

Introduction

We are in the midst of a mini-series on Leadership. Healthy and growing churches are always developing leaders. They are committed to the growth and development of their members.

The first message was on phases of team leadership. Paul and Timothy are a team and they are writing to the saints in Philippi. We used the church at Antioch as a model for team development. Barnabas was sent from Jerusalem to check things out and he became the leader of the church. The church was growing and he needed help, so he went to Tarsus and brought back Paul. The two of them taught considerable numbers. In the next couple of years three more people were added to the leadership team. Then, in Acts 13, we saw how the Holy Spirit sent Barnabas and Paul out to do apostolic work.

Healthy and growing churches are always developing teams. We need greeting teams. We need a sound team. We need a worship team. We need an outreach team. We need more on the worship team, specifically a keyboard player and percussionist. We need more on the leadership team. Churches are not supposed to be run by one person. The pattern we see in the New Testament is a plurality of elders.

Our second message was on Servant Leadership. Paul and Timothy identify themselves as bond-servants of Christ Jesus. We saw how the leaders in the Bible, both Old and New Testament, were identified as servants. We used Jesus as our model for servant leadership. We looked at Jesus' Mindset, Jesus' Message, and Jesus' Mission. We ended by asking some questions about what a church would look like that was full of servants. The East Mountains and the world would be turned upside down with a people that laid down their lives for the sake of the gospel.

Today is our third message and we will be looking at the overseers that are mentioned in Paul's greeting. We will look at the office of overseer, and the work of an overseer. Next week, we will continue our study of overseers, looking at the charge to the overseers that Peter gives in 1 Peter 5. The fifth message in this series will be about deacons.

How many of you have ever had a difficult time getting along with someone? How many of you have ever been offended by someone? How many of you have struggled with forgiving someone who has hurt you? How many of you have offended someone else? How many of you know people right now that are odds with one another or struggling to get along with one another?

I can identify with these questions. In fact, I had a difficult week. It wasn't difficult at work. I had a successful week. I wrote two nice contracts for training. There were no brush fires to put out and things went pretty smoothly. I had my message for today finished by Wednesday and the Lord changed it up on me Thursday morning. But that was not difficult.

It was difficult for me because I offended Karen twice. I hurt the one that I love the most and had to apologize and work through some issues. I am so grateful to have a wife who lets me know when I have offended her. I am grateful to have a wife who forgives me seventy times seven. I am grateful to have a wife who is committed to our relationship and working through things. But working through offenses can be a difficult process. It is well worth the effort and on the other side is great joy and peace.

This morning we want to talk about some of those relational issues. But first, I want us to take a look at the office of overseer. Paul and Timothy, who are bond-servants of Christ Jesus, write this letter to ALL the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi. Then, they add a little addendum, including the overseers and deacons. Today, we are going to focus on the overseers.

(Philippians 1:1) "Paul and Timothy, bond-servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers and deacons:"

What is an overseer? Some translations call this a bishop. What is a bishop or overseer? What is the difference between a pastor, a bishop, and an elder? These are good questions. In various denominations, all these terms refer to different offices. I want to take a few minutes to look at these terms, because that will help us to see clearly and to answer all these questions.

I. The Office of Overseer

The word for overseer is episkopos. Epi means over and skopos means to see. It literally means one who oversees or gives oversight. The word is used only five times in the New Testament, but other forms of the word are used. The first place that we find the word being used is in Acts 20:28. Paul is at Miletus and he is meeting with the Ephesian elders. He was in a hurry to get to Jerusalem so that he could be there for Pentecost. Therefore, he elected not to go to Ephesus, but to simply meet with the elders.

(Acts 20:16-17) "For Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus in order that he might not have to spend time in Asia; for he was hurrying to be in Jerusalem, if possible, on the day of Pentecost. {17} And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church."

In verse 28, he tells the elders to be on guard for themselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made them overseers (episkopos), to shepherd the church of God. It is clear that the elders in Ephesus were called overseers or bishops in this passage.

(Acts 20:28) ""Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood."

Many people believe that a bishop rules over the elders. They teach that he oversees the elders of a church. He is the leader and the elders are there to serve and to support him. If this was the case, Ephesus would be in trouble. The Holy Spirit had made all the elders overseers, and so there is a clear leadership problem. No, the context of the verse tells us that an overseer is just another term used when speaking about the elders. There must be another reason that Paul and Timothy used the term overseer.

