



# Lessons for Today from the Early Church

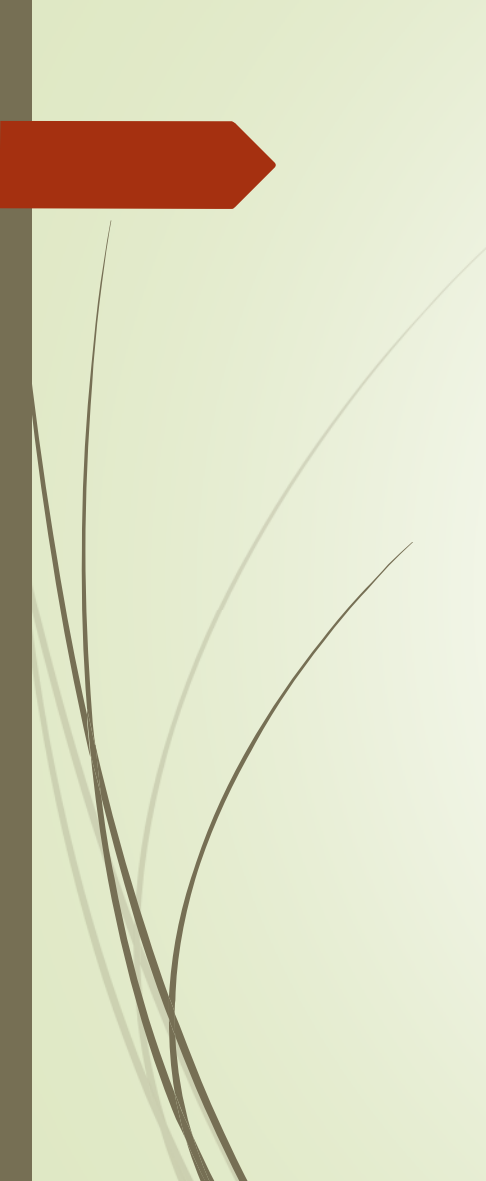
What can we learn from the Early Church?

Discrimination and Leadership



# The Hebrews and Hellenists

- ▶ Let's read Acts 6:1-7
- ▶ Who were the Hellenists?
- ▶ Why were the Hellenistic widows overlooked?
- ▶ Explore the situation. Why the animosity towards the Hellenists?
- ▶ We will look at the issue of discrimination in more depth when we consider the book of James.
- ▶ What problems were created?

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- What were the dangers here for the church and the leadership?
  - What was the solution?
  - What were criteria for the people chosen for this?
  - What does this tell us about the main duties of the Pastor/Elder/Shepherd/Overseer/Bishop?
  - What does that tell us about the role of the proto-deacons?
  - One of the men chosen was Nicolus, a proselyte from Antioch.

# Nicolas and the Nicolaitans

- Nicolas, the proselyte (non-Jew convert to Judaism) is reported by Irenaeus to be the leader of the Nicolaitans. Not everyone accepts this identification. Irenaeus wrote this around 180 AD, about 95 years after the book of Revelation where the Nicolaitans are mentioned. The choosing of the seven would have been early to mid 30's AD.
- Here is the quote: *3. The Nicolaitanes are the followers of that Nicolas who was one of the seven first ordained to the diaconate by the apostles.<sup>302</sup> They lead lives of unrestrained indulgence. The character of these men is very plainly pointed out in the Apocalypse of John, [when they are represented] as teaching that it is a matter of indifference to practise adultery, and to eat things sacrificed to idols. Wherefore the Word has also spoken of them thus: "But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitanes, which I also hate.*

■ Roberts, Alexander, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, eds., *The Apostolic Fathers With Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*. ANF I. Accordance electronic edition, version 3.0. 9 vols. New York: Christian Literature Company, 1885.

# Leadership – Roles and Responsibilities

- ▶ “So the twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples and said, “It is not pleasing to God for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables.” (Acts 6:2 LSB). Note that it is the leaders that initiated the procedure
- ▶ We are going to look at passages that relate to these two functions – We have a twofold division that becomes clearer as time goes on in the New Testament.
- ▶ As we look at the passages, we want to see who qualifies for each category and what the duties are.
- ▶ How are the elders and deacons chosen? It appears that elders, overseers, bishops and shepherds are used as synonyms.
- ▶ When looking at Scriptures, it is important to determine if they are descriptive, prescriptive or are establishing a pattern to be followed


