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# DEFENDER OF TRUTH

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Theme

# *The Bishops & Deacons*

# DEFENDER OF TRUTH

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# EDITORIAL

This edition of Defender of Truth is themed on Bishops and Deacons. God's plan for each congregation is to have officers who oversee their work and worship. Unfortunately, a significant majority of churches of Christ in Nigeria are not scripturally organized. A common excuse is the lack of qualified Christians to take up these positions. The articles herein remind readers that the work and qualifications commanded by God are attainable if Christians "work out their salvation with fear and trembling" (Phil.2:12). We trust that you will be edified by reading this edition.

Previous editions of the magazine can now be viewed and downloaded from the website [www.defenderoftruth.com.ng](http://www.defenderoftruth.com.ng). The site also has articles, books, audio and video sermons which the reader will find edifying.

## THE BISHOPS AND DEACONS

by **Afolabi A. Akinyemi**

*"Paul and Timothy, bond servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the **bishops** and **deacons**" (Philippians 1:1)*

*"And it was He who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be **pastors** and teachers, to equip the saints for works of ministry and to build up the body of Christ, until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God, as we mature to the full measure of the stature of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed about by the waves and carried around by every wind of teaching and by the clever cunning of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into Christ Himself, who is the head". (Ephesians 4:11-16)*

Jesus Christ gave grace to Christians according to the measure of the gifts of Christ to be officers in His body which is the church so that the church might grow to maturity. One of the offices is that of Pastors. Paul the Apostle instructed Titus to set in order what was unfinished in Crete and appoint elders in every town (Titus 1:5). Also, Paul and Barnabas appointed elders in the churches during Paul's first missionary journey (Acts 14:23). These show the necessity of elders in the church today. Bishops are otherwise called Elders, Overseers or Bishops in the New Testament.

*From Miletus, Paul sent to Ephesus for the **elders** of the church. (Acts 20:17)*

*Keep watch over yourselves and the entire flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you **overseers**. Be **shepherds** of*

*the church of God, which He purchased with His own blood. (Acts 20:28)*

*As a fellow elder, a witness of Christ's sufferings, and a partaker of the glory to be revealed, I appeal to the **elders** among you: Be **shepherds** of God's flock that is among you, watching over them not out of compulsion, but because it is God's will; not out of greed, but out of eagerness; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. (1 Peter 5:1-3)*

The words used to describe bishops illustrate different elements of their work and qualities. Mounce's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words define the words as follows:

**Pastor:** is a "shepherd," a person who tends a flock. The English word "pastor" is derived from the Latin word *pascere*, which means "to feed"

**Overseer:** means "overseer, bishop." Its two root words (*epi* plus *skopos*) literally refer to someone who "looks over" or "watches over" a group of people. In the NT it is used 4x for those who have been appointed as "overseers" or elders in the church (these two words are essentially synonymous in the NT; see Acts 20:28; Phil. 1:1). In 1 Tim. 3:2 and Tit. 1:7 Paul writes about the qualifications for overseers.

**Elder:** older; as noun, a senior; specially, an Israelite Sanhedrist (also figuratively, member of the celestial council) or Christian "presbyter" among the Christians, those who presided over the assemblies (or churches) The NT uses the term bishop, elders, and presbyters







interchangeably.<sup>1</sup>

The definitions of these words and their usage in the New Testament reveal that they are used for the same offices and not as in some denominations where they are accepted as different offices.

The word deacon is from the Greek New Testament word diakonos which means “an attendant, a waiter (at the table or in other menial duties), one who executes the commands of another, esp. of a master, a servant, attendant, minister”

The word is used in a general sense to describe household servants (John 2:5), government officials (Rom.13:4) and all disciples of Christ (John 12:26) Specifically, it is used in the New Testament to denote men specially selected and appointed as officers of the church. (Phil.1:1; 1 Tim. 3:8-13)

## QUALIFICATIONS OF BISHOPS

The qualifications of Bishops and Deacons are spelt out in the Holy Scriptures.

