

The Effective Church

Nine studies on what makes a church a vital, dynamic organism pleasing to God:

Lesson 1 - A Biblical Mindset. 1 Tim. 3:15 is our guiding truth here: *"I write so that you may know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth."* The church is not a country club, not a social gathering place. Its purpose is rooted in its identity as the family of God, the gathering of people called out into a special relationship with the living God, the pillar and foundation of God's truth in the Scripture. The effective church will see itself in this light, not as a Methodist, Baptist, Presbyterian, or Bible, church.

Lesson 2 - A Biblical Program. The church that has a biblical mindset will follow the program that was at the heart of the New Testament church. Acts 2:42 spells it out in the simplest possible terms: the Apostle's teaching, the partnership and sharing which defined the fellowship of the saints, the continual remembrance of the cross in the celebration of the Lord's Supper, and the prevailing prayer of the body. The church that is effective will not only have a biblical mindset and a biblical program, but it will have a biblical preoccupation.

Lesson 3 - Sound Doctrine. The Scripture is read, applied, and taught. In an effective church, sound doctrine is communicated not primarily to condemn and rebuke, but primarily to stimulate to love and purity: 1TI 1:5 *"But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith."* Sound doctrine communicated out of a sense of love drowns out the chorus of false teaching the world is shouting.

Lesson 4 – Handling Sound Doctrine. The effective church also communicates sound doctrine in the manner most needed by and suited to the congregation, offering the ABC's to those who are young, the deeper things of God to the more mature. It will handle the word of God accurately and appropriately, providing the forum that is most effective for the need.

Lesson 5 and 6 - Godly Servant Leaders, Part 1 and Part 2. No church can rise above its leadership. If the leadership isn't what it should be, the people won't be either. Hosea 4:9 says "like people, like priest". It is critical that the church leadership is what God intended and ordained for it to be: shared leadership, not a hierarchy, by a team of godly men who serve as elders to shepherd the people, ministering to their spiritual needs.

Lesson 7 - Deacons - Godly Servant-Leaders, Part 3. And the church leadership is not just responsible for the spiritual needs of the people, but for their physical, material needs as well, through the serving ministry of the deacons.

Lesson 8 - The Role of Women. The Bible teaches the full equality of men and women before God. Women are equally gifted, and equally called to serve. However, God created men and women for different roles, and fulfilling those roles as men and women are key to being the people he wants us to be. We do ourselves no favors by sacrificing a God-given role for one that our fallen world feels more comfortable with.

Lesson 9 - The People of an Effective Church. The people of an effective church are "continually devoted" to the faith, devoted to the word, the fellowship, and to praying for one another. They are focused on one another's needs and not their own, and as a result they are intensely unified, in mind and in action. Because they are all these things, the people of an effective church are themselves effective witnesses of Jesus Christ. Such a church is equipped to deal with the toughest of times.

Lesson One: A Biblical Mindset: the Church vs. the church

About 5 years ago we led a study on the nature of the church. Using Chuck Colson's book, "The Body," for our outline, we studied God's design for the church with an emphasis on the "C" Church - the universal, supernatural Body of Christ that is made up of all saints, in all churches, for all time.

The "C" Church was described by C. S. Lewis, writing in "The Screwtape Letters", as: "spread out through all time and space and rooted in eternity, terrible as an army with banners" That Church is a spectacle which makes even Satan's boldest demons uneasy. All who have confessed Christ are part of that Church by the fact that they are his children.

But that Church is not really visible to us, at least not in its entirety. But there is another church that we do see. Or perhaps more accurately, an aspect of the universal, triumphant Church that is decidedly fixed in space and time, and somewhat less majestic than its mighty parent. This is one is spelled with a small "c," the local church. Lewis also describes that church in "Screwtape:

It is "the half-finished, sham Gothic erection on the new building site." When we go inside, we see "the local grocer with rather an oily expression on his face bustling up to offer one shiny little book containing a liturgy which neither of them understands, and one shabby little book containing corrupt texts of a number of religious lyrics, mostly bad, and in very small print. When he gets to his pew and looks round him he sees just that selection of his neighbours whom he has hitherto avoided."

Big difference, and yet every local expression of the church - the visible expression of Christ's body - is just as much part of his body as the part that is "terrible as an army with banners."

We are going to take up where we left off 5 years ago. We will not focus so much on the nature of the Church as we will God's design for the church. Specifically, we are going to look at those Scriptures that serve as "operations manuals" or "instruction guides" for every local church - the pastoral Epistles of 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus. We will see what Scripture says is the church's mission and program, and what role every person - man, woman, and child - is to play. We will see what roles leaders are to play and why, and what a pastor is to be.

The Church, the Pillar and Support of the Truth - 1 Timothy 3:15

According to a USA Today survey in 1994, half of all church-goers attend an average of once a month. Obviously, there isn't a lot pulling these people to the body on a weekly basis. Read now the "Psalm of Summer" and see if it doesn't strike a familiar note:

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Psalm of Summer

Now it came to pass that spring turned to summer again. God's people raised their voices and said:

"Recreation is my shepherd, I shall not stay at home;
 He maketh me to lie down in a sleeping bag;
 He leadeth me down the Interstate each weekend.
 He restoreth my suntan;
 He leadeth me to State Parks for comfort's sake.
 Even though I stray on the Lord's Day, I will fear no reprimand,
 for Thou art with me;
 my rod and reel they comfort me.
 I anointest my skin with oil, my gas tank runneth dry;
 Surely my trailer shall follow me all the weekends this summer,
 and I shall return to the House of the Lord this fall."
 But then it is football season and that's another psalm.

In our own fellowship here at SMBC, we tend to average about 120 in worship, with another 40 kids and helpers in children's church, 160 in all. Every Sunday. That's great, but guess what? It's never the same 160!

What happens is that we tend to regard church culturally. It's the "Sunday morning place to be" as a noxious church sign I once saw pointed out. And we'll be there, unless we're really tired, or we've got plans for the day, or we're going out of town for the weekend. In short, there just isn't a lot of respect for the local church, even from Christians. Maybe that's because we see our own errors and sin most clearly.

Georga Barna, The Second Coming of the Church

In 1997 Georga Barna, a Christian pollster and social scientist published *The Second Coming of the Church*, a critical examination of the American church. Barna says that "the typical Christian church, as we know it today, has a limited shelf life." He says that within the next few years he expects America to experience either massive spiritual revival or moral anarchy. But he doesn't believe that the church in America is ready to play a role in helping revival. In fact, he doesn't believe the church is even a significant influence in our culture.

Quoting Barna: "Influence creates change, which dictates the ways in which we think and live. If you want to shape a culture, you do so by exerting influence. And the way to influence a culture is by impacting the lives of the individuals within it, one life at a time, by saying and doing things that are meaningful.

"The mass media - most notably television, radio, newspapers, magazines and the Internet - have tremendous influence on Americans. The government, our schools and businesses also have substantial influence on our lifestyles, attitudes and values. Even families, beleaguered as they are, maintain a fair degree of sway over who we are and how we live. But the Christian Church? Its influence is minimal - and deteriorating."

A methodological problem?

"At the risk of sounding like an alarmist, I believe the Church in America has no more than five years - probably less - to turn itself and this culture around. Barna says that our problem is "primarily operational in nature," and has three key aspects:

1. Most Christians - and he's talking about truly born-again, saved individuals - think and behave no differently than anyone else, and thus negate the power of their faith.
2. Those in positions of Christian leadership generally do an inadequate job of leading God's people. That is, the pastors, elders, etc.
3. The systems, structures, institutions and relational networks developed for the furtherance of the Church are archaic, inefficient and ineffective - and, perhaps, even unbiblical.

According to Barna then, our problem is not theological but methodological: how can we get Christians to be the light in the darkness by practicing core biblical principles and creating a better earthly existence for all of humankind?1

We probably can all agree with Barna's observations. What's the fix? Basically, Barna says, it's time to blow the whole thing up. Scrap the local church as we know it and start over with a different form, different systems and structures.

And that is where I diverge from Barna. I don't think it is ever time to blow up something God instituted, until he does it himself at the end of the age. But this is a common refrain in many Christian circles. And if Barna is right in his observations, then we really do, as the church, need to do something. But what?

The Church, the Pillar and Support of the Truth - 1 Timothy 3:15

I think that one of the most important things we need to do is to stop thinking and treating church culturally, and start thinking of it biblically. If we are lax in our devotion to the body of Christ, then we misunderstand a fundamental truth about the church, and a big one at that. It is found in 1 Timothy 3:15: "but in case I am delayed, I write so that you may know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth" (NASB, emphasis mine).

First, an observation. Paul isn't talking primarily about the "C" Church. He is talking about the local variety. "How one ought to conduct oneself" means how we are to behave, what we are to do. 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, and Titus are all instruction manuals for the people of the church. As such, they are specifically focused on our responsibilities and roles in the body.

This single verse contains 3 explosive truths about the local church, the ragtag collection of neighbors pictured by Lewis, who are believers in Jesus Christ and gather together every Sunday. Here and wherever else there are Christians.

Household of God

We as a body represent the household of God. That word "household" refers to a family. 1 Timothy 3:5: ("but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?") Household here is the same word, talking about the family of an elder. The church is the family of God. His sons and daughters, and Christ's brothers and sisters (Hebrews 2:11). The same word is sometimes used of buildings, but there were no church buildings in those days, and it is certainly not a building that Paul has in mind here. It is a spiritual building, one that Peter calls "a spiritual house" (same word) made up of "living stones" (1 Peter 2:5). The idea in the household of God is that it is both God's family and God's dwelling, his house. Not the building, but the people.

The Church of the Living God

"Church" is ekklesia, from a compound of "ek" - out of - and a derivative of "kaleo" - to call, to invite - in secular terms an ekklesia was a gathering of citizens called out from their homes into some public place. So in sacred terms, an ekklesia is an assembly of Christians "called out" from the general populace, who gather together for a common purpose. A church, an ekklesia, is not a building. If this building fell down around our ears we'd continue to be SMBC. We'd meet in homes, at the town hall, wherever, but we are SMBC, not this building.

Whose church is it? Who does it belong to? The "living God's." That phrase is used several times to indicate that God, the living God, is not just alive, but he is the source of life. Not just living, but eternal and omnipotent. All other gods are less than dead, they are imaginary and non-existent (Jer. 10:10; Daniel 6:26).

Not only is the local church God's family, but we are the "called out ones" who belong to the everlasting, omnipotent, living God. A pretty far cry from an oily grocer!

The Pillar and Support of the Truth

Pillar - in the Greek, this means "pillar." That is, a prop or support, specifically the beams that hold up and support the roof of a temple. Support - "foundation" Not only is the church a pillar, it is also the foundation. Of what? The truth! What truth? God's Word. Like a strong pillar that holds up massive temple ceilings, like the strong foundation that gives these pillars their footing, the church is to hold up and hold out the truth that God has entrusted to it - his word.

Let's see if we can get a clearer picture of this from a couple of other Scriptures:

- Who is the foundation of the church? Jesus is. 1 Cor. 3:11, "For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ." He is also the cornerstone of the church, Eph. 2:19-20, "So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, having been built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone." Jesus is the foundation and cornerstone, and it is on this foundation that the further building of his body proceeds.

The Word of God, taught by the apostles and prophets, is also part of that foundation. Eph. 2:20 says the church is built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets. Matthew 7:24 - "Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine, and acts upon them, may be compared to a wise man, who built his house upon the rock.

- ➡ Because it stands on the foundation of Christ and his word, the church itself is the "pillar and support," the foundation of the truth. Not its source, but its guardian.

There is an interpretation of this truth that can and has caused major problems, so we need to be aware of it and avoid it. Just as the Catholic church has overemphasized Peter's role as the foundation of the church in Matthew 16, so they have overemphasized the church's role here.

Is the church the source of truth? Of course not. Can the church ever be in error? Of course. Yet some would answer differently, and not just in Catholic circles. There are plenty of evangelicals around who blast the Pope for speaking "ex cathedra" but exhibit all the same symptoms themselves. The church has been entrusted with great responsibility, not imbued with ex cathedra authority!

The local church then is built upon Jesus Christ. Its only program is to hold forth his Word. If it ceases to do that, it ceases to be his church.

Now, when you think of our local church do you think of the household of God, the called out ones of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth? If we say, "No way!" we are either not doing church right, or we aren't thinking right in our thinking about the local church. Do you know what it means that God would entrust his truth to this bunch! I mean, look at us! That tells me that 1) God is not worried, because he is in ultimate control and 2) I don't have to worry, because he is in ultimate control.