This view of bishops being over the elders was not the original use in church history. It wasn't until a man named Ignatius introduced this concept at the end of the first century. He had concern about false teachers, false apostles, and false prophets and so he developed a tier of leadership. Gene Getz describes how this took place in his book, *Elders and Leaders*.

Facing the results of what he considered a deteriorating situation, Ignatius moved the church toward a three-tier system of leadership. The primary leader of the elders/overseers in various churches in the early years of Christianity became “the bishop.” Using the freedom we see in the New Testament story to use different terminology to identify spiritual leaders, Ignatius redefined the term episkopos to refer only to the primary leader of “the elders.” In other words, the presbytery or body of elders reported directly to a single bishop, and the deacons in local churches basically reported to the elders and assisted them as well as the bishop with their ministries. As this change took place, the “bishop” in a believing community began to take on more and more authority, particularly because of Ignatius’ teachings...Unfortunately, this system set the stage for some of the serious leadership abuses that have haunted Christianity for centuries.”¹

Another term that is used is presbuteros, which means an elder. The presbytery that Gene Getz refers to means a plurality of elders or body of elders. The word is only used once in Scripture, 1 Timothy 4:14. The body of elders had laid hands on Timothy and prophesied over him, imparting a spiritual gift to him. Paul tells Timothy not to neglect this spiritual gift.

(1 Timothy 4:14) "Do not neglect the spiritual gift within you, which was bestowed upon you through prophetic utterance with the laying on of hands by the presbytery."

In Titus 1:5-8, Paul charges Titus with appointing elders in every city as he directed. The word for elder is presbuteros. Notice in verse seven when Paul is speaking about being above reproach, he says, “for the overseer (episkopos) must be above reproach. Again, it is very clear that the elder and the overseer are one and the same office.

(Titus 1:5-9) "For this reason I left you in Crete, that you might set in order what remains, and appoint elders in every city as I directed you, {6} namely, if any man be above reproach, the husband of one wife, having children who believe, not accused of dissipation or rebellion. {7} For the overseer must be above reproach as God's steward, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not addicted to wine, not pugnacious, not fond of sordid gain, {8} but hospitable, loving what is good, sensible, just, devout, self-controlled, {9} holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, that he may be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict."

This list of qualifications for elders is nearly identical to the list of qualifications given in 1 Timothy 3:1-7

A third term is also important to understand, and that is pastor. The Greek word is poimen, and it means a shepherd. It is used 18 times in the New Testament, but Ephesians 4:11 is the only time it is translated as pastor. All the other references are translated as shepherd.

(Ephesians 4:11) "And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers,"

¹Elders and Leaders by Gene Getz, pages 224-225.

03 Office of Overseer

There is another word that also must be looked at, poimano. Poimen is the noun form and poimano is the verb. Poimano is used 12 times in Scripture. In Acts 20:28, Paul tells the elders to be on guard for themselves and for all the flock. It is shepherds that watch over a flock. He goes on to say that the Holy Spirit has made them overseers, and that they are to shepherd (poimano) the church of God. In this verse we find all three terms that refer to the same office. These are elders or overseers and they are to pastor or shepherd the flock.

(Acts 20:28) ""Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood."

G4165. poimaino, poy-mah'ee-no; from G4166; to tend as a shepherd (or fig. supervisor):--feed (cattle), rule.

Another passage that is good to look at is found in 1 Peter 5:1-4. We will take an in depth look at that passage next week. Peter exhorts the elders (presbuteros) to shepherd (poimano) the flock, exercising oversight (episkopeo). All three words are used in this passage. Again, it is very clear that the elder, overseer, and pastor are all the same office.

(1 Peter 5:1-2) "Therefore, I exhort the elders (presbuteros) among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, {2} shepherd (poimano) the flock of God among you, exercising oversight (episkopeo) not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness;"

Looking at the three different words give us a fuller understanding about what pastoring is all about. It is like looking at different sides of a diamond. The term elder (presbuteros) means an older person. It refers to the spiritual maturity and character of the office. Some churches have a rule that elders must be over 40 years of age. I don't see this in my studies. I believe Timothy and others were younger than 40. Jesus was only 30 when He began His public ministry. It is the spiritual maturity of the believer and the character of the man that qualifies him for the office. But there is something to be said about the age and maturity of a man. An older man has been through some of the storms of life and is able to impart wisdom to the flock.

