

DIVERSITY IN THE CHURCH

1 TIMOTHY 3:1-13

“The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. 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.

“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.”¹

Church records gathered from southern churches during the Antebellum period in the United States tell an amazing tale. There are accounts of Baptist congregations composed of both slave owners and slaves. There are instances recorded telling of congregations pastored by slaves. The Baptists of the South were convinced that God’s work transcended the socio-political scene, being composed as it was of redeemed individuals. Consequently, the criterion for selecting elders and/or deacons was based upon demonstrated Christian maturity, rather than being based upon socio-economic or political considerations.

The congregation of the Lord is to be a welcoming place, a place where anyone will be accepted to hear the message of life. Those who believe the Master and who are born from above become members of the Household of Faith, members of the Body of Christ. Here, within the assembly of the righteous is found a true unity that is born out of the common faith we share. Consequently, Christian maturity—holiness, godliness, righteousness—is what recommends an individual for leadership within a congregation. The world seeks diversity of race, culture and sex at all levels of organisations. The church, however, seeks righteousness in those who lead.

Today, however, a new push that must prove detrimental to church health is in the ascendancy among the faithful. It is an emphasis arising from the world, and not from the Head of the Faith. It is an emphasis on making ourselves acceptable to all people; and it has introduced a virulent heresy into the life of contemporary churches. Contemporary Canadian Christendom is rife with the thought that ecclesiastical offices must be representative of the race, the sex and perhaps even the social status of those who rely upon those offices. Thus, rather than seeing that He who bought the church with His Own blood appoints whom He wills to holy office, contemporary Christians have adopted the wisdom of this dying age, seeking to ensure that no one feels excluded. In our drive to be sensitive, we have neutered the Faith by creating something of an affirmative action program to ensure diversity in the church.

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We will do well to refresh our memories of how men are appointed to holy office. For the continued health of our own congregation, and in order to encourage all who must be accountable for seeking out those who are called, I invite your participation as we explore the instruction provided by the Apostle to the Gentiles for discovering those who should lead us.

COMPOSITION OF THE CONGREGATION — There are two questions before us in this message: what is the composition of the congregation; and how are leaders for the assembly to be selected? If we can settle the first of these matters, it will make settling the second of the matters somewhat simpler. The congregation will demonstrate unity of purpose, unity of qualification for membership and diversity reflecting the milieu in which the body is found.

In **1 CORINTHIANS 12:13**, Paul makes a statement that reveals the composition of the Body. “In one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.” It is not distorting Scripture to state that on the basis of this particular verse, the Body is composed of individuals without reference to cultural background and without reference to economic background.

When writing the Galatian Christians, Paul makes a similar affirmation when he writes, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” [**GALATIANS 3:28**]. He is speaking somewhat more broadly in this passage; he is not focused specifically on the composition of the congregation, but speaking of the redeemed as a whole. Those who are saved are not redeemed on the basis of race or culture, economic condition, nor even on the basis of sex. Whenever we speak of the Household of Faith, we recognise there are only saints and ain’ts.

Let me pause for a moment to stress a point suggested by what the Apostle has written. Ancient culture, to say nothing of modern cultures, was extremely divisive. There was a vast cultural divide between Jews and Greeks. The Jews identified all non-Jews as Greeks, and they thought of these non-Jews as barbarians. Likewise, the non-Jews considered the Jews to be cultural inferiors—they lacked the worldly sophistication of the educated pagans.

Obviously, there was little interaction between slaves and free people. The Roman Empire was a society in which sixty percent of the population were slaves. These slaves might be better educated than the masters they served, they might be more cultured but they were not free. Slaves had no independent existence from their masters. Perhaps a slave could somehow accumulate enough moneys to purchaser his or her freedom, but so long as a slave was a slave, that person had no individual existence. A slave was answerable to his or her master or mistress. The slave was a tool to be used as the owner determined; and the life of the slave could be terminated on the caprice of the slave owner.

