

Leadership at Redemption

*Elders and Deacons
imitating the Good
Shepherd*



REDEMPTION
CITY CHURCH

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Introduction

At Redemption City Church, the way we do things might appear different from what many Christians are used to seeing. Whether it is baptism and membership or how a church structures its leadership, Christians in our part of the world are often confused by a mix of worldly and biblical practices.

Should the church adopt business principles to help the organization grow? Are leaders the guys who are really good accountants? Are the leaders the ones who do the work to serve the members? Where is the biblical precedent for who leaders are and what they do?

We recognize that throughout church history there have been different forms of government in a church which attempted to be grounded in biblical principles. But it appears to us that much of church organization today results from an assumption that the Bible doesn't have much to say about the church's leadership or simply that too much emphasis is given to worldly principles over biblical ones.

This guide is our attempt to clarify our understanding of the biblical principles that guide how we structure leadership at Redemption, what leaders do, and who can fill these roles.

1. Image Bearers

It can no longer be assumed that leadership is a natural part of the created order and an expected part of the structure of the church. We live in a very egalitarian society where anyone can do what he wants and we reject the concept of authority. We've cast off the monarchy. We speak down to the President. One of our favorite pastimes is complaining about our bosses.

However, from beginning to end, the Bible carries structures of authority throughout not simply because it is a reality we must deal with in the fall, but because it is a part of God's good creation flowing out of his very nature.

In Genesis 1 God created man out of the dust of the ground, gave him life, and gave him a partner to help him have dominion over the earth. Adam was given the command to provide and protect, to work and to keep the garden (Gen. 2:15). But he was incomplete, so God made him a helper. Eve was to come alongside to help Adam accomplish the work he was given. It was his responsibility, but she was his equal partner in making the work happen.

Right away we see differing roles in the creation mandate. But this idea didn't come out of nowhere. We were made in the image of God (Gen. 1:27) and the way we relate to one another displays something about the character of God. Our image bearing reflects the diversity of persons in the Trinity, where the diversity is unified in one purpose (Gen. 2:24).

Even within God himself there are differing roles as Father, Son, and Spirit work to accomplish his purposes in this world, yet each person is equally God. Hippolytus wrote of the Trinity, “The Father decrees, the Word executes (and the Son is manifested through whom the Father is believed on). The economy of harmony is led back to one God; for God is one. It is the Father who commands, and the Son who obeys, and the Holy Spirit who gives understanding: the Father who is above all, and the Son who is through all, and the Holy Spirit who is in all.”¹

This is the image we bear. In our different roles in life we work together to accomplish the unified goal of making God known. Whether it is the union of a man and woman in marriage or the union of church members there is an economic ordering of authority and responsibility that reflects God’s work in this world.

2. Jesus: Our King, Our Model, Our Helper

When Adam and Eve rejected God’s call on their lives to represent his rule in the world, the fall did not introduce authority structures, but it filled them with tension. From then on it would be difficult to find unity, with both leader and follower fighting over the roles and experience difficulty engaging in their responsibilities (Gen. 3:16–19). But God promised that one day one of their sons would

¹ Hippolytus, *Against the Heresy of One Noetus*. (ANF 5:228).

arrive and fix it all, restoring peace and harmony in these roles (Gen. 3:15).

The promised Son would be a great leader. He would crush the head of the enemy. He would be the embodiment of wisdom (Prov. 8:22–31). He would be an eternal king (2 Sam. 7:13–16). He would be a great prophet to lead the people in understanding God’s will (Deut. 18:15). He would be a great priest who would go before his people into a rebuilt temple and stand before God on behalf of his people (Zech. 6:11–12).

The entire Old Testament traces the development of these promises and the repeated failure of any of the sons of Adam and Eve to be that promised Seed. Then in the Gospels we see Jesus as the great fulfillment of all these promises. He is the Seed of Eve, the Son of Abraham, Son of David, the King of Israel. He is the prophet greater than Moses, the one who knows God’s will and gives wisdom for righteous living. He is the priest who made a sacrifice for his people and intercedes before God on their behalf. He is the great Shepherd who guides his sheep and leads them to green pastures.

Before deciding who should lead a church we should look to the Leader of the Church, Jesus Christ himself. He is the head of the church (Eph. 1:22). He is our great authority and all in leadership within the church are ultimately slaves under his lordship.

Those who are called to leadership don't simply fit some list of character qualifications, but they are men who more than others reflect the character of our great Shepherd and model appropriate submission to his command.

