Congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ,

Who here remembers Haynes car repair manuals? They were car specific repair manuals written by experts. Today we use Youtube videos. But we don’t want a general video about how to remove a coil pack, we want the video for how to remove a coil pack for our exact model car. So the point is we recognize the benefit of expert instruction from someone well qualified about the subject.

Well, there are all sorts of books and articles about how to do church but if you want expert instruction from someone well qualified, the best source is the Bible. And that is because the Church is the church of Jesus Christ and the Bible is His instruction manual for how to do church. And we noted last time that while the Bible is full of relevant principles about how to do church, 1 Timothy is detailed **Instruction about how to do church**. To help Timothy with problems in the church at Ephesus, the Spirit of Christ guided Paul as he wrote this letter so that Timothy and all believers would have Christ’s instruction manual for church.

And our focus with this sermon series is what is said about the government and order and discipline of the church. So we began, last time, with ch’s 1-2. And we saw that the chief problem in Ephesus was **false teaching**. And the problem had to do with *what was being said*, the *behaviour* of the false teachers, and the fact that some *women* were doing the teaching and wanting leadership positions. So Paul began his apostolic instruction by reminding Timothy of His duties as a minister of Christ. And he then spoke about worship and leadership in the church – He urged believers to pray, and he explained that because of creation and the Fall, it is men, not women, who are to lead in public worship and to be the office-bearers in the church.

And that brings us to ch’s 3-4. And in these two chapters we read about the officers that Christ gifts to His church. In ch. 3, we read about **Christ’s gift of officers, and the instruction about what the offices are and who the officers should be,** and in ch. 4 we see that **Christ gifts us officers**, as we see *why* we need them and *what* they are to do.

1. So first of all, let’s walk through ch. 3 and read about Christ’s gift of officers.
   1. And the first thing for us to note, which continues the instruction at the end of ch. 2, is that the officers Christ gifts to the church are to be **men** and not women.
      1. You will see that after the trustworthy saying reference, the ESV has “*if anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task*.” Other English Bibles have that phrase as “*if any man aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task*.” Paul originally wrote this letter in Greek and while Greek does have words for ‘man’ and ‘he’ it also has words that could mean male or female, or both, depending on the context. And the words translated as “anyone” and “desires” are examples of words that could have male or female in view. However, because Paul has just said that women are not to teach or exercise authority over men, and because in vv2&12 Paul literally says that the overseer and the deacon must be “*a one wife man*,” when he could have said something neutral like ‘must have one spouse,’ and because the character qualities for elders and deacons in this chapter are put in the masculine form, our English Bibles are quite right to have v1 as “*if a man aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task*.” The expectation of ch. 3 is that the elders and deacons will be men.
      2. And just to be thorough on this point, a quick note about **verse 11**, which is often referred to when the sex of office-bearers is discussed. Our ESV has it as “*their wives*,” meaning the wives of the deacons. The Greek word there is ‘g*unaikas*,’ from which the English word ‘gynaecology’ is derived. And when that word is used in the Bible, it is translated either as ‘women’ or ‘wives.’
         1. So, those who like to argue in favour of female deacons translate the word as ‘women’ and argue that what is in view here is instruction about female deacons alongside the instructions for male deacons. But congregation, that just does not work at any level.
            1. To start off, it would be **utterly inconsistent** with everything that Paul is saying very plainly in this letter about women and authority and teaching in church.
            2. And, that same word, *gunaikos*, is used in **v2 and v12** where the overseer and the deacon are to be a “*one wife man*.” If Paul wanted to say something about female deacons here, there are far clearer ways he could have said it than by using the word that translates as wives a few verses before and a few verses after.
            3. And **thirdly**, if female deacons were in view, we would rightly expect a corresponding requirement that they be one husband women.
            4. So again, Bible translators are bang on in translating the word as “wives.” If the deacon (and the overseer) is married, then his wife has to be the sort of woman described here.
      3. But there is more that needs to be said these men in relation to v1. And we will introduce this point here and return to it before we switch our focus to ch. 4. We read, “*The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task*.”
