



The Leadership of the Church

1 Timothy 3:1-13; Ezekiel 34:1-24; Acts 6:1-7

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1. The Offices of the Leaders
2. The Qualifications of the Leaders
3. The Roles of the Leaders
4. The Role of the Congregation

In our series on the church, we come this evening to "The Leadership of the Church." I would like to open the Scriptures show you who leads the church and how they lead it.

For many of you, you might be inclined to think that this topic doesn't really apply to you at all. You are not a leader in the church. Perhaps you don't have a desire to be a leader, which is fine. But, this message this evening will be very applicable to all of you all. Whether you are a leader within the church or not, you all will be interacting with the leaders. You need to know what their role is and what their role is not. You need to know how it is that you are to interact with the leaders of the church. Furthermore, an understanding of the leaders in the church will give you insights into how exactly we "conduct business" at Rock Valley Bible Church.

Let's begin tonight by looking at ...

1. The Offices of the Leaders

Open in your Bibles to 1 Timothy, chapter 3. This is perhaps the clearest text in all of the Bible which deals with leadership in the church.

1 Timothy 3:1-13

(1) It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires [to do.] (2) An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, (3) not addicted to wine or pugnacious, but gentle, uncontentious, free from the love of money. (4) [He must be] one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity (5) (but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?); (6) [and] not a new convert, lest he become conceited and fall into the condemnation incurred by the devil. (7) And he must have a good reputation with those outside [the church,] so that he may not fall into reproach and the snare of the devil. (8). Deacons likewise [must be] men of dignity, not double-tongued, or addicted to much wine or fond of sordid gain, (9) [but] holding to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. (10) And let these also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons if they are beyond reproach. (11) Women [must] likewise [be] dignified, not malicious gossips, but temperate, faithful in all things. (12) Let deacons be husbands of [only] one wife, [and] good managers of [their] children and their own households. (13) For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a high standing and great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.

In this passage, we have two offices described for us. In verse 1, Paul gives us the first office. "It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the **office of overseer**, it is a fine work he desires to do." (Technically, the word "office" isn't really in the text, but the idea is correct. The NIV shows this nicely, "If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task.")

In verse 8, the second office in the church is given, "**Deacons** likewise must be men of dignity ... "

Now, some of your translations might say, "**bishop**" in verse 1, which is simply a translation of the Greek word, episkopoV(episcopos). This word is comprised of two Greek words, epi (epi), which means "upon," and skopoV (scopos), which means "to look." The most literal rendering of this word is "those who look over, or those who look upon." Whether you call this office a bishop, or an overseer, it doesn't really matter, because it speaks about the same office. You simply need to understand that these are two translations of the same Greek word.

There is another name that you might give to this office. Turn over to the book of Titus. In Titus, chapter 1, verse 5, Paul writes, "For this reason [Titus] I left you in Crete, that you might set in order what remains, and appoint **elders** in every city as I directed you, [namely,] if any man be above reproach, ..." Paul follows this exhortation by giving essentially the same list of qualifications as he did for the overseers in 1 Timothy, chapter 3. I believe that Paul was speaking about the same office, simply using a different word (or title) to describe it. When writing to Titus, he described this office as an "elder" but when writing to Timothy, he used the word, "overseer." These are not separate offices, they are one and the same. An overseer is the same thing as a bishop is the same thing as an elder.

We see all of these descriptions come together in the book of Acts 20:28. In this passage, Paul is giving his farewell to the elders of the church at Ephesus. He didn't actually go to Ephesus, because he knew that he didn't have the time to spend there, but he sailed to a port about 30 miles south of Ephesus in the city of Miletus (see verse 17). In verse 28, Paul tells the Ephesian elders to "Be on guard for

yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood." Notice that the **elders** here **are called overseers**. This again is the Greek word, *episcopos* (episcopos), which at times is translated, "bishop."

But notice even more closely in verse 28 that the role of these elders is "to shepherd the church of God." This word translated, "to shepherd" is the Greek word, *poimaino* (poimaino), from which we get the word, "pastor." The same word is translated "flock" earlier in the verse, which quite naturally brings up this shepherding imagery. It is the duty of overseers/bishops/elders to "pastor" to church, which leads to another title for this office in the church, that of pastor.

