

Today we continue our five part series on the church: Sacred Assembly. Usually as a church, we preach straight through books of the Bible so that we can engage with whole counsel of God, not just the parts that we want to talk about. That said, we are not doing that right now. As a new church, it is important that we lay down who we are as a church and why we do things the way we do. Week 1 we talked about the church as a whole and looked at the many ways that the Bible talks about the people of God, those called out to be His. Last week we looked at the role of the Word of God as the guiding force in our lives. The fact that the Word of God is the means by which God works: it is the active force as well as the power we are to support and hold up. We ended last week with a verse out of 1<sup>st</sup>. Timothy:

I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these things to you so that, if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth. **1 Timothy 3.14–15**

We hit the second part of this: the pillar and buttress of church. Today, we are going to spend a little more time on the first part: how we are to behave in the household of God, the church family. Specifically, we are going look at how God has set up leadership and authority for His body, for which He is the Head.

That is where we begin. Jesus Christ is the ultimate authority in the church. You may have heard that before and wondered how that actually works. It sounds clever, because let's be honest:

1. He doesn't attend planning meetings
2. Jesus doesn't actually give us the details of: which missionaries we should support, what sermon series we should do next, or how to best reach the specific population in the community that we feel needs the gospel.

So how is Jesus the Head of the church, or the senior pastor, or the leader of leaders? This means that all things flow from Jesus and all things must be tested

by the Word of God. So our idea of what it means to be the church comes out of Scripture. Our mission for the church is derived from Scripture. Our understanding of leadership and authority are built out of Scripture. In other words, we are not just shooting from the hip.

### **The Need for Leadership**

Before we start defining a structure, it is important to understand that there is a structure. The Christian life is not every man and woman for themselves. There is a way that we are to behave in the household of God. In creation, we see God, the perfect parent, set the family rules. Respect for authority is part of the creative order. Submission is part of the created order. God creates Adam, gave Adam the rules, told Adam what to do, gave Eve as a helper to him. Ultimately, the whole structure relied on Adam's submission to God.

Adam failed to lead in the way that God had commanded him, but God did not give up on the idea of using people to lead people. Throughout Israel's history, as they wander through the desert, as they settle in the Promised land, God continues to lead His people through Prophets and Priests. We see in Matthew 16 that God hands the authority of His church over to the Apostles. But the apostles did not live forever. They were not the end of the plan. In His letter to the Ephesians, Paul sheds light on what the structure of the church would look like moving forward:

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

We see authoritative progression here in the gifts that God has given to His church. He gave the prophets and apostles, God spoke directly to them AND through them, so that we could have the Word recorded. We have the evangelists, those who take the Word of God into places where it has not yet taken root (missionaries). Finally, we have the shepherds and teachers, the men that God has given to authoritatively rule over local churches. In Scripture, we

see this role of Shepherd also being referred to as pastor, overseer, elder...these are all the same thing. These are specifically the leaders that God has given to His church, as gifts, for the building up of the body of Christ. But who are these men? And what exactly do they do?

Grab your Bibles and open them to **Acts 20**. At the same time, keep your finger in **1 Timothy 3**. What we are going to do today is look at what it means to be the leader of God's spiritual family, and we will see how the qualifications that Paul lays out for elder are intrinsically tied this vision of what they are supposed to do.

What pastors do (**Acts 20**) and who pastors are (**1 Timothy 3**). Jesus is the Head over both the ends and the means.

In **Acts 20**, we find Paul giving a farewell address to the Ephesian Elders. This was a church that he had been at for about three years, a church that he had not only founded and preached at, but one where he had served and ministered. He is now leaving and these are the final words, the parting wisdom that Paul gives to them. Starting in v.26, it says:

### **STEADFAST**

Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all, for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God.

The first duty of a pastor then, is to steadfastly declare the counsel of God. Paul says: I have done this, I am innocent of the blood of those who have not believed. I fell confident that I have done my part. If Paul is innocent of the blood, it means there is a way of declaring God's truth that would make someone guilty.

A pastor is guilty if people are convinced that they need anything other than the Jesus Christ in their life. A pastor's job is not to get people to believe in him, or buy into what he is selling, a pastor's job is to faithfully declare the truth as God

has revealed it in His Word. And to do it steadfastly, which means that he continues to do it with passion, he must have a strong relationship and understanding of who he is in God. And if you notice I keep using the masculine pronoun: HE. That is because first and foremost the leader of the church must be a man. This flows directly from the established leadership structure instilled in creation, commanded as the appropriate model for the home, modeled by Jesus (who was a man). It is the first thing that Paul says when he is introducing the role in **1 Timothy**:

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. (2.12–15)

This verse can, and has, been abused. We can't allow other people's errors to guide our vision of God's plan. LET'S BE CLEAR. This verse isn't saying that women are less valuable, less gifted, or have less to offer. It is saying that women and men are different. And as such, God has appointed them to different tasks. And in the last verse there Paul shows what this difference looks like. Men do not bear children. It does not matter how much men think this is unfair or unequal (we don't really complain it). It doesn't matter if we don't like it, a guy is not going to have a baby. WHY? He wasn't given the right equipment to make it work. That's the scientific answer. The Biblical answer would be: it isn't how God created it to work. When we see the family, and the family of families, the church, we see that God made the men the leaders. And they are the leaders even if they pass the torch to their wives, in which case they are just crappy, lazy leaders. God will still hold the men accountable, in the same way that it was Adam that He looked for when He came to punish when Adam and Eve ate the apple. At Communion Church we will ever only approve men for the role of elder, in accordance with God's Word.

