

Main Idea: At WBC we are joyfully commitment to biblical church leadership. We’re going to remind ourselves why today from the book of Titus, where we learn that there are two essentials in the polity of a God-centered church.

- I. In a God-centered church, structure matters.
 - A. According to Titus, a church needs godly leaders (ch 1).
 - B. According to Titus, a church needs godly members (ch 2).
 - C. According to Titus, a church needs a godly reputation in a community (ch 3).
- II. In a God-centered church, function matters.
 - A. A church needs elders that lead (Titus 1:5-9; 1 Tim 3:1-8).
 - 1. They must have Christ-like character.
 - 2. They must make the gospel attractive, starting at home.
 - 3. They must be men who can defend and teach the Word.
 - 4. They must be men who can work with people (esp. problem people).
 - 5. They must have a shepherd to lead them.
 - B. A church needs deacons that serve (1 Tim 3:8-13; Acts 6:1-6).
 - 1. They must have a godly testimony (8).
 - 2. They must know the Word (9).
 - 3. They must be proven servants (10).
 - 4. They must have God-honoring families (11-12).
 - 5. They must protect the pastoral ministry of the Word (Acts 6:3-4).
 - C. A church needs a congregation that makes the gospel attractive (Titus 2:10).

Make It Personal: What are the implications for WBC?

- A. We must see church polity as vital gift from God.
- B. We must see church polity as a way to reflect God’s glory.
- C. We must see that church polity is fluid.
 - 1. We need to keep growing in our understanding of church polity.
 - 2. We need to keep growing future elders and deacons.

We’re going to fuel our love for God today by talking about church polity. Huh? What does church polity have to do with loving God? As we’ll soon see, a lot! That ought not surprise us because all things are from Him, through Him, and to Him, according to Romans 11:36. This includes church polity.

I’ll be even more specific. At WBC we seek to demonstrate a joyful commitment to biblical church leadership. Why? We’re going to remind ourselves why today from the book of Titus, where we see two essentials in the polity of a God-centered church.

Scripture Reading: Titus 1:5-9

To begin, I’d like to ask six questions. See if you recognize the source.

- 1. What is the chief end of man? Man’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him forever.
- 2. What rule hath God given to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy Him? The Word of God, which is contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, is the only rule to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy Him.
- 3. What do the Scriptures principally teach? The Scriptures principally teach what man is to believe concerning God, and what duty God requires of man.
- 4. What is God? God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, in His being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth.
- 5. Are there more Gods than one? There is but one only, the living and true God.

^{**}Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

¹ For a previous look at this passage, see the message preached at WBC in 2011 in our series, “Nine Marks of a Healthy Church.”

6. How many persons are there in the Godhead? There are three persons in the Godhead; the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost; and these three are one God, the same in substance, equal in power and glory.²

Those are the first six questions of what is known as the Westminster Shorter Catechism, which was written by the Westminster Assembly in London in 1647. Since then, literally millions of children have memorized those questions and answers.

At the end of his life, William Beveridge, a theologian from the 19th century, said: “The older I grow – and I now stand upon the brink of eternity – the more comes back to me the first sentence in the Catechism which I learned when a child, and the fuller and deeper its meaning becomes: What is the chief end of man? To glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.”³

This is why we are here. To glorify and enjoy God. There’s no greater purpose, no pursuit that matters more. And who is this God we were created to glorify and enjoy? He is certainly one God, insists the catechism, but He exists as three persons.

You say, “One God, three persons? That’s hard to understand.”

Yes, but there’s something else about this Triune God that’s amazing. He is an amazing teacher, the best there is. What He wants us to know (in this case, regarding His triune nature), He helps us to know. This is why He gave us the Bible, His precious Word. And in the Bible, He shows us that He has created two institutions that we might begin to understand His triune nature.

First, He instituted marriage. What do we see in marriage? We see two people, two of God’s image-bearers who are equal in worth but quite distinct in function. When they marry, two persons become one flesh, yet never lose their individual personhood.