Not only is an **overseer** a **bishop** and an **elder**, but he is also a **pastor**. They are all talking about the same office, the same leaders. A similar verse is found in 1 Peter 5:2, when Peter instructed the elders to shepherd the flock of God by exercising oversight.

These words are often used interchangeably, and they should be, because they all describe the same person. However, each term focuses on a different activity of these individuals.

The term, **overseer** (or bishop), describes the activity of looking after the church as a whole. This is similar to the shepherd, getting up on a higher place to watch for danger from all quarters and to scope out the best place to feed upon next.

The term, **pastor**, describes the activity of caring for and feeding and leading the flock. Rather than being over the flock and looking out for it, this describes better the process of being with the sheep and helping them along. "Follow me!"

The term, **elder**, describes the activity of imparting wisdom as a man who has been down the path of life already. In most every culture, those who are aged in years are esteemed as the leaders of communities. So with the church.

These all picture the same office.

Turn back to 1 Timothy, chapter 3. We come to the second office in the church. It is that of **deacon**. The Greek word for deacon is *diakonos* (diaconos), which is essentially a transliteration of the Greek word (like baptism, which is really a Greek word). Since the word is a transliteration, we simply need to look at the meaning of the word. Deacon means, "servant." When Christ said that "He didn't come to be served, but to serve and to give His life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45), this same word is used. To push the imagery home, Jesus didn't come "to be deaconed," but He came to "deacon." A deacon is nothing other than an official "servant" of the church.

These are the only two offices of the church. The Bible doesn't describe to us any other offices. It is these two. That's not to say that we cannot have any others, but others merely confuse the issue.

For instance, we went to a church last week, where they had three offices in the church: elders, staff, and board of directors. Another church I know about had elders, deacons, and administrators. Often, churches have one pastor, the deacons, and the board of trustees. Furthermore, sometimes churches have pastors who aren't elders. In each of these instances, the role and function of each of these offices are difficult to understand simply because they deviate from scriptural terms. In most cases, however, the roles of these leaders naturally tend to fall along the lines of the roles of elders and deacons. Why not simply call them by their Biblical names and help ease any confusion that might arise?

We will get to their roles, but let us first look briefly at ...

2. The Qualifications of the Leaders

They are spelled out quite easily for us here in 1 Timothy. It isn't my purpose to give full details here. I simply want to zip through them and give you some type of structure for them. Let's look first at the qualifications for the elder/overseer/pastor.

Motivational Qualifications (verse 1)

The first qualification is found in verse 1, "If any man **aspires** to the office of an overseer, it is a fine work he **desires** [to do]." First and foremost in the life on an elder must be a desire and motivation for the work.

You remember a few weeks ago when I told you that I was elected to be the vice-president of my Sophomore class in high school, without my knowledge that I was even running? I came back from lunch and found that I had been written in by many of my friends. One of my greatest challenges in fulfilling that office was that I didn't really have a desire to be there in the first place. I struggled with my ambition and motivation.

The church has no place for people in leadership who are merely fulfilling a duty. A leader in the church shouldn't be someone who was nominated by someone in the church and voted in by the congregation with a "willingness to serve." There needs to be more than willingness. There needs to be a passion for the work -- an internal desire to work for the glory of God in leading the church.

Let me note further that here ought to be a purity to this motivation. It isn't for selfish gain. It isn't for glory. It isn't to be recognized by the church or by the community. It isn't to put on some resume. It is for God and His glory.

Peter says it this way, "I exhort the elders among you ... [to] shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock" (1 Peter 5:1-3).

Next we have a few ...
Personal Qualifications (verses 2-3)

Paul gives 12 of them. Let me note, by the way, that this is the calling of every Christian.

