

THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST

SPREADING THE SOUL-SAVING MESSAGE OF JESUS

1 TIMOTHY LESSON 2 (Chapter 3)

Introduction by narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:

THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST. Spreading the soul-saving message of Jesus. And now, Kevin Pendergrass.

Welcome to the Gospel of Christ. In this lesson we are going to be looking at the organization of the Lord's church—specifically, the one church that He built. Before we look at the **organization** of the Lord's church, it is vital that we understand the **nature** of the one church. In Matthew 16:18 Jesus said, "I will build My church." Notice that Jesus did not say that He would build **churches**. He said that He would build His **church**. There would be only one church that Jesus would build. We know that this is true because in Acts 2 we see the beginning of the Lord's church. In fact, in Ephesians 4:4 Paul said that there is only "one body." In Ephesians 1:22-23 we see that the body is the same thing as the church. Therefore, there is one body, and there has to be only one church—the church of Christ (Rom. 16:16). It is vital for us to understand some background regarding the nature of the one church.

Let's now look at the organization of the Lord's church—the one church that He established. We first need to understand that organization in regard to **authority**—specifically concerning who does **not** have authority. Today some people say that a certain man has authority, and that you can flip a coin and choose that this person or that person can start making decisions in the church, and that is perfectly fine. Others say that it doesn't really matter because everyone has authority when it comes to truth, and everyone can do whatever they want to do. However, let's look at 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4 in order to understand a vital principle.

"Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God."

Here we see that anyone who opposes the truth, who claims to be God, or who claims to be able to make decisions is condemned by the Word of God. Think of someone like the pope. He is someone who claims to have authority, and who claims to make decisions regarding truth. Yet when we turn to 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4 we can see that such a thing is condemned in the Word of God. The pope is not the one who has authority when it comes to truth. In fact, that is strictly condemned. In Matthew 23:9 Jesus was condemning religious titles when He said in a spiritual context, "Do not call anyone on earth your father, for one is your Father, He who is in heaven." When Jesus spoke in Matthew 23:9, He condemned what many people do today when they refer to someone in a spiritual fashion as "father." That is condemned. That person is not a spiritual father. God is your spiritual father if you are a faithful Christian. We need to clear that up and get it out of the way so that we do not misinterpret or misunderstand that some man is the one who has authority. Man is not the one who has authority when it comes to truth.

So who does have authority in the one church? From Matthew 28:19 we learn that Jesus had "all authority" in regard to truth. If Jesus has all authority, how much does that leave for you and me today? "All" eliminates everything else. When it comes to matters of truth,

we do not have any authority. Only Jesus Christ does. We learn from Colossians 1:18 that Christ is the Head of His church. In 1 Peter 3:22 we learn that all are subject to Christ. Who has “all authority” in the one church—the Lord’s church? Jesus does. He has “all authority.”

Now let’s go farther and look at the organization of the one church. There is a position in the church known as “elder.” There are several different terms used to describe this position. The first one is the term “elder,” which simply means “an older man.” In Scripture there is always a plurality of elders, not just one. We see this in 1 Peter 5:1, in Acts 20:17, and in Acts 15:22. There is always a plurality of elders. There is not just one man who is the single elder. Even Peter himself was an elder among many other elders. There was not just one at one congregation.

Two others terms used to describe the position of elder are “pastor” and “shepherd.” It is interesting to note that when we look to the world today, the word “pastor” appears to be used among most religious groups or denominations as a title for a preacher. Yet when we go to the Bible, the term “pastor” is used only once—in Ephesians 4:11. The word for pastor is the same word that is used for “shepherd” in 1 Peter 2:25. This word has its roots in the Old Testament. We see evidence of this in Jeremiah 10:21 and Jeremiah 23:1. This person is someone who is a spiritual leader or spiritual teacher. The term “elder” represents the same position as the words “pastor” or “shepherd.” And it is always a plurality. So many churches today have one “pastor,” yet that is condemned in Scripture. There must be a plurality of pastors, not just one.