We don't simply look at a list of qualifications, but we look to a person who reigns over us, models righteousness for us, and lives his love out through us. Jesus is our King, and every leader points to his reign. Jesus is our model who showed us what righteous submission to the authority of God looks like. And Jesus lives in us by sending his Spirit to be our helper within to make us walk this life imitating Christ.

Leadership in the church is reserved for those who have shown the Spirit of God working to help a man imitate Christ, model his submission, and point others to his rule.

3. Elders

A. What is an elder?

i. Biblical History of Elders

Where does the concept of elders come from? It would be easy to think that the idea simply shows up in the New Testament with no Old Testament example. When we think of leadership in the OT we remember Abraham, Melchizedek, Moses, Aaron, Joshua, Gideon Deborah, Samson, Samuel, David, Solomon, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Ezra, and Nehemiah. OT leadership was executed

by the prophets, priests, kings, and judges, and we gloss over the elders of the tribes of Israel.

OT elders were essentially the oldest people in each of the twelve tribes that descended from the Israelite fathers (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob). The leadership for the entire nation fell upon those great leaders we know so much about. But when it came to leadership of each local tribe, that fell by default to the oldest members of the tribe.

Generational faithfulness was of most importance in the nation of Israel. The commands of God were to be handed down to successive generations from the father to his children to his grandchildren and to his great-grandchildren (Deut. 6:1–2). Inspiring this faithfulness would be the common remembrance of what God has done by rescuing them bondage in Egypt (Deut. 6:20–25). The older you were the closer to that original exodus generation you were. It is more likely you remember those events or know people who were part of those events.

Elders were the ones most likely to be more faithful because they were closer in age to the giving of the law and the generations that were thought to be most faithful.

ii. New Testament Elders

As we see in many cases, when Jesus comes and establishes the new covenant the old pattern takes on a similar but new form. The office of priest was fulfilled by Christ the high priest and now we are all a priesthood of believers (1 Peter 2:5–9). The anticipated King, the Son of

David, was fulfilled by Jesus the King of Israel and now we are all in the royal family (Eph. 2:6; Rev. 1:5–6). The prophet greater than Moses was fulfilled by Christ (Acts 3:17–22) and now we are all prophets proclaiming the word of God (Joel 2:28–29; Acts 2:16–21; Col. 3:16; Rom. 15:14; Heb. 3:13).

Eldership also takes on a new form. Elders are no longer simply those who are physically older than everyone else, but those who have greater spiritual maturity. In 1 Timothy 3:1–7 Paul lists qualifications and responsibilities for a leader of the church, but these are all qualities and tasks that every believer should strive toward.

But entrance in the New Covenant is not from physical birth as it was in Israel, but by spiritual birth (John 3:3–8). Those who are closest to covenantal faithfulness are not those in greatest age, but those who display the greatest influence of the Spirit in their lives. It doesn't matter as much how close one is to the events that established the covenant, but how close one is to the Mediator of the covenant, that is, Jesus himself.

Really all of the qualifications for church leadership describe the character of Christ. And those who will lead Christ's people must be those who most reflect and submit to his leadership.

The apostles make quick work of appointing these men to lead the churches as they plant them. After planting new churches in Acts 13 and 14, they return to the same cities to

appoint elders who will represent the apostolic authority with them in the local gathering (Acts 14:19–23). Later on Paul checks in with some of these churches by writing letters to them and he appeals to the local church authority under apostolic teaching of the Lord Jesus, not his own desires (1 Cor. 5:1–5; Gal. 1:1; Phil. 1:1). It is the elders who are representatives of the local church’s authority under the Lordship of Jesus Christ and his apostolic word (i.e. the Bible).

B. Who can be an elder?

In our context, the Biblical progression of the word “elder” no longer simply means “older,” but more spiritually sanctified to be like Christ. So the primary qualification for eldership is not age, but Christlikeness which could occur at various ages. It is less dependent upon a set age and more upon the relative maturity of the local church body.

We also believe this call is limited to men (1 Tim. 2:12).² As explained previously, right from the beginning the man was given the responsibility to cultivate and guard with the woman coming alongside of him. Eve got herself in trouble because she did not call on her husband to defend her, but engaged the battle with the Serpent by herself (1 Tim. 2:13–14).

This has been the pattern of biblical leadership throughout the history of God’s people. Men have consistently held the roles of leadership. In the few cases where women took

² See Appendix 1 – FAQ’s for further explanation of this verse.

leadership roles (Deborah, Jezebel, Athaliah), it was due to utter moral breakdowns in the community. Women in leadership positions were a judgment against the men for failing to execute their appropriate roles. But God proved he would still accomplish his plan even with such a masculine void.