So, what do we do with this? What does this mean to you in a practical, daily way? Let me answer it this way: If you are part of the local church, then you are part of the pillar and support of the truth. You have been entrusted by God with responsibility for the truth of the gospel and the word of God. You - not just the pastors, elders, deacons, Sunday school teachers, etc. God has handed each of us a role in holding out and holding up the truth. Therefore, 1) we need to know it and 2) we need to do it.

We live in a day when 65% of the people believe the Bible is the Word of God, and the same 65% say there is no such thing as absolute truth. And in such a day as this, it is the local church that God has called to uphold and carry the rock-solid, absolute truth that is found in the Scriptures.

So what is the fix for Barna's observations? Not new forms, systems, and structures, but simple adherence to the old ones! That is to say, the Biblical forms. Not Baptist, not Presbyterian, not Methodist or Lutheran, not even Bible Church. Just Bible.

If the church would be the church of God's design, its influence on society and its ability to have a role in revival would be immense. What we want to do in this study is to know the church of God's design, then make sure that we are the church of God's design, each one of us.

1 Taken from the Barna Research website, <http://www.barna.org>

Lesson Two: The Church's Program

We started our study of the local church by talking about the need for a biblical mindset towards the local church, as opposed to a cultural mindset that is based on whatever denominational models or contemporary examples we may be used to or prefer. This need exists because the church faces real obstacles, as George Barna has stated in *The Second Coming of the Church*:

1. Most Christians think and behave no differently than anyone else.
2. Christian leaders generally do an inadequate job of leading God's people.
3. The systems, structures, and institutions are archaic, inefficient, ineffective, and perhaps, unbiblical.

This series on the local church will address all 3 of Barna's concerns. The central theme of the study is that the ragtag collection of individual believers you see sitting around you is in fact the body of Christ. We looked at 1 Timothy 3:15 and said that its 3 main points form the proper understanding of the church that Jesus intends us to be: the household (or family) of God, the church (gathering of called-out ones) of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth.

In this lesson we will look at what the Bible says the program of the local church ought to be.

What is God's design for the local church? What are the critical, essential, must-do programs that the church cannot avoid?

To answer those questions, we are not going to look at successful contemporary churches, or at the church throughout history. Instead, we'll go to the very beginning of the church, the period immediately following its birth at Pentecost. What did the Apostles, who knew Jesus intimately and were entrusted with the church's founding, spend their time on? What was their program for the church?

Acts 2:42-47 - there were simply 4 points to their program, v42:

- Apostle's teaching
- The Fellowship
- The Breaking of Bread
- Prayers

What was their mindset as they did these things? *They did them continually - constant, ongoing. They were devoted to them - steadfast, single-minded, set course of action*

Apostle's Teaching

First of all, the church was marked by the Apostle's teaching. The Apostles led the Jerusalem church for several years, and they led it by doing two things, teaching and praying. In fact, so important were these two duties that when it came time to make a choice between serving the very real physical needs of the body and the spiritual needs, they chose the spiritual. Look at Acts 6:2, 4. The Apostles would devote (that word again) themselves to 1) prayer and 2) the ministry of the word.

The ministry of the word indicates not only that the Apostles were devoted to teaching it, but to everything that had to do with teaching and living it - study, memorization, meditation, application, preparation, in addition to the actual times of teaching. The ministry of the word was so important that they put it above their own participation in the care and feeding of the widows in the church.

What did they teach?

- OT Scriptures - as devout Jews, they would have had a good background in the Scriptures, but not formal training. Specifically reasoned from OT to prove Jesus was Messiah (Acts 17:2-3).
- The Gospel - They would have told what they saw and heard Jesus say, do and teach - his commands, his parables, his life story, most of all, his passion and resurrection.

Note that we are talking about a period of several years here. In fact, it was several years before the church moved beyond Jerusalem.

Do you think they spent the whole time on the basics? No, their teaching would have gone well beyond the "ABC's" - from basic knowledge, to in-depth understanding, to wisdom and experience, to changed lives.

Maybe we see that best illustrated in Paul's ministry. Paul took *time* to found and lead the churches - at Antioch 1 year (Acts 11:19), Corinth 18 months (18:11), Ephesus 3 years (20:31).

Their teaching was absolutely central to the church's founding, and to the entire church in the NT. It formed the basis for the gospels. Note that all of Paul's and most of the general epistles were probably written before the first gospel (Mark). Rather than the common and critical view of the theology of the epistles coming after the gospels, in reality the majority of NT theology was formed while the gospel was still in oral form!

What the Apostles taught was authoritative, because they had been handpicked by Jesus and the truth of their words was attested by signs and wonders. Because of their authority, their teaching was passed on accurately and fully (1 Cor. 15:3-5; 2 Th 2:15).

How did they teach? To show that, I want you to look at the "theme verse" for any pastor or teacher in the local church: 1 Timothy 4:13: Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading

of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching. Note the three emphases on reading, exhorting, and teaching.

First of all, not merely reading (telling what it says), or preaching (telling how to live it) or teaching (telling what it means). **The teacher is responsible for all three!**

So, they were in Bible studies morning, night and noon? No, there is a real emphasis on action in 2:43-47.

Teaching is done in a variety of ways - How'd they teach?

- Publicly (as in Acts 1-2)
- Privately (v46, 20:20)
- Reasoned (17:2, 17, 18:4, 19)
- Preached (8:25, 28:31)
- Taught (see overhead)
- Multitudes (Acts 2, 14)
- Small groups (Acts 16:13)
- Individuals (16:14-15, 32)

There is more to building up the body than a Sunday school lesson or a sermon. These are just two tools out of a whole bag.

Responsibility of the local church to teach ala 1 Tim. 4:13, and to use whatever means and methods are most effective to get the message across. Not so much knowing it as it is to be built up by it (Eph. 4:11-13).

The Fellowship - partnership, sharing

When we see the word "fellowship" we need to get away from thinking about it as a Christian party. It is much more than that - partnership, sharing. Fellowship is what Paul described in Phil. 1:9-11, 2:2. It is seen here in Acts in v44-47.

In this case, the Christians had a distinctive and large gathering, 3,000+ believers together. Gathered at Solomon's Portico in the Temple (Acts 3:11, 5:12). Big crowd, maybe met all at once, maybe in smaller groups thru the day. Note, "day by day." Every day, not just once or twice in a week. What do you suppose they talked about?

The Breaking of Bread

This is the Lord's Supper, Communion. Phrase is used for both ordinary meals and sacred meals. Note that it recurs in v46, where the intent seems to be more of a regular meal ("food"). Here, the term is placed between two obvious religious terms (fellowship and prayers), and so probably intends to convey the Lord's Supper.

But realize this, that from earliest times, the Lord's Supper was not a ceremonial meal that was part of a formal church service. The "Agape" or "love feast" was a regular meal that the church ate together whenever they met. It was literally a pot-luck that all contributed to and shared in, and that meal itself was considered a celebration of Jesus' body and blood as a very simple imitation of the original Supper. There are 3 examples of it in Scripture, here, in 20:7, and 1 Cor. 11:17-22. As early as 70-90 AD the act of commemoration was being split from the actual meal, becoming a separate and ceremonial part of the meal. By the end of the 2nd century it was strictly ceremonial and by itself.

Point is, the Acts church was devoted to remembrance of the Cross via communion. Just as we do so often these days, the church met to eat, but there was a purpose to their gathering together that went beyond mere food/relationship/fellowship. They met to commemorate the Lord's Supper.

The Prayers - obvious, but two points.

Literally, "the prayers." The church met together to pray - spontaneously, as need arose (4:24-31) and formally (3:1) with the non-Christians at the Temple, at least until Jewish persecution broke out.

Lesson Three: Sound Doctrine

Review

We have seen the description of the local church from 1 Timothy 3:15 (family of God, gathering of God's people, pillar and foundation of the truth) and the program of the local church. The biblical program for the church has just 4 points: 1) the Apostle's teaching, 2) the fellowship, 3) the breaking of bread, and 4) the prayers (Acts 2:42). The people were *continually devoted* to these things, and two natural results just flowed out of their program, worship and witness (Acts 2:47).

That is the program of any church that wants to be a biblical ministry. There are no other requirements for a biblically centered church, just these 4. A church continually devoted to these things will be a worshipping, witnessing church! That is not to say that more can't be done, but the power and the work of the Lord is going to result from his program, not man's. A church with sufficient size can organize to provide all kinds of wonderful services, but they must give place to the Spirit's plan, or else they are out of step biblically, and in danger of moving the church's focus, and therefore costing it its influence.

Our heart's desire as a church as well as men and women of God is that everything we do would be a faithful reflection of Scripture.

Introduction

An article in the Washington Times, April 30, 1999, strikes right at the heart of where we are in our study on the church. The title of the article says it all: "Evangelical tone of memorial spurs backlash." The article goes on to state: "Some liberal Christians, black and Jewish leaders are outraged over the strongly evangelical Christian tone of last Sunday's memorial service for those massacred at Columbine High School. 'The entire community was invited to come and mourn, and then it turned into an evangelical prayer service,' said the Rabbi Stephen Foster of Temple Emanuel... 'The issue was one of insensitivity to the kind of statements being made that were exclusively directed to not just Christians, but fundamental Christians.' Another rabbi called the service reflective of an 'ignorant, narrow-minded' streak of Christianity... The consensus was that the program was not inclusive to all faith communities,' said the Rev. Michael Carrier of Calvary Presbyterian Church."

How do you respond to these comments? Are they right? Sure, but that doesn't mean they are correct. What is at issue here is that there is something way more important than inclusiveness, and that is sound doctrine – truth.

We are going to draw most of the material for the remaining studies from the Pastoral Epistles. Those are the letters of 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus. They are called the Pastorals because they deal with pastoral issues. As we have said, they deal with how "one ought to conduct oneself in the church." (1 Tim. 3:15) We aren't talking about things like "no running in the halls" and "Speak quietly and reverently." We are talking about how to *live*, not just act. What roles are we called to in the church?

Sound doctrine. We've said a lot about the authority of the Bible over the last month. No need to repeat it all again here. But if you are fuzzy on the concept, study 2 Timothy 3:16-17, Hebrews 4:12. The heart issue of biblical authority and its central, supreme place in the ministry of the Spirit is that 1) God has revealed himself in Scripture 2) Scripture is God-breathed and therefore inerrant, without error or flaw as he himself is. 3) Because it is God-breathed and inerrant, it is authoritative over every aspect of our lives.

What do the Pastorals tell us about sound doctrine?

1. The Need for Sound Doctrine - 1 Tim. 1:4, 6-11, 18-20; 4:1-5; 2 Tim 2:23-26; Titus 3:9-11
2. The Goal of Sound Doctrine - 1 Tim 1:5
3. No Room for Compromise with Sound Doctrine – 1 Timothy 1:18-20

To start us off, I need to give you a historical overview of the last years of Paul's ministry. I'm not doing this because it is fun (although it is) or because it is interesting (although it is that, too). Rather, the historical overview will set the context for the topic we will begin to cover today, and

that context will lend weight to what I believe the Pastoral Epistles show is to be at the heart of any church ministry: sound doctrine.

The Pastoral Epistles are rooted in two local churches, one at Ephesus and one at Crete. All three are named for their recipients, Timothy at Ephesus and Titus at Crete. They were written somewhere around 63-64AD from Rome, but before we get too far, I want to direct you to Acts 20.

In Acts 20, Paul is passing thru Asia for what he believes is the final time, on his way to Jerusalem. He is saying goodbye to the churches he has helped found, and he wants very much to talk to the Elders of the church at Ephesus, a place where he ministered for at least 3 years (20:31). He lands at Miletus, but instead of making the journey inland to Ephesus, he calls them to him.

Beginning in 20:18, Paul exhorts these leaders of the church at Ephesus to take care and guard the church. He reminds them of the model for servant leadership that he gave them as he ministered among them (20:18-27) and warns them of their need for diligence and discipline to guard the flock of God (20:28-35).

28 "**Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock**, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. 29 "I know that after my departure **savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock;** 30 **and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them.** 31 "**Therefore be on the alert**, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears. 32 "And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace....

Who must they protect the church from? Themselves!

Leaving the men on the beach at Miletus, Paul traveled on to Jerusalem, where he was taken as a prisoner to Caesarea and held for 2 years, then held another 2 years in his first imprisonment in Rome. Released around 62AD, Paul most likely traveled around to some of the churches before making the long trip to Spain. During this trip and probably before Spain he visited at Ephesus with Timothy, left him in charge there and traveled on to Macedonia (1 Tim. 1:3) to fulfill his promise to the Philippians to visit them (Phil. 1:25-26, 2:24), and eventually to Crete with Titus (Titus 1:5). Returning from Spain, he most likely visited Miletus, Troas, and Corinth (2 Tim. 4:13, 20). At some point, either before or after Spain, he spent a winter at Nicopolis (Titus 3:12).

