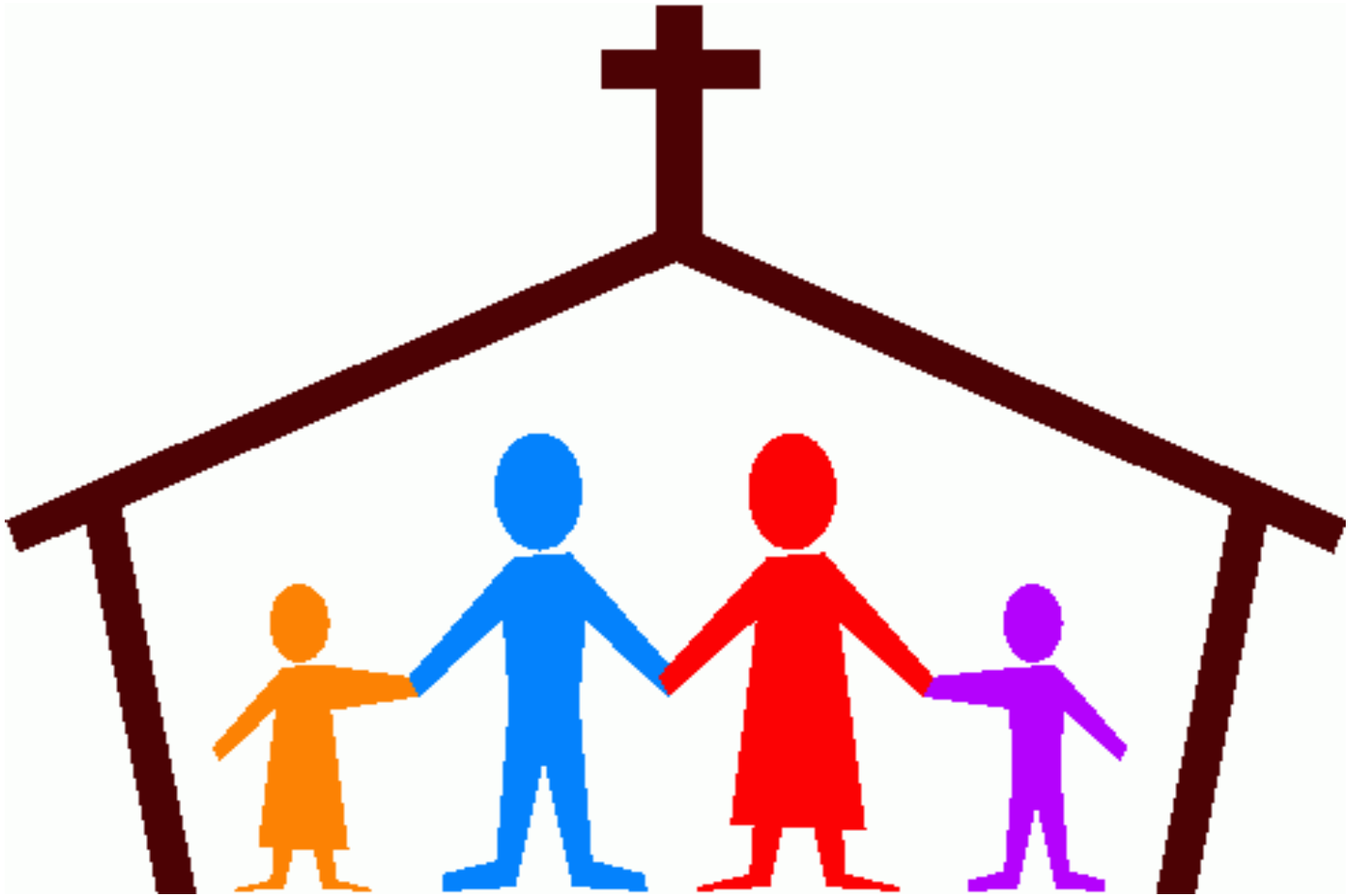


The Church Of Christ

Lesson 6:

The Organization Structure Of The Local Church



Discovering God's Word

Bible Study Series

The Church Of Christ

Lesson 6: The Organizational Structure Of The Local Church

Learn about the role God has given to elders, deacons, saints, and evangelists in the organizational structure of the local church

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Discovering God's Word Bible Study Series

Study Number: DGW69

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My plea: It is my hope and prayer that you are searching for the truth that is contained in God's word, the Bible. My desire is to help you understand and obey these truths God has revealed in the pages of His word. It is to that end that I write this material. Please observe all of the Scripture references and evaluate whether the conclusions I have drawn are in harmony with God's word. If they are, I ask that you make honest application of those truths to your life and obey God's instructions.

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The Church Of Christ

Lesson 6: The Organizational Structure Of The Local Church

In lesson 5 we saw some differences in how the Bible uses the word “church” in a universal sense and in a local sense. Among the differences we observed was regarding its organizational structure. The universal church has no earthly organizational structure. That is, there is no man, woman, or counsel that sits atop the universal church on this earth. Instead, Jesus Christ is its only Head. Colossians 1:18 says, “And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence.” Furthermore, there is no authority for one local church to be “head” over the other local churches. Rather, each local church is designed to be autonomous (self-governing).

In contrast with the universal church (and its lack of an earthly organizational structure), God has given each local church a specific organizational structure. He has certainly equipped the local church with all it needs in order to be self-governing. He has given it a work to accomplish (a work that is not too

large for it to accomplish) and He has given it an organizational structure that is sufficient to accomplish its purpose. Please simply notice that there is absolutely zero New Testament authority for one local church to govern the affairs of another local church!

In addition, as we begin to consider the God-given organizational structure for a local church, it is important to recognize that local churches were authorized by God to exist without this organizational structure (i.e. without elders and deacons). Consider the language of Acts 14:23 and Titus 1:5. Acts 14:23 says, “So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.” Titus 1:5 says, “For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you.” Both of these passages necessarily infer that congregations were in existence prior to the appointing of elders. God did not condemn their existence without elders. In fact, God only wants congregations to appoint elders and deacons when there are men who meet the qualifications He has given (as we will see later).

Still, it is important to recognize that even though congregations were authorized to exist in the New Testament without elders and deacons, this was not what God *desired* from them. There was a reason elders were appointed in every church in Acts 14:23. Whenever a congregation is *not* organized according to the pattern we will see in this lesson, notice that something is said to be “lacking” – according to Titus 1:5. This organizational structure God has given for the local church is more than just a *good idea*! This is something which ought to be pursued by the entire congregation!

Now, as we prepare to begin looking at each part of the organizational structure God has given for the local church, consider Philippians 1:1: “Paul and Timothy, bondservants of Jesus Christ, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons.” The God-given blueprint for the organizational structure of the local church is summarized in this text: Bishops (elders), deacons, and saints.

The purpose of this sixth lesson in the study, “The Church Of Christ,” is to help you gain a better understanding of the God-given organizational structure of the local church. Note that this applies to every local church.

Elders

The Scriptures refer to “the position of a bishop” (1 Timothy 3:1). The *English Standard Version* of the Bible refers to such as “the office of overseer.” This is a God-given “office” in the local church. In fact, as we will see, the men who fill this office will serve in a role of oversight and spiritual leadership for the entire congregation.

Three Greek words refer to the same office

Whenever you read through the New Testament (and depending on which translation of the Bible you are reading from), you will come across a few different English words. Initially, you may believe that each one of these words refers to a different “office” or special position in the local church. However, upon closer examination, you should conclude that the terms “elders,” “presbyters,” “overseers,” “bishops,” “shepherds,” and “pastors” all refer to this same office! While all of these names are Scriptural to use, I will use the term “elder” or “elders” through most of this lesson when referring to this office, for the sake of simplicity.