God's plan for his people is to redeem the created order where Adam protects and provides for the covenant community with complementary support from Eve. The church is to be an outpost of that restored creation until Christ returns and makes the whole world new.

The Apostles had their role establishing the church and today the elders represent that authority for each local community continuing the pattern of men leading the way with Christ-like character.³

This character is summarized in lists in 1 Timothy 3:1–7 and Titus 1:5–9.⁴ But (as mentioned before) this character list isn't simply a checklist of behaviors. It is a picture of the character of Christ. Who is a man who represents Jesus well in his life?

³ Note that every reference to elder leadership in the church is plural. There is always more than one elder and no indication that any church was led by one guy. Only one person has sole authority, Jesus Christ. It takes a multitude of men to more fully represent his leadership character. This is why we rotate pastoral responsibilities, so no pastoral task takes on the identity of one pastor, but instead that of Christ.

⁴ See summary in Appendix 2 – Qualifications and Responsibilities of an Elder.

It is helpful to back up to 1 Timothy 1–2 to see the character of Paul as he imitates Christ in exhorting Timothy to pastoral leadership. He is concerned with the gospel taking hold in people’s hearts, not just debating doctrine. He stays faithful, welcoming trials of many kinds. He is humble, recognizing his complete unworthiness for the task. He is thankful for the abundant mercy shown to him in Christ and takes every opportunity to glory in Jesus. This endurance is achieved in constant prayer, displaying dependence upon God’s Spirit for every breath.

C. What do elders do?

Three words occur regularly in the New Testament for the men who lead the church: shepherd (ποιμήν), elder (πρεσβύτερος), and overseer (ἐπίσκοπος). These are used interchangeably in the NT to describe the same role of a local church leader (see Acts 20:17–28; Titus 1:5, 7; and 1 Peter 4:17–5:4). He is a shepherd (=pastor [Latin translation of same Greek word]) who feeds the flock (John 21:15–17). He is an elder who represents the apostolic authority before the local covenant community. He is an overseer who leads the daily/weekly affairs of the body.

All of these responsibilities are grounded in Christ accomplishing them in his own life and continuing to do it through his appointed leaders (John 10:11–16; Heb. 13:20–21; 1 Peter 2:22–25; 5:4). The local church leaders are simply those who model Christ best among the people and inspire faithfulness in the flock.

Biblical Responsibilities

Specifically, the authority of an elder is limited to certain tasks. It is not an all-encompassing authority. He doesn't have authority over how a family runs their household. He doesn't determine how someone educates their kids. He doesn't even have the authority to declare who is and is not a Christian.⁵ Only Christ has such ultimate authority over the affairs of each individual.

Instead the tasks of the elder include: teaching/preaching, shepherding, praying, equipping, and leading.⁶ The elders' unique responsibility among all the roles of the church is to publicly proclaim and defend the authoritative word of Christ through his Apostles (Acts 6:2, 4; 1 Tim. 2:11–12; 3:2; 2 Timothy 3:16–4:5). It is the elders' primary job to make sure everyone in the body is growing in their knowledge of Christ through his word.

Shepherding may be considered a special application of that task. It is to go after the wandering sheep and pull them into the flock guiding them to the best fields for eating the most satisfying soul-food. Often this looks like individual counseling and one-on-one discipleship. Going after the one and leaving behind the ninety-nine while they graze together (Matt. 18:10–14).

⁵ See our guide on Church Membership.

⁶ We preached a series on the responsibilities and character of an elder early in 2019. See Appendix 4 for links to those messages.

Of course this is always done in complete dependence upon the Chief Shepherd. Praying is a responsibility undertaken whether counseling, preaching, evangelizing or discipling. The elders lead by example participating in corporate prayer times and modeling faithful prayers. Whenever a member is sick, the elders gather to anoint the person and pray for healing (James 5:14–15).

All of this healing, shepherding, and praying is done to equip the saints to exercise their unique gifts in the church (Rom. 12:6–8; Eph. 4:11–12; 1 Cor. 12:4–31). The church should not take on the identity of its elders but the identity of Christ through the diverse workings of each of its members. The elders' job is to give each member the Scriptures in whatever way necessary to equip and inspire that member to her fullest expression of her gifts in order that the members working together would be the builders of the body (Eph. 4:16).