         1. Paul has had a lot to say about false teachers. In **1:20** he mentioned two men who he had “*handed over to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme*.” And those two men were probably elders. So while people can misuse office or desire it for the wrong reasons, like power and influence, it is good that a man aspires to or seeks or wants to serve as an overseer. In fact, the office of overseer is described as a “noble task.”
            1. In **Matthew 9:36ff**, we read about Jesus going through the countryside preaching and healing. It says, “*When He saw the crowds, He had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then He said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into His harvest."*”
            2. Congregation, overseers are Christ’s primary gift to the church. We read this last time in Ephesians 4: Christ gave “*pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ*.” It is why Paul said to Titus, “*This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you*.” In other words, Titus, the best thing you can do for the churches is to appoint elders.
            3. So this office is a noble task that men should aspire to. And we will come back to this point in a few moments.
      4. But before that, a few comments about overseers and deacons.
         1. In our church we always talk about elders but the term Paul uses here is ‘overseer.’ So why these two terms? Why do we usually speak about elders?
            1. Well, the Greek word used here literally means ‘to over-see,’ which is why it is translated as overseer; these men are to over-see the congregation. Typically, these men are older men. And that is why later in on in 1 Timothy, Paul will speak about the “elders,” which translates a Greek word that literally means the bearded one – an older man. And in **Titus 1:6**, Paul says that an ‘elder’ is to be … and that *as an* ‘overseer’ he is to be … And in **1 Peter 5** also, Peter writes to the elders calling on them to “*serve as overseers*.” So very simply, overseers are elders and elders are overseers; they are one and the same man.
            2. And one consequence of this fact is that the only rulers that Christ has given the church are the overseer/elders. There is simply no concept in the Bible of Popes and Cardinals and Archbishops and bishops and elders; there are just the elders.
            3. And last Friday we had a *regional* Presbytery meeting and later this year we will have a *national* synod meeting. But we don’t have a super elder or a bishop who is the boss; we just have the elders of the churches meeting together to discuss things they have in common.
         2. But alongside the overseer/elders there are to be **deacons**. And the Greek word translated as deacon literally means “table-server.” It implies lowly service. And this is perfect because while Christ is a loving, kingly ruler, which is what the office of elder reflects, He also came to serve and not to be served. Remember Him washing the feet of the disciples, for example? So our deacons reflect the loving service of Christ.
            1. In **Acts 6**, when a practical matter of service became a problem in the church in Jerusalem, the first deacons were chosen so that the Apostles (elders) could focus on their core calling, the ministry of the word and prayer.
            2. Paul begins his letter to the church in Philippi with these words: “*To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons*.” So if there is a church of Christ, there should be elders and deacons to rule and serve.
   2. So the officers that Christ gifts the church are to be men but what I just said leads us into our next point, which is that Christ gifts the church **many** officers. What I just said was, “If there is a church of Christ, there should be elders and deacons to rule and serve.” And the letter ‘s’ on the end of elderS and deaconS is not accidental.
      1. Earlier we read from **Numbers 11**. Moses told the Lord that he that he could not carry the burden of leading the people alone. So the Lord commanded him to appoint 70 men of the elders of Israel who would stand with Moses and Judge or rule the people. So that was the first example of the Lord’s people being led and served best by more than one person
      2. And we just noted Paul’s instruction in **Titus 1:5** that Titus appoint elderS in every church. And Paul’s letter to the church in Philippi was addressed to the elderS and deaconS. And throughout Acts and Paul’s letters, it is always the Apostles and the elderS, and the council of the elderS, and the elderS of the church.
      3. As a safeguard against overload and a one-man tyranny, God’s design is that there *always* be more than one elder and *ideally* more than one deacon.
   3. But also, and we don’t have time today to walk through each of the qualifications for elderS and deaconS, note that **Christ gifts the church with men of good character**. Did you notice that with all of these qualifications, the focus **is very much on character *not duties***? Paul does not so much give a job description as he does a description of the *type* of men who should serve as elder and deacon.