But simply being male does not an elder make. Paul goes on (in 1 Timothy) to define additional aspects of the elders relationship to God:

The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. Therefore an overseer must be above reproach

Being above reproach is sort of a junk drawer term. It means that there is a character there that is tangible. That this isn't a man that you have to be constantly wondering if he will disqualify himself. It mean that this is a man who understands who he is in Christ, and lives in the truth of that reality. It does not mean perfection, because no man but Jesus is. It does not mean above criticism, because Jesus was and we don't want to make sure that Jesus as the model, would qualify. Above reproach means that there is a respectability to the way that this man lives his life. It means that this is a person whose life does not negate his authoritative declaration of God's truth.

Paul also says: not a new convert. If the elders are supposed to teach the whole counsel of God, that it is going to take some time for them to really understand the whole counsel of God. The most terrifying people in life are the ones who have just enough knowledge to be dangerous. Especially in an authoritative position, a person who is going to wield a sword whose strength he does not understand, is dangerous. Paul says: give them time. They'll either prove their qualifications, or disqualify themselves...do not be hasty with the laying on of hands. It's a lot easier to be patient than it is to try to take power from those it has been given. Flip back to **Acts 20**, and we see the next part of an elder's role is to:

### **SINNERS**

Pay careful attention to yourselves

Paul is a firm believer in sin. This is an important aspect to remember about your pastors, they are sinful sinners. They may be equipped by God and called out for a specific task, but this does not negate the fact that they make

mistakes. Be gracious to them in the same way that Jesus Christ has been gracious to you.

This does not mean, of course, that you put up with grievous sin and habitual mistakes. Paul is calling these men to keep careful attention, not only because they might disqualify themselves, but because they might embarrass the name of Jesus Christ and do great pain to the church community in the process. For this reason, in laying out the qualifications for elders, Paul lists aspects of discipline that a pastor must display:

1. Temperate – a person whose ability to make decisions is not impeded by his emotions.

Are they able to discern and process information in a disciplined way? We shouldn't have pastors who think place their passion above their proclamation.

2. Self-controlled – a man who lives a disciplined life and has a history of good decision making

Does their life show a pattern of good decision making? We don't want pastors who have a pattern of foolishness in their life.

3. Not given to drunkenness – does not have habitual sin (pornography, drugs...).

Does their life reveal the ability to be convicted of and overcome sin? We don't want pastors who fall into unhealthy patterns of following their own desires when time gets tough.

4. Not a love of money– a man who is content, who views Jesus as the treasure  
Does this man have a heart that cares ultimately for Christ? We don't want pastors who are using the church for their own selfish gain.

I am sinful. But you also need to see that I a man who is not blind to my sins, driven by my sin, and who is not complacent with my sin. Pastors need to lead the way in how they deal with their sin. They are not men who never fall, but

men who have a response to their sin which is above reproach. Paul gives us the next piece to being a pastor:

### **STEWARDS**

[pay careful attention] 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.

So we see that ELDERS ARE STEWARDS. And a steward is someone who is tasked with being diligently responsible for something that belongs to someone else. In this case, the Holy Spirit has given the overseers (they are called specifically by God for the task), to dutifully care for the church, which in the end has been purchased by and belongs to Jesus Christ. This implies a few things:

#### 1. Pastors must image Jesus.

Jesus calls pastors to care for HIS church. Then he adds some weight to the task by reminding us that the reason that the church exists is because HE died to make it a reality. Jesus' love for the church was expressed in the cross the single most powerful AND sacrificial action in the history of the world. In obtaining the church, Jesus allowed Himself to be humiliated, treated with contempt, judged as too weak by some and too overly harsh others, he was led quietly to the slaughter...he didn't fight, he didn't raise a voice in his defense before Pilate. He gave up His rights so that He could serve.

We see at the Last Supper, the meal that the apostles had just before His death, we see Jesus wash the feet of His disciples. After submitting Himself to this humiliating act, He said to them:

For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you. Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. **John 13.14-16**

Jesus is speaking to the same guys that he had given the keys to the kingdom to in Matthew 16. He is saying, your leadership is to be punctuated by service. I

said punctuated by service, not ALL about service; Christians are not to be defined by their lowly position. The cross may have been humiliating, but it was also VICTORY. Jesus death conquered Satan in one strike and made it possible for the church to exist. Those who lead God church must be confidently secure in the finished work of Jesus Christ, and follow His example to be servant leaders.