Finally, the task of the elder is to lead. That is a rather vague concept, but generally it means to know the church well and envision the destination well to understand how to lead the church into maturity. The elders must foresee as best as men are able what is coming (to protect from harm) and where we must go (to provide safe travel) before the church is able to see it. He must be out front leading the way calling others to follow and inspiring imitation of his Christ-like character (1 Cor. 11:1) while regularly running to the back of the flock to encourage the tired sheep.

Relationship with the Church

To be an elder is not to be a king. An elder is simply a representative holding authority for certain tasks. More than anything an elder is a member of the church. His testimony is accountable to the church as much as any other. When the leaders of the Galatian churches went astray, Paul confronted the entire church for allowing it to happen (Gal. 1:1–10). When Paul arrived in Berea preaching the gospel, those assembled quickly went to the text to verify the truthfulness of his teaching (Acts 17:10–11). The church must hold its leaders accountable to faithful gospel proclamation and Christ-like character representation. If an elder is in sin, he is held to the same standard as any other member. Two or three witnesses must approach him and confront him (1 Tim. 5:19). The church is responsible to defend the gospel corporately, not just leave it to the elders.

But those elders who are faithful should be cared for well. They have an eternal life-and-death responsibility (James 3:1) and should be supported to maintain focus on the task (1 Tim. 5:17–18).

Though the church has an obligation to make sure its elders are staying faithful, they should do this in a way that honors their leadership role. Hebrews 13:7 reminds every member to imitate their leaders as they speak the word pointing us to Christ. In verse 17, members are reminded to obey and submit to the leaders who have the grave task of caring for souls.

Redemption City Church is congregational, but that does not mean the congregation will vote on every matter. The church appoints elders to lead in most details and the church executes their authority through the appointment and discipline process.⁷ Many of the applications of this authority will be made without the church's full and direct input. The elders will make many decisions without consulting the church as a whole, but through regular interactions with members as wisdom suggests. It just would not be wise to open up the spiritual lives to the entire church on most occasions. Oftentimes decisions are of such personal and sensitive nature that it wouldn't be wise to make such details public. And with the responsibility of leading through the darkness where most of the church cannot see, the church must trust its elders to make many decisions that may not become visible for some time.

There will be times where the elders propose something and the church needs to affirm in unity despite not having exhaustive answers to every question. In certain matters it is not appropriate to share all the details and it is godly for the church to vote in favor of a proposal because they trust their elders even if they don't have all the information to agree on every detail.

This is why character is such a vital qualification for leadership. The church isn't supposed to blindly follow its

⁷ Same as in membership. We also extend this responsibility to approving a budget since it often involves a large sum of money that wisdom suggests it is better to have more oversight.

elders, but to follow the elders' leadership according to the character they present. The checks and balances are found in the character evaluation, not in debating the merits and details of every proposal.

We should never appoint an elder simply because he is a good businessman, skilled with numbers, knowledgeable of systematic theology, or a really nice guy. We appoint men who we can be confident will care for our souls because Christ, the one who cares most for our souls, is clearly at work by his Spirit in these men.

4. Deacons

A. What is a deacon?

i. An Upside Down Kingdom

In many Baptist churches deacons became the leadership board that ran the church while a single pastor/elder was mainly responsible for preaching and visiting members in need. The deacons were seen as the administrators, the ones who made the church operate, managed finances, ran the ministries, and held the pastor accountable. Much authority was assumed on the deacon.

But when one reads the New Testament it is difficult to find very much of any guidance regarding the office of deacon. There are a couple of scattered references (Phil. 1:1 for certain), but the bulk of our understanding comes from one section (1 Tim. 3:8–13).

The word deacon is a transliteration of the Greek word δίακονος. Its meaning is simply, servant. The noun is used 29 times in the NT. The verb form (διακονέω = to serve) occurs 37 times. Most often this word describes a servant in the house or fields and Jesus uses it to explain what his kingdom is like.

In Mark 10 the disciples are arguing over who is the greatest in the kingdom. Jesus responds, “whoever would be great among you must be your servant (deacon) (Mark 10:43). And then he grounds this reality in himself: “For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” (Mark 10:45).

The point is that Jesus is the greatest in the kingdom and yet he is the greatest servant in the kingdom. If any strives to be great, he must be a servant like Christ. Again, Jesus is our example for leadership and he leads his kingdom in an upside-down way. He serves and creates a kingdom of servants.

ii. Exemplary Servant Representatives

Because of this, every disciple is called to be a servant in the church, using her gifts to care for others. But there is still a unique office that Paul presents to Timothy in which the church sets apart specific people to be official representatives of the church. In his letter Paul explains the qualifications for this role, but he doesn’t explain the responsibilities. It is somewhat similar to the qualifications of an elder (as would every character trait that points to

Jesus), but without the responsibility of teaching and defending the doctrine of the church.