If we look at the use of the word elder in the Old Testament, we can gain a fuller understanding of its meaning. It was the elders who were known as leaders in Israel. They were the political leaders in the community. They were also the legal authorities. People brought matters to the attention of the elders, who would gather at the city gates, the place where town meetings and judicial matters were settled.

However, there is a change in the use of elder in the New Testament. The elders in the New Testament were ordained and held an official office in the church. There are specific requirements given, which were not given in the Old Testament.

The second word, pastor or shepherd (poimano) refers again to the function of the elders. Pastors care for the sheep. Pastors or shepherds lead and feed the flock. Pastors teach the flock. The KJV uses the word feed the flock instead of shepherd the flock. The same Greek word poimano is

used. They just translated it feed, because that is one of the primary functions of a pastor.

(1 Peter 5:2 KJV) "Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind;"

The third term, overseer (episkopeo), speaks more about the work that the elder does. Elders oversee the flock. It is extremely important to understand what the Lord wants elders to oversee in a congregation.

Our first thought might be that it is the ministries of the church that we oversee. In 1 Peter 2:25 we find that Jesus is referred to as the Shepherd and Guardian of our souls. The word Guardian is episkopos in the Greek. Jesus, as a Shepherd, oversees our souls. We, as elders, need to oversee the souls of the sheep in the flock. All through the Psalms we find that the Lord is watching over and caring for our souls.

(1 Peter 2:25) "For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls."

Psalms 23 is a great example of a Shepherd caring for the souls of the flock. He leads the sheep beside still waters where their souls can be put to rest. He makes them lie down in green pastures. In other words, he makes sure they get their rest and that they are well fed. The Shepherd restores the souls of the sheep. The Shepherd gives guidance in the paths of righteousness. The Shepherd walks with the sheep, giving them courage, comforting them and giving them security. As overseers, we oversee the souls of the sheep.

(Psalms 23) "(A Psalm of David.) The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want. {2} He makes me lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside quiet waters. {3} He restores my soul; He guides me in the paths of righteousness For His name's sake. {4} Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil; for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff, they comfort me. {5} Thou dost prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; Thou hast anointed my head with oil; My cup overflows. {6} Surely goodness and lovingkindness will follow me all the days of my life, And I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever."

Another reference to what it means to be an overseer is found in Hebrews 12:15-16. There are four specific things that we find in Hebrews 12:15-16 that we are to oversee. We are told to see to it that no one comes short of the grace of God, that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble and by it many be defiled. The word see to it is the word episkopeo. Episkopeo is the verb and refers to the act of overseeing, whereas episkopos is the noun and refers more to the office.

(Hebrews 12:15-16) "See to it (episkopeo) that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled; {16} that there be no immoral or godless person like Esau, who sold his own birthright for a single meal."

Let's take a look at the four specific things that the writer tells ALL of us to oversee:

1. In our watching over the flock, we are to make sure no one comes short of the grace of God. The grace of God could refer to many things. We receive salvation by grace, not by legalistically following the law. We need grace to go through situations in our life, especially difficult ones. We need grace as in the ability and desire to accomplish God's will. We are to make sure that people have plenty of grace.

When a person is sick or needs help, we need to be there to help them through the trial or difficulty. It is part of seeing to it that they do not come short of the grace of God. I believe that the primary way for us to work this out is through our small groups. When there are needs that the small group cannot meet, the church at large needs to step up and help out.

2. The author also tells us to see to it or episkopeo that there are no immoral people in the flock. Paul addressed the Corinthians because they were allowing immorality in the church. Paul wrote to the church at Corinth, not the overseers or elders of the church. He did not write to Apollos, but to the saints at Corinth. If the church and the elders in Corinth had given proper oversight, Paul would not have needed to address the issue like he did. Are there people living in immorality in the church? Are there people living together outside of marriage? Are there people behaving immorally with one another. All of us, as overseers, must address these issues. It is part of the charge that we have been given.

(1 Corinthians 1:1-2) "Paul, called as an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother, {2} to the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling, with all who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours:"

(1 Corinthians 5:12-13) "For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Do you not judge those who are within the church? {13} But those who are outside, God judges. REMOVE THE WICKED MAN FROM AMONG YOURSELVES."

3. We are to make sure there are no godless people like Esau in the flock. The number one way that people come into a church is relationally. Therefore, the first line of defense for the church to see to it or episkopeo that there are no godless people in the church is the people that know the person. When we bring people to church, we should know the condition of their souls. It is through relationships that we get to know one another.

