

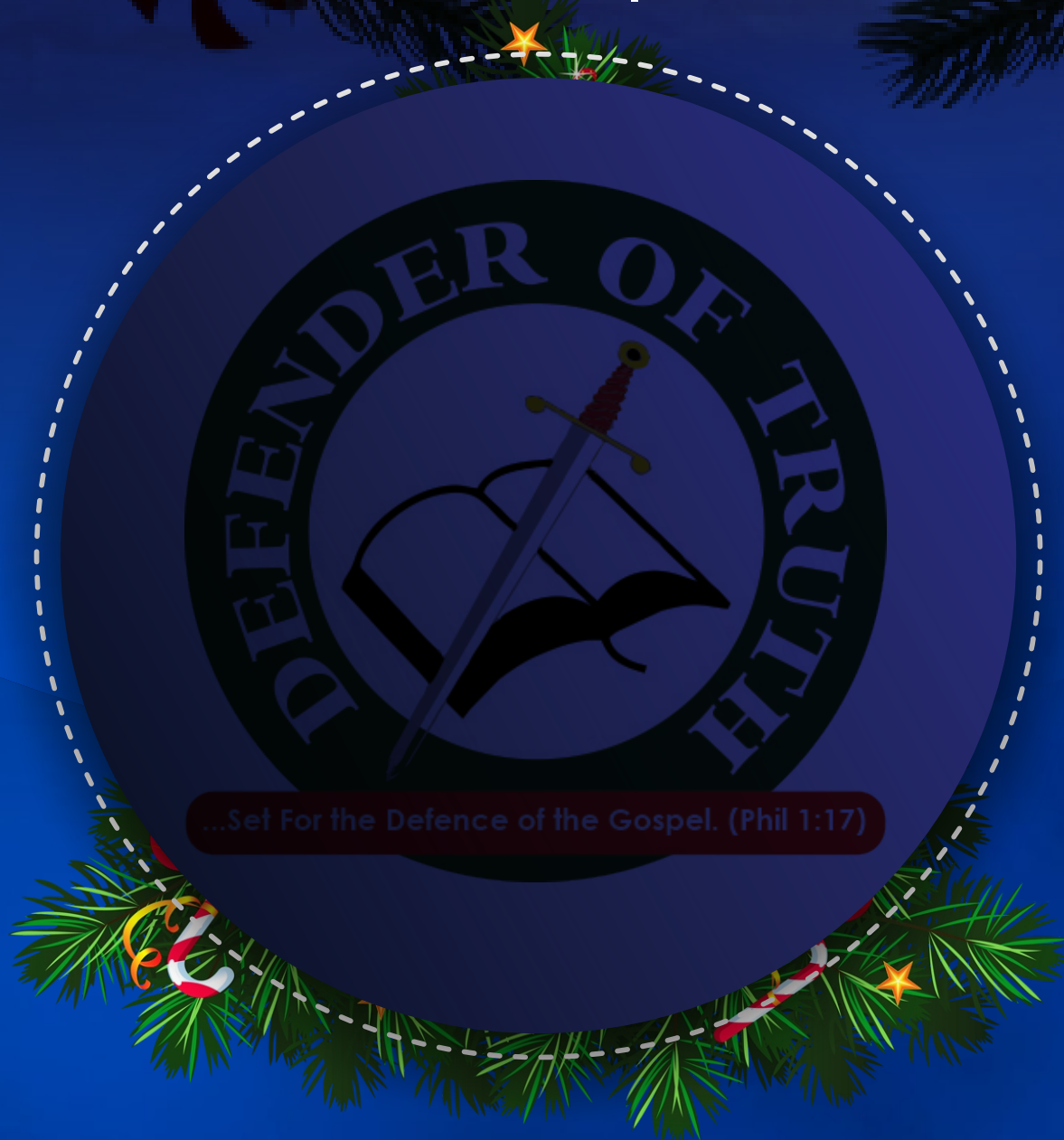
DEFENDER OF TRUTH



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The Organization of The Church

DEFENDER OF TRUTH

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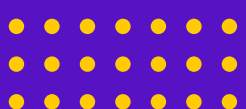
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EDITORIAL

by Afolabi Akinyemi

In this edition of the Defender of Truth, we take an in-depth look at the organization of the church. This is one of the unique characteristics of the Church of Christ. We aim to cause the reader to rethink denominationalism and take a decision to practice Christianity as revealed in the New Testament. It will also encourage Christians not to depart from the pattern revealed by God in the New Testament.

THE ORGANIZATION OF THE CHURCH

by Afolabi A. Akinyemi

The Church of Christ was established according to a pattern revealed in the Holy Scriptures. The New Testament reveals all details relating to the church so that we are not ignorant of its nature, work, worship, and organization. The organization of the church of Christ is one of the characteristics that distinguish it from denominations.

The word church is used in two ways in the New Testament. The universal sense which describes the people of God all over the world without limitation of place of residence or location (Matt. 16:18; Eph. 1:22; Eph.5:22; Col 1:18) and the local sense which describes the people of God based on location be it city, town or village (Rom 16:1,5; 1Cor 1: 1-2; 1 Thess 1:1). (For a detailed article on the universal church and the local church please refer to Defender of Truth Vol. 2 No. 1 January-March 2022)

All Christians are baptized into the body of Christ of which Jesus Christ is the head (Col.1:18; Eph.1:22-23) regardless of location and then join a local church of their choice just like Paul joined the disciples at Jerusalem after his conversion in Damascus (Acts 9:26-28). The universal church represents the fellowship all Christians have with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ (1 John 1:1-3). It does not meet for work and worship but rather it is the church in localities that gathers for worship and carries out the work assigned by God. The Scriptures do not reveal any other form of organization for the church. The hierarchical organization found in denominations with provincial, state, regional, or national churches is foreign to the New Testament. Our Lord Jesus Christ provides for officers in the church so that its mission might be accomplished.