In Acts 6:1–6 the Apostles encourage the church to set apart some men who will distribute food equally to everyone in the church. The Apostles do this so they can spend more time in the ministry of the word and prayer. They have been called to teach and pray, but just as important as that is caring for the physical needs of the body. So they have the church choose seven men of great character to lead this other effort.

The word “deacon” is not used in this text, so it doesn’t necessarily support building the office around this story. But the concept of exemplary service is here and provides some insight into how a church might define a deacon.

At Redemption City Church we believe elders are responsible for teaching/preaching, praying, shepherding souls, and leading down the spiritual path. The elders equip the saints for all of the other types of ministry to be done (and similar teaching, praying, shepherding responsibilities on a smaller, more individual scale). Deacons are servants who have proven to be of great Christ-like character and skilled in a task which the elders have decided has become too much of a distraction to their primary ministry. The elders recognize someone who is serving in a way that we want the church to imitate and in a way that will reduce some of the load on the elders.

B. Who can be a deacon

Everyone is called to be a servant of Jesus in his church, but who can be one of these official service representatives of the church?

The only place we have more specific qualifications to consider⁸ is 1 Timothy 3:8–13. There Paul lists many characteristics of an exemplary servant. We are all called to these qualities, but a deacon will be one who has matured in these more than what is common in service toward the church.

One of the qualifications Paul tells Timothy must mark a deacon is one who “holds the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience” (1 Tim. 3:10). At a minimum this means he knows the gospel deeply, even though he is not required to be skilled in explaining the word of God as an overseer is. Even more than knowing the gospel deeply, however, holding the mystery of the faith suggests he lives out its unifying implications. The “mystery” Paul speaks of (especially to Timothy in Ephesus; Cf. Ephesians 3:1–6) is that Jews and Gentiles are one in Christ. Therefore, a deacon must always be using his service to promote unity among the believers, not serving with partiality toward anyone.

One important question is whether or not women can be deacons. We at Redemption City Church affirm a woman’s call to the diaconate. 1 Timothy 3:11 says in the ESV,

⁸ More explicit than simply the standard of “be a servant like Christ.”

“Likewise, *their wives...*” and lists some qualities that are godly in women. Some argue that Paul is requiring that a deacon’s wife must be qualified as well. But we fear that the ESV has overtranslated the text.

In the Greek New Testament the verse simply says, “Likewise women...” The construction of using the word “likewise” picks up from when Paul gave instruction for overseers. He then says *likewise* to begin a new consideration of deacons (v. 8) and uses *likewise* again to begin a new consideration for women.

Why doesn’t he use the word *deaconess*? Because that word didn’t exist yet. Nowhere do we see that word used in that time period. It is only a couple hundred years later when the church needs a name for all of these women who are holding the office do they call them *deaconesses*.⁹

You can see Paul’s use of this phrasing just one chapter earlier when he first exhorts men to humble prayer lives and then exhorts *likewise women* (1 Tim. 2:9) to humble dress. The theme of both exhortations is humble submission, but expressed differently by men and women. Similarly in chapter 3 both men and women are exhorted to the diaconate through different character qualifications.

Paul returns in 3:12 with the title *deacon* again just to be sure that nobody thinks he has moved onto a different

⁹ For example, see Canon XIX of the Council of Nicaea (NFPF2 14:40).

category for women. The entire section of 3:8–13 is calling men and women to an office of leading the church by exemplary service and faithful representation of the church’s witness for Christ.

One example of this is Phoebe. At the end of his letter to the Romans he commends to the Roman church the servanthood of Phoebe. He entrusted her to deliver this letter to Rome for him. He has such confidence in her character to commend her to the church in Rome, so Paul calls her “a *servant* of the church at Cenchreae.” It is the same word for the office of deacon.

Many will argue that he is not referring to the office of deacon, but simply commending Phoebe for her excellent service as a representative of the church at Cenchreae. But that is exactly what we are saying the office of deacon is: official representative of a local church modeling exemplary service.

Phoebe is a woman who is of such high Christ-like character that she is given an official servant-leadership role in the church to carry out a task that alleviates the teachers of the church from the responsibility. Paul is able to continue ministering the word because he appointed Phoebe to this diaconate of delivering an important document.

