



Issues in Ecclesiology



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Identity & Role of the Church

Ephesians 3 asserts that “the church” is a major part of God’s redemptive program, yet much confusion surrounds the origin, nature, identity, and destiny of the church. The primary word the New Testament uses for the church is *ekklēsia*, a term meaning “those who are called out.” In the ancient world, the *ekklēsia* referred to a group of citizens who had been “called out,” or assembled for some specific purpose, whether administrative or militaristic. The first New Testament appearances of this word come from the words of Christ in the book of Matthew. A survey of the appearances of this word, especially in Matthew and Acts, allows one to form a definition of “the church.”

The first appearances of the word “church” in the NT occur in the words of Jesus, which are seminal in our understanding of “church.” Let’s take a look at Matthew 16:18; 18:17. In Matthew 16 Jesus arrives in the regions of Caesarea Philippi. He has attempted to get alone with His disciples for several weeks and has finally succeeded. Near Caesarea Philippi, where shrines to false gods and the divine Augustus (a.k.a. “the son of god”) stood, Jesus asked His disciples, “who do men say that I the Son of Man am?” In answer to Jesus, Peter boldly says, “you are the Christ, the Son of the Living God!” After praising Peter for this insightful declaration, Jesus makes a declaration of His own, “I will build my church.” Around this central truth regarding His identity, Jesus will rally those who profess faith in Him, i.e. His church. Not even the “gates of hell” (i.e., an OT Idiom for death, Is. 38:10; Job 38:17; Ps. 9:13; 107:18) can overcome Jesus, and His followers! The “keys of the kingdom of heaven” in verse 19 probably refer to the stewardship of the Gospel given to Peter and the other Apostles, which grants entrance into heaven for those who believe it (cf. Matt 23:13 & Luke 11:52). Jesus then empowers Peter and the other Apostles with these words, “whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” This phrase parallels a Rabbinic idiom for authoritative teaching and application. In other words, Jesus promises to use the Apostles to distill truth & organize His “church.” (cf. also John 16:13).

The next appearance of the word “church” occurs in Matthew 18. In this context, not long after Caesarea Philippi, Jesus spoke to His disciples concerning humility, accountability, restoration, & forgiveness. In this context the second use of the word “church” appears. With these words, Jesus directs His followers regarding the path to restoration of an errant

brother. Paramount to this process is the role of the "church" to hold its members accountable. As Mark Dever notes, "Notice to whom one finally appeals in such situations. What court has the final word? It is not a bishop, a pope, or a presbytery; it is not an assembly, a synod, a convention, or a conference. It is not even a pastor, a board of elders, a board of deacons, or a church committee. It is, quite simply, the church—that is, the assembly of those individual believers who are the church." When one moves beyond these first two passages in the book of Matthew and adds the significant appearances of the word "church" in the book of Acts (e.g., Acts 2:47; 11:26; 15:22), one can arrive at definition for "the church." First, let's state a definition, and then expand upon it. *A New Testament Church is a voluntary and locally organized assembly of professing believers in Jesus Christ, who are under the authority of Jesus Christ, defined by the Apostle's doctrine, led by Biblically qualified men, & holding one another accountable to carry out the Great Commission.*

Elaborating upon the above definition, Jesus said, "I will build MY church." Thus, Jesus is the "Author and Finisher" of our faith (cf. Heb. 12:1). Without Him, the church would have nothing to believe, follow, or hope in. The church, by definition, consists of those who submit to Jesus as LORD (cf. Rom. 10:9-10). Yet the New Testament also recognizes that not everyone who externally associates with the church is a true believer (cf. Matt. 13:24–30; Jude 4). Thus, some within the church will merely profess faith without possessing genuine faith. Further, in the Upper Room Discourse (cf. John 13-16) Jesus told His disciples that He would send the Spirit, who would guide them into all truth. This alludes to the authority wielded by the Apostles in the power of the Spirit to give and record truth. Acts 2:42 declares that the early church followed this Apostolic doctrine. Later N.T. epistles implore the church to recognize Apostolic doctrine, or not be recognized as believers (1 Cor. 14:37-38; 2 Thess 3:6; 1 Jn. 4:6; 3 Jn. 9). Thus, a church is organized beneath the doctrine handed down to us by the Apostles. Yet the church also needs qualified leadership. The Apostle Paul later wrote the letters of 1-2 Timothy and Titus to organize the local churches (cf. 1 Tim. 3:15; Tit. 1:5). These letters parallel the words of the Apostle Peter in 1 Peter 5, as well as the words of Hebrews 13:17. These N.T. epistles dictate that local churches are to be led by biblically qualified leadership, who themselves ought to shepherd beneath the authority of the "Chief Shepherd" to whom they must later give an account. Responsibility does not simply rest upon the shoulders of the leadership, however. Rather, every member

of a local "assembly" must strive to consider one another, exhort one another, and provoke one another to love and good works (Heb. 3:13; 10:24-25), and to do the work of the ministry (cf. Eph. 4:11-16). These passages teach us that our sanctification is a community project. We do not have the most accurate view of ourselves, we only think we do! We need the patient, loving, and gentle confrontation of fellow believers. In other words, we need real relationships. Therefore, Hebrews exhorts us to "assemble," or better, "not forsake the assembling of ourselves." Finally, the goal of a church is also very important. The church is not simply a club that gets together. We are not simply an institution that manages people and money. Rather, we are an assembly, which seeks to live out the teachings of Christ, and extend them to the world. In other words, we have a mission (Matt. 28:19-20).

Another implication of the passages listed above is that the church did not have its beginning until after the death, burial, resurrection, and ascension of Christ. Only after these events would Christ send the Spirit, who would enable the Apostles to organize and lead the church. The books of Luke, and especially John, give several references and allusions to the coming of the Holy Spirit, which would function as the primary means by which Christ will "build" His church. John 7:37-39 highlights that the sending of the Spirit would not occur until after Jesus is "glorified." Yet when the Spirit comes, He will grant "rivers of living water" in the lives of believers. The Spirit will also serve to guide the Apostles into "all truth," (cf. John 16:13), whereby the Apostles would later organize the church beneath the Apostle's doctrine (cf. Acts 2:42). Luke 24:29 predicts that the Holy Spirit, also called "the promise of the Father," will not come until Jesus sends Him subsequent to the ascension. These references indicate that "the church" did not have its official beginning until after the sacrifice of Christ and the sending of the Spirit. Thus, most scholars correctly place the "birthday of the church" in Acts 2.

Though the birthday of the church is in Acts 2, the church also has a present function on this earth. The purpose of the church is summarized by the Great Commission. The church will carry out this commission until Christ comes for them. Though the timing of the Rapture is a matter of great debate, the reality of the Rapture is well attested in the Scripture (cf. esp. John 14:1-3; 1 Thess. 4:13-18; 1 Cor. 15:50-58). Christ promised to come for His church, and the church is to be faithful in service to Christ until He returns to call us home. Hebrews 12:22-24 and

other passages such as Revelation 2:26-27, seem to indicate that the church will still be recognized as a distinct entity during the kingdom period, even after the Rapture. A few of the parables of Christ, such as the parable of the talents (Matt. 25:14-30) or the parable of the nobleman in a far country (Luke 19:11-27) reveal that the church will function in a governmental role during the kingdom period. Believers that are faithful now in service to the Lord will later rule “over cities.” The final destiny of the church will occur in the eternal state, where believers will see God’s face and serve him forever (cf. Rev. 22:3-5).

Church Government

Church government is a subcategory of ecclesiology, which seeks to determine the most biblical way to organize a church. There are two main issues at stake when one seeks to determine a biblical model of church governance. The first issue seeks to answer the question, “how many church offices are there?” The second issue seeks to answer the question, “where does the authority lie?” Or to put it another way, “who has the final say?”

Let’s seek first to answer the question regarding the number of offices ordained in the New Testament. The New Testament uses a variety of different words to describe the offices in a local assembly. Much debate has occurred over the centuries concerning whether these terms are synonyms or not. For instance, the episcopal form of church government believes that the “bishop,” (Greek word *episcopos*) is a different and superior office to the office of pastor or elder. The episcopal form of church government is found most often in the various churches of Roman Catholic, Orthodox, or Anglican lineage. However, the New Testament uses the titles “bishop,” “elder,” and “pastor” interchangeably, which argues strongly that they are synonymous terms that all refer to one and the same office. The synonymous use of these terms appears most clearly in Acts 20, Titus 1, and 1 Peter 5.

Acts 20 records a speech of the apostle Paul to the Ephesian elders as Paul is on his way to the city of Jerusalem. This is an important passage for New Testament ecclesiology because it identifies the primary office of a local church as “elder,” yet always refers to this office in the plural, that is, multiple “elders.” Additionally, Paul uses the terms “elders” and “overseers” (Greek word *episcopos*) interchangeably between verse 17

and verse 28. Further, Paul refers to the task of these elders with the verb “shepherd,” which is where we get the word “pastor.”

In Titus 1:5-9 Paul states the purpose for which he left Titus on Crete, namely to “appoint elders (plural) in every city as I commanded you.” Paul goes on to describe the moral qualifications of these elders in verse six beginning with “blameless.” Verse 7 repeats the qualification of “blamelessness,” yet this time describes this office as “a bishop.” This is the clearest example of the terms “elder,” and “bishop” being used interchangeably. However, this same pattern appears in 1 Timothy 3-5. 1 Timothy 3 uses the title “bishop” twice in verses one and two, and then goes on to describe a list of moral qualifications that parallel Titus 1. Yet later in 1 Timothy 5:17 and 19 the title “elder” is used to refer to those who “rule” in a local assembly. Thus, once again the two titles of “elder” and “bishop” appear to be synonymous.

Not only does the New Testament use the titles “elder” and “bishop” interchangeably, but it also does so with the titles “elder” and “pastor.” In 1 Peter 5:1-4 the apostle Peter exhorts the “elders” he is writing to by also referring to himself as a “fellow elder.” Yet he goes on in verse 2 to command them to “shepherd the flock of God, which is among you, serving as overseers.” This verse is important to our discussion in two ways. First, note once again how the term “overseer” (Greek word *episcopos*) and “elder” are once again used interchangeably in a similar way as Acts 20. Secondly, however, Peter uses the word “shepherd,” which is the verb form of the word where we get the word “pastor.” Therefore, the three titles of “bishop/overseer,” “elder,” and “pastor” are all used interchangeably by the New Testament. Additional evidence is found in 1 Timothy 3:15, which states the purpose for Paul writing the book of 1 Timothy, namely, that Timothy would know how to conduct himself in the church of God. Earlier in that same chapter, Paul lays out the offices for a local church. Yet Paul describes only two offices, that of “bishop” and “deacon.” The fact that Paul highlights only two offices is once again in support of the fact that the New Testament views the terms “pastor,” “elder,” and “bishop/overseer” as synonymous terms.

While it seems clear that the New Testament supports only two church offices, the question remains, “who has the authority?” Or to put it another way, “who has the final say?” Historically, there are several answers to this question. The episcopal form of church governance argues from Matthew 16 that an apostolic succession from the apostle

Peter down to the Pope in Rome is where the authority lies. This view of Matthew 16 is tenuous at best, and church history seems to support the idea that this view was a development that took place over the first few centuries of church history, but that it does not originate with the New Testament or the original apostles. Rather, the book of Acts and the pastoral epistles of 1-2 Timothy and Titus show a vastly different picture. Other than the replacement of Judas in Acts 1, apostles were never replaced when they died, rather, the authority passed to localized “elders.” See especially Acts 12, where the apostle James is not replaced after his death. See also Acts 14:23, which reports that Paul and Barnabas “appointed elders” in every church that they planted. Titus 1 also supports this idea, when it states that Paul left Titus on Crete to appoint elders in every city. Though some may see a sort of “succession” in this pattern, I believe the New Testament affirms the opposite. The picture that emerges is that as the apostles were passing off the scene, they were investing their authority in the Scriptures they were writing. This idea of “the Apostle’s doctrine,” or the “tradition” they handed down evidences that a body of apostolic truth was already recognized by the beginning of the New Testament era, Acts 2:42; 1 Cor. 11:2; Titus 1:4; 2 Thessalonians 2:2; 3:6, 14; Jude 3; Eph. 4:4-6; Col. 2:7. Paul urged Timothy to be sure that he read the Scriptures publicly, and give himself to careful teaching and preaching of those Scriptures (1 Tim. 4:12-16; 2 Tim. 3:15-4:5). It seems clear that the apostles did not invest their authority in a succession of infallible men, but invested their authority in the infallible Scriptures, which in turn give instruction on how to appoint Biblically qualified men as local leaders (cf. 1 Tim. 3).

The New Testament always and without exception speaks of “elders” (plural) as the leaders of churches. Yet the question could be asked, how many churches could a board of elders rule over? The Presbyterian form of government employs the biblical idea of elder boards (cf. 1 Tim. 4:14) but believe that higher level elder boards could hold authority over more than one church, and thus have elder boards beneath them with lesser authority. The primary Scriptural warrant for this position is found in Acts 15, where a general council exercised authority over more than one local congregation. While evidence for this view seems strong at first glance, it may be reading too much into Acts 15, which evidently was an exception during the apostolic period and not the rule for all periods of church history. Additionally, Acts 15 was about discussing the integrity of the Gospel, not about exercising ecclesiastical authority over other

local congregations. Finally, specific instructions regarding a Presbyterian form of government are lacking in the NT epistles. Another factor opposing the Presbyterian form of government is the NT idea of the autonomy of local churches. The New Testament always speaks of “elders” (plural) in a given location such as Rome, Philippi, Ephesus, etc. Acts 14:23 and Titus 1:5 are again helpful here in stating that “elders” were appointed in “every city.” Several New Testament epistles contain a list of believers that “send greetings” (i.e., an expression of fellowship) to other believers in a different geographical location or as representatives of a church’s intention (cf. 1 Cor. 16:1-4; 2 Cor. 8:16-24) but did not seek to exercise authority over locations outside of their own. In other words, local congregations had “autonomy,” that is, the ability and authority for self-governance, unhindered by the leadership of other churches. Further evidence of this is seen in the fact that Jesus addressed each church in Revelation 2-3 as an individual entity. The implication is that each church is responsible for the maintenance of orthodoxy and orthopraxy.

While the New Testament consistently affirms the existence of elder boards over each autonomous church, the question remains, are these churches elder ruled or elder led? In other words, a debate exists as to whether the final say on church governance rests with the elders (a sort of oligarchy) or the congregation (a pure democracy). Congregational church governance argues primarily from Matt. 18:15-17, Acts 6:1-6, 13:1-3, and 1 Cor. 5. Some also argue that the word “appoint” in Acts 14:23 refers not to the laying on of hands, but the stretching of hands (i.e., a church vote). While I deeply respect the congregational view of governance and do believe that a healthy church will have much congregational involvement, I am personally persuaded that the Scripture places the authority over a local assembly in the hands of the board of elders, who “rule” over the congregation and give account directly to the other elders and ultimately to God Himself. Note especially Acts 14:23; 20:28; Phil. 2:29; 1 Thess. 5:12-13; Titus 1:5; 1 Tim. 5:17; Hebrews 13:17; 1 Peter 5:1-4.

Church Offices

The New Testament teaches two offices for a modern, local church, the offices of elder (a.k.a. bishop or pastor) and deacon (cf. 1 Tim. 3). If

these two offices are clearly understood and implemented, they are both distinct and sufficient for the needs of a local church.

The New Testament concept of the office of elder is primarily drawn from Old Testament Judaism (cf. Ex. 12:21; 19:7; Num. 11:16; Deut. 27:1; 1 Sam. 11:3; 16:4). The elders of Israel were mature men who exhibited strong moral convictions, being characterized by truth, integrity, courage, and the fear of the Lord (Ex. 18:21–22; cf. Num. 11:16–17). The office of “elder” is most clearly discussed by the New Testament in Acts 20, 1 Timothy 3, and 1 Peter 5. The term “elder” is synonymous with “bishop” (sometimes also translated “overseer”) and “pastor.” These three terms all refer to the same office, but also help describe that office. I like to think of these three terms and their interrelation as follows. “Bishop/overseer” is the noun, that is, it defines what an elder is. The term “elder” is like the adjective, that is, it describes what the elder is like. The term “pastor/shepherd” is the primary verb, that is, it describes what an elder does.

The term “bishop” or “overseer” refers to the function of the elder. This term means “leader” or “ruler.” This aspect of the office is most clearly seen in verses like 1 Thess. 5:12-13, 1 Tim. 5:17, and Hebrews 13:13, which describe the elder as one who “rules,” who is laboring among the assembly, but are “over” the assembly “in the Lord.”

The term “elder” is the word that most literally refers to age. In a spiritual sense, the word refers to the seasoned spiritual maturity of those who rule over the church. In other words, the term “elder” ought to be viewed as the term that describes the moral qualifications required of one who installed in the office of overseer. Theoretically then, there ought to be numerous “elders” (in the moral qualitative sense) in a particular congregation, which are not in the office of “overseer.”

The term “pastor” is the noun form of the verb “shepherd.” This verb is a carry-over from the OT, which also describes leaders as “shepherds” (cf. Ps. 77:20; 78:70–72; Numbers 27:17; 1 Kings 22:17; Ezekiel 34; Jeremiah 25:34-35; 23:1-3). The word “shepherd” marshals a profound word picture that helps one understand the duty of an overseer. Acts 20 and 1 Peter 5 are the two passages that most clearly lay out the duty of an overseer. Acts 20 gives several commands that relates to the office of overseer, which include the following. "Take Heed to yourselves & the Flock" (v. 28, cf. 1 Tim. 4:16). "Feed the flock" (v. 28, note Paul's personal example of this in v. 20 & 27. Cf. also the idea of "Sound

Doctrine," Tit. 1:9). "Watch for Wolves," which is probably an allusion to false teachers (v. 29-31, cf. Matt. 7:15; 1 Tim. 1:20; and Rev. 2:2).

"Support the Weak" (v. 35, cf. also 1 Thess. 5:14). Note how all of these commands invoke the word picture of a shepherd (cf. John 10:11; 21:16; 1 Peter 2:25; 5:2; Heb. 13:20). Based upon the following passages, I would also argue that Elders are also responsible to determine church polity (cf. Acts 15:22), by ordaining other elders and deacons (Acts 6:1-6; 1 Tim. 4:14; 5:22; Titus 1:5).

Though some views of church polity make a distinction between the terms "elder" and "pastor," I do not believe this has biblical support. While there naturally exists leaders among leaders, the office of elder is not distinguished from the pastor in the New Testament. Rather, the terms are used interchangeably. Thus, I think it is perhaps most biblical to say that the lead "pastor" is synonymous with the elder who labors "in the word and doctrine" (cf. 1 Tim. 5:17). Yet when it comes to actual authority, the teaching elder would be equal with the other elders on the elder board. I believe this is the biblical pattern so that no one man holds all the authority in a local assembly. The human sin nature and lust for power necessitates the wisdom of dividing up authority. Yet there is also a practical side to this as well. As illustrated by Jethro's advice to Moses in Exodus 18, plurality in leadership and delegation of responsibility allows the job to be completed more effectively without burning out the leadership. This idea of the importance of delegation is not merely seen in the plurality of elders in a local assembly, but also in the origin of the second office of a New Testament church.