Why are all of these words used in our English Bibles in reference to the same office? There are two reasons. First, sometimes there are archaic (no longer commonly used) and modern (more commonly used) English words that mean the same thing. For instance, both “presbyter” and “elder” refer to someone who is older – “presbyter” is an archaic English word. “Bishop” is an archaic English word for the term “overseer.” “Pastor” is an archaic English word for “shepherd.” Second, there are actually three Greek words used in reference to this office. Why are three separate Greek words used for the same office? Each one provides useful information about the people who will fill this office

and the work they will be doing. Consider these three Greek words with me.

(1) Presbuteros. This is the Greek word that is commonly translated either “presbyter” (archaic English word) or “elder” (modern English word). The Greek word generally refers to someone who is older. In fact, context will determine whether this word is used in its general sense (simply referring to someone who is older) or whether it refers specifically to this office in a local church. Therefore, when this word is used specifically in reference to this office in the local church, it tells us that an older man (someone who has life experience) will fill this office.

(2) Episcopos. This is the Greek word that is commonly translated either “bishop” (archaic English word) or “overseer” (modern English word). The Greek word refers to a man who is charged with the duty of seeing that things which are done by others are done in the right way, applicable to a curator, a guardian, or a superintendent, etc. (see *Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon Of The New Testament*, Strong’s number G1985). Specifically, as this word is used in the New Testament with reference to this office in the local church, it emphasizes the work that will be done by these individuals (a work of overseeing the local congregation).

(3) Poimen. This is the Greek word that is commonly translated either “pastor” (archaic English word) or “shepherd” (modern English word). This Greek word simply has reference to the one who does the work of shepherding. But, while it generally refers to a physical shepherd who leads physical sheep, this word is also used to identify the men who serve as elders and spiritually shepherd the flock (the local church). Like “episcopos,” this word emphasizes the work that these individuals have been given to do.

Now, I have made the claim that each one of these Greek words has reference to the same office in the local church – and not to different offices or individuals. But, how can we know whether that is true? Consider two passages with me. First, consider Acts 20. In this passage, verse 17 identifies that Paul (when he was in Miletus) “sent to Ephesus and called

for the elders of the church.” Verse 18 says that when they had come to him, Paul began to speak with them (a discourse that would continue through verse 35). Then, notice what Paul tells these “elders” in verse 28: “Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.” So, these “elders” were made “overseers” so that they would “shepherd the church of God.”

Next, consider 1 Peter 5:1-4: “The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.” Again notice that when Peter wrote to exhort the “elders” that he instructs them to “Shepherd the flock of God...serving as overseers.”

Both of these passages demonstrate how these three words are all used interchangeably with reference to the men who fill this office in the local church. Each one of these words helps us to understand the nature of this office within a local congregation. What we can conclude is that the men who will fill this office must be older men who have gained life experience (and experience in Christian living), who are committed to watching over the souls of those within the local congregation. These individuals take the lead in a local congregation and serve as models for the rest of the congregation to imitate and follow.

These individuals must meet specific qualifications

Realizing the seriousness of the work these men will be doing and the influence they will have in a local church, God did not leave man with the responsibility of arbitrarily deciding who would make good elders. Instead, He has provided strict guidelines that must be met by the ones who will fill this office. These qualifications are recorded in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9. As we notice these

qualifications, pay attention to each one and recognize that these qualifications are not optional. Rather, they are all essential in order for an individual to be rightly appointed to this office!

1 Timothy 3:1-7 says, “This is a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work. A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach; not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous; one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence (for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?); not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the same condemnation as the devil. Moreover he must have a good testimony among those who are outside, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.”

Titus 1:5-9 says, “For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you — if a man is blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of dissipation or insubordination. For a bishop must be blameless, as a steward of God, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but hospitable, a lover of what is good, sober-minded, just, holy, self-controlled, holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict.”