1. Above reproach. This has been called the crowning characteristic of them all. It means that no one can lay any accusation against this man. In whatever ways this man is discredited, the accusations don't stick. I have heard this man called, "The Teflon Man" -- accusations don't stick!
2. Husband of one wife. He is a man, not a woman. Literally, he is a "one-woman-man." His singular devotion to his wife, (if he has one), is obvious to all.
3. Temperate. He is not given to extremes, but sober-minded and calm.
4. Prudent. He is of sound mind. He is sensible.
5. Respectable. His life is orderly and stable.
6. Hospitable. He loves strangers.
7. Able to teach. He is capable of teaching and being taught.
8. Not addicted to wine. He isn't controlled by any substance.
9. Not pugnacious. He isn't a fighter.
10. Gentle. He is forbearing and patient.
11. Uncontentious. He is peaceful and resists feuds.
12. Free from the love of money. He doesn't have a love for the physical things in the world.

These are pretty simple and straightforward. Like all of Paul's lists in the scripture, I believe that they are merely suggestive and not exhaustive. In other words, there are things in a man's life which may disqualify him, which are not on this list. For instance, suppose a man is a compulsive liar. There is nothing on this list which explicitly speaks about this, and yet, he wouldn't qualify. Or suppose a man worshiped idols. There is nothing here that would explicitly disqualify such a man, yet, such a man shouldn't be an elder. Perhaps you could argue that these types of disqualifications fall under not being "above reproach," which simply illustrates my point that these 12 character qualities are not exhaustive, but rather suggestive.

All of these qualifications speak of a man's godliness. He ought to be a model worthy to be followed. Please note that he is perfect in any sense, and yet he is to walk in a blameless manner. "How blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the LORD" (Psalm 119:1).

Domestic Qualifications (verses 4-5)

Leaders in the church have an ingrained test-bed to examine -- their home. We read, "[He must be] one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity (but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?);" (1 Tim. 3:4-5).

An elder must ...

1. Manage his own household well.

This addresses all areas of his house. His wife must be willingly submissive. The house must be well kept. The finances must be in order. The atmosphere at home needs to be calm and orderly, not chaotic.

I have seen men, who were leaders in ministry who had disorderly houses, both with children who weren't under control and a chaotic atmosphere at home. This ought not to be.

An elder must ...

2. Keep his children under control with all dignity

His children need to be obedient to his voice. They need to be submissive to him because they respect and love him, not because he rules with an iron fist (i.e. with all dignity).

Why these domestic qualifications? The church is God's household (c.f. 1 Tim. 3:15). Let a man first demonstrate that he can lead his own house before he is placed in leadership of God's house. The house is much easier to lead than the church.

Experience Qualifications (verse 6-7)

"Not a new convert, lest he become conceited and fall into the condemnation incurred by the devil. And he must have a good reputation with

those outside [the church], so that he may not fall into reproach and the snare of the devil" (1 Tim. 3:6-7).

He is not a novice in the faith. He has been a Christian for quite some time and has demonstrated his faithfulness in the faith.

He has a good reputation with those outside the church. In other words, those who aren't Christians look upon this man and see consistency in his life. Someone outside the church might say something like, "He's a leader in the church? I didn't know that. But I'm not surprised. He is a nice man and has been fair and honest with me in all of my dealings with him. He has been helpful and has a great attitude."

Deacon Qualifications (verses 8-13)

The qualifications for deacons are similar. Look at verse 8, "Deacons likewise, ..." In other words, the deacons need to live similarly to the elders. They need to have personal piety which is above reproach. Their families need to be well ordered. Their reputation with those outside needs to be favorable. Again, let me simply zip through these qualifications.

1. Men of dignity. They are worthy of respect.
2. Not double-tongued. They have integrity of speech.
3. Not addicted to wine. Exactly the same as for an elder.
4. Not fond of sordid gain. They have financial integrity and are not greedy for money.
5. Holding to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. His life and doctrine match.

(Skip to verse 12.)

6. Husbands of one wife (i.e. a one woman man) (like for elders).
7. Good manager of their children (like for elders)
8. Good managers of their households (like for elders)

The Qualified Man

Note that all of these qualities focus on a man's character (with the exception of the elder being "able to teach," verse 2). It is a man's godliness, not his business savvy which qualifies a man for leadership in the church. It isn't a man's great motivational abilities or natural leadership abilities which qualifies him for leadership in the church of the living God. His character qualifies him to lead.

At Rock Valley Bible Church, we take these qualifications very seriously.

