

Sermons Series:

Church Strategy: 4 Stakes to Strengthen

Sermon title: *Church Leadership/ Deacons*

Scripture passage: Acts 6:1-7

June 24, 2018

Clearwater Bay International Baptist Church

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Let's pray.

Well, we are talking about church strategy and trying to lay out a roadmap of some directions we need to move in.

Specifically, we are looking at '**4 Stakes to Strengthen**'; 4 tent pegs that we need to hammer in a bit and arrange a little, so that our church is more secure and stronger.

We talked about Elders last week. In the Bible, the pattern of authoritative leadership in the church is a group of male Elders or Overseers whose job it is to:

- shepherd the church
- care for the church
- to teach and instruct the church in the word of God.

And this is distinct from Deacons. Deacons are another office of the church along with Elders.

But they are not the same thing and are often confused.

So, what is the role of Deacons and how are they different from Elders? That's our main question today. Turn in your Bible to [Acts chapter 6](#). I will read [verses 1-7](#).

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. 2 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. 3 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. 4 But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word." 5 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. 6 These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands on them. 7 And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many priests became obedient to the faith.

In this passage, we have the beginnings of the two offices of the church and an explanation of what makes them distinct from one another.

We have this one group, the Apostles at this time and later in each local church Elders, who say that they are getting pulled away from ‘preaching the word of God’ to ‘serve tables’...to make sure that the daily distribution of food to widows is done.

It’s a practical thing that needs to be done, but the Apostles need to **“devote themselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.”**

So, they choose 7 men to help out in these practical ways; to SERVE practically.

The reason we say this is the beginning of Deacons is because the word Deacon means ‘servant’.

It is a common ordinary word in the New Testament for ‘servant’. So common that Jesus, Paul and all believers are referred to as Deacons.

The Apostles say their ‘service’ is to the Word and the Deacons ‘service’ is to making sure the widows have enough food.

But not only that....they were acting as unity builders as well. They were making sure ‘by their service’ that the church is unified.

So, Elder (literally in Greek ‘episkopos’) means overseer. Someone who is looking over the church carefully.

Deacon (literally in Greek ‘diankonos’) means servant and originally meant “*to run errands*”.

These are the two distinct offices of the church and they have certain functions in the New Testament.

Elder’s primary ministry is to oversee and teach the word and Deacons have a primary ministry to serving in the practical things.

Turn to **1 Timothy 3** where we will see the qualifications for Elders and Deacons. I will read **verses 1-13**. It will be good for us to see them together.

1 The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. 2 Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, 3 not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. 4 He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, 5 for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church? 6 He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. 7 Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.

8 Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain. 9 They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. 10 And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless. 11 Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things. 12 Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well. 13 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.

Notice a few things in this passage about Deacons.

1. The character of Deacons is to be virtually the same as that of Elders.

Here in Timothy we have a lot of similarities in what's required of them in their character or what type of people they are to be.

Both are to be above reproach or dignified.

Both are to be sober minded.

Both are to be husband of one wife or a one woman man.

Both are to manage their homes well.

Both are NOT to love money.

2. There is **a clear distinction between the roles of Elder and Deacon** as we saw last week in Philippians 1, the letter is addressed to the ‘Overseers and Deacons’ and in Acts 6 and 1 Timothy 3.

3. **There are differences in what they are to do.**

- Elders are to be able to teach. Deacons are not.
- Elders are to ‘care for God’s church’. Deacons are not.
- Elders are to be hospitable. Deacons are not required this. (But all believers are!)
- Elders must not be a recent convert. There is no mention of this for Deacons.
- In the Deacon passage it mentions SERVE a few times but not in the Elder passage.
- Elders must be well thought of by outsiders but the Deacons passage makes no mention of this.

4. **WHO can serve as a Deacon is different than who can serve as an Elder.**

There is a direct mention in 1 Timothy for women **NOT** to serve as Elders/ Pastors/ Overseers (not...“to teach or exercise authority over a man” 1 Timothy 2:12) but what about women serving as Deacons??

1 Timothy 3:11 mentions the wives of Deacons but it can also be translated as ‘women likewise’ instead of ‘wives likewise’. Whether this passage means the wives of Deacons or Deaconesses, it is clear that there were women who were ‘*serv*ing’ or ‘*Deaconing*’ in this way.

In fact, we have an example of a Deaconess in scripture.

Turn with me to **Romans 16:1-2**. I will read it.

I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant (Deacon) of the church at Cenchreae, 2 that you may welcome her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints, and help her in whatever she may need from you, for she has been a patron of many and of myself as well.

The word that is used here for Phoebe is the word Deacon. And there were many women in the New Testament who served the church in various ways.

So, let me answer some questions that you might have in your mind.

1. Why are we even talking about this? Why the need to address the difference between Elders and Deacons?

Answer: Because many churches today confuse the two offices and the church needs both to function properly and biblically. Elders and Deacons are both desperately needed. Our own church needs to form both.

Our own church is in need to bring things into line with the scriptures and clarify these roles.

For example: Our bylaws state under section 5.3.2 number 1 & number 4 that the function of Deacons is to 'oversee'.

And in section 5.3.3 number 2 one of the qualifications listed for Deacon is Titus 1:6-9, which in the Bible is the qualification for Overseers or Elders.

To be specific and as clear as possible.. our church...in the future...needs to:

- (1) Restructure and rewrite our bylaws to bring them in line with the scriptures.
- (2) We need to form an Elder Board to shepherd, oversee and teach the church.
- (3) We need to extend and recognize our Deacons and Deaconesses who serve faithfully.

2. What would you envision a biblical Deacon Board (Deacons & Deaconesses) looking like?

Answer: It's a group of men and women serving in various capacities in the church. We actually already have men and women who serve as Deacons but aren't recognized as such...we just say they are 'serving'.

Deacon of set up.

Deaconess of music.

Deaconess of website and media.

Deacon of Mandarin Speaking ministry.

Deaconess of Finances.

Deaconess of Kid's Ministry.

Deacon of small groups.

Deacon of parking.

Etc.

Deacons are people who serve. It's not a ruling body or a group of people who meet together.

They don't meet together. It's not a "House of Representatives" and the Elders are the "Senate". It's just people who serve the church in various ways with their gifts, under the authority of the Elders. And we desperately need Deacons.

3. Can't we just change the names and call them whatever we want? Do terms matter? Why not use *Committee*? Why not call the *Elders...Deacons*?

Well, the Bible calls them what it does and I think it shows that we take God's word seriously and we honor God and his word when we bend to it in every way.

4. Pastor, aren't you a little uptight? I mean, why can't you just leave things as they are and stop trying to change things?

Answer: Yes, I am a bit uptight. But don't worry. These things will take time for us to restructure and align.

I do want you to know that I don't love God's word anywhere near enough what I need to....but I do love this book! God's word is so good. It has the answers for us for all things. And **I desire for our church in every way to align ourselves the best we can to the word of God.**

Please please know, that is all I am trying to do.

Pray for me that I will conform to God's word in my own life personally and that our church will love God's word so much that we must obey it.

As the word says in 2 Timothy 3, **All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, ¹⁷ that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.**