legal documents and contracts and shall maintain a secure repository of such documents.

Regarding Treasurers: The Treasurer and/or Assistant Treasurer (hereafter referred to as treasurers) shall prepare and make bank deposits and disburse all such funds according to the authority granted by the

Executive Committee. The treasurers shall make reports of the congregation's financial condition at each regular meeting of the Elder Cabinet. The treasurers shall maintain adequate financial records and release the records to the Executive Committee upon request for the purpose of the annual audit. The treasurers shall both be an authorized signer of bank drafts against accounts. The treasurers shall be present in tabulating the offerings. If either person is unable to be present for tabulation, the Chairman of the Executive Committee or his designee shall serve.

Terms of Service: The offices of Chairman, Vice Chairman and Secretary are elected by the congregation for a term of two years, after which a two-year sabbatical from that position must be taken. The office of Treasurer and Assistant Treasurer are both elected by the congregation for a term of two years and may serve a maximum of two (2) consecutive terms.

(2) Standing Committees are those which continue indefinitely, unless dissolved by an act of the Elders (i.e. outreach, fellowship, discipleship, etc.).

(3) Temporary Committees are those which are established for a specific time to perform a specific task, after which they dissolve.

For the sake of prudence, the Elders will ensure the following:

- a. All standing and temporary committees will have a chairman appointed by the Elders.

- b. Standing Committee chairman will take a necessary one (1) year sabbatical from that office after a period of two (2) years.
- c. Standing Committees will be given an allotted annual budget from which to work, determined by the Executive Committee.

PART 2 – Leadership Qualifications

Section A – Elders

The scriptural qualifications for an Elder are outlined in I Timothy 3:1–7 and Titus 1:5–9. This position will be open to men only, and the man who seeks this office must meet all of the Scriptural requirements. The Elders will examine the candidate, and if he is found to meet the requirements, he will be presented to the congregation for affirmation. If, at any time, an Elder becomes unable to perform his duties, he may resign his post. He may also be removed because of a spiritual lapse, by an action of the Elders.

(1) Vocational Elders are those men who, in response to God's call, have devoted their vocational lives to the ministry of the Word in the service of the church. These Elders are known as:

- a. Senior Pastor
- b. Associate Pastor(s)

(2) Lay Elders are those men who have not been called to vocational ministry, but nevertheless have been called by God to serve in the role of shepherd.

Though distinct regarding their gifting, the Elders share an equality in the oversight of the church. The Elders will be at least three (3) in number. If at anytime this number falls below three, and a suitable candidate is unavailable, the Deacons will assist with oversight during the interim.

Section B – Deacons

The scriptural qualifications for a Deacon are outlined in I Timothy 3:8–13. This position will be open to men only, and the man who seeks this office must meet all of the Scriptural requirements. The Elders will examine the candidate, and if he is found to meet the requirements, he will be presented to the congregation for affirmation. If, at any time, a Deacon becomes unable to perform his duties, he may resign his post. He may also be removed because of a spiritual lapse, by an action of the Elders.

Section C – Executive Committee Members

To serve on the Executive Committee, a person must be a member in good standing for a period of at least one (1) year. This person must be of good reputation within the church and fit the description of being “above reproach.” The Elders will examine and nominate candidates for this committee, and these candidates will be presented to the congregation for affirmation at an annual meeting.

PART 3 – Meeting Procedures

Section A – Congregational Meetings

Annual Meeting

There will be at least one (1) annual meeting of the congregation during the final quarter of the calendar year for the affirmation of officers and Executive Committee members for the following year as well as adoption of the budget. A copy of the proposed slate of officers and executive committee members and a copy of the proposed budget will be provided to all members in good standing at least two (2) weeks prior to the annual meeting.

Other Meetings

Other congregational meetings can be called by the following:

- (1) The Elders
- (2) The Executive Committee

Congregational meetings called by one of the aforementioned groups require a written notice postmarked five days in advance for all members in good standing detailing the reason for the meeting.

