



**The Biblical Role of  
Pastors/Elders and Deacons  
at Sheridan Hills Baptist Church**



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# What Does the Bible Say About Church Leadership?

There are **TWO CHURCH OFFICES** revealed in Scripture.

**Office of Pastors** (aka Elders/Bishops/Overseers).

**Office of Deacons.**

- The terms '**pastor**', '**elder**', '**bishop**'/'**overseer**' are used interchangeably in the Bible.
- These three terms all refer to the same position in the church.
- Our understanding of the biblical terms is often clouded by the contemporary use of the noun '**pastor**' and unbiblical denominational structures. (Baptists rightly believe in local church autonomy.)
- In the Bible, the term '**pastor**' is used only in one instance (Ephesians 4:11). The Bible usually refers to this office by using the terms '**elder**' (*presbuteros*) or '**overseer**' (*episkopos*).

## 1. References to '**Pastor**' (*poimen*) in the New Testament:

- A) The word '**pastor**' (*poimen*) literally means '**shepherd**'.
- B) **Ephesians 4:11** is the only place in the Bible where the word '**pastor**' is used. It treats pastors and teachers as one group and thus suggests that the chief role of the pastor is feeding the flock through teaching people God's Word, a role clearly assigned to bishops/overseers in 1 Timothy 3:2 and to elders in Titus 1:9.
- C) In **Acts 20:28** the elders of Ephesus are encouraged in their 'pastoral task', that is, their shepherding task, thus showing that Paul saw the elders as the shepherds/pastors.

*28 Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, **to shepherd** the church of God, which he purchased with his own blood.*
- D) In **1 Peter 5:1-2** the *elders* are told to "**tend the flock of God**" that is in their charge. In other words, Peter saw the elders essentially as pastors or shepherds.

## 2. References to '**ELDERS**' (*presbuteros*) in the New Testament:

### **Acts 14:23**

*And when they had appointed **elders** for them in every church, with prayer and fasting, they committed them to the Lord in whom they believed.*

### **Acts 20:17**

*And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the **elders** of the church.*

### **1 Timothy 5:17**

*Let the **elders** who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching;*

### **Titus 1:5**

*This is why I left you in Crete, that you might amend what was defective, and appoint **elders** in every town as I directed you.*

### **James 5:14**

*Is any among you sick? Let him call the **elders** of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.*

## 3. References to '**Overseers/Bishops**' (*episkopos*) in the New Testament:

- A. When we compare **Titus 1:5** with **1:7** we observe that the terms '*bishop/overseer*' and '*elder*' are interchangeably used.
- B. In **Acts 20**, Paul calls the '**elders**' to come down from Ephesus. Then he says to them in verse 28 that God has made them '**overseers/bishops**' among the flock. So we observe that the '**elders**' are the **bishops/overseers** in the church at Ephesus.
- C. In **1 Timothy 3:1** Paul says, "*If any one aspires to the office of bishop/overseer, he desires a noble task.*" Then he gives the qualifications for the **overseer/bishop** in verses 2-7. Unlike the **deacons**, the **overseer** must be "*able to teach*" (v. 2) and in v. 5 he is said to be one whose management of his own household fits him to care for God's church. These two functions are ascribed to **elders** in **1 Timothy 5:17**: teaching and governing.
- D. In Philippians 1:1 Paul writes, "*to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the **bishops/overseers** and **deacons**.*" These are the two offices of the church as also seen in 1 Timothy 3:1-13.
- E. The office of **bishop/overseer** is the same as the office of **elder** in the New Testament. It is listed beside the office of **deacon** (Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:1-13) in such a way as to show that these two were the main offices by which the ongoing life of the church was to be managed.

### **1 Peter 5:1 ALL THREE ARE USED REFERRING TO THE SAME TASK**

*So I exhort the **elders** (*presbyterous*) among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: 2 **shepherd** (*poimane*) the flock of God that is among you, exercising **oversight** (*episkopountes*), not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly;*

## **4. Biblical guidance for THE FUNCTIONS of Pastors/Elders:**

- A. Prayer and the Ministry of the Word -- Acts 6:4
- B. Managing the Church -- 1 Timothy 3:4-5
- C. Leading and Overseeing the Church -- 1 Timothy 5:17
- D. Caring for People in the Church -- 1 Peter 5:2-5
- E. Giving Account to God for the Church -- Hebrews, 13:17
- F. Being an Example -- Hebrews 13:17
- G. Preaching and Teaching -- 1 Timothy 3:2, 5:17
- H. Praying for the Sick -- James 5:13-15
- I. Refuting False Teaching and Doctrine -- Titus 1:9
- J. Protecting the Church from False Teachers -- Acts 20:17-31