The second office of a New Testament church is the office of deacon. The English word "deacon" is a transliteration of the Greek word that is most often translated "servant." The text that most probably records the origin of the office of deacon is Acts 6. The verb form of the word for deacon does appear in Acts 6:2, but the noun form of the word does not appear until Philippians 1:1 and 1 Tim. 3:8, 12. If Acts 6 does record the origin of the office of deacon, and I believe it does, the context of the passage is helpful in defining the purpose and function of the office of deacon. The early church had experienced incredible growth in the first few chapters of the book of Acts, and their numbers now existed in the thousands. The size of the group led to sluggishness in logistics. This in turn led to an accusation of favoritism of the Hebrew widows above the Grecian widows. When this came to the attention of the apostles, they sprang into action and offered a practical solution. They suggested appointing seven men to the function of serving the assembly. The reason

for the new office was to eliminate distraction of the apostolic duties by delegating physical responsibilities to other men. Though not identical, the qualifications listed in Acts 6:3 do seem to parallel the qualifications Paul will later articulate in 1 Timothy 3. Collin Hansen is helpful in his summary of this passage when he states, “Just as the elders provide an example of living by Christian doctrine, so deacons provide an example of living in service.” Hansen goes on to make the observation that the role of the deacons was primarily in the physical needs of the assembly, but that behind this resided a spiritual need as well. The physical neglect of the widows in Acts 6 was leading to spiritual disunity in the Christian community. The deacons were appointed to head off this disunity. Hansen summarizes by calling the deacons “the shock absorbers for the body.” That is a helpful analysis. Though the deacons function primarily in the sphere of the physical needs of the church, the physical often overlaps the spiritual. The elder is required to be qualified as a teacher (cf. 1 Tim. 3:2), while the deacon is not. However, the teaching of the Scripture and the overall health of the body is often diminished if physical needs are not met. These physical needs end up serving as distractions to the assembly and they detract from the unity and thus function of the church. A word study of the term “deacon” or “servant” throughout the New Testament illustrates the kinds of duties a servant normally did. When considered in a modern context, areas of service would include caring for buildings, bank accounts, benevolence funds, logistics for events etc.

Meaning & Purpose of Baptism

Christian baptism is an important part of Christian discipleship, yet the varying views on baptism also tend to be a dividing line among Christian denominations. The importance of Christian baptism roots back to the Great Commission passage of Matt. 28:19-20. This records one of the final commands that Jesus gave to His followers. The Great Commission is one of the defining purposes for the church. Our duty is to make disciples of Jesus Christ. This discipleship process begins with baptism, and then teaching them to know and observe the commands of Christ. The primary theological element about baptism that is introduced in the Great Commission passage is the fact that Christian baptism must include a confession in the Triune God. Baptism already existed in

Judaism, as well as in numerous pagan religions of antiquity, normally as a cleansing rite or an initiation rite for proselytes. Baptism itself was not new, but Christian baptism is distinguished from these other forms of baptism by including the confession about the Triune God, which by definition would also include a declaration of the deity of Jesus Christ. Paul later draws attention to this confession as the fundamental confession of Christian doctrine (cf. Rom. 10:9-10; 1 Cor. 12:3). It is interesting to note that the first Christian baptisms that occurred after Peter's Pentecost sermon in Acts 2, probably occurred within the dozens of Mikvah just south and in the shadow of the Temple Mount. In other words, within a stone's throw of the Sanhedrin, which put Jesus to death for what they considered blasphemy, a group of thousands were baptized because they confessed this very "blasphemy," namely, that Jesus is God!

Peter's famous Pentecost sermon in Acts 2 climaxes with the application, "Repent and be baptized for the remission of sins" (Acts 2:38). Some students of Scripture mistakenly take this verse as proof positive that baptism is necessary for salvation. However, a closer look at this verse, as well as the other examples of baptism and conversion throughout the Scripture, reveal a different picture. First, note that the primary command in Acts 2:38 is to "repent." This is the central call in the Apostolic declaration of the Gospel. Note how frequently the command to "repent" is made throughout the book of Acts (cf. 3:19; 8:22; 17:30; 20:21; 26:20). Note especially that these other passages command repentance, but do not even mention baptism. A similar phenomenon appears in Mark 16:16, "he who believes and is baptized will be saved." Many textual scholars will dismiss the ending of Mark 16 due to poor textual support, however, even if one assumes the inspiration of this section, this verse does not teach baptismal regeneration. Though the first half of Mark 16:16 is often used to teach the idea of baptismal regeneration, note the second half of the verse, which states, "but he who does not believe will be condemned." The second half of the verse does not reference baptism but emphasizes unbelief as the condition for condemnation. Thus, belief is the primary emphasis of the verse, yet baptism is assumed to follow true belief. Secondly, the Greek construction underlying the phrase "for the remission of sins" in Acts 2:38 does not necessitate that baptism is required "for the remission of sins," but could also be translated "because of remission of sins." In other words, baptism is the result of remission of sins (i.e., what John the Baptist would call "fruits of repentance," cf. Matt. 3:8), not the prerequisite for remission. This

observation fits well with the other references to baptism throughout the book of Acts (Cf. Acts 2:41; 8:12-13, 16, 36-38; 9:18; 10:47-48; 16:15, 33; 18:8) and the epistles (cf. 1 Cor. 1:14-17 & 15:1-4).

The examples of baptism throughout the book of Acts indicate that baptism is not a prerequisite for salvation (a.k.a. baptismal regeneration), but a step of obedience after one has been saved. Note especially the examples of the Ethiopian Eunuch (Acts 8:12-13, 16, 36-38), Cornelius (Acts 10:47-48), Lydia (Acts 16:14-15), and the Philippian jailor (Acts 16:31-33). All these examples are clear in that the individual in question responds in faith to the Gospel message and then receives the rite of baptism afterward. The account of the Philippian jailor is especially significant in that he asks the direct question, “what must I do to be saved?” Paul does not respond by commanding him to be baptized. Rather, Paul says, “believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved.” If baptism was necessary for salvation, this would have been a good place to indicate that. In fact, every example of baptism in the book of Acts is subsequent to a confession of faith in Christ. Further, no baptism in the book of Acts is performed upon an infant. The very nature of baptism argues that only those who confess faith in Christ are candidates for baptism.

Several other passages in the Scripture argue against baptismal regeneration. The thief on the cross (cf. Luke 23:40-43) is a classic example. Jesus promised this thief that he would be with Christ that very day in Paradise. Obviously, the thief on the cross was not taken down, baptized, and placed back on the cross! Rather, his faith in Christ saved this thief, and baptism was unnecessary for his soul’s salvation. Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 1 and 15 serve as further evidence that refutes the idea of baptismal regeneration. While addressing the various segments and divisions in the Corinthian church, Paul mentions that he is thankful that he baptized only a few people, lest they say that they were baptized in the name of Paul. Certainly, Paul would never have made such a statement if baptism was necessary for salvation. In fact, later in the very next chapter, Paul states that he determined not to know anything among the Corinthians save “Jesus Christ and Him crucified” (1 Cor. 2:2). In Paul’s famous summary of the gospel in 1 Corinthians 15:3-4, he never mentions baptism. The fact that baptism is not necessary for salvation has led some to dismiss it altogether. However, while baptism must not

be elevated beyond its purpose, it does remain an important element in the process of discipleship, because it was commanded by Christ (Matt. 28:19-20) and it communicates several key ideas.

The ordinance of Christian baptism is an important element in the discipleship of believers because it communicates several key ideas. First, as mentioned above, baptism is significant in that it identifies the participant with the Deity of Christ, and thus, the Triune God. The act of Christian baptism is to be done “in the name” of the Father, Son, and Spirit, indicating not only belief in, but also submission to the Triune God. Secondly, baptism signifies the washing away of sin (Acts 22:16; Heb. 10:22; 1 Cor. 6:11). Neither the act of baptism, nor the baptismal waters themselves serve as the cleansing agent for sin (only the blood of Jesus does that, cf. Heb. 9-10), baptism does picture this cleansing. Thirdly, baptism not only pictures the act of cleansing, but it pictures this cleansing by re-enacting the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (cf. Rom. 6:1-4), which in turn also portrays the spiritual experience of the believer, who has been crucified with Christ, yet raised to walk in newness of life (cf. Rom. 6:1-4; Gal. 2:20; Col. 2:12). Fourth, baptism serves as a public declaration of faith in Christ (cf. 1 Cor. 12:2), which also then associates the participant with Christ’s church (cf. 2:41; 1 Cor. 12:12; Rom. 12:4-5). Fifth, some scholars also point out that the act of submersion under the water and the subsequent rising out of the water also portrays the idea of escape from judgment (cf. esp. 1 Peter 3:20-21). Note how adherents of baptismal regeneration often use 1 Peter 3:20-21 to argue their point. However, Peter makes it clear in that passage that baptism is not “the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience before God.” In other words, baptism is subsequent to and the result of a good conscience toward God, not the cause of it. In fact, the book of Hebrews states emphatically that external rites do not have the ability to cleanse the conscience (cf. Heb. 9:13f.). Peter’s point in this passage is that baptism serves as a pledge to follow the Lord, which is made by a clean conscience. Peter also seems to indicate that baptism portrays the idea of escape from judgment.

These observations concerning the symbolic significance of baptism serve also to indicate the NT teaching regarding the mode of baptism. While church history records the use of various modes of baptism such as sprinkling, pouring, or immersing, the symbolism of baptism discussed above, as well as the illustrations of baptism in the NT argue

decisively for baptism by immersion. Only immersion can portray the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. Further, several of the narrative sections that record baptisms also record descriptive elements such as the large amounts of water necessary (cf. esp. Matt. 3:16; John 3:23; Acts 8:36-37).

RMBC Salvation & Baptism Booklet

Part 1: Salvation

The Bible is all about who God is, who we are, and how we are to relate to Him.

- God is the eternal reality, the only thing that has always existed. Read Genesis 1:1 & Psalm 90:2.
- God created all things for His own glory. Read Revelation 4:11.
- Humanity is the climax of God's creation because we were made in His image. Read Genesis 1:26-28.
- Humanity's purpose is to know God, love God, and serve God.

The Bible records the rebellion of humanity against God their Creator, and the wrath of God that results.

- Read Romans 1:18-23.
- Who receives God's wrath according to verse 18?

- Read Galatians 5:19-21 & Revelation 21:8. What are some examples of ungodliness and unrighteousness?

- Are you guilty of committing any of these things?

- Read Romans 3:23. Is there anyone, who is not under God's wrath? _____
- Read Revelation 20:11-15. What happens to those guilty of ungodliness and unrighteousness?

The Bible announces the Gospel (literally “good news”) of how mankind can be saved from God’s holy wrath against our sin, and how we can have eternal fellowship with God.

- Read John 3:16; John 3:36; & Romans 5:6-9.
- According to these verses, how did God show us that He loves us? _____
- According to these same verses, how are we saved from God’s wrath? _____

Let’s look at an example in the Bible of someone who was saved.

- Read Luke 23:32-43.
- According to these verses, who was crucified along with Jesus? _____
- What is a criminal? _____
- According to verses 40-41, were these men guilty of a crime and deserving of death? _____
- According to verse 41, was Jesus guilty of a crime and deserving of death? _____
- If Jesus was not deserving of death, then why did He die? Read 1 Cor. 15:3-4 & 1 Peter 3:18. _____
- According to verse 42, what did the criminal ask Jesus? _____
- What did Jesus promise him in verse 43? _____
- What did the criminal hanging next to Jesus do to be saved? _____
- Read Acts 16:31; Rom. 10:9-10; Ephesians 2:8-9 & Titus 3:5.
- According to these verses, how are we saved? _____
- Have you ever asked Jesus to save you? _____

Part 2: Baptism

Why is baptism important?

- Read Matthew 28:18-20.
 - What did Jesus tell His followers to do?
-

Who is supposed to be baptized?

- Read Acts 2:41; 8:12, 36-38; 18:8.
 - According to these verses, who were baptized?
-
- According to these verses, when were they baptized?
-

What does baptism symbolize?

- Read Romans 6:3-4 & Col. 2:11-12.
 - According to these verses, what does baptism symbolize?
-

Does someone need to be baptized to go to heaven?

- Reread Luke 23:32-43.
 - What did Jesus promise the criminal in verse 43?
-
- Was the criminal baptized while he was hanging on the cross?
-
- According to this story, is baptism necessary for salvation?
-
- Can someone go to heaven without being baptized?
-

A helpful illustration:

- Think of a wedding ring. What is the purpose of a wedding ring?

- Does a wedding ring make someone married?

- If a ring doesn't make someone married, then why do people wear one? _____
- In the same way, baptism does not save someone, it merely functions as a public testimony that someone is saved.

RMBC Philosophy for Discipleship

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to biblically define the concept of discipleship and seek to apply it in a local church setting. First, this paper will begin with defining the biblical idea of discipleship. Second, this paper will seek to defend the activity of discipleship in the life and commands of Christ as well as the Apostle Paul. Third, this paper will attempt to identify the core elements of New Testament discipleship

before fourth, demonstrating what discipleship looks like practically in a local church setting.

DEFINING DISCIPLESHIP

It is appropriate at the beginning of studying any subject to start by defining the subject at hand. Jesus Himself gave perhaps the most basic definition of discipleship when He said, “It is enough for a disciple that he be like his teacher, and a servant like his master.”¹ In the words of Chris Byrley, “Discipleship is the process of devoting oneself to a teacher to learn from and become more like them.”² Jeremy Kimble and Chad Spellman elaborate,

The standard definition of a “disciple” is a follower or learner who adheres to the teachings of another person. It refers to someone who takes up the ways of someone else. Applied to Jesus, a disciple is someone who learns from him to live like him. It is someone who, because of God’s awakening grace, conforms his or her words and ways to the words and ways of Jesus.³

¹ *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982), Mt 10:25.

² Chris Byrley, “Discipleship,” *Lexham Theological Wordbook* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014).

³ Jeremy M. Kimble and Ched Spellman, *Invitation to Biblical Theology: Exploring the Shape, Storyline, and Themes of Scripture*, Invitation to Theological Studies Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2020), 421.

These same authors go on to note that the early church practiced discipleship so well that the early followers of Jesus became known as “Christians,” which means “little Christs (Acts 11:26; 26:28).”⁴ Greg Allison points out that this concept of discipleship is what Paul refers to when he describes his own ministry as “warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me” (Col. 1:28–29).⁵ Paul wrote something very similar when writing to the Galatians. Paul described the Galatians as, “my little children, for whom I am again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you” (Gal. 4:19). Allison summarizes by stating, “Clearly, the goal of the church’s discipling is to produce wholly devoted and fully formed Christ-followers who are characterized by orthodoxy (sound doctrine), orthopraxis (right practice), and orthopatheia (proper sentiment).”⁶ Thus most basically, discipleship refers to the process whereby a follower of Christ comes to reflect Christ in his actions and attitudes.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Gregg R. Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers: The Doctrine of the Church*, ed. John S. Feinberg, Foundations of Evangelical Theology Series (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 441.

⁶ Ibid.

DEFENDING DISCIPLESHIP

The Pattern and Command of Jesus to Make Disciples

There are those that contend that the concept of discipleship is not very biblical at all. In fact, Wilkins admits that there is “a curious scarcity of words for “disciple” in the Old Testament, and *mathētēs* does not occur at all in the Epistles and Revelation.”⁷ Based on this observation one might conclude that the modern church should not make too much of the concept of discipleship.⁸ “However, other terms and expressions point to abundant theological concepts of discipleship everywhere in Scripture.”⁹ While the simple term “disciple” or “discipleship” may not have wide usage outside of the New Testament Gospels, the concept is frequently seen.

Old Testament examples of discipleship appear in several passages. The Greek word *mathētēs* is the most common word translated

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Michael J. Wilkins, “Disciple, Discipleship,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, electronic ed., Baker Reference Library (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1996), 175.

⁸ Cf. for instance Craig Blomberg, “Review of Patterns of Discipleship in the New Testament Edited by Richard L. Longenecker,” *Themelios* 23.2 (1998).

⁹ *Ibid.*

into the English word “disciple,” but it nowhere appears in the LXX.¹⁰ Wilkins points out that the Hebrew word *talmîd* is the equivalent to the Greek word *mathētēs*, and while the noun form only appears one time in the Old Testament in 1 Chron. 25:8, other forms of the word appear frequently.¹¹ Although various terms and forms are used, examples of the teacher-disciple relationship appear throughout the Old Testament in such cases as the disciples of Isaiah (Is. 8:16), the sons of the prophets associated with Samuel (1 Sam. 19:20-24), Elisha (2 Kings 4:1, 38; 9:1), Baruch the scribe (Jer 36:32), the scribal tradition surrounding Ezra (Ezra 7:6, 11), and the class of wise men alluded to in such passages as Prov 22:17; 25:1; and Jer. 18:18.

While the concept of discipleship appears throughout both the Old and New Testaments, it “enjoys its most concrete expression in Scripture when Jesus walked with his disciples during his earthly ministry.”¹² It is most appropriate, therefore, to study the life of Christ as

¹⁰ M. J. Wilkins, “Disciples and Discipleship,” *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels, Second Edition* (Downers Grove, IL; Nottingham, England: IVP Academic; IVP, 2013), 202.

¹¹ The following list is a synopsis of Wilkins, *Dictionary of Jesus*, 202.

¹² Michael J. Wilkins, “Disciple, Discipleship,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, electronic ed., Baker Reference Library (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1996), 175.

displayed in the New Testament Gospels in order to begin to understand the biblical concept of discipleship.

When Jesus walked the earth in the first century AD, the concept of discipleship was alive and well within Judaism. The New Testament itself attests to this reality. “Apart from the disciples of Jesus, the Gospels present us with ‘disciples of the Pharisees’ (e.g., Mt 22:15–16; Mk 2:18), who possibly belonged to one of the schools (cf. Acts 5:34; 22:3) and ‘disciples of John the Baptist’ (Mk 2:18).”¹³ Literature outside of the New Testament also attests to a master-disciple relationship that ranged from “philosophical (Philo, *Sacr.* 7; 64; 79), to technical (rabbinical scribes [*m. ’Abot* 1:1; *b. Šabb.* 31a), to sectarian (Pharisees in Josephus, *Ant.* 13.289; 15.3, 370), to revolutionary (Zealot-like nationalists in *Midr. Šir Haširim Zûta*).”¹⁴ Thus, on the one hand the relationship between Jesus and His disciples was not entirely unique. Yet on the other hand, the way Jesus conducted this relationship had elements that were unique to Him.

One such example of a unique element in the relationship between Jesus and His disciples was the fact that Jesus chose his

¹³ Ibid., 203.

¹⁴ Ibid.

disciples. “Early Jewish and Greek tradition most frequently assume that disciples are responsible for acquiring their own teachers of the law or philosophy.”¹⁵ Yet Jesus took the initiative with His disciples. Jesus not only took the initiative to choose His disciples, but on occasion He also rejected potential candidates for disciples (cf. Mark 10:21-22). Keener calls this rejection of possible disciples “radical”¹⁶ and argues that it indicates how “weighty”¹⁷ a responsibility it was to follow Jesus.

Jesus did more than merely make disciples during His own lifetime and ministry. Jesus also commanded His disciples to go on and make further disciples. “This requirement is stated most clearly in Matthew’s account of the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19–20). All who become Christ’s disciples have the great responsibility and privilege of leading others to trust Christ.”¹⁸ As Blomberg points out, “‘Make disciples of all the nations’ (Mt. 28:18–20) has been understood as the

¹⁵ Craig S. Keener, *The Historical Jesus of the Gospels* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 203.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Charles R. Swindoll and Roy B. Zuck, *Understanding Christian Theology* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2003), 1028.

heartbeat of Christ’s commission for the Church of all ages.”¹⁹ This clear command to make disciples appears at the end of the book of Matthew, however, the entire Gospel of Matthew is “strong on discipleship.”²⁰ In fact, Wilkins suggests that “several factors point to Matthew’s intention to provide in his Gospel resources for discipleship.”²¹ Wilkins goes on to point out that these factors include,

(1) the major discourses are directed at least in part to the disciples (Mt 5:1–2; 10:1–2; 13:10; 18:1; 23:1–3); (2) most of the sayings directed to the disciples are in fact teaching on discipleship; (3) the disciples are portrayed primarily in a positive yet realistic light; and (4) the disciples are called, trained and commissioned to carry out their climactic mandate to “make disciples” (Mt 28:19).²²

Mark Keown agrees with these observations, but also emphasizes the harsh realism of Jesus’ call to become a disciple. Keown calls the Sermon on the Mount a “radical ethic of living righteously.”²³ Matthew

¹⁹ Craig Blomberg, “Review of Patterns of Discipleship in the New Testament Edited by Richard L. Longenecker,” *Themelios* 23.2 (1998): 71.