Two other terms used to describe an elder are “bishop” or “overseer.” I want us to look in the Book of Acts in order to see how these words are used interchangeably. In Acts 20:17 we read, “From Miletus he [Paul] sent to Ephesus and called for the elders of the church.” There we see the term “elders” (plural) being used. Look in Acts 20:28, which is speaking of the same position: “Therefore take heed to yourselves and to 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.” There we see overseers, shepherds, and elders being the same thing. Such men are to “shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.” All of those terms are used to describe the same position. In Philipians 1:1 the term “bishop” is seen as being the same as “overseer.” In Titus 1:5 we see that “elders” are the same as “bishops” in Titus 1:7. All of these terms are talking about the same position. We should not get confused and say, “Well, here it says ‘bishop.’” Is that different than overseer? Or, is an overseer different than a pastor? Is a pastor different than an elder? Of course not. All these words mean the same thing. They are all describing the same position. Let’s go over those just one more time. Elder, pastor, bishop, overseer, and shepherd all relate to the exact same position.

Can just anyone be a pastor/bishop/overseer/shepherd? Does just anyone fit the description of this position? What if someone walked in and said, “I want to be a pastor today.” Are they automatically going to be a pastor? Of course not. There are qualifications that one must meet for such a position. We read these qualifications in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and in Titus 1:6-9. We are going to quickly look at some these qualifications—not just for bishops/overseers, but we also will examine how these need to apply to our lives as well.

The first qualification is desire. A man must have a desire to be an elder. If someone does not want to be an elder, then that person is already disqualified because he does not possess the necessary desire. Another qualification is blamelessness. When we look at the word “blameless,” it does not mean that we’ll never be blamed for something. It carries the idea that if a person is blamed for something, he cannot be laid hold of. We know that Jesus was blamed in Matthew 26:59, but when the truth came out there was nothing that

His accusers could lay hold of to find Him guilty. Colossians 1:22 says that we should all be blameless. Again, that does not mean that we will never be blamed for certain things. In fact, more than likely we will be blamed. People may lie about us or say things about us that they shouldn't. But when the objective truth comes out in the end, we will be found blameless because we have lived a life that is pure and holy.

Another qualification is being the husband of one wife. Another one is that a man must be temperate. This carries the idea of someone who is restrained in his conduct—one who can handle situations. This person does not “go off the deep end” or go crazy over the least little thing. An elder is someone who is temperate and who can control his emotions.

An elder also must be someone who has a sober mind. Sober simply means healthy. When an elder gets to an age where he no longer can reason, then he is no longer qualified to be an elder. What if someone had been an elder all his life (among several other others), and he had been a great elder, but then he comes down with Alzheimer's, or something else happened to him so that he could not reason any more simply because of his age? That man is no longer sober minded. Someone might say, “Well, I don't see the big idea. What's the big deal? Who really cares? That doesn't matter.” It does matter, because in 1 Peter 5:8 Peter said, “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.” Why is it so important that elders be sober minded? And why is it so important for us to likewise be sober minded? Satan is out there, and is trying to find anyone he can so he can catch his prey. We need to always be on guard. We need to always be focused and ready to catch these things. Unfortunately, many congregations today in various religious groups have let false practices come into their worship so that people no longer are worshiping in spirit and in truth. In John 4:24, Jesus said that if we want to be pleasing to God, we must worship Him “in spirit and in truth.” People today bring in different plays, skits, and mechanical instruments, even though there is no authority for any of these things found within the Scriptures. Because people are not being sober minded any longer, Satan attacks them—and people allow these types of things to come into their worship because they are not on guard and are not watching out. It is very important that an elder be sober minded.

An elder also must be one who has good behavior, and someone who has his life under control. He keeps his commitments, and he keeps his finances under control. He also must be hospitable. In 1 Peter 4:9 we read, “Be hospitable to one another without grumbling.” What does “without grumbling” mean? Have you ever been to someone's house because they invited you over for a meal? Afterwards you turn to your spouse and say, “Well, it looks like now we're going to have to invite them over because they invited us over.” That is being hospitable—but with grumbling. We are to be hospitable, but we are to make sure that we are doing so in a joyful way. We should enjoy offering our hospitality.