In a similar manner, women were generally thought to be inferior in every aspect to men. A wife could not go out into public without her husband’s permission. A husband could kill his wife with surprising impunity; she was not thought capable of having an independent existence outside of her husband or father. There were some notable exceptions within Roman society—though even these had distinct limitations; nevertheless, it seems accurate to say that a woman’s existence was at the sufferance of her husband. Such an attitude persists even in this day within multiple cultural communities that foster the attitude that women are to have neither voice nor freedom to think for themselves, becoming mere chattel for their husbands.

So, you can get just a small idea of how radical was the idea that the assembly could be composed of people without reference to social status, without consideration of economic situation, and without indication of the sex of those uniting.

At another point, speaking of the composition of the assembly of the Lord, Paul writes, “Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all” [COLOSSIANS 3:11]. Again, the divisions commonly associated with this dying world are excluded from consideration for membership. What is important is the relationship of the membership to Christ Jesus the Lord. Of first importance in determining suitability for membership in the assembly of the Lord is whether one can say that he or she has been born from above, that all sin has been forgiven in Christ the Lord and that the individual has been accepted in the Beloved Son of God.

The criterion for membership in the local assembly is clarified when the Apostle writes, “In Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near” [EPHESIANS 2:13-17].

The congregation of Christ the Lord is to be composed of twice-born people. To the Galatian Christians, Paul patiently explained, “In Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love” [GALATIANS 5:6]. This same truth is iterated toward the end of this particular letter when Paul again writes, “Neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation” [GALATIANS 6:15].

Let’s put together what we have learned concerning the composition of the congregation: only people who are saved through faith in Christ and who have openly confessed that faith through baptism are qualified for membership in the local assembly. Those who are redeemed are called to present themselves for baptism as an act of identification with Christ Jesus. Following from this knowledge is the matter that no individual may be excluded from the congregation of the Lord on the basis of race, culture, economic status or sex.

Because we live in a fallen world, and because many of the professed people of God have forsaken the Word of God to pursue their own imaginations, it seems eminently prudent—and assuredly necessary—to caution that those who are redeemed are responsible to live a life that is holy and righteous. Church members are responsible to be holy, living according to the standards of the Word. Each member is accountable to the assembly for his or for her actions. When instructing the churches in the encyclical we know as Ephesians, the Apostle writes, “Be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

“But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving. For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not become partners with them; for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, for anything that becomes visible is light” [EPHESIANS 5:1-14].

What is required for membership in a New Testament church? One must be saved. Then, having been saved, the individual must openly confess faith in the Son of God through baptism as a believer. Those who are lost are called to life in Christ the Lord. Those who are redeemed from sin are commanded to identify in baptism. Those who have been baptised as believers are invited to unite openly in the assembly of the Lord. To do less is to be disobedient to the divine command.

APPOINTMENT TO HOLY OFFICE — It should go without saying that we should expect that those who provide leadership for the congregation of the Lord will themselves be saved. However, because the thinking of the world has infected so many churches, it is necessary to spell out the requirements for leadership among the people of God. That is the focus of what the Apostle has written in our text. You will notice that Paul is unconcerned about diversity as we think of diversity. Diversity as a leadership tool is an artifact of contemporary society. Moreover, the concept of diversity would appear to be a novel thesis when viewed through the lens of history.

Throughout the Word of God are repeated appeals for unity—for harmony as the people of God seek unity in the Faith. In His High Priestly prayer, Jesus asked of the Father, “The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me” [JOHN 17:22, 23 NASB].

Paul instructs believers to “Live in harmony with one another” [ROMANS 12:16], and then he pens a prayer for those who believe, asking, “May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” [ROMANS 15:5, 6].

The plea to Christians in Rome is mirrored by his words included in the Letter to the Ephesian believers. “I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all” [EPHESIANS 4:1-6].

