

# PAUL'S THEOLOGY

## *Lesson 51*

### The Church – Part 4

### The Structure of the Church and the Authenticity of Paul's Letters

Last week, I received a distressed telephone call from my daughter Gracie. She was working her way through her college textbook and class on the New Testament. The professor and text taught that Paul did not write the letter to the Ephesians found in the New Testament, but rather, some unknown that scholars label “a member of the Pauline School” was the author. With noticeable exasperation in her voice, Gracie asked me, “Does this mean that I can't believe what I read in the Bible?”

I firmly told Gracie that she did not need to doubt the Bible, nor her faith. I asked her to verbalize for me the reasons offered to support this view by her text or professor. She said, “Nothing really that I can recite, except for a different ‘eschatology’ [she had trouble pronouncing the word] in the books.” I suggested that Gracie not worry about it, but make notes on the issues and we would discuss them over Thanksgiving. Some things are not so easily responded to, if one is not given the opportunity to address them more fully than a brief telephone call!

The question of Pauline authenticity is not a new one to me. In my own college days, I took a class entitled, “Pauline Theology.” One of our textbooks in that class was *The Writings of St. Paul* by Wayne Meeks<sup>1</sup>. At the time of publication (1972), Meeks was teaching at Yale University. Meeks divided Paul's writings into two categories: those that were “undoubted letters of Paul,” and those that were “works of the Pauline School.” Meeks considered Paul undoubtedly the author of 1 Thessalonians, Galatians, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Romans, Philippians, and Philemon. Meeks classified 2 Thessalonians, Colossians, Ephesians, and the Pastoral Letters of 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus as “works of the Pauline School.”

To this point in our study on Paul, we have not addressed the question of authorship of any of these five letters that some scholars do not regard as authentically Paul's. In this lesson, however, those questions are relevant and worthy of examination because much of Paul's teaching on the organization and structure of the church comes from the pastoral epistles of 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus.

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<sup>1</sup> Meeks, Wayne, *The Writings of St. Paul*, (Norton 1972).

Therefore, we will spend a portion of this class discussing the issues of authenticity and authorship before launching into a discussion of Paul's writings on church structure.

## AUTHORSHIP

The reasons for challenging Paul's authorship of certain letters change depending on which letter is challenged. In other words, the reasons for challenging the Pastoral Epistles are different than the reasons for challenging 1 Thessalonians or Ephesians. We will give reference to these different reasons in due course, but first, we should layout the importance of the issue by addressing a concern of many on why this is or is not important.

The core question for many on this point is the very reliability of the Bible itself:

If Paul did not write those books that bear his name, how can we believe any other fact of Scripture?

To some, this question seems absolutely black and white, with only one answer: either Paul wrote each letter and the Bible is true, or Paul did not write all the letters and the Bible is false. I have no doubt that Gracie's college professor would not agree with those as the only two possible conclusions. There are people who question Paul's authorship on certain epistles that still hold to the veracity of the Bible as Holy Scripture. Before we probe Paul's authorship, we fairly ask whether someone can hold both opinions ("no" on Paul's authorship; "yes" on the Bible as Scripture)?

This is an important question because it reflects our ability to fairly assess the evidence. Meeks discussed the authenticity of the Pastorals asserting,

There are important scholars who still support Pauline authorship. But the evidence to the contrary is so extensive that it is doubtful whether anyone would continue to defend the traditional apart from the reluctance to admit that a deliberate fiction could have been accepted into the New Testament canon.<sup>2</sup>

Meeks then goes into the one argument he sets out as "the only strong argument for the authenticity" – the tradition of the church. We set aside the logical fallacies Meeks and others sympathetic to his views employed to address Meeks's challenge head on.<sup>3</sup> If he is right that the only real reason people would support

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<sup>2</sup> Meeks at 132.

<sup>3</sup> The logical fallacies Meeks committed can bear many labels. We believe that Meeks could be accused of arguing *ad hominem*, meaning he is attacking the person rather than the position. Meeks does not simply hit the argument head on in a fair, academic manner. Instead, he argues against the person who holds the opposite belief implying the person has no real academic

Pauline authorship is a tacit refusal to see it any other way, then any discussion of the pros and cons is irrevocably tainted.