So we can learn about God by looking at marriage. God uses marriage to teach us that He’s one God, yet three persons. There’s oneness, yet plurality. The Father is equal to the Son who is equal to the Holy Spirit, yet they possess different roles that complement one another. The Son is not the Father. The Spirit is not the Father, nor the Son. The Son actually submits to the Father, and joyfully so. And the Spirit does what the Father and Son instruct Him to do.

This is God, and He wants us to know this, that we might know Him rightly, then glorify Him, and enjoy Him forever.

But there’s more. Indeed, God is a tremendous teacher, and He wants us to know what He’s like. So He has given us something else.

Church polity. It’s true. The word “polity” simply means a particular form or system of government. So churches have pastors and deacons and business meetings. Why? Is it just a necessary evil for getting things done? Not at all. The church, and specifically church polity, is a gift from the Triune God that we might know Him rightly, this One God who exists as three different persons with differing roles.

This certainly elevates the importance of church, doesn’t it? This is why, at WBC, we are joyfully committed to biblical church leadership. This is His gift to us, that we might glorify Him and enjoy Him forever.

You say, “But church leaders abuse their authority, far too often. How can you say it’s a gift from God?”

Because it is. Sadly, there are parents who abuse their authority too, and government officials, and coaches, and school administrators. And when that happens,

² [The Westminster Shorter Catechism - Ligonier Ministries](#)

³ [What Exactly is the Westminster Shorter Catechism and Why Memorise It – Banner of Truth USA](#)

it's wrong, and must be addressed. But that doesn't change the reality that our Creator has given us structures, particularly in the home, in government, and in the church, that He knows we need, not just to function, but that we might think rightly about Him, and therefore enjoy Him to the fullest.

This leads to some important questions, starting with who is supposed to lead the church? The smartest people? The most likeable? The biggest donors? Those who have been around the longest? If a person holds a powerful position in the community, or at work, does that mean he qualifies to lead in the church?

And then, another set of questions. What are we supposed to call our leaders, and expect of them? And what should leaders expect of those under their care?

I'm thankful we don't take a poll to answer these questions at WBC. We don't even turn to our by-laws or our polity books, not initially. We turn to God's Word. We want to know what God says about this subject, and thankfully, He has a lot to say.

Some might say, "Polity doesn't matter, does it, as long as you get the job done?"

But it does matter. Frankly, we have no right to impose a school board structure on the church, or a corporate model from the business world, or throw out structure altogether as some might suggest. Why are these approaches unacceptable?

Because they *misrepresent God*. Paul explains in 1 Timothy 3:14–15, "Although I hope to come to you soon, I am writing you these instructions so that, if I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth."

Notice, the church is *God's* household. It's the church *of the living God*. And in His Word God gives us the basic structure He wants to see in His church.

Why would He do that? In short, it's because He wants His church to reflect Him and what He's like. He's a Triune God, three persons with distinct roles, and the persons demonstrate perfect love for each other by fulfilling these roles. So when a church takes biblical polity seriously, it's putting God on display for the world to see.

I'm not sure any book in the Bible illustrates the power of church polity any more clearly than the little epistle that Paul wrote to Titus. In the book of Titus we discover there are two essentials in the polity of a God-centered church.

I. In a God-centered church, structure matters.

Paul sent this letter to Titus around AD 63-65. Titus was on the island of Crete where he and Paul had done evangelistic work. After the Lord saved some people, Paul moved on to another ministry, but he left Titus behind. As he explains in 1:5, "The reason I left you in Crete was that you might straighten out what was left unfinished..."

So this book is sort of a church planting manual. You have some baby Christians, but there's no structure yet, no polity in place, and really, not even a church. That's Titus's job, to set up the structure. If these young believers in Crete were ever going to do what Paul had done all over the Roman Empire, to reach lost communities for Christ, they needed something, three things in fact. Scan this letter and you'll see what any church needs if it's to reach a community.

A. A church needs godly leaders. That's assignment #1 as Paul makes clear in chapter one. Notice 1:5, "This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you." Why did Paul leave Titus in Crete? He knew the church would never survive, let alone make Christ known to others, unless it had proper leadership in place. I left you to *appoint elders*, says Paul, *in every town*.

