

Two Offices - Pastor & Deacon

Philippians 1:1

Introduction

In a previous lesson we discussed church government, and how the local church is autonomous and self-governing. This is based on the New Testament definition of a church: a local, visible, autonomous assembly of baptized believers. We have no hierarchy or denominational leadership. A local church answers only to Christ, and is capable of governing itself.

Therefore, we reject the notion of leaders over denominations or regions. The only church office that once had this authority was that of an apostle (2 Cor. 11:28). But when the apostles died, so did that unique office and authority. There are no apostles today, because an apostle had to be a witness of the resurrection of Christ. (Acts 1:22; 4:33)

W.B. Boggs, a Baptist missionary to India wrote, "Baptists hold that, according to the plain teaching of the Holy Scriptures, the regularly appointed offices in a Christian church are but two - that of bishop or pastor, and deacon; the first, to minister in things spiritual, and the second, in things temporal."

I. The Pastor

A. His Titles & Functions

1. Bishop (episkopos) - overseer, superintendent (Phil. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:1)
2. Elder (presbuteros) - leader, ruler (Acts 20:17)
3. Pastor (poimenos) - shepherd, one who guides and feeds the sheep (Eph. 4:11-12)

These three titles are not distinct offices, but rather separate descriptions of the same Biblical office. The names are used interchangeably in the New Testament.

4. Examples:

- a) Acts 20:17, 28: they are called elders, but then he tells them to “take heed” (elder), to be overseers (bishop), and to feed the flock (pastor).
- b) Titus 1:5-11: these are the qualifications for those to be ordained as elders in the churches. In verse 5, they are called elders. In verse 7, they are called bishops. In verse 9, they are to be able to minister in the word as a pastor-teacher.
- c) 1 Peter 5:1-4: In verse 1, they are addressed as elders. In verse 2, they are told to feed the flock of God (pastor). Then they are told to take the oversight of the church (bishop).

5. Other Biblical titles

The distinction here is that they may or may not always refer to the actual office of the pastor. They are, however, included in that office.

- a) Preacher (Rom. 10:14; 1 Tim. 2:7; 2 Tim. 1:11)
- b) Teacher (1 Cor. 12:28; Eph. 4:11; 1 Tim. 2:7; 2 Tim. 1:11)
- c) Minister (Eph. 3:7; 6:21; Col. 1:7, 25; 4:7; Thess. 3:2; 1 Tim. 4:6)
- d) Brother (Acts 9:17; Rom. 16:23; 1 Cor. 16:12; 2 Cor. 2:13; Eph. 6:21; Phil. 2:25; Col. 4:7,9; 1 Thess. 3:2; Phile. 1:1, 7, 16, 20)

6. Other Common (unbiblical) titles

- a) Clergyman - often a generic, legal title for anyone involved in the work of the ministry. It has an unbiblical connotation that there is a superiority of clergy over the “laity,” which the Lord hated. (Revelation 2:6, 15)
- b) Reverend - this is found only once in the Bible, and it specifically refers to the name of God. (Psalm. 111:9)
- c) Father - Christ taught against using this title. (Matthew 23:9)

B.H. Carroll wrote: “Bishop, pastor, elder, preacher and teacher do not signify so many offices, but departments of work in the one office. Here [in the church] is a working force - there is an overseer for that working force;

here is a flock - there is a shepherd for that flock;
here is an assembly - there is a ruler of that assembly, a president;
here is an audience - there is a preacher to that audience;
here is a school - and there is a teacher for that school, an expounder of the word of God.”

B. His Qualifications

1. 1 Timothy 3:1-7

- a) A desire for the work, blameless (nothing to be accused of)
- b) The husband of one wife (not divorced & remarried), by implication, a pastor must also be a man.
- c) Vigilant, sober (serious), of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach;
- d) Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous;
- e) One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection.
- f) Not a novice (too young or a new convert); of good report outside the church (a good reputation in the community).

2. Titus 1:5-9

- a) Blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of riot or unruly (rebellious).
- b) Not selfwilled, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre (money, gain).
- c) A lover of hospitality, a lover of good men (good friends & associations), sober (serious), just, holy, temperate (self-controlled).
- d) Holding faithfully to the word, sound in doctrine.

