

The Brown Street Beacon

*"...Shine out among them like beacon lights,
holding out to them the Word of Life" (Phil 2:15-16)*



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Why So Many Offices?

It is amazing how simple the organizational structure of the local church in the New Testament was. The church was simply made up of elders, deacons and saints (Philippians 1:1).

The work or responsibility of the elders is to oversee the flock. There are several terms in the New Testament that refer to this position: *elder, bishop, pastor, presbytery and overseer*. These terms simply denote different aspects of this position in the local church. For example, the term elder (presbuteros) denotes a man that is older and therefore wiser than the youthful due to his experience. The term bishop (episkopos) denotes a superintendent, or in other words, one who has overseeing skills. Since these terms refer to the same office, they can be used interchangeably as they are in scripture (Titus 1:5-7). Now, take note of the fact that while an elder or bishop is an office in the church, i.e., a designated role that qualified men are placed in by the Holy Spirit (Acts 20:28), never are these terms used as titles that separate and elevate one group of men over another in the body of Christ.

We also see the role of a deacon in the local church. The word deacon comes from the Greek word diakonos and Thayer says it means *"to be a servant, an attendant, to serve, wait upon; to minister to one...to provide take care of...,in Christian churches to serve as deacons; to minister; to attend to anything that may serve another's interests..."* Sometimes the word diakonos is used in an unofficial sense in which it simply describes one who is serving in some capacity; however, it is clear that the word is also used in an official sense to denote the office of a deacon. Like elders, those who are deacons in an official sense must meet certain qualifications (1 Timothy 3:8-13). The work of the deacon is to serve the local church (Acts 6:1-4). (I'm not sure that the men in Acts 6 were deacons, but at the very least they were forerunners to that office.) Now, like the terms elder, pastor or bishop, the word deacon is never used as a title.

Now, according to Philippians 1:1, there are no other positions in the church. The saints are simply those who make up the rest of the local church, that is, Christians who became such by obeying the gospel and who decided to join themselves to a specific local church. It should be noted that as saints in a local church, they are all under the rule and oversight of the elders of that church (1 Peter 5:1-2).

What about the local preacher? Is that not an office in the church? No and it is never called such on the pages of inspiration. A man in the local church who happens to do the preaching is simply another saint in the local church exercising his talent to proclaim the gospel. Since he has a special talent to preach, or at least he should have that talent, the elders pay him wages for feeding the flock on a regular basis. The work that he does in connection with that local church is under the oversight of the elders just like the work of the deacons and the other saints.

What about an evangelist? An evangelist is simply one who preaches the word. Thayer says the Greek word (*euangelistees*) means a bringer of good tidings." The work of an evangelist is not limited to a local church. His job is to preach the Word whenever and wherever he can. The *work* he does with a local church is under the oversight of the elders of that local church, but the evangelist himself, if he is not a member of that church, is not. Listen to what scholars say about an evangelist.

Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary

"The evangelist was a gift of God to the early church (Eph 4:11). These persons were not attached to any specific local church. They traveled over a wide geographical area, preaching to those to whom the Holy Spirit led them. The early disciples were also called evangelists (Acts 8:4) because they proclaimed the gospel."

Barnes' Notes

"The evangelist may have been one whose main business was "preaching," and who was not particularly engaged in the "government" of the church. The word properly means "a messenger of good tidings;" and Robinson (Lexicon) supposes that it denotes a minister of the gospel who was not located in any place, but who traveled as a missionary to preach the gospel, and to found churches."

Fausset's Bible Dictionary

"...Christ gave him (*Philip*) to the church, additionally, in the capacity of an "evangelist" now in one city, now in another. So others scattered by persecution (Acts 8:4) "went everywhere evangelistically preaching (*euangelizomenoi* (NT:2097) the word." The "pastors" taught and exhorted; the "evangelists" preached the glad news which prepared the way for the pastorate. It was therefore a work rather than an order."

The evangelist, then, is not an office in a local church nor do we ever find an evangelist wearing that term as a title. I am a preacher who does work with the Brown Street church of Christ and that *work* that I do with this local church is under the oversight of the elders that we have. I am also an evangelist who preaches in various places across the country. The *work* that I do across the country does not fall under the oversight of the elders here for they only have the oversight of the flock which is among them (1 Peter 5:1-2). At the same time, I am a member of the Brown Steet church of Christ. Do I wear a title of distinction in this local church? No! I am just a saint (Philippians 1:1). Am I under the oversight of the elders as a member of this church? Yes, for I am a part of the flock.

In the first century, there were also temporary offices or roles that were held by some. There were apostles and prophets (Ephesians 3:5; 4:11, etc.). These were not offices in the local church, but temporary positions held by select men in the body of Christ. Today we do not have apostles and prophets for no one qualifies to be an apostle (Acts 1:21-22), and there is no need for prophets seeing that the faith has now been once delivered and is complete (Jude 3). Once again we find that the terms apostle and prophet were never used as titles.

So then, let's get back to where we began. The local church is made up of elders, deacons and saints. From where then did all these offices that we have come? I recently read a letter from a local church of Christ that had a variety of positions held by different men and women in the church. They not only had elders and a minister (no mention of deacons), but they had an *executive secretary, youth director, education director, song director, and transportation director*. That these were set up as offices or roles within the local church is seen by the fact that each person who occupied

these positions had their own extension listed where they could be located when you called the church building. Now there is nothing wrong with a saint doing a particular work within the church, like teaching a Bible class or taking care of the finances, but they shouldn't be separated, elevated or distinguished from other saints in any way.

Friends, we need to stop complicating matters. The organizational structure of the local church in the New Testament was simple. As we have seen, it was made up of elders, deacons and saints, not a bunch of directors. No titles were worn. There was no distinction made among the membership. They were all brethren. Let's be content with what we read of in the New Testament.

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