## **The TWO MAJOR ROLES of Pastors/Elders:**

### **1. GOVERNING.**

#### **1 Timothy 5:17**

*Let the elders who **rule** (*proestotes*) well be considered worthy of double honor especially those who labor in preaching and teaching.*

#### **1 Timothy 3:4-5**

*He must **manage** (*proistamenon*) his own household well, keeping his children submissive and respectful in every way; for if a man does not know how to **manage** (*prostenai*) his own household, how can he care for God's church?*

#### **Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:2**

The duty of elders to "**oversee**" or "**supervise**" the flock implies a governing function.

### **1 Thessalonians 5:12**

*But we beseech you, brethren, to respect those who labor among you and are over you (proistamenous) in the Lord and admonish you. . .*

### **Hebrews 13:17**

***Obey your leaders and submit to them; for they are keeping watch over your souls, as men who will have to give account.***

## **2. TEACHING/EXHORTING.**

### **Ephesians 4:11**

*And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers*

### **1 Timothy 3:2**

*Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach,*

### **1 Timothy 5:17**

*Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching.*

### **Titus 1:9**

*He must hold firm to the sure word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.*

## **FOUR CONCLUSIONS concerning Pastors:**

1. In the New Testament, 'pastor', 'elder', 'bishop'/'overseer' all refer to the **same office**. This fact is clearly seen in Acts 20, Titus 1, and 1 Peter 5:1-2 where the terms are used interchangeably.
2. Paul's mission in church planting and writing included the preparation and appointment of these leaders in all the churches.
3. The Bible always speaks of a plurality of pastors/elders that are given the role of governing and teaching the church.
4. God has always meant for a team of men to lead His church (*ecclesia* or 'called out ones') .

## **BIBLICAL GUIDANCE CONCERNING DEACONS**

### **1. Deacons and Pastors (or elders) are the two distinct offices in a New Testament Church.**

- A. The two New Testament offices are only mentioned together twice: Philippians 1:1 and 1<sup>st</sup> Timothy 3.

In 1<sup>st</sup> Timothy 3 the qualifications are spelled out for the two offices: overseers in verses 1-7, and deacons in verses 8-13.

The qualifications are very similar except that the pastor/elder must be able to accurately and effectively teach the Word of God.

- B. Pastors/elders are not deacons, and deacons are not pastors/elders.

### **2. The word 'deacon' literally means 'servant'.**

"**Diakoneo**" and its derivatives, as their etymology suggests, are used mainly for personal help to others.

"**Diakonia**" is found 34 times in the NT. It means service at the table. (See: Luke 10:40; Acts 6:1)

"**Diakanos**" is found 29 times in the NT. Its primary meaning is one who serves at tables.

*"In Philippians 1:1 and in numerous references in early Christian literature outside the New Testament, overseers and/or elders and deacons are mentioned together, with deacons always mentioned last. Because of this order, and because of the natural connotations of the word 'diakonos', most interpreters believe that deacons, from the beginning, served as assistants of church leaders."*

(*'Deacon', 'Deaconess'*, Fred A. Grissom, Holman Bible Dictionary, Holman, 1991)

**3. Deacons are intended by God to be an extension of the ministry of the Pastors/elders in greater care of the needs of the flock.**

The Acts 6 account is quite clear on the founding of the deaconship and nowhere does Scripture repeal the original purpose:

*1 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. 2 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. 3 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. 4 But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the Word." 5 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. 6 These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands on them.*

**Deacons are servants/helpers who assist the pastors/elders in meeting the "needs" of the church.**

**4. The early Deacons were selected for their spiritual qualifications.**

1 Timothy 3 and Acts 6 expound the qualifications for the office of deacons; the later contains what could fairly be called the "core qualifications":

**1 Timothy 3:8-13**

**8 Deacons** likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain. **9 They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience**. **10 And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless**. **11 Their wives** likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things. **12 Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well**. **13 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.**

### **Acts 6:3**

*3 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.*

- 5. Deacons are never presented in Scripture as a check or balance of power against the pastors/elders as is sometimes seen in some Baptist churches today.**

The pastors/elders answer to each other, the congregation and the Lord all the time.

