

Bible Basics Conference 2015: The church

Part 10

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[00:00:00] You're all a bit tired, just like I am, to be honest. So I ask for your patience and it's an important subject because we have heard about all these wonderful things which the Lord does, but now here we're talking about very practical things. Local charges and local responsibilities. Now each one of us is somewhere in a locality where we gather around the Lord, and there is work to do. Now the gifts you have seen are broader, they go, you know, they apply to the whole church, but here now we talk about things which really belong to a locality. Where you gather there is work to do, and I think it is like a giving and taking. We come to receive, we come to get blessing, [00:01:13] but we forget that there is also a bringing in, a giving, a taking care of things for the benefit of the local meeting. Now the scripture here says a few things about it. It talks about the so-called bishop and deacon, and we know in our, in the world today, in the denominations, we have found many denominations where they appoint people to certain functions. But we do not read it anywhere in the scripture that there is a bishop or a... Excuse me, can somebody quickly come here? There is a message on [00:02:20] probably from the internet. A bishop or a deacon over a particular assembly or a number of assemblies. But there is always the word of a number of bishops and deacons for a particular locality. And then we find the whole scripture, I am going to read it later on, about moral qualities of those who would like to serve, for the elders, for the deacons.

[00:03:13] I don't know what it is.

Now, when you look at Acts chapter 14, you find that the Apostle Paul and Barnabas, on the second journey where they went, they appointed or ordained elders. In verse 23, when they had ordained them elders in every church and had prayed with fasting, [00:04:04] they commanded them to the Lord on whom they believed. And this scripture is often used to say, well, you know, this is what we have to do today. They did it then and now we do the same. But it was the Apostles Paul and Barnabas who did it. And you have to understand, the whole scripture was not given at that time. So they didn't have 1 Timothy 3, which explains the qualification. So it is clear the Apostle, they looked around to see if there are those who could function as such, and they appointed it. And we only find one more reference in Titus 1 verse 5, where the Apostle Paul gave Titus the order, more or less, to go to Crete and appoint elders there. [00:05:02] We find no other reference for any appointment of such functions

in a local church. So as we have no more Apostles today, we don't have anyone which has the capacity to really nominate you in a certain function. What does that mean? The function still exists.

There is no body. You are not selected by those who are present. You are not selected by a higher body. No, you have no such things of an official appointment, but the function still exists today. And that's why we have to have this particular portion, which I would like to read from 1 Timothy 3, [00:06:05] verse 1. This is a true saying. If a man desires an office of a bishop, he desires a good work. A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behavior, given to hospitality, apt to teach, not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre, but patient, not a brawler, not covetous, one that rules well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity. For if a man knows not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God? Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride, he fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover, he must have a good report of them [00:07:04] which are without, lest he fall into reproach and a snare of the devil. Likewise must the deacons be grave, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre, holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience, and let these also first be proved, and then let them use the office of a deacon, being found blameless. Even so must their wives be grave, not slanderous, sober, faithful in all things. Let the deacons be the husband of one wife, ruling over children and their own houses well. For they that have used the office of a deacon well purchase to themselves a good degree and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus. These things [00:08:09] write I unto thee, hoping to come unto thee shortly, but if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth. So the purpose we have right at the end, that thou knowest how to behave in the house of God. We have in the first verses the description of the bishop, elders, or overseers. We find that these three terms really mean the same.

But the overseers, he designates more the work of the office, and elders means more the person.

[00:09:05] We have already seen that before in another context. The person, also the dignity and the authority which goes with it. And the references you have here show in the Old Testament you already had elders, so it was something known already from the people of Israel, and you saw there were certain qualifications needed to become an elder. Now when you read this, this whole section of the qualification, these moral qualities of an elder, what is your reaction? What is your reaction? It has to be blameless. The husband of one wife, and I especially emphasize one wife, [00:10:03] it doesn't mean that if you are single you will not be able to be an elder, but at that time you had the possibility of having two wives, but today if somebody's divorced and remarried, he also had two wives, he does not qualify as an elder. But here we have a whole list of things.