C. His Authority

1. He is to be obeyed, unless he contradicts the Bible. (Heb. 13:17, 24)
2. He is to be honored and respected (1 Tim. 5:17)
3. He is to be given the benefit of the doubt. (1 Tim. 5:19)
4. He is to be financially supported (1 Tim. 5:17-18; 1 Cor. 9:7-14)

D. His Limitations

1. He is not to be a dictator over the church. (1 Pet. 5:2-4) He is appointed to be a decision maker, but not to make all decisions. Each church determines for itself what requires a church vote, and what the pastor may decide on his own. The church body is to govern itself. He simply leads that democratic process.
2. He is to be chosen (ordained) by the church, not self-appointed. (Acts 14:23; 16:4) This ordination should only follow careful examination. (1 Tim. 5:22)
3. He can be disqualified from his office. (see qualifications above)
4. Just as a pastor is selected for his office by a church vote, he can also be removed from office by the same method. This should only be done if he is proven to be in sin, or to be teaching heresy. Personal styles or “quirks” are not grounds for removal from office. (Titus 3:10-11)
5. He can be disciplined for sin, just as any other member. (1 Tim. 5:19-20)

II. The Deacon

A. The Definition

Diakonos - servant or minister (Phil. 1:1)

B. The Origin

1. Acts 6:1-7, there were widows who needed to be cared for by the church in Jerusalem, but some were neglected which caused some murmuring and contention in the church. The pastors could not focus on the spiritual needs of this large congregation while also being concerned with the physical needs and administration.
2. The main duty of the pastor is given in verse 4, “But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word.” These two points had to remain the focus of the pastors.
3. But the physical needs of the people also needed to be handled. So the apostles asked the church to select seven men who could take care of that business, leaving the pastors free to minister to the spiritual needs of the congregation.

4. God's hand of blessing was on this decision, and verse 7 says that immediately after this, "the word of God increased; and the number of disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly..."

C. The Duties

1. Not every church (especially small ones) need deacons. There is not prescribed number that a church must have. But where the needs increase, the pastor often needs help to keep a handle on the physical, temporal aspects of the ministry.
2. Deacons are not to be a governing "board," but a group of men to help serve the Lord and the church by serving the pastor. It is not a decision-making council. They are instead the "doers" once a decision has been made. On the other hand, wise deacons can provide great insight and counsel to the pastor and the church.
3. They can serve really in any capacity that the church needs, but mainly their responsibilities will be on the material side of ministry. Here are some likely areas of responsibility: church finances, pastoral support, business administration, church property and maintenance, distributing to those in need, helping the pastor oversee the congregation, matters of church discipline, administering the ordinances.
4. "The deacon's office is supplemental to the pastor's office." B.H. Carroll. Deacons do not serve to compete against or check the pastor's authority. They are to counsel, protect, provide for and help the pastor.

D. The Qualifications

In a sense, every Christian is called to be a servant, and to serve in his or her local church. But not every Christian is called to be a deacon. As a formal, Biblical office of the church, there are certain qualifications that must be met in order to become a deacon.

1. Acts 6:3-6
 - a) Honest report
 - b) Full of the Holy Ghost
 - c) Full of wisdom
 - d) Full of faith

2. 1 Timothy 3:8-13
 - a) Grave, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy.
 - b) Holding to the faith, pure in conscience, proven over time, blameless.
 - c) The wives of deacons must be grave, not slanderers, sober, and faithful in all things. The implication is that a man could be disqualified from being a deacon by the actions of his wife.
 - d) Husband of one wife (not divorced & remarried), implied is also the qualification that a deacon must be a man.
 - e) Ruling children & house well

Conclusions:

Consistent with the other Biblical, Baptist Distinctives, the local church is fully equipped to govern itself. The Lord formed two offices to serve and lead His church: the bishop/elder/pastor and the deacon. The terms applying to the pastor are used interchangeably in the New Testament.

There are not two different types of elder (ruling and teaching), as some believe. There is only one kind. There may, however, be multiple pastors (especially in a large church), but one is always the head or lead pastor. The others assist. (See Acts 20:17; Phil. 1:1; Titus 1:5 for multiple elders).

A quick look through the New Testament will show that women have an integral role in the work of the ministry, but cannot hold a formal office in the church, as they do not meet the Biblical qualifications for a pastor or a deacon.