We suggest, however, that one can question whether Paul actually wrote one or more of the challenged letters, and still hold to the full integrity of Scripture. So, Meeks's taint of our views is not proper, yet we still hold to the genuineness of Paul's authorship of the epistles. Importantly, however, this is not out of academic cowardice where we refuse to accept the honest, intellectual truth. It is simply out of reflective thought and analysis of the evidence, both pro and con.

How can we say that Scripture can maintain integrity for those who question whether some of the Pauline letters were written directly by Paul or by Paul's disciples? Consider that we know that the Scriptures include Hebrews, a letter/sermon/book with unknown authorship. Yet, the church included the book in the canon as fully inspired by the Holy Spirit. That the Spirit worked through authors who are unknown is consistent with views of the Old Testament as well. There are a number of Old Testament works whose authorship is unknown. It was never a requirement of the church (or Judaism) that the author of a work be known before accepting it as Scripture.

We also know that the practice of writing in someone's name was common in antiquity, and some legitimately believe that including such works into Scripture would have seemed natural and proper in the early church. We take issue with that conclusion, for reasons set out in this lesson, but we can accept it as intellectually honest.<sup>4</sup> This allows one to hold to non-Pauline authorship and still hold on to the integrity of the church's choices of Scripture.

The specific considerations of authorship of all the letters scholars dispute are beyond the scope of this lesson. There are a number of good commentaries,

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validity, just an intransigent opinion. Perhaps, the best label from the field of logical fallacies is termed "poisoning the well." It is a common, yet fallacious ploy in arguing to discredit someone before addressing the integrity of his or her argument.

<sup>4</sup> Meeks suggests, in his comments on the authorship of Ephesians, that, "many scholars would prefer to attribute the letter to a disciple of Paul – the use of the founder's name by a member of a given school was regarded in Hellenistic literature as praiseworthy. If this is the case, then the disciple was a worthy representative of the school" (Meeks at 122). While Meeks's point has validity in the Hellenistic world, it is not so clearly substantiated in the era of church history that accompanies these works. Another early book that claimed authenticity was *The Acts of Paul and Thecla*. History unfolded that the book was not authentic but was a good faith effort by a Bishop in Asia to write a tribute to and about Paul. According to Tertullian (ca. 200), this forger was not lauded as a disciple of the Pauline School who wrote a worthy pseudonymous book. Rather he lost his position and was brought to shame for writing a forgery! (See Tertullian, *De Baptismo*, 17).

however, that set out both sides of the issues.<sup>5</sup> Rather than go letter by letter, we shall choose several of the concerns most relevant to this lesson. Our concerns center on the letters commonly grouped together as the “Pastoral Epistles.” They are 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus. These letters are most relevant in this lesson for in them Paul discusses much of his teachings on church structure and organization.

Meeks begins his discourse on these three epistles dating them around 125 AD, roughly 60 years after Paul’s likely death. Meeks then states,

The closely related group of documents which purport to be Paul’s letter of instruction to Timothy and Titus (they received the label “pastoral” in 1753) are almost certainly pseudonymous.<sup>6</sup>

A core reason Meeks and others give is connected to the aspect of the epistles that deals with church organization. These select scholars find that church officers and catholic organization of the church became “very important” in the second and third centuries. On the contrary side of this argument, many scholars opine that Paul would naturally wish to leave behind instructions for churches to carry on the mission and teaching of Christ after his demise. In fact, it would be amazing to suggest that Paul faced death and failed to write to someone trustworthy like Timothy, leaving instructions for the future of the church until Christ’s triumphal return.

A second reason often cited for refusing to accept church history’s position of Paul’s authorship is the personal history contained in the Pastorals that is not found in Acts. Of course, if one accepts Acts and the epistles at face value, then the explanation is simple. Acts does not end with Paul’s death. It ends with Paul falsely imprisoned in Rome. If Paul were released, as seemed likely based on the history of the charges against him, then Paul would have made missionary journeys not given in Acts. These journeys would have made sense with the details given in the Pastoral Epistles. Further, we should add that church history bears out these facts, both of Paul’s release from the Roman house arrest and his subsequent missionary work.