These "ports of call" mark a natural progression back to Rome. Following the burning of Rome in 64AD, Nero had made it a crime to evangelize. It is most likely that Paul was arrested on this charge, and imprisoned there a second, final time (2 Tim. 1:16-17). When he wrote 2 Timothy he expected execution at any time (4:6-8). He was beheaded sometime between 64 and 68AD, with 67AD being the most commonly held date.

What has all that to do with the local church, especially SMBC? Where does this travelogue apply to us? We'll see that as we look at what Paul and Timothy found when they returned to

Ephesus. It is most likely at least 4 years and maybe more since Paul last saw the Ephesian elders on the beach at Miletus. Not an especially long time, right? But look at what he found when he got there. We can see it simply by skimming a couple of chapters of 1 Timothy. The church at Ephesus had gotten into a bunch of weird stuff:

- 1 Tim. 1:3-4 – Strange doctrines, myths, genealogies which lead to mere speculation rather than God’s administration of faith.
- 1 Tim. 1:6-7 – Turned aside (from something they have been pursuing before) to fruitless discussion, wanting to be teachers but not understanding what they teach.
- 1 Tim. 1:19-20 – Some have rejected faith and a good conscience, wrecking their own faith in apostasy and blaspheming, winding up being thrown out of the fellowship
- 1 Tim. 4:1-3 – What has happened shouldn’t be a surprise. The Spirit had said that some will fall away by paying attention to deceitful doctrines of spirits and demons. They will be led astray by hypocritical liars whose consciences have been seared (desensitized to good and evil – they can’t even tell right from wrong anymore – conscience is no longer functioning) so that they teach things like asceticism, abstaining from marriage and from certain foods for holiness.

One thing is clear about the identity of the men who are leading astray the church. One, they have influence with the weak ones in the church, and they are clearly teachers. For that reason, most believe that these false teachers are former elders in the church who have become apostate and are doing their best to take the rest with them.

Three Reasons Sound Doctrine is Needed

What Paul found and dealt with in 1 Timothy did not go away over night. In fact, many of the same issues not only spring up in 2 Timothy, written 4-5 years after 1 Timothy, but also in Crete, written to a church 100’s of miles away. But nowhere is the need for sound doctrine more clear than in 2 Timothy 3. There are 3 reasons here as to why sound doctrine is desperately needed.

Difficult times (read 3:1-5)

Paul is describing a brutal, evil people. Do you know what really surprise me about them? V5 – they are religious (but after their own fashion)!

Depraved men (read 3:6-9)

These depraved men prey on women who are particularly vulnerable, weak-minded and led by impulse. Fascinated by what they call knowledge, they are always learning, yet never coming to the knowledge of the truth. Indeed, Pilate’s cynical "What is truth?" has become the rallying cry of the non-Christian intellectual. They stand in opposition to the truth, depraved, rejected, foolish. Yet the standard-bearers of the generations.

Deceitful men (read 3:13)

Finally, sound doctrine is needed because there are so many imposters and deceivers. Not only that, but so many who are willing to be deceived!

Timothy stands in complete contrast to these men. (read v10-12)

- **But you** rings out loud and clear, separating Timothy from these evil men.
- **Followed** unlike these former leaders of the Ephesian church. Timothy followed Paul in everything – teaching, conduct, purpose, faith, patience, love, perseverance, persecutions, sufferings. All of which are the natural result of desiring to live godly!

Do you think the depraved and deceitful men will ever face such trials from the world? No, they fit the world to a tee! So what is Timothy to do? Call on Caesar? Raise a revolution? Take up arms against the infidel?

- No – v14, **continue** in the things you have learned and know, namely the sacred writings (v15), that is, Scripture, which gives wisdom to know the salvation which is in no other than Jesus Christ. And beyond our initial salvation, Scripture is profitable for all teaching, reproof, correction, training in righteousness, so that we are fully equipped for every good work.

Therefore, Timothy's charge is clear. In view of the difficulty of the times, the depraved and deceitful men who waylay the weak in the church, Timothy is to stand in opposition to the false teachers, he is to follow Paul's faithful example, taking whatever persecution comes, and he is to continue in what he knows, namely, Scripture. And what is he to do with the inspired Scriptures which are profitable to make a Christian fully equipped? He is to preach it.

(Read 4:1-2). a solemn charge. Look at how Paul invokes God's name here. **Preach the word.**

- **When?** In season and out (at all times)
- **How?** Reprove, rebuke, exhort (in all ways)
- **For how long?** With all patience and instruction (over and over and over)
- **Why?** Because men won't endure sound doctrine and will run from it (v3-4). They will only want to hear what they want to hear, and will hire for themselves pastors and teachers who will accommodate them.

Sound doctrine can be uncomfortable, can't it? Perhaps even for believers, depending on our hearts. **But you** again. Tough. The man of God has no choice but to be sober, to endure the hardship that will clearly come his way if he holds to the Scriptures, to do the work of an evangelist, and so to fulfill his ministry.

Because the times are difficult, men of depraved mind will abound, and deceivers will come to lead many astray, preach the Word. God-breathed, profitable, equipping. At all times, in all ways, over and over and over again. And there is a reason for it.

The Purpose of Sound Doctrine – 1 Timothy 1:3-5

Paul gave Timothy pretty clear instructions in v3 – ***remain*** at Ephesus and ***instruct*** certain men. Why? What did Paul hope to accomplish with this instruction? V5 – love. What kind of love is Paul looking to grow? That can be seen by its underlying foundation:

1. ***pure heart*** - The love Paul is looking for comes from a pure heart. Not Dudley Doright pure, not naïve or just plain nice, but a heart that has been purified from sin.
2. ***good conscience*** – Romans 2:15 says that God has written his law on our hearts. This is our conscience, which was made to act as a warning system to tell us when we are getting ourselves into trouble, when we are doing wrong. If your conscience is good, that means it is sensitive to evil and operating effectively, letting you know right from wrong. If your conscience is evil, or seared, it is desensitized and won't let you know right from wrong.
3. ***sincere faith*** – full assurance, true belief

What is the relationship of these 3 things to sound doctrine? First, sound doctrine reveals the source of a pure heart:

Psalm 119:9-11 How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word. I seek you with all my heart; do not let me stray from your commands. I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.

Second, sound doctrine trains the conscience to know right from wrong.

- *2 Corinthians 4:2: . . . by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.*
- *Titus 2:11-12: For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age.*

Finally, sound doctrine communicates accurately the gospel, revealing not only a sound and reasonable, and coherent faith, but more than that, a powerful faith because it is based on God's truth:

- *Romans 1:16-17: For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "But the righteous man shall live by faith."*
- *2 Tim. 3:15: . . . from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.*

Man can't add much to the power of the gospel, which is the heart of sound doctrine. He just winds up subtracting from it. So the goal of sound doctrine is love from a pure heart, a good conscience, and sincere faith. Obviously, the love in view here is a pure love of God and of God's people. The author of Hebrews echoes that thought in 10:22:

*let us draw near with a **sincere heart** in **full assurance of faith**, having our hearts sprinkled **clean from an evil conscience** and our bodies washed with pure water.*

"Draw near" to God, obviously, in a loving and submissive way, to worship and honor and serve the God who saved us. The goal of sound doctrine is love, from a pure heart, and a good conscience, and a sincere faith.

No Room for Compromise

If the church is the pillar and foundation of the truth, of the gospel message and the scriptures, then what do you do with false teachers? You correct them. You confront the false teaching right out front, not hiding the need for correction from the people, and deal with it. What if those who are teaching falsely won't take the elder's correction? There is no room for compromise.

1 Timothy 1:20 mentions Hymenaeus and Alexander, 2 men, apparently teachers (and therefore elders) who have "shipwrecked" their faith and Paul says he has "delivered them over" to Satan to teach them not to blaspheme. In other words, they have been removed from the protection of God's family, of his gathering, and been put out of the church. 2 Timothy mentions both men again (2 Tim. 2:17, 4:14), plus another false teacher, Philetus. They obviously did not get it, did they?

There has never been a greater need for the preaching and teaching of sound doctrine. We could wish that the 1st century wolves who ravaged the church from the inside were the last of their kind, but we know they were not. There are many who are ignorant, or deceived, or worse, maliciously twisting God's word to suit their own purposes.

Yet, we also live in an age when criticism or correction of other believers is simply not tolerated. It is decried as "unloving," and so churches that teach contrary to God's inspired, inerrant, authoritative word abound today. What can we do?

1 Timothy 4:2 - preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction.

How did they come up with these 4 activities? Did some 1st century church growth consultant think them up on retainer for the Apostles? They were just the natural activities for God's people!

The impact of the church on Jerusalem cannot be overstated. While they clearly found ways to meet specific needs, as the food distribution problem of 6:1-7 shows, this was a church without elaborate programs, without groups targeted at specific needs, without services that were formally targeted to the sensitivities of unbelievers. The programs of the church would have been

such that they advanced the continual devotion of the people to the Word, to sharing, to remembering the Lord's Supper, and to prayer.

The church's simple program had an impact that could only be called supernatural:

- Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe
- Wonders & signs through the Apostles
- All together
- Had all things in common, sharing w/all as needed
- Daily, w/one mind breaking bread together
- Sincerity/simplicity of heart
- Praising God
- Having favor w/the people
- Lord added to their number

Is that lost to us? That "sense of awe?" What caused it in the first place?

Not the "signs and wonders." They were merely one by-product of everything that was going on in the Jerusalem church. What caused that sense of awe was *all* that God was doing in their midst, from v44 (all together) thru v47 (being saved).

The impact of the church was so huge that two natural results in v47 almost get swallowed up - 1) worship and 2) witnessing. Both worship and witnessing are natural results of a church that is doing exactly what it is supposed to be doing. I don't feel that we need church-directed programs for worship or witness. Every individual is responsible for both. However, the church can and should provide outlets and activities that will encourage and strengthen both areas.

2 points before we close about the attitudes of the people. Note the phrase in v46, translated in NASB as "day by day continuing with one mind," "continuing daily with one accord" in KJV. A unique Greek word underscores the uniqueness of the church: *homothumadon* - compound of *homou* (together) and *thumos* (passion), with *one passion*. Homothumadon could be translated to "rush along in unison". Picture a river, rushing along, many streams joining into one, going the same place, by the same means. Or an orchestra, where different notes from different instruments are sounded but harmonize in pitch and tone. The Holy Spirit so blended together the lives of the people that made up the church that they were "rushing along in unison" How about us?

How involved were these people with one another? Didn't they have jobs? Families? Hobbies? Sports? Yup.

And the phrase that ends v46, "gladness and sincerity of heart." First, the sense of joy was palpable and continuing. Gosh, what if God meant it to be that way?! Second, there was a sincerity of heart - everything they did, they did because they meant it, they wanted it! There is another point here. The word translated "sincerity" can also be translated "simplicity." Their hearts were unfettered, uncluttered, and their church was as well. No need for big programs, yet it was a huge church by anybody's standards. No need for tons of board meetings, yet they were constantly together. No need for any to go hungry, yet they had a formal program in place to distribute food or money to the needy!

Every need was met because there were no secrets between them. Obviously, as this group of people saw God work and move in individual's lives so clearly, they must have bubbled over the top with it all. And it was clear that God was blessing: 120 (1:15) grew, 3,000 (2:41), grew (2:47), 2,000 more (4:4), grew (5:14-15), grew (6:1), grew (6:7), upset the world (17:6)

Transplant yourself to that first body of believers - just as you are, with habits and attitudes intact. What would they make of you? But consider what habits and attitudes did they bring with them? What kinds of behavior did they have to be saved from?

What is the program? Teach the word, fellowship, Lord's Supper, Pray. And witness. Is there a place for formal programs in the church? Sure, as long as they work towards accomplishing one of these goals.

Lesson Four: Handling Sound Doctrine

Review

We saw in the last lesson that there is a great, crying **need for sound doctrine**. Because these are *difficult times* (2 Tim. 3:1-5) and there are *depraved and deceitful men* (2 Tim. 3:6-9, 13), false teachers who are wolves in sheep's clothing, willing to lie, cheat, and steal to get power and status.

Because of the prevalence of false teaching in the early church, there is quite an emphasis in the Scriptures on correction, on rebuke, on reproof. Unless we pay close attention to what Scripture itself says is the reason for sound doctrine, we could easily wind up as unloving, dictatorial gestapo-pulpiteers who abuse their people spiritually. And so we need to keep the **purpose of sound doctrine** in view. The purpose for sound doctrine is to lead the individual believer to *love* the Lord and one another, from a *pure heart*, and a *good conscience*, and a *sincere faith* (1 Tim. 1:5).