The second line of defense for us is through small groups. Remember, that one of the purposes of small groups is to build relationally with one another. We want to study together and to pray together, but we also want to do things that will help us build relationally. Sharing meals with one another is tremendous for building relationally. It was at one of our fellowship meals that I discovered that a couple that had been coming did not believe in the deity of Christ. They were part of a cult called "The Way."

Another line of defense is through the church membership process. The elders or overseers can do this is through the membership interview that you do when people come forward to join the church. We need to verify that they believe and have confessed Jesus as Lord of their life, that they have put their trust in the Lord for their salvation.

4. The fourth area that ALL of us are to oversee is the harmony of relationships in the body. The Lord says that we are to “make sure that no root of bitterness springs up causing trouble and for many to be defiled.” We need to watch over the flock to make sure that relational difficulties are worked out. We need to be peacemakers. We need to set the pace in working out relational problems. We need to give instructions to the flock in forgiveness and how to handle conflict. We need God's wisdom as we oversee the flock in this area.

I mentioned that this week was a difficult week for me. I had to oversee my relationship with my wife. I had done a great job at messing things up. My responsibility is to fix the relationship. If it is me that is broken, I need to repent and get right with God and with the other person. If it is the other person, I need to apply Galatians 6:1, and restore the person in a spirit of gentleness. Paul tells us to look to ourselves first, lest we also be tempted. We have to be in right standing before we can help others. We have to oversee our own lives before we can oversee others.

(Galatians 6:1) "Brethren, even if a man is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, lest you too be tempted."

There are spheres of influence. All of us have responsibility to oversee our own lives. Parents have the responsibility of overseeing their lives and their children. Life Group leaders have a responsibility of overseeing their lives, the lives of their children, and the lives of those in their home groups. And all of us have a general responsibility of overseeing the relationships in the church. Ultimately the elders or overseers have responsibility over the church and will have to give account to the Lord for the members of the church. The church is people and an overseer in a church is to oversee people.

I would like to go back to the book of Philippians. Let's read Philippians 4:2.

(Philippians 4:2) "I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to live in harmony in the Lord."

Paul urges Euodia and Syntyche to live in harmony in the Lord. This indicates that they were not living in harmony. This tells me that there was a problem between these women. There was strife and discord. Paul urges these two women to work it out and live in harmony.

He has just told us in Philippians 2 that we need to have encouragement, love, fellowship, affection, and compassion. He says to make his joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, and intent on one thing. He wants Euodia and Syntyche to have love for one another. He wants them to be united in spirit, not separated by conflict and discord. He wants them to have common vision and purpose, being intent on one things. He tells them to do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit. Most conflicts originate from selfishness.

(Philippians 2:1-5) "If therefore there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, {2} make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. {3} Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with

humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself; {4} do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. {5} Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus,"

Paul tells them to do nothing from selfishness. He tells them to have humility of mind and to regard one another as more important than themselves. Euodia and Syntyche need to stop thinking they are right and the other is wrong. They need to have humility of mind, not arrogance of mind, thinking they are always right. They need to consider each other as more important. He tells Euodia to look out for Syntyche's interests and vice versus. Paul is giving practical suggestions to these women on how they can oversee the relationships in their own lives.

Let's go back to Philippians 4 for a minute. Let's start in verse 1. Paul says, therefore, my beloved brethren. Who are these beloved brethren? They are ALL the saints at Philippi, including the overseers and deacons. Paul tells these two women to live in harmony. Then, after telling them to live in harmony, Paul says, indeed, true comrade, I ask you also to help these women. It seems as if there is a certain person he is talking to. It could be the lead overseer. We are not sure by the text.

(Philippians 4:1-4) "Therefore, my beloved brethren whom I long to see, my joy and crown, so stand firm in the Lord, my beloved. {2} I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to live in harmony in the Lord. {3} Indeed, true comrade, I ask you also to help these women who have shared my struggle in the cause of the gospel, together with Clement also, and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life. {4} Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice!"

Remember our passage in Hebrews. We are to see to it that no root of bitterness springs up causing many people to be defiled. Paul is exhorting the church to see to it that these two women get things worked out and live in harmony. Paul is exhorting these two women to take responsibility and oversee their own relationships with one another. Paul is exhorting the overseers and the lead overseer to make sure that no root of bitterness springs up causing many people to be defiled.