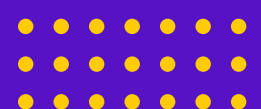
And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and

teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ— 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. Ephesians 4:11-16

Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists, Pastors, and Teachers are listed in the verses quoted above as officers of the church. Apostles and Prophets were present in the early church for a specific purpose which is to facilitate the revelation of divine truth. This purpose has been accomplished because this truth has been completely revealed to mankind and recorded in writing, therefore the offices of Apostles and Prophets do not exist in the Church of Christ today (Eph.2:20; 1 Cor.13:8).

Evangelists otherwise called Preachers are heralds of salvation through Christ. They proclaim good tidings of the gospel of salvation to the world. Paul the Apostle, instructs Timothy as to his role as an evangelist in his epistles to him in 1 & 2 Timothy so we are not left in doubt as to the function of evangelists in the Church of Christ.

These things I write to you, though I hope to come to you shortly; but if I am delayed, I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth 1 Timothy 3:14-15



Pastors are called by a variety of names in the New Testament to depict their role and function in the church. They are called elders, overseers, bishops, and presbyters. (Acts 20:17,28; 1 Pet. 5:1-4) They are to feed the flock of God and rule over them. (1 Tim.3:5; 5:17) Pastors are to be appointed in every church.

So when they had appointed elders in every church and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed. Acts 14:23

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 Titus 1:5

Since each church is to have its pastors to feed and rule over them amongst other functions, the rule of the pastors is limited to the church in which they were appointed. They are instructed to feed the flock among them and take the oversight thereof. They are to take oversight of the work and worship of the church. The Pastors of a church are subject only to the authority of Christ. There are no provincial, state, regional or national pastors revealed in the New Testament. Please note that a plurality of Pastors is mentioned as being appointed in every church meaning that there should be a plurality of Pastors in every church. The qualifications of Pastors are listed in 1 Tim.3:1-7 and Titus 1:6-9.

*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. Acts 20:28*

*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. 1 Peter 5:1-4*
The New Testament also lists teachers as being one of the offices in the church.

And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healing, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues. 29 Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles? 1 Corinthians 12:28-29

The teachers in the early church were instructors who teach by divine revelation since we know that the New

Testament had not been completed in the early days of the church. In the church today, all Christians are expected to grow to become teachers by studying the word of God.

For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. Hebrews 5:12

Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. 2 Timothy 2:15

Paul the Apostle in his epistle to Timothy mentions the office of deacons and the qualifications of those who could be appointed into the office (1 Tim. 3:8-13). The word deacon is from the Greek word *diakonos* which means "minister, servant, one who executes the commands of another".

Deacons are those who are specially appointed to serve the church under the rule of the Pastors. The men appointed by the apostles to take charge of food distribution in the church at Jerusalem were Deacons since they were specially appointed to serve in that capacity. (Acts 6:1-6)

The organization of the church as revealed in the New Testament is simple and unique. I urge all readers who are members of denominations to turn away from perversions of New Testament Christianity.

¹Mounce's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words

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THE EVANGELIST: QUALIFICATIONS, APPOINTMENT, AND FUNCTION

by Jobalo Oshikanlu

Bible Gem:

But as for you, be clear-headed in every situation [stay calm and cool and steady], endure every hardship [without flinching], **do the work of an evangelist, fulfill [the duties of] your ministry** (2 Timothy 4:5, AMP).ⁱ

Introduction: The Evangelist

The Bible is clear in Ephesians 4:11-13 that the work of the Evangelist is a distinct and definite role in the Church of God. The passage states that the Lord “gave some to be ... evangelists” amongst other rolesⁱⁱ, with the purposes being “for the edifying of the body of Christ” and to promote “the unity of the faith”. It is clear from Ephesians 4:8-13 and 1 Corinthians 12:28 that amongst the special roles that the Lord ordained in His Church are those roles which are inspired or divinely called and thus temporary, and those that are not inspired roles and thus permanent. The only divinely inspired or miraculously guided roles (who were also preachers) were the Apostles and Prophets (1 Timothy 1:12; 2:7; Ephesians 3:3-5); these were the earthen vessels (2 Corinthians 4:7) to whom God committed the gospel for its revelation and confirmation (1 Timothy 1:11; Mark 16:20). The Apostles and Prophets have no successors (much in the same way that a foundation is not part of the main building – Ephesians 2:20), but their authority and work remain with us today (as that foundation) through their writing and examples (Philippians 3:17-19) which are codified in the New Testament for us (2 Peter 1:3,13-15).

However, the Lord ordained that His Gospel continue to be preached (Matthew 28:19-20) and the special role to lead this charge in the Church on a permanent or continuing basis is the Evangelist (2 Timothy 4:1-2), and we see examples in the scriptures such as Timothy (ref. our Bible gem above), Philip (Acts 21:8) and Titus (Titus 1:5; 2:1,15). Those who perform this role today do so because they have chosen to serve the Lord in this way, not because the Holy Spirit still inspires or miraculously guides anyone.

In essence, the role of the Evangelist is to *preach the gospel of Christ, and to be urgent in so doing whether in*

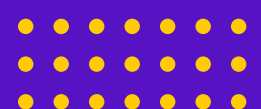
season or out of season (2 Timothy 4:2). Indeed, this essence is conveyed in the very meaning of the name which is the English transliteration of the descriptive name used in the original Greek New Testament (“*euangelistes*”), that means a proclaimer of good news or “a preacher of the Gospel”ⁱⁱⁱ. Evangelists undertake to spread the Gospel of Christ by teaching and preaching it both publicly and privately using all opportunities that they can find.

Qualifications and Appointment

As the Church is the pillar and arena of the Truth (1 Timothy 3:14-15; Ephesians 3:21), the Lord also ordained that evangelists train other men in the Church to become teachers and evangelists. This training in the house of God is not to be equated with or replaced by training elsewhere (2 John 9; 2 Peter 3:18).