The chairman of the Elders will moderate all congregational meetings. If he is unavailable, the chairman of the Executive Committee or his designee will moderate. All members in good standing will be

entitled to participate in the meeting. The secretary of the Executive Committee will keep the minutes of all congregational meetings. The minutes will be filed in the church office. All congregational meetings shall be governed by Robert's Rules of Order. A quorum shall consist of the members present. Motions require affirmation of eighty (80) percent of the members present to be carried.

Section B - The Session of the Elders

The Elders will meet at least once every two (2) months in a closed session. In decisions affecting the oversight of the church, the Elders will speak with one voice. In the event of an individual Elder's position being called into question, the remaining Elders will speak with one voice.

Section C - The Elder Cabinet

The cabinet will be made up of all Executive Committee members, standing and temporary committee chairmen. This cabinet will meet with the Elders at least once every two (2) months in an open meeting to make decisions regarding the program of the church. The chairman of the Elders or his designee will moderate the meeting. All financial requests will be approved or denied by the Executive Committee. All programming requests and changes will be approved or denied by the Elders. The secretary of the Executive Committee will maintain a record of attendance and will keep the minutes of all cabinet meetings. The minutes will be filed in the church office.

Section D - Other Meetings

After an initial organizational meeting within the first quarter of the calendar year, all standing committees will meet individually according to a schedule of their own choosing as needed. After being appointed, temporary committees will meet individually according to a schedule of their own choosing as needed.

Article 5 – Church Employees

PART 1 – Vocational Elders

Section A – Senior Pastor

Selection Procedure

In the event of a need, the Elders will actively seek a candidate for the position of senior pastor to be presented to the congregation. If need be, the Elders may appoint a committee to assist in the search. Once a candidate has been examined, and has the unanimous approval of the Elders, he may be recommended to the congregation for affirmation. The recommendation of the Elders must be affirmed by at least 90% of the members present in a regular or called congregational meeting before a call to a senior pastor can be extended . The term of this ministry shall be for an indefinite period. It may be terminated by either party upon sixty (60) days written notice. A written statement setting forth the salary to be paid and other conditions of the call shall be made in duplicate, one (1) copy for the Senior Pastor and one (1) copy to be filed with the church records (see Article 5 Part 3).

Dismissal Procedure

A petition of removal documented with reasons and signed by no less than 25% of members in good standing must be presented to the Elders. Within two (2) weeks after the referral, the Elders will meet with the senior pastor regarding the allegations. After proper discussion and investigation, the Elders will present the petition to the Congregation along with the findings of their investigation and their recommendation. A congregational meeting shall be called within two (2) weeks of the Elder's investigation. A majority of members present shall rule.

Section B – Associate Pastor(s)

Selection Procedures

The Scripture indicates that the Apostles made the decisions as to who would and who would not serve as their assistants during their ministries (Acts 15:36–40). In keeping with this, the Senior Pastor will make the initial decision concerning a person who should be considered for Associate Pastor. Anyone in the congregation who would like to make a recommendation of a candidate should make it to the Senior Pastor. Once the Senior Pastor has made his initial decision on a candidate, he will present this candidate to the Elders for examination. Once a candidate has been examined, and has the unanimous approval of the Elders, he may be recommended to the congregation for affirmation. The recommendation of the Elders must be affirmed by at least 90% of the members present in a regular or called congregational meeting before a call to an Associate Pastor can be extended. The term of this ministry shall be for an

indefinite period. It may be terminated by either party upon sixty (60) days written notice. A written statement setting forth the salary to be paid and other conditions of the call shall be made in triplicate, one (1) copy for the Senior Pastor, one (1) copy for the Associate Pastor. and one (1) copy to be filed with the church records (see Article 5 Part 3).

Dismissal Procedure

As overseers of the congregation, the Elders may terminate the employment of an Associate Pastor. Any petitions from the congregation concerning dismissal of the Associate Pastor must be presented to the Elders with reasons and signed by no less than 25% of members in good standing. Within two (2) weeks after the referral, the Elders will meet with the Associate Pastor regarding the allegations. After proper discussion and investigation, the Elders will present the petition to the Congregation along with the findings of their investigation and their recommendation. A congregational meeting shall be called within two (2) weeks of the Elder's investigation. A majority of members present shall rule.