²⁰ Michael Green, *The Message of Matthew: The Kingdom of Heaven*, The Bible Speaks Today (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 42.

²¹ M. J. Wilkins, “Disciples and Discipleship,” *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels, Second Edition* (Downers Grove, IL; Nottingham, England: IVP Academic; IVP, 2013), 208.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Mark J. Keown, *Discovering the New Testament: An Introduction to Its Background, Theology, and Themes: The Gospels & Acts* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2018), 205.

8:18-22 calls upon disciples of Jesus to “place allegiance to the kingdom above family and culture”²⁴ in an all or nothing acceptance of service to Christ. Strauss suggests that the “martyrdom of John illustrates the ultimate cost of discipleship”²⁵ and thus brings to life the potential laden in Jesus’ words that a disciple “deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me” (Mark 8:34). Ryken grants a modern example of radical discipleship when he points to Dietrich Bonhoeffer. “Not only did the German theologian write a major book on the subject, but he also paid the price in his own Christian experience. Shortly before the end of World War II Bonhoeffer was executed for his opposition to Hitler. He became a living, dying example of his own maxim, that ‘when Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.’”²⁶ Daniel Reid observes that “Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s classic book *The Cost of Discipleship* (1937) has helped to shape the current usage of these terms, which tend to stress the cost and content of intentional obedience to Jesus and his teachings.”²⁷

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵

Mark L. Strauss, *Mark*, ed. Clinton E. Arnold, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 267.

²⁶ Philip Graham Ryken, *City on a Hill: Reclaiming the Biblical Pattern for the Church in the 21st Century* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2003), 111.

²⁷ Daniel G. Reid et al., *Dictionary of Christianity in America* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990).

What would possibly motivate someone to answer such a drastic call to allegiance?

As difficult as Jesus' call for discipleship is, Jesus also provides motivation for such allegiance. In the positive, Jesus assures His followers that giving their allegiance to Him will save their soul and result in honor and glory at His return to earth (Mark 8:34-38). In the negative, disciples can walk away from Jesus and face eternal damnation (Matt. 7:21-23; 8:12). In short, one can reject the call to become a disciple of Jesus, but it comes with eternal consequences if they do.

The Pattern and Command of Paul to Make Disciples

While the life of Jesus gives the clearest examples of the process of discipleship, the life of the Apostle Paul also serves as a powerful example. Due to the absence of the language of “disciple” and “discipleship” in Paul’s epistles, “some suggest that discipleship in Paul is different from that found in the Gospels.”²⁸ Yet as suggested earlier, Paul makes clear reference to the concept of discipleship in such passages as Col. 1:28-29 and Gal. 4:19. To these passages one might add

²⁸ Craig Blomberg, “Review of Patterns of Discipleship in the New Testament Edited by Richard L. Longenecker,” *Themelios* 23.2 (1998): 72.

1 Tim. 4:7 where Paul explicitly states, “exercise yourself to godliness.”

Swindoll elaborates.

The word Paul used for “train” (Greek, *gymnazō*) referred to training in the Greek gymnasium for athletic events, and the noun *gymnasia* (training or discipline) in 4:8 is the source of the English word “gymnasium.” Athletic training and competition is one of the most frequent biblical analogies for Christian living (1 Cor. 9:24–27; Phil. 3:13–14; 1 Tim. 4:7–8; 2 Tim. 2:5; Heb. 12:1–2).²⁹

Paul clearly expected Timothy to actively engage in personal discipleship and teach others to do the same. In fact, Paul’s relationship with Timothy is perhaps Paul’s most eloquent endorsement of discipleship.

Paul’s relationship with Timothy began on Paul’s second missionary journey as recorded in Acts 16, but then went on to span nearly two decades before Paul’s death. Kent describes this relationship between Paul and Timothy in the following words. “This final letter to Timothy is more personal and less official than the other Pastorals. It abounds with those intimate references which close friends may share (1:4–6; 3:14–15), and the emotional element, though always controlled,

²⁹ Charles R. Swindoll and Roy B. Zuck, *Understanding Christian Theology* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2003), 1025.

is warmly human (4:6–9, 16–17).”³⁰ Köstenberger agrees when he states, “Paul’s words [in 2 Tim.] underscore how the Christian faith is passed on through deep interpersonal relationships and ministry partnerships... and bears telling testimony to the beauty and gospel significance of long-lasting mentoring relationships.”³¹ Paul clearly displayed an interest and aptitude as a model for discipleship.

Paul not only modeled discipleship in his relationship to Timothy, but he also commanded Timothy to continue in the process. 2 Timothy 2:2 is perhaps the clearest command in Paul’s letters to engage in the process of discipleship. Köstenberger summarizes this verse by saying, “Essentially Paul, the seasoned apostle, seeks to impart to Timothy, his foremost disciple, the same mentoring mind-set (cf. 1 Tim 4:12) that had characterized his own apostolic ministry (see, e.g., 1 Cor 11:1).”³² Both the examples and commands of both Jesus and Paul provide clear New Testament basis for the ongoing relevance and

³⁰ Homer A. Kent Jr., *The Pastoral Epistles: Studies in 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus*, Revised Edition. (Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 1986), 243–244.

³¹ Andreas J. Köstenberger, *1-2 Timothy & Titus*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander, Thomas R. Schreiner, and Andreas J. Köstenberger, *Evangelical Biblical Theology Commentary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2021), 210–211.

³² *Ibid.*, 228.

necessity of discipleship in the modern church. However, it remains to be seen what primary elements make up the process of discipleship.

DISCERNING DISCIPLESHIP

Discipleship must be Relational

In his famous *Training of the Twelve*, A.B. Bruce traces three steps in the process of Jesus making disciples.³³ These phases of discipleship begin with the initial invitation of “come and see” taken from John 1:35. This phase is followed by the invitation to “come and follow me,” which occurs in Matt. 4:19 and Mark 1:16-18. The final phase is “come and be with me” as described in Mark 3:13-14. Bull Hull adds a fourth and final phase to this that he calls “remain with me,” which he develops from John 15:5-7.³⁴ Hull traces these stages and suggests that they serve as a model for believers in the church today.

³³ Bruce, Alexander Balmain. *The Training of the Twelve; Or, Passages out of the Gospels, Exhibiting the Twelve Disciples of Jesus under Discipline for the Apostleship*. New York: A. C. Armstrong and Son, 1889.

³⁴ See Bill Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship: On Being and Making Followers of Christ*, NavPress, Colorado Springs, CO, 2006, pages 169-186.

Hull describes these phases as progressively growing in intensity and responsibility. Jesus begins with a “light commitment,”³⁵ a simple invitation for honest inquirers to investigate the nature of His ministry. This simple invitation to investigation is then upgraded to “participation”³⁶ with Jesus’s ministry, “representation”³⁷ of Jesus’ ministry, and then finally the transition where the disciples carry on the ministry of Jesus in His absence.³⁸ Hull goes on to parallel these steps with Robert Coleman’s helpful list of selection, association, consecration, impartation, demonstration, delegation, supervision, and reproduction.³⁹ Elton Trueblood likens this process of discipleship to the phenomenon of coaching.

Some are now coming to believe that the least inadequate or distorting term for a spiritual leader in a congregation is “Coach.” The word has overtones, which modern man comprehends very well, indeed. Furthermore, the image of the coach is one which can be universally, honored by young and old alike... The glory of the coach is that of being the discoverer, the developer, and the trainer of the powers of other men. This is exactly what we mean when we use the biblical terminology about the equipping ministry... since the equipping minister must not be above the heat of the battle, he is, ideally, not only

³⁵ Hull, *The Complete Book*, 170.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 175-178.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 178-181.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 181-185.

³⁹ Cf. Hull, *The Complete Book*, 166-167.

the coach, but a “playing coach,” sometimes carrying the ball himself, and sometimes seeing to it that another carries it.⁴⁰

This concept of coaching helps capture the core principles behind the process of discipleship and seems to reflect the sort of approach Jesus Himself took. Duvall and Hays underscore this point when they observe, “At the heart of discipleship to Jesus stands a relational encounter with the presence of Jesus.”⁴¹ While commentating on the Gospel of John, Koester observes, “when it comes to discipleship, John provides no list of vices or virtues, no detailed set of exhortations, no comprehensive discipleship manual. Rather, he hones in on the love relationship between the Lord and his followers.”⁴² This is perhaps the key element being described in Jesus’ use of the metaphor of the vine and branches, which portrays this sort of “organic unity between Jesus and His disciples.”⁴³ These scholars all highlight a key element to any discipleship process, namely, the element of relationship.

Discipleship must be Instructional

⁴⁰ James R. Newby, *The Best of Elton Trueblood* (Nashville: Impact, 1979), 140.

⁴¹ J. Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hays, *God’s Relational Presence: The Cohesive Center of Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic: A Division of Baker Publishing Group, 2019), 288.

⁴² Craig R. Koester, *The Word of Life: A Theology of John’s Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008) 188.

⁴³ Köstenberger, *A Theology of John’s Gospel and Letters*, 503.

While relationship is a key element to any discipleship process, it cannot stand alone. Discipleship is more than mere relationship, but it must also include committing to faithful men the things they need to learn and pass on (cf. 2 Tim. 2:2). While some discipleship models devalue teaching, Terry observes, “For Paul, correct doctrine is the foundation for practice and knowledge is the ground for hope (Rom 5:3) and spiritual freedom (Rom 6:3, 6, 9, 16).”⁴⁴ Allison agrees when he states, “Though discipleship can never be reduced to teaching and learning, education is a very important aspect of this work.”⁴⁵ Kimbell and Spellman write, “Like Paul, we are responsible to proclaim the “whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:26–27)... Many pastors tend to default to the Pauline Epistles as their primary (if not virtually exclusive) preaching content.”⁴⁶ While the epistles of Paul are necessary, so too is the rest of Scripture.

According to Michael Anthony, Christian education for the purpose of discipleship takes place in three general formats: in formal

⁴⁴ George A. Terry, “A Missiology of Excluded Middles: An Analysis of the T4T Scheme for Evangelism and Discipleship,” *Themelios* 42.2 (2017): 348.

⁴⁵ Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers*, 441–442.

⁴⁶ Jeremy M. Kimble and Ched Spellman, *Invitation to Biblical Theology: Exploring the Shape, Storyline, and Themes of Scripture*, Invitation to Theological Studies Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2020), 423.

educational settings like Sunday school classes, in nonformal educational settings such as seminars or training sessions, and in informal settings like home groups.⁴⁷ Though various formats can be created for the purpose of teaching, the goal of teaching should never be forgotten.

Discipleship must be Practical

The elements of relationship and instruction are incomplete if not coupled with the practical outworking of those things into everyday life. Quinn and Strickland insist, “Whole-life discipleship does not jettison spiritual formation, but requires it.”⁴⁸ These authors go on to describe that while instruction and participation in the spiritual disciplines are essential, they are incomplete without wedding “the temporal and eternal facets of work for the kingdom’s sake.”⁴⁹ Ryken agrees when he states that *information* must also be supplemented by *training* in such practical areas as “how to study the Bible, worship God, live as a spiritual family, share the gospel, support world missions, and serve others with deeds of

⁴⁷ Michael J. Anthony, “The Nature of Theology and Education,” in Estep, Anthony, and Allison, *A Theology for Christian Education*, 16–17.

⁴⁸ Benjamin T. Quinn and Walter R. Strickland II, *Every Waking Hour: An Introduction to Work and Vocation for Christians* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press; Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2016), 79.]

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

mercy.”⁵⁰ Pure information without application stalls and stagnates the process of discipleship.

Bill Hull’s illustration of coaching discussed earlier helps flesh out this point.⁵¹ A good coach does much more than merely giving information to his athletes. Rather, those athletes must learn to employ that information in real life. They must practice, drill, and perfect the methods taught to them by the coach. So too in a local church ministry. A disciple must learn to pray, study, teach, serve, and evangelize, but one of the best teachers is experience. The disciple must become a doer in order to be a true disciple (cf. James 1:22-25).

DETAILING DISCIPLESHIP

This section of the paper suggests a simple and practical process for pursuing discipleship in the local church. These elements include calling to the crowd, inviting into relationship, finding the faithful, and committing to the committed. One should think of these steps as concentric circles that might resemble a target. The outermost circle has the lowest level of commitment, while the innermost circle indicates the

⁵⁰ Philip Graham Ryken, *City on a Hill: Reclaiming the Biblical Pattern for the Church in the 21st Century* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2003), 124.

⁵¹ Cf. Hull, *The Complete Book*, 166-167.

highest level of commitment. The goal is to live out the principles of discipleship in a sincere and attractive way that invites others to engage in the process of discipleship and increase in their level of commitment to Christ.

Calling to the Crowd

This step in the process would be represented by the largest circle and the lowest level of commitment. This step would involve the public teaching of the Word of God to the largest crowd. This step would include most obviously the Sunday morning worship service, Wednesday night Bible study, evangelistic outreach, and a variety of other public gatherings or ministries that are designed to accommodate everyone. These gatherings are to focus on Gospel presentations, expositional teaching of the Scripture, as well as clear calls to the crowd to take seriously the commands of Jesus regarding discipleship.

Inviting into Relationship

This stage is represented by the second largest circle on the target and involves the first step toward greater commitment. This segment would include social gatherings that meet outside of the weekly worship gathering that are intended to promote more relational connections within the church. Examples would include luncheons, small groups, men's

groups, women's groups, teen groups, family camps, retreats, conferences, or personal hospitality. These gatherings are designed to foster the development of relationships, which in turn develops a sense of community. A strong sense of belonging in a community provides a family feel, which is necessary in order to encourage greater degrees of involvement and commitment including faithful attendance, membership, service, evangelism, and discipleship.

Finding the Faithful

Once a relationship has been built and greater involvement has been observed, character must be developed. Character development can occur in a variety of ways but should include more specific training in both the disciplines of grace as well as in practical ministry service. This stage should involve a specific initiation into some area of service where the disciple possesses both interest and aptitude. For one to advance in the process of discipleship, they must engage in the work and participate in the mission. Areas of service can range from cleaning, facilities maintenance, church workdays, hosting, teaching classes of various ages, music ministry, outreach ministry, helps ministry, etc. Though involvement in service is a vital element of discipleship, it must take place in progressive stages. Jesus taught that those who are faithful in the

little things, will also be faithful in much (Matt. 25:14-30). Areas of service should begin with small and simple tasks but grow in accordance with the development of the disciple's character and aptitude. The disciple should be trained, encouraged, corrected, and held accountable, yet also given room to fail, learn, and try again. A faithful disciple should advance toward greater degrees of responsibility.

Committing to the Committed

This final stage might be likened to the bullseye in the target. This is the stage of discipleship for which the local church is ultimately aiming. This stage involves not merely those who faithfully serve, but those who are willing and able to represent and reproduce the various ministries of which they are a part. This is going to be the smallest, most select group of individuals within the congregation. This group should be directly led by the elders of the local assembly. Those who participate in this group are those who have answered the call, taken up the invitation, engaged in service, demonstrated that they are faithful, and are now chosen for more intensive discipleship.

Intensive discipleship should include a more specified curriculum that covers ministry philosophy and practice, biblical worldview, leadership skills, Bible backgrounds, book surveys, systemic

theology, and church history. The curriculum should attempt to give the disciple a firm grasp of the whole counsel of God and equip them to teach the Word of God faithfully. The goal of this level of discipleship would be to disciple those who will go on to disciple others. This group is the core of the church, as well as the pool from which the church draws its future leaders. This group most specifically seeks to accomplish the model that Paul enlisted Timothy to do in 2 Tim. 2:2, “the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.”

CONCLUSION

Discipleship is not an option for believers today; it is a command. Though the process of discipleship can be long and arduous, it must not be neglected. Church leaders must develop a biblical and intentional view of discipleship. They must evaluate the members of their congregation in order to discern where they are at in relationship to the process of discipleship and then reach out to help those members take the next spiritual step all for the glory of God!

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Overview of Biblical Eldership

Definition of Bishop/Elder/Pastor (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 1)

- *“Bishop” is the “overseer” of the church, the under-shepherd of the flock of God (1 Peter 5:1-4). Greek word ἐπίσκοπος means over-see... or put “scope” upon...*
- *“Pastor” Primary duty is to shepherd/feed/pastor the flock (1 Peter 5:2; Acts 20:28).*
- *“Elder” refers to the qualifications, or maturity of a believer, which qualifies him to be a “Pastor,” or “Overseer.” Contrast with “novice” (1 Tim. 3:6). To desire the office of overseer is a good thing, but one must be qualified.*
 - a. *Qualifications of an elder, just like a deacon, are primarily moral & practical. However, the ability to teach the Bible is the primary qualification that distinguishes an elder from a deacon.*
 - b. *One must be an elder [qualification] to be a bishop [office] in order to pastor [duty] (Titus 1:5-9). Think adjective, noun, & verb of same office.*

Scriptural Occurrences of the words relating to N.T. church office

1. *Elder (Acts 11:30; 14:23; 15; 2, 4, 6, 22, 23; 16:4; 20:17-38; 21:17-26; 1 Tim. 5:17, 19; Titus 1:5; James 5:14; 1 Peter 5:1, 5; 2 John 1; 3 John 1).*
2. *Bishop (Acts 20:28; Philippians 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:7; 1 Peter 2:25).*

Appointment of Elders (Acts 14:23; 1 Tim. 3:1-6; 5:22-25; Titus 1:1-9)

1. *Elders, who are qualified according to the standards set by the Apostles & who possess a desire to serve, are then appointed (1 Tim. 3:1)*
2. *Existing leadership appoints or selects qualified men (Acts 14:23; 2 Cor. 8:19; Titus 1:5).*
3. *These qualified men are then examined and approved by the collective discernment of the whole church (1 Tim. 3:1-6, 10; 5:22-25; Acts 6:3; 13:3-4).*

Number of Elders:

- *The Biblical model is to have multiple of both offices [elders & deacons], as many as needed to fulfill the needs (Acts 6; 14:23; 15; 20:17; Titus 1).*

Primary Duties of Elders

1. *Feed i.e. Guide by Teaching (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:2)*
2. *Exhort with sound doctrine and refute those who contradict (Tit. 1:9).*
3. *Watch Over i.e. Guard & Govern (Acts 20:28-29; Heb. 13:17; 1 Pt. 5:2)*
4. *Be Example of the Christian Life (Phil. 3:17; 1 Peter 5:3)*
5. *Pray (James 5:13-15)*
6. *Admonish (1 Thess. 5:12)*
7. *All by the Grace of God i.e. “commend to God” (Acts 14:23; 20:32)*

Response of the Congregation to the Leadership

1. *Know them (1 Thess. 5:12)*
2. *Esteem them (1 Thess. 5:13)*
3. *Don’t Slander them, but hold them Accountable (1 Tim. 5:19)*
4. *Obey & Submit to them (Heb. 13:17; 1 Peter 5:3-5)*

Qualifications for Elders: (Lofquist’s summary of Strauch)

1. **Above reproach / anepilēmpton (1 Timothy 3:2).** This is the overall characteristic that must mark the leaders of the church. This quality is the summary statement of the specific character qualities that follow. It literally means “without handles” and means no sinful accusation can be hung on this godly man, no charge against him will “stick.” This godly leader is unassailable, irreproachable, free from any disgraceful mark when people assess his character. This statement is listed first because unless the godly leader is above reproach, his message, his testimony, and the church he is a part of will all be discredited. If there is a question by people concerning a leader’s life, he/she is not qualified to lead.
2. **Husband of one wife / mias gunaikos andra (1 Timothy 3:2).** Despite what may be believed upon an initial reading, this

statement does not primarily refer to marital status. The literal Greek is translated, “a one-woman man” and refers to sexual faithfulness. The elder must be characterized as a one-woman man who is not flirtatious, promiscuous, or involved in a questionable relationship with another woman. Viewed this way, Paul is not referring exclusively to the marital status of the prospective elder, but to a character trait – just as he does with the other qualifications for elders (Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 193). Interpreting this qualification as a character trait is most clearly seen in 1 Tim.