An elder also must be able to teach. And he must be someone who is not given to wine. This carries the thought of not even being close to wine. He must be a person who is not violent, and who does not get angry easily or who “blows up” at the least little thing. He must not have a reputation of being violent. He also must not be greedy for money. It is not wrong to have a lot of money. I've even heard people say, “This man is rich, so he can't be an elder. He's not qualified.” It is not wrong to have money, but we cannot be greedy for it. Why would this particular qualification be included? As an elder, a man will be shepherding the flock. There will be times when an elder will be in charge of the congregation's finances. Perhaps an elder will even have sole access to those funds. What if an elder stole some of the congregation's money because he was greedy? A greedy person should not be in such a position because he might be tempted to do such a thing. Someone who is greedy for money is not qualified to be an elder.

An elder must be gentle. He must be compassionate. He must be understanding. He cannot be quarrelsome and be the type of person who looks for a fight just for a fight's sake. Do not get this confused with someone who is ready to stand for the truth or for someone who is ready to "fight the good fight of faith." Rather, this is speaking of matters of opinion. This is talking about someone who wants to fight "just to fight." An elder also must be a person who does not covet or possess a strong craving for power or money. An elder must rule his own house well. He must be a good father, and must have his house under control. A person could look to this man as a good leader because he is a good father. He takes care of his family.

Also, an elder must have faithful children. It is almost humorous times (in an ironic way) because there are those (as in the Mormon denomination) who claim to be elders, yet one of the things (among many others) that is conspicuously missing in their lives is "faithful children." An elder must have faithful children. A question arises: "What if someone meets all these qualifications, but has only one child? Does that mean that such a person does not have 'faithful children'?" Genesis 21:7 answers that. "She also said, 'Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? For I have borne him a son in his old age.'" Here we can see that the term "children" can, at times, mean just one child. So, if someone meets all the other qualifications for being an elder, but has only one child, then does that person have "faithful children"? If the child under consideration is faithful, then, yes, that person has "faithful children." In Ephesians 6:1 the Bible says, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right." What if a child read that passage and said, "Mom, Dad, I don't have to obey you any more because I don't have any brothers or sisters." We would understand that that wouldn't be right because if someone asked you, "Do you have children?," you would say, "Yes, I have one child." We see that in the Scriptures as well.

An elder cannot be a novice—that is, someone who is a new convert. An elder must be a lover of what is good, and cannot be a lover of what is evil. He must be able to get mad at the right things and love to hear good things. An elder must be "just"—someone who shows no favoritism because he is fair. He must be someone who is holy and pure in action as well as in thought. An elder must have self-control. Also, he must have good testimony from outside. Again, this does not mean that everyone will like what this person has to say or that everyone will like what he teaches. But he will be someone who "practices what he preaches." A person may not agree with an elder at all times. Many people did not agree with Paul. Yet in Galatians 4:16 Paul asked, "Have I therefore become your enemy because I tell you the truth?" Paul still had a good testimony from outside because people saw that he was consistent. He practiced what he preached. That is exactly what an elder must do. An elder must be someone who is not a hypocrite.

Now, if Christ has "all authority," what is the point in having pastors, elders, or bishops? The point is this. The elders' responsibility is found in Acts 20:28. While elders do not have authority in matters of truth, they are to shepherd the flock. Acts 20:28 says, "Therefore take heed to yourselves and to 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." What is the elders' responsibility? The elders' responsibility is not to make matters of truth or to have authority in truth, but to make decisions when it comes to matters of opinion. In 1 Peter 5:1-5 Peter said that Christ is the Head Shepherd. Elders have authority only when it comes to opinion—such as making a decision regarding the preacher they are planning to hire. If the preacher is a faithful member of the church of Christ and preaches the truth, it is up to the elders to decide who they actually hire. It is up to the elders to decide how the church's money is used. As long as they are supporting a good, sound work, they might

choose a different work than someone else might choose. But as long as they are choosing a work that is sound and faithful, that is their decision. What about the location of the church building, what type of building the church will have, or the different types of works in which the church will be involved? These are decisions that elders make—not decisions regarding matters of truth. We've already seen that Christ has all authority when it comes to truth.