There are Christians who believe that due to multiple degrees in Theology from secular schools, or training and certificates from human colleges and schools of Biblical studies, they have become qualified to be evangelists. We must warn and admonish all such that these human colleges would never attain the spiritual impact that the Lord has ordained for only His church as the pillar and ground of the Truth (Revelation 7:15; Ephesians 3:21; Isaiah 55:10-11). Writing, of recent, to a certain young brother, on this matter that is perhaps part of the bane of preaching work today, yours truly counseled as follows –

The one spiritual tragedy I see with many of our brethren such as your good self who have been to



human Bible colleges, some of who preach or want to preach, is that they regard the Bible college training as superior or equal to training in the church. No one can serve the Lord successfully as an evangelist or Preacher unless he has been seasoned in the church. The training in the church is merely under and alongside other Christians and Preachers (2 Tim 2:2; 3:10-12; Acts 16:1-5) but that is the way and path to receiving the "power of God that worketh in us" (Eph 3:20-21). No matter how much cerebral knowledge you gain at college, you will run into trouble eventually with both the Lord and our enemy if you are missing the grace & growth path of the Lord which is only on the Lord's platform and not in a human institution (2 Pet 3:18; 2 Tim 3:15). In other words, the Spirit of the Lord is in the Church, not in the human Bible college (1 Cor 3:16-23). Since we communicated, I've inquired and heard of some of your activities (some of which I find no scriptural basis for) and some challenges you've faced with one church. While I thank the Lord for your zeal, I'm convinced that you're still needing time and training in sound doctrine in the church to serve the Lord as an evangelist (2 Tim 2:19-22). I'd therefore advise you to focus on your secular work at this time as the young man that you are (1 Thess 4:11-12) and serve the Lord only as a faithful Christian and Bible student in His church (you've done enough of human colleges) and do not slack in your secular work until such a time as other seasoned Preachers or any local church genuinely asks you to take up preaching (1 Tim 1:3-4). The Lord, not us, is the Lord of the harvest. He will send forth His own reapers. But He will send only those who are meet for His use (2 Tim 2:21). But the enemy will continue to use dishonorable vessels to beguile men (2 Tim 3:13).

This is not to say that it is a sin to study or teach in a human college. Secular colleges have a right to teach any subjects including the Bible. However, the point to note is that human-established colleges outside the church cannot replace or compare with the potency of the church in training and/or appointment of evangelists.

As part of training in the Church, because the evangelist is not divinely inspired or miraculously guided like the Apostles and Prophets, the Evangelist is required to, with diligence, study the word as recorded by the Apostles (2 Timothy 2:15). Importantly, he is solemnly warned to be careful both as to himself and as to what he teaches (1 Timothy 4:16). He must be able to keep himself pure (1 Timothy 5:22), and to be "gentle to all, able to teach, patient" (2 Timothy 2:22-25). Furthermore, the Evangelist must be an example to other Christians both in word and in conduct (1 Timothy 4:12) and must be steadfast in the faith, loyal in the truth, refusing false speculative doctrines, and uncompromising toward those that teach them (1 Timothy 6:3-11; 4:1,6; 2 Timothy 3:14-17; 4:1-5). Men who are not able or willing to give themselves to the above qualifications and responsibilities should not take on the special role of being Preachers of the Gospel (James 3:1).

Finally, the question sometimes arises whether a person can be an evangelist or give himself to preaching work without having been appointed by a local church. It must be well understood that a preacher or evangelist can become such, or qualified as such, arising from his training in the church (2 Timothy 2:2) and his study and preparation for the work (1 Timothy 4:11-13), even without an official act of a church. To assume otherwise is an outgrowth of the clergy-laity concept that grew up during the great apostasy, and is as foreign to the New Testament as is the idea that preachers have special robes to wear and also have titles such as "Pastor" (without appointed elders) or "Reverend" or "Father". A local church certainly has the right to choose or pick its

own preacher or who it would support as an evangelist. But no church is God's agency in deciding who is an evangelist and who is not.

The Function of Evangelists

From the scriptures, we learn the following key obligations or functions of an Evangelist:

1. Proclaiming Christ and His Gospel both publicly and privately, wherever and whenever opportunity affords (Acts 8:5,35,40).
2. Baptizing those who have heard the Gospel of Christ, believed, and confessed faith (Acts 8:12,36-38).
3. Correcting those who err in doctrine or behavior, warning those who sin, exhorting and encouraging those who are growing toward spiritual maturity, with inexhaustible patience and faithful teaching (2 Timothy 4:1-2).
4. Assisting in building up local churches (1 Timothy chapters 1 to 3; Titus 1:5).
5. Completing the organization of local congregations by teaching and guiding the church up to the appointment of elders and deacons, the last-mentioned two roles being the Lord's plan for the government of every local church (Titus 1:5).
6. Teach and edify the church using all appropriate means and reasonable opportunities to the best of his ability (1 Timothy 4:13; Titus 1:13, 2:1,15).
7. Perpetuate the Gospel by training and committing it unto others who would faithfully teach it as teachers including ultimately as evangelists (2 Timothy 2:2).
8. Giving his maximum possible time to the Lord's work (2 Timothy 4:2; 1 Timothy 4:13-16; 2 Timothy 2:4-5; Philippians 4:11-13).
9. Warning others against the dangers of apostasy (1 Timothy 4:1-6).
10. Protecting the church from false teachers (1

Timothy 1:3; Titus 1:10-11).

11. Guard the faith (1 Timothy 6:20-21) and "handle aright the word of Truth" which means to apply it correctly to all people and all conditions as needed (2 Timothy 2:15) to the end that men and women might be saved.

Conclusion

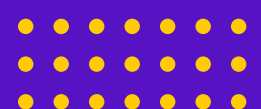
As we continue to pray with faith that the Lord of the harvest sends out laborers into His harvest, Evangelists today, that is, those who undertake to spread the Gospel of Christ by publicly teaching and preaching it should strive to fit themselves into the above requirements of the New Testament as perfectly as possible. Also, local churches and their leading men should make it a priority to bountifully remunerate and financially support faithful Evangelists because the Holy Spirit declares that the laborer is worthy of his hire (1 Corinthians 9:11-14; Philippians 4:14-19; Galatians 6:6).

ⁱ Except for this quote from the Amplified Version (AMP) or as otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from the New King James Version (NKJV).