Notice that there are two basic categories for these qualifications: Personal qualifications and family qualifications. A man who has all of these qualifications will certainly be an excellent leader for a local church to help the members of the local church live in a way that will please God! Specifically, the family qualifications that are given in the text (regarding his marriage and his children) will demonstrate his ability to lead others in the ways of God. Again, 1 Timothy 3:5 asked, “if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?”

In addition, take a moment to consider some specific observations from these qualifications. Only

older married men with Christian children will rightfully fill this office. Not women. Not single men. Not men without children. Not men with very young children. Not men without Christian children. These observations are significant because there are many religious organizations (many local churches) today that will have (so-called) “pastors” or “elders” who are not older married men with Christian children! Some churches today have women “pastors.” Some churches today have homosexual “pastors.” Some churches today have “pastors” or “elders” who are single men. Some churches today have “pastors” or “elders” who are not old enough to have Christian children. Again, we must hold fast to the pattern God has revealed in the pages of the New Testament (2 Timothy 1:13)!

The work of elders

What is the work of those who meet the God-given qualifications and are appointed as elders in a local church? The Greek words we have already discussed that are used to identify the men in this office provide an excellent framework for understanding the work that these men will be responsible for. Namely, this is the work of overseeing and shepherding the congregation. But, in addition to this observation, consider some passages which specifically identify aspects of the work of elders.

(1) They are to exercise oversight. 1 Peter 5:2-3 says, “Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.” They are not to be lords over the congregation; but, they must act as loving shepherds. Thus, they provide direction for the congregation and make sure that the things done by the congregation and individual members of the flock are according to God’s will.

(2) They must be examples. Hebrews 13:7 says, “Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct.” This commandment is applicable to elders in a local church. The members of the local church are expected to be paying attention to the ways in which

the elders are living – and striving to imitate their godly examples. Certainly, the elders are expected to be godly men who are demonstrating a high standard of Christian living for the rest of the congregation to be able to follow! Just go back and consider the specific qualifications that we studied to see how God expects the elders to be living.

(3) They lead and watch over the souls of the congregation. Hebrews 13:17 says, “Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.” Clearly, those who are elders have been given the oversight of the congregation (as demonstrated from 1 Peter 5:2-3). Not only does this involve the things which are done collectively by the congregation; but, this passage also demonstrates that the elders must be watching out for the souls of each member of the congregation. Again, they are to be shepherding each sheep in the flock (the congregation). The seriousness involved in this is seen in the fact that they will give an account for how they have carried out this work.

(4) They will watch out for danger. When Paul was meeting with the elders of the Ephesian church, consider what he told them in Acts 20:28-31: “Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears.” Part of exercising oversight in the local church will be watching for any danger to the flock. There are certainly many “savage wolves” (spiritually speaking) that would love to come in and destroy a local church (i.e. through false teaching). In addition, Paul warns that they watch out for danger that could come from among themselves as well (either from the congregation or the eldership itself).

(5) They must stand boldly for the truth. Consider what is said about elders in Titus 1:9-11: “holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught,

that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict. For there are many insubordinate, both idle talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole households, teaching things which they ought not, for the sake of dishonest gain.” The elders (who are not new converts to Christ, according to their God-given qualifications) must have a solid understanding of the truth – and be willing and able to stand against those who are speaking or acting contrary, for the good of the flock!

(6) They must fulfill their responsibilities willingly and with joy. Go back and review 1 Peter 5:2-3 and Hebrews 13:17. In fact, when we considered the qualifications in 1 Timothy 3:1-7, notice that the passage began by saying, “If a man desires the position of a bishop....” There must be a desire to serve God and the local church in this capacity. Certainly, this is not an easy work to do and one that will take a willingness and joy to accomplish – as well as to endure all of the cares and trials that will come when an individual serves in this capacity.