In order to steward, to lead like Jesus, pastors need to give up their rights, their desires, their ego, in order to exude a strength that comes from the work of Jesus. In this way, the pastor's model for the church, the model that was given to them in Jesus. They are image-bearers:

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**

2. Pastors must remember that the church will be given back to Jesus. Your pastors will not always be your pastors (especially for those of you who change churches every two years). This life is just a drop in the bucket in the grand scheme of things. Pastor's must care for the church under the realization that they will be presenting her back to Jesus Christ one day. They will have to give an account for all of the souls in the church. Not just yours. Paul says: pay attention to ALL of the flock. A pastor's vision needs to be for the whole body to the end.

The way that an elder is assessed and measured in this, is by looking at the other aspects of stewardship that he has been entrusted with: Husband of one wife, has obedient children and manages family well. Paul says:

For if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church? **1 Timothy 3.5**

In order to be given the responsibility of caring for the bride of Christ, a man need to already show that he understand stewardship as it relates to the things



he already has been taking care of. If a man does not take this responsibility seriously in his house, HE WILL NOT BE TRUSTED WITH GOD'S HOUSE. Paul gives us the next task for elders:

### **SHEPHERDS**

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 every one with tears.

Paul moves from the idea of steward to shepherd. And he does it by way of warning: FIERCE WOLVES ARE COMING! Do not be surprised that the moment I leave everything goes bad. Not only don't be surprised, expect it. It won't be a simple head on attack. These attacks will come two-fold: they will come at you from the outside and from the inside. It's these interior attacks that pose the greatest threat. THE GREATEST DAMAGE is done when men from the inside (trusted men, often pastors) begin to teach twisted things.

Twisted truth starts as truth, and then gets bent out of shape by depraved minds. Most heretics have verses. But they use these verses to weaken the church rather than strengthen it. They use those verses to pull people away from trust and dependence on Jesus Christ into trust and dependence on themselves. DEPENDENCE ON SELF IS DEATH. Any theology that does not make God greater and yourself smaller is death.

The elders role is to keep these false gospels at bay. But it is not just to shoot the wolves, but also to care for the sheep lest they become wolves. EVERY PERSON HAS THE POTENTIAL TO BE A WOLF.

Paul says I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears. ADMONISH. The words means to correct with gentleness. To correct through tears. It means to love people enough to warn them of where their sin is leading

them. We don't delight in the sin and struggle of others. Paul is coming up beside people who are in error and correcting and guiding them with the care and concern of a shepherd. What does a shepherd do? He protects the sheep from the dangers that come from the outside, but most of the time he protects them from themselves.

In order to shepherd well, Paul gives a list of qualifications that refer to how a pastor relates to others:

Able to teach – first and foremost know what truth is

Respectable, Hospitable, Not Violent , Gentle, Not Contentious, Good reputation with outsiders

In other words, it is important that shepherds know when the sheep need comfort, when they need guidance, and when they need a swift kick. To kick an injured sheep, or encourage one who is flirting with danger is not caring for the flock.

People need to trust that their pastor cares for their soul, not just an idea of truth.

### **SUBMISSION**

And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.

Paul leaves them by giving their ministry a final encouragement. He says I leave you to God and the gospel, all that you really need. Which is able to give you the strength where you are weak, and has the power to do the work of sanctification. God is in control of all things; Jesus death and resurrection have secured all things; the Holy Spirit is doing the work of sanctification in the hearts of people. As to say, don't believe for a second that it is your ability that is going to carry this thing. Pride and ambition are the two greatest threats to the church (per Calvin). They are what makes wolves. The only solution is the pure and sincere handling of Scripture leads to Jesus Christ alone being given the glory.

HE LOVES US AND HE LOVES JESUS MORE.

The desire for eldership is a noble task, but it is not a light one. But this sermon is not only for men who are or who aspire to be elders. The whole church needs to understand the role so that they understand their responsibility to their pastor.

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**

Leading the family should be joyful. If we all understand that the goal of the church is for all of us together to strengthen and encourage one another, to remind each other of how awesome God is, to falling more deeply in love with Jesus, WE SHOULD HAVE SOME JOY. But what leads to pastoral groaning:

1. Fighting Sheep

Huge concerns over unimportant things; dying on an issue because it is your issue

2. Hiding Sheep

Sitting there, but not really caring enough to engage...hidden sin

3. Gossiping Sheep

Sowing dissension because you can

I know it seems self-serving to preach against the things that happen to annoy me and lead me to groaning, but this is not about me. These things undermine the established authority structure (they are sinning against God), they weaken the church (all parts work together), but if you aren't convinced by that: IT IS OF NO ADVANTAGE TO YOU. It brings you nothing to fight against your leaders.

At Communion church we believe that the Holy Spirit calls men to pastor the church. That calling is confirmed by their character as measured by the elder

qualifications in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1, as well as their competency, their ability to do the job of elder as described in passages such as Acts 20.