And the question is, are we really saying, well, the standard is so high, how can we really achieve, or how can we live up to it? Why do you think so many things are mentioned for the qualification of an elder? When you function as an elder, amongst other elders in the meeting, you need to have the respect of the congregation. There is also the need for authority. [00:11:09] And if you are not able to rule well your own house, how can you really execute authority in the meeting? How can you be an example to others? These are questions which really is like a mirror in which you and I should look into. Maybe you have a desire to be an elder. Maybe you have a desire to be a deacon. But look at the whole list of things, and also money plays an important role. Not greedy or filthy looking with both. And this is what we see today. Alice and I were watching on our trip to Colombia last time, a presentation [00:12:02] of a gospel preacher in America. And the first half hour was a wonderful message. And then came the statement, the account, and the appeal to send money for at least 15

minutes, non-stop. Really challenging people. Now you have to do it, and the Lord will reward you. So we really felt that this is exactly what the Word of God is warning us against. Greedy or filthy looker. To make yourself rich in being a pastor or a deacon.

We have to be approved. And if you look at the qualification, who can be an elder? Who can live up to that standard? [00:13:01] But there is true encouragement for us. It starts if you desire the office of a bishop, office of a bishop, you desire a good work. Isn't that encouragement? The Lord is encouraging you. He says, we need elders in the meeting. And I encourage you to live up to that standard, to be able to carry that function. Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honor. Many say, you know, if I act as an elder, I get nothing but criticism.

Everybody's trampling on me. Nobody listening. So I better don't function as an elder. Is that the solution? We have here several encouragements, and the biggest encouragement [00:14:01] is of the chief shepherd. Says, you know, I want you to be a shepherd. I want you to take care of the flock in your locality. There's a crown. I will reward your faithfulness.

And the same applies to the deacons in that verse 13. So we have seen the function still exists, even so no one is appointed. But that work has to be done. Take care of the flock, feed the flock. We have heard all these things this afternoon. And above all, be an example to them. You have to live it up. And if you have a family, if you're a father of a family, you know very well what that means. You can talk to your children all day long. Says how they should behave. If you don't do it, they will never listen to you. They first point at you and says, but dad, you don't do what you're saying. [00:15:05] And this is exactly in the assembly too. We have to be an example first, before we can then tell others to get right or to change things. The deacons, when you read this example in Acts 6, and we don't have time now to do that, but the qualification of the deacons, they were to be of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom. To do what? To look after widows, to serve them which have a special material need. You have to be full of the Holy Spirit to do that. Now we see what the qualities which God requires are very different than the qualities [00:16:04] the world today look for. You know, if they look for manager, they send you into one of these management schools, and you learn all sorts of things. But here, the apostle Paul said to the brethren, go and look around for men like this. And they found some. They found seven men. And if you look at Stephen, he was full of the Holy Spirit. He was of honest report. And you know, they didn't start to become that when they were looked for. They were already there. And I think this is the message for us today. There are many young peoples. We don't know what the Lord has for you, but would you be in a position, if in your local meeting, they're looking for people like that, would they come to you and say, you fulfill the qualities? [00:17:05] We should do it now, without even being a deacon or a bishop. We should live up to that standard. And you know, when we talked about the marriage, be of one wife, how many young peoples have I seen promising, and then they married, perhaps the wrong person, and they were gone. To marry in the Lord would mean that you really, really getting prepared for things which come later on. An elder, you cannot be an elder when you're 20 year old. I was in a meeting in Jamaica just recently. There was only one brother and he was about 20 year old. He could not be an elder. He was a young brother, but he's carrying on as [00:18:06] much as he could do to help in such a capacity. But you know, life is forming us. When you have to bring up children, you get formed by the children, by the family, by the surroundings. But that's all part of the school that later on God can use you to function as an elder, to help in other situations. There was a question about sisters. What can sisters do? And you know, when you talk about the responsibilities and the charges in the local meeting, the sisters are very, very valuable. And I would like to read Romans 16, where the Apostle Paul [00:19:05] commended such a sister. In the book, it is recorded for us even today. He was living 2,000 years ago. I commend