ⁱⁱ The passage speaks in similar terms to 1 Cor 12:28 which describes various roles or functions that God has "set" or "appointed" or "ordained" in the Church.

ⁱⁱⁱ See W.E. Vine, BS440.S746 1996, page 208.

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APOSTLES AND PROPHETS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH

by Osamagbe Lesley Egharevba

"And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ," (Ephesians 4:11-12)

As far as the organization of the New Testament church is concerned, apostles and prophets were part of those that God outlined in the church during the infancy stage of the church. Paul stated in Ephesians 2:20 that the church was built upon the *"foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone."* Apostles and prophets were set there for a specific purpose, and when their mission was accomplished, they are no longer needed today (I Corinthians 13:8).

However, it is not uncommon to see people today in the religious world call themselves apostles and prophets. Some individuals and churches would not consider one a true Christian if such does not possess the gift of prophecy. As part of our duty to rightly divide the word of truth (II Timothy 2:15), our endeavor in this writing is to examine the role of apostles and prophets; their qualifications, how they were appointed as well as the duration of their work.

Definition of Terms

The word "apostle" is from the Greek word "Apostolos" (G652), and it means a messenger; someone that is sent from or forth. In the New Testament, we find that the word is used in two distinct senses. Generally, it could refer to anyone that is sent by another to fulfill a task or mission. For example, we find that the word "messengers" in II Corinthians 8:23 is a translation of the Greek word, "Apostolos" – *"If anyone inquires about Titus, he is my partner and fellow worker concerning you. Or if our brethren are inquired about, they are **messengers of the churches**, the glory of Christ"* (II Corinthians 8:23). The word translated "messengers" in this verse is "Apostolos" and the brethren were called apostles in the sense that they were sent by the churches on a mission. Another good example is found in Acts 14:14, where Barnabas (alongside Paul) was called an apostle. Here, Barnabas was an apostle in the sense that he was sent by the church in Antioch of Syria, and accompanied Paul on evangelistic trips.

In a special or official sense, the term "apostle" also refers to those individuals who were specially and

divinely selected to serve as Jesus' original representatives or messengers – *"And when it was day, He called His disciples to Himself; and from them, He chose twelve whom **He also named apostles:**"* (Luke 6:13). Jesus chose these men as special messengers or ambassadors (II Corinthians 5:20). Of these original twelve, we find that Judas betrayed the Lord and committed suicide (Matthew 27:3-5). Matthias was selected by divine appointment to replace Judas (Acts 1:16-26). Paul was another man chosen by divine appointment to serve as the apostle of the Lord (I Corinthians 1:1; 9:1-4; Galatians 1:1).

Prophets on the other hand were people who spoke for God. They receive revelations from God and speak what God has revealed to them. Agabus was an example of such (Acts 11:27-30). In the church that was at Antioch, we find that there were certain prophets there (Acts 13:1). There were also prophets in the church at Corinth (I Corinthians 14:29). When people were baptized in the New Testament, we find that the apostles often lay hands on them to receive the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:14-17) and they would receive the miraculous ability to prophesy, speak in tongues, etc.

"But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all: for to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healings by the same Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another different kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues." (I Corinthians 12:7-10)

Qualifications

Becoming an apostle in the official sense of it requires one to meet certain qualifications. Christ appointed the first set of men by handpicking them as seen in Luke 6:13. However, in replacement of Judas, Matthias was appointed by divine qualifications. These qualifications were outlined in Acts 1:21-22 when Judas was to be replaced: *"Therefore, of these men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John to that day when He was taken up from us, one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection."* From this verse, we see that for one to be qualified to be an apostle, such had to have seen the Lord and been an eyewitness of His resurrection. That was the basis on

which Judas was replaced.

Functions

The apostles specifically described their unique role in the early church as involving giving themselves to “the word of God” and “the ministry of the word” (Acts 6:2,4). Basically, apostles were commissioned by Jesus to introduce the religion of Christ (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16; Luke 24:46-48). We can see this coming to place by their preaching of the Gospel to the whole world (Colossians 1:23), and the establishment of the church of Christ (Acts 2). Second, apostles were largely responsible for making the New Testament available—first in oral form and, more specifically, in written form (1 Corinthians 14:37; Galatians 1:12; Ephesians 3:3-4; 1 Thessalonians 5:27; 2 Thessalonians 2:15; 3:14; 1 Peter 1:12; 2 Peter 1:12-21; 3:15-16). These two central tasks are set forth clearly in the New Testament. That was why Paul said in Ephesians 2:20 that the church was built upon the “*foundation of the apostles and prophets*.” The Holy Spirit provided the apostles miraculous powers to confirm their testimony (Acts 4:33). And once all the information necessary to the promotion of the Christian religion was revealed to the early church (through oral means made possible by the distribution of the gifts), the church would have the means available to grow and mature in Christ (cf. 1 Corinthians 13:8-13). While prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers were part of this early development of Christianity (Ephesians 4:11), the office of an apostle was the primary means by which Christ accomplished the inauguration of His religion.

Duration

Once the functions of the apostles and prophets were completed (i.e., introducing the church and making the New Testament available), the apostolic office faded from the scene along with the age of miracles. There are some Bible reasons why we do not have apostles today. First, their work has been completed. Second, no one today can meet the qualification that was listed to be an apostle – no one can serve as an eyewitness to Jesus. Third, all who were selected as apostles were chosen by Jesus. No method is recorded in the Bible for the training of new apostles. In fact, Paul's argument that he was an apostle rested on the fact that he was not trained or selected by men (Galatians 1:11-12). Fourth, there is a distinct lack of proof that men today are apostles. There were signs which proved they

are apostles. For example, Paul said to the Corinthians; “*Truly the signs of an apostle were accomplished among you with all perseverance, in signs and wonders and mighty deeds.*” Where is the evidence of signs which prove apostleship today? A notable sign was the ability to pass on the gifts of the Spirit by the laying on of the apostles' hands (Acts 8:18). Paul even showed this ability (II Timothy 1:6). Today we have claims of such an ability, but there has been no proof. Hence, neither apostles nor miraculous gifts were needed any longer. They had served their temporary purpose (Mark 16:20; Acts 4:29-31; 13:12; 14:3; Romans 15:18-19; Hebrews 2:3-4; cf. Exodus 4:30). Miraculous gifts functioned as scaffolding while the church was under initial construction and was removed at the completion of the structure (1 Corinthians 3:10; 13:11; Ephesians 4:13-14). The Bible is the totality of God's written revelation to humans today and it is the perfect law of liberty (James 1:25). Consequently, people now have access to everything they need (2 Peter 1:3) to enter into a right relationship with God via Christianity and the church of Christ. The apostles “had no official successors. From the nature of their duties, there could be no succession” (Hayden, pp. 20-21 cited in Miller, 2002). Based on this, apostles, quite simply, are no longer needed!