*This is a trustworthy saying: If anyone aspires to be an overseer, he desires a noble task. An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not dependent on wine, not violent but gentle, peaceable, and free of the love of money. An overseer must manage his own household well and keep his children under control, with complete dignity. For if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how can he care for the church of God? He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same condemnation as the devil. <sup>7</sup>Furthermore, he must have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the snare of the devil (1 Timothy 3:1-7)*

*“An elder must be blameless, the husband of but one wife, having children who are believers and who are not open to accusation of indiscretion or insubordination. As God's steward, an overseer must be above reproach—not self-absorbed, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not greedy for money. Instead, he must be hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined. He must hold firmly to the faithful word as it was taught, so that he can encourage others by sound teaching and refute those*

*who contradict it” (Titus 1:6-9).*

## General and Specific Qualifications

### A. General Qualifications

These characteristics are required of every Christian to be right with God. One who has these characteristics has his own spiritual life in order, and so is fit to give the spiritual leadership involved in the eldership.

### B. Specific Qualifications

These are characteristics which are peculiar to the special ministry or office of the eldership. These qualifications result from circumstances, talents, and accomplishments not possessed by every sound Christian. They must be possessed by every elder. A Christian could be presently sound in faith and life without having these particular points.

## Avoid Extremes

- A. Two extreme viewpoints can eliminate the scriptural office of elder.
  - 1. A man does not have to have all the qualifications.
  - 2. A man must have all the qualifications to a perfect degree.
- B. One must possess the qualifications and must be outstanding in the matters specified.
  - 1. Some are absolute. When a man is considered for appointment as an elder, he either is or is not scripturally married.
  - 2. Some are relative. Degrees of comparison are involved. A man must have the qualification, but he might have it to a greater or lesser degree than others (as a better teacher or more patient than another).

## Seven Specific Qualifications

Qualification & Passage	Synonyms	Explanation
Man 1 Tim. 3:1; Tit. 1:6	Mature male	“Anyone” or “any man” in sense of a mature male; one with experience in family life (as seen in other qualifications)
Desire office 1 Tim. 3:1	Long for, reach for	Suggests a desire that causes one to prepare
Husband of one wife 1 Tim. 3:2; Tit. 1:6	A man of one woman	A married man, living in union with only one woman, as provided by the marital laws of God



Father of faithful children, not accused of riot or unruly Tit. 1:6	Having believing children, not riotous or unruly	Must have offspring who are Christians, not living in debauchery and disobedience
Rules well his own house 1 Tim. 3:4	Superintends presides over his family	A family man; domestic or home relations in order, including especially proper guidance for his children's conduct.
Apt to teach; holding fast the faithful word to give instructions 1 Tim. 3:2; Tit. 1:9	Skillful in teaching; able to teach	A diligent student of God's Word who is able to teach the truth to others.
Not a novice 1 Tim. 3:6	Not a new convert; not a recent convert	Not a new convert, thus lacking the knowledge & experience necessary for humility, stability, & wisdom.

### Eighteen General Qualifications

Qualification & Passage	Synonyms	Explanation
Blameless 1 Tim. 3:2; Tit. 1:6	Not guilty of wrongdoing; without reproach	Cannot be fairly charged and convicted of wrongdoing; not living a life of blame and reproach.
Vigilant 1 Tim. 3:2	Temperate; sober	Clear head & self control, so as to be very watchful.
Temperate Tit. 1:8	Self-controlled; self governed; continent	Control of desire so as to abstain from all that is unlawful & to be moderate in the lawful things.
Sober 1 Tim. 3:2; Tit. 1:8	Sober-minded; sensible; prudent; of sound mind	Calm & cautious, even tempered & wise in the use of the mind (thus, not unbalanced or clouded – as by alcohol, flaming temper, mental disturbance, etc.); not rash, impulsive, or unstable.
Of good behavior 1 Tim. 3:2	Orderly; well behaved; of good conduct	Good order in attitude, manners, appearance, and all relations with fellowmen.
Given to hospitality 1 Tim. 3:2; Tit. 1:8	Hospitable; generous (to guests); loving (to guests)	Loving strangers so that one is friendly, warm, generous, loving, and kind in meeting them, receiving them in the home, & supplying their needs.

