

## More than a Building, Elders: The Shepherds, 1 Timothy 3:1-6, 9/14/25

If you watched Erika Kirk speak for the first time after Charlie's murder, you may recall her encourage all people to go to church. She didn't say go listen to a podcast, or watch a sermon on Youtube. But go to church. Because church is this beautiful, messy group of people, and what unites us is not politics, or ethnicity, or socio-economics, or stage of life- but the gospel of Jesus Christ. Christianity is a team sport where we practice the 59 one anothers and help one another grow in a way that we can't get through isolation and individualism. It's a body of people, not a building. And that's really what our series is all about. Today and next Sunday we are concluding this series looking at what the Bible says about leadership in the body of Christ.

One of the situations I find myself most prone to the sin of anger is in dealing with customer service. About a year ago, I had a terrible experience with an HVAC service company (I won't put the company on blast publicly, but if you want to know, ask me privately). I was trying to solve a problem and I was on hold being sent from one representative to another and I started to grow impatient. "I said, listen I don't want to be rude, but if we can just skip all the steps here and can you get me to a manager who has the authority to help me?" And the woman said, "Ugh, well my manager isn't available." I said, "OK, well when will your manager be available?" "I don't know." I said, "Well, can you give me their name and phone number so I can talk to them directly?" She said, "I'm sorry, I'm not authorized to do that." And at this point I was exasperated, and I yelled, "Who's in charge around here?" And I hung up the phone.

So, if you've ever asked the question, even in frustration, "Who's in charge here?" You are actually asking a very fundamental question that goes all the way to the very nature of God, did you know that?

God of course has all authority in his universe. But He entrusts his authority over to others in his creation. We see this pattern from the very beginning of Scripture.

- **Creation of Man and woman** as his image-bearers to bear his authority on earth. (*Genesis 1:26-31*).
- In OT Israel: **Prophet, Priest and King**: (*Numbers 3:5-10, Deuteronomy 18:15; Leviticus 21; 1 Samuel 10:1*).
- **Household**: (*Ephesians 5:22-25, Ephesians 6:1-3*)
- **Government**: (*Romans 13:1-4*).
- **Heavenly Realms**: (*Colossians 1:16; Daniel 10:13*).
- **The Trinity**: (*John 6:38, John 16:13-14, Matthew 28:18-20*)

And what this all reveals to us is authority isn't evil, or even a necessary evil. In fact the opposite is actually true. Authority, when exercised according to God's design for the good, for the flourishing of his creation, reveals the glory of God. And the church is no exception. Scripture gives us a clear structure and pattern of authority designed for the flourishing of the members of the body and to display the glory of God.

- **Jesus is the Head and Chief Shepherd** for the Church. Can you imagine if your hand started talking back to you? No it takes instruction from the head...same in the church. (Ephesians 1:22-23, 4:15, 1 Peter 5:4). Ultimately, we do not answer to a counsel, a pope, the government, or kings, the church is under the authority of Jesus himself.
- **Foundations of Apostles and Prophets:** Jesus as the head and chief doesn't keep all the authority up at the top, he hands over the keys of the kingdom (a symbol of his authority) to the Apostles (Matthew 16:18-19). Paul says that the apostles and prophets (those who spoke with the authority of God before the Scriptures were completed and wrote the Bible under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit) formed the very foundation of the leadership and authority for the church (*Ephesians 2:20*). And so we see this pattern of delegated authority in the church.
- **Elders: The Shepherds:** And as the early Apostles planted more churches in more cities, we see the establishment of the office of Elders. Elders were the shepherds responsible for the spiritual authority of the NT churches. (*Acts 14:23; 1 Peter 5:1-4, 1 Timothy 3:1-7*)
- **Deacons: The Lead Servants:** As the church grew, the apostles and elders recognized the need for additional leadership. In *Acts 6:1-6*, the first deacons (servants) were chosen to care for the physical needs of the congregation. And within 30 years the deacons had become an established office of leadership within the church (1 Timothy 3:8-13)

So in today's church the instruction and pattern we see are these two offices- Elder and Deacon lead and serve the church. So what we want to do for the rest of this message is discover more about what the Bible says about the leadership role of Elders in the church and what difference it makes in our church in Wilmington 2000 years later. Next week we will look at the office of Deacon and ask the same questions.