unto you for our sister, which is a servant of the church, which is in Cangria. So she served in a locality in Cangria. We don't know what type of service, but she just says to the Lord, what can I do for you? And the Lord showed her and she served. Acts 9, verse 39.

Then Peter rose and went with them. And when he was come, they brought him into the upper chamber [00:20:01] and all the widows stood by him weeping and showing the coats and garments which Dorcas made while she was with them. Another sister, she made coats and clothes. You sisters know more about that. But say you have a meeting of 20 widows and she had to make clothes.

Well, she had to get very close to that sister. She had to take the measures because every sister had a different format. She couldn't just build one and then make 20 clothes. No, she had to take the measures of one sister, go to the next, and she had to come very close. So what I try to say is, this Dorcas, she knew this person very well. But what we don't read about her, she didn't [00:21:02] talk about them, she made clothes for them. And this is what we need, sisters, not to talk about the others. Particularly when you know something about, you know, you very quickly you start chatting and telling the next person, they telling the other person. We don't hear anything that Dorcas ever said a word to anyone. She knew this person. They came to her, she had to take the measures, she talked to her, she knew exactly, they had to take the clothes off to really get very close to that sister. She knew all about these sisters, but she never talked about it, what she saw. This is a service of a sister which is very, very recommendable. And then we find in Titus here other things like the older man, the older women, we should be examples to the young ones. [00:22:03] The young ones are very good observers. They're looking at us, even if they don't say anything, they know us much, sometimes much better than we think. Teaching younger women is addressed to the older women. What does that mean? I don't think that means that the sisters now have to organize sister's weekend, or even I heard recently a sister's conference, so that they now have a platform where they can preach. It's only sisters. I don't think when you read these verses and when you study the place of the sister, you don't think this is the application of the meaning of this. But that you go and visit that younger sister, and you sit down, have a cup of tea, and you talk quietly. You might observe, but don't speak openly. Go and visit, go and tell her, and say, look I have [00:23:08] made the same mistakes. Tell about your mistakes. Maybe she learns more about your mistakes than if you tell her how she should do it better. Setting a positive example, that is really the message. To be an example as parents for the children, as brothers and sisters, the older ones for the younger ones. There are a lot of things, you know, you might say, what can I do? What can I do? Well, when we leave here, who is cleaning the hall? Somebody has to take care of that. Cleaning the meeting hall every Sunday, or during the week. Providing the bread and the wine. You know, when you come, it is understood that there is on the table bread and wine, but somebody [00:24:04] has to bring it. Somebody has to take care of it. And that's Sunday after Sunday. We don't talk about these people, but you know the Lord sees that. And he doesn't say, you know, this man, he's very capable and has got so many gifts. He's more worth than the one who is just bringing the wine and the bread every Sunday. He counts the faithfulness of us. That is what he will reward.

Doing the door keeping, helping and caring for the saints, keeping in touch with the absentees. That can mean different things. You can be absent because you're sick or old. And I know of a meeting in Zurich where the young man got together and says, we have so and so many sisters who cannot come to the meeting because of old age. What can we do for them? So they took [00:25:08] notes every Sunday from the ministry meeting, wrote them down, prepared them and then sent them out. Gave them so they could read it. What was the message on Sunday? And you know, it was for their