PART 2 – Staff Management

The Elders are responsible to interview, hire and manage all church employees.

PART 3 – Salary Packages

Salary packages will be approved or denied by the Executive Committee. Any change in salary that would increase the annual budget within that calendar year would need to be taken before the congregation for affirmation.

Article 6 – Church Membership

PART 1 – Membership Record

An accurate record of Members in Good Standing will be maintained in the church office. An updated membership list will be provided to all Members in Good Standing on an annual basis.

PART 2 – Joining the Church

The membership of this church shall consist of persons who confess faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as personal Savior, who give evidence of regeneration by living a life consistent with that profession of faith, who have been baptized by immersion, and who have been received into membership according to one of the following two ways:

- (1) Profession of Faith for baptism, after which the person can join by affirming the Statement of Faith.
- (2) Statement of prior baptism in a bible-believing church, after which the person can join by affirming the Statement of Faith.

All who desire membership in the church must attend a meeting with an Elder who will explain the Statement of Faith and the responsibilities of church membership.

PART 3 – Member in Good Standing

A “Member in Good Standing” is a member who is at least sixteen (16) years old, is an active participant in the overall program of the church and has the right to participate in congregational meetings. A person would not be considered a member in good standing, and thus would void their right to participate in congregational meetings, if one or more of the following were to take place:

(1) He/she has willfully not attended worship for a period of 120 calendar days without plausible reason (which is determined by the Elders).

(2) He/she is under the discipline of the church (explained in PART 4, Section C)

A member who has lost his/her good standing due to attendance issues will be required to meet with the Elders before being restored to the status of Member in Good Standing. A member under discipline will be subject to the requirements explained in PART 4, Section C.

PART 4 – Leaving the Church

Section A – Membership Transfer

Upon request, a letter of transfer will be granted to all members in the event of a membership change. When the letter is granted, the member will be removed from the membership roll of the church.

Section B – Membership Resignation

If a member chooses to be removed from the membership roll, he/she may do so by sending a letter of intent to resign to the Elders.

Section C – Church Discipline

The Bible teaches that all people, even regenerated believers, are sinners. Yet the life of a believer is not to be marked by habitual, unrepentant sin. When a member of the church is found engaging in habitual, unrepentant sin, and restoration has been sought and not been achieved, the offending member must be removed from the church membership roll. The Scripture describes this process in multiple passages including Matthew 18:15–20, I Corinthians 5:1–4, and Titus 3:10–11. The Elders will have the responsibility to determine that the scriptural requirements are fulfilled before a person is brought before the congregation for removal. After removal, the disciplined member will be required to give a statement of repentance and reaffirmation of faith before being allowed back into church membership.

Section D – Membership Roll

An attempt to contact a member who has not shown an interest in the church program for a period of one (1) year will be made regarding their intentions for membership. If no interest is shown, or contact cannot be made, his or her name will be removed from the membership roll.

Article 7 – Church Property

PART 1 – Sale and Purchase of Property

Section A – Land, Buildings and Vehicles

The sale and purchase of physical land, buildings and/or vehicles must receive the affirmation of the congregation in a regular or called congregational meeting.

Section B – Miscellaneous Sales and Purchases

The sale and purchase of all items except land, buildings and/or vehicles will be under the authority of the Executive Committee. The Executive Committee has the authority to approve expenditures that would increase the annual budget up to six (6) percent. Expenditures that would increase the annual budget more than six (6) percent would require congregational affirmation.

PART 2 – Maintenance of Property

The oversight and management of the church property will be by the Session of Elders. If need be, a standing committee can be appointed to assist in this oversight. No property donations will be accepted without the approval of the Elders.

PART 3 – Corporate Dissolution

In the event that the church corporation dissolves, all property will be liquidated and the funds will be donated to a recognized non-profit organization(s).

The Executive Committee will decide upon and oversee the dispersement of the assets.

Article 8 – Adoption and Amendments

This constitution may be adopted and/or amended at any congregational meeting by an eighty (80) percent affirmation of the members present, provided that notice of the proposed amendment has been announced at a regular Sunday morning service and been given by written notice postmarked five days prior to the meeting for all members in good standing.