When I opened today, I asked if any of you had ever been offended. I asked if you had a difficult time forgiving the other person. I asked if you had ever offended someone else.

Someone said to me this week that since I was talking about overseers, that they did not see a need to come to church. The implication was that since they were not going to be an overseer, they did not need to hear about overseers. The truth is that God wants all of us to be overseers. There are those who are called to oversee in a broader sphere, the church, but all of us are to be overseers.

How are you doing overseeing your soul? How are you doing overseeing the relationships in your life? What steps do you need to take to live in harmony with those around you? Do you need to humble yourself like I had to do this week? Do you need to repent of arrogance and selfishness? Do you need to get your eyes off of yourself and think of others as more important than yourself? Do you need to go apologize to someone and ask them to forgive you? Do you need to forgive someone that has hurt you?

God wants you and I to live in harmony. He wants you and I to be united in spirit, and to have fellowship with one another. When we do that, there is a release of joy that comes. Notice that Paul says, make my joy complete by being.... Also notice in Philippians 4 that after urging them to live in harmony, he says rejoice in the Lord always, again I will say, rejoice. When we have resolved matters and are in harmony with one another, there is joy. Do you want joy in your marriage? Do you want joy in your relationships with others? Learn to be overseers.

(Philippians 2:2) "make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose."

(Philippians 4:4) "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice!"

Can you imagine what a church would look like that is full of overseers? Can you imagine what a church would look like that was committed to working through things and forgiving one another? There would be no bitterness. There would be no defiling of one another. There would be a love and a caring for one another. There would be a fellowship like we have never experienced. There would be an outpouring of the Holy Spirit and joy like never before.

Let's pray. If you need someone to pray with you for a relationship, come forward. If you need to go to forgive someone, forgive them. Just say, "Lord, I forgive so and so for what he/she did to me. I release them from this offense.

If you are walking in immorality and want to get right with the Lord, just ask the Lord to forgive you. To repent means to do an about face. It means to stop and turn around and go the other way. If you are serious about getting right with the Lord, tell Him you are sorry and then stop living in immorality. Make a commitment to walk in purity. The Lord says the time already past is sufficient for you to have carried out the desire of the Gentiles, having pursued a life of sensuality, lusts, carousels, and abominable drinking parties. He says to no longer live for the lusts of men, but for the will of God. Make a commitment to stop what you are doing and live for the will of God. If you want someone to pray with you, come forward and we will pray with you.

If you have never given your heart to the Lord and want to make a commitment to Christ, come forward. We would like to pray with you. This is the most important decision you will ever make in life. God has plans for your life. He has good works prepared for you to walk in. He has plans for welfare, not for calamity, to give you a future and a hope. Come and place your trust in Christ. The Lord says, "behold, now is the day of salvation." Come and receive forgiveness. Come and receive cleansing. Come and begin to walk in newness of life.

If you are going through a rough season in life and need grace and strength. There are folks here today that want to see to it that you have grace. They will pray with you and for you. They will stand with you. There is an abundance of grace here today. Come and receive grace this morning.

Amen.

Introduction (Phil1:1)**I. The Office of Overseer**

- Episkopos means to _____. It is translated as bishop in some versions. (Ac 20:16-17, 20:28, Heb 12:15-16)
- Presbuteros, means an _____. A presbytery is the team of _____. (1 Tim 4:14, Tit 1:5-9)
- Poimen means _____ or _____. Poimano is the verb tense. (Eph 4:11, Acts 20:28, Ps 23)
- It is clear from several passages that all three words refer to the same _____. (1 Pet 5:1-4)

II. The Work of an Overseer

1. See to it that no one comes short of the _____ of God. (Heb 12:15)
2. See to it that there is no _____ person. (Heb 12:15, 1 Cor 1:1-2, 5:12-13)
3. See to it that there are no _____ people. (Heb 12:15)
 - The first line of defense is _____.
 - The second line of defense is _____.
 - The third line of defense is _____.
4. See to it that there is no root of _____. Where there are unresolved conflicts, _____ can set in and many can be _____. (Phil 4:2, 2:1-5)
 - We should restore people in a spirit of _____. (Gal 6:1)
 - _____ is one of the chief causes of strife and discord. (Phil 2:1-5)
 - We need humility of mind and to think of others as _____ than ourselves.
 - _____ has a responsibility to help people live in harmony. (Phil 1:1, 4:1-4)
 - When we live in harmony, there is great _____. (Phil 2:2, 4:4)

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