- 6. Deacons are to be capable of serving the Lord in spiritual ways.**

The original seven deacons were people who were able to serve the Lord in ways which were more spiritual in nature than merely delivering food. Stephen was a man of spiritual power:

*"And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and signs among the people" (Acts 6:8).*

Philip was not only a deacon, but also was gifted in evangelism. (Acts 8:5-7).

- 7. The office of Deacon requires a firm grasp of sound doctrine.**

A church is content oriented. It is a doctrinally driven community, built upon God's truth. Every member should have this approach in this fellowship; leaders such as deacons, not less but, more so.

*"They must hold the mystery of the faith [Christian truth as hidden from ungodly men] with a clear conscience" Acts 6:9*

- 8. The presence of deacons should advance the unity of a Church.**

When the Apostles laid out the plan for the creation of this office, *"The saying pleased the whole multitude"* (Acts 6:5). The complaints about the benevolence ministry stopped. And the complaints were by the Greek speaking Jews, the Hebrew speaking Jews obviously bent over backwards to preserve the church's unity, for all the men selected had Greek names. It is still true today: Any time a church has deacons who are properly doing their jobs; the church is more likely to be in unity.



Deacons are to be peacemakers. Their ministry was first established to bring peace to the first church.

**9. The presence of Deacons should advance the mission of the Church.**

The immediate impact of the creation of the office of deacon was to eliminate the controversy in the church and to get the church back on course in fulfilling its mission. The Bible says that:

*"Then the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith" (Acts 6:8).*

Again, it is still true. When a church has deacons who are in God's will, the cause of world evangelization will move forward.

## **SUMMARY of the New Testament Church Leadership:**

1. The two offices of the church are a **plurality of Pastors/Elders** and a **plurality of Deacons**. This fact is clearly seen in Philippians 1:1 and 1 Timothy 3.
2. In accordance with the meaning of the words and the practice of the New Testament, **Pastors/Elders** are charged to lead, care, manage, and shepherd the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made them overseers, (Acts 20:17-28, 1 Timothy 5:17, 1 Peter 5:1-4, Ephesians 4:12).  
Key word for **pastor/elder** → **SHEPHERD**.
3. In accordance with the meaning of the word "Deacon" and the practice of the New Testament, **Deacons** are to be helpers of the Pastors/Elders and servants of the Church, (Acts 6:1-6, 1 Timothy 3:8-13).

Key word for **deacon** → **SERVANT**.

**4. These leaders are God's gift to the church for His glory.**

Ephesians 4:11-12

*"And **He 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."*

# **WHAT WE EXPECT FROM OUR DEACONS**

## **1. You will serve and help lead the Body of Christ:**

- A) by personal example in Christ-honoring character
- B) by personal example in involvement (at worship and events)
- C) by taking responsibility for logistical needs for services and ministry  
ie. Lord's Supper, Baptism, Security, Greeters, Ushers, Parking, Facility Prep, AWANA, Funeral assistance, Facilities care, Hurricane prep/recovery, Nursery, Youth etc
- D) by caring for church members who are sick or in need
- E) by helping facilitate Community Groups

## **2. Expectations for Deacon service.**

- A) you truly love the church as the Bride of Christ and your spiritual family
- B) you faithfully attend worship (your absence is a rarity)
- C) you give financial support consistently, generously, sacrificially, cheerfully
- D) you take responsibility for support tasks that need to be done
- E) you help Community Groups succeed in caring for the flock
- F) you often visit people at home or in the hospital
- G) you help with occasional benevolence needs
- H) you maturely and diligently protect the unity of the body
- I) you attend and assist with church-wide events
- J) you meet monthly to learn, pray and organize for ministry to the flock

**Bottom-line:** God raises up men and their wives who will love and care for His Church. These couples see Christ's family as a major part of their everyday lives. They want Christ's church to thrive, so they willingly support it with their time, money and prayer. They are the type people who serve others willingly, gladly and eagerly, and they see the spiritual importance of doing so in the context of Christ's body... ALL FOR HIS GLORY and not their own.

**They sincerely desire to hear, 'Well done, my good and faithful servant.'**