In fact, the Apostle insists that a primary purpose for the gifted individuals given to the churches is to unite the people of God. The ascended Christ “gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love” [EPHESIANS 4:11-16].

Paul’s plea to the Christians of Colossae was, “Above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body... Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him” [COLOSSIANS 3:14-17].

Nor should we imagine that Paul is alone is pleading for unity among the people of God. Peter has written to the saints, “Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind” [1 PETER 3:8].

The pleas we have just witnessed from the Word reflect the assessment concerning the first believers following the ascension of the Master. “All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers” [ACTS 1:14]. The model we have received for the churches is that those uniting as congregations seek unity in the Faith—unity of purpose and unity in worship of the True and Living God, even as the membership demonstrates harmonious relationships in every facet of interactions with one another. The people of God are to emphasise their unity rather than exaggerating their diversity.

Based on this clear teaching of the Word, whenever we are compelled to seek out leaders, our goal should be to find those individuals who will foster the unity that is sought in the Word. The qualifications for such individuals are a matter of character rather than education. Character, not credentials or connections, is the criterion for selection of elders and of deacons. Moreover, the character sought is verified through observation rather than through mere testimony. Let that sink in: the church is to value character, not credentials or connections. The eldership and the diaconate of the congregation must reflect God’s divine work in the lives of those appointed.

Listen once more to the qualifications for elders. “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 TIMOTHY 3:2-7].

The criteria for elders is expanded somewhat when Paul writes Titus. “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. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined. He 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” [TITUS 1:5-9].

Similarly, the qualifications for deacons revolve around issues of character rather than sex, social standing or economic considerations. “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... Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well” [1 TIMOTHY 3:8-10, 12].

The congregation of the Lord is not a sociological experiment where social engineers attempt to recreate the world as they wish it to be, nor is the church subject to affirmative action! This is the Body of Christ, and we are to reflect Him as we build the Body. Those who lead are not elected, nor are they to reflect some perceived socio-economic pattern. Rather, those who lead the church must have been equipped by God Himself, recognised by the congregation as divinely prepared, and openly set apart to the service for which God has equipped them. The criterion for serving as elders and deacons differs from what we might imagine.

I have observed among the churches of the Lord a dreadful situation in which the church is viewed much as one would view a service club. People join much as they might unite with any secular organisation; and some of those who join are elected to positions that the group has deemed necessary. Because the church is registered as a charitable organisation, the people are very careful to ensure that they don't violate the rules that have been set in place by politicians. In order to meet the political standard, it becomes necessary to "elect" elders and/or deacons on some recurring basis (usually annually). Thus, there is a frenzy of activity as members of a nominating committee scurry about asking various individuals, "Will you let your name stand? Will you be a deacon this year? Will you serve as an elder this year?" The primary consideration for those asked to serve in these positions revolves around economic status or social standing in the community or the need somehow to ensure "diversity." Is it any wonder, then, that our churches are generally devoid of spiritual vitality? We substituted our best thoughts for the wisdom of God, and we wonder why things don't work better than they do!

In a general sense, the elders of the church, as is also true for the deacons of the congregation, are recognised as qualified through observation. There is no shortcut for this determination; it requires time to satisfy the congregation. The church does not hire a preacher; the congregation of the Lord receives a shepherd that has been appointed by the Chief Shepherd [SEE 1 PETER 5:1-4].

The usual method employed in the contemporary evangelical church is to write the Director of Missions or the Area Minister asking them to send the ministry information profiles of those they have adjudged suitable for the ministerial task. Those individuals that are thought to be more capable in the estimate of the denominational leaders will be recommended to larger or more prestigious churches, and those that are less capable will be recommended to churches that are out of the way or not as well recognised. On the strength of the recommendation of the denominational leaders, the church hires a preacher, provided the congregation can tolerate the sermon. If the preacher is a good fit, he will stay for about three to five years, and if he is less suited to the congregation, his tenure will be somewhat truncated.