And notice, “as I directed you.” Apparently, Paul had given Titus a verbal assignment when he left Crete, but I get the sense Titus hadn’t completed the job yet. So Paul is now following up with this written reminder. *Get those elders in place, Titus.*

What are elders, and why does a church need them? We’ll see in a moment when we take a closer look at these verses. But what else does a church need?

B. A church needs godly members. That’s what chapter two is all about. Verse 1, “You must teach what is in accord with sound doctrine.” So Titus was to teach. Teach whom? “Teach the older men,” says verse 2. “Teach the older women,” says verse 3. Instruct the older women to “train the younger women,” says verse 4. “Encourage the young men,” says verse 6. “Teach slaves,” says verse 9.

Teach them what? In essence, to live godly lives that, as verse 10 explains, “makes the teaching about God our Savior attractive.” Beloved, unless our lost neighbors *see* it, they’re not going to *hear* it. If this community is ever going to hear what we have to say about our Savior, they must see it first. They must see the evidence of our Savior at work in our lives. They must see that we “say no to ungodliness and worldly passions,” verse 12, and that we “live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives,” while we wait for our Savior to come back, verse 13.

But these are just young Christians in Crete. And they’ve come from nasty pasts (see 1:12). You can’t expect young Christians with wicked pasts to live godly lives, can you? God’s Word says you can, because they can. God’s grace makes change possible, says Paul in 2:11. And the leader’s task is to teach them how, and hold them accountable. As Paul stresses in verse 15, “These, then, are the things you should teach. Encourage and rebuke with all authority. Do not let anyone despise you.”

Friends, God’s Son left heaven and ultimately died on a cross and rose again in order to save sinners *from their sins*. When a person claims to know Christ yet remains in unrepentant sin, it sends a very conflicting message to the lost about our Savior.

So a church needs, first, godly leaders, then a godly congregation.

C. A church needs a godly reputation in a community. That’s what chapter three is all about. “Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities,” says Paul in verse 1, “to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good.”

Christians ought to be the best citizens in any community, the most loyal, law-keeping, and caring people in town. “And I want you to stress these things,” says Paul in verse 8, “so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good.”

There’s the first essential. In the polity of a God-centered church, *structure* matters. If a church is going to present an accurate picture of God to a community, that church needs godly leaders, godly members, and a godly reputation.

II. In a God-centered church, function matters.

Several years ago, I walked into a McDonalds just outside of Los Angeles, and you know what it looked like? Just like the one I’d seen in Bucharest, and Bangkok, and Wheelersburg. You’ve seen one, you’ve seen them all. They’re all basically the same.

Is that the way the church is, all the same? No. When you read the New Testament and compare the churches, you’ll find some differences, due to culture, language, giftedness of the people, etc. But you’ll also find some basic similarities. Of course, it starts with a common faith, based on a common gospel, and a common commitment to the one Savior, Jesus Christ.

But there are also functional commonalities. When you read the epistles, you find out that churches (regardless of cultural differences) need three functioning parts, by God's design. A church needs elders that lead, deacons that serve, and a congregation that makes the gospel attractive.

A. A church needs elders that lead (Titus 1:5-9; 1 Tim 3:1-8). In Titus 1:5 Paul told Titus, "Appoint elders in every town." That's the same action we see Paul and Barnabas taking when they started churches in Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch. Acts 14:23 says, "Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church."

Let's think about the terms Paul uses. In verse 5 he refers to 'elders' (Greek, *presbuteros*). Then in verse 7 he shifts to 'overseer' (KJV 'bishop'; Greek, *episkopos*). The terms are closely related, if not interchangeable.

Titus was to appoint *elders* ['ordain' in the KJV], indicating this is an office in the church. The term "elder" has a Jewish background. In the synagogue, the elders led the assembly. So in the church. *Elder* points to a man's reputation and standing. He may well be older in years than the rest, though not necessarily. But without question he must demonstrate maturity and stability. He's not a novice but a man who, by God's grace, has a proven and respected walk with Christ.