Of good report of them which are without 1 Tim. 3:7	A good reputation among outsiders; well thought of by outsiders & good standing with them	Having a good reputation among those of the world; cannot be fairly accused by non members of the body.
Not given to wine 1 Tim. 3:3; Tit. 1:7	Not addicted to strong drink; not a wine-drinker	Not a drinker of intoxicating beverages
Not a striker 1 Tim. 3:3; Tit. 1:7	Not quarrelsome, contentious, ready with a blow; not a fist-fighter or brawler	Not having the spirit of intolerance, anger, and force that makes one abuse others by tongue, fists, or weapons; not a fighter
Not greedy of filthy lucre 1 Tim. 3:3; Tit. 1:7	Not desirous of filthy gain; not desiring dishonest gain	Not guilty of excessive desires which lead to ungodly methods to obtain possessions; not a money grabber or lover of dishonest money.
Patient 1 Tim. 3:3	Gentle; avoids contention; conciliatory; kind; mild; reasonable, forbearing	Being considerate and loving, not harsh, hot tempered, or revengeful; patient in all trials & under all circumstances.
Not a brawler 1 Tim. 3:3	Not contentious or quarrelsome; avoids strife; not a wrangler	Not a quarreler or a noisy disturber; not one who makes angry demands in loud speech
Not covetous 1 Tim. 3:3	Not loving money or having a passion for it	Not a money seeker or lover; not having a deep passion to gain possessions.
Not self-willed Tit. 1:7	Not stubborn, arrogant or self pleasing	Not having a stubborn disposition; not considering & pressing for one's own will above the needs & desires of others; not self-willed.
Not soon angry Tit. 1:7	Not irritable, quick tempered or hot headed	Not easily provoked to anger; not resentful, but slow to wrath; not easily or quickly angered.
A lover of good men Tit. 1:8	Loving all good	Loving good men, good character, good traits, good deeds; devoted to all that is good & helpful to others; loving goodness, as when seen in others.
Just Tit. 1:8	Upright; fair; rendering to each his due; exact, equal, & right judgment for all	Fair & honest; not showing partiality or prejudice; giving to each person exactly what is due him.
Holy Tit. 1:8	Religious life; pure life; devout & pious toward God	Holy and pure in life – loving God & serving Him; a life which hates sin more & more, but loves God more & more. <sup>ii</sup>






in churches without elders. The qualifications of elders and deacons are attainable because they were made for men. The qualifications should not be viewed as hindrance to attaining these offices rather Christians should strive to "live soberly, righteously and godly in the present age" (Titus 2:12) to attain these offices.

Qualification of Deacon	Qualification of Bishop
Reverent	Sober, temperate
Not given to much wine	Not given to much wine
Not greedy for money	Not greedy for money, not covetous
Husband of one wife	Husband of one wife
Man	Man
Rules his children and his own house well	Rules his own house well, having his child ren in submission
Holds the mystery of faith with a pure conscience	Holy, Just
Blameless	Blameless
Not double -tongued	Of good behaviour

- i Mounces' Complete Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words
- ii The section of this article on the qualifications of elders is culled from the book Leadership in the Church by Ron Holbrook.  
Holbrook Ron. (2023) Leadership in the Church. Truth Publications Inc



# DEACONS

THEIR ROLE AND QUALIFICATIONS

1 Timothy 3:13

God commands evangelists to set things that are lacking in order and appoint elders in every city(church)(Titus 1:5; Acts 14:23). This shows clearly that some things are lacking

# THE WORK OF BISHOPS

by Jobalo Oshikanlu

**Bible Gems:** “Take heed unto yourselves, and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit hath made you **bishops**, to feed the church of the Lord which he purchased with his own blood” (Acts 20:28 ASV). “This is a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of a **bishop**, he desires a good work” (1 Timothy 3:1).<sup>1</sup>

## The Bishop and the Church

The term “bishop” simply refers to an overseer, that is, one who has the responsibility of seeing to it that things are done properly. No organization can be more successful than its leadership. As an organization, the same applies to the local church. As revealed in the New Testament, the local church is a group of Christians in a specific locality who agree to worship God together regularly and to do the Lord's work collectively as a progressively organized body, independent of any other organization. Thus, for a local church or congregation of the Lord to be successful, it must have effective leadership.