### What are Elders?

Simply put, **Elders serve under the authority of Jesus Christ and are affirmed by the congregation as shepherds who care for the church.** The New Testament uses three interchangeable terms for the same leaders in the church- **Elder (Presbuteros), Overseer (Episkopos), Pastor (Poimen).**

**Elder (Presbuteros)-** used most often, about 40 times to describe the office of leadership in the church.

Now for some of you the word Elder might have some baggage attached to it because of bad church experience in a church that had elders who led in a heavy-handed or ungodly way. That's an abuse of this biblical, God-given term. But if you don't like the term Elder, the Bible has two others you can use.

### **Overseer (Episkopos) 5x**

Paul in 1 Timothy 3:1 says, **Here is a trustworthy saying: Whoever aspires to the office of overseer desires a noble task.** Here Paul isn't talking about a separate office from Elder, this is the same role, just a word variation.

**Pastor (Poimen)** 18x. This word literally means *Shepherd*. Only once is this word used in the noun form, Ephesians 4:11, most often used to describe what the Elder/Overseer does- pastors or shepherds the flock.

1 Peter 5:1-2, we see all three of these terms used together to describe various aspects of the same leadership responsibility. *To the elders (Presbuteros) among you, I appeal as a fellow elder and a witness of Christ's sufferings*

*who also will share in the glory to be revealed: Be shepherds (poimaino) of God's flock that is under your care, watching over them (episkopeō).*

Phil Newton in his book *Elders in the Life of the Church* summarizes the nuance among these three words: "Elder- emphasizes the spiritual maturity required for the office;

Overseer implies the leadership and direction given to the church;

Pastor suggests feeding, nurturing and protecting the flock."

### What do Elders do? 7 Things

1. **Leading and guiding the church** as the Lord's shepherds (Hebrews 13:17, Acts 15, 1 Timothy 5:17-22).
2. **Teaching/Preaching God's Word** (Titus 1:9, 2:1, 2 Timothy 4:1-2) and training up others to do so as well.
3. **Protecting the church from false doctrine** (1 Timothy 1:3-4, Acts 20:26-31). Have you ever wondered how churches that at one point were bastions of the gospel and the Word of God, somehow abandoned both and are basically clubs with a handful of members? Oftentimes, it's because they failed to do this. They allowed false doctrine, and things that distract from the truth to reign unchecked, and the work of God was no longer advanced.
4. **Caring for and keeping watch over the flock** (Acts 20:28, 1 Peter 5:1-4) In the Gospels, we find Jesus constantly *among* the people as the Good Shepherd. Except for periods of private prayer, it seems Jesus spent all his time with his disciples, as well as with the crowds- teaching, mending their wounds, serving them, listening to their concerns and protecting them. The Good Shepherd not only laid down his life for the sheep, but he also spent his life with them. Just as literal shepherds live among their flocks and know their sheep, and just as Jesus immersed himself in relationships with his disciples, so elders share their lives with church members. They see people as their ministry.
5. **Equipping the church for ministry** (Ephesians 4:12, 2 Timothy 2:1-2)
6. **Praying for the church and anointing the sick** (Acts 6:1-4, James 5:14)
7. **Modeling a godly lifestyle** (1 Peter 5:1-4, 1 Timothy 3:1-7, 2 Timothy 2:14-15)

What are we to look for in Elders? **1 Timothy 3:1-7** *Here is a trustworthy saying: Whoever aspires to be an overseer desires a noble task.*

**2** Now the overseer is to be above reproach, faithful to his wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach,

**3** not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money.

**4** He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him, and he must do so in a manner worthy of full respect.

**5** (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?)

**6** He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil.

**7** He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap.

What is particularly notable about the qualifications of Elders is that other than the ability to teach, what qualifies elders is not their personalities or their accomplishments, not whether they have degrees, or are Executives, or have a glowing resume...above all else is their character and integrity. That's because Elders are called to lead not only by what they teach, but how they live, just like Jesus did.