I'm not just saying that. We will be purposefully very slow in affirming anybody to these offices. I'm not putting a time-frame on this process, (and circumstance to circumstance will vary), but for me, before I came to be an elder at Kishwaukee Bible Church, the process took more than two years. I was grateful for the process. One thing that we don't want to do is have unqualified men leading in the church.

We will be very deliberate to examine each of these characteristics in detail. Whatever it takes....

We need to talk to the **wives**, and ask, "How does your husband lead your home? Is it a joy to submit to him? Does he love you like Christ loved the church?"

We need to talk to the **children** and say, "Tell me what dad is like? What is it like at home? Do you like being with him? Does he get angry easily?"

We need to talk with **those outside** the church, who know him. Neighbors or employers. An employer (i.e. one's boss) is the best person to talk to -- they spend much time with this individual and see his character. "How does he present himself at work? Does he have a good reputation? Does he control his tongue? Does he obey your directives?"

We need, perhaps most importantly, to talk to the **church body**. You all are going to be the ones to affirm these individuals or not. This will have lasting effect. To have an unqualified man in leadership as an elder or deacon is devastating to a local church.

One avenue to the church affirming such a man is by testing him. We skipped verse 10 earlier, let's look at it now, "And let these also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons if they are beyond reproach." Though verse 10 speaks about deacons only, the principle most certainly applies to elders as well. We need to test the candidates. It doesn't make sense to place somebody in a place of leadership without them first demonstrating competence to do the work.

Within a secular organization, an employee will often rise from staff, to supervisor, to manager, to director, to partner or vice-president. If they demonstrate competence in the one level, they are promoted to the next until they no longer demonstrate competence. This is the point where employees often end up -- their first level of incompetence. In the business world, they call this the "Peter Principle." We don't want the Peter Principle to apply in the church. Thus, we need to test candidates and insure that they are qualified and able to do the word.

The elders and deacons need to be skilled people at their work. We would never attempt to put an unskilled man in the cockpit of an airplane and say, "fly the plane!" Nor would you place an unskilled man in the back of a sailing vessel, to man the rudder, unless everybody in the boat wanted to go swimming. The stakes are high with regard to the church. People are of eternal value. Their souls will either live forever, or

burn forever. God has ordained the church to be the cultivating ground of these souls. We need to do our part to insure that the elders and deacons are skilled in their work, before they are affirmed to the office.

Elders should be tested in elder work and deacons should be tested in deacon work. Which brings to mind, "What is elder work? What is deacon work?"

3. The Roles of the Leaders

First, let's look at the role of the elder, the role of the pastor. Because, when you understand the role of an elder, the role of the deacon fits right into place.

As mentioned previously, the word for pastor means, "to shepherd." Here are four basic duties of a pastor:

The pastor needs to **provide for** the flock.
The pastor needs to **care for** the flock.
The pastor needs to **protect** the flock.
The pastor needs to **lead** the flock.

With sheep, this is straightforward, ...

You **provide for** the flock by leading them to good pastures where they can graze.
You **care** for the flock by grooming them, by cleaning them, and by sheering them.
You **protect** the flock by warding off any natural enemies to sheep (i.e. lions, coyotes, ...).
You **lead** the flock by guiding them where they need to go.

With the church, this translates like this, ...

You **provide for** the flock by ...
... "preaching the word" (2 Tim. 4:2).
... feeding the souls of people with spiritual nourishment (i.e. man lives by "every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord" - Matt. 4:4).
... teaching them what God says.

You **care for** the flock by ...
... "encouraging the fainthearted, and helping the weak" (1 Thess. 5:12).
... "visiting orphans and widows in their distress" (James 1:27).
... "praying for the sick [and sinful]" (James 5:14).
... pursuing the straying member (Matt. 18:12-14).

You **protect** the flock by ...
... exhorting in sound doctrine (Titus 1:9) so that the flock isn't "tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine" (Eph. 4:14).
... refuting those who contradict (Titus 1:9).
... disciplining those who are stubbornly unrepentant (Matt. 18:17).