Conclusion

God warned us that there would be false apostles. Their deeds would demonstrate them to be false (II Corinthians 1:13-15). When tested, they would be shown as false apostles (Revelation 2:2). When a man falsely claims apostleship, he does so to gain authority with the church. By claiming to be an apostle, he claims the right to teach his doctrine and that doctrine will necessarily conflict with the proven doctrine already delivered by the apostles (Galatians 1:6-10). Hence, we are warned to test every spirit (I John 4:1). Just because a man claims to be an apostle does not make it so.

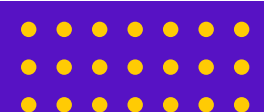
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FALSE RELIGIOUS TITLES

by Oladapo Olawale

In almost every human establishment, (e.g. military, educational and corporate institutions) titles and ranks are essential ways of creating and delineating roles and responsibilities for day-to-day functioning, to maintain order and stability in these organizations. Usually, such titles are established or spelt out in a rule book or constitution of such institutions. Any title or designation not contained in the rule book is viewed as *ultra vires* (without authority or basis) the constitution establishing such organization. There is an even far greater obligation in the religion of Christ for all who profess the same to ensure that there is biblical authority and approval for all the titles that men arrogate to themselves today.

Contrary to what many may think and practice, Christ forbade His followers from wearing any flamboyant titles of honor in a religious sense, e.g., "Rabbi," "Master," "Father," and quite common today such appellations as "Reverend," "Doctor," etc. (Matthew 23:8-10). Titles ought therefore to be rejected being contrary to the doctrine of Christ. But, due to the innate desire in man to feel greater, better, or wiser than others, it is quite difficult to appreciate this eternal truth. Men would rather demand that special honour, praise, and respect be accorded to them over and above what is ordinarily extended to everyone else. Indeed, the ways of God are strange and different from that of men.

New Testament on Religious Titles

Whereas men desire high places/positions of honour and superior appellations (Matthew 23: 6 -7), Christ requires His followers to have a humble attitude, not seeking to be greater than others, serving others rather than being served (Matthew 20:25-28); not thinking of themselves more highly than they ought to think (Romans 12:3); doing nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind each Christian is to regard one another as more important than himself (Philippians 2:3). Wearing of titles in Christianity has no scriptural basis because they tend towards self-exaltation and vain glory.

In the New Testament, we read of offices (such as apostles, elders, and deacons, evangelists (Ephesians 4:11) which only describe the functions and responsibilities to be performed by those charged to occupy such positions. These offices which are meant for the equipping/perfecting of the saints (Ephesians 4:12) do not automatically add titles either by prefix or suffix to the names of those who occupy these positions. For example, a bishop (also known as elder/presbyter) or deacon who oversees and serves respectively in the church is not addressed Bishop John/ John Bp. Or Deacon/Revd. John. Such an example is simply not found in the New Testament.

Many titles worn today are either a misrepresentation/supplantation of bible descriptions and nomenclatures or an outright variation or addition to the laid down offices in the New Testament. The New Testament, for instance, recognizes the office of a bishop

which is also the same as an elder, presbyter, or pastor. Today, these names which are merely synonyms of the same office are being replicated into different offices with different unscriptural titles to match them. The New Testament does not create offices such as that of Archbishop, General Overseer/Elder, or Regional Pastor nor do we read of names such as Cardinal, Venerable, etc. All these are human ideas on how they think the church of God ought to be organized contrary to His laid down pattern.

Some False Religious Titles

We shall consider a few of these titles which are false by the fact that the bible forbade the wearing of titles in a religious sense and, many of them are worn as misplacements/variations of true biblical teachings, thus, lacking biblical approval.

(a) Pope

This is perhaps recognized as the highest title amongst adherents of the Roman Catholic denomination and accepted erroneously by most people who profess the religion of Christ. The word is derived from the Latin word *papa*, from the Greek *papas* meaning "father"; he is seen as the head of the church. This title is a usurpation of the position of Christ because Christ, possessing all authority in heaven and on earth is the exclusive head of the church (Matthew 28:18; Colossians 1:18). The pope who is usually addressed as the *Holy Father* is the head of the Roman Catholic church on earth and not the head of the church which Jesus built. Without even delving into the historical background and vain attempts to justify the creation of this title, it is sufficient to say that this title along with its lesser variant, Father (Fr.) is not found anywhere in the New Testament, neither is there any Apostolic example for such office. In a religious sense, Jesus Christ prohibited His followers from calling anyone father and that includes the pope (Matthew 23:9). This title is a misnomer, and it best describes the self-fulfilling purposes that titles serve.

(b) Apostle

The word Apostle from *Apostolos* simply means *one that is sent*. In the loose sense, anyone sent on work of service can be called an apostle, in the same way, some brethren were referred to as *messengers or apostles of the churches* (2 Corinthians 8:23). Epaphroditus was referred to as a messenger (apostle) and minister to Paul's need (Philippians 2:25) and Barnabas (Acts 14:4, 14). However, concerning the 12 disciples of Christ, it has a special meaning for those who had been with Christ and witnessed all that he did whom he sent forth on a limited mission of seeking the lost sheep of Israel (Matthew 10:1-42; Mark 6:7-13; Luke 9:1-6) and on a larger mission to the whole world (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15ff). Matthias and Paul would later become added to these numbers. In this sense, apostleship is an office (Ephesians 4:11). No one is qualified to be called an Apostle today because to do so, one would have to meet the qualifications required in Acts 1:20-23 which is impossible for anyone to achieve today. It is thus an aberration for anyone to arrogate that title to himself. Again, the office of an Apostle was not worn as a title by any of the apostles even when they fulfilled a higher

calling of revealing all of God's truth and handing down the gospel to us today (John 16:13; Acts 2:42; Ephesians 2:20).

