

LESSON 6



CHURCH OFFICERS

Scripture Texts: 1 Corinthians 12:28-31; Ephesians 4:11-13; Titus 1:5-9

The church is a visible organism as well as spiritual. The Kingdom of God cannot be seen, but the Church of God is seen. God has given it work to do. Officers are necessary to carry on that work. God in His perfect administration has made provisions for this. God, Himself, appoints the people to their several places in the body, and who will now presume to take upon himself this right and privilege of the Almighty?

We have studied how God has set the members in the church as it pleased Him. Now if God sets the members, and the Spirit gives the gifts with power to function, what more is needed?

MEMORY VERSE: *"But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him."*

1 Corinthians 12:18

Specific Gifts

First Corinthians 12:28-31 **And God hath set some in the church**—God is the one who places these officers. This is very important. The weakness and apostasy of the church are due in large measure to the placing of officers without a calling by those without God's direction. To keep the church a divine organism, its work must be carried on by those having the divine empowering. If the world is to be reached by the transforming power of God, that power can come only by way of an unbroken connection leading from God. So God sets **apostles . . . prophets . . . teachers . . . miracles . . . healings, helps, governments . . . tongues**. This list gives the function rather than the title, that is, it refers to the work done by each instead of naming the office. It is probable that all of these ministries come within the boundaries of elders and deacons.

First apostles—an apostle is one set forth to proclaim the Gospel where it is not known. Christ's Apostles had a special apostleship. They received the message and training from Christ in person. They were first to spread it to the world. The church continues to have apostles who plant Christianity in non-Christian places. **Prophets**—those speaking for God, receiving a message from God and passing it on to men.

This is preaching under the unction of the Spirit. It is speaking **unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort** (1 Corinthians 14:3). It is also sometimes the foretelling of events (Acts 11:27-28; 21:10-11). **Teachers**—those who teach the truths of God and of the Bible. **Miracles**—verse 10 calls it **the working of miracles**, the doing of acts impossible to do by human power only. More faith would produce more miracles now. **Gifts of healings**—healing of physical ailments. **Helps**—a great number of services not so much noticed but necessary and fruitful in the work of the church. **Governments**—administrative abilities, skill in directing people and projects, in handling problems of discipline and business. **Diversities of tongues**—speaking in languages not learned before. Verse 30 adds the interpretation of tongues—telling the meaning of the language spoken by the other.

All of these abilities are given by God to be used in His service. Gifts differ. Not all have any one gift. The gift determines the office. The Spirit makes room for every gift He gives. We are told to **covet earnestly the best gifts**—to desire and pray for the power from God to do His work, not selfishly or for honor, but to please and glorify

Him. The best gift is the one that God sees fit to give. Be satisfied with that which God is satisfied with. He knows where He can use you best.

Bishops, Deacons, and Elders

Ephesians 4:11-13 **Evangelists**—those who sound forth the Gospel. These are traveling ministers. Philip was an evangelist (Acts 21:8), as was Timothy (2 Timothy 4:5). **Pastors**—those who feed the flock, shepherds. Teaching, nurturing, advising, warning, encouraging, building up in the faith—this is pastoral work. It is for a worker settled in one locality. Pastors are appointed overseers by the Holy Spirit to feed the Church of God (Acts 20:28).

Paul wrote to **the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons** (Philippians 1:1). The ministries we have been considering seem to be covered by the two offices named here—**bishops and deacons**. The Greek word for "bishop" is *episkopos* and means overseer. A bishop and an elder are the same, "elder" being the title or rank of the office. The same men are called elders and bishops (or overseers) in Acts 20:17, 28 and in Titus 1:5, 7. Elders are those leaders who minister the Word either as apostles, evangelists, pastors, or teachers. Peter and John spoke of themselves as elders (1 Peter 5:1; 2 John 1).

The Greek word for "deacon" is *diakonos* and means helper. Deacons are helpers in the work of the elders. This covers the remaining ministries named. No place in these Scriptures do we have any minister called "reverend." This is a man-made title and is inappropriate for a true minister of God. "Pastor So-and-So" or "Elder So-and-So" is in accordance with the Bible.

Qualifications for Elders

Titus 1:5 Paul instructed Titus to **ordain elders in every city**. These elders would be pastors to take oversight of the congregations. Titus would only recognize as elders those whom God had chosen and given the abilities of elders. The ordination was not formal. It was prayer and laying on of hands as the Spirit led (Acts 13:3). The authority comes only with the gift, as the gift comes from God.

Titus 1:6-9 Only those showing the required qualities are to be recognized as elders. Paul gave the standard to which elders must measure. There is one standard for elders and deacons alike (1 Timothy 3). Elders must be **blameless**—guiltless, living right; **the husband of one wife**—no bigamist; **having faithful children**—the ability to raise children well is the same as is required to rule the church well; **blameless, as the steward of God**—faithful in handling the precious Gospel and the souls entrusted to his care; **not selfwilled**—yielded to God; **not soon angry**—longsuffering in love; **not given to filthy lucre**—no lover of money, not preaching for money; **a lover of hospitality**—quick to open his heart and home to others; **a lover of good men**; **sober**—serious-minded, seeking good in all men; **just**—righteous toward God, honest toward men; **holy**—without sin; **temperate**—moderate in all things, self-controlled, not extreme; **holding fast the faithful word**—believing the Bible, studying it, understanding it, keeping it, so that he may be able **by sound doctrine**—true teaching and preaching **to exhort and to convince** any unbeliever.

Other Offices

There are many ministries that are covered by the offices of elder and deacon. Some of these are Sunday school superintendent, music director, choir director, secretary, and youth leader. We have Bible examples of the choosing of people for specific services (Acts 6:1-6; Acts 11:27-30).

God's part is to choose and qualify the officers (1 Corinthians 12:18). Man's part is to recognize and accept God's choice. This can be done rightly only by people who are saved and led by the Spirit. By waiting upon God in prayer and following His leading, His choice can be found. Personal, human feelings and desires should never be allowed

to crowd out the Spirit's leadings. God gives one the ability, he exercises it as opportunity offers, and his brethren come to respect and accept his divine call.

Should Women Hold Offices?

This is to be left to the Holy Spirit. Women should hold any office in which they are placed by God through the Holy Spirit. Both sons and daughters are to prophesy or preach (Acts 2:17-18; Acts 21:9). There are a number of women in the Bible who rendered valuable aid in the work of the church. Women are not to be excluded from the work of spreading the Gospel of Christ. The Bible states that a woman is not to usurp authority over the man (1 Timothy 2:12). But authority that God gives is not usurped.

JUST A THOUGHT

**Ask yourself, "What kind of a church would ours be
if everyone was like I am?"**