      1. And this too should not surprise us. Consider this story from **Luke 7**: “*As [Jesus] approached the town gate, a dead person was being carried out-- the only son of his mother, and she was a widow … When the Lord saw her, His heart went out to her and He said, "Don't cry." Then He went up and … said, "Young man … get up!" … and … gave him back to his mother*.” Do you see? What Jesus *did* grew out of His compassion and care for this grieving woman; His character.
      2. In recent months I have detailed the injustice that Jesus suffered at the hands of the Jewish leaders and Pontius Pilate. But He never once lashed out; He demonstrated perfect self-control. And we are not able to be perfect, but if we elect a man as an elder who struggles to keep a lid on it when he is under pressure, the sheep will be hurt.
      3. If we elect men to office who are of good character, the work will get done and it will be done for the right reasons.
      4. And I want to say here that the Lord has blessed us as a congregation with men of good character. Thank you, Lord!
   4. Well, before we move on to ch. 4, I want to return to what we said earlier about the eldership being a noble task that it is good for men to aspire to. And notice also what it says about Deacons who serve well in v13, they “*gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in faith that is in Christ Jesus*.”
      1. I am one of those rare beasts who have served as a deacon, and as an elder, and as a minister. And I look back on my years as a deacon with enormous thankfulness to the Lord. You see, what I learned then is that I was helpless without the Lord Jesus and that anything I did well was all about Him. And my love for Him and His people grew immeasurably. And it has continued to grow as an elder and as a minister. There are still many times when I feel like I just can’t … or it’s too hard … but the Spirit of Christ carries me or does things that seem humanly impossible.
      2. My brothers, please aspire to serve as a minister or elder or deacon. The call to serve may not come to you all, and that is fine, for there are many ways we can serve Christ and His people, but the church needs ministers and elders and deacons.
      3. And setting aside the ability to teach, which not every man has, 1 Tim. 3 is not a description of a super Christian man that most men cannot possibly hope to be, it is a description of a Christ-like man. Pastor Thabiti Anyabwile says, “The pastoral challenge to aspire to be an elder is good and godly. It’s another way of saying to Christian men, ‘This is what Christian maturity and Christ-likeness look like.’ … Can you imagine the Christ-exalting power of a church filled with men possessing a strong, godly desire to lead Christ’s sheep in their homes and their church?”
      4. So here is a thought exercise for us all to do: If we asked the boys and girls, and our young people, What do you think about ministers and elders and deacons? what would they say? Would they say, A noble task!? A way to gain confidence in faith that is in Christ Jesus? A precious gift from Christ. I would love to be a minister or elder or deacon one day! Or would they say something different? And while there will be many things that contribute to their answers, I think we all know that their answers will have a lot to do with the attitude of us oldies to office and the office-bearers.
2. Well, that brings us, secondly, to **chapter 4** where we see that Christ Gifts US Officers. And this chapter has three main parts to it where we see that we are given these officers to protect and preserve us…
   1. … **from falling away**. And we see this in vv1-5, where Paul says that he knows from the Holy Spirit “*that in later times some will depart from the faith*.”
      1. And first of all, this word from the Spirit is probably a reference to the words of Jesus in **Matthew 24:10-11**. There Jesus spoke about the later times and said, “*And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another. And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray*.”
      2. And when Paul uses a phrase like ‘**later times**’ or the ‘last days,’ he wasn’t speaking about something way in the future. Paul planted the church in Ephesus and lived there from around AD 54-57. His letter to Timothy was probably written about 6 years later. But in between leaving Ephesus and writing this letter, he actually met with the Ephesian elders. We read about the meeting in **Acts 20**. And Paul said to them, “*Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers … I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them*.” So Paul would have seen what was going in Ephesus now as evidence of them being in the later times. So the simplest way for you and me to think about the later times or the last days is the whole period between Jesus’ first coming and His second coming. And what that means for you and me today is that while there will likely be an increase of those who depart from the faith just prior to the Lord’s return, but there will always be those who depart from the faith.
      3. And I have to ask you **if this is something you take seriously**? If you have been here for a while you will know that we believe that the Bible teaches that God causes all His elect children to persevere in faith; not one of them will be lost. And that is 100% true. But that does not mean that everyone who once professes faith will reach heaven.