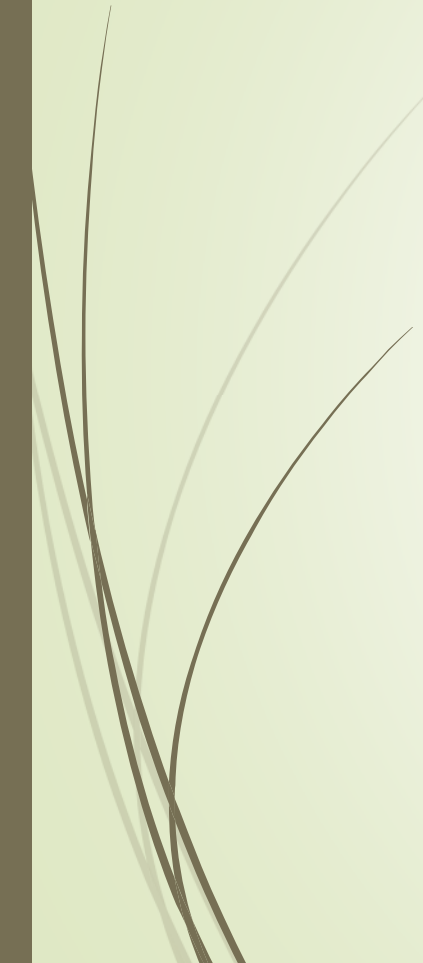



## Timothy and Titus

- ▶ The clearest instructions are given in Paul's letters to Timothy and Titus, so let's read them.
- ▶ 1 Tim 2:12-3:15, 5:17-21
- ▶ Titus 1:5-9
- ▶ Acts 14:23
- ▶ Acts 15:1-29
- ▶ Acts 20:28-31
- ▶ Jam 3:1
- ▶ Gal 2:11-14
- ▶ We should note here that the letters of Paul to Timothy and Titus are letters to pastors. The instructions to these two men serve as a guideline for pastors/elders/shepherds/overseers and bishops.

# Elder responsibilities

- ▶ Preach and Pray – Acts 6
- ▶ Decide doctrinal matters – Acts 15,
- ▶ 2 Tim 4 “preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and teaching.” (2 Tim. 4:2 LSB)
- ▶ “For this reason, I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city as I directed you,” (Titus 1:5 LSB)
- ▶ “holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to reprove those who contradict.” (Titus 1:9 LSB)
- ▶ “For there are many rebellious men, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, who must be silenced because they are upsetting whole families, teaching things they should not teach for the sake of dishonest gain.” (Titus 1:10-11 LSB)

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- ▶ “These things speak and exhort and reprove with all authority. Let no one disregard you.” (Titus 2:15 LSB)
  - ▶ “As I exhorted you when going to Macedonia, remain on at Ephesus so that you may command certain ones not to teach a different doctrine,” (1 Tim. 1:3 LSB)
  - ▶ “First of all, then, I exhort that petitions and prayers, requests and thanksgivings, be made for all men,” (1 Tim. 2:1 LSB)
  - ▶ “An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, sensible, respectable, hospitable, able to teach,” (1 Tim. 3:2 LSB)
  - ▶ “But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons,” (1 Tim. 4:1 LSB)... “In pointing out these things to the brothers, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, being nourished on the words of the faith and of the sound doctrine which you have been following.” (1 Tim. 4:6 LSB)

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- ▶ “Command and teach these things. Let no one look down on your youthfulness, but show yourself as a model to those who believe in word, conduct, love, faith, *and* purity.” (1 Tim. 4:11-12 LSB)
  - ▶ “Until I come, give attention to the public reading of *Scripture*, to exhortation and teaching.” (1 Tim. 4:13 LSB)
  - ▶ “If anyone teaches a different doctrine and does not agree with sound words—those of our Lord Jesus Christ—and with the doctrine conforming to godliness,” (1 Tim. 6:3 LSB)
  - ▶ “Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty or to set their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy.” (1 Tim. 6:17 LSB)
  - ▶ Are there any indications as to the amount of time that elders are expected to put into being elders?
  - ▶ Are there any indications as to term limits?
  - ▶ How do you deal with elders that have gone astray or are sinning? (1 Tim 5:19-21, Gal 2:11-14)



# False Teachers

- ▶ The question comes up about elders that either sin or are not faithful to Scripture i.e. teaching false doctrines. There are a number of passages that deal with this.
- ▶ The first thing is that there were false teachers in the New Testament Churches.
- ▶ The second is that there are warnings about false teachers coming into the Church.
- ▶ There is a pattern of identifying, addressing and rebuking the sin and false teaching. After this comes avoiding and expelling.
- ▶ Matt 18:15ff, Matt 7:15ff, 24:11, Acts 20:28-31, Rom 16:17-18, 1 Cor 5:1ff, Tit 3:10-11, 2 Tim 2:15-18, 2 Pet 2:1-3, 1 Jn 4:1-6, 2 Jn 7-11, Jude 4ff, Rev 2:2-6, 2:14-16, 20-23