Introduction

Some measure a successful church different ways: 1) a beautiful building; 2) a happy and well-fed congregation; 3) an entertaining speaker in the pulpit. 2 out of 3 ain't bad. For the church to function as the church, we will see that it needs to be led in sound doctrine.

How can SMBC be all that God wants us to be? If you've been here any time at all you've seen lives touched, people saved, marriages restored, yet many of us sense that God is just beginning. May disagree, but I believe Scripture shows that handling sound doctrine is a critical and basic requirement for a church to be all God would have it be.

2 Timothy 2:15: Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth.

How does a good minister of sound doctrine keep from being ashamed? By handling accurately the word of truth, the Scriptures. As Gary said a couple of weeks ago, "handling accurately" literally means "cutting straight." As a tentmaker would fit together big pieces of canvas, cutting and sewing them together so that the tent would do what it was supposed to do - **cover and protect** the one who used it, so is the good minister of sound doctrine to cut straight the word. That means that he knows 1) what the word says and 2) how to teach it and 3) how to apply it. He will not add or subtract anything, saying nothing more nor less than what the Scriptures teach, so that the power of God's word is free to do what it is supposed to do in the individual's heart.

How does a good minister of sound doctrine do that? How does he handle it accurately? **By working hard at it.** Be diligent, as a workman.

We see the word "study" in this verse and we picture the teacher working away as a student, and that is not inaccurate, but it is not really the picture Paul had in mind. The word he uses for "workman" here is specifically an agricultural day-laborer.

And that underscores our point. Sound doctrine must be handled accurately, and the only way to do that is to labor in it. Sound doctrine requires discipline!

The Discipline of Sound Doctrine - 1 Timothy 4:6-16

Exercise. There are a couple of significant word pictures you need to grasp here. One of them is in the word *discipline*. We love the Olympics, summer and winter. The favorite summer game in our house is gymnastics. When you watch them, men or women, one of the things that always gets talked up is what they had to do to get there. In the gym 10 hours a day to perfect her routine. Sweating, aching, to the point of exhaustion, then working the whole routine over again.

Those are the pictures of the man who labors in the word! The teacher is to be *disciplined*, fed from the Word (v6), training the heart and mind to godliness in and by the Word (v7-9).

Labor. My wife grew up in ranch country in the desert east of Palm Springs. Her Dad owned and managed citrus ranches for years, and those ranches were worked by day-laborers, working the fields in 115 degree heat. Talk about hard work, back-breaking, hand-toughening, neck-cracking labor!

Unlike bodily exercise, which is of small profit relative to the profit of godliness (not none, just small), godliness is of great profit, and so worth the effort. And it is effort (v10) - *labor*, toiling to the point of exhaustion. It is hard work, not easy. There are 6 reasons the work is labor here:

- Hard work because it is continual (v11). Keep commanding and keep teaching.
- Hard work because it must be lived out (v12). Not just words in a sermon, but quality of his life.
- Hard work because he must be balanced in his presentation of the Word (v13), reading it (telling what it says), preaching it (telling how to live it, applying it, aimed at the heart), and teaching it (telling what it means, aimed at the intellect). He is to give attention to these things - same word as used of priest offering to God in Heb. 7:13. What happened to the priest that didn't offer to God correctly? Do you think the priests gave careful attention to how they offered? Is the Sunday sermon the only means by which a minister of sound doctrine ministers?
- Hard work because he can't neglect it - ever (v14-15). There is no vacation from the Word. He must "take pains" in the Word. The word means "meditate." He is to attend to the Word carefully, grapple with it, think it through over and over. He must be diligent in the Word, immersed, wholly absorbed, and given over to it.
- Hard work because it makes demands on your character (Pay close attention to yourself); your creed (and to your teaching); and your conduct (persevere in these things) (v16a). Persevere, continue long, abide in. Same word as when Peter kept knocking to be let into the house after release from prison (Acts 12:16), knock and knock and knock.
- Hard work because the stakes are enormous - salvation depends on it (v16b). Not that the minister of sound doctrine saves himself and his people, but the minister is used by God to effect salvation.

*As the unfaithfulness or carelessness of the pastor is ruinous to the Church, so the cause of salvation is justly ascribed to his faithfulness and diligence. True, it is God alone who saves; and not even the smallest portion of his glory can lawfully be bestowed on men. But God parts with no portion of his glory when he employs the agency of men for bestowing salvation. John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles to Timothy, Titus and Philemon*, p. 118. Quoted by Homer Kent, *The Pastoral Epistles*, p. 161.*

What does that tell you about the Sunday sermon? 1) more ways to minister sound doctrine than just that once a week message. 2) that message is pretty important

Is there a downside? What dangers are there in such an emphasis on sound doctrine?

1. Spiritual abuse, 2) dry, 3) intellectual emphasis, 4) one-sided, one-dimensional ministry.

Our greatest strengths are usually what turn into our greatest problems. Our focus can slip out of balance, exclude a vital area of ministry, such as witness or partnership.

Fundamental, evangelical churches often tend to one of two "camps."

- "Soul-winning station," to use the old phrase. All gospel, all the time. Little biblical depth, stunted growth, lack of maturity.
- "Lecture hall." All theology, all the time. Little spiritual passion, few new believers, bloated heads sitting on inactive backsides.

Both are out of balance. Neither one is doing the job Scripture says we are to do. Why not? It's hard work. 3 questions for us today:

- Do we support the institution (SMBC) or its reason for existence?
- Do we emphasize correct doctrine and neglect the quality of our lives?
- Have we allowed non-absolutes to become absolute?

So, we've seen the discipline required to handle sound doctrine and conclude, "Whew! I'm glad I don't have to work that hard! Good thing we've got Gary to do all that work for us!" Wrong!

The Responsibility of Sound Doctrine

The good minister of sound doctrine is required to lead his people in sound doctrine, but there is a congregational requirement as well. It is a shared responsibility.

Minister:	Congregation:
Provide basic knowledge of the Word (1 Peter 2:2)	Crave it
Provide in-depth knowledge of the Word (Hebrews 6:1-2)	Learn it
Pray for spiritual growth beyond knowledge (love - Eph. 3:19)	Grasp it
Provide opportunities to serve one another (Eph. 4:12, 16)	Do it

The Result of Sound Doctrine

What happens when the leader and the led do their parts? What is the result of sound doctrine exercised by both? Turn to Ephesians 4:11. The minister's role is clear in v11-12: *And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and*

teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ;

But so is the congregation's in v13: *until **we all** attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fulness of Christ. As a result, **we** are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in love, **we** are to grow up in all aspects into Him, who is the head, even Christ, from whom **the whole body, being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.***

God ordained leaders in the church who would labor in sound doctrine on behalf of his people, but that isn't the last step or the end result. It isn't just having a wonderful, godly, hard-working man in the pulpit that causes Christ-likeness and spiritual maturity. **Where does the real growth come from?** The working together of the people, who, as they are led and trained, support and care for one another, each contributing a vital part to the building of the body of Christ in love.

That is why I say that the genuine and complete ministry of sound doctrine is one of the most critical requirements for any church to be all that God would have it be. It is in the balanced provision and reception of sound doctrine that the church is edified, and the maturing of the body takes place. Not just the pastor, not just good teaching. Requires knowledge of the Word, but also requires spiritual wisdom that surpasses knowledge. Requires a godly man who **labors** in the Word, but also requires a congregation who will crave the basics, learn the deep things, grasp the love of God, and will sacrificially serve one another.

Realize that your church is not a "Sunday place to be" it is a community, a partnership, a family. Remember the purpose of sound doctrine: Love, from a pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith! And love and appreciate your Pastor.

Lesson Five: Elder Rule, Part 1

What we've been looking at is what the Bible says about the local church. How is a man or woman to conduct oneself in the church? We are making this study a priority because we believe that for SMBC to be effective as a church, for SMBC to be all that God wants it to be, it has to first make **his** priorities for the church **our** priorities. To do that, we have to know what his priorities for the church are.

In some cases we need to have our minds changed about what a church is to be and how it is to function. **How many of you have come to SMBC from another church?** Almost all - we come from widely varying backgrounds, bring a whole set of expectations and notions of what church is based on our previous experience. What we knew as kids, what we thought was important, because it was always done that way. We need to check those expectations and experiences against Scripture to make sure they hold up.

We also need to avoid the temptation to think that we here at SMBC have church figured out. That we know what a church is supposed to be and if anyone else wants to know all they need to do is ask us! But we also need to recognize when we are dealing with change using the "that's how we've always done it" approach. We all need to adopt a habit of biblical thinking. That is especially true about how God wants his own family to conduct themselves, because it isn't our church, it's his!

As we have completed 4 studies in this overall series, we have really been looking at God's priorities for an effective church. Effectiveness is what we are about here. I firmly believe that the vast majority of us hunger and thirst to be useful to God. To be part of a rich fellowship that honors him and meets one another's needs, that is dynamic and vibrant and aggressive about its love for the Lord, for his people, and for the lost.

Is that you? If that is your heart, then you are in the right place! Not because we have "arrived," not because we've "made it." We have miles to go in so many areas. But you are in the right place because we know where we want to be and it is all our heart's desire to get there. We need the power of the Spirit, the grace of the Lord Jesus, and the love of God to see us through.

And so these studies on the local church should not be taken lightly. We aren't just filling up the Sunday school hour so we have something to do while our children cut and paste! I hope that throughout this study we are holding ourselves up to the mirror of the Word and checking our reflection out! As we do that we'll see a few areas that look okay, where we can say, "Okay, we're at least on the right tract, now we just need to faithfully stay the course." And where we are not reflecting the Word, where our priorities or practices don't meet his, where we are falling short; it is how we will respond to these areas that will determine how serious we are about being an effective church for God's glory.

We are now to the point in this study where things can start to get uncomfortable. We are moving into personal roles and relationships in the church, the stuff that you and I are accountable to do and to be. Here is where we are going to be challenged most directly. In fact, today we are going to be talking about elder rule, and I understand the elders have a lawyer present.

What are the marks of an effective church? How can we look at SMBC and say, "Yes, we are doing what the Lord would have us to do." There are several marks, and so far we've seen 3. A church that is effective for God, a church that meets God's priorities for the body of Christ, is a church that:

1. **Has a biblical mindset.** It's not a country club, it isn't defined by what you knew as a kid. The church's purpose for existence is rooted in its identity as the family of God, the gathering of people called out into a special relationship with God, the pillar and foundation of God's truth in the Scripture (1 Tim. 3:15)
2. **Has a biblical program.** The church that has a biblical mindset will follow a program that is biblical. We don't need a dozen programs to fit every need of our people or our community. We need the program that was at the heart of the New Testament church: the Apostle's teaching, the partnership and sharing which defined the fellowship of the

saints, the continual remembrance of the cross in the celebration of the Lord's Supper, and the prevailing prayer of the body. The church that practices these things is effective, and results in a community that is sincerely worshipping God and effectively witnessing (Acts 2:42-47).

3. **Is immersed in sound doctrine.** The church that is effective, which is a dynamic and vital place that meets God's priorities for the body of Christ is a church that is immersed in sound doctrine. The Scripture is read, is applied, is taught. It is the hallmark of the effective church, that sound doctrine drowns out the chorus of false teaching the world is after. That the sound doctrine is communicated not primarily to condemn and rebuke, but primarily to stimulate to love and purity. That the sound doctrine is communicated in the manner most needed by and suited to the congregation, offering the ABC's to those who are young, the deeper things of God to the more mature, and the ability to grow in love and wisdom to all. The effective church recognizes the need for sound doctrine, teaches it keeping the purpose for sound doctrine in mind, and handles it effectively.
4. **Is led by a team of godly shepherds.**

What do you think is the predominate model of church government? The **hierarchical** model, and it comes in two flavors: 1) pastor at the top, council of elders or deacons or trustees as his advisors, working with him or watching over him as he leads and directs the ministries of the church and the people of the congregation. 2) congregation at the top, directing by majority vote the ministries of the church and emphasis of the pastor and boards.

Where is the basis for this hierarchical model found? The Harvard Business School. Where can you find it in Scripture? You can't! The only form of church gov't found in the NT is shared leadership by a team of men called "elders" and "overseers."

In fact, elder/overseer almost always appears in the plural form.

1. "Elder" or "overseer" only appears in the singular when discussing a specific individual who is an elder (1 Tim. 5:19; 1 Peter 5:1; 2 John 1; 3 John 1) or when discussing the qualifications of an overseer (1 Tim. 3:1-2; Titus 1:7).
2. Otherwise, elders and overseers are always referred to in the plural sense, while their respective churches are referred to in the singular sense: i.e. "the elders (plural) of the church (singular)" (Acts 14:23, 15:4, 22, 20:17, 28; Phil. 1:1; Titus 1:5; James 5:14)

There is **never** a singular elder addressed, there is **never** an individual who is called the pastor of a church. In other words, the only form of church government found in the NT was a team of men sharing leadership. There is never a singular elder, overseer, or pastor in view.