         1. In **ch. 1:20**, we are given the names of two men who surely professed faith once but who had made shipwreck of their faith.
         2. And many of us will know people, perhaps even people we love very much, who once professed faith but who now want nothing to do with Christ and His people.
         3. The Book of **Hebrews** is full of warnings, addressed to those who professed faith, to strive and persevere, lest they fall and fail to reach glory. **Hebrews 4:11** is one example: “*Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience*.”
         4. In **1 Peter 5:8**, we are warned to watch out for the devil, “*who prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour*.”
         5. Do you take these warnings seriously? Do you strive? Are you watchful? Or are these warnings just for others? But you will cruise into heaven?
         6. Many professing Christians think the biggest danger they face is persecution, marriage break-up, addictions, unemployment. Uh uh. It is unbelief – departing from the faith. And the point being made here is that Christ gifts us Officers to help us stay in faith.
   2. How so? Well, we see that in v12 where Timothy is told to set the believers an example in the way that he talks and behaves and in love, faith, and purity. And this is something that applies to all office-bearers in the church. They are to model gospel ministry – they are to show members what it means to live in fellowship with Christ and how that effects the way they talk, their work-life, life in the home, devotions, church attendance, sexual purity, etc.
      1. **Hebrews 13:7** says the same thing, “*Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith*.” Are you starting to get a sense of how important office-bearers are as Christ’s gift to the church?
   3. But it is not just how the office-bearers live that helps us stay in faith, it is also through the teaching and preaching ministry.
      1. First of all, in **verse 6**, Timothy is told to put what has been said about public worship, and elders and deacons, and the danger of departing from the faith before the brothers. And the verb form of the Greek word translated as ‘put before the brothers’ has ongoing, continuous action in view. Timothy, keep putting this before the brothers. They need to hear it again and again.
      2. And in **v11**, Timothy is told to command and teach these things.
      3. And in **v13**, though there are a thousand things that Timothy could put his time into, he is told to devote himself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, and to teaching.
         1. And this was Timothy’s **official duty**. v14 describes his ordination by the council of elders to this work. As a minister/elder Timothy was to be devoted to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, and to teaching.
         2. And again in v15 he is told to practise these things and immerse himself in them.
         3. And similar instructions are given in **2 Timothy 4:1-2**: Timothy, *“preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching*.”
         4. Do you see how important the official preaching/teaching ministry is?
   4. And the importance of the godly living of the office-bearers and the official preaching and teaching ministry is further emphasized in v16 where Timothy is told to keep a close watch on himself and on the teaching, and to persist in this, for by so doing he will save himself and his hearers.
      1. And that word “**save**” has what was said in v1 in view. What would keep Timothy and the people in the congregation from departing from the faith is the faithful preaching of the Word of Christ and the godly example of the office-bearers.
      2. And because Christ is the same today and because the church is the same today, what will keep me and you from departing from the faith and growing in faith and usefulness to Christ is the godly example of myself and the office-bearers and the public reading of Scripture, exhortation, preaching/teaching.
   5. And speaking as an office-bearer, and I am sure every office-bearer among us would say the same, this is a daunting responsibility. How can it be that the Lord Jesus Christ has chosen to use us, with all of our sins and weaknesses, to save you? These are words designed to drive men to the Lord Jesus who alone can equip us to serve as office-bearers in such a way that the Spirit of Christ delights to use our words and actions top bring people to faith and to grow in faith. Please, please pray for us.
   6. But this is Christ’s instruction manual for preserving and promoting true religion. Can we grow and get better in this area or that area? Certainly. The catch cry of the reformation was Reformed and always being reformed by God’s word. But congregation, I am very grateful to Christ that this church understands and pursues this model of ministry – a devotion to the public reading of Scripture, exhortation, preaching/teaching by Christ’s officers. And I rejoice that the office-bearers that Christ has given us strive to set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity, and that they keep a close watch on themselves and the teaching.

May Christ be praised for His instruction and may we be faithful in our obedience. Amen.