

# **THE OFFICERS OF THE CHURCH**

**by Pastor Ron Crisp**

The Roman general, who on the field of battle achieved victory, was honored with a triumphant march into Rome. The captives of battle were paraded and the victor made gifts of the spoils from the successful conquest. Paul uses this scenario in Ephesians 4:7-12 to reveal the nature of Christ's ascension into Glory after His victory at Calvary. Like the honored Roman general, He bestowed gifts that were won in battle upon His people (Acts 2:33).

## **MINISTERIAL GIFTS**

Christ in the sending of the Holy Spirit has endowed each of His people with one or more abilities to be used for the edification of the church. These several abilities were referred to in scripture as "gifts of the Spirit". Christ has also placed within His churches certain offices that He intends to be filled by men with a special combination of gifts. Because Christ sent the Holy Spirit, Paul refers to these men as "gifts" from Christ. These ministerial gifts are:

### **Apostles**

This was a foundational office and was, therefore, a temporary gift. These men were led into all truth as they authored most of the New Testament. See John 16:13. In this way the apostles laid the doctrinal foundation of the church (Ephesians 2:20). Apostles had very special attributes:

1. Christ personally commissioned the apostles. (Matthew 10:1-15, I Corinthians 9:1)
2. Apostles received their message directly from Christ. (Galatians 1:11-12)
3. Apostles had seen Christ Jesus after His resurrection. (Acts 1:15-22)

4. Apostles had the power to perform apostolic signs. (Matthew 10:1, Hebrews 2:3-4, II Corinthians 12:12).

Those who would want to prove the presence of apostles in this present time will often point to scripture in which the Greek word translated "apostle" is used of men other than the twelve. They neglect to comprehend that the term can be used of an office as well as in a general sense of any messenger. Words may often be both specific and general in their meanings.

### **Prophets**

All apostles were prophets but not all prophets were apostles. Like the apostles, this was a foundational ministry. Prophets received direct revelation from God. Keep in mind that it was more than sixty years following Christ's ascension into Heaven that the writing of the New Testament was completed. Until the New Testament scripture was completed it was necessary for the gift of prophecy to be manifest and in effect in the churches. Prophets supplied the need of the early New Testament churches for New Covenant revealed truth.

### **Evangelists**

These men were gifted heralds of the Gospel. At this present time the designation "missionary" is used to describe these men and their calling.

### **Pastors and Teachers**

Most Bible students will agree that this is a two-fold description of one office. The pastor is a shepherd over the spiritual concerns of the flock. He feeds the church by teaching God's word.

### **PERMANENT OFFICES**

God's wisdom and purpose are easily seen in the three offices that are permanent or normative for the present - the offices of evangelist, pastor and deacon. Christ has given evangelists to found churches, pastors to shepherd those churches and

deacons to protect pastors from distractions to their true work and responsibility. Evangelists typically move from place to place as they evangelize and establish new churches. However, the office of pastor and deacon are normative/standard positions within established assemblies. See Philippians 1:1.

## **THE OFFICE OF PASTOR**

### **Titles of a Pastor**

The New Testament refers to ministers over churches as bishops, elders or pastors. The title "bishop" means "overseer" and "pastor" means, "shepherd". The title "elder" undoubtedly implies that a man should possess both the maturity and leadership ability to lead his people.

### **Duties of a Pastor**

Acts 20:17-35 speaks of Paul's exhortation to the elders of the church in Ephesus. His words paint a beautiful picture of just what pastoral labor really encompasses. Four primary responsibilities of a pastor

A pastor is to rule or oversee the church (Hebrews 13:17). This is not to be dictatorial reign but is to be a pastoral overseeing by consent of the church body. A pastor rules by teaching God's Word, by setting an example and by admonishing those who need direction and guidance. A pastor is to protect the flock by pointing out error and by rebuking those who would introduce that error. A pastor is to be a man especially given to prayer. See Acts 6:4. A pastor is to administer the ordinances of Christ.

### **Qualifications of a Pastor**

The qualifications of a man who desires the office of an elder are given in I Timothy 3:1-7 and in Titus 1:5-9. All of the specifications but one speak of the character of the man himself. Being "apt to teach" is the only job-related skill given as a requisite. A church should not call for the ordination of a man who

does not meet God's requirements as set forth in the heretofore-cited scriptures. Should it attempt to do so, the presbytery should refuse to ordain him to that office. Read I Timothy 5:22.

### **The Proper Treatment and Care of Pastors**

The members of a church should follow and profit from the teaching and exhortation of their pastor. See Hebrews 13:17. A pastor should have the maturity, knowledge and concern to helpfully guide the flock toward spiritual maturity. On the other hand, the church itself has responsibilities toward its pastor. Four of these responsibilities are:

1. A church that is financially and materially capable should provide comfortable support for its pastor. This accommodation will free that pastor from worldly entanglement. Therefore, his time may then be wholly devoted to prayer and to the study of God's Word. Scriptures regarding this counsel may be found in I Corinthians 9,1 Timothy 5:17 and II Timothy 2:4.

2. A pastor is to be loved and esteemed for his work (I Thessalonians 5:12-13). No one does a greater or more noble work than does a worthy pastor. A pastor watches over souls.

3. A church should protect its pastor by refusing to hear accusations that are not supported by the testimony of two or three witnesses. The admonition from I Timothy 5:19 commands compliance. To comply is of great benefit to both a church and its pastor.

4. A church should pray for its overseer. Paul pleaded for prayer in his own behalf. A pastor needs God's power and leadership. He flies on the wings of his people's prayers.

### **THE OFFICE OF DEACON**

#### **Title of a Deacon**

The Greek word that is translated "deacon" in our English Bible simply means "servant". For example, in Romans 16:1 the Greek word is so translated. In its general use the word "deacon" can be applied to any dedicated child of God. However, both the Greek word translated "apostle" and the Greek word translated "deacon" can designate specific offices.

Some wrongfully use Romans 16:1 to propose that a woman may fill the office of deacon. Again, the command and specific uses of the word are being confused. God's Word strongly precludes the possibility of a woman holding this office. Acts 16:1-6 and I Timothy 3:8-13 speak to this matter.

### **Qualifications of a Deacon**

The prerequisites for those who may serve as a deacon are detailed in Acts 6:3 and again in I Timothy 3:8-12. This office must never be bestowed upon one as an honorary token. A church must never allow a man's wealth or influence to sway it to disobeying God's Word. A church must abide by God's requirements and guidelines for choosing a deacon.

### **Duties of a Deacon**

What is the function of a deacon? Acts 6:1-6 tells us that a deacon is to shelter a pastor/elder from labor that would hinder the ministry of prayer and the preaching of God's Word. When a deacon meets his responsibility, his church is in a better position and to do God's work, See Acts 6:7.

### **The Reward of a Deacon**

A deacon who faithfully fulfills his responsibilities earns respect and standing in his church. Read I Timothy 3:13. He stands as an example of Christian character. One day God will reward him for work well done.

## **CONCLUSION**

It has been said that officers are not necessary for the existence of the church but for the well-being of the church. Missionaries, pastors and deacons are gifts of Christ to a church for the edification and spiritual prosperity of God's people.

Regrettably, in many instances, deacons have formed boards and have attempted to rule churches. The office of deacon is not a ruling office. Note Acts 6:1-5. Churches are to be governed by congregational vote. It is an elder, not a deacon, who is to provide leadership and spiritual oversight to his church. God's way is best.

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