- 5:9 & 14 when Paul uses its equivalent phrase “one-man woman,” which is speaking of the godly character of a widow.
3. Sober-minded / *nēphalion* (1 Timothy 3:2). This term literally means “wineless” and should be understood as referring to a clear-mindedness and a self-controlled state of behavior and thinking. The godly leader is one who realizes the serious nature of life. Therefore, he/she organizes his/her life in a way that is disciplined and serious. This is a description of stability. The godly leader sets the standard of being a rock on which others can look and see the example of serious godly living.
 4. Self-controlled / *sōphrona* (1 Timothy 3:2). The NASB translates this characteristic as “prudent” which is closer to the meaning than self-controlled. It conveys the idea of sound judgment, sensible thinking, reasonable perspective in decision making. Some even use the idea of good spiritual common sense. It is the opposite of imbalanced thinking and excessive, indiscreet over-reactions. The godly leader has a reasonable, wise response to all the strange and difficult situations every one of us regularly face.
 5. Respectable / *kosmion* (1 Timothy 3:2). This refers to one’s “orderly” (literal Greek meaning), respectable conduct in all manners of life. The term originally referred to how one dressed, how a person presented himself. Godly leaders must be an example to believers in how to act and present themselves in the church, and in public. They are to demonstrate a lifestyle that other believers can emulate as they would Christ.

6. Hospitable / philoxenon (1 Timothy 3:2). This literally means “a lover of strangers.” It has to do with seeing those who others do not see: the stranger, the marginalized, the forgotten, the newcomer, the visitor. It then means you open your heart to those people, and you open your home. The godly leader is to be the example of giving of yourself and your resources to meet the needs of the stranger, the poor, and the forgotten ones in the church. People mimic their leaders, and if the leaders are not giving and hospitable, the church will be cold and unloving.
7. Able to teach / didaktikon (1 Timothy 3:2). This is the only difference between the deacon and the elder. Both are leaders by example and character, but the elder has the God-appointed task of teaching and shepherding the flock. The elder must, as Paul told Titus, “Hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it” (Titus 1:9). The elder has the mandate to defend God’s people against false teachers and to build up the flock in the wisdom and knowledge of the truth. This is an extremely high calling, one in which Paul encouraged Timothy to “do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15). But all godly leaders must ultimately be people of the Word, concerned with good doctrine, because ministries that have weak doctrine are weak. Doctrine is the foundation upon which every ministry, every church, stands or falls. If someone desires to lead in ministry, but cannot accurately handle the Word, he/she is not qualified to lead the people of God. You can help; but you can’t lead.
8. Not a drunkard / mē paroinon (1 Timothy 3:3). This word literally has the idea of “not beside wine” and has to do with reputation and testimony. The godly leader must not be known by others as one who abuses drinking or any other substance that would shed a poor light on his testimony. In fact, it would perhaps seem best that a godly leader abstain from drinking at all so that his/her testimony would not be in question.

9. Not violent / *mē plēktēn* (1 Timothy 3:3; Cf. Proverbs 16:32). Literally meaning “no striker, no hitter,” Paul writes that elders must be men of peace and not of aggressive force and violence. Specifically in mind here is a quick-tempered person who resorts to force to get his way. The elder must be the premier example of what it means to take insult and injury, and not lash out in retaliatory violence (a real problem for men). The elder must be a peace-maker (Matthew 5:9), and never respond in quick violence or anger. Improper responses indicate a man who does not have self-control and proves him unworthy of the high calling of the elder.
10. Gentle / *epieikē* (1 Timothy 3:3) The elder must not be violent (the word above stated negatively); the elder must act gently and kindly (this word stated positively). The word for “gentle” has no English equivalent that adequately conveys its fullness and richness. Forbearance, gentleness, magnanimous, and gracious all help capture this word’s full range of meaning. The Greek word literally means a willingness to yield and patiently make allowances for the weakness, weirdness, and ignorance of the fallen human condition. Being gracious, reasonable, and considerate (Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 199-200). This is one of the most important characteristics that is to mark the godly leader, because this is the attitude that God displays toward humans. God is extremely patient and kind to those who are undeserving, and this is what the godly leader is supposed to model.
11. Not quarrelsome / *amachon* (1 Timothy 3:3). The word above for “no striker, no hitter” is about settling differences with force and violence. This word is about settling differences with yelling and screaming. Division and strife in the body of Christ is something that happens with all-too-often, painful frequency. The elder is to be a model of how to act so as not to cause strife and division within the body of Christ. There are times when the godly leader must confront error and protect the flock, but even then, he/she must do so with carefully measured words. Not shouting. “And the Lord’s servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to

- everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness” (2 Timothy 2:24-25).
12. Not a lover of money / *aphilargyron* (1 Timothy 3:3). Greed is what motivates false teachers (Titus 1:11). An elder must never be seen as one who is in love with riches and wealth. The godly leader serves as one who expects nothing in return. It is a one-way street of service. The elder must be free from the love of money so that it does not influence how he leads. Many leaders have thought twice about confronting a fellow brother because he was giving a significant portion of the church’s finances. Such thoughts are wrong. Holiness and purity is the priority of the godly leader. The elder must not be driven by wealth or possessions and must not allow those to enter into his mind when making a decision. Those who do not have enough self-control to keep away from the love of money do not qualify to be an example to God’s people.
13. Manages his own house well / *idiou oukou kalōs proistamenon* (1 Timothy 3:4-5). This is a very practical character quality of the elder and is the testing ground for the elder’s leadership skill. Although this characteristic of an elder may be downplayed, it is essential. The godly leader’s organization and leadership of his/her household demonstrates his/her ability to lead and influence others. Leadership in the family is very similar to leadership in a ministry. It is not won by being a tyrant, but by loving fairness and justice. Caring for the local church or a ministry is more like managing a family than managing a business or state. Therefore, a man’s ability to manage God’s church is directly related to his ability to manage his own household. A man or woman may be successful in business, a capable public official, a brilliant office manager, or a top military leader, but a terrible ministry leader. In the family of God, a man’s ability to lead his family is the test that qualifies or disqualifies a man to be an elder. An elder’s relationship with his children will be seen in his relationship with the congregation. If he is too harsh with his children – rigid, impatient, insensitive, permissive, inconsistent, or passive – that is how he will respond to the congregation. If one wants

- to know what an elder will be like, observe how he manages his children (Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 202).
14. Well-thought of by those outside / marturian kalēn tōn exōthen (1 Timothy 3:7). The elder's standing in the community must be the same as it is with the church body. Many men would be examined as outstanding within the church, but at their jobs they could be accused as bad men, liars and cheats. The elder is known as a man of integrity and is recognized for honesty and impeccable character in both the church and by non-believers. A godly leader's testimony with unbelievers outside the church is crucial. [Titus 1:6-10 gives a parallel list which closely follows the list in 1 Timothy 3. In order to avoid repetition, only terms which are different enough to warrant a comment have been included.]
 15. Must have well-ordered children / tekna mē en katēgoria asōtias ē anupotakta (Titus 1:6). The word pistos can mean either "faithful" or "believing." It seems best that this refers to faithful (submissive, respectful) children rather than children who are truly saved. The best Christian fathers cannot guarantee that all their children will really believe. To say this passage means believing Christian children places an impossible standard upon a father since salvation is a supernatural act of God. God, not good parents (although they are used of God), ultimately brings salvation (John 1:12,13). This qualification describes the necessity of the children of the elder to be in submission while under his authority, and "not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination." Debauchery has to do with wild, uncontrolled living. Insubordination describes a lifestyle that is unruly or disobedient. A godly leader's children must demonstrate through their lifestyle that he/she is capable of leading and influencing others.
 16. Not arrogant / mē authadē (Titus 1:7). The elder is to be the model of godly humility. Just as all Christians are to consider others more important than themselves (Philippians 2:3-4), the godly leader is to be the example of that mindset. The godly leader is not to think of himself as indispensable, but as a humble slave of Christ (actual meaning of doulos used often in the New Testament).

17. Lover of good / philagathon (Titus 1:8). This is the attitude of the Christian who is functioning in true Christian love (1 Corinthians 13:4-7). The godly leader is to be the example of what it means to desire and earnestly seek the good of others and seek their benefit. Godly leaders do not function so they might be exalted, but they function so that others might benefit greatly from their service. They see ministry as about others, and not themselves.
18. Upright / dikaion (Titus 1:8). This is a beautiful description of the one who is to model godliness to the flock of God. The word for “upright” (dikaion) is from the same root as “righteous” and has to do with being fair minded and equitable in dealing with others. The godly leader’s conduct must conform to the standard of what is right as a person of integrity who sticks by his word.
19. Holy / hosion (Titus 1:8). The word for “holy” (hosion) pertains to being devout, dedicated, concerned with practical holiness. It describes a person who doesn’t take the things of God as a joke but keeps himself/herself free of anything that would “stain” him in the eyes of God. God declared that all believers are to be holy even as He is holy (1 Peter 1:15-16) and He is the one who has appointed Christian ministry leaders by His grace to demonstrate the pattern in which Christians are to live.

What does it mean for an elder to be “blameless”?

1) Issue

- a) “Blameless” ἀνεπίλημτος pertains to what cannot be criticized—‘above criticism, beyond reproach.’ This word does not mean a charge is never brought (cf. 1 Tim 5:17-25), but that if a charge is brought it cannot stick.
- b) “Blameless” is the overarching description that serves as an umbrella word for the whole passage. The remaining 16 qualifications serve to flesh out this overarching quality. *Elders are to be “blameless” in relation to their marriage, their children, the outside world, and the believing community.*
- c) Compare Psalm 18:20-24. David is not here claiming sinlessness, but blamelessness. Sinlessness would require never sinning or miss stepping, while blamelessness implies

that though there may have been a misstep, it was corrected and made right.

d) This then raises the question how far back do we look in the past to determine if a person is qualified? How do we “test” one’s character? Is it implied that a lapse on any of these characteristics at any time is a “permanent, for life” disqualification?

2) **Best answer:** The qualifications of 1 Timothy 3 describe an overall character of life evidenced over time, [*i.e. a trajectory of life*], not momentary instances of success or failure. This interpretation is seen in lexical, exegetical, and theological evidence.

a) **Lexical Evidence:** This interpretation is borne out by a Word Study on the related words “proved” (δοκιμάζω in 1 Tim. 3:10) & “character” in the N.T. (δοκιμή). δοκιμή appears 7 times in the N.T. (Rom. 5:4; 2 Cor. 2:9; 8:2; 9:13; 13:3; Phil. 2:22). It is translated “character, proven character, test, trial, or proof.” It is connected to the word δοκιμάζω, which means to “test by fire, and evidenced as genuine” (2 Cor. 13:5; Phil 1:10; 1 Thess. 2:4; 5:21; 1 Tim. 3:10; 1 Peter 1:7; 1 John 4:1). A person’s character is something developed over time through various trials (Rom. 5:1-5). Note especially Phil. 2:22 where it describes the “proven character” of Timothy, who as a son with his father, labored alongside Paul in the gospel. Failure along the way is expected, however, the habit of recognizing sin, repenting of it, and seeking restoration ought to be the pattern of life of a given candidate for elder.

b) **Theological Evidence:**

i) Testimony of Scripture regarding the power of the Gospel to forgive sin & transform sinners:

(1) Romans 1:16, the Gospel is the power of God unto salvation.

(2) 2 Corinthians 5:17, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.

(3) Colossians 3:10, put on the new man who is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created Him.

- (4) Ephesians 2:1-10, we once walked according to the course of this world... BUT GOD who is rich in mercy, because of His great love... made us alive together in Christ... created in Christ Jesus.
- (5) Titus 3:1-8, note the description of the state of an unbeliever contrasted with the state of a believer after the grace of God transforms them (Titus 2:11-15).
- (6) 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, Paul lists the sins that cause one to disinherit the kingdom of God, but then he states of the Corinthians, "and such were some of you, BUT you were washed... sanctified... and justified..."
- (7) 1 Timothy 1:12-17, Paul gives his own testimony regarding the transformative nature of the grace of God in his own life, thereby making Paul a trophy of God's grace!

ii) Testimony of Scripture regarding Sanctification:

- (1) "Sanctification" is the process whereby a believer in Christ progressively changes to become more like Christ in character (John 17:17, 19; Rom. 5:20; 15:16; 1 Cor. 1:1; 6:9-11; 2 Cor. 3:18; Phil 3:10-16; 1 Thess. 5:23). Sanctification is a process, not an event. Sanctification takes time, and evidences itself progressively in the life of someone who is learning to conquer sin in their lives.
- (2) *"While past sins can affect one's present status, this effect need not be permanent, for one's character is not fixed and immutable but changes as one either matures or regresses. Thus, there seems to be little reason to assume that past sins must permanently render one blameworthy. In fact, to subscribe to such a position ignores the possibility of genuine repentance, forgiveness, and spiritual growth, and assumes the questionable position of "once blameworthy, always blameworthy." This would seem to disqualify all potential candidates, for no believer lives perfectly above reproach. In short, such a position denies progressive sanctification to potential candidates, for one must live a blameless life from the moment of*

conversion or else forever forfeit the opportunity to become an elder” (Jay E. Smith).

iii) Testimony of Scripture regarding Restoration:

(1) “Restoration” is the process whereby a sinner is brought back to right standing before God and others. The verb form of this word (καταρτίζω) means ‘to make adequate, to furnish completely, to cause to be fully qualified, adequacy.’ See 2 Cor. 13:9; Galatians 6:1; Ephesians 4:12; 2 Tim. 3:17.

(2) Note especially the appearance of this word in Galatians 6:1, where the immediate context is clearly speaking of a moral or ethical failure regarding the sins of the flesh (Gal. 5:19-21). *Though it must be acknowledged that absent from the context of Galatians 5-6 is any indication that Paul was concerned with restoration to leadership.*

Rehabilitating the sinner, not reinstating the leader, was the primary issue in Galatians 6. However, these situations, though not identical, need not be mutually exclusive. It certainly seems reasonable to suppose that Paul envisioned restoration to some sort of usefulness, which in some cases might involve the restoration to leadership.

(3) In the narrative sections of Matt. 4:21 & Mark 1:19 this verb is used to describe how fishermen “mend” their nets in order to bring them back into good working order.

(4) The process of repentance, forgiveness, and discipleship promotes this among believers (Luke 6:40; 1 Thess. 3:10; Hebrews 13:21; 1 Peter 5:10; 1 John 1:9). Can it promote this among leaders?

c) Exegetical Evidence:

i) Testimony of Peter:

(1) Jesus said that if one were to deny Him then He would deny them before His Father in heaven (Matt. 10:33). Later in the book of Matthew it records Peter’s denial of Jesus before men (Matt. 26:70-72).

- (2) Yet after the resurrection, Jesus purposefully went out of His way to restore Peter both privately and publicly (John 21; Mark 14:7; 1 Cor. 15:5).
- (3) Peter was at one time guilty of denying the Lord Jesus, yet Jesus restored him not only to full fellowship, but also to leadership among the apostles (Acts 1-2; Gal. 2:9; 1 Peter 5:1-5).
- (4) Even after receiving the Holy Spirit and while leading the early church, Peter was in need of open rebuke (Gal. 2:11-14), yet this did not disqualify him from leadership.
- (5) Peter later calls himself an “elder” and charges fellow elders (1 Peter 5:1-5). This evidences that even an imperfect leader, as well as one who was disqualified at one point, can be restored to leadership and used powerfully by God.
- (6) Jay Smith is again helpful here with these words, *“John 21:15–23. After Peter’s threefold public denial, the resurrected Lord publicly reinstated Peter to a position among the disciples... The significance of Peter’s reinstatement is difficult to assess, however, for it raises the issue of the normativeness of biblical narrative. Specifically, the issue is whether Peter’s unique place as one of Twelve, or Jesus’ personal involvement, or the occurrence of the event before Pentecost makes his restoration the exception rather than the rule. Evidence needed to resolve this issue decisively is not readily apparent, but other New Testament examples of failure on the part of leaders (e.g., Peter in Gal 2:11–14 and John Mark in Acts 13:13; 15:36–41; cf. 2 Tim 4:11) seem to favor restoration. At the very least, then, one should be very cautious about rejecting the possibility of restoration, for such action clearly would run counter to the example afforded by Peter and would be based on the mere possibility—not even the probability—that the case of Peter is not normative.”*

ii) Testimony of Paul:

(1) Read Gal. 1:13-16; 1 Tim. 1:12-17 & 1 Cor. 7:25; 15:9-10; Col. 1:25. Paul often uses his own testimony as an example for the powerful effect of the grace of God in one's life.

(2) Was Paul an Elder? Can the example of his life set a pattern for elder qualifications?

(a) A close comparison of 1 Timothy 4:15 & 2 Tim. 1:6 declares that Timothy was appointed by the board of elders, of which Paul was a part. Taken at face value, this indicates that Paul was an elder.

(b) Acts 21:18 may allude to Paul as an Elder by the grammatical phrase, "all the elders were present." This phrase specifically refers to the elders of Jerusalem, yet James is singled out, though he was clearly an elder (Acts 12:17; 15:1-35). Paul was probably meant to be included in this group as "an elder."

(c) Paul is explicitly invited to lead and teach the church at Antioch (Acts 11:25-26), Paul was an official representative of the church at Antioch when delivering the famine relief offering (Acts 11:27-30), and Paul is clearly listed among the leadership of the church at Antioch (Acts 13:1-3). Local churches were to be led by Elders (Acts 11:30; 14:23; 1 Timothy 3; Titus 1). Paul is clearly among the group labeled "prophets and teachers." Though these are indeed "gifts" (Eph. 4:1-11), and not "offices," they are often gifts associated with the office of elder. [see esp. 1 Tim. 5:17; 1 Peter 5:1-4]

(d) Though Paul was an Apostle, and therefore more than an elder, was he less? If Paul served as an elder in Antioch, would he not qualify as an elder in any church?

iii) Testimony of John Mark

(1) John Mark was a native of Jerusalem, in whose house the Last Supper was probably held (Acts 12:12, 25).

- (2) John Mark accompanied Paul and Barnabas on the 1st missionary journey, but abandoned the group after the mission on Cyprus (Acts 13:5, 13).
- (3) When Barnabas wants to take John Mark on the 2nd missionary journey, this leads to a conflict between Paul and Barnabas (Acts 15:36-41). After this conflict Barnabas takes John Mark back to Cyprus, where the Biblical record is silent for over a decade.
- (4) Yet in 2 Tim. 4:11 Paul has changed his opinion regarding John Mark, calling him “profitable for the ministry.”
- (5) John Mark later becomes a travel companion to Peter (1 Peter 5:13) and also pens the Gospel of Mark.
- (6) Though never explicitly referenced as an “elder,” the life of John Mark is powerful testimony regarding the qualifications of someone growing and advancing until one that was previously disqualified later becomes requalified.

3) Can the Life and Ministry of the Apostles be followed as an example for qualifications for elders?

- a) The office of Apostle was indeed part of the foundation of the Church (Eph. 2:20), and unique in many ways to the first generation of the Church (Eph. 4:11). The authority of the Apostles to give Scripture (Acts 2:42; Tit. 1:4; 2 Thess. 2:2; 3:6, 14; Jude 3; 1 Cor. 14:38) and grant miracles (2 Cor. 12:12; Heb. 2:4) was unique to the office of Apostle.
- b) Yet on the other hand, the morality exhibited in the lives of the Apostles is over and over again set as a standard to follow (1 Cor. 4:16; 11:1; Phil. 3:17; 4:9; 1 Thess. 1:6; 2:10-14; 2 Thess. 3:7,9).

How do we respond to an erring elder? How quickly do we remove an elder from leadership? Read 1 Tim. 5:17-22.

- 1) Do not receive a charge against an elder unless based on two or three witnesses... Paul uses the pattern from Dt. 17:6, which was the process in a capitol crime case... in other words, take this very seriously! Dismiss charges of personal bias or a grudge... or if only from one source. Yet entertain legitimate charges, from more than one “witness.”