While many people in the church will play a part in many of these functions, Elders are uniquely called to *lead* in these ways. Every member of the church bears the responsibility to care for each other, to be concerned about doctrinal purity, to teach others the Word of God, and to pray for others. Elders simply shepherd these functions with the authority and weighty responsibility of the church under our Chief Shepherd, Jesus Christ.

### What does this mean for us?

At Brandywine Valley Church, we are "People of the Book." The Word of God is our final authority, and what that means is that we seek to have God's Word shape every part of our lives and our church, and in this case the structure of our authority and governance as a church. For nearly 10 years our Board of Deacons and Ministry Leadership Team has been studying the Scriptures, reading books and exploring how we can better align with what the Bible says about the leadership of the Church, particularly as it relates to Elders and Deacons. In 2018, we created an Elder Exploration Team made up of men and women members, myself and one Deacon who could help provide research and direction in this process. Just before Covid, we had a plan to roll out a road map to the changes we are proposing. And then Covid happened. We picked up where we left off about 2 years ago and we are now ready to roll out a road map for some structural and cultural changes to the governance and leadership of the church. Let me share with you the key changes we are proposing and then the road map of how we intend to get there.

I'd like to describe our proposed new Governance Structure like this:

**Jesus-Ruled, Elder-Led, Deacon-Served, Congregationally-Governed**

**Elder-Led:** Lay Elders would come alongside our pastors to lead, feed, care for and protect the flock, which is a critical need especially as our church continues to grow. These men would form an Elder Board in a roughly 2:1 ratio of lay Elders to pastors would provide for the spiritual leadership, oversight, and shepherding that our congregation needs.

**Deacon-Served.** We will propose new roles and responsibilities for Deacons as the lead servants that we believe better aligns with what the Bible teaches. Currently our Deacon board is more like a "Delder" Board. Some of what they do is more in the Elder qualifications and some of what they do are more aligned with what the Bible says Deacons should do. So we want to clearly delineate those responsibilities, and therefore open up this office to both men and women for reasons that we will look at next week.

**Congregationally-Governed.** Maybe some of you have some skepticism or fear that this is some kind of power grab. In reality, it's quite the opposite. Nothing changes about the congregational government structure that we currently have. But what this does do is open up the congregation to nominate, call and affirm more leaders from among you to serve in these important positions of authority and leadership.

**Road Map:**

On **November 30th at our Congregation Sunday** we will be presenting a proposal for changes to our Bylaws that reflect the Biblical alignment that we are hoping to achieve. In accordance with our Bylaws we will only present these Bylaws, and they will not be voted on until our **Spring Congregational Sunday** next year in May. If these changes are affirmed by an 80% or more vote, we would be **affirming our first class of Elders and new Deacons in November 2026.**

In the meantime we will be providing you with a **position paper and "who does what?" structure** that will clearly lay out our intentions. We have some copies available at the welcome desk today, but you will receive a PDF in an email tomorrow if you are in our database.

We will host Q&As, and provide other opportunities for you. It's critical that we move forward together and so we want to move slowly and intentionally. The first of those **Q&A opportunities is September 28 at 10am in the Fellowship Hall.**

Of course, any deacon or member of our MLT can answer questions and feel free to schedule a meeting with us.

Here's how I want to end our time together: I said that our governance structure is Jesus-Ruled. And that's because we believe he is Lord, he proved it by raising from the dead and he reigns in heaven and he is the only way to live forever, life with God.

Two Questions:

1- Between 1 and 10- if you died today, how certain would you be that you are going to heaven. Think of your number.

2- If you stood before God and he said, "Why should I let you in, what would you say?" Because I...No it's because God- sent his son Jesus Christ to die for our sins, Raised him from the dead.

1-9 is all the same- some part of you is saying it's on you. So do believe that Jesus died for 90% of your sins? 80% of your sins? 50%? Or do you believe that he died for all of your sins? Every sin goes on the Cross, goes in the grave and he came out without them.

What is the gap? What part of you thinks it's up to you. The only thing you can do in hell is pay for your sins forever. Either they get paid there or on the cross, you get to choose.

Romans 10- If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead you will be saved.

Ephesians 2- For by grace...