"Elder" here refers to a man, a male. Basic, but important. Elders are to be men. Why? Does a distinction in roles mean that women are less important than men? Does a distinction in roles in the Godhead mean that the Son is less important than the Father? Not at all. Roles are a good thing, in the home, and in the church, for they help us understand the Triune God better.

It's called complementarianism. At WBC we believe that the Lord has given men and women different but equally important roles in His church. The roles complement one another, and the differences are meant to be a beautiful reflection of God's triunity.

So what does an elder do? He is also an *overseer* ['bishop'], a term referring to his function or duty. He is to give godly oversight, to lead God's people in a way that reflects the leadership of the Great Shepherd Himself. He functions as Christ's under-shepherd, and thus must possess the ability to feed and lead sheep.

It's significant that the word 'elders' in verse 5 is plural. Paul told Titus to appoint *elders* in every town. We see the same in 1 Peter 5:1, "To the elders among you I appeal as a fellow elder." That's interesting. Peter was an apostle, but here, thirty years after Christ returned to heaven, he calls himself a fellow elder. The apostle John does the same thing in 2 John and 3 John, introducing himself simply as "The elder." While the apostles led the church in the early years, their position was transitional. Now God intends His church to be led by *elders*.

"The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching," says Paul in 1 Timothy 5:17. "Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him....," says James 5:14. Paul told Timothy in 1 Timothy 4:14, "Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through a prophetic message when the body of elders laid their hands on you."

The point is, God doesn't want His church to be a one-man show. It misrepresents what He is like. He wants His churches to be led by a team of godly men, qualified men who will lead His sheep where He wants them to go.

How many elders was Titus to appoint? We're not told. How many elders should our church have? The Bible doesn't give a number, certainly no more than are qualified, but more than one if we're to meet the standard. Do all elders have the same function?

No. While all can teach, as we'll see, not all teach in the same capacity. And one of the elders must serve as the lead-elder, who shepherds the shepherds.

What are the qualifications for elders? Paul gives at least fifteen in verses 6-8. In 1 Timothy 3:1-8 you'll see a similar list. I've put them in five categories.

1. *They must have Christ-like character.* Notice verse 6, "If anyone is above reproach." The NIV says, "An elder must be blameless." He repeats the word in verse 7, "For an overseer, as God's steward, must be above reproach." It's a strong word, "**blameless**" (*anegkletos*), free from accusation, irreproachable. It's not suggesting perfection, but rather that there are no skeletons in the man's closet, no unaddressed sin issues that would cloud his testimony.

And to flesh out what "above reproach" looks like, Paul gives other qualities.

"not arrogant" (*authades*) – the word means stubborn, self-willed, overbearing. It's the person who views decisions as "his way or the highway," who resists input from others because he's always right.

"not quick tempered" (*orgilos*) – It refers to the person who has a short fuse, who is irritable and it doesn't take much to set him off.

"not given to drunkenness" – The elder must be under the control of the Spirit, not the spirits. Substances don't control him, alcohol for sure, but it would also include narcotics, nicotine, even food.

"not violent" (*plektes*) – The term refers to a contentious and quarrelsome person who loves to fight. The church can't afford to have this kind of person in a leadership position.

"not greedy for gain" (*aischrokerdes*) – A person whose heart is set on financial gain isn't qualified to lead in the church.

On a positive note, the elder must be...

"hospitable" (*philoxenos*) – literally, the word means "loving strangers." It refers to the person who is generous to guests. He doesn't wait for others to take the initiative. He does as His Savior did. He takes the first step. He goes up to the new person. He invites the stranger to his home, shares his food and his life with the stranger so that in a short time, the stranger is no longer a stranger.

"a lover of good" (*philagathos*) – In a world that mocks goodness and morality, the church needs leaders who not only talk about it, but *love* it. Some men are quick to write a letter to a congressman to try to legislate goodness (and there's a place for letter writing), but the church needs people, especially elders, who *love what is good*. It shows up in their movie selection, their music choices, what kind of jokes they laugh at, and so on. An elder is to be a *lover of good*.