Multiple elders in one local congregation

We have established that God has designed for men to fill this office – and have established the qualifications he has placed upon such people. But, how many men does God want to fill this office in a local church? Can only one man serve in this capacity? Does he specify anything concerning this question? Let’s consider.

The Scriptures repeatedly demonstrate that God desires for there to be a plurality of elders in every congregation. Again consider the language in Acts 14:23 and Titus 1:5. Acts 14:23 says, “So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.” Titus 1:5 says, “For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you.” In both of these passages, notice that “elders” (plural) were appointed/to be appointed. Nothing is said about appointing a single elder to oversee a congregation.

In fact, the only approved example in the New Testament is for there to be elders (plural) in one congregation. There is no Bible authority for just one elder (or pastor or bishop, etc.). Consider that the church in Jerusalem had “elders” (Acts 15:2). The church at Ephesus had “elders” (Acts 20:17). Whenever an individual was sick and wanted prayer, he/she was to call for the “elders” of the church (James 5:14). We simply never read about just one elder, bishop, pastor, overseer, presbyter, or shepherd of a congregation in the New Testament. Instead, there is always a plurality of elders! Therefore, a local church must have at least two men who are qualified to be elders in order to be rightly organized in this way!

The great wisdom of God is demonstrated in this fact! Having only one man who leads a local congregation could easily result in perversions to God’s word (as he would be the only one overseeing and leading the congregation). However, having a plurality of elders serving in this capacity creates checks and balances, where there is accountability in the eldership. In addition, please note that the Scriptures do not authorize a system in which one of the elders takes a leading role over the others. Instead, they are all to be equal and have equal authority. Read 3 John 1:9-11 to see God’s condemnation of one man who elevated himself above the congregation!

Elders oversee one local congregation

How far does the authority of elders reach? Does their authority reach beyond the local church – or is it limited to the local church? The Scriptures clearly demonstrate that their oversight is limited to the congregation they are members of themselves. Again, in Acts 20:28, Paul told the Ephesian elders to “take heed” to themselves and to all the flock, “among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers.” 1 Peter 5:2 also records the instruction for elders to “Shepherd the flock of God which is among you.”

No elder or group of elders have any authority beyond their local congregation! They do not have authority to oversee multiple congregations (i.e. a separate smaller church without elders). They do not have authority to oversee a separate work that

is not being accomplished by the local church they oversee (i.e. an orphanage, teaching program, etc.).

Their authority is limited by the New Testament only to include the congregation they themselves are members of. There is absolutely **zero** authority for any other arrangement! Again, the great wisdom of God is seen in this. Whenever this authority is violated or perverted, a hierarchical structure develops (like the Catholic diocese). Furthermore, elders simply cannot properly provide oversight for a congregation they do not regularly attend! For instance, how would the elders know what was being taught if they were not present for the teaching?

Deacons

Not only is the office of elders part of the organizational structure of the local church; but, the office of deacons is also part of the God-given organizational structure for the local church. While the Scriptures do not give us as much detail regarding the office of deacons as it does regarding the office of the eldership, we will spend time discovering what we can know about the role of deacons in the local church.

Greek word for “deacon”

As with the elders, let’s begin formulating our understanding for this role in the local church by considering the Greek word used in the New Testament for “deacon.” Again, we will be able to gain a greater appreciation for the work of a deacon by establishing this point.

The Greek word that is translated “deacon” is also translated “servant.” It is the word “diakonos.” Like we saw with the word “presbuteros” (elder), “diakonos” has a general and a specific meaning – and the context will dictate which is under consideration in a specific passage.

Generally, the word “diakonos” means servant. Romans 16:1-2 is an example of this general use: “I commend to you Phoebe our sister, who is a servant of the church in Cenchrea, that you may

receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and assist her in whatever business she has need of you; for indeed she has been a helper of many and of myself also.” This Christian woman was a “servant of the church in Cenchrea” (the word “servant” is the Greek word “diakonos”). But, she did not occupy the office of a deacon – because this passage helps us to understand that she did not meet the God-given qualifications for such (as we’ll see momentarily). Still, she was a servant of the church (in a general sense).