(c) Reverend

Not even one of the Apostles was addressed by the title of Reverend (Revd.) They are no doubt revered in the responsibility assigned to them, but that does not add this as a title to their names. Paul with all his outstanding work in the cause of the gospel could have been addressed with a special title, yet Peter simply called him: *our beloved brother Paul* (2 Peter 3:15). It is presumptuous for men today to wear this title because doing so is without the authority of Christ (Colossians 3: 17; 2 John 9).

(d) Priests

In the Old Testament God separated the Levites to act as priests attending to the tabernacle or temple, offering sacrifices, etc. The High Priests were appointed from the sons of Aaron. In the New Testament Christ is our High Priest and the only mediator between God and man (Heb. 3:1; 1 Tim. 2:5). All Christians are priests (1 Peter 2:9; Rev. 1:6). Because of this change in the priesthood system (Hebrews 7: 11 – 12), there is no place for a special priestly office in the church today.

(e) Bishops, Elders, Pastors, or Shepherds

This is one of the New Testament offices that have been deliberately misconstrued today. The word bishop refers to someone who watches or looks after (Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:1; and Titus 1:7). The bishops or "overseers" were appointed to watch over the congregation from which they had been chosen. They were to "manage" the house of God (Acts 14:23; Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:1). These overseers were also referred to as elders, shepherds, or pastors (note how the terms were used interchangeably: Acts 20:17, 28; Titus 1:5, 7; 1 Peter 5:1-3).

The pattern in the many denominations today is to have the bishop as a superior head of a group of local churches and in some cases like the Roman Catholic denomination, the bishop himself is subject to an Archbishop. In many Pentecostal denominations, it is common to have the General Overseer (GO) oversee the entire denomination. As with the office of the pope, the office of the GO is both a misnomer and a usurpation because Christ is the General Overseer of His church (1 Peter 5:4). These patterns which are a corruption of God's due order are alien to the New Testament.

Again, in many cases today, a pastor is used to describe the head of the local church, whereas, in the Bible, we have a plurality of pastors (elders) appointed to rule over the local church (Acts 14:23; 20:17; Titus 1:5).

The holders of this office in the New Testament (as it is also required today) do not wear these offices as titles to their names such as Bishop Peter, Elder Peter, or Pastor Peter.

(f) Deacons

Deacon is derived from the Greek *diakonos*, which means servant. Deacons were to serve along with elders in the early church with specific qualities required to occupy this office stated in 1 Timothy 3:8-13. In our time, in many denominations, the work of deacon has been

elevated to be used as a title such as Deacon John/John(Dea.) which is not the case in the New Testament. Moreover the office of deacon does not exist to be occupied by women, as such there is also no such title as Deaconess.

(g) Evangelist or Minister

An evangelist or minister (Eph. 4:11,12; 1 Tim. 4:6) describes the work of proclaiming the word of the Lord. These words were not used as religious titles to suggest they were above their brethren.

(h) Saint

The word saint means holy. All Christians are called saints in the New Testament (Phil 1:3). In the Roman Catholic church, the title of a saint is reserved for anyone considered to have lived an exceptional life and is accorded to someone even after they are dead. This is a very strange practice, lacking any scriptural basis. Although God's children are saints, they do not go about addressing themselves as Saint (St) John, St. Mary, and the like. Likewise, one does not become a saint only after he is dead, anyone who has obeyed God's calling through the gospel has been called to be God's holy child – a saint (1 Peter 2:9)!

(i) Brother

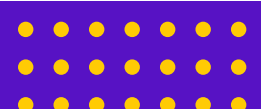
When used in the scriptures, this word is used to describe a relationship. It is not meant to be used as a title to exalt one person above another (Matthew 23:8).

The list of various titles men ascribed to themselves in the religion of Christ today is endless. Titles such as Venerable, Cardinal, President, Doctor (innovated by men), and many more are being employed merely to exalt and please men rather than place due emphasis on the work God requires done.

CONCLUSION

If we are to be pleasing and acceptable to God today, we must honour and respect His word which forbids the wearing of titles in a religious sense and avoid devising titles that seek to recreate His laid down pattern of organization for the church. Does it then mean that those tasked with leadership responsibilities in the church of God are to be accorded no respect? This is not the case. God requires every Christian to recognize and respect the authority of those tasked to lead the church, who labour in His vineyard to be esteemed **highly for the sake of the work they do** (1 Thessalonians 5: 12 – 13). They are not however esteemed by arrogating titles to themselves as doing this merely leads to self-exaltation and personal aggrandizement. Every child of God whether in a leadership capacity or not has roles and responsibilities in the Kingdom. Discharging these responsibilities is a special and noble privilege. God emphasizes these special and noble responsibilities rather than title labels. We ought to heed the teachings of Christ on this rather than loving men's accolades (Gals 1:10).

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THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE CHURCH

by Bro Opemipo Olusola



Beginning in Genesis, God's creation account stresses that both men and women are created equal in God's image (Gen.1:27). Women are wonderful creatures of God. They are created to serve as a help-meet to man (Gen.2:18,24). They are placed under man's authority. (1 Cor.11:3).

"To the woman He said, I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing: with pain, you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you" (Gen.3:16)

Though the fall of man came through the woman in the Garden of Eden, (Gen.3:6-7), Yet our Redeemer, Lord, and Savior Jesus Christ was born of a woman, a virgin, in fulfillment of the prophecies of Isaiah, (Gen.3:15; Isaiah.7:14; Matt.1:21-23). Hence women are not second-class citizens in the Kingdom of Christ on Earth, (Gal.3:28).