A congregation of the Lord's people should strive to have elders (a plurality of elders). We see in Titus 1:5 that if elders are missing, then a congregation is lacking something. The congregation is not sinning, but it is lacking. A congregation can have no elders and not be sinning because sometimes the men of the congregation just aren't qualified to be elders. What happens if there are no men who are qualified to be elders? Men cannot be put into the position of an elder because they are not qualified. Or, perhaps there is only one man who is qualified. If there is not a plurality, then the qualifications set forth by the Bible are not met because there must always be a plurality of elders. In Acts 14:23 we see that for a period ranging from a year and a half to as much as three years, there were no elders in the congregation. They were striving to have elders, just as we should strive to have elders. It is not a sin not to have elders. But if there are men who are qualified, then there should be elders because the congregation is lacking.

Christ is the Head of the one church. After Christ there are elders or pastors. Then we come to the third type of organization found in the Scriptures concerning the church: deacons. The term "deacon" simply means "someone who serves." Sometimes this term is actually rendered as "to minister." In 1 Corinthians 3:5 we see the word used, not in a technical sense of "a deacon," but instead to describe someone who serves the Lord. At other times, however, the term does take on a technical description (such as in 1 Timothy 3). To be a deacon in a technical sense, a person must meet these qualifications.

A deacon must be reverent, and must take the job seriously. A person who is a deacon cannot do a job half-heartedly. A deacon also cannot be double tongued (that is, a person who says one thing but does something else). A deacon cannot be given to wine. People sometimes come to this description to try to justify social drinking. They say, "It says that a deacon is not to be 'given to much wine,' which indicates that a person can drink a little bit of wine." We need to understand the back drop. Throughout the Bible we see passages such as the one found in Proverbs 23:29-39 where we are told not to even look upon alcoholic wine. That is poetic language, yet it still shows how we are to abstain from even looking upon wine because of how dangerous it is. In Ephesians 5:18 in the original Greek the Bible indicates that we are not to even be in the process of becoming drunk with wine. Social drinking is condemned in Scripture. A language can condemn an excessive indulgence without implying that an action is authorized in a lesser amount. In other words, if something is sinful, it is sinful. Let me give you an illustration. If I found out that one of my friends had been cheating on his spouse every night, and I said, "You shouldn't be cheating on your wife every night," did I just imply that the person could cheat on his wife on weekends? Of course not! No one would say that. Again, language can condemn an excessive indulgence without implying that the action is authorized in a lesser amount. We see this principle applied in the Ecclesiastes 7:17—"Do not be overly wicked or be foolish: Why should you die before your time?" Because the Bible says, "Do not be overly wicked," does that imply that we can be "a little bit wicked at times"? Of course not. We need to let the Bible interpret itself.

Another qualification for a deacon is that he cannot be greedy for money—just as in the case of an elder. A deacon also must be able to hold to The Faith, and must be able to stand strong in truth so that he can hold The Faith in a good conscience. A deacon must be some-

one who has been tested and found blameless. In 1 Thessalonians 5:21 we are told to “test all things and hold fast to that which is good.” A deacon must be the husband of one wife, and must be a good husband who rules his children well.