We do not find any local church in the Bible having some men serving as elders, others serving as bishops, and then another or others serving as pastors. Instead, we find churches having elders OR bishops OR pastors, as all these three terms refer to the same position in the Lord's Church. They are given the responsibility of “*taking the oversight*” of the congregation (1 Peter 5:1-2 KJV). Thus, the office of leadership in the local church is the eldership or the bishops.

## What are Bishops or Elders?

When Paul came to Miletus on his third preaching tour, he summoned the elders of the church at Ephesus to meet him (Acts 20:17). He reminded them that the Holy Spirit had made them “overseers” of the local church and charged them to “feed” (pasture or shepherd) the church of God (Acts 20:28). In this passage, the three words – “elders”, “overseers” and “feed” – describe the role of elders in the congregation. The same truth is demonstrated in 1 Peter 5:1-2.

The words “elder” and “presbyter” are from the original Greek New Testament word *presbuteros* denoting advanced age or spiritual maturity. The words “bishop” and “overseer” are from the original Greek New Testament word *episkopos* denoting the work of overseeing, supervising or superintending. The verb

“feed” (original Greek, *poimaino*) is from the noun *poimen* meaning a herdsman or shepherd. The latter is translated as “pastors” in Ephesians 4:11 and implies that these elders or bishops watch for and care for the souls of the members of the church, just as a shepherd watches for and cares for his sheep (Hebrews 13:17).

Hence, three Greek words rendered by six English terms (elder, presbyter, overseer, bishop, shepherd, pastor) all refer to the same office in the local church. They are aged (i.e. spiritually mature) men who, having met divinely given qualifications (1 Timothy 3:1-7, 11; Titus 1:5-9), are selected to rule the local church and to watch for and care for the souls of the members.

## The Work or Responsibilities of Bishops

Every local church must be capable of striving and must strive, to develop a scriptural eldership due to the critical importance of the work of the elders.

The elders or bishops in the congregation are the only earthly rule of the church authorized by the Lord (1 Peter 5:1-2). The scriptures teach that there should be, sooner or later, bishops (elders) in every church. After the Apostle Paul had gone through Asia Minor preaching the gospel, he and Barnabas returned to the congregations they had established and “*appointed elders in every church*” (Acts 14:23). The Apostle left Titus in Crete to “*appoint elders in every city*” (Titus 1:5).

The elders, or bishops, are to be spiritual leaders of the local church (1 Peter 5:1-3). They have no right to make or change the law of Christ. Their job is to see that the church operates according to the word of God (Titus 1:9). Also, in fulfilling their role as spiritual leaders, elders are required to protect the church from false teachers (Acts 20:28-31; Titus 1:9-11). Hence, the members of the local church must submit to the men who faithfully carry out this work of oversight (Hebrews 13:17).

The elders' work of oversight extends to the proper care and scriptural use of the Lord's funds i.e. the







congregation's treasury (1 Corinthians 9:13-14; 16:1-4). As faithful stewards placed in charge of the flock, the collections gathered in the congregation which solely belong to the Lord are also in the charge of the elders, and they must ensure proper utilization and accounting for such funds (1 Corinthians 4:2; Hebrews 13:17; cf. John 12:6).

From time to time, issues, problems, controversies and disputations will arise amongst the brethren. The bishops' oversight responsibilities would include the proper handling and dealing with such issues and problems, all of which must be approached biblically for the edification of the church. Like the great Shepherd of the sheep, Jesus Christ, the elders must stay by the sheep and protect them from the wolves who will come around from time to time (John 10:11-14). The obligations extend to the administering of both instructive and corrective discipline when needed among the flock (Acts 5:1-13; 1 Corinthians 5:1-13; 2 Thessalonians 3:6, 14-15).