A third reason Meeks and other like-minded scholars give is the difference in vocabulary and writing style of the Pastoral Epistles. A signal difference is found in Paul using one Greek word for “deposit” (*paratheke παραθηκη*) in 2 Timothy,

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<sup>5</sup> Among our favorites are *The New International Commentary of the New Testament* series (previously edited by F. F. Bruce, now under the editorship of Gordon Fee) and *The New International Greek Testament Commentary*, both published by Eerdmans.

<sup>6</sup> Meeks at 132.

while the word is not used in any of Paul's other letters.<sup>7</sup> We do not find this argument compelling for a number of reasons. First, there are a number of words Paul used in certain letters but never used elsewhere. True, Paul did not use *paratheke* elsewhere in his writings, but neither did any other writer in the New Testament. Further, Paul was writing 2 Timothy at a much later time than his other letters, and it is not surprising that different words came into Paul's usage as he travelled, grew, and interacted with different people and different cultures. Which of us does not use an occasional different word than we might have years ago? Finally, we note that Paul was not writing to a church in the Pastorals. He was writing to close, intimate friends. A shift in certain vocabulary and style is certainly not surprising in that light.

While the arguments for the other epistles shift about somewhat, they are not too dissimilar to those reasons given for the pastorals. The theology is argued as different from the theology Paul exhibited elsewhere. Particularly noted is Paul's doctrine and teaching of the end times ("eschatology"). Much of this issue goes away as one understands that Paul grew in his understanding as his life progressed.

That is not to say that Paul wrote and taught one thing at one time and then a different thing at another time. However, we can recognize that Paul certainly changed his own expectations in some ways and God has seen to show us that in Scripture. So, we see Paul in his early writings discussing what will happen to "we" (where Paul includes himself among those still alive at the second coming)<sup>8</sup> when Jesus returns, while in later writings Paul speaks of what will happen to those who remain upon Christ's return (excluding himself from those alive when Jesus returns). We see in Paul what we see in the church as a whole. In its earliest days, it anticipated Christ's return at any moment. The Acts 2 church was so convinced that they sold all they had and shared the money. As time passed, they grew in understanding God's plans to delay Christ's triumphal return possibly beyond their own lives.

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<sup>7</sup> 2 Timothy 1:12 "But I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard until that Day what I have entrusted [*paratheke*] to him" (Footnote rendering of the ESV). Some scholars believe that if Paul were writing of tradition, then he would more likely have used the word *paradosis* (παράδοσις), which meant "tradition" and was used by Paul in five different places (ironically, two instances are in 2 Thessalonians, which many of these same scholars refuse to accept as Paul's).

<sup>8</sup> See 1 Thess. 4:15, "'we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep.'" The same chapter references "those who have fallen asleep" putting the death of those believers who die before the second coming in the third person. By the time of Corinthians, Paul was writing differently including himself among those likely to die before the second coming: "God will raise *us* up" (1 Cor. 6:14).

This directly impacts the development of church structure also. As the church grew, the need for various jobs changed. Initially, the apostles served the church. As the church grew, the apostles found that too much time was spent in administering and its attendant service, to the exclusion of preaching and teaching. At this point, the apostles installed church deacons to assist in the service (Acts 6).

In like manner, we see Paul writing toward the last days of his own life making sure that the structure of the churches left behind would be what God intended for the future of his body. We see Paul's work toward that end in the Pastoral Epistles.

## **CHURCH STRUCTURE IN PAUL'S WRITINGS**

In 1 Timothy, Paul writes of several matters that are pertinent to church structure. First, he writes to Timothy as a teacher and leader of the Ephesian church Paul left behind. His instructions were first and foremost instructions to Timothy to teach and preach Jesus as Savior and Lord.

This charge I entrust to you, Timothy, my child, in accordance with the prophecies previously made about you, that by them you may wage the good warfare, holding faith and a good conscience. (1 Tim. 1:18).