You might ask, "But what about Paul? Or Timothy, or Titus? Didn't they serve as singular pastors?" Probably so, but only for short-term assignments, until specific objectives were reached, at which time they moved on. What were their short-term assignments?

- **Paul** - Acts 14:21-23: *And after they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying, "Through many*

tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God." **And when they had appointed elders for them in every church**, having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

- **Titus** – Titus 1:5: For this reason I left you in Crete, that you might set in order what remains, and **appoint elders in every city** as I directed you
- **Timothy** – 1 Timothy 1:3: As I urged you upon my departure for Macedonia, remain on at Ephesus in order that you may **instruct certain men not to teach strange doctrines**,

In none of these passages is there a sense of being the man in charge in any kind of permanent way. They were there with apostolic authority to do a job, and when it was done, they moved along. The longest single ministry we know of in Paul's life was his 3 years at Ephesus, out of approximately 30 years of ministry!

Three Key Words

The NT uses two words to describe the office of elder, and it uses them interchangeably:

- elder (presbuteros): aged, mature
- overseer (episkopos): manager, one who oversees. Translated "bishop"

The first term describes what he is, the second, what he does. But there is a third term that is not used as often, and it describes how the elder practices his oversight:

- as a shepherd (poimen): pastor, one who leads a flock

In the NT these terms are identical and can be used interchangeably

List of Qualifications:

Turn to 1 Timothy 3:1-7 – Notice in v1 what the following list of qualifications is for: overseers. Now look at Titus 1:6-9 – It's a virtually identical list of qualifications, what is the office? elders. Furthermore, Paul calls the same man both elder (Titus 1:5) and overseer (Titus 1:7)

1 Peter 5:1-2

Therefore, I exhort the elders (presbuteros) among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, shepherd (poimaino) the flock of God among you, exercising oversight (episkopeo) not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God;

Acts 20:17, 28 – Paul's Farewell to the Elders at Ephesus

And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders (presbuteros) of the church. "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you

overseers (episkopos) , to shepherd (poimaino) the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.

What about the Pastor-Teacher?

You might say, "But what about Ephesians 4:11? 'And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers.'" When we studied the Spiritual Gifts last year we saw that all these gifts in v11 were "office" gifts. That is, the gifts are the offices themselves. There is no "gift of apostleship," nor a "gift of evangelism," nor a "gift of pastoring." There was an office of apostle, which has passed away. There is an office of evangelist, which is uniquely filled by individuals called to that office. In the same way, there is an office of pastor-teacher, which God has given to the church to lead it.

Doesn't that indicate then that someone was "the pastor?" No, it indicates that some of the elders were specifically called to teach. The word translated "pastor" is the word for a shepherd. As we have seen, all the elders are to shepherd the church. Do you know, this is the only time in the NT where the leader in a church is called a shepherd? All other uses of this word are verbs, describing what he does, rather than giving him a title. There is only one person in the NT who is given the title of shepherd: Jesus.

So those who were called to serve in the office of pastor-teacher did not serve alone, but in a group of men who were all gifted, qualified, and appointed to lead their church. 1 Cor. 12, Rom. 12, Eph. 4 tell us that every person in the church is uniquely gifted to fulfill a need in the body. This is no less true of elders. Each man is uniquely gifted to fulfill their office. All are to be able to teach, but some are more able than others by Spirit-giftedness. Those men would have been the pastor-teachers.

The primary role of an elder, overseer is not a teacher but a shepherd.

So what does it mean for the elders to shepherd their flock?

Elders are shepherds (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:2), and shepherds care for their sheep:

- Knowing them. (John 10:14)
- Going before and leading them. (Ps. 77:20; 78:52; 80:1)
- Seeking out good pasture for them. (1Ch. 4:39-41; Ps. 23:2)
- Numbering them when they return from pasture. (Jer. 33:13)
- Watching over them by night. (Luke 2:8)
- Showing tenderness to the young. (Gen 33:13,14; Ps 78:71)
- Defending them when attacked by wild beasts. (1 Sam. 17:34-36; Amos 3:12)
- Searching them out when lost and straying. (Eze. 34:12; Luke 15:4,5)
- Attending them when sick. (Eze. 34:16)

Shepherds illustrate godly leadership:

- a. Of God as leader of Israel. (Ps. 77:20; 80:1)

- b. Of Christ as the good shepherd. (Zec. 13:7; John 10:14; Heb. 13:20)
- c. Of kings as the leaders of the people. (Isa. 44:28; Eze. 34:23; Jer. 6:3; 49:19)
- d. Of protectors and teachers of the people. (Jer. 23:4)
- e. Of Christ seeking the lost as they search out straying sheep. (Eze. 34:11-12; Luke 15:2-7)
- f. Of Christ's tenderness. (Isa. 40:11; Eze 34:13-16)

As God's appointed leaders in the church, elders must rule by caring for the sheep and by practicing godly leadership – not ruling harshly over the body. The elder's responsibility is to love the people, feeding, watching out for them, protecting and defending them, caring for them, bringing them back when they have lost the way, sharing their lives and earning their trust.

The elder's role model: Look at John 10:14-15. The Good Shepherd, who lays down his life for the sheep. Do you want to lay down your life for the sheep? Then God may well be calling you to the office. If that doesn't describe you, you may want to reconsider.

That is why Paul says if any man wants to be an elder, it is a good thing, a fine work (1 Tim. 3:1). It is nothing to be ashamed of to want to be an elder, providing the motivation is appropriate – to serve, not to be first! In fact, it is pretty clear that elders are called by God to the office. Our challenge as a church is to recognize God's call and ordain the men he has called into service here! One way to do that is by recognizing those who meet the biblical qualifications for the office.

Too many Diotrophes' – 3 John 9-10

Diotrophes "loves to be first." 1) Doesn't accept authority over him (John's) 2) Doesn't show hospitality to traveling Christians (probably emissary's from the apostles – authority again) 3) puts out from the church those who do show hospitality. Too many of these guys around.

And not enough of these guys: Qualifications of an Elder

What kind of man does an elder have to be to fulfill this role? A man of godly character and conduct, as exemplified in the qualifications for elder given in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 & Titus 1:6-9. Since we have spent a fair amount of time recently on these qualifications, we will not go over them in detail here. However, the following short list of definitions and questions can be a help to evaluating men for the office. These are taken from a sermon on qualifications for Elders by W. Gary Phillips, Senior Pastor at SMBC:

1. "Above Reproach" - *Does he seek to model Christ in his life?*
2. "husband of one wife" - *Is he totally devoted and faithful to his wife?*
3. "Temperate" - *Is he Spirit controlled, rather than self-indulgent? Does he react according to biblical principles or does he lose control?*
4. "Prudent" - *Is he biblically minded, so that he turns to Scripture for his answers to life's problems in a balanced way?*
5. "Respectable" - *Does he live an orderly, disciplined life?*
6. "Hospitable" - *Does he share his home with others to minister to their needs?*
7. "Able to teach" - *Is he able to communicate the Word of God to others?*

8. "Not addicted to wine" *Is he free from any abuse that might take control of his life or offend a weaker brother?*
9. "Not pugnacious" - *Is he physically abusive or verbally abusive to anyone? Does he handle those who disagree with grace and patience?*
10. "Gentle" - *Does he handle others in a gracious, patient manner?*
11. "Uncontentious" - *Does he manage quarrelsome people without a personal agenda?*
12. "Free from love of money" - *Is he seeking his own personal security in possessions? Is he honest in his business practices? Does he view finances as one who is responsible as a steward?*
13. "Manages household well" - *Does his wife respect him as a spiritual leader? Are his children under control? Do they admire him and submit to his leadership?*
14. "Not a new convert" - *Does he truly know the Lord and show progress in spiritual maturity?*
15. "Good reputation outside the church" - *Is his life one of visible integrity?*

How many churches choose as their leaders men who are movers and shakers in the community? That is not the biblical model. When I see these qualifications, I see primarily broken men, who fully recognize their sin and their dependence on God. Those are the men who should serve as elders.

In the next lesson we will focus on some of the problems of shared leadership, some implications of shared leadership, and the congregation's responsibility in a church that practices the biblical model of shared leadership.

Lesson Six: Elder Rule, Part 2

In the last lesson, we said that:

- Elder rule is the only church leadership seen in the NT other than the Apostles.
- There are three key terms for elders in the NT - elder (presbuteros): aged, mature; overseer (episkopos): manager, one who oversees. Translated "bishop"; and shepherd (poimen): pastor, one who leads a flock. The first term describes what he is, the second, what he does, the third term describes how the elder practices his oversight.
- These terms almost always appear in the plural. In fact, there is never a singular elder/shepherd in view in the NT.
- The elders of a church are to be men of godly character and conduct. Broken men, recognition of their sin and their dependence on him (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9) **because**
- The elders shepherd the church (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:2). As God's appointed leaders in the church, elders must rule by caring for the sheep and by practicing godly leadership – not ruling harshly over the body

Today, 3 questions:

- Why would God ordain shared leadership?
- What are the implications of the biblical model for the church today?
- What is the congregation's responsibility in an elder-rule church?

Why would God ordain shared leadership?

Two reasons: Consistency. Shared leadership is consistent with:

- Church as a family, a fellowship (1 Tim. 3:15).
- Church as a kingdom of priests (1 Peter 2:5,9). No need for priestly representative (Heb. 9:11-15, 10:12-14). All have equal access, all have the same Mediator
- Church as a body, with all parts supplying what is needed (1 Cor. 12, Eph. 4)
- Church as a humble-servant community (Matthew 20:25-28; 1 Peter 5:3), under the headship of the Good Shepherd, Jesus (John 10:13-14). Jesus chose the Twelve, not the One.

Second reason, effectiveness. Shared leadership is more effective than singular, because:

- Balances weakness (1 Cor. 12, Eph. 4:16) – we are one body, all parts needed to work.
- Lightens the load – Eccl. 4:9-12
- Provides accountability – Proverbs 27:17 - Iron sharpens iron

Problems of shared leadership

Let me illustrate some of the perceived problems of shared leadership by telling you about a family that visited our church for several weeks a while back. They asked me to come over and answer some of their questions about the church, and we talked for about an hour, in a very pleasant conversation. During that time, they asked about our church leadership, and two things in particular really bothered them. First, that SMBC is not associated with a governing body or denomination, and second, that we practiced elder rule. Literally, their faces fell, and I could tell they didn't like what they were hearing. When I asked them what they thought of it, they asked "Doesn't it take a long time to get things done?" "Who holds the elders accountable?" And that was the last I saw of them.

Let me ask you a question. Suppose you had the opportunity to sit down and learn directly from the expert in the one area of life that you most wanted to succeed in. Maybe its James Dobson, or Elisabeth Eliot, or Truett Cathy, or whoever. Wouldn't you want to listen to him or her? If you knew that by following their advice you could make your marriage better, your job more satisfying, your family happier, you'd do what they said, right?

Well, God has spoken clearly about what it takes to be an effective, dynamic, vital church, and yet right at the outset, the vast majority of churches are disregarding what he says. Instead of the shared leadership of elder rule, the vast majority of churches opt for a one-man show or some kind of exercise in democracy. So here's my question: Why? Why do they do that?

Because making shared leadership work is tough! It is far harder to lead as a council of equals than it is to direct subordinates. It takes a different kind of leadership, cooperative, not directive.

Here is how elders are to cooperate together to fulfill their office:

- Elders are to rule (1 Tim. 5:17) as overseers (1 Tim. 3:1, Titus 1:7) who manage the church (1 Tim. 3:5) acting as shepherds (1 Peter 5:2), not as lords (1 Pet. 5:3, Mat 20:25-28).
- Elders must be devoted to prayer and the word (Acts 6:4) rather than focused on short-term needs. However, they are responsible to provide leadership for meeting those needs (Acts 6:1-7).
- Elders are to be able to teach (1 Tim. 3:2) but not all will be called or uniquely gifted to teach (1 Tim. 5:17).
- Elders are to diligently labor among the people (1 Thess. 5:12-13) living as examples (Heb. 13:7; 1 Peter 5:3).

Where is the elder's meeting in this scenario? Pretty minor part of the job. The primary work of an elder takes place among the people of his church, not in a room fighting it out with other elders. He lives out his life in front of and among the flock, discipling, encouraging, strengthening.

