

WHAT IS THE CHURCH? 3
CHURCH LEADERSHIP: ELDERS AND DEACONS
1 Timothy 3:1-13

At the core of the divine plan is the growth and consolidation of the church, particularly at the local level. By this we mean *a group of professing believers in a specific geographical area who are organized to do their part in God's plan*. This is the level at which the divine purposes become visible and practicable and are ultimately fulfilled. This being the case, we would expect God to provide a plan for local assemblies to function effectively, especially in regard to leadership. Indeed, this is precisely what God has done. In Scripture we are presented with a model of church leadership that centers on two principal leadership roles: *elders* and *deacons*. Notice these two roles in Philippians 1:1.

1. THE OFFICES OF BIBLICAL LEADERSHIP

A. ELDERS

1) Three Key Terms. The primary office of leadership, according to Scripture, is that of "elder." The NT uses three different words to describe the same leadership role.

- "*presbuteros*" = elder. When used of church leaders, it emphasizes spiritual maturity.
- "*episkopos*" = overseer or bishop. In the church it refers to one who carefully exercises oversight.
- "*poimen*" = pastor or shepherd. Biblically it's more of a description of the role of caring for the flock than a title.

These three titles are used interchangeably (one example: 1 Peter 5:1-2). What do we learn from this about the role of an elder?

2) The Importance of Plurality. Paul's consistent practice was to develop a group of elders to lead each local church (e.g., Acts 14:23). There is absolutely no evidence that there was just a single authoritative leader in any of these congregations.

- Why is a plurality of elders important for a church?
- If the church is to be led by a plurality of elders, why do most churches have an individual called "the pastor"?
- How do you understand 1 Timothy 5:17?

B. DEACONS AND DEACONESSES

"*diakonos*" = servant or minister

- According to Acts 6:3-4, what is the job description of a deacon?
- What is the relationship of deacons to elders?

2. QUALIFICATIONS FOR CHURCH LEADERSHIP

- Explain: "*An overseer must be above reproach*" (1 Timothy 3:2; compare Acts 6:3, "*of good repute*").
- What are further qualifications for elders and deacons in 1 Timothy 3?
- 1 Timothy 3:1, "*The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task*" (Phillips Version: "*has laudable ambition*"). In a real sense, the same could be said of deacons. What would keep you from taking the initiative to move toward church leadership?