Specifically, the word is used with reference to an office in the local church. The term is used in this way in Philippians 1:1, when Paul greets the bishops, deacons, and saints in the Philippian church. Also, the word is used in this specific way in 1 Timothy 3:8-13 – as the passage identifies the God-given qualifications for those who will fill this office. Still, even in the specific use of this word (in reference to an office in the local church) the overall idea of a “servant” holds true!

These individuals must meet specific qualifications

Just as we saw regarding the elders, God has given specific qualifications for the deacons of a local congregation. These qualifications are given in 1 Timothy 3:8-13. Notice each one of these qualifications as you read this passage and understand that each one of these qualifications is absolutely essential for an individual to rightly be appointed as a deacon!

1 Timothy 3:8-13 says, “Likewise deacons must be reverent, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy for money, holding the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience. But let these also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons, being found blameless. Likewise, their wives must be reverent, not slanderers, temperate, faithful in all things. Let deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well. For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a good standing and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.”

Once again, you should notice that there are both personal and family qualifications for these

individuals to meet. These individuals also should be good examples of how to live a godly life – and their service to God as deacons will simply be a continuation of how they have faithfully served God and their families in the past! Also, notice some specific observations from these qualifications. Only married men with children will fill this office. Not women. Not single men. Not men without children. Certainly all of these individuals can be servants in a general sense (as Phoebe was, Romans 16:1-2). However, those who will rightly fill the role of being a deacon in the local church must meet all the qualifications given in 1 Timothy 3:8-13!

The work of deacons

Since elders have the work of oversight and shepherding the congregation, what work do the deacons have? There is actually very little information given in the Scriptures concerning the specific work these men will accomplish. However, we are not without *any* information on the subject. In fact, God has given us enough information that we can make right conclusions about the nature of their work.

First, you must remember what it means to be a deacon. Remember that the Greek word refers to someone who is a servant. Generally this is true (as we saw in Romans 16:1-2). However, this same idea must also be applied to its specific use regarding deacons. They serve as special servants of the church.

Second, the passage in Acts 6:1-7 will prove to be helpful as you study the work of deacons: “Now in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplying, there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution. Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, ‘It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word.’ And the saying pleased the whole multitude. And they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus,

Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch, whom they set before the apostles; and when they had prayed, they laid hands on them. 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.”

Though these seven men are not called “deacons” in the text, their work fits well with the service deacons should be performing as servants of the church. As we will see in greater detail in lesson 7, part of the work of the local church is to take care of needy Christians. Notice that these seven men were able to focus on this work and make sure it was accomplished – so that the apostles could focus on their God-given work and responsibilities. Thus, the work of these seven contributed to the word of God being spread and individuals being saved! In the same way, deacons will serve the church in ways that will help ensure that needs are met and that others (i.e. the elders) are able to focus on their God-given responsibilities, thereby contributing to the spiritual good that is accomplished!

Saints

Once again, Philippians 1:1 mentioned bishops (elders), deacons, and saints – as Paul addressed the local church in Philippi. Therefore, let’s give some consideration to the things God has said about “saints” in a local church – though we will not be discussing everything God teaches about the role of individual Christians or their role in local churches. A brief overview should be sufficient for the purpose of this study.

Individual Christians – not an “office” in the local church

We have clearly seen that not all members of a local church can serve in the capacity of elders and deacons. Not all the members will be qualified to serve in such capacities and not everyone will desire to serve in such capacities. Therefore, all other Christians (as well as the elders and the deacons) will be fulfilling the roles that are given to individual Christians (saints).