When the elders gather together, it should be to pray, to seek God's wisdom from his Word and apply that wisdom to the specific needs and direction of the body (which they know clearly because they labor among them) in order to keep the body moving towards fulfillment of its mission and goal.

What Are the Implications of Shared Leadership?

- **How many elders are to shepherd the flock?** *All of them!* The Bible teaches no such thing as a one-man pastorate.
- **Who appoints elders today?** Originally, elders were appointed by apostles (Acts 14:23) and their delegates (1 Tim. 5:22; Titus 1:5). Is there biblical evidence to suggest how a congregation might choose elders? Yes 1) representatives for the collection appointed by the church (1 Cor. 16:3; 2 Cor. 8:9). 2) qualifications given so we could recognize an elder when we saw one. Perfectly legitimate to appoint, so long as the qualifications and job description is met.

- **How should elders be appointed?** Majority vote? Although that is our practice, I would suggest that the biblical practice was more like this. When a man's life matched the qualifications of the office, and his desire was to lay down his life for the flock as their shepherd, he would be ordained as an elder by the church, by the laying on of hands. Majority vote seems a little out of place to me.
- **How should they make decisions?** Unanimously – no such thing as majority rule in the body of Christ. One Spirit, same Spirit in all (1 Cor. 12, Eph. 4) call for end to divisions in the body (1 Cor. 1:10)
- **Should there be terms limiting the elders time in office?** We don't have terms for pastors, do we? No biblical basis for terms. Why do we do it? Elder for life can be a problem if 1) not serious about qualifications and 2) no mechanism in place for dealing with an elder who is not fulfilling the office.
- **How do you deal with a sinning elder?** Multiple witnesses, but deal severely with sin (1 Tim. 5:19-20)
- **How do you deal with an elder who may not be sinning, but is simply not fulfilling the office?**
- **Is there any such thing as a lead elder?** Yes. Peter as the leader of the Twelve, those worthy of double honor in 1 Tim. 5:17. Delegation is part of the shared aspect of the leadership. Not all are gifted to do everything, and so not all should do everything. But if there is a "lead elder" he is to be a "first among equals."
 - Rest of elders must ***not*** relinquish their responsibility to shepherd to 1 or 2 others, or to the paid staff. Temptation to do so always exists due to time pressures, discomfort w/difficult spiritual matters. Great willingness to pay someone to do the work.
 - "First among equals" is open to abuse by a dominating, controlling leader who might look for ways to force agreement or to force out dissent. What to do?

Shared leadership takes a reliance on the Holy Spirit and on prayer (Acts 6:4). It takes men who are willing to continually exercise patience, humility, love, self-control, and who will trust one another. It takes good management practices, clear communication, understood lines of responsibility. It takes a group of people who are serious about biblical qualifications, willing to work closely together, to pray together, and to build one another up.

What is the Congregation's Responsibility in Shared Leadership?

If the elders are shepherds then the people are. . . sheep! There must be an attitude of submission and willingness to be led, balanced by a prayerful and sincere concern to hold the shepherds to accountability. Don't fight him, unless on scriptural grounds he needs to be fought.

- Give those who "rule well" especially in the word, double honor (support, pay, etc.) (1 Tim. 5:17-18)
- Don't accuse lightly (v19)
- Deal severely with their sin (v20)
- Don't appoint elders hastily (v22)
- Evaluate elder candidates carefully (v24-25)
- Esteem your elders highly in love - Appreciate (1 Thess. 5:12-13)
- Remember and imitate - Obey (Hebrews 13:7, 17)

Lesson Seven: Deacons, A Team of Godly Servant-Leaders

The last two lessons have focused on the leadership of a team of godly servant-leaders, practicing biblical leadership, as one sign of an effective church. Elders who lead as shepherds of the congregation are the major component. Now it's the Deacon's turn.

What is the job of a deacon? What do they do in churches you are familiar with? Here are three general observations:

1. Ruling executives. Many churches call their leadership board "Deacons," esp. Baptist. (NTD 9)
2. Janitors. Opposite end of spectrum – responsible for physical plant, buildings, grounds, etc.
3. Church Gofers. Anything and everything that the pastor, staff, ruling board, congregation decides. (NTD 10)

In fact, SMBC is pretty close to number 3. Here is what our by-laws state about Deacons:

The Deacons function under the oversight of the Elders to serve the church in a wide variety of practical, need-meeting tasks and ministries as determined by the Elders . . .

All 3 of these observations have the same basic problem at heart – not enough thought for what Scripture says. Still deeper, could show an overall lack of trust in Scripture, corresponding reliance on man's plans.

To be effective, a church must follow God's design, not man's. **A mark of an effective church is a team of deacons who are ministering in accordance with God's design.**

One term, 3 uses

The New Testament has one word that generally has to do with serving. That word "diakon" and its various forms are the words that are used for the Deacon and for what the Deacon does, which is "serving."

- *diakonos* – servant or minister
- *diakonia* – serving or service
- *diakoneo* – to serve

That first word, *diakonos*, is itself used three different ways. 1) As a literal servant (Matthew 22:13; John 2:5, 9). 2) As Christian workers in general, that is, people who serve (Romans 16:1; 1 Cor. 3:5; Eph. 6:21; Col. 1:7) and 3) as servant-officers in the church (deacons - Philippians 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:8, 12).

Acts 6:1-6 shows both how the deacons came into being and their primary ministry and function. Read and relate Acts 6:1-6. Note: "deacon" is absent, noun and verb are present (v1-2).

What would the 7 have to do to accomplish their task? What practical steps would they have to take?

1. Collect money and/or goods
2. Distribute money and/or goods
3. Purchase food with money donated
4. Develop and implement procedures to ensure fair distribution to all
5. Coordinate service for all the needy

How big is the church in Jerusalem at this time? Over 5,000 (Acts 4:4, 5:14, 6:1). How poor was Jerusalem at this time? Relatively destitute. So how important was this job? Absolutely critical. It was critical that the witness of church not be hindered by lack of provision for its own, and it was critical that apostles not be taken away from central ministry of prayer and the word (Acts 6:4).

Therefore to make sure that all were served, a special "office" was created, and filled by the Seven, men of godly character and ability. This should raise a question in your minds: "Aren't all Christians called to serve one another?" Yes, Galatians 5:13 says we are all to serve one another through love. 1 Peter 4:10 says, "As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God."

So if we are all to serve, why would there be a special office of "servant?" 4 reasons: 1) As above, some needs are too important for ad hoc ministry. 2) Some needs require specific skills and character. 3) The vulnerable need to be protected by doing the ministry right and establishing accountability. 4) The witness of the church needs to be protected as well.

This helps us understand the need for godliness in those who are officially designated "servants" i.e. deacons. The qualifications are found in 1 Tim. 3:8-13. Anyone can serve as a janitor or an usher. Elders are to rule, but when it comes to providing for the needs of the body, the church requires someone who is spiritually and morally qualified, of proven integrity.

The diaconate is not a teaching office, nor a ruling office. Subordinate to the Elders, deacons serve. What kind of service are the deacons to render? We see that by seeing how the word is used when it doesn't describe a person, when it is used as a noun or a verb:

- Matthew 25:44 "Then they themselves also will answer, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not take care of You?'
- Acts 6:1 Now at this time while the disciples were increasing, a complaint arose . . . because their widows were being overlooked in the daily servicing.
- Acts 11:29 And in the proportion that any of the disciples had means, each of them determined to send a contribution for the relief of the brethren living in Judea.
- Acts 12:25 And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had fulfilled their mission,
- Romans 15:25-26 but now, I am going to Jerusalem servicing the saints. For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem.
- Romans 15:31 that I may be delivered from those who are disobedient in Judea, and that my service for Jerusalem may prove acceptable to the saints;
- 2 Corinthians 8:4 begging us with much entreaty for the favor of participation in the support of the saints,
- 2 Corinthians 9:1 For it is superfluous for me to write to you about this ministry to the saints;

Overwhelmingly, the use of "service" or "serving" as nouns and "serve" as a verb refers specifically to relief, to meeting pressing needs, to care of the hungry and poor. **The work of the deacons therefore is to meet people's practical, material needs.**

And there is the rub for most churches, including SMBC. It isn't usually the deacon's fault. Most churches design their functions less on Scripture and more on practice, which is pretty much par for the course. We need to consider ways to implement a diaconate that is more in line with Scripture.

One question for you – should every church have a board of deacons? Is it mandated in Scripture? Consider:

- Paul appoints elders in every church in Acts 14:23. Nothing is said about deacons.
- The church at Philippi is about 10 years old and has deacons (Phil. 1:1), the church at Ephesus is at least that old and has deacons (1 Tim. 3:8, 12). What about the church at Crete? In the only other book that addresses church officers, Titus is given standards for elders, but nothing is said about deacons. Evidently, deacons are not mandated.

What is mandated? Meeting the needs of the people. If doing that takes the elders away from their central ministry of prayer and the word, then deacons are needed. They just need to be doing the right things.

In a body of 150+, which is us, there is certainly enough need that the elders can't handle it all without distraction. So I believe we need deacons. But what should be their primary focus?

- How many needy are there in our body? A few, not a lot, at least today.
- Is financial need the only kind there is?
- How open are we in general to admitting we need help in a given area?
- What kinds of needs might the church meet?
 1. Help for widows, disabled, elderly?
 2. Care and visitation of chronically sick or disabled – who says visitation is the elder's job?
 3. Ministering to shut-ins, tapes of sermons, bulletins, serving communion
 4. Staying close enough to the people to recognize financial difficulty
 5. General help for those in need – you name it.

Much work to do here. Need leadership to 1) plan (elders) and 2) implement (deacons). 3) People to be open in environment that looks down on problems and expects gov't to meet needs.

Deaconesses

The astute among you may notice I've said nothing about 1 Tim. 3:11 – women, commonly understood to be deaconesses. We will go into more detail on this in [Lesson 8 - The Role of Women](#). For now, let's just take one point:

Where are deaconesses found in Scripture?

First, there is no such word as "deaconess" in Scripture. The word for servant can be either feminine or masculine, and so can describe a woman like Phoebe in Romans 16:1, or a man like Epaphras in Colossians 1:7. "Deaconess" is first used in the 4th century, so don't look for it in your concordances.

But here in 1 Tim. 3, right in the middle of deacon qualifications, Paul talks about **women** being dignified, not gossips, temperate, and faithful. What's going on? "Women" is the generic word for adult female, not necessarily married. Context determines marital status, so women is the correct translation, not wives, not deaconesses.

So is Paul addressing women in general here? No - would Paul be addressing women in general in the midst of a discussion of church officers? No, plus he has already discussed women in general in 2:9-15. He must mean women who are serving in some official capacity.

Are these women deacons then? No. Couldn't be more clear that deacons are men (v8, 12). Also, if women could be deacons, why would he need to address women especially in v11? The same qualifications for male deacons would hold for them. So who are they?

They are just what the verse says, women, and they are women who are serving. There are two distinct probabilities. 1) they are women who are serving in order to meet the special needs of the women in the church, esp. of singles and those married to unbelievers. 2) they are the wives of the deacons and elders, who assist their husbands in their ministry as official servant-leaders.

There is no room for dogmatism here though, the scriptural record is just too thin. I believe it is entirely appropriate to have an office of "deaconess" and that those women who fill the office could either be single women, women who are married, or the elder's and deacon's wives. They serve the church as Phoebe did in Cenchrea, probably focusing on the needs of the women. It is also entirely appropriate to have no board. Again, it is much like the deacons. There is not a mandate for every church to have an established board. What is mandated is to meet the needs of the people.

Lesson Eight: Women in the Church

This lesson will go a little deeper on one area of the people of the church, specifically women. What is her role in the body?

Why woman's role? Because it is a continual controversy. The debate between radical feminists and staunch traditionalists has bled into the evangelical church. Now the debate is between two Christian camps. One holds the view that the sexes complement each other perfectly but have differing roles. The other says there is no distinction of roles, and no differences between men and women except the obvious biological ones. Who is right? Much to say that won't be said here. We could spend weeks on this one subject, but we won't.

Just to make sure that there is no suspense, we believe *the Bible teaches the full equality of men and women* before God. That *women are equally gifted, and equally called to serve*. However, we also believe that God created men and women for *different roles*, and that fulfilling those roles are key to being the people he wants us to be. We do ourselves no favors by sacrificing a God-given role for one that our fallen world feels more comfortable with.

So we need to know what those roles are. To do that we must let Scripture interpret Scripture. All Scripture is the inspired, authoritative word of God. Difficult passages need the light of other Scripture to help us understand them. As we examine Scripture, we take it whole, not piecemeal. As we do that we will get the whole picture, not an isolated part that may not reflect the whole. That is true in spades of 1 Tim. 2:9-15, Paul's instruction to Timothy regarding the women of the Ephesian church.