Every woman needs to understand her God-given roles in the eternally planned church to function to the optimal level. Let us not forget that a church becomes disqualified when God's plan for the church is neglected or despised! (Eph.3:10-11; Phil.3:16-19)

A role can be defined as the action for which a person or thing is specially fitted or used, or for which a thing exists; function; purpose; or task. A role is also defined as a socially expected behavior pattern usually determined by an individual's status in a particular society.

When speaking of women's roles in the church, we are discussing the actions for which women are specially

fitted in the assembly of God's people, the church. The inspired scriptures, the Bible is our only source of learning about women's functions in the church. (2Tim.3:16-17)

Women in the Earthly Ministry of Christ

In the Greek, Roman, and Jewish cultures which considered women with contempt, Jesus showed love and great respect to women. Though Jewish rabbis did not teach women and the Jewish Talmud said it was better to burn Torah than to teach it to a woman,¹ Jesus never took this position. Jesus taught the Samaritan woman at the well (John.4). He also taught Mary and Martha (Lk.10:38). He touched women to heal them and allowed women to touch Him (Lk.13:10ff; Mk.5:25ff). Jesus even allowed a small group of women to travel with Him and His disciples – an unprecedented occurrence at that time (Lk.8:1-3).

After His resurrection, Jesus appeared first to Mary Magdalene and sent her to announce His resurrection to the disciples (John.20:1-18), even though women were not allowed to be witnesses in Jewish courts because they were considered liars.

From our Lord's dealings with women, we could learn that He raised the station of women in life and showed them compassion and respect in a way they had never known. This demonstrated their equality as God's creation. However, Jesus did not exalt women to a place of leadership over men.

Gal.3:28 points to equality indicating that the way of salvation is the same for both men and women and that they are members of equal standing in the body of Christ. However, the phrase "you are all one in Christ" did not eradicate all the differences in responsibilities for men and women. (1Tim.3:1-13)

The Scriptural Role of Women in the Church

The New Testament reveals that women are not permitted to lead men in the church ;1Cor.14:34,37 says

¹[Women & Talmud Torah \(sefaria.org\)](http://sefaria.org)

"Women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the law says..... If anybody thinks he is a prophet or spiritually gifted, let him acknowledge that what I am writing to you is the Lord's commandment".

1 Tim.2:11-15 Says "A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived; It was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. But women will be saved through childbearing. If they continue in faith, love, and holiness with propriety"

A Christian woman is expected to be actively involved in both personal and congregational evangelism. (Matt.28:19). The Lord's command to "Go and make disciples of all nations..." is for both male and female gender in His kingdom. Priscilla along with her husband taught Apollos in the scriptures(Acts.18:24-26). The social media can be used to teach the gospel of Christ to the world (2 Tim.4:1-2). Women can also support evangelists in the preaching of the gospel (Lk.8:1-3; Phil.4:2-3).

The older women are charged with the responsibility of teaching the younger women to be home managers, well-mannered at home and in their conduct before the unbelievers. (Tit.2:3-5)

Christian women can also serve as servants for a local church, like Phoebe in Rom.16:1-2.

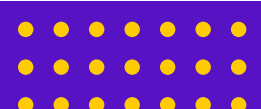
From the beginning of the Christian dispensation, women fulfilled a vital role in the assembly of God's people. Although women are spiritual equals to men and their services are very essential to the body of Christ they are excluded from leadership over men.

Any attempt by men to subvert this divine instruction will amount to a rebellious act against the authority of Christ over the church (1 Cor.14:34,37).

May all our women be vessels unto honour like Dorcas, Euodias, Priscilla, Eunice, Lois, etc. (Acts 4:36-42; 18:24-

26; Phil. 4:2-3; 2 Tim. 1:5-6) toward the expansion of the kingdom of God on Earth in Jesus' mighty name. Amen.

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THE ROLES OF BISHOPS AND DEACONS IN THE CHURCH

by Kayode Adekunle

One of the unique features of the New Testament Church is seen in the way it is organized. It must be noted that in terms of organization, the church is seen in two senses in the New Testament, the universal and local sense. The universal sense is the whole Body of Christ that believers are baptized into (Acts 2:47; 1 Cor 12:13) "... by one Spirit, we are baptized into One Body..." Christ is the universal head of the Church because the church is His body (Eph 1:22-23; Col 1:18). However, the church is not universally organized, that is the universal church cannot be physically seen. The church in the New Testament is only physically organized locally.

The local Church is made up of a group of Christians coming together in a particular locality to worship God and carry out other missions of the church like evangelism, benevolence, and edification as stipulated in the New Testament. A few examples of these are the Church in Jerusalem (Acts 8:1); the Church at Antioch (Acts 13:1); the church of God at Corinth (1 Cor 1:2); the Church of the Thessalonians (1 Thess 1:1 etc). Each local church is expected to have elders who are to run their affairs. These elders are to be assisted by the deacons. Acts 14:21-23 shows that Paul and his company appointed elders in "every church" in the cities of Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch. Paul told Titus to "set in order things that are lacking and appoint elders" in Crete (Titus 1:5)

A fully grown local church is self-governing with Elders and Deacons running its affairs. An example of a scripturally organized local church is the church at Philippi "Paul and Timothy, bondservants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons". (Phil 1:1). We also see the elders at work in the church in Jerusalem (Acts 15:6).

Who are the Bishops?

The bishops are the men who are also referred to as elders in the early church (Titus 1:5-7). They are appointed by local churches, with the evangelist in such local churches playing a leading role in the selection and appointment process (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5). By the nature of their work, they are expected to oversee the affairs of the local church and equally shepherd them. These same men are referred to as pastors in Eph 4:11. Luke says this in Acts 20:28 "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". Peter complements this with "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" (1 Peter 5:1-3). This proves clearly that all these words used are not designations as we see them being used in denominations, they are simply words indicating the work being done by the same men.

The Roles of Bishops in the Church

While the evangelist is charged to "take heed to himself and his teachings" (1 Tim 4:16), Paul admonished the elders from Ephesus to "take heed to themselves and all the flock" (Acts 20:28). This statement underscores the role of the bishops in the church.