The average tenure of a pastor in the typical evangelical church is less than three years; I am aware of one Canadian denomination in which the average pastoral tenure is about eighteen months. Because of such abbreviated tenures, it is not uncommon that preachers will repeatedly use the same sermons. Many preachers keep a catalog of sermons that they preach over and over because there is no need to expand their repertoire. They are not challenged to grow, and thus the congregations are stunted. Because the preacher is hired, he will inevitably irritate some powerful individual in the assembly and be fired. Surely this was not the design of the Head of the Church! Surely the Master longs for His people to grow in grace and knowledge of Himself! If the congregation is to grow, the pastor must invest Himself in the Word and in the people.

If the Apostle's words in our text mean anything, it is that God has given His people a pattern to seek out those whom He has appointed to leadership. The pattern provided is that a congregation is responsible to watch those who are members of the assembly, assessing God's work in each one's life. As the men mature, demonstrating the Spirit's effective preparation in their lives, the congregation should prayerfully seek God's guidance. Scripture appears to teach that elders select elders, presenting them to the assembly for acceptance by those whom they will teach and lead. The elders are not being sought out in order simply to take care of business—the elders are to teach! Listen again to the Apostle. [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" [TITUS 1:9].

In our text we are taught that the elder must “be able to teach” [1 TIMOTHY 3:2]. This is stated in anticipation of Paul’s instruction in his final letter to Timothy. “The Lord’s servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will” [2 TIMOTHY 2:24-26].

There is nothing novel about the message we declare; it is the message of grace that has been repeated since God graciously intervened to provide atonement for our first parents. For this reason, the Apostle instructed Timothy, “You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus, and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also” [2 TIMOTHY 2:1, 2].

To be able to teach is so much more than mere ability to craft a sermon that is pleasing to the ear—it is the willingness to spend time in the presence of God until the divine message suffuses the soul. To be able to teach implies that the dew of heaven is seen on the brow of the one bringing the message; it is to toil until assured that the aroma of life pervades the words that are spoken. To be able to teach means that the imprimatur of heaven is indelibly stamped on the message as it is brought to the people. Those who listen are left disturbed at their own sense of failure and encouraged in the knowledge that grace is extended to all who will receive it.

If the elders seek out elders, presenting them for acceptance by the congregation, then it is obvious that those who serve as deacons are sought out by the congregation as a whole. When the first servants of the church were appointed, they were chosen by the congregation and appointed by the elders. “Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, “It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.” And what they said pleased the whole gathering, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands on them” [ACTS 6:1-6].

Elders select elders, submitting them to the congregation for acceptance. However, the congregation selects deacons, submitting them to the elders for acceptance. So, the labours of the congregation are divided to ensure that the work continues without hindrance. In either case the criteria for appointment are the result of observation—personal knowledge by those selecting, and agreement to receive those who are presented.

LEADING THE CHURCH — The churches of this day can be horribly dysfunctional. There exists a strange idea that a board is necessary to run the church. As an aside, I have often noted that the only boards found in the New Testament come from a shipwreck [see ACTS 27:42-44 NKJV]. The congregation of the Lord is not run by anyone; we serve one another in love and we seek to follow our divine Head—Christ Jesus our Master. Deacons are appointed to care for particular tasks associated with addressing physical needs of the congregation, overseeing the acts of mercy for the membership as such needs are revealed. The elders are responsible to address the spiritual needs of the congregation, protecting the flock from assault, even as they ensure there is nourishment and refreshment for the people of God.

Deacons are not specifically addressed in detail in the pages of the New Testament, though from the appointment of the first servants of the congregation we can garner some information concerning their role. Though they are not designated deacons, in the account provided in Acts 6, the men appointed nevertheless act as deacons [see **ACTS 6:1-6**]. It was because those functioning in the role of elders felt it wrong to turn from caring for the spiritual oversight of the assembly to “serve” [*diakonéo*] tables that the congregation was instructed to act. Those appointed were to serve the congregation through oversight of the acts of mercy for the assembly while the elders devoted themselves to prayer and the ministry of the Word. Thus, a division of labour is evident. Deacons care for the acts of mercy required within the congregation; elders devote themselves to the ministry of the Word. Thus, each provides leadership through investment of life rather than functioning as a political entity.