# How are Elders chosen?

- ▶ Jesus chose the apostles
- ▶ Jesus chose Paul (Acts 9)
- ▶ Paul and Barnabas appointed elders (Acts 14:23)
- ▶ Titus is told to appoint elders (Tit 1:5)
- ▶ The Holy Spirit has made them overseers and shepherds (Acts 20:17,28)
- ▶ Paul seems to indicate that Timothy's leadership role was the result of the laying on of hands by the council of elders. (1 Tim 4:11-14)
- ▶ Paul, in his instructions to Timothy in a passage talking about elders, tells him not to "lay hands upon anyone hastily", indicating the appointment of elders. (1 Tim 5:19-22)
- ▶ They are to be men, not women. (1 Tim 2:12-14, 1 Tim 3:1) At the end of chapter 2, he says that women are not to have authority and he takes it back to Adam and Eve to eliminate any possibility of someone saying this is cultural. Note he is to be the husband i.e. man of one wife...




# Deacons

- ▶ The word really just means servant.
- ▶ 2. one who gets something done, at the behest of a superior, *assistant to someone*
  - Bauer, W., F. W. Danker, W. F. Arndt, and F. W. Gingrich, eds. A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature. 3d, Accordance electronic edition, version 2.8. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000.
- ▶ *one who renders service to another; an attendant, servant,*
  - Mounce, William D. Mounce Concise Greek-English Dictionary of the New Testament. Accordance electronic edition, version 4.7. Altamonte Springs: OakTree Software, 2011.
- ▶ This means that this office does not have authority, but rather is subject to authority.
- ▶ Are separate from elders (Phil 1:1, 1 Tim 3:8)
- ▶ Deacons have similar qualifications as elders (1 Tim 3:8)
- ▶ Let's read 1 Tim 3:8-13
- ▶ They are to be beyond reproach
- ▶ Hold to the truths of the faith
- ▶ Women can be deacons



# Deacon Responsibilities

- ▶ Caring for the widows (Acts 6:1-7)
- ▶ There does not seem to be any such office in other societies in the 1<sup>st</sup> century.
- ▶ In the Old Testament, we have some passages that require caring for the orphan and widow. (Deut 14:28-29, 24:19-21, 26:12-13)
- ▶ In 2 Macc 3:10, money was in the temple for the relief of widows and orphans.
- ▶ In Jewish society, there appears to be a certain amount of caring for the widows and orphans
- ▶ The New Testament does not tell us much about the roles of deacons other than what we read in Acts 6:1-7. They are never portrayed as having any authority.

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- ▶ It is significant that nowhere in the New Testament do deacons have ruling authority over the church as the elders do, nor are deacons ever required to be able to teach Scripture or sound doctrine.

- ▶ Grudem, Wayne. *Systematic Theology* (2nd Edition). Accordance electronic edition, version 2.1. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020.

- ▶ In general, the verses on deacons show that they had recognized offices to “serve” the church in various ways. Acts 6:1–6 suggests that they had some administrative responsibilities but were nevertheless subject to the authority of those who had rule over the entire church.

- ▶ Grudem, Wayne. *Systematic Theology* (2nd Edition). Accordance electronic edition, version 2.1. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020.

- ▶ The function of deacons is not spelled out here, but the qualifications for deacons suggest some functions. For instance, they seem to have had some responsibility in caring for the finances of the church, since they had to be people who were “not greedy for dishonest gain” (v. 8). They perhaps had some administrative responsibilities in other activities of the church as well because they were to manage their children and their households well (v. 12). They may also have ministered to the physical needs of those in the church or community who needed help

- ▶ Grudem, Wayne. *Systematic Theology* (2nd Edition). Accordance electronic edition, version 2.1. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020.