"self-controlled" (*sophron*) – to be of sound mind, to behave in a sensible manner. It carries the idea of "disciplined." The person whose life is out of control is not qualified to be an elder in God's church. This applies to his spending habits, his eating habits, the amount of time he spends watching television, on Facebook, playing sports, and so on. He lives a balanced, under control life, made possible by the Holy Spirit.

"upright" (*dikaios*) – righteous, and by implication, innocent. If you want to know how to please God, imitate an *upright* person for his walk is consistent with God's righteous standard.

"holy" (*hosios*) – It's used of God in several passages where He is referred to as "the Holy One" (Acts 2:27; Rev. 16:5). If there's something the contemporary church needs today, it's *holiness*. And who is supposed to set the example? The elders are.

“disciplined” (*egkrates*) – strong, master of, controlling, curbing, restraining. It’s the opposite of a feeling-driven life. Sin always “feels” natural to a sinner. Godliness never does. That’s why Paul told Timothy, “Train yourself to be godly (1 Tim. 4:7).”

What do the above traits have in common? They are all characteristics that Christ demonstrated, right? So when we see them, they illustrate Christ. And that’s the role of the elders, to model Christ. And that starts with character. But it doesn’t stop there.

2. *They must make the gospel attractive, starting at home.* That’s verse 6. Right after “blameless,” Paul elaborates with, “the husband of one wife.” The NIV says, “the husband of but one wife,” literally, a “one woman man.”

There’s some difference of opinion about this, but the bottom line is clear. A one-woman man is a man who is devoted in his heart and life to the woman to whom he made a covenant promise. He loves her, gives his heart only to her, and thinks only of her. He finds sexual fulfillment with her alone. He flees from all sexual temptation (including the woman at work but also the woman on his computer screen) in order to demonstrate his covenant loyalty to his wife, in the fear of God.

This was a huge issue in the first century Roman world. The typical man did not marry until around the age of thirty (in contrast to girls, who normally married around age fourteen). It was assumed that before he married (and even after) he would “sow his wild oats.” The Greeks had what they called the “men’s hall” where they engaged in socially accepted sex. Some men had one or more concubines among the slave-girls of their household. It was quite accepted that a married man have, in addition to his wife, another woman (or more than one woman) with whom he had relations.⁴

But what’s common in society has no place in the church. So who’s going to pave the way? The elders must. God says an elder must be a *one-woman man*.

Furthermore, verse 6 adds, “and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination.” The NIV says, “a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient.” One of the prime tasks of a church leader is to pass on the faith to others, and this begins in his home.

Paul gives a similar emphasis in 1 Timothy 3:4-5, “He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect. (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God’s church?).”

The point is, if a man is to be an elder, his life must make the gospel attractive, starting at home. The next category takes us to a very specific elder function. Verse 9 says, “He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.”

3. *They must be men who can defend and teach the Word.* The elders are the gatekeepers in the church. “Able to teach,” says Paul in 1 Timothy 3:2. They must know God’s Word and know how to use the Word, both to *encourage* and *refute*. How do they encourage? By sharing sound doctrine. Who do they refute? Those who oppose sound doctrine. Which brings us to the fourth category.

4. *They must be men who can work with people, especially problem people.* Verse 10 says (NIV), “For there are many rebellious people, mere talkers...” Verse 11 says, “They must be silenced, because they are ruining whole households by teaching things they ought not to teach.” “Rebuke them sharply,” says Paul in verse 13, “so that they will be sound in the faith.”

⁴ Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary, Titus, p. 502.

Friends, a church needs godly elders who can do that. They know God's Word, and they know how to work with problem people, tactfully, wisely, biblically. When they become aware of someone whose life and/or teaching isn't in accord with God's Word, they go talk to the person, with an open Bible, and lovingly rebuke them, if necessary. So "they will be sound in the faith," says Paul in verse 13, and so the church likewise will remain true to the faith.