In the ancient world, servants were often part of a household, both male and female. If there were a larger team of servants there would be a primary male servant and

female servant who ordered the affairs of the household service, the man heading the coordination of culturally masculine responsibilities and the woman leading the more feminine tasks. In the household of God (the local church) we are all servants, but the office of deacon holds these leadership responsibilities among the servants guiding all the servants to more faithful execution of all of our service roles. Both men and women have unique ways that their exemplary service may be better suited for different household responsibilities and so both male and female deacons are a benefit to the church.

Therefore, we are delighted at Redemption City Church to affirm exemplary women servants by giving them non-teaching (of adult men) leadership roles in order that they would model for other men and women (and boys and girls) what Christ-like service looks like.

C. What do deacons do?

The church calls deacons to be leaders of efforts which have become necessary due to the unique makeup of this body. They administer non-teaching duties that are vital for the church to flourish in its gospel witness. Deacons may lead set-up teams and coordinate facilities. They may be the leaders of community group ministry, fellowship meals, sound equipment, missionary support, finances, children's or women's ministries. Deacons run any number of things that the elders are not called to as shepherds and teachers.

The office of deacon is a needs-based role, not a permanent position. If the need goes away, so does that specific diaconate. There is no board of deacons because there is no need for them to coordinate together. They gather teams to coordinate in order to accomplish their task as a servant who displays to the rest of the church what a good servant of Christ looks like.

Just as we do for elders, we present candidates and hold elections for deacons because we need the church to affirm this character in someone who will be an official public representative of the church. Deacons may not represent the church on doctrine, but they do represent the church in many ways. For example, a facilities deacon would interact with public building officials and thereby represent the character of Christ among us in their interactions. Same goes for any deacon. We want to be sure that we are putting forward exemplary servants before the public so when the world sees our church they see as much of Jesus as possible in us.

Appendix 1 – Frequently Asked Questions

Is Redemption City Church Elder Ruled or Elder Led?

Hebrews 13:17 says that a church must submit to her elders, so there is a clear expectation that the elders of a church bear some level of authority over the church. Yet, as we have seen, there are certain authorities that are not given to the elders. Jesus gave the church the responsibility to declare whose profession of faith is credible. Jesus expects the church to hold one another accountable to faithful Christian living.

We tend to avoid labels if there is specific baggage that might shortcut proper understanding. So we are hesitant to use the term congregational, elder-led, though that is most consistent with how we are organized.

We are congregational in that the congregation is responsible for the purity and unity of the church in Christ. It is every member's responsibility to hold every other member accountable to right doctrine and behavior (1 Cor. 5:1–5; Gal. 1:1). The church must agree on who comes in and goes out of the family. The church must decide who its leaders will be. Additionally, large decisions that affect every member are often brought together for a final consensus (e.g. approving yearly budgets, property purchases).

Yet the church must submit to its elders who are given the representative authority over the church. The church cannot come together to make every minor decision and they must trust the elders to make many big decisions too. The elders are charged with leading, so they must do so with the understanding that they make the operational decisions on behalf of the sheep they are called to lead. Elders must have the freedom to speak and lead where the church may not have insight. And the church must trust that Jesus is working by his Spirit to guide them through their elders.

Though the congregation has final approval authority on a few things (membership, budgets, property, etc.), the elders will likely have much more information on these major topics and will provide the bulk of the preparation and leadership to move them forward. The elders will assemble a budget they believe best fits the vision and calling of the church. The elders will investigate property acquisitions that may benefit the entire church. They will know many personal details of the members (or prospective members) and other elders (or potential elders). But the final approval for these items falls to the church. On the rest of the issues it is vital for the church to trust the leadership of her elders to guide and teach where there is uncertainty.

How does 1 Timothy 2:11–12 apply to who can be leaders in the church?

Paul's letter to Timothy is giving the young pastor instructions on how to lead the church well. The first chapter highlighted the central focus of a pastor's heart and message: the mercy of God in Christ toward us which is the power to confront anyone who teaches otherwise.

The verses in question come in chapter 2 which emphasize a posture of humble dependence of God in prayer in all things. There Paul tells Timothy that even in defending the gospel the men should not be quarrelsome and women should be peaceable and quiet (similar warnings but emphasizing each gender's tendencies). Paul says of women, "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."

Does this mean women should never talk in church and can have absolutely no form of authority whatsoever over any man? We don't think so.