As you read, does it sound like women are supposed to stay barefoot and pregnant, dressed in burlap with their hands over their mouths? That is how some interpret it.

Some say that Paul was a victim of his culture, and was merely showing the biases of his age in this passage. Some say that he failed to grasp the full impact of his own teaching in Galatians 3:28, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." They say that the full force of the verse obliterates all functional distinctions between men and women. Others, are less charitable, saying Paul deliberately distorted God's revelation concerning women.

But critics tend to bring their own cultural biases with them. As Bible-believing Christians we don't have the option to simply choose what we like. We can't default to either the radical feminist nor the staunch traditionalist positions. We must search the Scripture to see what God has said, and then act accordingly.

Before we get into the detail in Timothy, I want you to see a couple of Scriptures that position the word of God as a whole on women in the church. This is God's track record on women, as it were:

Creation and Women

- Man and woman are fully equal, each bearing God's image: Gen. 1:27
- Eve was created as a helper perfectly suited for man's needs: Gen. 2:18-25

Jesus and Women

- Women had a significant place in Jesus' earthly ministry: Matt. 13:33; Mk. 5:25; Lk. 8:1-3, 10:38-42, 15:8-10; John 20:1-18

Women in the early Church

- Women had an important role in the early church from the very beginning: Acts 1:12-14; 9:36-42; 16:13-15; 17:1-4, 10-12; 18:1-2, 18, 24-28 -
- Women are often named in the Epistles showing they were prominent in the early churches: Rom. 16:1-16 – of 28 named, 11 are women.

Different Roles for Men and Women

God designed the family to be the loving, self-sacrificing building block of society. But they have different roles. The husband's basic role is the leader and provider, the wife's is the follower and nurturer. So,

- Husbands are primarily commanded to love their wives to prevent harsh, domineering rule (Eph. 5:25; Col. 3:19; 1 Tim. 3:4-5; 1 Pet. 3:7)
- Wives are primarily commanded to submit to their husbands to prevent stepping into the husband's role (Eph. 5:22-24; Col. 3:18; 1 Pet. 3:1; Titus. 2:5)

Although it is clear that women have a submissive role, it is equally clear that it doesn't keep them from being important and actively involved! The woman's role differs from man's, but it is neither inferior nor significantly limited.

We will see 4 aspects of the role of women in an effective church. Dress, Demeanor, Design, Defense. We'll make more sense of those as we go along.

Their Dress, v9-10

When Paul says, "I also want women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or expensive clothes" is he literally saying a woman is not to braid her hair, not to wear gold or pearls, to shop at Kmart rather than Nordstroms?

Read 1 Pet. 3:3. Similar thought: braids, jewelry, dresses. **Dresses?** If they aren't wearing dresses, then what? Obviously Peter is not being literal, but hyperbolic. Peter's point is not that a woman wear no dresses at all, but that her dress would be in keeping with her character. Read v4.

Same with Paul. Paul's emphasis is on character, not dress, internal, not external. Read v10. Titus 2:3-5 lists the good works a woman should be adorned with.

Godly women dress appropriately, modestly, in humility in keeping with internal adornment of a character given to "good works." This was needed instruction then, and it is needed now. Men are carnivores and many women know that to catch a meat-eater you have to show some bait. **Not to be so in the church.** Evidently a problem in Ephesus, it was a problem in our church in Los Angeles. Is it a problem where you are?

So, what can women wear? Is it okay to shop at Nordstroms? Okay to wear nice jewelry? Have your hair all done up? Answer: If it is appropriate, modest, and discreet, not ostentatious, revealing, attention-calling, then sure. Your call, ladies, in the light of the word of God.

Their Demeanor, v11-12

When Paul says, "A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent" is he saying that women are never to speak, even to open their mouths in church? What about asking questions? Singing hymns, either solo or in congregation? Women are never to teach, period?

Look at 1 Corinthians 14:34-35: "women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says. If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church." Yikes! Just makes it worse! How should we understand this? Couple of points:

1. In both 1 Tim and 1 Cor., the verb "teach" indicates a process, an ongoing activity, not a one-time action. In other words, Paul is talking about a teacher in the church. That is, the

officially recognized, authoritative teacher of the congregation, the pastor-teacher (1 Tim. 5:17).

2. "Let . . . receive" is a ***command***. First it is a command to the church and to the women that they must learn, they must sit under teaching. Second it is a command as to how they are to learn: in quietness and submission. How should men learn? With noise and rebellion? No, the same way. We read too much into v11, Paul's main point is v12 - no women elders, no women pastor-teachers.

Can women ever be teachers? Absolutely yes:

- 1 Cor. 11:5 - praying/prophesying. Both were done out loud, in worship service. Paul is not forbidding all speech in 1 Cor. 14 if he allows in c11! Same holds true for Tim.
- Acts 18:26 - who took Apollos aside? Does it say that Aquila let her have it for overstepping her bounds?
- Phil. 4:2-3 - two women who were Paul's co-laborers. No indication they taught, but they certainly support Paul's teaching ministry to the extent they are considered partners in his presentation of the gospel.
- Titus 2:5 - explicit instruction about women's role in teaching: women, children. Those who want to minimize this role overlook the need to lay a bedrock of faith early, and the need to support young women in the challenge of being a wife, raising kids, and being a godly women as well.

God's design for women in the church is not that they surrender their minds, becoming puppets, robots to be ruled by the guys. Rather they are to fulfill a role that is centered in the home, not exclusively conducted there. Above all, Paul's point is that women in the church guard taking authoritative positions in the church, moving out of God's intended design for men, women, and the church as a whole.

So, what can women do in the church? Can they teach? Women and children, yes. Could argue for teaching men "under the authority" of the pastor, but that is really pushing the Scripture. What about reading Scripture in worship? Praying aloud? Leading in prayer? Again, probably pushing the Scripture to have a woman lead the congregation in prayer as our Elders currently do. Sing?

There is an implied "only" in some minds when it comes to teaching children and other women, as in women can "only" teach . . . For the feminists, this is promoting an inferiority that belies their beliefs. For the traditionalists, the same inferiority pervades. What could be more important than building a bedrock of faith in children and teaching young women to be godly women, wives, and mothers?

Their Design, v13-14

Why can't women have authority over men? Who says it is her God-given role to be in submission? That is the unasked question Paul answers in v13-14.

Because God intended it that way, as is seen in the order of creation. Who was formed first? Man was created first, bearing God's image as the authority, the head over creation. The woman was formed second, to be everything the man needed. Not as his inferior but as his helper. What happens when you have multiple authorities with the same jurisdiction? Chaos, and God is not a God of confusion, but of peace (1 Cor. 14:33). Therefore, out of respect for the man's authority as the first created by God, the woman is in submission to him.

Because Eve was deceived, not Adam. Eve willingly bought the serpent's lies because she wanted that fruit. Once she tasted it what did she do? She took some to her husband, and he ate it (Gen 3:6). Not that Adam was without sin, he just wasn't deceived. He willfully disobeyed, using the serpent's deception of Eve to fulfill his own desire to eat, then blamed her for his action (Gen 3:12)! The Fall occurred because both sinned, not just Eve. Paul is just underscoring Eve's culpability here to explain the authority/submission roles. If you think he is being unfair, he lets Adam have it in Romans 5.

Their Defense, v15

So how can women get themselves out of the mess Eve helped create? V15 - Saved through childbearing!? Commentators understate this as "an obviously difficult passage to interpret." We'll do our best. How is this to be understood?

First, understand that "saved" has two distinct meanings, physical salvation, that is preservation as in the saving of a life; and spiritual salvation, as in saving from sin. In general, "saved" in the gospels refers primarily to preservation, "saved" in the epistles to salvation from sin. We'll distinguish these two definitions as "kept safe" on the one hand and "saved from sin" on the other.

There are basically four interpretations:

1. Physical - Godly women are kept safe during childbirth. That is, a Christian woman will never suffer difficulty in bearing children. Right.
2. Spiritual - Women are saved from sin by bearing children. Unlike men. Big problems here, notably:
 - Eph. 2:8-9 - "by grace through faith . . . not of works."
 - Rom. 10:9-10 - no special "childbearing clause" for women
 - Gal. 3:28 - all the same spiritually before God.

1. Spiritual - Women are saved from sin by The Childbearing - i.e. the birth of Christ. In this interpretation there is an emphasis placed on "the" childbearing - singular, significant and "through" - the agency or means by which salvation comes. Couple of points to recommend it:

- Context in v14 was Adam and Eve (the woman in v14, she in v15)
- In line with Gen. 3:15 - prophecy of specific childbirth that would undo the Fall.
- Spiritual catastrophe in v14 needs appropriate deliverance in v15.

And so this view is a real possibility. There are a couple of cons however. This view doesn't have an explanation for the move to the future tense in v15 "will be saved." Nor does it address the change from singular "she" to plural "they." There is one other strong contender to consider.

1. Physical - Women are kept safe from society's ills, especially the tendency usurp man's authority, by living a godly life, as exemplified in raising a family. This view contends that "she" in v15 is a woman in general, not Eve in specific.

- That helps understand both the change to future tense and to plural. Women in general will be kept safe from sin's results in an evil world that would pressure her to step out of her God-given role and into man's.
- In this view, childbearing stands as an illustration for all that fulfill's woman's role.
- Childbearing is not sufficient unto itself, of course. The need for faith, love, holiness, and restraint continues.

Which is right? Either 3 or 4 - I favor 4, just barely. You pick for yourself and we'll ask God about it someday!

What's the point here? Paul has said what they are to be: adorned with good works rather than ostentatious clothing. And what they aren't to be: pastor-teachers in the church. And how they should protect themselves: by raising a family, continuing in faith, love, holiness, and restraint. I like the emphasis in Titus 2:3-5: read.

Conclusions

So, do women have a limited role? Yes, but only in that she is precluded from the offices of elder, of pastor-teacher, and of an authoritative role over men in the church. Many elders envy women in this regard. By the way, men are limited too, they are just happier about it.

Should all have children? Does this mean that all married women should have children? Yes, if the Lord allows. Bonnie and I know the pain of wanting kids but not being able to have them. Tried to get pregnant for 7 years. Know many who are unable, and that is in God's hands. Scripture shows that God is especially tender toward such couples. However, there is no place in

Scripture for couples to choose to not have children. The choice of career in place of family is simply not in keeping with God's design for the family.

Should women work outside the home? Is there a problem with a working wife and mom? The answer is: *it depends*. That famous Proverbs 31 woman is a hard-working woman. She seems to be engaged outside the home a fair amount, bringing "her food from afar," negotiating real estate as she buys a field, engages in trading with the merchants. Lydia in Acts 16:14 was herself a trader in purple cloth. Nothing is said about a husband and kids, but she was a working woman.

I'd answer it this way. Every Christian wife's emphasis is to be on the home. Titus 2:5 says literally she is to be a "home-worker." It is possible to take a job outside the home and still provide for it, but her life will be more complicated by outside work. Take care not to sacrifice the home's needs for the sake of money.

But what if you really, really need the money? Many have legitimate need for dual incomes. That is understood. Men, be careful not to require your wife to work to maintain a standard of living that is beyond your need. Women, be careful not to take an outside job because you want freedom from the home. Both attitudes are to the detriment of the family, of your role in ministry, and ultimately of your own spiritual well-being.

Lesson Nine: An Effective Church is Known by its People

Now it's your turn. I've annoyed the elders, irritated the deacons, and offended the women, so now we're going to see what the scripture says about everybody else - the people of an effective church. And I want to say one thing as we begin. I believe that the potential of *any* church that is biblically based, that loves the Lord, and that loves its people is unmatched! I am truly excited about what God is doing here, and I want you to be excited about it as well. As we look at Scripture this morning we are going to see one particular church made up of people who are absolutely sold out to Jesus Christ and to one another. They are on fire, and 2,000 years later, they still stand as examples of what God wants his church to be. But they are examples to inspire us forward, not to beat ourselves up over because we fall short. What has truly excited me in this study is that any church, even SMBC, can have the impact of the church I'm going to show you. The principles are laid out clearly in God's word. We just need to see them and follow. Turn again to Acts 2:42-47.

We've been here before, haven't we? These verses provide the model for a biblical program. But Acts 2:42-47 says an awful lot about the people of the church, and so it also provides the model for us as the people of a church. As we see the "body life" of the 1st century church, we will see 4 aspects that are characteristic of a vital, dynamic, effective people who in turn make up the church of Jesus Christ.