There's one more requirement for elders.

5. *They must have a shepherd to lead them.* In Ephesians 4:11-12 we're told that Christ gave pastors to the church to equip the saints for the work of the ministry. The term "pastor" means shepherd. Sheep belong to one shepherd, and they know his voice and will follow him. But sheep will also follow others who care for them as long as they know their shepherd trusts them.

So put Ephesians 4 and Titus 1 together, and here's what we see. While a church needs a plurality of elders who each have a shepherding role, there should be a lead shepherd of the shepherds and of the flock. In this epistle we see Titus giving direction to the elders in Crete. So did Peter with the elders in 1 Peter 5, and John in 2 John. They called themselves elders, but they also led the elders under their care. In Acts 20:17ff we see Paul leading the elders.

The point is, a team of elders leads a church, but someone must lead the elders, and therefore, ultimately, leads the church. In our context, this shepherd of the shepherds is called the senior pastor, or the lead pastor.

Someone might say, "Well, they were apostles. Does this distinction still apply?"

1 Timothy 5:17 seems to indicate it does. Paul says, "Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching." Note the distinction between elders, all of whom "rule" (NIV says "direct the affairs of the church"), but some elders do so by their "labor in preaching and teaching."

So, in a God-centered church, function matters, for God intends our function to communicate beautiful truth about Himself. A church needs, first, elders that lead.

B. A church needs deacons that serve (1 Tim 3:8-13; Acts 6:1-6). It's worth noting that you don't see the position of *deacon* mentioned in Titus. In a brand new church, you don't need deacons, not yet. You need elders, for sure, men who can model and teach the Word, disciple young believers, and give direction. It won't be long, however, before you'll need to develop a second office to protect the first.

That's what we find in 1 Timothy. Why 1 Timothy? Because Paul wrote this letter to Timothy who was serving, not in an infant church, like Titus was in Crete, but a church in Ephesus that had been there a while, a ten year old pre-teen church. So in chapter three he gives qualifications, first for overseers/elders (verses 1-7), and then for deacons (verses 8-13).

Basically, the qualifications for elders and deacons are quite similar, the main difference being the elder must be able to teach. What's true of deacons?

1. *They must have a godly testimony* (8). "Deacons, likewise, are to be men worthy of respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine, and not pursuing dishonest gain." And while deacons aren't required to teach the Word...

2. *They must know the Word* (9). "They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience."

3. *They must be proven servants* (10). "They must first be tested; and then if there is nothing against them, let them serve as deacons." The term "deacon"

means “one who serves.” So before you give a man the title, he must prove himself to be indeed one who serves his church.

Is this man faithful to the church? Does he participate in all its services? Has he done other jobs well in the church? Does he have a glad heart when he serves? Is he a man of the Book? Does he have good relationships with people? For those men for whom the answer is *yes*, verse 10 says, “let them serve as deacons.”

Of course, there’s another vital area to check closely.

4. *They must have God-honoring families (11-12).* “In the same way, their wives are to be women worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything. A deacon must be the husband of but one wife and must manage his children and his household well.”

What’s the evidence that a man has a God-honoring family? Here are two. Verse 11, his wife is godly. And verse 12, his house is in order. Deacons are role models in the church, and so are their wives. They show the rest of us how to serve.

Perhaps you’re thinking, “Wow! God’s standard is high. Why would anyone want to be a deacon?” Here’s a reason, verse 13, “Those who have served well gain an excellent standing and great assurance in their faith in Christ Jesus.”

There’s one other deacon qualification. It’s at the heart of why they exist.

5. *They must protect the pastoral ministry of the Word (Acts 6:3-4).*

While the term “deacon” means “one who serves,” the fact is, elders serve too, and so should all church members. But by God’s design, elders, deacons, and church members all serve in different ways (again, a reflection of the Triune God).

In Acts 6 we see a great illustration of this distinction. The apostles gathered the church together and said, “It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word in order to wait on tables (verse 2).” The solution? Verses 3-4, “Choose seven men... We will turn this ministry over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the Word.” Literally, “to *deaconing* the Word.”