- 2) Follow the pattern of Matt 18 in every case. Confront personally, plurally, & then publicly. Yet if repentance is shown, welcome back & work to restore.
- 3) Only if an elder *“continues to sin”* [*present active participle*] (1 Tim. 5:20), they need to be rebuked openly before all... Yet even in this verse restoration is the target. *Rebuke* them, don't *remove* them. Compare same verb “Rebuke” in Tit. 2:15; Heb 12:5; Rev. 3:19, where the goal is clearly on restoration of an erring brother (Gal. 6:1-2).
- 4) This context clearly speaks of rebuking an elder. Yet in v. 22 Paul states “lay hands suddenly on no man.” This phrase seems to refer to the appointment of an elder, yet the context also suggests it may refer to the reappointment of an elder who was temporarily disqualified.
- 5) Rebuke, remove if necessary, and possibly restore all without partiality!
 - a) Elders are not supposed to be perfect; rather they need to show humble repentant hearts that propel them to abhor wickedness and pursue righteousness. As Bryan Hodge says, *“We’re not looking for one who has never sinned, nor are we looking for one who will never sin again. However, he should be one whose pattern of life is to shun sinfulness and strive to live righteously. This is one who walks in the light maintaining fellowship with God.”*
 - b) If we read the qualifications of an elder as “one strike and you are out,” then are we grossly underselling the Gospel of Jesus Christ? Are we truly understanding grace in light of godly living? No leader is perfect. Only God is perfect. Elders are under-shepherds beneath the “Chief Shepherd” (1 Peter 2:25; 5:1-4). Is God looking for perfect men? Or men quick to repent?

What sins would disqualify an elder from leadership?

- 1) The Reality of Disqualification:
 - a) The Greek word ἀδόκιμος is the opposite to the word δοκιμή discussed above. “Proven Character” (δοκιμή) is the opposite to being “disqualified” (ἀδόκιμος). To be disqualified literally means one “failed the test.”

- b) The word “disqualified” appears 8 times in the N.T. (Rom. 1:28; 1 Cor. 9:27; 2 Cor. 13:5-7; 2 Tim. 3:8; Tit. 1:16; Heb. 6:8). The KJV translates the word “reprobate” 6 times, “castaway” 1 time, and “rejected” 1 time. NKJV, ESV, NASB, HCSB and others often translated the word “disqualified.”
- 2) The Reasons for Disqualification:
- a) The question remains what sins and/or continuous state of sin would disqualify an elder from office? An elder who violates one of the qualifications of 1 Timothy 3, who has been confronted according to 1 Timothy 5, and yet remains in sin must be removed.
 - b) An elder who evidences repentance and seeks restoration might still require removal based upon the discernment of the current leadership (1 Tim. 1:3; 5:17-25; Titus 1:5).
- 3) The Requirements for Requalification?
- a) The question remains if a disqualification is temporary or permanent. See note on “Restoration” above.
 - b) The of Scripture in 1 Tim. 5:17-22. This context clearly speaks of rebuking an elder. Yet in v. 22 Paul states “lay hands suddenly on no man, lest you be a partaker of his sins.” This clearly refers to the *appointment* of an elder, yet the context involving rebuking elders also suggests it may refer to the *reappointment* of an elder who was temporarily disqualified.
 - c) Spurgeon gave us a helpful piece of advice in this regard. He advised that someone can be requalified for office when they are known more for their repentance more than their sin.

Does an elder have to have a family to be qualified as an elder?

1) Is marriage required for an elder?

- a) If 1 Timothy 3:2 is a command to be married in order to be an elder, it would contradict Matt. 19:10-12 & 1 Cor. 7:7-8, 32-33, which hail the single life as not only worthy of ministry, but also possessing distinct advantages over married life. Jesus, Paul, and the Apostle John were all unmarried, and Jesus and Paul, both highly recommended it for others.
- b) Perhaps the objection may be raised that a single man cannot minister to families in a practical way because he himself has never had one. However, this is one of the practical reasons

for having multiple “elders,” plural. In other words, no one elder will be able to minister to every need in the same way, however, a plurality of elders is God’s way of remedying this.

2) Are children required of an elder? How many Children are required, one or more?

a) The Greek structure of this comment is the same as above. This comment is a criterion to meet “if” a man has children. It does not seem to be an imperative to have children, or a directive on how many to have.

b) The Greek construction in 3:1 is used again in 5:3-16, [*give especial note to v. 4*], to qualify a “widow indeed.” The “if” clauses are addressing general & particular situations that a widow may or may not meet. Having children is assumed, but not required (v. 4). Would not this same construct in 3:2-5 also communicate the same thing?

c) Additionally, the Bible often uses the term “children” (plural) to refer to one or more. In Genesis 21:7, Sarah said, “Who would have said unto Abraham, that Sarah should have given “children” (plural) suck for I have given him a son (singular) in his old age. Though having but one son, Sarah indicated that she had given suck to children (plural). In Luke 14:26, Jesus said we cannot be His disciple if we don’t love Him more than our children (plural). Shall we understand this to mean that one cannot be qualified to be His disciple if he has no children or only one child (singular) to love less than Him? Of course not! Consider I Timothy 5: 9-10: Here a widow could be taken into the number “if she brought up children.” Does Paul imply here that an otherwise qualified widow who had brought up only “one” child or no children could not be taken into the number?

3) Consider John the Elder (2 John 1 & 3 John 1).

a) Identifying “John the Elder.” Note this helpful summary from [Jobes](#). “The earliest ascription of authorship [of 1-3 John] to John comes from Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna (d. AD 156), and from Papias, a contemporary of Polycarp, whose writings survive only as quotations in the later writings of Irenaeus and Eusebius. Both Polycarp and Papias lived in the greater vicinity of Ephesus in western Asia Minor, the location to which the apostle John is said to have fled at about the time when the Romans destroyed

the temple in Jerusalem (AD 70), taking Mary the mother of Jesus with him. There he presumably lived for the rest of his long life, on into the reign of Trajan, the Roman emperor who ruled the empire from AD 98 to 117. Irenaeus (AD 175–195), bishop of Lyon, was born in Asia Minor and as a child personally knew Polycarp, who is said to have been appointed bishop of Smyrna by eyewitnesses of the Lord Jesus. Irenaeus says that John, the disciple of the Lord who was with Jesus in the upper room, wrote the gospel while living in Ephesus (*Haer.* 3.1.2). Even though such sources are subject to the same historical scrutiny as other ancient documents, this is a remarkable chain of historical witnesses enjoyed by no other NT book. The witness of Papias is more complicated and has been the subject of more debate, for his writings are preserved only in those of Eusebius, whose interpretation of Papias’s words raised the possibility of two men named John, one authoring the gospel and another, the elder John, the letters and the book of Revelation (*Hist. eccl.* 3.39.3–17). *Papias mentions John twice, once as a “disciple of the Lord” and again as an “elder.” But Eusebius overlooked the fact that even when Papias refers to Peter and James, he doesn’t at first call them “apostles” but “elders,” suggesting that the two titles were not mutually exclusive in Papias.*¹ [emphasis mine] But ever since the fourth century when Eusebius wrote, there has been debate in the church about the authorship of the three letters attributed in the NT to “John” and about who is buried in “John’s tomb” in Ephesus.” (Jobes)

- b) Though the Apostle John is one in the same as John the elder, this does not answer the question regarding whether or not he was married. Nowhere does the N.T. say John was single, yet nowhere does it say he was married.
- c) Church history on the other hand is unanimous that John remained single his entire life.
 - i) Early church fathers Jerome, Epiphanius, and Augustine all insist John remained celibate his entire life. Early church testimony is in fact unanimous on this point.
 - ii) John had no children, yet he had spiritual children (1 John 1:3-4; 2 John 4).

What does it mean for an elder to “rule well” his children, and have them in “subjection”?

- 1) Does it mean that his children should never significantly fail in any way at any time?
 - a) Does the Bible ever imply this is even possible? It rather implies the opposite anytime correction of children is referenced (Prov. 4:1; 8:10; 13:1; 15:5; 19:18; 20:30; 22:6,15; 23:13; 29:17; Heb. 12 etc).
 - b) What defines a failure of a child as significant enough to merit an elder’s disqualification? Where is that list of sins?
- 2) Does it not more likely refer to the overall trajectory of a child’s life, which ought to be to “do the will of their father” and follow God with their lives?
 - a) The character of the children, like the character of the elder, ought to reflect an overall trajectory of life [*i.e. expressed in the present active indicative verb, rather than an imperfect passive verb*]. We do not examine someone and set their character based on their worst day or moment, but their overall trajectory and track record of repentance & faithfulness.
 - b) Failure is to be seen as normal in the rearing of children. This seems to be the implication of Proverbs 3:12, Hebrews 12 and elsewhere, which speak of the necessity of “chastening.” Chastening occurs because failure occurs. Children need correction. *“Ruling well” certainly includes discipline, but the need of discipline indicates that there is a misbehavior in the first place. To require discipline from fathers or leaders on the one hand, and to assume the absence of misbehavior on the other hand is inconsistent.* It is not the absence of misbehavior that qualifies a man for leadership, but his handling of it.” [See online article, “Does a prodigal disqualify you from spiritual leadership?”]
- 3) In other words, “ruling well” does not require perfection of those being ruled. Rather, it is a standard of leadership required of the ruler. A ruler is to be active and intentional in his leadership, but this never guarantees those being led will submit. In fact, note how this same verb “rule” occurs in 1 Timothy 5:17, which describes the rulership of an elder over the church. We would

never imply that one errant member of the congregation disqualifies a man from ruling that congregation; the multiple passages concerning church discipline evidence that church members will walk away from God (Matt 18:15-20; 1 Cor. 5; 2 Thess. 3; 1 Tim. 1:20). Yet this never disqualifies the elder. Is it not how the elder responds to such situations that proves he is either qualified or disqualified?

4) The verb “rule” also occurs in 1 Thess. 5:12, where Paul exhorts the members of the church in Thessalonica to submit to those who rule over them. *This text states explicitly that both the ruler as well as the ruled have a responsibility in this arrangement.* In other words, a ruler cannot be held ultimately responsible for the unruliness of those he rules over (see 1 Thess. 5:12-15). This is not only true in the relationship between an elder and the congregation, but also between a father and his children.

a) John Vaughn elaborates: *“What does it mean to ‘rule well?’ Is this a man who has no disobedient member in his congregation? If one of them requires discipline, is he disqualified? To ‘rule well’ means to ‘stand in front and lead’, to set an example (as an elder) of the truth he is preaching (as a bishop).”*

b) Bob Jones III comments: *“If a preacher has a household of children who are rotten, rebellious, or lewd and dissolute, he is unqualified to preach. I’m not sure, however, if one child goes astray and the others turn out well that a preacher is disqualified. ...I think that we’re unscripturally hard on Christian fathers in ministry when one child goes bad. We don’t take into account the perfidy of the devil. It is possible for a child to go bad in spite of the best parenting and the best examples from father and mother. Each child is a free moral agent. Adam and Eve were God’s children, and they exercised their free moral choice against God and for sin in a perfect moral environment.”*

c) Wayne Grudem gives us a potent warning. *Christian leaders must treat this subject cautiously, being careful not to make pronouncements where Scripture does not do so. Otherwise, they can encourage much false guilt and a needless sense of alienation from God by requiring of people a pattern of conduct that God himself does not require and for which,*

therefore, he will not empower obedience. [Wayne Grudem, Christian Ethics: An Introduction to Biblical Moral Reasoning (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 726]

- 5) Rebellion & failure are inevitable, however, the father's and child's response to failure is paramount.
- a) Compare Hebrews 12:1-13 and note the role of a father. The father is to provide instruction and correction. The children are expected to fail, be chastened, and gradually grow to maturity.
 - b) Compare Matt 21:28-31, Jesus' parable concerning two sons. Note especially the son who evidenced open rebellion yet embraced repentance and a change of direction later. *Note the repentant rebel is still characterized as doing the "will of his father." In other words, rebellion and failure of children are inevitable, yet the overall trajectory of children is what ought be examined.*
- 6) The Bible teaches two truths regarding the parent to child relationship, which must both be held simultaneously in tension.
- a) Children are commanded to honor their parents; thus responsibility lies upon the children (Ex. 20).
 - b) Fathers are commanded to subject their children; thus responsibility lies upon the fathers (1 Tim 3).
 - c) Yet Ezekiel 18:5-13 balances these two ideas in saying that a father is not to be put to death for the children's sins, nor the children for the father's sins. Prov. 20:11 states that a child is to be held personally responsible for their own reputation.
 - d) God Himself is the perfect parent: yet even He has imperfect, rebellious children (Jer. 2:30; 5:3; 7:28; Heb 12:1-15). Does this disqualify God from being God?

Overview of Biblical Deaconship

Defining a Deacon (Acts 6:1-7)

Situation: (v. 1)

- 1) Growth in the Church: Growth [*cp. Acts 2:41 & 4:4 = 5-8,000*] from God [*cp. Acts 2:47*].
- 2) Grecian Group Neglected:
 - a) People [*“Hebrews” i.e. Israeli Jews who spoke Hebrew or Aramaic. “Hellenists” i.e. Greek speaking Jews from the Diaspora, who migrated back to Israel*]. In other words, this was an ethnic, cultural, and economic clash (*cf. Gal. 3:28*).
 - b) Problem [*neglect in the daily distribution, which was common in Judaism (see Deut. 10:18 & 15:7), but the Christians were excluded from that. The Apostles oversaw this (Acts 4:37; Gal. 2:10 & James 1:26-27; 1 Tim. 5), but were becoming too busy to do it effectively*]
 - c) Result [*“murmuring” has no root word in Greek... it is an onomatopoeia used in Exodus 16:7-12 LXX. Phil 2:14*]. Note Satan’s strategies: persecution, corruption, & now distraction.

Solution: (v. 2-6)

- 1) Apostles Led (v. 2) i.e. Confident Leadership
 - a) Defined Problem (v. 2), i.e. Disorganization & Distraction
 - b) Offered Solution (v. 3-4)
 - i) Delegation to Qualified Men (v. 3)
 - (1) *The Greek word for “serve” is where we get our English word “deacon” (Philippians 1:1 & 1 Tim. 3:8).*
 - (2) *Greek deacons & Hebrew Apostles, i.e. balanced leadership.*
 - (3) *Practical Delegation [cp. Exodus 18; Num. 27:1-8] to Spiritual men [These 3 qualifications are expanded upon in 1 Timothy 3].*

ii) Determined Personal Priorities (v. 4)

(1) Prayer [*Acts 1:14; 2:42; 3:1; 4:23-31; 1 Tim. 2:1-3*]

(2) Ministry of the Word [*Acts 2:42; 4:4, 18; 5:21, 25, 27-28; 2 Tim. 2:1-2, 15; 4:1-4; 1 Peter 5:1-4*]

(3) *OT Precedent*: “Looking on, Jethro took it on himself to give Moses some advice: “You shall represent the people before God and bring their cases to God, and you shall warn them about the statutes and the laws and make them know the way in which they must walk and what they must do” (Ex. 18:19–20). Jethro was concerned for the people, but he was first of all concerned for Moses, and he advised him to restrict himself to what he alone could do well: (1) pray and represent the people’s concerns before God, since he was the one to whom God spoke directly, and (2) teach the people the ways of God.” (Boice)

2) Congregation Approved (v. 5-6)

3) Men Appointed (v. 6)

a) Method? (cf. Acts 14:23)

i) Congregational Nomination & Election? (cf. 2 Cor. 8:19)

ii) Appointment by Existing Leadership with Congregational Approval? (cf. Titus 1:5)

b) What We Do: Leaders appoint leaders with the consent of the congregation.

c) Why We Do It this Way:

i) Scriptural Evidence: The following passages indicate that these men are either chosen, appointed, nominated, or vetoed by current leadership, Titus 1:5; Acts 14:23; 2

Corinthians 8:19. Although the process is led by the leadership, it is confirmed by corporate discernment, Acts 6:3; 13:3–4; 1 Timothy 3:2... After a time of examination, 1 Timothy 3:6, 10; 5:22-25. Perhaps after recommendation in order to determine qualification.

- ii) Historical Evidence: Compare 1 Clement 44:1-3 dating to AD 95-96, written by Clement of Rome, who might be mentioned in Philippians 4:3. This identification is supported by Eusebius (Hist. 3.15) and Origin in his John commentary 6.36. Clement states that leaders were appointed by apostles who would then appoint the next leaders with the consent of the whole church.

Success (v. 7)

1. Unity: *“the saying pleased the whole multitude...”*
2. Word Disseminated [*More teaching was done, more people hear*]
3. People Discipled [*Increase in both quantity & quality*]
4. *Priests Converted* [*This serves as the background for Stephen*]

Synthesis:

1. Just as the elders provide an example of living by Christian doctrine, so deacons provide an example of living in service. (Hansen)
2. Behind the physical care lies a second aspect of a deacon’s work: striving for the unity of the body. By caring for the widows, the deacons helped make the food distribution among these women more equitable. This was important because *physical* neglect was causing *spiritual* disunity in the body (see Acts 6:1). The deacons were appointed to head off disunity in the church. Their job was to act as the shock absorbers for the body. (Hansen)

Describing a Deacon (1 Tim. 3:8-13)

Probable Setting for 1 Timothy:

1. *After Paul's first imprisonment (AD 60-62), yet before his second imprisonment and death (c. AD 67), Paul traveled in Asia.*
2. *During his travels, he left Titus on the island of Crete, and he left Timothy in the city of Ephesus.*
3. *A transition was taking place. The Apostles were passing off the scene, and so they gave direction on how the church was to perpetuate itself from here forward...*

Purpose of 1 Timothy (3:14-15): *Orderly Arrangement of the Church of God.*

Perpetuating the Church: *i.e. describing right leadership*

1) *Elders (v. 1-7)*

2) *Deacons (v. 8-13)*

a) *Description (v. 9, 11-12)*

- i) Grave = Respectable, honorable (serves as a sort of umbrella description) "This term means worthy of respect, stately, dignified. It is a positive term, perhaps explained by the three negative phrases that follow." (Kent)
- ii) Respectable in Speech (not double tongued, lit. not having two stories) "Persons who spread conflicting tales among the congregation are not to be selected as deacons. Since the ministrations of such an officer would conceivably take him on constant rounds of visitation, a double-tongued person would spread havoc in short order. This officer must know how to bridle his tongue." (Kent)
- iii) Respectable in Self-Control (not addicted to wine)
- iv) Respectable in Priorities (love people and use money, not vice versa)
- v) Respectable in Private (good conscience consistent with the faith) "We infer that the office of deacon gave the

holder opportunity to yield to this impulse. If his work involved the distribution of alms to the needy, there was a chance for embezzlement. Anyone who has access to church finances has opportunity to act dishonestly. Erdman has stated: “Judas was not the last treasurer who betrayed his Lord for a few pieces of silver.” (Kent)

vi) Respectable in regard to the Faith.

(1) Academically, “Although the deacon is not required to have the gift of teaching, he does need to be settled in his faith.” (Kent) The “mystery” references particularly NT truth as opposed to OT truth (cf. Eph. 3:1-7; Col. 1:26).

