

**The Epistle of Joy
Philippians 1:1-2
Part 3**

The theme of this epistle is joy. Biblical joy is a deep down confidence that all is well no matter what the circumstances might be.” It is a gift from God to all those who believe, produced in them by the Holy Spirit, as they receive and obey God’s Word. It is not diminished by trials. Trials only cause biblical joy to focus on future glory. Though as Christians we may or may not experience happiness, which is related to circumstances, joy should be our constant companion.

Certainly Paul demonstrated this to be true. He wrote this epistle while he was imprisoned in Rome. He was facing the very real possibility of being executed, but in spite of these circumstances he wanted to communicate to the Philippians his joy. Not only did he want the Philippians to know about his joy, but he also wanted them to share that joy.

Hopefully as we study this epistle this is exactly what will take place in our lives. Hopefully we will not only know about Paul’s joy in the midst of terrible circumstances, but we will share in his joy as well. Hopefully we will share with him that deep down confidence that all is well no matter what the circumstances might be in our lives.

We have begun to work toward that goal by examining the introduction to this epistle. Let us read **Phil. 1:1-2, “Paul and Timothy, bondservants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers and deacons: (2) Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”** I have divided these verses into three different parts.

The first part that we have considered I entitled “the servants.” Let us look at the very first phrase of **V. 1, “Paul and Timothy bondservants of Christ Jesus.”** Paul, the author of this epistle, identifies he and his traveling companion, Timothy, as bondservants of Christ. They were not forced into Christ’s service; they willingly chose this because they realized the only way for them to experience life and life abundantly was through the path of surrender. Hopefully we have chosen this same path and are continuing to walk that path this weekend.

The second part of the introduction we considered I entitled “the saints.” Let us look at **V. 1** again, **“Paul and Timothy, bondservants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi...”** The word “saint” (HAGIOS) is the noun form of the verb “sanctify,” meaning “to separate or set apart.” All Christians are set apart because they are **“in Christ Jesus.”** Hopefully this is how you see yourself in Christ and hopefully you are seeing this worked out in your life.

Paul was writing this letter to all the saints in the city of Philippi, a very strategic city at the top of the Aegean Sea. It was at Philippi that Paul planted the first European Church. And from the very first day that the saints at Philippi received the gospel from Paul, they had been very close to him.

But even though it was addressed to all Christians in the city of Philippi, there were two groups of saints at Philippi that were specifically addressed. The first group he calls overseers. Let us look again at **V. 1, “Paul and Timothy, bondservants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers.”** This morning we are going to look at this particular group of Christians that Paul is addressing at Philippi.

My hope for this weekend’s message is that we will appreciate the importance and necessity of church leaders. My hope for this weekend’s message is that we will not only appreciate the importance and necessity of church leaders, but also we will see how we can help serve one another.

THE OVERSEERS

The authority to lead a local church did not rest in the congregation. The authority to lead the local church did not rest in a single man called “the pastor,” but in a group of men called “overseers.”

The word “overseer” or “bishop” which is the term used in the KJV is one of three terms used to refer to the same individual. The term “overseer” (EPISKOPOS), “elder” (PRESBUTEROS), and ‘pastor’ (POIMEN) all refer to the same person (Acts 20:17-38).

This is clearly seen in Acts 20:17-38, where all three terms are found. Paul asked the elders (PRESBUTEROI) to assemble (Acts 20:17). He exhorts them to oversee (EPISKOPOS) and to pastor (POIMEN) the church (Acts 20:28).

Why are there three separate terms? It appears that though the words are interchangeable, each word has a different emphasis. The term “elder” emphasizes the maturity of the church leaders. The term “shepherd” or “pastor” emphasizes their care for those given to their charge. The term “bishop” or “overseer” emphasizes their function. Though Paul chose to address the church leaders as “overseers” in Phil. 1:1, emphasizing their function, the most commonly used term in the New Testament for this group of biblically qualified men is “elders.” And it is this term that we have chosen to use here at Valley Bible to refer to our church leaders.