You **lead** the flock by ...
... "exercising oversight" (1 Pet. 5:2) and seeing the big picture.
... guiding the congregation in the way they should go.
... saying, "This is the way, walk in it" (Is. 30:21).
... helping individuals with decisions in their lives.

Though the shepherd leads the sheep, **the shepherd is practically a servant of the sheep**. Let me put it like this, "if you would make an organizational chart of a shepherd and the sheep, who would be on top?" In one sense, it would be the shepherd. But in a practical sense, it would be the sheep. They've got the easy life and are treated like kings! The shepherd brings them food. When danger arises, the shepherd protects them. When they need a sheering, it is the shepherd who shears the sheep. The shepherd provides for them and cares for them in every way!

Jesus said it this way, "The rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. It is not so among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave" (Matt. 20:25-27).

To be a pastor/overseer/shepherd is a high calling. James said, "Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we shall incur a stricter judgment" (James 3:1). God's judgment upon the shepherds who neglect their task is strict.

In **Ezekiel 34**, we hear God's condemnation on the shepherds of Israel, who were not diligent in their task. In each of the four ways mentioned above, they failed in their task. God's condemnation upon them was great, "Then the word of the LORD came to me saying, 'Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel. Prophesy and say to those shepherds, 'Thus says the Lord GOD, ...'" (Ezekiel 34:1,2a)

These shepherds **didn't provide for** the flock. "Woe, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flock? You eat the fat and clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fat [sheep] without feeding the flock" (Ezek. 34:2b-3).

These shepherds **didn't care for** the flock. "Those who are sickly you have not strengthened, the diseased you have not healed, the broken you have not bound up, the scattered you have not brought back, nor have you sought for the lost; but with force and with severity you have dominated them (Ezek. 34:4).

These shepherds **didn't protect** the flock. "And they were scattered for lack of a shepherd, and they became food for every beast of the field and were scattered" (Ezek. 34:5).

These shepherds **didn't lead** the flock. "My flock wandered through all the mountains and on every high hill, and My flock was scattered over all the surface of the earth; and there was no one to search or seek [for them]" (Ezek. 34:6).

Notice the strictness of the judgement, "Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the LORD: "As I live," declares the Lord GOD, "surely because My flock has become a prey, [i.e. they **hadn't been led**] My flock has even become food for all the beasts of the field for lack of a shepherd [i.e. they **hadn't been protected**], and My shepherds did not search for My flock [i.e. they **hadn't been cared for**], but [rather] the shepherds fed themselves and did not feed My flock [i.e. they **hadn't been provided for**]; therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the LORD: 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "Behold, I am against the shepherds, and I shall demand My sheep from them and make them cease from feeding sheep. So the shepherds will not feed themselves anymore, but I shall deliver My flock from their mouth, that they may not be food for them"' (Ezekiel 34:7-10).

Though the situation is bleak, the LORD will always show Himself to be faithful to His sheep. In the next six verses, the LORD Himself describes how He, Himself will do what the shepherds of Israel failed to do. He will become, in person, the shepherd of the sheep and will do what the shepherds of Israel failed to do.

Look at verse 11 and following, "For thus says the Lord GOD, 'Behold, I Myself will search for My sheep and seek them out. As a shepherd cares for his herd in the day when he is among his scattered sheep, so **I will care for My sheep** and will deliver them from all the places to which they were scattered on a cloudy and gloomy day. And I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries and bring them to their own land; and **I will feed them** on the mountains of Israel, by the streams, and in all the inhabited places of the land. I will feed them in a good pasture, and their grazing ground will be on the mountain heights of Israel. There they will lie down in good grazing ground, and they will feed in rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. I will feed My flock and **I will lead them** to rest,' declares the Lord GOD. 'I will seek the lost, bring back the scattered, bind up the broken, and strengthen the sick; but the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them with judgment'" (Ezek. 34:11-16).

The shepherds of Israel failed in their duties. So, the LORD said that He, Himself would come and feed and shepherd them. How will this happen? Look at verses 23,24, "'Then I will set over them one shepherd, **My servant David**, and he will feed them; he will feed them himself and be their shepherd. And I, the LORD, will be their God, and My servant David will be prince among them;" I, the LORD, have spoken" (Ezekiel 34:23,24).