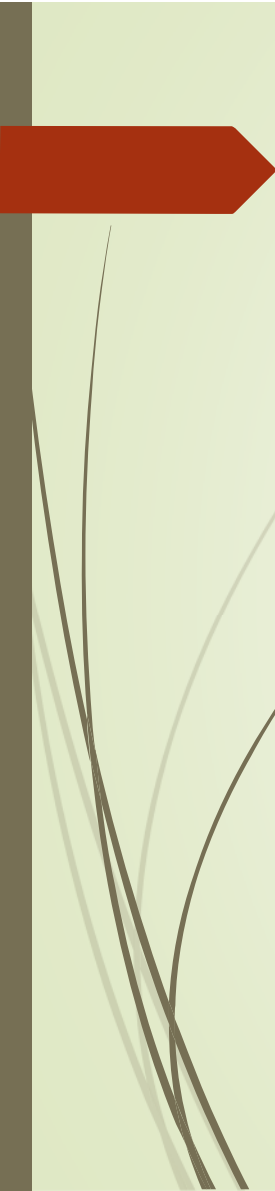
## Examples of women serving

- ▶ Pheobe, a servant (deacon) (Rom 16:1)
- ▶ Women ministering to Jesus and His disciples (Luke 8:3)
- ▶ Priscilla and her Husband Aquila talked to Apollos to explain the way of God more accurately.
- ▶ Philip, one of the seven had four daughters that prophesied. (Acts 21:8-9)
- ▶ Lydia seems to have hosted a house church (Acts 16:14-14, 40)
- ▶ Women prophesy (1 Cor 11:5)
- ▶ Mary – worked hard (Rom 16:6)
- ▶ Junia – a missionary with Andronicus (likely her husband) (Rom 16:7)
- ▶ Tryphaena, Tryphosa and Persis – labourers in the Lord (Rom 16:12)
- ▶ Euodia and Syntyche contended with Paul as fellow workers (Phil 4:2)



# Biblical Leadership Structure


- ▶ As we consider the Scriptures, the following emerges as the Biblical Leadership Structure.
- ▶ A group of Elders leads the Church and are the authorities.
- ▶ A group of Deacons is under the authority of the Elders
- ▶ Elders are appointed by the current Elders.
- ▶ In our society, when a new Church is started that is not under an existing Elder group, likely the best path would be to choose Elders based on Biblical principles and then have those appoint subsequent Elders.
- ▶ The congregation would select people of good reputation to be considered for Deacons. They must then be tested as per 1 Tim 3:8ff and if we follow Acts 6, the Elders would then lay hands on them and appoint them as Deacons.
- ▶ Acts 15:13ff seems to indicate that there is a lead Elder that makes the final judgment after an issue is discussed within the Elder group.

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- ▶ Men can “aspire” to the office of overseer.
  - ▶ Teachers will receive a stricter judgement. (Jam 3:1)
  - ▶ Elders are responsible to preach the Word, pray, teach, reprove, rebuke, exhort and be hospitable. They are to maintain pure doctrine and correct false doctrines
  - ▶ This requires a commitment to invest some significant time into this office.
  - ▶ Not much is said about the responsibilities of the Deacons other than Acts 6, but since the word itself means servant, it would appear that a number of functions that entail the practical parts of church life would fall into this role.
  - ▶ A thorough study of Paul’s letters to Timothy and Titus would help illuminate this issue as well, since Paul is giving direct instructions to two pastors.
  - ▶ The congregation at large is to minister to one another’s needs



# Upside Down

- ▶ As people, we tend to want to do things upside down.
- ▶ In Genesis 3, we have Adam and Eve rejecting God's way and believing they had a better idea. This was a disaster
- ▶ In the book of Numbers chapter 14, the Israelites rejected the command of God and figured that they had a better idea. Instead of going into the promised land, they were going to go back to Egypt. Their judgement was that they would not be allowed to go into the land.
- ▶ The following day, they again figured they had a better idea. They were not going to go into the promised land in rebellion against the command of God. Again, a disaster.

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- ▶ In the time of the Judges, the Israelites continually went against the commands of God and were repeatedly judged by God. It ends with “everyone did what was right in their own eyes”. Judg 21:25
  - ▶ In the book of Jeremiah, after the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians, God told the remaining people to stay in the land of Israel. The people rejected God’s command and went to Egypt, taking Jeremiah with them. (Jer 42:1ff) This again was a disaster for them.
  - ▶ I think we can see that when we believe that we know better than God, the result is not good. We seem convinced that we can come up with a better plan and find good reason for it.
  - ▶ It seems we are still doing this with the selection of Pastors, Elders and Deacons. We want to be the ones in charge selecting the leaders and telling the leaders what to do and being in control of when they leave or are terminated.



# Application for Today

- ▶ How do we apply that in our church.
- ▶ What does that tell us about our roles in the body?
- ▶ Where does “counselling” or talking through problems or questions fit? Is that the role of elders, deacons or the congregation in general?
- ▶ Does Matt 22:36-40, Gal 5:13, 6:2 fit here?
- ▶ How does our desire to have control and do things “democratically” fit with Scripture?