The command to be quiet is simply an exhortation to women not to try to correct the false teachers by exalting themselves above these deceived men. They will be won to true faith through a humble spirit which reflects God's created order of man leading and woman helping. The called men are the ones out front in the spiritual battlefield and the women complement their work by nurturing those

rescued from enemy oppression. The men build the spiritual house and the women complement this work by making it a welcoming home.

Both roles are vitally important. The church that emphasizes the tasks of the men in leadership at the expense of the tasks of women does not fully present the gospel of Christ who died for male and female (Gal. 3:28).

“But,” you might say, “that means men always lead women.” Not exactly. Women can have a lot of influence over men in many ways. Biblical correction of a man can (and should!) be done in a way that still honors this created order. Women can have much knowledge that the men in their lives don’t hold and men would be foolish not to provide opportunities for these women to speak. Women can lead and coordinate ministries that they would be much better suited and more qualified to handle (women’s ministry, children’s ministry, anti-trafficking counseling, single-mother care, etc.). Paul expects women to have a voice in prayer and sharing God’s word in the church (1 Cor. 11:5), but in a manner that shows her submission to God’s order.

The command for women not to have authority is not a universal command (no authority of any kind whatsoever), but in this context Paul is specifically referring to theological and doctrinal teaching in the church. It should be clear that godly, qualified men, above reproach, skilled in teaching and defending the word are leading the church

in public teaching and theological devotion. Women best support that work in a more subtle way that empowers these men to do that better and fills out the simple message with abundant life. Women add flesh to the doctrinal skeleton that the male leaders proclaim and defend.

In other non-public-teaching tasks where the official doctrinal position of the church is not proclaimed women are encouraged to make their gifts available and put to use to provide complementary ministry that affirms and substantiates the message of the elders.

How many elders should the church have?

The NT gives no instruction for how many elders is necessary. It simply assumes that a plurality is best. Two is technically a plurality, but the more diversity in voices and perspectives a church has in leadership the better served the church will be and the better Christ will be on display.

The more elders there are, the more individual care each member can have. Additionally, we want to be a church-planting church which sends teams of elders and families out to start new churches. That requires us always to be training up and evaluating future elders, bringing more on as often as possible to join us, to replace us, or to go out from us. The better we do at this task of training future elders, the less dependent the church will be on one or two men.

Do these offices have term limits?

There is no exhortation to limit the term of an elder in the NT. The only limit of the term of an OT elder was their life. That may suggest that a NT elder holds the position for the length of his spiritual faithfulness.

We also recognize the prudence in building in opportunities for rest and accountability to the church. Within our constitution we require staff elders to take a (3-month) sabbatical every 3 years and lay elders to take a (1-year) sabbatical every 6 years. Lay elders terms are 3-years and they must be reaffirmed after every term (or after the sabbatical). This way the elders are required to step back from ministry and allow others walking in the Spirit to have influence and allow the church an opportunity to review his time in ministry.

Should elders be paid?

The church should do everything it can to honor its elders. 1 Timothy 5:17 says elders are worthy of double honor. The word honor can mean financial compensation, but the point is that a church should go above and beyond to be certain its elders can focus on their ministry without concern for feeding his family (1 Tim. 5:18. Cf. 1 Cor. 9:11, 14; Gal. 6:6).

This does not necessarily mean that every elder must be included in the church's payroll. Even though Paul said he had the right to be compensated by the church, he refused that right in order that there could be no argument that he was preaching for his own gain (1 Cor. 9:12–18; 2 Cor. 11:7–9). Instead he worked on the side making tents to raise money to feed himself so not to be a burden to the churches (Acts 18:1–4).

This also does not mean that every pastor should refuse pay for the sake of the mission of the gospel. Both are God-honoring options (like marriage and singleness both have their value). We want both to be an option. If a lay-elder delights in his work outside the church and can remain a positive influence in the church, we want to affirm that calling. If an elder would not be able to faithfully shepherd the flock with external work, we want to do everything we can to find a way to pay him so he can be free to minister the word to the church.

Should elders be ordained?

Ordination is an official declaration of authority conferred upon a man for the role of ministry of the word. Paul says something like this happened to Timothy in Ephesus when the elders laid hands on him (1 Tim. 4:14; 2 Tim. 1:6). A local government may require an official ordination document in order for the elder to provide marriage and burial services under its law.

In the first sense we will always ordain every elder as they go through an examination process and are affirmed by the entire church and installed into the role by the elders. The legal ordination may or may not occur based on foreseeable calling for the elder and need in the church.

What is the process for appointing new elders?

