
Mission 119 Ministries

DEACONS AND PASTORS

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THE PROBLEM

- “In many churches, an older or charter member, someone who is bold and speaks in a domineering way, the deacons, someone with lots of money or a *busybody* is the real overseer of the church. They *run the show* and it is their leadership which prevails. What a violation of scriptural policy! The pastor is to be the overseer or leader.” – Lester Hutson, *What We Believe and Why Vol. 1*
 - *The pastor cannot fulfill his God-given responsibilities if he is only permitted to serve at the end of marionette strings held by non-pastors.*
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TERMS

- The noun “deacon” is derived from the Latin “diaconus,” which transliterates the Greek *diakonos*.
 - The Greek noun occurs 29 times in the NT and is usually translated as a “servant” or “minister”
 - The Greek noun *diakonos* derives from the Greek verb *diakoneō* that means “to serve”
 - A leading Greek lexicon (BDAG) provides this definition of “deacon”: “one who gets something done, at the behest of a superior, *assistant* to someone.”
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TERMS

- The noun “deacon” gets used in a technical and non-technical sense to refer to one who serves, and does not always refer to the office of a deacon
 - Non-technical: “Then said the king to the **servants**, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast *him* into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” (Matthew 22:13)
 - Non-technical: “For he is the **minister** of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the **minister** of God, a revenger to *execute* wrath upon him that doeth evil.” (Romans 13:4)
 - Technical: “ Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and **deacons.**” (Philippians 1:1)
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THE BIBLE SAYS...

➤ **Acts 6:1** And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministrations. **2** Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples *unto them*, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables. **3** Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. **4** But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word. **5** And the saying pleased the whole multitude: and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas a proselyte of Antioch: **6** Whom they set before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid *their* hands on them.

THE BIBLE SAYS...

- We do not find the noun “deacon” in Acts 6:1-6 but we find the related verb *diakoneō* translated “serve”
 - The apostles were in charge of the local church in Jerusalem but elected to delegate certain administrative responsibilities to others
 - “It seems appropriate to think of these seven men as ‘deacons’ even though the name *deacon* had perhaps not yet come to be applied to them as they began this responsibility, for they seem to be given tasks which fit well with the responsibilities of deacons hinted at in 1 Timothy 3:8–12.” — Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*
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THE BIBLE SAYS...

- Philippians 1:1 refers to “deacons,” which tells us that local church had a plurality of deacons, but does not address their role
 - 1 Timothy 3:8-13 describes the qualifications for deacons
 - Some of this qualifications may hint at their duties, for example, not being greedy suggests they might have a role in caring for the church finances
 - But whereas the NT does not indicate the specific responsibilities of the deacon beyond the example in Acts 6 and the meaning of the word (“servant”), the NT says a good deal about the responsibilities of pastors
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THE BIBLE SAYS...

- We see three Greek terms used in the NT to describe the functions of the pastor, translated in our English bibles as “pastors,” “bishops,” and “overseers”
 - Despite its popularity in modern churches in the U.S., the least used term in the noun form is “pastor” or “shepherd” (Greek *poimēn*)
 - The noun “shepherd” is used only once in the NT for the church office of pastor: “And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, **pastors** and teachers.” (Ephesians 4:11)
 - The verse is better translated “shepherd-teachers” or “pastor-teachers”
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THE BIBLE SAYS...

- The verb form *poimainō* — to shepherd / to pastor — is used in Acts 20:28
 - **Acts 20:17** And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the church... **28** Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.
 - Paul addresses the elders (where are the deacons?)
 - The elders were appointed by the Holy Spirit as “overseers” (Greek *episkopas*) of “all the flock” (does this include deacons?)
 - And they were to pastor / shepherd / feed the flock
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THE BIBLE SAYS...

- The noun “overseer” (Greek *episkopos*), according to the leading Greek lexicon BDAG, means “one who has the responsibility of safeguarding or seeing to it that something is done in the correct way, *guardian*”
 - The notes to the NET translation for Acts 20:28 say the term was adopted by Christian communities to refer to an “overseer or supervisor, with special interest in guarding the apostolic tradition...This functional term describes the role of the elders (Acts 20:17). They were to guard and shepherd the congregation.”
 - In many English translations, *episkopos* is translated “bishop”
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THE BIBLE SAYS...

- The qualifications for a “bishop” / overseer are set forth in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9
 - Comparing these two passages, it is clear that Paul refers to the same office as overseer and elder
 - Elder is the Greek noun *presbuteros* and can indicate older age but also, according to BDAG, “an official”
 - What is clear is that elder, pastor, bishop and overseer are all referring to the same office, but DEACONS ARE NOT ELDERS
 - In particular, note that elders must be “able to teach” (1 Tim. 3:2) but deacons have no teaching requirement
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FUNCTIONS OF THE PASTOR