Those are the qualifications that a person must meet to be a deacon. We read of a plurality of deacons, and never just one. But there have been some who have advocated “women’s rights,” and who have said, “I believe it is OK for women to be deaconesses.” They use Romans 16:1 to prove their point, where Paul said to the church in Rome, “I commend to you Phoebe our sister, who is a servant.” Some have suggested that the term “servant” in this passage actually means “deaconess.” In fact, some translations use the word “deaconess.” Does that mean that we must have women deacons in the church? Of course not. The term “deaconess” is actually a terrible translation. The word is the same word that we use for “servant.” We’ve already seen at the beginning of this discussion on deacons that it is simply another term to describe a servant. Phoebe was simply a female servant in Christ—as all women should be. If a woman is a faithful child of God, then she also is a servant of God. She is not a “deaconess.” Also, think about this. How could a woman be a deacon? We just looked at the qualifications, one of which says that a deacon must be “the husband of one wife.” It is impossible for a husband to be a husband of one wife—which helps us understand that Romans 16:1 is not teaching a woman can be a deacon. In fact, 1 Timothy 2:9-11 condemns the idea of women having roles of authority when it comes to spiritual matters. Phoebe was simply a female who served in the Lord’s church.

If there is one verse that could sum up the organization of the Lord’s church, it would be Philippians 1:1. Mark this verse in your Bible as indicating the proper organization of the Lord’s church. In Philippians 1:1 we read, “To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons.” The phrase “to all the saints” is simply another way of saying “Christians.” The phrase, “who are in Christ Jesus,” refers to the fact that Christ has all authority. The phrase, “with the bishops,” refers to the elders or pastors. The phrase, “and deacons,” simply is speaking about deacons. This verse speaks about the proper organization of the Lord’s church.

While it is vital for us to understand the proper organization of the Lord’s church, I want to ask you if you are sure that you are saved. Do you **know** that you are saved? How do you know that? Have you heard what the Bible has to say? Romans 10:17 says that “faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” Once we hear, we must believe. John 3:16 says, “Whoever believes in Him [Christ] should not perish but have everlasting life.” Is belief enough? Some people say that all a person has to do is believe, and then he or she is saved. But James 2:19 teaches that “even the demons believe and tremble.” James 2:24-26 teaches that belief is not enough. A person almost must repent, which is a hard commandment at times because when we repent we have to change our lives. From Acts 17:30 we learn that “these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent.” Then we must confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. We do not have to confess our sins to another person. We must confess that Jesus Christ is Lord (Rom. 10:10). After doing that, we must be baptized for the forgiveness of our sins (Acts 2:38). In Mark 16:15-16 Jesus said, “He who is believed and is baptized will be saved.” Have you obeyed the truth today? If not, we pray that you will obey the Gospel of Christ.

Narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:

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STUDY QUESTIONS FOR 1 TIMOTHY LESSON 2 (CHAPTER 3)

1. According to Matthew 16:18, how many churches did Jesus promise to build?
2. According to Ephesians 1:22-23, by what other name is the church known?
3. According to Ephesians 4:4, how many bodies are there?
4. If the church is the body, and if there is only one body, how many churches are there?
5. What did Jesus forbid in Matthew 23:9?
6. According to Matthew 28:19, what did Jesus say that He had been given?
7. Is there any significant difference in the terms pastor, bishop, overseer, and shepherd?
8. What important point do we learn regarding the position of elders in the church when we read in Acts 20:17, "From Miletus he [Paul] sent to Ephesus and called for the **elders** of the church"?
9. List two different passages in the New Testament where the qualifications of elders are given.
10. What does the Bible mean when it says that an elder must be "blameless"?
11. What does the Bible mean when it says that an elder must be "sober minded"?
12. When the Bible says that an elder must have "faithful children," does it mean that an elder and his wife **must** have more than one child?
13. What does the Bible mean when it says that an elder cannot be a novice?
14. Do elders have authority to alter matters of truth?
15. If a congregation of the Lord's church does not have elders, is it necessarily sinning?
16. What does the word "deacon" mean?
17. What does 1 Timothy 3:9 mean when it says that deacons must "hold the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience"?
18. When the Bible says that a deacon is not to be "given to much wine," does that imply that it is acceptable for a deacon to drink "a little bit of wine"?
19. Does Romans 16:1 prove that it is acceptable to have deaconesses in the church? Why or why not?
20. There is a passage in the Book of Philippians that provides an excellent one-verse summary of the organization of the Lord's church. Where is that passage located?