The LORD Jesus Christ will come and be the shepherd of Israel. That's why the writer to the Hebrews calls Him, "the great Shepherd" (Heb. 13:20). That's why Peter calls Jesus, "The Chief Shepherd and Overseer of your souls" (1 Peter 2:25; 5:4).

In very many ways, the pastors and elders of Rock Valley Bible Church will fail in their duties. This past week, looking at these passages of what a shepherd is called to be, I was convicted of my lack in these areas. Don't think that I am going to be able to perfectly shepherd all of your souls. It is my tremendous desire to do what I can, but I have failed and will fail in the future.

But there is one who will never fail in His shepherding of the flock. It is the Lord, Jesus Christ. He is the head of the church (Eph. 5:23). He is the Chief Shepherd (1 Pet. 5:4). In many ways, He is the Senior Pastor of Rock Valley Bible Church.

Ultimately, my role as His under shepherd is to bring you to Him. Jesus said, "Come to me, all you who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart; and you shall find rest for your souls" (Matt. 11:28-29).

Don't find your security and comfort in the pastors here at Rock Valley Bible Church, but find your comfort in the Good Shepherd, who "lays down His life for the sheep" (John 10:11). Find your security in the one who can give eternal life and can protect you until the end (John 10:28).

In very many ways, I see the shepherds of the church to be mere pictures of what the true shepherd is like.

Jesus provides for the flock.
Jesus cares for the flock.
Jesus protects the flock.
Jesus leads the flock.

The shepherds of the church are often the means through which Jesus accomplishes His shepherding of the church.

That's the role of the elder. Let's focus our attention now upon the role of the deacon. The best passage to understand their role is found in **Acts, chapter 6**.

The church was growing by leaps and bounds, as Acts 6:7 records, "And the word of God kept on spreading; and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith." This is great, but it caused a problem. "Now at this time while the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic Jews against the native Hebrews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving of food" (Acts 6:1).

The widows were being neglected. Apparently, there was a custom of those in the church providing food for the widows. This custom was being neglected. The apostles took responsibility for the problem and chose to solve it by delegating the task. Not that they were above the task. Not that the task was too low for them, but they simply had different priorities. They couldn't feed, care, protect, and lead the church as well as serve tables. They simply couldn't do it all.

"And the twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples and said, 'It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables. But select from among you, brethren, seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task. But we will devote ourselves to prayer, and to the ministry of the word'" (Acts 6:2-4).

Though it doesn't actually mention these servants here to be deacons, the concept of having officially appointed servants to serve was apparent. I like to call these men here, "proto-deacons." Just as the first piece of software out the door to be tested is the prototype, so these deacons were first to ease the burden on the shoulders of the apostles. Their focus was that of service in an official capacity. In the first two verses, it describes their duties as "serving tables." They were identified and qualified to accomplish the task set before them.

This is where I would place the duties of the deacon. Their primary role is to relieve the pressure of the pastors by caring for the physical burdens of the church, so that the elders might place their concern upon the spiritual health of the flock.

Let's get real practical. At Rock Valley Bible Church, the deacons will be responsible for handling the finances of the church. If we build a building for us to meet in permanently, it will be the deacons who will head that effort. If we purchase a building, it will be the responsibility of the deacons to manage the property of the building. Physically caring for those in need will be responsibility of the deacons.

To boil it down, the elders of the church will focus their efforts on the spiritual matters of the church (i.e. the teaching, the shepherding, the counseling, ...), while the deacons of the church will focus their efforts on caring for the physical needs of the church.

Now, having said that, let it not be thought that these duties are mutually exclusive. Elders and deacons are not union laborers, who refuse to do anything that is outside of their realm of responsibility. Certainly, a pastor cares for the physical concerns in the church. Certainly, a deacon shepherds people in his labor (i.e. administering benevolent funds -- there is a great opportunity for discipleship and accountability and oversight in helping those in need get back on track with their lives)

Deacons will certainly seek guidance from elders when considering physical projects (building or financing missionaries). Elders will certainly seek guidance from deacons when discerning the physical difficulties of people.