Devoted to the Ministry – Acts 2:42a

In the very beginning of this passage there is one small detail, so easy to overlook, but so important to understand the power of the first church. As the people of the church took part in the 4-fold ministry of the church: the Apostle's teaching, the fellowship, the Lord's Supper, and

the prayers, they adopted a certain attitude, a particular mindset that ignited the church, and set their own lives on fire as well. It's in the very beginning of v42: *"And they were continually devoting themselves..."*

The idea here is that they gave themselves continually to the word, to the fellowship, to remembering Jesus' sacrifice in the Lord's Supper, and to the prayers. In other words, these things weren't a sometime thing with these people, they were constant, ongoing parts of their lives. They were anything but casual about them. When Luke says they were devoted, he means that the people were steadfast, immovable, single-minded about them. They regarded them as critically important aspects of their lives. They were serious about their faith. And that devotion was ongoing. They weren't devoted to them Sundays, then forgot about them the rest of the week. They were "continually devoted."

In other words, they spent all the time they could spend in the study of the word under the guidance of the Apostles. And they spent all the time they could spend in fellowship together, fellowship that was based on their common bond as believers in Jesus as Messiah. They regularly remembered Jesus' death in what was called the "agape" or love feast. Literally, a pot-luck meal that all the church partook of every time they got together, daily in some cases!

And they spent all the time they could in prayer together and for one another. In fact, the book of Acts shows the church as a whole praying together all the time: 1:14 says that the church "all joined together constantly in prayer," as they waited for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. In Acts 1:24 the whole church prays over choosing a successor to Judas. 2:42 says they were continually devoted to prayer. In 4:24-31 the church is together praying for boldness in their witness in the face of persecution. When the need arose for men to provide for the widows in Acts 6, the whole church prayed over the solution. In Acts 12:5, 12 when Peter was imprisoned, the entire church gathered together to pray for him. Acts 13 shows the church at Antioch praying Paul and Barnabus as they are sent on the first mission. 14:23 shows that new churches established on that mission were dedicated with prayer as Paul and Barnabus moved on. Finally, as Paul was on his final trip to Jerusalem, he would stop and meet with his old friends in churches he had started and pray all together for what lay ahead of him in Acts 20:36 and 21:5.

This was a serious bunch of people. Their devotion to these things was in large part responsible for their effectiveness as a church. I'm struck by the fact that in their prayer they mostly prayed for and with one another. You don't see a lot of individual's praying in the book of Acts, and you rarely find people praying for their own needs anywhere in the New Testament. When Paul commands us to pray in Eph 6:18 he says, "With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints." His emphasis is on praying for one another. James 5:16 says, "Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much."

I think it is significant that we are not told to pray for ourselves in these matters. Instead we are told to pray for one another, which means we need to be involved in each others lives and open and honest with each other about our own needs and struggles.

What do we pray for? Everything: "all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit. . . with all perseverance and petition for all the saints." Knowing that "The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much" (James 5:16), and that "if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us." (1 John 5:14), we bring our concerns before him in supplication for our needs, in intercessory prayer for one another, and in thanks for all he has done for us. Such prayer shows where the heart is, at heaven's throne, not this world's cares. And that's exactly where God wants 'em.

Focused on Other's Needs - v44-45

Turn back to Acts 2. There is no way to overstate the excitement of these people who were continually devoted to their newfound faith. Luke says in v43 that "everyone kept feeling a sense of awe" because of what God was doing. Every man, woman, and child had this incredible sense of awe at what was happening around them. Literally, that word translated awe is "*phobos*" - fear! It was just a little bit *scary* to see God at work so close to hand!

What was so awe-inspiring? Not just the "signs and wonders" the apostles did. Those miracles were just one by-product of all that was going on in the church. As awe-inspiring as it might have been to see the lame healed, it was equally awe-inspiring to see the hard-hearted made soft, the wicked made pure, the unjust made right. That sense of awe came from *all* that God was doing in their midst as he radically changed the lives of the people who accepted Jesus as their Messiah.

Nothing illustrates that life change more than what we see in v44-45: "*And all those who had believed were together, and had all things in common; and they began selling their property and possessions, and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need.*"

I don't know about you, but these verses have always made the first church sound a little like a commune to me, a pretty negative connotation. My two older brothers were right in the middle of all the '60's mess. They both went to UC Berkely in 1967, and literally wound up supporting themselves by selling homemade sandals on the street in Haight Ashbury while they lived a "communal" life. Their reason for doing that was total freedom, total openness, no restrictions. The first church wasn't that kind of commune.

Neither was the first church a utopian, Socialist society, where the focus is on achieving the ideal society by destroying individualism, and sharing resources in order to promote absolute equality.

The first church was neither concerned with freedom and openness, nor with total equality. Rather, they were focused on meeting one another's needs. They were concerned with making sure that the poor Christians had food, clothing and shelter, and that the sick could be cared for. How did they take care of these problems? By holding their possessions loosely.

Their attitude was that nothing they owned was their exclusive property. They were so focused on one another's needs that it didn't seem like the stuff they owned was theirs to keep. That attitude translated into direct action. 2:45 says they sold both land and goods, and as believers had needs that they could not meet themselves, they shared them out. As a result, need and want

were virtually eliminated from among the believers. Acts 4:34 says that as a result *there was not a needy person among them!* As they ministered to one another's needs, they were fulfilling one of God's purposes in forming the church in the first place.

These people ministered to one another because they understood that God wanted them to. They were created for such a ministry. Indeed, all God's people were created and redeemed for such a ministry of mercy. Paul says in Titus 2:14 that Christ died for us in order to "redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself a people for His own possession, *zealous for good deeds.*" In Eph. 2:10 he says: "we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works"

We were created and saved for good works. Now, you don't have to empty your bank account and send it to a televangelist. You don't even have to sell your home and give us the proceeds so we can build a new building. In Titus 3:14 Paul says we are to do "good deeds to meet pressing needs." The kind of needs being met in Acts 2, the most basic human needs of food and shelter. Over and over, the New Testament puts an emphasis on providing for the needy, especially of the family of God. Did you realize that most of Jesus' parables have at their heart caring for the poor?

Listen to Jesus in Matthew 25:34, explaining what is going to happen when he returns to judge the nations:

"Then the King will say to those on His right, 'Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. 'For I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me.' . . . 'And the King will answer and say to them, 'Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me.'

God created us to care for one another, and as we take care of each other, he will take care of us. We don't need to worry about what we're going to eat, or drink, or what we're going to wear. If the church is doing what it is supposed to do, none of us will be needy.

Now, you may be saying to yourself "I don't know of anybody here is without food or shelter." Okay, how about sick? How about lonely? How about needing help to move? There are any number of ways that this lesson applies.

You know what happens when the people of the church are focused on other's needs instead of their own? God is glorified: Matt. 5:16, "Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven." 1 Peter 2:12, "Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may on account of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God"

And so the people of an effective church are devoted to the fellowship, and are focused on one another's needs. Third, they are unified. But not *merely* unified, they are *intensely* unified:

Unified in Mind and Action - v46

"And day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart"

Back to Acts 2. That one phrase, "with one mind" is such an unassuming little phrase. But it is huge in its implications – *homothumadon*. It sounds like something out an anthropology book, doesn't it? Or better yet, like something that didn't make it on the Ark! Usually translated "of one mind" or "of one accord," it means way more than simply agreeing with somebody on something. It is a much stronger, much more passionate in its intensity. In fact, passion is exactly what the word gets at. Most times the word is found it has at its root some very real, overriding passion.

It's used of **wrath and anger** in Acts 7:57, at the end of Stephen's testimony, the Jews snapped and it says that "they cried out with a loud voice, and covered their ears, and they rushed upon him *with one impulse*" to stone him to death. In Acts 18:12, Luke says the Jews who were trying to stop Paul rose up against him *with one accord*. In Acts 19:29, the whole city of Ephesus riots and Luke says "the city was filled with the confusion, and they rushed *with one accord* into the theater."

It's used of **Fear** in Acts 12:20. There, Herod is very angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon; You didn't want Herod mad at you, and the people were frightened, so they came to him seeking peace *with one accord*.

My point is that every time it is used, it refers to people who are focused, passionate, holding tightly and deeply their sense of commitment and course of action. In each case there is some external force that so holds the minds and hearts of the people that they are given up, emotionally or intellectually, to their passion. There is an external force concentrating an internal fire.

In the case of the first church it was the daily interaction of the body. They were "of one mind" because of what they had seen God do in their lives. They were saved, their needs were met, they were filled with the Spirit, and so they were of one mind. Their sense of unity translated into action. They spent time together. v46 says they met in the Temple, and from house to house. They took their meals together. In many, many cases, the food for the very meal they shared was a reminder of their unity, as God provided it through his people.

Their common bond was real and it was deep. Note the phrase that ends v46, "gladness and sincerity of heart." There was a real sense of joy among them. Don't you sometimes sense it here? There is a true happiness in our fellowship that honors God. Second, there was a sincerity of heart - they did these things not out of a sense of obligation, but because they wanted to!

Are you wondering just how realistic this is? Didn't these people have jobs? Families? Hobbies? Sports? Yup. As a matter of fact, the rigors of living 2,000 years ago meant they had much less time than we do. We just fill ours up with a lot more stuff. You know, there is more than just physical stuff, possessions, that we need to hold loosely. We need to hold our time loosely, too.

Where is your priority on time? The need for balance between work and family is clear. No one wants to end their life regretting the hours spent at the office instead of being with wife, husband, and children. Have you considered the fact that the family of God needs your time as well? Give consideration to how, where, and why you spend your time. Are there needs in the body you are aware of that you could help meet by giving up some hours somewhere?

There is a second point of application I am struck with here. Christ has no use for lukewarm Christians. Jesus says to the church at Laodicea in Rev. 3:15-16. *'I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I would that you were cold or hot. 'So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth.*

If you can't be lukewarm about Christ, and I'd submit that you can't be lukewarm about his people, either. He died for them, after all. He wants us to love and be devoted to one another. If your only involvement with God's people is to come to church, you are missing out on what Christ has in store for his church, and the rest of us are missing out, too. We were created for the kind of fellowship the first church experienced. These people who model what an effective church was were devoted to the ministry, focused on other's needs, and were unified.

Effective Witnesses - v47

What did the world think of the first Christians? Did they think they were just a bunch of loons running around the Temple? Just another cult of some starry-eyed, failed Messiah? Do you know what the world thought of the first church? They were impressed. v47 says the church had "favor with the people." The people liked what the church was doing, and as a result "the Lord added to their number *daily*."

That what Jesus said would happen in John 13:34-35 *"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."* Which brings us to the final point, the people of an effective church are effective witnesses for Jesus Christ.

You know why they were effective? Because they were devoted. And because they put other's needs ahead of their own. And because they were intensely unified. All the things that made them the church God intended are the very things that made them effective witnesses for Jesus Christ. How interested would Jerusalem have been if the first church just kind of went about this new faith thing with a humdrum attitude? If they didn't meet one another's needs? If they were sort of together, sort of not, alternating between the body and the world like a yo-yo? Not very!

Instead, the first church had an incredible impact on Jerusalem, an impact that could only be called supernatural, as the result of an entire church moved to spread the gospel. Luke traces it for us as the church spreads from the original 120 believers of Acts 1:15, to a church of 3,000 in 2:41, to 5,000 in 4:4. And it didn't stop there. Acts 5:14 says "multitudes of men and women were constantly added to their number." 6:1, "the disciples were increasing in number". 6:7 "the word of God kept on spreading; and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith." Until finally, in Acts 17:6, in Thessalonica the church is said to "have upset the world."

How'd they do that? It's only 20 years from Acts 1 to Acts 17 - how'd they get so far so fast? Did they organize the world's first Evangelism Explosion program? Did they print up a million tracts? Blanket the city with invitations to a tent revival? Nope. They just went next door to their neighbor's house, or their family, or their co-workers, and told them about this truly incredible, marvelous, fantastic thing that happened to them. How their sins were forgiven thru the work of Jesus Christ on the cross, and how they knew their salvation was real because of the reality of it in the lives of his brothers and sisters in Christ.

In other words, Christ and his love was made tangible and visible in the fellowship of his people. Their witness was effective because it was natural and it was real. And that's all that God asks of us. We aren't called to be evangelists, we are just called to be witnesses, and to testify to what we have seen and heard.

And so the effective church has a biblical mindset and program. It is immersed in sound doctrine, and led by a team of godly servant-leaders. And the effective church is known by its people. They are serious about their faith, devoted to the word, the fellowship, and to praying for one another. They are focused on one another's needs and not their own, a people who are intensely unified. Because they are all these things, the people of an effective church are themselves effective witnesses of Jesus Christ.

God does great things with willing servants. The church at Jerusalem eliminated need from their midst and upset the whole world with the gospel. Who knows what God might do here through us as we take these principles from his word and make them our own. Amen? Amen.