(2) Practically, “The great truths of the faith are not to be held as theological abstractions but are to be properly employed in daily life. To hold the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience is so to live in the light of Christian truth.” (Kent)

vii) Respectable in Public (blameless [no charges stick] after being tested)

viii) Respectable in the Home (marriage and children are in good order)

b) *Examination* (v.10):

i) *Tested*:

(1) Candidates must first be tested before being selected as deacons. The verb is a present imperative (*dokimazesthōsan*)... a constant observing or testing, so that when deacons are needed, qualified ones may be nominated as candidates. Persons who have been under observation by the church for an adequate length of time can then be termed “unaccused” if no disqualifying trait has appeared.” (Kent)

- (2) Tested Character: "Character" (δοκιμή) appears 7 times in the N.T. (Rom. 5:4; 2 Cor. 2:9; 8:2; 9:13; 13:3; Phil. 2:22). It is translated "character, proven character, that which stands the test, trial, i.e. proof." "Character" is connected to the word δοκιμάζω, which means to "tested by fire, and evidenced as genuine" (2 Cor. 13:5; Phil 1:10; 1 Thess. 2:4; 5:21; 1 Tim. 3:10; 1 Peter 1:7; 1 John 4:1). A person's character is something developed over time through various trials (note use of δοκιμή in Rom. 5:1-5). Cf. the life of Timothy is an illustration (Phil. 2:22). Failure along the way is expected, however, the habit of recognizing sin, repenting of it, and seeking restoration ought to be the pattern of life of a given candidate.
- (3) Blamelessness: what it is not... "Blameless" does not mean a charge is never brought (cf. 1 Tim 5:17-25), but that if a charge is brought it cannot be proven to be a part of their character. "Blameless" does not mean sinless. At the end of his life David claims to be "blameless" (Ps. 18:20-29). We know David was not sinless, however, David was blameless. "Sinlessness" refers to one never having done wrong. "Blamelessness" refers to having done wrong, but getting it right, and never "wickedly departing from God" (Ps. 18:21). "Wickedly departing from God" parallels the unrepentant, high handed sins of Num. 15:22-31. cf. Acts 3:17; 13:27; 17:30; 1 Tim. 1:13; Heb 9:7.
- (4) Blameless: what it is... "Blamelessness" pertains to what cannot be criticized—'above criticism, beyond reproach.' One Gk. synonym literally means "not to be taken hold upon" or "irreproachable." Just like Daniel in OT times (cf. LXX of Dan 6:4), this person must be a man of integrity against whom no legitimate charge can be brought.

- (5) "Blameless" is the overarching description that serves as an umbrella word for the whole passage (cf. synonyms in v. 2 & 10). The remaining qualifications serve to flesh out this overarching quality. Thus, the qualifications of 1 Timothy 3 describe an overall character of life evidenced over time, [*i.e. a trajectory of life*], not momentary instances of success or failure in any one category.
- (6) Helpful Quote from Jay Smith: *"While past sins can affect one's present status, this effect need not be permanent, for one's character is not fixed and immutable but changes as one either matures or regresses. Thus, there seems to be little reason to assume that past sins must permanently render one blameworthy. In fact, to subscribe to such a position ignores the possibility of genuine repentance, forgiveness, and spiritual growth, and assumes the questionable position of "once blameworthy, always blameworthy."*
- ii) *Selected*: in an attempt to follow this command, we will recommend the candidates and then give the congregation 1 months to get to know these men, and come to the elders if there are any concerns.
- c) *Compensation/Outcome* (v. 13):
- i) These men purchase to themselves an honorable standing in the church and gain the right to be heard.
- ii) "They can expect to be recognized for their faithful service—and great boldness in the faith (cf. 2 Cor 3:12; 7:4; Phlm 8). These benefits, rather than financial gain, should be rewards for faithful service in the church." (Kostenberger)
- iii) "Boldness in the Faith" might reference evangelism (cf. Stephen, Acts 6), or perhaps prayer (cf. Heb. 4:16).

Duty of a Deacon:

General

1) *NT Evidence for the Existence of Deacons:*

- a) Deacons and elders (= pastors/overseers/bishops) are the two ongoing church offices taught in the New Testament (Cf. Phil 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:1-13).
- b) Some biblical scholars emphasize a relationship between the *hazzan* of the Jewish synagogue and the Christian office of deacon. The *hazzan* opened and closed the synagogue doors, kept it clean, and handed out the books for reading. It was to such a person that Jesus handed the scroll of Isaiah after finishing his reading (Lk 4:20). (Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible)

2) *Historic Evidence for the Existence of Deacons:*

- a) *1 Clement* 42:4 asserts that the apostles “appointed their first fruits, when they had tested them by the Spirit, to be bishops and deacons for the future believers” (Holmes).
- b) *Didache* 15:1 calls for approved overseers and deacons to be “men who are humble and not avaricious and true and approved, for they too carry out for you the ministry of the prophets and teachers” (Holmes; compare Polycarp, *To the Philippians* 5:2). (LBD)
- c) The requisites for the choice of deacons fit those required for the administration of congregational funds and for house-to-house visitation, two functions typically ascribed to the deacon in patristic literature (Hippolytus, *The Apostolic Tradition* 9, 21, 23–25, 30). (Zondervan Encyclopedia of the Bible)
- d) Christian meetings were already beginning to look a lot like our liturgy today. By the middle 100s, St. Justin Martyr was able to describe the usual course of a Christian meeting: they gathered and read “the memoirs of the Apostles and the writings of the prophets.” Then there was a homily. Then the congregation stood and prayed. After the prayer, bread, wine, and water were brought in, and the leader

spoke a prayer. After that, the bread and mixed wine were distributed. Later the “deacons” would take the bread and wine to members who couldn’t make it to the meeting. (cf. *First Apology*, 65–67).

Specific (word study on *diakonos* & *diakoneō*)

- 1) *Secular Greek Usage*. References have been found in extrabiblical writings where the Greek word “deacon” meant “waiter,” “servant,” “steward,” or “messenger.” In at least two instances it indicated a baker and a cook. In religious usage the word described various attendants in pagan temples. (Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible)
- 2) *NT Usage*. The same word was used by biblical writers in a general sense to describe various ministries or services.
 - a) The translation “deacon” (Gk. *Diakonos*) occurs in only two passages in most translations of the NT (Phil. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:8–13). But the Greek word *diakonos* from which it is taken is found 30 times. (Nelson’s New Illustrated Bible Dictionary)
 - b) The Greek noun *diakonos* G1356 was a common term for “servant, assistant, messenger.” It and its cognates (*diakonia* G1355, verb *diakoneō* G1354) are used with reference to table waiters (Lk. 22:26–27; Jn. 2:5, 9), royal servants (Matt. 22:13), service or ministry in general (Mk. 10:43–45 [Jesus]; Acts 1:17, 25 [apostles]; Rom. 11:13 [Paul]). (Zondervan Encyclopedia of the Bible)
 - c) The verb form of this Greek word is *diakoneo*. There is a strong tendency of this verb (*diakoneo*) to refer to the kind of serving that involves very practical acts of supplying physical or material needs (cf. Matt. 4:11; 8:15; Luke 8:3; 10:40).
 - d) The noun *diakonia* is used of financial aid (2 Cor. 8:4; 11:8; Rom. 15:25; see contribution), of benevolence gifts (Acts 6:1), and of personal assistance with regard to temporal

needs or in evangelistic and missionary efforts (Acts 19:22; 1 Cor. 6:15; 2 Tim. 4:11; Rev. 2:19).

- e) In the judgment described in Matt. 25:31–46, the Son of Man will separate the sheep from the goats on the basis of service (cf. *diakoneō* in v. 44). From Matthew 25:44 we could include dire needs arising from hunger, thirst, alienation, nakedness, sickness, imprisonment. That would imply that the basic notion of “serving” in the sense of being a deacon is to help meet needs for
 - i) food
 - ii) water
 - iii) acclimatization
 - iv) clothing
 - v) health
 - vi) and whatever needs arise from emergencies (like imprisonment).

Summary:

- 1) In later centuries the deacons were involved in administering goods to the poor, assisting in the ordinances of baptism and the Lord’s Supper, and performing other ministerial and administrative tasks. Some have suggested that the qualification of not being double-tongued [hypocritical, HCSB] (1 Tim. 3:8) perhaps indicates close contact with church members in home visitations. Others maintain that the requirement of not being greedy (1 Tim. 3:8) indicates that deacons were responsible for collecting and distributing funds. (Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary)
- 2) “It would seem, then, that the deacon office exists to assist the leadership of the church by relieving the elders of distractions and pressures that would divert them from the ministry of the Word and prayer and the general, visionary oversight of the

church. Thus, it would seem that deacons would care for the building and grounds; supply the communion and baptismal needs, as well as all other food and fellowship materials; administer a fund for the manifold material needs of the people and be ready to step in during crises of all kinds; handle the greeting and welcoming ministries; provide practical assistance in job-hunting, housing matters, legal-aid, child-care, etc. In general, they would be ready to assist the elders of the church in any “service” that would support and promote the ministry of the Word.” (Piper)

Philosophy of Stewardship

- “Stewardship” has to do with how the church views and manages the resources God has given it.
- Note several principles regarding stewardship from the parable of Jesus found in Matt. 25:14-30.

Principles of Stewardship:

1. Stewardship is a trust (Mt 25:14).
2. A steward doesn’t own the property (Mt 25:14).
3. The owner does as he wishes with his property (Mt 25:15; Rom 14:4,8).
4. Stewards face accountability (Mt 25:19; Rom 14:12).
5. Faithfulness will be the standard of accounting (Mt 25:21, 23; 1 Cor 4:2).
6. Great faithfulness brings greater privileges, responsibilities (Mt 25:21, 23b).

7. Privilege unused is privilege removed; note the tragedy of wasted opportunity (Mt 25:24-29).

The Mindset of a Steward We must learn to adopt the biblical mindset of a steward (cf. Proverbs 16:4; Colossians 1:17; Revelation 4:11; 1 Corinthians 4:1–7; 15:28)

1. God is the source and sustainer of all things animate & inanimate, not only in creation, but in my life. All I am, and all I have comes from God, and is sustained by Him. My existence, my health, abilities, environment, opportunities, accomplishments, hardships, relationships, destiny, joys, and sorrows!
2. I am a steward: I'm not an owner, not an originator, but a receiver... I ought to employ all things with Thanksgiving (1 Timothy 4:3; Romans 14:6; James 1:17), whether good or bad, painful or pleasurable. I ought to employ all things that I have been given. I must exercise my talents, abilities, invest my resources, and care for people and serve them (1 Pt. 4:9-10). I lastly, I must return all things completely back to God! It is all from him and through him, so it got returned back to him. He can give, and he can take away. All is for his glory! I must offer it back to him, put it on the altar, and relinquish control (1 Cor. 15:27-28).

What Does that Mean Practically?

- This mindset of good stewardship fleshes out in several practical areas and governs how we handle our resources here at RMBC.

Practicality of Stewardship:

1. Thank God for what we have but also trust that He will provide whatever else we need. So, this means we do not have regular sermons on money. We only address giving when it comes up in a particular text.

2. The elders don't track who gives money and how much individuals give. We don't chase people down and ask for more money. There is an offering box in the back and what you give to the church is between you and God. We don't look over your shoulder or micromanage!
3. We also seek to use the resources we have and do not want to just pile up a giant nest egg and wait for a rainy day! We want to support missions, show benevolence, invest in our people, and promote the cause of Christ around the world. If we have more, we spend more. If we have less, we spend less.
4. While we seek to use our resources, we do not want to go into debt doing so. We thank God for what we have and trust God for the future. We don't want to become a slave to the lender. If we don't have the money for a project, we don't do the project.
5. On the one hand we try to take good care of our facilities and be a good testimony in how things appear. Yet on the other hand we are not afraid to use them! We are not afraid of children playing, coffee spilling, or things breaking. We want our buildings to be full of life! The buildings are for the people, the people are not for the buildings!
6. We promote accountability in how the funds are gathered, counted, recorded, managed, and spent. Multiple people are involved in each process. Several checks and balances help prevent the misuse, abuse, or embezzlement of church funds.
 - a) Our elder board sets the budget and makes big decisions on spending.
 - b) Yet our deacon board does all the gathering and counting of money.
 - c) Our treasurer does all the recording and balances the books.
 - d) We do an annual business meeting with a fully detailed budget and walk through the spending of the church line by line.

- e) Spending requires two signers per check. Our bank authorized check signers are made up of both deacons and elders.
 - f) The paid staff do not set their own salaries. The unpaid elders decide what the salaries will be for the paid staff.
7. We also encourage and help provide biblical instruction for individual families to find financial freedom for themselves so that they too can participate in what the church is doing on behalf of others and the Gospel. The church cannot go forward unhindered financially if the individual families are in financial bondage. Therefore, the church will provide financial counseling if & when desired.

Philosophy of Worship

A PRACTICAL APPROACH TO WORSHIP AND MUSIC

Music That Glorifies God

“Music styles became an issue largely to one significant problem: with the rise of secular culture in the 1800’s, people began to compartmentalize their lives. Certain things were viewed as holy and sacred while others were secular and neutral. Prior to that time religion dominated life. Everything in culture and society was viewed through ‘religion glasses.’ Soon, the rise of technology and mass media, popular culture began to dominate, and musical styles began to reflect the ever-increasing sinful secular worldview.” (Scott Ariol)

Make Choices that Glorify God

1. Reject music that clearly communicates unwholesome messages.
2. Ask honest questions about what the music communicates.
3. Apply biblical principles and make God-glorifying decisions.

Once we have eliminated clearly wrong music and asked all the right questions, we must take one more step. Remember, we are not asking the question, ‘What’s wrong with this music’ but ‘what’s right with this music.’

1. Is the music beneficial? (Ephesians 4:29)
2. Does the music risk failing to bring glory to God? (1 Corinthians 10:31)
3. Does the music offend others? (Romans 14:13-19)
4. Does the music control you? (1 Cor. 6:12)

Congregational Worship Music

Congregational worship music should be God-oriented

- God must be the center of the service. Because the Bible is our only objective source of truth about God, Scriptural truth about God should be the content of congregational worship. Worship is not about us – it is about God. *It is therefore necessary that music used in congregational worship be God-oriented.*

Congregational worship should be doctrine-oriented.

- Music that is trite and shallow may be fun to sing, but it is not appropriate for congregational worship. This is a time when believers are given to understanding and acknowledging sound doctrine.

Congregational worship music should be affection-oriented

- “True, affectionate responses of worship will be based on an intellectual understanding of truth and will not be fleeting passion that has quickly risen and will soon vanish. Because the very nature of worship is response to truth, the music used should develop deep affections for God and not simply emotional passions” (Scott Aniol).

Congregational worship should be congregation-oriented.

- The church meeting together is a gathering of believers who worship God together. The congregational worship service offers a distinct opportunity not to worship individually, but corporately. The result of such worship is a *unified* response toward God. Therefore, music used in congregational worship should be limited to songs that express objective truth that applies to all Christians.
- Music that glorifies God is that which helps believers become more Christ-like. It is music that will not cause others to stumble and will not risk failing to bring God glory.

Psalm 149:1 Praise ye the LORD. Sing unto the LORD a new song, *and* his praise in the congregation of saints.

Psalm 22:22 I will declare thy name unto my brethren: in the midst of the congregation will I praise thee.

Psalm 89:5 And the heavens shall praise thy wonders, O LORD: thy faithfulness also in the congregation of the saints.

Psalm 111:1 Praise ye the LORD, I will praise the LORD with *my* whole heart, in the assembly of the upright, and *in* the congregation.

Hebrews 2:12 Saying, I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee.

Philosophy of Worship

1. Motives for Worship

2. Defining Worship
3. Forms of Public Worship
4. Fundamentals of Worship
5. Functions of Worship
6. Flow of Public Worship

Motives for Worship

1. Created to Worship (Is. 43:7, 21)
2. Commanded to Worship (Ps. 22:23; 135:1; 150:6)
3. Called to Worship (Phil. 3:3)
4. Compelled to Worship (Ps. 116:1-2)
5. Destined to Worship (Rev. 4-5; 14:6-7; 19:10; 22:3, 8-9)

Defining Worship

Defining worship is a notoriously difficult task. McGee put it this way...

Attempting to define worship is a problem much the same as that of the soldier stationed on the West Coast, when his mother, a native of Kansas, wrote, saying, "When you come home, please bring a souvenir that will tell me something of the Pacific Ocean which I have heard so much about." So, when he went home, he took her a bottle of sea water. Now that bottle of sea water may have said something about the ocean, but it told nothing of its vastness, of the breakers along the shore, nothing of the beauty of the sunlight on the whitecaps. It told nothing of the things of the deep, of the breeze that gently hovers. Neither can mere words adequately define the subject before us: worship. (McGee)

The most commonly used word for worship in the New Testament is the Greek word *proskuneō*, which means "to kiss toward."

- Charles Ryrie states that kissing the earth was an act done historically to honor the deities of the earth, as well as lying down flat in reverence. (Charles Ryrie, *Basic Theology* (Colorado Springs: Victor, 1986), 428.)
- Our English word *worship* is a shortened form of “worthship,” which means to attribute worth to whatever we are worshipping.
- This word signifies submissive lowliness and deep respect. (Ralph P. Martin, *Worship in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 11.) (cf. Ps. 96:5-8).

Most basically, the primary words for *worship* in both Hebrew & Greek refer to the posture of bowing down, either in a kneeling position, or prostration on the ground.

- a. The posture itself is also used in secular, non-religious contexts where one shows respect or deference to another (Gen. 18:2; 19:1; 23:7).
- b. In religious contexts worship does not merely refer to posture, but more specifically the posture of the heart, i.e., the attitude, which then shapes action (cf. esp. Matt. 4:8-10, “fall down and worship me”).

Important Occurrences of the word, “Worship” throughout the Bible:

Gen. 22:5; 24:26, 48, 52; Ex. 4:31; 12:27; 24:1; 33:10; 34:8, 14; Deut. 26:10; 2 Chron. 7:3; Neh. 8:6; 9:3, 6; Job 1:20; Matt. 14:33; 28:9; Rev. 4:10; 5:14; 19:4, 9-10.

- Trace the idea through the passages above and note how worship is both an action and reaction. Sometimes it is initiated by people toward God, and sometimes it is a reaction by people after God has done something.
- Ross says this concerning worship. *“If we even begin to comprehend his glorious nature, we cannot. We will be caught away from our worldly experience and transported in our spirits to realms of glory. We will be overwhelmed by the thought of being in his presence, tremble at the thought of hearing what he*

has to say to us and be amazed at the thought that we can speak to him, and he will listen! How can we not desire to transcend the ordinary routine by entering his courts to praise and glorify him above the profane things we so eagerly value? ... For worship to be as glorious as it should be, for it to lift people out of their mundane cares and fill them with adoration and praise, for it to be the life-changing and life-defining experience it was designed to be, it must be inspired by a vision so great and so glorious that what we call worship will be transformed from a routine gathering into a transcendent meeting with the living God.”

A Working Definition:

Worship is both the action of ascribing ultimate worth to God and the attitude of holy wonder of God.

a. Objective & Subjective Sides of Worship

- i. *Objectively*, worship is the posture of submission to God’s revelation of Himself.
- ii. *Experientially*, the result of worship is the purpose of celebration and jubilation that wells up within me in response to God’s revelation of Himself.

b. The Subjective Side of Worship:

- i. It would be very difficult to draw a line between holy wonder and *real worship*; for when the soul is overwhelmed with the majesty of God’s glory, though it may not express itself in song, or even utter its voice with bowed head in humble prayer, yet it silently adores. Holy wonder will lead you to *grateful worship* and *heartfelt thanksgiving*. It will cause within you *godly watchfulness*; you will be afraid to sin against such a love as this. (Spurgeon)
- ii. According to George Barna research, eight out of every 10 believers do not feel they have entered into the presence of God, or experience a connection with him,

during the worship service. Half of all believers say they do not feel they have entered into the presence of God or experienced a genuine connection with him during the past year. (Rory Noland)

- iii. Should we not remind ourselves that worship is a TRANSITIVE verb [a verb that requires a direct object]? We do not meet to worship (i.e., to experience worship): we aim to worship GOD. “Worship the Lord your God and serve him only”: there is the heart of the matter. In this area, one must not confuse what is central with byproducts. If you seek peace, you will not find it; if you seek Christ, you will find peace. If you seek joy, you will not find it; if you seek Christ, you will find joy. If you seek holiness, you will not find it; if you seek Christ, you will find holiness. If you seek experiences of worship, you will not find them; if you worship the living God, you will experience something of what is reflected in the Psalms. Worship is a transitive verb, and the most important thing about it is the direct object. (D. A. Carson)
- iv. In the same way that, according to Jesus, you cannot find yourself until you lose yourself, so also you cannot find excellent corporate worship until you stop trying to find excellent corporate worship and pursue God himself. Despite the protestations, one sometimes wonders if we are beginning to worship *worship* rather than worship *God*. As a brother put it to me, it’s a bit like those who begin by admiring the sunset and soon begin to admire themselves admiring the sunset. (D. A. Carson)
- v. It is appropriate to ask whether there is much genuine, deep, heartfelt worship in our churches. In many evangelical churches people do not truly worship God in their hearts until the last hymn, after the sermon has focused their attention on who God is so that they begin to rejoice in God with a heart full of praise. (Wayne A. Grudem)

- vi. Helpful Illustration (Tim Keller), contemplative, transforming worship is kind of like great family time. When we spend time as a family, sometimes we have quality time amidst quantity time...
- vii. Another illustration (Daniel McCoy), we have a liturgy when we go to the gym, we don't merely go haphazard, or we will never have results. Yet sometimes we have a really great workout!