- So what then are the functions of pastors?
 - The labels tell us a lot — they shepherd / feed (*poimainō*) the flock / sheep (*poimnion*), they are overseers / managers (*episkopos*) of the local church
 - Thus their primary responsibilities are to be in charge of a local church (under Christ) and teach
 - Key passages that confirm their oversight / teaching functions are Acts 20:28-31, 1 Peter 5:1-4, 1 Timothy 5:17
 - Note that this specifically includes protecting the flock from “grievous wolves” (Acts 20:29)
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VARIOUS SOURCES

- “The term ‘deacon’ refers literally to someone who serves. Some modern versions have used the term ‘church helper’ (GNB) or ‘Assistant-Officer’ (TCNT) in v. 8. Bible scholars view the overseer as providing administrative leadership for the church. They see the deacon as helping the overseer in the ministries or work of the church.” — Thomas Lea and Hayne Griffin, *1, 2 Timothy, Titus*, The New American Commentary Series (SBC)
 - ...deacons seem to be assistants to the bishops. In the *Pastoral Epp. the deacons are a separate class of Church officers, charged chiefly with material duties. — Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church
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VARIOUS SOURCES

- “It is significant that nowhere in the New Testament do deacons have ruling authority over the church as the elders do, nor are deacons ever required to be able to teach Scripture or sound doctrine.” — Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*
 - “There is widespread misunderstanding about the job description of a deacon. The misunderstanding is not only among the general ranks of Christians but also among deacons themselves.” – Lester Hutson, *What We Believe and Why Vol. 2*
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VARIOUS SOURCES

- “There are two primary classes of church leadership offices in the New Testament: that of the overseer and elder, and that of the deacon (Phil 1:1; 1 Tim 3:1–13). Deacons do not hold teaching or ruling authority in the church but exercise responsibility for the physical needs of the congregation. The complementary service of overseers and deacons is analogous to that of the apostles and the Seven in Acts 6:1–6.” — The Lexham Bible Dictionary
 - “The office of ἐπίσκοπος (*episkopos*) is equivalent to the elder (πρεσβύτερος, *presbyteros*) and is characterized by pastoral oversight and care, ruling authority, and teaching sound doctrine.” — Lexham Bible Dictionary
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VARIOUS SOURCES

- “Each church had a plurality of both deacons and elders (Phil. 1:1). Deacons were created to assist the elders. As subordinates, they were to relieve the elders of menial tasks so that the elders could concentrate on prayer and the ministry of the Word of God (Acts 6:2). Elders were overseers of the church’s doctrinal and spiritual matters; deacons, as assistants, were in charge of the social and physical ministries.” — Norman Geisler, *Systematic Theology, Volume 4*
 - One of the major roles of elders in the New Testament is to govern the New Testament churches. In 1 Timothy 5:17 we read, “Let the elders who *rule* well be considered worthy of double honor.”... The fact that they are to act as shepherds of the flock of God, and the fact that they are to exercise oversight but not to domineer (that is, not to rule harshly or oppressively) strongly suggest that elders have ruling or governing functions in the churches... — Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*
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VARIOUS SOURCES

- “The pastor is the overseer, the person whom God first and directly expects to take the initiative and leadership to correct whatever danger might threaten the church.” – Lester Hutson, *What We Believe and Why Vol. 1*
 - “If he deems it is in the best interest of the work of the church, the pastor has the God given authority to rebuke a transgressor openly. 1 Timothy 5:19-21.” – Lester Hutson, *What We Believe and Why Vol. 1*
 - “Attempts at oversight by those who are not pastors constitute a very serious offense against God and against the office of the pastor.” – Lester Hutson, *What We Believe and Why Vol. 1*
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VARIOUS SOURCES

- “Although Hebrews 13:17 does not name elders, certainly there are some church officers with governing authority over the church, for the author says, “*Obey your leaders and submit to them*, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account.” Since the New Testament gives no indication of any other officers in the church with this kind of authority, it is reasonable to conclude that the congregation is to submit to and obey its elders. (This conclusion is also consistent with the description of responsibilities Paul gives to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:28.)” — Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*
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VARIOUS SOURCES

- “The word [deacon] never, in any instance where it refers to this special office in the church, carries the idea of lord, director or boss....Historically many deacons have envisioned themselves as a board of directors for the church. They have viewed themselves as the ultimate authorities of the church. Too few have viewed themselves as servants; they have thought of themselves as bosses over the church including the pastor. Many deacons consider keeping the preacher in line to be their number one function....That type of thinking is in direct opposition to anything God’s Word teaches on the subject. It is absolutely unjustified in the Bible.” – Lester Hutson, *What We Believe and Why Vol. 2*
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CONGREGATIONAL GOV'T

- The Baptists and some others may follow a “congregational” model of church government
 - What this means in practical terms runs along a continuum, and at one end of the spectrum would be a church where the congregation literally votes on everything (never works)
 - For congregationalism to be effective, the church members cannot have voting rights that (1) undermine the specific roles God delegates to the pastor and (2) the members’ obligation to submit / obey the pastor
 - Does not mean the congregation cannot vote the pastor out (for proper cause), but once they vote the pastor in they are obligated to submit to his leadership (submit means submit / obey) as per Hebrews 13:17
 - Does mean that a congregational model that places a deacon board above the pastor is unbiblical (and unworkable)
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