The religious world today has done much harm to people's understanding of the word "saint." Today, a "saint" is commonly believed to refer to a prominent dead Christian. However, the Bible very clearly uses the term to refer to all Christians – even those who were living. For instance, Paul wrote to the bishops, deacons, and saints in Philippi (Philippians 1:1). Was he writing to the living or to the dead? Many other passages demonstrate the same point – Acts 26:10; Romans 1:7; Romans 15:26; 1 Corinthians 16:1; Ephesians 1:1; etc.

The word "saint" is the translation of the Greek word "hagios." This term simply refers to someone who is holy and set apart from evil. This is true of all Christians – who have been set apart from their sin and are devoted entirely to God (see 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 and 1 Peter 1:15-16)! So, whenever the word "saint" is used in the Bible, it is used to refer to a Christian!

However, as you consider the inclusion of "saints" as part of the organizational structure of the local church (as seen in Philippians 1:1), please understand that this does not constitute a special "office." All Christians (even the elders and deacons) are saints. But, not all saints are elders and deacons. Yet, every saint/Christian has an important role to play within a local church!

The work of individual Christians

The Bible is full of instructions concerning the work of individual Christians. However, just consider a few basic points with me for the purpose of this lesson. All Christians must fulfill these responsibilities within the local church they have joined themselves to!

The work of saints includes: (1) Taking an active role in teaching the gospel in the community (Acts 8:4), (2) doing good to everyone according to opportunity (Galatians 6:10), (3) serving others (John 13:14-15), (4) submitting to the elders of the congregation (Hebrews 13:17), (5) attending and participating in the assemblies of the local church (Hebrews 10:24-25), (6) fulfilling God-given responsibilities toward the brethren (Galatians 6:2; Hebrews 3:12-13), (7) helping to restore those who have fallen away from Christ (Galatians 6:1; James

5:19-20), (8) being zealous for every good work (Titus 2:14), (9) doing what each one is capable of contributing (Ephesians 4:16), (10) fulfilling all the God-given responsibilities relative to living a faithful Christian life (Revelation 2:10), etc.

Each Christian has something to contribute

You see, every individual Christian who is a member of a local church has something he/she can contribute to the local congregation! Each one has different abilities, opportunities, knowledge levels, interests, strengths, etc. that can benefit the group. If each Christian would simply do his/her part, the local congregation could be all that God desires for it to be! However, if even one member of the church decides not to do his/her part, the local congregation will not function at its maximum ability! Along with 1 Corinthians 12:12-27, Ephesians 4:16 describes the benefit of every member supplying his/her part: "from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love."

Evangelists

Bishops, deacons, and saints represent the organizational structure of the local church (i.e. Philippians 1:1). However, I want to spend just a few minutes discussing the role of evangelists – as they often interact with local congregations. In this section, I want to create some basic awareness. But, we simply will not be able to study this in great detail at this time.

Not an "office" in the local church

Evangelists are often part of local churches. This is fully authorized by God. For instance, Philip (an evangelist) labored in the region of Samaria (Acts 8:5). Later, Philip went to Caesarea (Acts 8:40). Then, in Acts 21 (around 20 years after the events in Acts 8), Philip continues to be working to preach God's word in Caesarea (see verse 8). Perhaps this was with one local church, perhaps it was not.

Definitively, the Scriptures say that Paul labored in Ephesus, working with the congregation there for three years (Acts 20:31). Other examples could also be provided; but, suffice these to help demonstrate the point that evangelists worked in a specific region for extended periods of time.

The term “evangelist” simply refers to a preacher of the gospel (someone who brings the good news of Christ to others). In this way, every Christian should be an evangelist – as all Christians have the responsibility to teach the gospel to the lost (see Acts 8:4 and 2 Timothy 2:24-26). However, the term is particularly applied to those who make their livelihood through preaching the gospel. The Bible gives authority for individuals to be supported financially by their brethren and by local churches so that they can commit to a full-time work of proclaiming the gospel to others (see Philippians 4:15-16; 2 Corinthians 11:8) – and references them as having a role in the edification of the church (Ephesians 4:11-16).