But it is their focus, which is important. The pastors must focus on spiritual matters. The deacons must focus on physical matters.

As we conclude, let me make a few applicational remarks concerning, ...

4. The Role of the Congregation

1. Trust your elders and deacons.

If these men are rightly qualified, they will lead the church in a godly manner. God has ordained that they would lead the church. You are called to submit to them. "Obey your leaders, and submit to them; for they keep watch over your souls, as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you" (Heb. 13:17).

I am exhorting you to trust your leaders, because joyful obedience will come from a trust that is developed over the years. I know that if you trust someone, their words will be like gold in your heart. You will treasure them. You will follow them anywhere.

Work hard at trusting the future elders and deacons of this church. I am working hard that you all might come to trust me. May my word to you be true. May I follow through on my promises. May I be quick to seek forgiveness. May I speak God's words.

With respect to decisions at Rock Valley Bible Church, they will be made by the leaders, the Elders and the Deacons. Presumably, they will be godly men who will make godly decisions on behalf of the congregation. For the most part, we will not have congregational votes, which simply lead to dissension and manipulation.

It doesn't make sense for church decisions to be made by members of the church, who haven't been to church in months, who show up cast votes for one cause or another. (I have heard of many of these types of things happening). Additionally, it doesn't make sense for church decisions to be made by new Christians who just became members of the church by vote, where the influence of a young and immature believer has as much influence as the godly elder who has walked with the Lord for 40 years.

With respect to decisions, I ask you now to give as much input as you can. When I tell you of opportunities with buildings and seeking your feedback, I'm not doing this as a show of humility. I genuinely want your input. Though decisions will be made by elders and deacons, the voice of the flock is all important.

You need to trust the elders and deacons. The day you fail to trust the leaders of the church is the day that you are faced with a decision: "Is the problem with you or is the problem with the leaders?"

- If the problem is with you, repent today!
- If the problem is with the leaders, speak with them first, before you talk to others concerning the problems.

2. Pray for your elders and deacons.

A week doesn't go by when I haven't prayed for each of you, by name several times. I have a prayer list of the requests that we have accumulated over the past months, which I pray over regularly. I make it completely through the list about 2 or 3 times per week. My heart is engaged in prayer for all of you.

I simply ask you to return the favor. As Paul says, "Brethren, pray for us" (1 Thess. 5:25).

The leading and guiding and caring for the church is a spiritual exercise. We need to constantly be on our knees before the throne seeking the Lord's direction with it all.

Pray for their godliness of character, as 1 Timothy 3 sets forth. Pray for their families to be managed well. For the elders, pray for much devotion to prayer and much devotion to the word. For the deacons, pray for strength to labor in service to the needs of the church. Pray for gracious speech seasoned as it were with salt. Pray for future elders and deacons. Pray for them to be raised up from within you all.

3. Aspire to the qualities an elder or a deacon

Perhaps there are some of you who don't aspire to be an elder or a deacon. Perhaps some of you who can never be qualified to be an elder or a deacon (because you are a woman). Yet, I still exhort you to pursue these characteristics required of an elder or a deacon. They are simply characteristics of a godly life. Remember Paul's words, "This is the will of God, your sanctification" (1 Thess. 4:3).

For some of you men, you may not desire either of these offices now, but it may change in the future. It wasn't always my desire to be an elder. I even attended seminary without this great desire to be a pastor, but God has changed my heart to long for it. Pursue these qualities now, that you may be ready if God so puts a desire in your heart to lead the church. The future elders and deacons of Rock Valley Bible Church will come from among you.

When Paul established churches, he always set forth a plurality of elders in each church (Acts 14:23). So likewise, we long for a plurality of elders to be established here at Rock Valley Bible Church. As long as we have only one elder here in Rockford, we will continue to be simply a branch of Kishwaukee Bible Church. But we trust that the day will come when God will raise up a plurality of elders here in Rockford. These men will come from among the congregation.

The role of Men's Equippers is crucial in this training process. It is here that the future leaders are trained for ministry. I will continue to focus my efforts upon training you men that God would raise qualified leaders to guide His church to His glory.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on November 11, 2001 by Steve Brandon.
For more information see www.rvbc.cc.