So here we see some men serving the Word and other men serving tables. Church ministry includes both deaconing the Word and deaconing the practical needs of the people. Both are vital. And they are distinct, as we see both in Acts 6 and 1 Timothy 3.

Deacons exist, not to do the pastoral ministry of the Word, but to protect it. If a church fails to distinguish the two positions of elder and deacon, both types of ministry end up suffering.

For instance, when a pastor (the lead-elder) delivers meals to widows, what’s he doing? You say, “He’s serving.” Yes, but how? He’s serving tables, and if he’s not careful he will end up neglecting the primary ministry God has called him to fulfill in the church, the ministry of the Word and prayer. It’s not that he is above waiting on tables, and sometimes he will. But he must not allow the ministry of tables to shortchange his ministry of the Word.

Now turn it around. In some churches, deacons see themselves as a governing board. But when a deacon assumes the role of overseer, when he tries to govern the church and determine its direction, what’s the result? He’s stepped into someone else’s role and ends up taking away time from what God has called him to do and the church needs him to do, *serving*. Deacons are to serve the people of the church (like widows), serve the physical needs of the church (like feeding the poor), and serve the ministry of the Word in the church (which includes everything from caring for facility needs, and budget matters, and addressing potential distractions in the church, all of which make it possible for us to hear God’s Word preached on Sunday.

Pastor Steve Viars shares a helpful illustration. “A deacon’s job is very similar to that of an anesthesiologist when a surgeon is performing an operation. Both the surgeon and the anesthesiologist are needed in the operating room. However, although the anesthesiologist is very important, he is not the surgeon. If the anesthesiologist ever leaves his post, and lunges for the scalpel, the patient is in grave danger.”

Function matters. A church needs elders that lead, and deacons that serve.

C. A church needs a congregation that makes the gospel attractive (Titus 2:10). Back to Titus 2:10 where we find this purpose clause. “So that in every way they will make the teaching about God our Savior attractive.” Paul’s talking about teaching slaves here, but it applies to the whole church. Here’s why elders teach, and deacons serve, so the whole congregation will make the gospel attractive to an onlooking world.

And this is why we are here, to make God our Savior known to a world that desperately needs to know the truth about Him, that He might save them, as He has us.

Make It Personal: What are the implications for WBC?

Let’s talk about three implications.

A. We must see church polity as vital gift from God. It’s vital, meaning we can’t do without it. And it’s a gift from our generous God. He gave us His Son, His Spirit, His Word, and today we’ve been reminded He has given us teaching on church polity, all for our good. In a society that attacks authority structures, this is vital to see.

B. We must see church polity as a way to reflect God’s glory. Brothers and sisters, when we do church rightly, we are showing the world around us what our God is like. When we submit to authority, we’re resembling Christ who submitted to His Father’s authority. When we serve, we’re doing what our Savior did, who served by giving His life as a ransom for us. When we do things decently and in order, we’re demonstrating the power of grace that turned our once messed up lives into something now decent and in order.

C. We must see that church polity is fluid. It’s not static, but developing. We saw that when we compared the church in Crete with the church in Ephesus. They needed elders in Crete. They needed both elders and deacons in Ephesus because the church was more developed. What does this mean for us?

1. *We need to keep growing in our understanding of church polity.* In April, WBC turned 145 years old. This means we are an established church. But we’re also a growing church, with many new people coming, with differing ideas about how church should look. This means we need to keep going to the Bible to see what it says about polity, for structure matters, and function matters. Why? Because how we do church communicates volumes to each other and the world around us regarding what we really believe about God.

One more implication.

2. *We need to keep growing future elders and deacons.* Who will be leading and serving this church, and other churches in ten years? This matters to us at WBC, which is why training leaders matters to us. We must constantly be preparing for tomorrow’s church today, by God’s grace.

It’s all about reflecting His glory. So let’s keep shining for Him!

Closing Song: #364 “My Jesus, I Love Thee” (all four verses)

July Benediction: Isaiah 33:2 (NIV 1984)