However, although these individuals may be involved in working with a local church to preach the gospel “full-time” in a specific area, these individuals have no special authority over a local church in their role as evangelists! Yet, because of their frequent involvement in the work of local churches, it is profitable to take a moment to consider their “qualifications” and their work, according to the Scriptures.

The “qualifications” of evangelists

For those who wish to do the work of a full-time evangelist, the Scriptures do inform us of some basic “qualifications” for them. Although these are not listed in a single passage or two (like was true concerning elders and deacons), there are many things said of these individuals (especially in the apostle Paul’s letters to the young evangelist, Timothy).

Consider some things that could properly be considered to be qualifications for those who wish to do the work of an evangelist: (1) It must be a man (1 Corinthians 14:34-35; 1 Timothy 2:11-12), (2) he must keep himself pure (1 Timothy 5:22), (3) he must be diligent (2 Timothy 2:15-16), (4) he must be

steadfast in faith, loyal in truth, refusing false speculative doctrines and uncompromising toward those who teach them (1 Timothy 1:3-11; 1 Timothy 4:1, 6; 2 Timothy 3:14-17; 2 Timothy 4:1-5), (5) he is to be an example to those who believe (1 Timothy 4:12), (6) he is to exercise care for both himself and for what he teaches (1 Timothy 4:16), (7) he is to fulfill the instructions in 2 Timothy 2:22-26, etc.

As you carefully consider these passages, you should consider that these qualifications are of both a personal nature and applicable to his treatment of God’s word. He must be faithful to the Lord both as a Christian and as an evangelist. He must, therefore, faithfully and accurately teach God’s word to others.

The work of evangelists

The work that God has given evangelists to accomplish can be seen through a study of the entire New Testament. Yet, again, Paul’s letters to Timothy (and also to Titus) prove to be particularly beneficial in an attempt to summarize the work of an evangelist.

Consider the following points regarding the work of an evangelist: (1) He is to preach the word faithfully and without regard for how it is received (2 Timothy 4:1-4), (2) he is to help complete what is lacking within the organizational structures of local churches (Titus 1:5), (3) he is to give himself entirely to the work (1 Timothy 4:13-16), (4) he is to warn against apostasy (1 Timothy 4:1-6), (5) he is to guard the faith (1 Timothy 1:3; 1 Timothy 6:20-21), (6) he is to handle the word of truth correctly (2 Timothy 2:15), (7) he is to assist in the building up of local congregations (1 Timothy 1:3; Titus 1:5), etc.

Conclusion

The local church has been designed in the way that God desires to accomplish its God-given purpose. Mankind must not make any changes to it and cannot improve upon it! God has designed it in a way that will effectively accomplish its mission, according to His great wisdom!

All local churches should desire to be organized in this way (i.e. Philippians 1:1). However,

if there are not individuals who meet the qualifications, a local congregation must not appoint individuals to these offices (i.e. elders and deacons). Individually, however, we must all fulfill our God-given roles in the local church (no matter what our roles are)!

Study Questions

Does the universal church have an earthly organizational structure?

Has God provided the local church with an organizational structure?

1. Elders

How many Greek words are used in reference to this office in the local church? What do these words indicate?

What qualifications must these individuals meet? List some observations concerning these qualifications.

What is the work of elders?

How many elders must there be?

What is the scope of the elders' oversight?

2. Deacons

What does the Greek word "diakonos" mean?

What qualifications must these individuals meet? List some observations concerning these qualifications.

What is the work of deacons?

3. Saints

Who are "saints"? Does this constitute an "office" within a local church?

What is the work of individual Christians?

What is the importance of each Christian's contribution to the local church?

4. Evangelists

Does this constitute an "office" within a local church?

What qualifications must these individuals meet? List some observations concerning these qualifications.

What is the work of evangelists?