The ministry of the Word assuredly entails teaching and preaching, but it is as well the work of spiritual oversight of the congregation. The pastor is not to strive to make people feel good about themselves; he is responsible to equip the saints for the work of ministry. The ascended Master “gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes” [**EPHESIANS 4:11-14**].

Elsewhere, we are informed that the elders are responsible to stand firm against the possibility of insinuation of error even as he builds the people through sound (healthy) teaching. “I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry” [**2 TIMOTHY 4:1-5**].

Addressing the elders of Ephesus, Paul cautioned them, “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. I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears” [**ACTS 20:28-31**].

The words anticipate the instruction that Peter would give the elders among the Diaspora, “Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you. Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you” [**1 PETER 5:6-10**]. Thus, it becomes apparent that elders are responsible to resist error, to protect against the insinuation of evil, and to instruct the people of God in righteousness.

Why should a message such as we have just received be necessary? One reason for the message is that I am responsible to ensure that the people of God are knowledgeable of the will of God. Thus, I take care to teach what has been delivered in the Word. However, the need for such teaching has become more urgent in this day because so many of the churches have incorporated attitudes originating in the thoughts of this dying world. Affirmative action grows out of the concept of society defined by class; it dismisses the unity of the Body of Christ through incorporating the concept of class. It arises from the proposition that some class is privileged, and in order to redress wrongs perpetuated against another class it is necessary to invoke affirmative action—deliberately choosing one class over another class, whether temporarily or permanently, in order to achieve an idealised diversity.

The great problem with the application of this concept within the church is that the congregation of the Lord is a classless society. As we have seen, the church is composed of redeemed individuals—one is saved or lost. If one is saved, he or she is responsible to unite with other redeemed individuals in the congregation of the Lord. To divide the people of God is the height of wickedness. We are warned, “If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy him. For God’s temple is holy, and you are that temple” [1 CORINTHIANS 3:17]. Any action that segregates the people of God denies the unity of Christ and imposes an artificial caste system upon Christ’s holy people.

Compensation for actions performed against a class in the distant past is a dangerous principle. This is especially true when such compensation is attempted within the church. The people of God must resist every such effort to segregate the people of God, seeing one another as redeemed by the grace of God and appointed to the assembly by the Spirit of God. Thus, each member of the Body is not only gifted by God, but is to be received as a gift from God. Those appointed to specific labours among the people of God are to be recognised and honoured because of their labours on behalf of God’s people.

Indeed, “Those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus” [1 TIMOTHY 3:13]. In a similar vein, “The elders who rule well [are to be] considered worthy of double honour, especially those who labour in preaching and teaching” [1 TIMOTHY 5:17]. The statement iterates something that the Apostle has written in an earlier missive. “We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you” [1 THESSALONIANS 5:12]. Again, the instruction mirrors that which is written in the Letter to Hebrew Christians. “Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you” [HEBREWS 13:17].

There is a place for you among the people of God. Have you faith in the Risen Son of God? Why do you delay confessing Him as Master over your life? Have you been obedient to His command to follow in baptism since you believed? What hinders you from such obedience? The invitation of the True and Living God is an invitation to life in His Beloved Son. Jesus died because of your sin, and He was raised from the dead to declare you righteous before the Father. The Word of God now calls all who will receive the life that is offered in Christ Jesus the Lord. “If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved” [ROMANS 10:9, 10]. The invitation concludes with these words, “Everyone who calls on the Name of the Lord shall be saved” [ROMANS 10:13].

Come, follow the Master. Do it now. Amen.