1. The Bishops are to feed, tend or shepherd the Church

This function is captured by the word pastor as used in Eph 4:11. The pastors are to pasture the flock (the church) like a shepherd does to his flock thereby feeding them with the spiritual food they need to grow, which is the word of God. When the bishops feed the church adequately, it simply means they are "taking care of the church of God" (1 Tim 3:5). It is not surprising that one of the qualifications the Holy Spirit stipulates is that a prospective bishop must be "able to teach" (1 Tim 3:2). The importance attached to the bishops carrying out the feeding function (teaching the flock) is further underscored when Paul told Timothy to "count elders who labour in word and doctrine for double honours" (1 Tim 5:17)

2. They are to watch over the Church

The elders in Ephesus were told to "watch" that is, to be on the alert (Acts 20:31). The whole essence of watching as a duty of the elders is to protect the minds of the brethren against false doctrine which could even emanate from amongst them. "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". (Acts 20:29-30). Bishops are to "watch over the souls" of the brethren by protecting them with sound doctrine and also by being able to spot any false doctrine. They are to watch out for false teachers and false teachings, even within their number. Bishops should be able to teach the brethren to stand firm and be capable of refuting false doctrine with sound doctrine (Titus 1:9-11). This task of watching over the souls of the church can be put in the right perspective when one considers the fact that God

wants a prospective bishop to be "sober-minded" and not to be "a novice" (1 Tim 3:2; 6). No doubt, it takes a sober-minded and mature brother to be able to watch over the souls of others.

3. They rule over the church

To rule means to be the head, manage, or direct. It also means to superintend or preside over. As the local church consists of Christians both men and women, some men have to guide and be in charge of their affairs. Our God is a God of orderliness and He desires that things be done decently and orderly in the churches (1 Cor 14:40), hence, the need for the bishops to oversee the activities of the church. Paul says this to Thessalonians *"And we urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. Be at peace among yourselves"* (1Thess 5:12). A prospective bishop *"must be able to rule his own house well before he could be qualified to take care of the church of God"* (1 Tim 3:4-5). Paul told Timothy to the elder that *"rules well"* should be honoured. (1Tim 5:17). The writer of Hebrews has this to admonition for the church *"Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct"* (Heb 13:7) He also says this *"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"* (Heb 13:17). Peter, however, brings in a word of caution for the elders when they are carrying out their function, he has this to say to them *"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"* (1 Peter 5:2-3) The rule of the bishops is not dictatorial, it must be governed by the word of God.

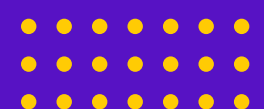
Qualifications of a Bishop

Men who desire to become bishops are expected to meet some qualifications as spelled out by the New Testament, this is pertinent because of how sensitive their jobs are. These qualifications are spelled out in 1Tim 3:1-7 and Titus 1:6-9

1. 1 Tim. 3:2-7. Without reproach, husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, orderly, given to hospitality, apt to teach, no brawler, no striker, gentle, not contentious, no lover of money, ruling well his own household, not a novice, of good reputation without
2. Titus 1:6-9. Blameless, husband of one wife, self-control, sober-minded, given to hospitality, able to exhort and convict the gainsayer, no brawler, no striker, not soon angry, not self-willed, not greedy of filthy lucre, having children that believe, who are not accused of riot or unruly, just holy, a lover of good.

The Deacons

Deacon is from the Greek word "diakonos" which primarily means "servant". The New Testament does not really specify the work of the deacons in the church. The earliest account of what their jobs could look like is the situation we see at the church in Jerusalem. When the Hellenists complained against the Hebrews that their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution, the Apostles *"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."* (Acts 6:2-4) As a result of this, seven men of faith and good reputation were appointed to take care of the business. From this scenario, it could be necessarily inferred that the deacons are appointed to assist the bishops to carry out their oversight functions in the church. The first account of their presence is in the church at Philippi where deacons are mentioned along with the bishops *"Paul and Timothy, bondservants of Jesus Christ, to all the*



saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons” Paul uses this statement to open his letter to the Philippians (Phil 1:1). If we equally go by the fact that just like the bishops, the Holy Spirit stipulates the qualifications of prospective deacons (1Tim 3:8-13), we can then safely conclude that these are “**younger men**” appointed by the church to act as servants and run errands for the elders.

Qualifications of a Deacon

1. 1 Tim. 3:8-13. (a). Grave. (b). Not double-tongued. (c). Not given to much wine. (d). Not greedy for money. (e). Holding the faith in a pure conscience. (f). Proved. (g). Husband of one wife. (h). Ruling their children and homes well.
2. Acts 6:1-6. (a). "A man of honest report", a good reputation both within and without the Church. (b). "Full of the Holy Spirit," bearing its fruits in his life (Gal. 5:22-24). (c). "Full of Wisdom," a man of prudence and sound judgment.

Appointment

There is no specific stipulated procedure for the appointment of bishops and deacons in the New Testament. The closest reference to such a thing is again, the scenario at the church in Jerusalem where the Apostles asked the church to “seek out from among them” men “whom they may appoint over the business” (Acts 6:3). Going by this, there is no doubt that the brethren in a particular local church will play active roles in appointing these men.

Furthermore, since the qualifications of prospective bishops and deacons are contained in letters written to two evangelists Timothy and Titus, it is expected that the evangelist plays a leading role in this process. He is expected to teach the church both the qualifications

and duties of these offices and equally leads in the selection and appointment process. Paul and Barnabas appointed elders in every church in Acts 14:23 and Titus was told to put things in order by appointing elders in Crete. (Titus 1:5)

Conclusion

There is no doubt that attaining either the office of the bishops and deacons is a measure of spiritual growth in the church. That is why the Holy Spirit says “**This is a faithful saying: if a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work**” (1Tim 3:1). We can also say without any restriction that it will not be out of place for all Christians to use the qualifications stipulated for both prospective bishops and deacons in 1Tim 3:1-7; 8-13; Titus 1:6-9 as a yardstick to measure their own Christian life.

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