In chapter three, Paul begins his discussion of "the office of overseer" (1 Tim. 3:1). The Greek word the ESV translates, as "office of overseer" is "*episkopos*." In English, we get the word "Episcopal" from it. The King James translates the word "Bishop." It is a word that Paul used in Acts 20:28 when he was speaking to the Elders of the church at Ephesus:

Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.

Paul sets out a number of requirements for an "overseer":

Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church? He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil.

Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil (1 Tim. 3:2-7).

These requirements are found by various churches to have different meanings. Some see the “husband of one wife” to require marriage of an overseer. The question then becomes whether the marriage be “of one wife” in the sense that polygamy is excluded, or in the sense that over a lifetime, the man never had more than one marriage (excluding divorcees and widowers who remarried).

Similarly, scholars debate whether Paul meant that the overseer had to have more than one child (since Paul speaks of plural “children”) or any children at all.

After discussing the office of *episkopos*, Paul writes of “deacons.” The word for “deacon” is *diakonoi*. It is the same word found in Acts 6 where the apostles set up deacons to serve the congregation in Jerusalem. Like the “overseers,” the deacons have a list of requirements by Paul. The list contains both affirmative and negative statements:

Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain. They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless. Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things. Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well. For those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus (1Tim. 3:8-13).

In common Greek usage, *diakonoi* simply meant “servants.” These were servants of the church, ministering to the body of Christ.

The roles of overseer and deacon were distinct roles, as we see not only here, but also in other writings of Paul. When Paul wrote his letter to the Philippian church, he began it:

Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus,

To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers [*episkopos*] and deacons [*diakonoi*] (Phil. 1:1).

One question that divides scholars is whether Paul also made room for women to be “deacons,” or in the word preferred by some, “deaconesses.” In Romans 16:1-2 Paul writes,

I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant [*diakonoi*] of the church at Cenchreae, that you may welcome her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints, and help her in whatever she may need from you, for she has been a patron of many and of myself as well.

The ESV translators use the English word “servant” to translate Paul in Romans 16, even though they are translating the same word that Paul later uses in Timothy (translated “deacon”). Paul is using the feminine form of the word in Romans.

The problem is not simply in Romans 16, but is also inherent in the 1 Timothy 3 passage above. Paul writes that “deacons” must be dignified, *etc.* Then in verse 11, he writes, as translated by the ESV, “Their wives likewise must be dignified...” The problem is Paul’s word translated “wives” is *gune*, a word that can mean “wives,” but more generally means simply “woman” or “women.” The ESV chooses to translate Paul as referring to the wives of deacons, but there is a question as to whether Paul is writing about women in some role similar or ancillary to deacons.

In a thorough discussion, George Knight gives four possible meanings: (1) women were part of the diaconate; (2) women had their own role as “deaconesses;” (3) there were women who served as female assistants to the deacons; or (4) Paul is writing about the wives of the deacons. Knight finds options 3 or 4 most compelling.<sup>9</sup>

As we read through 1 Timothy, we see no more checklists of any office. We do, however, read of Paul writing about a “council of elders” in chapter 4:

Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching. Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you. Practice these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress (1 Tim. 4:13-15).

The word for “elder” is *presbuteros* from which we get “presbytery.” While Paul uses the word very rarely (in 1 Tim. chapters 4 and 5 and Titus 1:5), Paul’s close companion Luke used the word frequently. Paul reminded Titus that one reason Paul left Titus behind was to “appoint elders in every town as I directed you” (Ti. 1:5).

Churches see this role of elder differently. Some see it synonymous with the role of “overseer.” One basis for this is the Acts passage where Luke mentions that Paul spoke with the “elders” [*presbuteros*] (Acts 20:17), yet Paul calls those elders

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<sup>9</sup> Knight, George W., *The Pastoral Epistles: a Commentary on the Greek Text* (Eerdmans 1992) at 171ff.