God’s design for the local church was that the church would be led by a plurality of biblically qualified men (Titus 1:5). And until such a group is recognized and functioning, the church is not considered well-ordered. How do we know this? Listen to the words of the Apostle Paul to Titus in **Titus 1:5, “For this reason I left you in Crete, that you might set in order what remains, and appoint elders in every city as I directed you.”**

Paul had preached the gospel on Crete and very likely had established a number of churches there. After establishing those churches, Paul left Titus behind. Why did Paul leave Titus behind? What did Paul say in **Titus 1:5? “For this reason I left you in Crete, that you might set in order what remains, and appoint elders in every city as I directed you.”**

This instruction communicates very clearly to us that a church should not be considered fully and

properly established until biblically qualified men are recognized as leaders. For a church to adopt a form of government other than this form of government presents huge challenges.

One-man rule is a flawed design and can lead to serious problems. If a church was depending upon one man for leadership, that church will very likely begin to reflect the giftedness of that single man in its decisions. Better for the church to depend upon the leadership of a plurality of men so that the variation of giftedness represented by those men will reflect itself in more balanced decisions and therefore a healthier church. If a church was depending upon one man for leadership, that church could stumble into a foolish decision or decisions unnecessarily. Why? Because a sole leader, the pastor, may very well be tempted to act arbitrarily, violating the biblical principle found in **Prov. 15:22** that **“In the counsel of many there is wisdom” (Prov. 15:22)**. If a church was depending upon one man for leadership, it exposes that one man to unnecessary, physical, emotional, and spiritual risks. **Eccles. 4:9-12** says, **“Two are better than one because they have a good return for their labor; (10) For if either of them falls, the one will lift up his companion. But woe to the one who falls when there is not another to lift him up. (11) Furthermore, if two lie down together they keep warm, but how can one be warm alone? (12) And if one can overpower him who is alone, two can resist him. A cord of three strands is not quickly torn apart.”** One-man rule in a local fellowship is a flawed design and can lead to serious problems. But someone might say, “well if one-man rule is flawed how about putting the leadership into the hands of the entire church membership?” This is commonly called “congregational rule.”

Congregational rule is a flawed design and can lead to serious problems. This was the form of government that our church practiced until 1982. In a congregationally-ruled church, every member has a voice and ultimately a vote. If a congregation makes themselves the ultimate authority in the church, putting themselves over any other so-called leader or leaders in the church, it would in effect leave the church as sheep without shepherds, violating the clear teachings of God’s Word. If a congregation makes themselves the ultimate authority and seeks to make decisions through the voting process, it opens the door to the immature leading the church rather than the mature, especially if the immature outnumber those who are more spiritually mature. If a congregation makes themselves the ultimate authority, open conflict can easily break out between members representing various viewpoints, as various people, sometimes in less than honorable ways, seek to secure the necessary number of votes to win.

God’s design for the local church was that the church would be led by a plurality of biblically qualified men. What was Paul’s instruction to Titus? **“For this reason I left you in Crete, that you might set in order what remains, and appoint elders in every city as I directed you.”**

The only problem with a church adopting this form of government is if, when elders are appointed as overseers, they select men who are not biblically qualified. What are the biblical qualifications for elders?

Generally speaking the leaders of the church are to be above reproach (1 Tim. 3:2) Listen to **1 Tim. 3:2**, **“An overseer, then, must be above reproach.”** This obviously does not mean that they are perfect, but rather it means that their lives can be emulated by the congregation,

resulting in ever increasing maturity in respect to the things of the Lord. It means that there are no glaring faults that would discredit them and undermine their leadership. We recognize that anyone can be accused falsely, even Jesus was accused falsely, but the obvious intent is that the elder's life would not in fact give a basis for a charge. If a charge or charges were brought against an elder, hopefully those charges would be found groundless.