own benefit. They had to listen for a whole hour, concentrated, making notes and then putting into writing and then pass it on. So the Lord is no man's debtor. If you do something for him, you will be rewarded. Doing the accounting. You see, that's why it is right. When it comes to deacons, those who serve, the assembly has to say something. They say, yes, we trust this and this brother to do the collection, counting the money. That is a very important job. And it cannot be [00:26:06] done by one person alone. Counting should be done by two. Everything should be witnessed. Even so, you can't be the most faithful brother in the meeting, but just for order's sake, you should be the two who do the counting. Two sides and put the money wherever. So to do the corresponding or preparing or serving refreshments. We arrived on Friday night. We were so late. We were hungry. We came to Annalise and it smelled so nice. Oh, she just baked a new cake. I said, oh, then she packed it out and she showed it. She said, it's not for you. It's for the conference. Well, she used the time waiting for us doing some refreshments. [00:27:04] Just some possible problems.

There could be in a locality where there is no brother who wants to take the responsibility. Nobody wants to be an elder. No, no, not me, not me. So, or the saints, they simply ignore that the Lord has given the function.

There are elders which might have to say something to a younger brother. And they just simply ignore it. So you don't have to tell me anything. I once was in a meeting, in a brother's meeting, in Basel, which is Switzerland, and a German brother says, I want that from now on we're going to speak in Swiss German. And Basel is, of course, [00:28:07] a border town and there are brothers from Germany, from France, which come and they wouldn't understand if we speak Swiss German. So the brothers, you know, had to talk about this. And they said, no, we're staying with proper German for this and this reason. And this young brother insisted, we have to change to Swiss German. And then at the end, this older brother, and he was really an elder in the meeting in Basel, he said, now just do it for the brother's sake. And then he says, now who are the brothers? We are all brothers. And this is the type of attitude where you don't want to recognize any authority. God has not given a disorder, has given authority in the meeting. We have seen the qualification [00:29:05] to have the respect, to have authority. It's the one side. But if one fulfills that, the other should observe and obey that authority. But then there is another thing that the novices might misuse this authority to reign. He wants to control everything. Deacons, the same thing that there might be no brothers or sisters are willing to serve. Or one brother, he wants to do everything. I also was in a meeting once, and there was a real problem. They said, and you brother, you're doing everything. You're counting the money, you're doing this and this and this. Then I was sitting there and I was listening and I was wondering, how come? It could be two reasons. It could be that this brother [00:30:03] really wanted to do everything himself, but it could also be because nobody else wanted to do it. So if nobody else, then he said, okay, then I do that as well. And I do this as well. And at the end he did everything. So this is something we have to be watchful. I don't think this is according to God's law that one is controlling everything or one is doing everything. But the other thing is doing nothing is also not right. We should be exercising. There are local charges. There are local responsibilities. And we should ask the Lord, what do you want me to do? Exactly what Paul referred to earlier. And the worst thing is for those who are doing nothing, that they sit back, but they are very quickly in criticizing what others do. [00:31:02] To finish, I have these three considerations. You know, serving in a locality is not a burden, it is a privilege. We should look at that from that side. And each one of us, we have heard today, the Lord has given us something. And he has placed us in the body the way he wanted us. We are a member of that body. And so the question is, what are you doing with your skills? What are your skills? And how could you use them for the benefit of the others? That's the first question. That is something we should ask. Each one for himself. When we go back, what can I do? What has the

Lord given me that I can do? What has the Lord given me that I can use for him? The second consideration, [00:32:02] we should keep reading that portion in 1 Timothy 3. As you get older, you and your brothers look that through again and again. You want to become an elder? You have to prove yourself. You have to have these qualifications. And so it is good when I'm 20 to start studying this portion. And as you get to 30 and say, well, I'm still far away, but I'm trying. And finally, the Lord can use you, truly, in a locality. And you know, Stephen, when they selected him, he had this qualification. And the third consideration, whatever the Lord would have you to do, do it.

It is a privilege to serve the Lord. And it is a privilege to serve the saints. And God [00:33:08] is no man's debtor. What you put in for him, time, money, energy, you will find that the Lord richly rewards you. Thank you very much.