Forms of Public Worship

1. There is a lot of debate today regarding the “form” of worship... does the Bible even speak to this issue or are we entirely free to do as we will?
2. The fact that some worship in the Old Testament was regarded as unacceptable to God (*e.g.*, Gn. 4:3–7; Ex. 32; Lev. 10; Is. 1), is a reminder that what is impressive or seems appropriate to us may be offensive to him. When New Testament writers talk about acceptable worship, they similarly imply that there are attitudes and activities that are definitely not pleasing to God (*e.g.* Rom. 12:1–2; 14:17–18; Heb. 12:28–29; 13:16). (Peterson)
3. Dan Kimball claims, “First, one really cannot make a case from the Scriptures for what a worship gathering should specifically look like. We have very limited knowledge of or specific guidelines on what should occur in a worship gathering. We see glimpses of things such as teaching, prayer, song, Communion, and so forth. However, our knowledge is limited and not detailed.”
4. I would humbly disagree. The Scriptures do give us an interesting pattern to follow in Nehemiah 8-9... the pattern seen here became the basis for the synagogue that developed on into the NT era. The synagogue then became the pattern for the early Christian church (cf. James 2:2).

Scriptural Pattern for Worship:

1. Corporate Gathering (Neh. 8:1-4)

2. Reading Scripture (Neh. 8:5-8; 9:3)
3. Teaching Scripture (Neh. 8:5-8)
4. Confessing Sin (Neh. 9:2-3, 16-29, cf. James 1:19-25)
5. Singing Praises & Playing Music/Instruments cf. Neh. 9:27 (Ps. 105-107 were probably written here on this occasion in Neh. 8-9. Note esp. Neh. 10:28, “singers.”)
6. Praying (Neh. 9 is primarily addressed to God)
7. Testifying of God’s Deeds (Neh. 9:5-15, 30-38)
8. Renewing Covenant Commitment (Neh. 9:36-38)

Fundamental Responses in Worship

1. Intellectual Response (Neh. 8:1-8). The term “understanding” appears 6x in Neh. 8.
2. Emotional Response (Neh. 8:9-12).
3. Volitional Response (Neh. 8:13-18). cf. James 1:21-25.
4. Worshipful Response (Neh. 9).

Functions of Worship

1. Adoration of Who God is (Neh. 9:5-15)
2. Confession of who we are (Neh. 8:9-12; 9:2-3)
3. Celebration of what God has done [Joy & Gladness (Neh. 8:10, 17; 9:5-29)]
4. Anticipation of what God will do (“Thy Kingdom Come” cf. Neh. 9:30-38)
5. Devotion of our lives to God in service (Neh. 9:36-38)

Flow of Public Worship

1. Attention: Corporate Gathering & Call to Attention
2. Revelation: Hear & Understand the Scripture: The term “understanding” appears 6x in Neh. 8. “Revelation” is primarily found in the Scripture but can also be emphasized in songs about the Scripture.
3. Conviction: Be Moved to Conviction by the Scripture
4. Confession & Cleansing: Receive the Cleansing Offered by the Scripture
5. Dedication: Respond in Obedience to the Scripture
6. Celebration: Celebrate (via song, prayer, or the Lord’s supper) the Blessing that Cleansing & Obedience Bring.

Note that these elements are the result of the prior elements. In other words, our subjective experience of worship is the result of our objective pursuit of God and ascribing Him the glory due unto His name...

These subjective elements are normally experienced during the sermon, particularly the end of the sermon, in the closing song, the closing prayer, or the celebration of the ordinances of baptism or the Lord’s Supper.

Music in Public Worship

We must make a distinction, however, between style and form. While the biblical form must be constantly followed, there will be different styles, there will be different languages, there will be a different vernacular for each people, and there will be different contexts, but the essential marks of true Christian worship must always be present. (Mohler, *SBJT* 2:4 (Winter 1998) p. 15)

Music in the Bible:

1. Importance of Music
2. Survey of Music in the Bible
3. Survey of Music in Church History
4. Core Issue Involved
5. Synthesizing Biblical Principles
6. RMBC Preferences

Though often a matter of great controversy, music has long held an important place in the history of Israel and the NT church.

Importance of Music

- a. Music is a powerful medium to pass on knowledge... Just think about the “ABC song,” which most of us learned before we could read. We learned the song in order to learn how to read!
- b. Music is also a powerful portal to our emotions... “Love, joy, sadness, glory—these are things that words struggle to express, but music handles naturally. You’re watching a movie: Why do the strings swell in the big love scene? Why are there deep bass notes when the villain makes his appearance? Why do the brasses blare when the special effects get bright and sparkly? It’s because music is the shortest route to the deepest emotions.”
- c. Yet with great power, comes great responsibility! Music has long been a matter of great controversy in Christianity, from the earliest days, until today. The primary reason for this is the Christian’s attempt to fulfill Christ’s exhortation to be “in the world, but not of the world” (cf. John 17:15-16). *In other words, how do we use music for the glory of God, while also maintaining a distinct difference from the worldly abuses of music that are all around us?*

Music in the OT

Every facet of Israel's life and every stage of its history were marked by music. Indeed, the Israelites excelled in music, perhaps more than any of their contemporaries, and nowhere more so than in their corporate worship.

- a. Music was present when people greeted each other and said farewell (Gen 31:27; Lk 15:25), when they married and were buried (Jer. 7:34; 48:36), when they went off to war and were welcomed back from it (Judg. 20:34; Is 30:32). From the least to the greatest, biblical people sang and played instruments (1 Sam 16:18; Job 30:31). At the everyday level we find romantic songs, working songs and drinking songs (Song 1:9–17; 2:15; Is 21:11–12; 22:13; Ezek. 33:32). Major events in the life of the people, such as the exodus from Egypt, conquering the Canaanites, recapturing the ark, dedicating the temple, crowning the king, and returning from exile, were celebrated in music and song. [Leland Ryken et al., *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 576.]
- b. From the beginning, music and song were at the heart of temple worship (2 Sam 6:5, 14; 1 Kings 10:12; 1 Chron 15:15–16), a tradition that continued when the second temple was built (2 Chron 29:25; 35:15; Neh. 7:1; 12:27–43). The scale on which this took place was impressive (1 Chron 15:19–21; 16:4–6, 39–42; 23:5–8; 2 Chron 5:12–13; Ezra 3:10–11). There were string, wind, and percussion instruments. The number of personnel required by this extravaganza and the overwhelming atmosphere of joy and festivity are beautifully captured in several passages (e.g., Ps 68:24–27; 149; 150). All this is seen as a natural or fitting response to what God has done for his people, whether corporately (Ps 147:1) or individually (Ps 13:6; 27:5–6; 71:20–23). This role of music and song was continued in the early church (Acts 16:25; 1 Cor 14:14–15, 26; Eph 4:19; Col 3:16). [Ibid.]

Although virtually all biblical references to music are positive, there is also an acknowledgment of the sinful use of music in a pagan setting (cf. Is. 5:11).

- a. Isaiah 5:11 is quoting an old song he expects his listeners to remember, since he introduces it by saying, “It will happen to Tyre as in the song of the harlot.”
- b. Amos denounces a culture for whom the music of religious ritual has become a substitute for the exercise of justice and righteousness (Amos 5:23–24). Amos also paints a picture of a decadent society whose music is part of an indulgent lifestyle that ignores social oppression (Amos 6:4–6). Isaiah paints a similar picture of indulgence as a substitute for the fear of the Lord (Is 5:11–12). The foil to these pictures of music as an index to decadence is the vibrancy of the pictures (found especially in the Psalms) of music as the expression of heartfelt devotion to God. [Leland Ryken et al., *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 577–578.]

Music in Paganism

Music had a prominent role in paganism...

- 1) Alluring someone into the grasp of a harlot (Aphrodite & Ishtar worship)
- 2) Manipulating the gods into doing your bidding or attracting & repelling demonic spirits.
- 3) Numbing someone into acts of sadistic masochism and self mutilation (Cybele worship)
- 4) Driving someone to extreme acts of sacrificing their own children (Molech worship)

This is one of the things we must understand if we want to understand why most of the early Christians were so fiercely opposed to instrumental music of any kind...

- a. Think about our own culture for a moment. What do Christian moralists complain about? Our entertainment is full of sex and

violence. It promotes immoral behavior as the norm and winks at even the most outlandish perversions. Drugs and booze make concerts into orgies. Popular music encourages our worst behavior. All this was true of popular entertainment two thousand years ago, too, except that it was probably worse—and all shot through with idolatry, since every kind of popular entertainment had something to do with pagan religion... The violence, for example, was real. People went to the “games,” as they were called, to watch men—and sometimes women—kill each other. To make the action more exciting, it was accompanied by loud music—Aquilina. 35-36.

- b. The theater was dominated by storylines in which adultery was the norm and getting away with it the happy ending. Like our musical comedies today, these plays were full of catchy tunes that people sang for days after they walked out of the theater. Often the lyrics were vulgar or obscene, but everybody was singing them... And of course there were the numerous mystery cults, many of which—like the cult of Cybele—relied on exciting music to put people in the right mood for the mysteries, which often ended in some sort of orgy. Ibid. 36-37.

Music in the New Testament Church:

- a. Cf. Jesus and His disciples singing “a hymn” in Matt. 26:30. Probably the traditional psalms of thanksgiving sung at a Passover meal, cf. Psalms 114–118.
- b. Colossians 3:16 tells us that the early Christians did sing, in case we had any doubt about that. But second, look at the context. The Colossians are supposed to be singing as part of teaching and admonishing one another. The music conveys the message.
- c. “Hymns” were a familiar idea to any formerly pagan Gentile Christian. Greek and Roman pagans wrote hymns to their gods, and it would seem natural that Christians would pick up the practice and apply it to their own needs. Many Bible scholars think they can identify very early Christian hymns in the letters preserved in the New Testament. For example, Paul signals that he’s quoting *something* in Ephesians 5:14: But it’s not any Scripture we know. Then what is it? There’s a good chance Paul

is quoting a hymn the church in Ephesus would know—a very early Christian hymn not otherwise preserved.

- d. Cf. 2 Timothy 2:11-13 & 1 Timothy 3:16. As Ruth Ellis Messenger (a twentieth-century hymnologist) explains, we can recognize these hymns by their progression: “Certain digressions in the Epistles, in which formulas of belief or of praise rise to a sure and effective climax, have the qualities of sustained hymns.” Ruth E. Messenger, *Christian Hymns of the First Three Centuries* (New York: Hymn Society of America, 1942), 7.

Music in Church History

Presence of Hymnody:

- i. Pliny: The earliest authentic record on this subject is the celebrated letter from Pliny to Trajan, just at the close of the apostolic age (A.D. 103, 104). In the investigations which he instituted against the Christians of his period, he discovered, among other things, that they were accustomed to meet before day to offer praise to Christ (*Epist.* x, 97).
- ii. Tertullian, only a century later, evidently understood the passage from Pliny to be descriptive of this mode of worshipping God and Christ, for he says that Pliny intended to express nothing else than assemblies before the dawn of the morning for singing praise to Christ and to God (*Apol.* c. 2).
- iii. Eusebius also gives the same passage a similar interpretation, saying that Pliny could find nothing against them save that, arising at the dawn of the morning, they sang hymns to Christ as God (*Hist. Ecclesiast.* iii, 32).
- iv. Justin Martyr also, who lived within half a century of the apostles, and is himself credited with being the author of a work on Christian Psalmody, mentions the songs and hymns of the Ephesian Christians: “We manifest our gratitude to him by worshipping him in spiritual songs and hymns, praising him for our birth, for our health, for the vicissitudes of the seasons, and for the hopes of immortality” (*Apol.* v, 28). Justin Martyr was able to describe the usual course of a Christian meeting: they

gathered and read “the memoirs of the Apostles and the writings of the prophets.” Then there was a homily. Then the congregation stood and prayed. After the prayer, bread, wine, and water were brought in and the leader spoke a prayer. After that, the bread and mixed wine were distributed.

- v. Irenaeus: Eusebius, moreover, furnishes this important testimony of an ancient historian at the close of the 2d century: “Who knows not the writings of Irenæus, Melito, and others, which exhibit Christ as God and man? And *how many songs and odes of the brethren there are*, written from the beginning (ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς) by believers, which offer praise to Christ as the Word of God, ascribing divinity to him!” (*Eccles. Hist.* v, 28).
- vi. Already, then, while the Apostles were still alive, the Christian Church was developing its own distinctive styles of music, in addition to the ones inherited from the ancient tradition of Israel. But which kinds of music were good for “building up,” for edification, as Paul would say? Should Christians imitate the extravagant chorus and orchestra that accompanied the Temple sacrifices? Should they dance to wild music like their pagan neighbors? It wouldn’t be easy to answer those questions. In fact, we’re still struggling with some of them today. Aquilina, 51-52.

Questions over Music:

- i. Clement of Alexandria (who lived in the late 100s) believed that the music led inevitably to indecency. “When you spend your time with flutes and psalteries and choruses and dancing and Egyptian krotala and other such inappropriate things, you’ll discover that impropriety and rudeness are the result.” Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor* 2.4.
- ii. The human voice alone, then, was what most of the Fathers of the Church preferred to hear in worship. But even voices could be arranged in complicated harmonies, and most Christian leaders didn’t want those. Instead, they said, the whole congregation should be “speaking with one voice” when they

sang. It should sound like one person singing when the whole congregation joined in. Aquilina, 61.

- iii. Gradual change ensued in Christian worship over the second and third centuries. However, the fourth century, with the changes in the legality of Christianity under Emperor Constantine, witnessed mammoth shifts in Christian liturgy. [J. Ligon Duncan et al., *Perspectives on Christian Worship: 5 Views*, ed. J. Matthew Pinson (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2009), 2–3.]

Basil vs. Bardaisan

- 1) Some Christian leaders like Basil utilized music to teach true doctrine.
 - a) St. Basil the Great was famous for his sermons, but he thought no one would remember them. (He was a little too modest there, because we still read them today.)
 - b) But he was sure the congregation would remember the melody of the Responsorial Psalm and go home singing it. The words would go with the tune, and the message of the words would stay with those people forever.
- 2) Some heretics like Bardaisan utilized music to teach false doctrine.
 - a) Bardaisan (or Bardesanes) was the leader of one of the most successful [heretical] sects, and it was successful because he had hit on a very good way of promoting it. He was a talented poet and composer—Bardaisan set his poems to tunes so catchy that pretty soon everybody was singing them. The message went with the melodies, and Bardaisan’s odd ideas went percolating through the Christian community in Edessa.
 - b) This resulted in added suspicion and retreat from music among many Christian groups. In fact, one story from the 600s tells us how a whole monastery packed up its relics and left because the monks could hear children singing in the newly built school nearby. See Quasten, *Music and Worship*, 97.
 - c) Other Christians weren’t willing to give up the joy and comfort of singing, but they retreated to the safety of Scripture. In the

300s, the bishops of western Asia Minor prohibited *psalmoi idiotikoi* in the liturgy: only psalms from Scripture could be used (*Canons of the Council of Laodicea* 49). This was just when the Arian heresy was booming, and many of the “private psalms” circulating must have been suspect in their theology... The heretics were spreading falsehood with music everywhere.

3) Settling on a Majority Opinion:

- a) Ambrose of Milan’s hymns were his biggest contribution to church music. He found a way to compose hymns that everyone could sing together and remember, but that at the same time would satisfy the most refined literary tastes. He beat the Arians at their own game. Ambrose created songs with short lines and catchy rhythms. But Ambrose’s strong background in classical poetry made his hymns as appealing to the intellectual elite as they were to the ordinary Christian in the street.
- b) “The Milan Moment” was when Ambrose stood against the order of the emperor to turn over his Catholic Basilica to the Arians. When soldiers were sent to take the basilica, Ambrose led his congregation in song inside the barricaded building. The soldiers did not attack, and the emperor rescinded his order. The power of music prevailed!
- c) Ambrose’s hymns set the fashion for most of the great Christian hymns to come: short, rhythmic lines in regular stanzas with simple but memorable tunes. Almost all the Church hymns written in Latin through most of the Middle Ages rely on Ambrose’s eight-syllable meter. Ambrose had found a very effective formula for spreading the Christian message.
- d) Augustine, who was converted to Christianity after hearing Ambrose’s famously eloquent sermons, himself would go on to become one of the great figures in Christian music—but for a different reason. Ambrose showed us how Christian music could be done. Augustine had a theory that explained why and how it worked...

- e) Augustine’s conversion happened in the year 387; by 390 he had written most of an extensive treatise on music... Almost every Latin writer on music uses the term “modulate” (*modulari*), which means to measure. From that meaning it gets the meanings of singing music or playing a musical instrument. And it sounds like a good use of the term: you have to be very precise to make the music sound good. You have to hit the pitch exactly, and you have to hold the notes for exactly the right times... all music was based on mathematics.
- f) Now, if music is an application of pure mathematics, then it is something more than a sensual pleasure. It’s an insight into the mind of the Creator, who made all things with mathematics... If we use music properly in worship, then, it directs our thoughts to the higher things on which we should be focused. Music can lead us in either direction, upward or downward.
- g) [Augustine] gave the Church a way of thinking (a philosophy) about music. Because he had suffered all those doubts about the value of music... *From Augustine’s time on, music would be an accepted part of the liturgy with a firm justification behind it. It wasn’t that music itself was dangerous; it was only that we had to find the right use of music to produce the right effect—to lead us upward rather than downward.* We could all have that beautiful and life-changing experience of being moved to tears by a hymn... He applied the ancient Greek science of music to the music of Christian worship, and at the same time he gave us a way of distinguishing good Christian music from bad: *good music leads us upward, to join in the praise of the angels; bad music leads us downward, to wallow in the desires of the flesh.*

Modern “Worship Wars”

- Traditional evangelical Protestants have fallen on a spectrum in which all agree the Bible alone is authoritative (unlike the theological liberals) and sufficient (unlike Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic theologies). However, evangelical Protestants have ranged from the stand that would say everything is okay in worship that is not forbidden in Scripture (Luther), to the

position that only things positively taught (either directly or indirectly) in Scripture are allowed (Calvin).

Christianity in England & America

1. Protestant Influence
2. Awakenings, Revivals, & the Missions Movement
3. Modernization, Liberalism, Fundamentalism, & New-Evangelicalism
4. The Rise of Charismaticism

Awakenings & Revivals

First Great Awakening:

1. The emergence of George Whitfield (1714-1770) and John Wesley (1703-1791) heralded a new day in the Awakening. Whitfield preached to 80% of the American population & has been called the “Awakener of the Awakening.” The work of these men in England, Scotland, & America would begin to lay the foundation for what would later be known as the evangelical movement, which centers on the Bible, preaches the necessity of personal conversion, followed by a walk with God, and a fervor for evangelism.
2. Many established pastors and denominations, mainly from Boston, opposed the Awakening as “emotionalism,” or “enthusiasm.” Edwards maintained a balanced view believing that neither the enthusiasts nor the rationalists properly defined true religion.
3. Conversions have been estimated by some in the tens of thousands. Hundreds of new churches were established. Existing denominations were redefined and refocused. New denominations like Methodism were created. Colleges and training institutions such as Yale, Dartmouth, Harvard, & Queen’s College emerged, which sought to conserve and extend

the fruits of the awakening. These effects set the rudder for the religious & intellectual future of America.