“overseers” [*episkopos*]. Similarly, while Paul uses the word “overseer” in Titus 1:5, he shifts to the word “elder” two verses later in a way that seems to show the two words as synonymous:

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— if anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife, and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination. For an overseer, as God’s steward, must be above reproach (Tit. 1:5-7).

Other churches see the roles as distinct, seeking to have Bishops who oversee the elders (considered “priests” in the Catholic church<sup>10</sup>) and deacons.

Because the word “overseer” [*episkopos*] was used in reference to Christ in his role as the Good Shepherd in 1 Peter 2:25, some churches take the word for “shepherd” – “pastor” – and use it in place of “overseer.”

Paul sets out no other offices in 1 or 2 Timothy. As we turn to the third Pastoral Epistle, we again read Paul giving structural instructions for the church to a fellow laborer, Titus. Unlike Timothy, however, Paul instructs Titus only on appointment of overseers, not of deacons. Scholars offer several reasons. First, some believe that the church on Crete was still in its infancy, and like that of the Jerusalem church pre-Acts 6, it had not yet reached a point where the overseers were unable to serve as well as teach. Others find the absence merely indicative of no need for Paul to repeat something Titus must have already understood.

We are remiss if we fail to note that everywhere Paul writes of “overseers,” “elders,” and “deacons,” he always uses the plural. As Knight noted,

An analysis of the data seems, therefore, to indicate the existence of oversight by a plurality of church leaders throughout the NT church in virtually every known area and acknowledged or commended by virtually every NT writer who writes about church leadership.<sup>11</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The journey through Paul’s constructions and concerns over church leadership show an unfolding history that deals with real problems and real issues in real

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<sup>10</sup> Catholic structure is not as simple as set out. Because it is both historically based as well as based on Scripture, the church has a function of “Cardinal” which is superior to that of “bishop.” The basis for a cardinal grew out of the New Testament “Elder” which the church considered “priest.”

<sup>11</sup> Knight at 176-177.

churches. It is what we would expect from God's wonderfully written Scriptures that are both simple and complex. We should be careful not to approach Scriptures only with the intellectual current of the day like many who ascribe to the selected authorship views simply because it seems the "educated" thing to do.

God has managed to produce Scriptures that brought unfolding layers of truth to the authors, the recipients, and the world. We can see this unfolding revelation throughout the several thousand years of history scripture contains, just as we can see it in Paul's many letters over the decades of his ministry.

We would be shortsighted to think that Paul would be writing with the same vocabulary and the same understanding after a decade of intense activity on the mission field for the Lord Jesus Christ. As F. F. Bruce said,

The main body of Paul's correspondence that has been preserved to us comes from a period lasting not more than from ten to twelve years. So short a period may see but little development in some men's careers when they have reached this stage of life, but Paul's life during these years was so full of intense activity and, latterly, a spell of enforced inactivity, coupled with an ever deepening awareness of what it meant to be Christ's apostle among the Gentiles, that it would be surprising if his experiences had no influence at all on his outlook on the future.<sup>12</sup>

Similarly, we must remember that Paul wrote to churches that were in different places at different times.

So as we work toward concluding this lesson, it seems proper to return the Gracie and the authorship of Ephesians. We will note several reasons given by the scholars for disputing Paul's authorship:

1. Several of the oldest manuscripts do not have the identifying words "in Ephesus" that are in Ephesians 1:1. These oldest manuscripts read, "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God: To the saints who are in Ephesus, and are faithful in Christ Jesus" as opposed to our translations which add the phrase: "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God: To the saints **who are in Ephesus**, and are faithful in Christ Jesus."
2. Tied with the "identity" issue set out above is the unusual aspect that the letter does not have any personal greetings to individuals, even though Paul spent a tremendous amount of time in Ephesus and had such a tearful departure once he left. (See Acts 19 and 20).

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<sup>12</sup> Bruce, F. F., *Paul, Apostle of the Heart Set Free* (Eerdmans 1977) at 305.

3. Certain words and phrases in Ephesians are seen closely related to words and phrases found in Colossians, yet at times with a seemingly different meaning or thrust. The language and style of Ephesians is also seen as closely related to that of 1 Peter (which many of these same scholars do not believe were actually written by Peter).