Specifically speaking, the leaders of the church are to meet all the qualifications found in 1 Tim. 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9. Let me list for you the qualifications that were highlighted in these two passages. They were to be the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, orderly, hospitable, able to teach, not addicted to wine, gentle, uncontentious, free from the love of money, manages his household well, not a new convert, a good reputation with outsiders, having faithful children not accused of dissipation or rebellion, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, loving what is good, just, devout, self-controlled. This weekend we do not have time to go into the meaning of each of these qualifications, but if you would like to know what our church teaches concerning these various qualifications, you can go to our website at ValleyBible.net and open up our position paper on church leadership.

If a church chooses to embrace God's design for church government found in the New Testament and will take the time to only appoint men who are in fact men above reproach who meet the qualifications found in these two passages, the church will be better served.

Why would these men have to be so high qualified to lead? I believe the answer to that is found in Hebrews 13:17. Let us read the verse, **“Obey your leaders, and submit to them; for they keep watch over your souls, as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.”**

The leaders of the church need to be highly qualified because the congregation is commanded to follow them (Heb. 13:17). What does the first part of the verse say? **“Obey your leaders, and submit to them.”** The leaders of the church have been given authority by God to lead. Does this mean that we are to obey the leaders of Valley Bible Church? And what do you think the answer to that question would be? Of course we are to obey the leaders! Just as wives are to obey husbands, children are to obey parents, citizens are to obey government officials, Christians are to obey their church leaders. This is why the leaders of the church need to be highly qualified.

Does this mean that the leaders of the church, in our case elders, would go around as a pattern of life commanding people to do things? Let me ask you a question: Husbands, are you biblically an authority in your home? And the answer I believe to that question is, yes. Do you go around as a pattern of life commanding your wife to do things? No. And neither would church elders. Hopefully because of your appreciation of the elders' God given role, you will very willingly honor their wishes.

For instance, we believe that it is profitable for your children to be in our childrens programs. This is our judgment. Hopefully you seek to cooperate with this desire as best as you can.

We believe that it is important for you to be involved in our church beyond just attending our

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Sunday Services. Hopefully you would seek to cooperate with this desire as best as you can.

In cooperating with our wishes and desires, you would be honoring the command of Heb. 13:17 to obey and to submit to the leaders of the church. If you simply ignore our wishes and desires for you, as we try and give spiritual oversight, would be a violation of this command. And what does the passage tell you is the result of that? It would be unprofitable for you.

Will the elders ever actually command that something be done, appealing to their authority? If the elders were to do this, it would only be when they believe that there is a spiritual crisis and that there is need for someone or a group of people to respond quickly and decisively.

The leaders of our church have no desire to go around commanding people to do things. Hopefully as you grow in your appreciation of the leaders of Valley Bible Church and understand their God given role, you will be seeking to obey them by responding to their wishes and desires. And certainly if they were ever to come to you and command you to do or not to do something in very strong terms, you would be prepared to obey them, trusting that the Lord would be working through them. The leaders of the church need to be highly qualified because the congregation is commanded to follow them.

The leaders of the church need to be highly qualified because the Lord will hold them accountable (Heb. 13:17). Let us again look at the verse. **“Obey your leaders, and submit to them; for they keep watch over your souls, as those who will give an account.”** A church should not put men into positions of spiritual oversight who are not well prepared to do this because they will be held accountable by God.

The leaders of the church need to be highly qualified because the congregation is commanded to obey them and the leaders will be held responsible for their oversight by God.

CONCLUSION

Pray for the leadership of this church. Presently we have three elders: Jim Kross, Gerry Andersen and myself. I thank God for each one of these men and their faithful service to this church and to me personally. We try and meet together once a week. Any decisions we make must be unanimously supported by all three elders. When we need additional counsel in making a decision or when we feel we need a greater base of support in carrying out a decision, we will always approach our deacons for help. Presently we have 15 deacons. This approach, which we believe is the biblical approach to church government, has served this church extremely well for nearly 20 years. This is my 28th year as a pastor of this church. While I have been here I have seen pastors of other churches come and go. But I have endured. How has this been possible? It is because I have been a part of a church that was willing to embrace elder rule, not only in theory but in practice, and for this I and the elders thank you.