Second Great Awakening:

1. While the 1st Great Awakening was led by pastoral evangelists, the 2nd Great Awakening was led by the first “professional evangelists” such as Charles Finney (1792-1865). The 2nd Great Awakening took on a much more emotional flavor than even the 1st Great Awakening, especially among the frontier camp meeting revivals in Kentucky & Tennessee. Finney ministered in the north but became controversial due to his employment of the “new measures” [protracted meetings, anxious bench, name calling, and other theatrics] that sought to manipulate crowds into decisions.
2. Asahel Nettleton (1783-1844) opposed Finney & led a much different wing of the awakening that was more emotionally controlled. The results of the 2nd Great Awakening are often debated. While Finney conducted large meetings in big cities and drew huge crowds, the results were not as long lasting. The area over which Finney conducted most of his efforts was later known as “the burned over district.” Church attendance and membership declined in these districts after Finney’s revival efforts. Some argue that cults such as Mormonism began in Finney’s wake.
3. Regardless of whether one sides with Finney or Nettleton, the 2nd Great Awakening made a lasting impact on American culture by establishing Sunday schools, colleges, seminaries, publishing houses, institutions for the ill & insane, and other social movements.

Path to Modern Revivals & Evangelicalism

- The Layman’s Prayer Revival (1858) is often overlooked by historians because it had no clear leader. Rather, it was a groundswell of Christian response to the emerging national crisis

that led to the Civil War. The YMCA & Salvation Army were products of this movement.

- The work of D.L. Moody and the establishment of non-denominational & trans-denominational institutes and organizations attempted to consolidate the gains from the revival of 1858 and its aftereffects as well as minister to America in the wake of the Civil War. These achievements laid the groundwork for much of modern evangelicalism that Billy Sunday & Billy Graham would lead.
- Sociologists and historians often define “modernization” as a society’s complex movement from an agricultural, rural, and traditional context to a “modern” industrial, technological society that is urbanized, democratic, and pluralistic.
- The process of modernization occurred in America in the decades between the Civil War & World War I. Modernization, and a simultaneous surge in immigration, had a profound impact upon Christianity in America, which led to Liberal Theology, the reaction of Fundamentalism, and the mediating position of New-Evangelicalism.
- Liberal Christianity is a sort of Christian syncretism with the humanistic philosophy of the Enlightenment.
- Liberal Christianity is a sort of Christian syncretism with the humanistic philosophy of the Enlightenment. The Humanism of the Enlightenment became so entrenched in mainstream thought that it wormed its way into seemingly every academic discipline. Historians like Hegel adopted it. Philosophers like Kant built upon it. Social reformers like Marx used it. Then theologians (mainly beginning in Germany) began to adopt Enlightenment thought into theology. Enlightenment thought seemed to be vindicated by the theories of Charles Darwin in his *Origin of the Species*, 1859.
- Theological liberalism became adopted in every quarter in the late 1800’s & early 1900’s in American schools of theology.
- Liberal Theology infiltrated and dominated nearly every major college and university of nearly every denomination setting the stage for the Modernist-Fundamentalist Controversy (1910-1930).

- Liberal theology resulted in a total gutting of traditional, orthodox theology. Liberalism was Darwinian. Liberalism denied the supernatural including the idea of revelation, miracles, the resurrection, the reality of sin and the necessity of conversion. Liberal theology focused on social change rather than personal evangelism. Liberalism (a.k.a. Modernism) infiltrated and dominated nearly every major college and university of nearly every denomination. This set the stage for the Modernist-Fundamentalist Controversy (1910-1930).
- The militant & colorful history of “Fundamentalism” led to a polarizing between Conservatives and Liberals.
- The militant & colorful history of “Fundamentalism” led to a polarizing between conservatives and Liberals. A new phase in the Fundamentalist movement began c. 1940-1955 with younger, more scholarly Fundamentalists that tried to better articulate the doctrines of Fundamentalism. These younger Fundamentalists came back from WW2 and had G.I. money that paid their way in higher education.
- The defining moment of this movement came in 1948 when Harold Ockenga coined the term “neo-evangelical” as he called his fellow Fundamentalists to not merely isolate but reengage in public social issues. The movement became officially known as “New Evangelicalism” with the publication of *Christian Life* magazine in March 1956. Their watchwords were “relevant” & “tolerant.”
- Though Okenga coined the term “New Evangelical,” the face of Evangelicalism would be Okenga’s younger contemporary, a dynamic young preacher named Billy Graham (1918-2018).
- While doing evangelistic meetings in L.A. in 1949, local journalists ran a piece on Billy Graham, which resulted in media coverage of his Crusade & an extended month of meetings and subsequent notoriety. The Billy Graham Evangelistic Association was founded in 1950, and Graham began holding evangelistic crusades all over the world. Though not an academic himself, Graham lent his influence to help reestablish evangelical academic respectability.

- Controversy around Billy Graham exploded during his New York crusade in 1957 when he allowed non-evangelicals to participate in the crusade. Fundamentalists like John R. Rice & Bob Jones II sounded the alarm and called for separation from Graham (i.e., the separatist phase of Fundamentalism, c. 1955-80s), yet Graham would go on to shape modern Christianity, especially in the spirit of ecumenicalism and an emphasis on social movements such as battling poverty, supporting civil rights, & opposing things like abortion. In his later years Graham began to associate more and more with Catholics and other non-evangelicals, insisting that he shared with them more commonalities than differences.

Crossover Christian Artists

- This *spirit of compromise* became more evident in artists such as Elvis Presley and many more, who had their start in Christian churches and organizations only later to launch a secular career that polarized this issue among many Christians.
- Crossover Christian artists became the lightning rod for controversy among evangelicals. Some Christians saw their favorite artists as endorsements of secular forms of music, while others saw these same artists as compromisers who were caving to the culture (esp. when many of these artists got lost in drugs, alcohol, broken marriages, and licentious living).
- Thus, many conservative Christians took a stand against modern forms of worship music in an attempt to preserve proper theology & morality.
- It is important to remember that the roots of RMBC go back to the fundamentalist / separatist movement of 1955-1980s.
- Much about this movement is noble! I liken it to the Letter to the Church of Ephesus in Rev. 2:1-7. The Fundamentalist movement was bold in its defense of truth and willing to separate from those who would compromise truth. However, the Fundamentalist movement also lost the spirit of Love, which

they had at the first. They became cold, harsh, withdraws, and legalistic.

- It is our desire here at RMBC to follow carefully what Jesus praised about the church at Ephesus, Smyrna, etc., but also take warning from what Jesus condemned them for.

Charismatics:

1. The modern Charismatic movement roots back to the Holiness movement, which began within the Methodist denomination in the 1830s. Wesley taught the concepts of second blessing and entire sanctification.
2. Sarah & Phoebe Palmer (1807-74) underwent emotional experiences that they equated with second blessing theology and began to teach that it could be sought rather than waited for (i.e., her “altar theology,” would later evolve into “name it & claim it” theology & the faith healing movement).
3. Palmer’s theology caught on and evolved into a series of revival tours led by Palmer and Charles Finney (1840-60s), then Holiness conferences (including the famous Keswick Convention in 1875), and finally into Holiness oriented branches of Methodism (e.g., Church of the Nazarene (c. 1895).
4. Charles Parham (1873-1929) began teaching the concept of a third blessing as the highest form of Christian living, which would be signified by the supernatural speaking in tongues. He also taught that a dramatic outpouring of the Spirit and a global revival would precede the return of Christ.
5. Sure enough, Parham’s followers soon began to experience speaking in tongues, seemingly validating his teaching. Parham became a sensation overnight. William Seymour, a student of Parham, took this Pentecostal theology to Los Angeles in 1906 & led “the Azusa St. Revival,” and soon outpaced Parham in fame and influence.
6. Pentecostalism spread like wildfire and became both racially integrated and gender inclusive in its leadership but remained on the outskirts of evangelicalism until after WW2, when TV evangelists

popularized it and people within mainstream denominations began experiencing charismatic gifts.

7. Leaders with powerful personalities (Dennis Bennett, Oral Roberts, Pat Robertson, Benny Hinn), as well as church networks like the Vineyard have launched Charismaticism into the center of evangelicalism.
8. Now Charismaticism is the largest and fastest growing segment of modern evangelicalism, yet many of its most outspoken leaders (esp. the NAR movement) are beginning to denigrate and even deny some of the core ideals of historic evangelicalism.
9. Charismatic theology led to an evolution in worship style that is known today as “praise and worship.”

Praise & Worship:

1. The Pentecostal movement impacted evangelicalism’s understanding of the nature of emotion (particularly physical expressiveness) in worship that ties directly back to the revivalism of Charles G. Finney (out of which, along with the Holiness movement, Pentecostalism emerged).
2. As Godfrey notes that there was “a somewhat dramatic shift that took place in music leading to contemporary Christian music, that shift probably took place with the rise of Pentecostalism. The Pentecostal movement in its drive for religious experience and religious energy and religious excitement did indeed think in new ways about music and sought to take the revivalist tradition of hymnody and make it even more exciting, even more engaging.”
3. *The importance of contemporary music styles in this movement flows directly from its theology of worship. Praise and Worship instead aims to bring the worshiper through a series of emotional stages from rousing “praise” to intimate “worship.”*
4. *This progression through which worshipers are helped to experience “the manifest presence of God” is engineered primarily through musical style. Worship leaders are encouraged to begin with enthusiastic songs of thanksgiving, leading the worshipers to an*

emotional “soulful worship,” and then bringing the mood to an intimate expression where “a gentle sustained chord on the organ and a song of the Spirit on the lips of the leaders should be more than sufficient to carry a worship response of the entire congregation for a protracted period of time.”

5. Grant Wacker, a sympathetic historian of Pentecostalism, comments on this phenomenon in early Pentecostalism: “And then there was congregational singing, one of the most notable and remarked on features of Pentecostal worship. . . . Music offered leaders a ready means for managing the intensity of the service. They could ratchet up the tempo until worshipers broke into ecstatic praise or tone it down when things seemed to be getting out of hand. Either way, music gave leaders a tool for regularizing the expression of emotion.”
6. Professor Charles H. Kraft offers a theological rationale for these songs: “True worship . . . usually takes a lot of singing to create an atmosphere of praise and worship.” This experience of worship is created significantly by the music of praise songs: “And it is the new music, sung with eyes closed for 10, 15, or 20 minutes at a time that makes that experience possible.”
7. Kraft praises these songs for breaking the excessively intellectual character of much worship: “Our worship services revolve around an informational sermon preceded by a token number of informational hymns.” These hymns reinforce the unemotional character of traditional worship: “We sing hymns so chuck-full of rational content and information that they are unmemorable.” Kraft calls on Christians: “Let’s stop being enslaved to the present rationalistic, intellect-centered approach to church that characterizes much of evangelicalism.”
8. Yet this anti-intellectual flavor in modern praise & worship is contrary to the example of Neh. 8-9 that we saw earlier that begins with an intellectual response to the Word, then an emotional response, followed by a volitional response.

9. According to a 2010 study by Faith Communities Today, the percentage of Protestant churches characterized by contemporary Praise and Worship rose from 29% in 2000 to 43% in 2010. The percentage change was even higher when they factored out mainline denominations and focused exclusively on Evangelical Protestants (from 35% to 51%). Today, the worship in a majority of evangelical churches is more characterized by Praise and Worship philosophy and contemporary music than by traditional practices.

Church leaders are “caught between two opposing forces.”

1. First, they desired to “remain counter-cultural, to draw a sharp dividing line between what is pagan and what is Christian...”
2. Yet they became increasingly concerned about communicating with pagan culture “in its own terms.”
 - Each side of the debate is struggling at some level with the tension between the need to remain faithful to the gospel and the Christian tradition while at the same time faithfully communicating that Gospel in a changing and complex cultural context that presents mammoth challenges to the continued witness of the Christian church...

Biblical Principles

1. We sing to God (Col. 3:16). God is our audience. Our worship is directed toward Him and meant for Him. Though we participate and undergo the experience of worship, our subjective feeling in worship is not the primary goal of worship. Giving God the glory due unto His name (cf. Ps. 96:8), is the primary goal of worship.
2. We sing about God, especially His Creation & the Redemption He wrought in Christ (Rev. 4:10-11; 5:9-10; 15:3-4). Though our experience and enjoyment of redemption (cf. Rev. 5:10) can also be sung about... note the primary subject of the song is God’s redemption in Christ (cf. Rev. 5:9). Same in Rev. 15:3-4. Carson has observed that “there is so much more to know about God than the light diet offered in many churches; and genuine believers, when

they are fed wholesome spiritual meals, soon delight all the more in God himself.” The forms of our worship should provide the substantial fare that leads to the lasting treasure and solid joy of delight in God.

3. We sing with God (H.S. empowered) (Eph. 5:18-19). We could parallel this idea with John 4:24, that in the New Covenant era, we are to worship the Lord “in Spirit & truth.” Though debated, the “Spirit” here can be taken as a reference to the Spirit of Truth, who is the primary energizing power of New Covenant worship. The Spirit’s empowering of worship seems to be in view in Eph. 5:18-19.
4. We sing with one another as a reflection of the unified body of Christ (Rom. 15:8-13), anticipating our ultimate union in heaven (Rev. 15:3-4). Early Church Father St. Basil asks us, “Can you consider someone an enemy once you’ve sung God’s praises with him with one voice? Singing imparts the highest good, love: it uses communal songs as a bond of unity, and it harmoniously draws people to the symphony of one choir.” Since public worship is the activity of the church assembled, *the forms of our worship should be unifying* and follow after things that afford peace (Rom. 14:21).
5. We sing with understanding (1 Cor. 14:15). Songs ought to be in the vernacular or at least explained so that they are understood by those singing them... Paul argues that if we do not understand what we are singing, then we cannot be edified, and this function of the song is diminished. Worship through song should be whole-personed... I sing with my heart and mind etc. *Thus, the music should not be so loud or distracting that the lyrics cannot be understood, yet the lyrics should not be so old that no one understands. There is a balance to be had here.*
6. We sing to edify one another (1 Cor. 14:26). Paul’s greatest concern, both for himself (14:6) and the Corinthians (14:13), was that love be displayed in their lives through the edification of others. Edification, not spontaneity, not style of music, not even the presence of supernatural spiritual gifts, was the true mark of the spirit in their lives and the true measure of the spirituality of their worship.

7. We ought to sing in an orderly fashion (1 Cor. 14:33, 40). That is planned, prepared, and implemented. This is not a command against spontaneity, but against confusion or a meeting without purpose or direction. We have a clear music leader who helps keep the congregation in time (1 Chron. 15:27) and we seek to have an ordered service rather than randomness.
8. We sing to instruct each other (Col. 3:16). One of the purposes of singing is not merely adoration, but also instruction. Both aspects bring edification. Much of modern music is focused on the emotional experience of the worshipper. While this does indeed have a place, it is remarkable how little of the content focuses on distinctly Christian ideas like the Trinity or the atonement. We want lyrics with weight, which can also function in a role of instruction.
9. We sing as an expression of our joy (James 5:13). At its core, worship in song is celebration. Singing can function as contemplation, meditation, motivation, etc. but it is also celebration. The closing song helps us express this joy in response to the truth of God in the sermon.
10. We strive to give no offense, but ultimately stand accountable before God (Rom. 14). In what way do the principles of Romans 14 have application to our music style choices? Several areas of Christian liberty exist where the principles of Romans 14 have practical application for local church issues (church music, wine in communion, celebrating Halloween, etc.). In situations like these a dichotomy can exist between private preferences and public policies at the institutional level. Romans 14:19 challenges us to pursue what makes for peace.

RMBC Music Preferences:

1. By *preference* we mean that we will establish these preferences in our public gatherings, but we recognize there are alternative preferences for different churches or for one's private enjoyment.
2. We prefer a classical sacred music style or an acoustical / orchestral (folk) style, as opposed to a rock style. (We are using the Coffee Ministry Team as a standard and goal)

3. While it is fine to amplify instruments with microphones, we prefer acoustical rather than electric instruments in order to avoid distortion capabilities.
4. We prefer a designated music leader up front (1 Chron. 15:27), with the music team off stage in the background to avoid a “concert feel” and rather to promote a “congregational feel.” We are participants, not spectators.
5. The Lyrics are to remain the primary focus. The music accentuates the lyrics but must not override the lyrics. So, music volume should not be overwhelming. The human voice should be easily and distinctly heard.
6. We want to promote “balanced music,” which we define as melody is primary, harmony is secondary, & rhythm is tertiary. In other words, beat must be in proper balance and not overemphasized.
7. Beat may be necessary to keep in time with numerous instruments, but it must not be overemphasized to the detriment of the lyrics.
8. While music is important and singing is commanded, it is given less emphasis in the NT that the teaching and preaching of the Word of God. Therefore, we seek to sing 3-4 songs, teach roughly an hour, and then close with a song. We don’t want to arrange our service along the lines of the centrality of praise & worship, but the centrality of Scripture and our response to the Scripture.

ORDINANCES

What are the Ordinances of the Church?

Ordinance Defined: *An ordinance is an outward rite, which Christ has appointed in the Local Church as a visible sign of the gospel. They are not sacraments, because a sacrament implies that a special grace is conferred on the person who participates in religious acts or ceremony (Eph. 2:8-9; Titus 3:5).*

Ordinances Delineated:

1. Baptism

- a. It was instituted by Christ to be a TESTIMONY of genuine faith in Him (Matt. 28:19-20).
- b. It was practiced by the early church (Acts 2:41).
- c. It is a public PROCLAMATION of one's personal faith in Jesus Christ. The examples in the New Testament show believers are always baptized after they declare faith in Christ, thereby evidencing genuine salvation (Acts 2:41; 8:12, 36-38; 16:31-34; 18:8).
- d. It is a PICTURE of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ (Rom. 6:1-6). Immersion is the best mode that pictures these events.

2. The Lord's Supper

- a. It is a TESTIMONY of genuine faith in Christ.
- b. It is a MEMORIAL of Christ's broken body and shed blood on the cross (1 Cor. 11:24-25 "*this do in remembrance of me*").
- c. It is a PROCLAMATION of the gospel of Christ (1 Cor. 11:26 "*ye do shew the Lord's death*").
- d. It is a PROPHECY of the final gathering of the saints when Jesus comes again (1 Cor. 11:26 "*ye do shew the Lord's death till he come*").

Open vs. Closed Communion

The case for **open communion** rests on the principle that participation in the Lord's Supper should be available to all genuine believers in Christ, since their worthiness derives from accepting Christ's death as payment for sin^[1]. A central argument holds that nothing should be required for communion that isn't essential to salvation itself, and since baptism isn't necessary for salvation, unbaptized Christians may participate^[2]. Additionally, the biblical prohibition against partaking "unworthily" refers to the manner of participation—such as excluding others, refusing to

share, or treating the meal as merely satisfying hunger—rather than to personal spiritual worthiness[1].

The **closed communion** position emphasizes protective boundaries. Advocates argue that restricting participation to members in good standing is the most reliable way to ensure that only genuine, baptized Christians participate[2]. Allowing visitors risks permitting non-Christians, unbaptized individuals, or excommunicated members to participate, which would implicate the church in unworthy participation and invite Christ’s discipline[2]. From another angle, critics of open communion contend it creates an unscriptural inequality between baptism and communion by treating baptism as optional while making the table essential, thereby deprecating baptism’s importance[3]. Open communion also complicates church discipline, since the table remains open to any believer regardless of moral standing[3].

The fundamental tension involves whether communion’s primary purpose is *inclusion* of all believers or *protection* of the ordinance’s integrity through membership accountability. Both perspectives agree that individual self-examination before partaking is essential[1], though they differ sharply on who bears responsibility for ensuring worthiness.

Sources:

[1] Got Questions Ministries, *Got Questions? Bible Questions Answered* (Bellingham, WA: Faithlife, 2014–2021).

[2] Gregg R. Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers: The Doctrine of the Church*, ed. John S. Feinberg, Foundations of Evangelical Theology Series (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 402–403.

[3] Rolland McCune, *A Systematic Theology of Biblical Christianity: The Doctrines of Salvation, the Church, and Last Things* (Allen Park, MI: Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary, 2010), 284.