Each case might vary in time and exact detail, but generally we will begin with a nomination process. The elders (though they are called to lead into the darkness by seeing a little further ahead of the rest of the church) are unable to see sufficiently the character of every man in the church, so we ask the church to help us discern who appears to be already growing in these qualities (in addition to the young men the elders have already begun to train for future leadership). It is our desire to always raise up elders from within instead of doing an external search. How will we know the character of a potential elder if he has not spent significant time with the church?

After the nomination process the elders will prayerfully examine the nominees and with the insight God provides them discern who appears to be a good fit for the church. The elders will not just consider character, but also doctrinal affinity with the church's statement of faith, diversity of life perspective (ethnicity, age, social status), and love for the vision of the church.

It wouldn't be prudent to bring many elders on at once as it takes some time to build camaraderie and teamwork together. So we will narrow the nominees down to 2-3 to begin a rigorous interview process with the current elders. The interview will include questions on moral purity, public respectability, theological knowledge, and doctrinal case studies.

After this process the remaining candidates will be presented to the church for public review. The church will invite the men into their homes to get to know their character. The men will be given public teaching opportunities. We will hold a Q&A session to bring forward some of the more pressing concerns before the church. We will even conduct a third-party review (other pastors and denominational leaders) to give an unbiased perspective on the candidates.

Finally, the church will vote to elect its new leaders. The constitution requires a vote of 75% or more to appoint elders. Following the vote, the elected elders will be ordained to ministry in the church through a public installation ceremony where the current elders will lay hands on them and confer pastoral authority to these men.

Appendix 2 – Table of Qualifications and Responsibilities of an Elder

List of qualifications and responsibilities compiled from 1 Timothy 3:1–7; Titus 1:5–9; Acts 20:17–18, 28; 1 Peter 2:26; 4:17–5:4; James 3:1; 5:13–14; Hebrews 13:7–21.

<i>Qualifications</i>
Above reproach, known for great spiritual maturity (spiritually “older”)
Faithfully committed to wife, pure in heart
Sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable
Able to teach
No temper
No addictions or strong appetites
Gentle attitude
Hospitable (uses home for ministry toward outsiders)
Good steward
Manages home well, cares for and leads family, children respectful and obedient
Seasoned, mature believer
Good reputation outside the church
Sound doctrine
Able to gently rebuke, a shepherd’s heart
<i>Responsibilities</i>
Teach and Preach the Word
Gather regularly to pray for congregation
Oversee vision of the church

Lead example of personal discipleship
Instruct the sheep
Strengthen the weak
Guard the vulnerable sheep
Rebuke the obstinate sheep
Bear with the difficult ones

Appendix 3 – Table of Qualifications and Responsibilities of a Deacon

List compiled from 1 Timothy 3:8–13 (concepts gained from Acts 6:1–8, though not specifically the same office)

<i>Qualifications</i>
Good reputation
Spirit-led
Full of wisdom
Faithful attender and minister of the body
Faithful Steward
Dignified
Not double-tongued
Not addicted to much wine
Not looking for personal gain
Has a clear conscience
Manages household well
Faithful husband
<i>Responsibilities</i>
Manage the resources of the church
Address the physical needs of the church
Coordinate ministries of the church prioritized by the elders

Appendix 4 – Recommended Resources

Books:

Anyabwile, Thabiti M. *Finding Faithful Elders and Deacons*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012.

Dever, Mark. *Understanding Church Leadership*. Nashville: B&H, 2016.

Merkle, Benjamin L. *40 Questions About Elders and Deacons*. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2008.

Newton, Phil A. and Matt Schmucker. *Elders in the Life of the Church: Rediscovering the Biblical Model for Church Leadership*. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2014.

Rinne, Jeramie. *Church Elders: How to Shepherd God's People Like Jesus*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014.

Strauch, Alexander. *Biblical Eldership: An Urgent Call to Restore Biblical Church Leadership*. Somewhere: Lewis & Roth, 2003.

Strauch, Alexander. *Paul's Vision for the Deacons: Assisting the Elders with the Care of God's Church*. Somewhere: Lewis & Roth, 2017.

Redemption Sermon Series on Elders

- Shepherding
 - <https://www.redemptionrochester.com/sermons/2018/12/31/john-101-18>
- Teaching and Preaching
 - <https://www.redemptionrochester.com/sermons/2019/1/7/1-corinthians-118-24>
- Character
 - <https://www.redemptionrochester.com/sermons/2019/1/14/i-timothy-31-7>
- Leadership
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