While these arguments may seem compelling to some, they do not seem persuasive to us. Consider the following:

1. Whether the early copies of the Ephesian letter had the phrase “who are in Ephesus” in the introduction or not actually enhances the argument for Pauline authorship. The letter was not directed to the church at Ephesus. Ephesus was a center of culture and commerce for the entire area of Asia Minor. The letter we call “Ephesians” was an encyclical – a letter intended for circulation among many churches. Certainly the mother church was likely Ephesus, but it was not a personal letter to that church. It was written to the entire area of churches. Understandably, then, some of the early copies might have “who are in Ephesus” but the preponderance would not, for the letter was written with a much greater audience in mind.
2. When we see the letter as an encyclical meant for an entire region of churches we are not surprised at a lack of intimate messages between Paul and the Ephesian elders and church. Paul does send the letter with Tychicus, allowing that personal details are conveyed through him. (“So that you also may know how I am and what I am doing, Tychicus the beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord will tell you everything. 22I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are, and that he may encourage your hearts” Eph. 6:21-22).
3. The relation of the letter to Colossians is not surprising if we consider that the letters were composed at the same general time. Tychicus was carrying both letters! (“Tychicus will tell you all about my activities. He is a beloved brother and faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord” Col. 4:7). Each letter has a unique message tailored to the recipients, but the language should be similar for authenticity. As to the suggestion that the similar phrases or ordering of ideas have slightly different meanings, that also is to be expected. This was not Paul using the “cut,” “copy,” and “paste” commands of a computer. It was Paul expressing what was needed to two different sets of people. I suspect that this Sunday Dr. David Fleming will present two Sunday morning sermons at our church, one at 9:30 and one at 11:00. The sermon will be the same, yet a comparison of transcripts will show that one uses similar phrasing but with different emphases and combinations. I can imagine scholars in a few thousand years comparing the transcripts and declaring that David likely only

preached one or the other service, citing the alternate one as that of a forger!

4. As for the idea that certain phrases and ideas are found also in 1 Peter, it is again not compelling evidence of a forgery. If we accept the writings of Peter as indeed being from Peter we can see that Peter was familiar with certain writings of Paul. (This is expected also when we consider that Paul wrote letters like Ephesians that were intended for wide distribution). 2 Peter 3:15 and 16 speak of Paul's writings:

And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures.

### POINTS FOR HOME

1. *"I am writing these things to you so that, if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth"* (1 Tim. 3:14-15).

Paul was not into structure for structure's sake. Paul did not emphasize the importance of the roles of leadership in the church because he had a personal agenda. Paul wrote and insisted on these things out of a concern for the church as a "pillar and buttress of the truth." Church leaders are important because of where they lead! They can teach of Christ and lead to Christ, or they can teach and lead elsewhere. Christ should be the target of the leader, both for himself, for his household, and for the community of believers under his care. This is why Paul is so clear on the qualities and qualifications of overseers and deacons. They have a very important role to fill!

2. *"He [the elder] must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it"* (Tit. 1:9).

Whether we label our leaders "overseers," "bishops," "ministers," or "pastors," one thing is certain: those leaders must hold firm to the word and be able to instruct others in sound doctrine. There are too many people who do the opposite. There are those more caught up in what they look and sound like than what they teach. There are those more concerned with their

own profit than what profits their community. There are those who do not “hold firm” to the word in the sense that they do not “practice what they preach.” Paul explained it further to Titus, “They profess to know God, but they deny him by their works. They are detestable, unfit for any good work” (Tit. 1:16).

3. *“The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task” (1 Tim. 3:1).*

Paul writes of the role of overseer as a “noble task.” The Greek words Paul chose were literally “a good work” (*kalon ergon* – καλον εργον). For Paul, the role of overseer was not an exalted position; it was work! Any good overseer or deacon will confess that the responsibilities are taxing, physically, emotionally, and spiritually. We should take time to thank God for godly leaders. We should also take time to tell the leaders we appreciate them. They work for God’s kingdom to the benefit of those in their care.