## Limitations on the Bishops

The elders are limited to serving as overseers in the local church of which they are members (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:2). They are not authorized to exercise oversight of any other local church. They are not to act as "lords" over the local church (1 Peter 5:3). They must not act in a self-willed or self-serving manner. It is also important to note that there must be more than one bishop (elder or pastor) in the local church, or none at all (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5). And again, their responsibility is to uphold the doctrine of Christ (Titus 1:9). They have no right to change or make new doctrines.

## CONCLUSION

Bishops (elders) in every local church is God's divine plan for the government of His people. No congregation is ultimately complete until it has developed and put in place qualified men as elders in line with the Lord's design, and every local church which will not appoint or work towards the appointment of such men rejects the authority of Christ. *"If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are"* (1 Corinthians 3:17).

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<sup>i</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from the New King James' Version (NKJV).

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# THE WORK OF DEACONS

by Oladapo Olawale

## Introduction

Alongside elders, deacons are a special category of workers in the New Testament church (1 Timothy 3:8ff). The work of deacons can be easily discerned from their name. The word deacon as used in the New Testament is translated from the Greek noun *diakonos* and verb *diakoneo* which generally refer to a servant or to serve respectively. A servant so defined can be a steward (John 2:5,9) or any servant at all (Matthew 22:13). Thus, in a general sense, the word can be used to describe different kinds of voluntary service such as rendering help or assistance to those in need (Matthew 20:26); ministering the word of God just like the Apostles, Evangelists and many Christians do (Acts 6:4, Colossians 1:26, 4:7); obediently following and working for Christ (John 12:26).

In a more restricted or technical sense, the word deacon refers specifically to those men appointed to serve on behalf of the church (Philippians 1:1) having met the qualifications laid down in 1 Timothy 3:8ff.

## Nature Of The Work Of Deacons

In 1 Timothy 3, the qualifications of deacons are listed immediately after that of elders. This suggests that deacons work closely with the elders in a local church. Deacons serve under the elders who have been tasked with overseeing 'all the flock' (Acts 20:28). Deacons being part of the local flock must be willing to submit to the rule of elders like every member of the church (Hebrews 13:17). Unlike the functions of elders, the nature of the work of service performed by deacons is not precisely stated in the New Testament. The main information regarding the work of deacons is found in 1 Timothy 3:13 which describes deacons who served well as obtaining for themselves a good standing and great boldness in the faith. Importantly, the work of deacons is to **serve well** in every responsibility assigned to them by the elders.

The account of Acts 6:1-7, however, provides us with an illustration of the nature of the work deacons do in the church. Seven men were chosen to ensure the needs of the Grecian widows (who had complained of neglect in the daily welfare distribution) were met. The Apostles deemed it fit to have special servants appointed to carry out these tasks to relieve the apostles of the burden of ministering the word of God and ministering distribution of food (serving tables) at the same time.

Although the seven men chosen to serve were not called deacons in the passage, the nature of the work of service they performed may be deemed similar to the responsibilities that would be assigned to deacons. It would seem therefore in the context of Acts 6, that the work of deacons relates primarily to the social and welfare needs of the saints. Notwithstanding its social and welfare nature, the work of deacons should not just be considered material or physical work of service because it is physical work geared towards a spiritual purpose of edification and benevolence. Also, through their noble service deacons who serve well in caring for the needy saints for instance will gain good spiritual standing by becoming adept at comforting, admonishing, and teaching the word of God as well as growing their confidence in achieving more success in spiritual tasks (1 Timothy 3:13).

Just as the apostles did with the seven men in Jerusalem, elders in a local church ought to assign to deacons many responsibilities relating to physical matters so that the eldership may be able to focus on strictly spiritual matters such as watching out for the souls of the flock through prayers and ensuring the word of God is well taught. Deacons therefore support the elders in their work by taking on duties that will allow them more time and resources to concentrate on spiritual matters.

## Types Of Service Deacons May Render

From the above, the various kinds of service deacons may perform in a local congregation can cover the following areas:

1. Benevolence and seeing to the general welfare needs of Christians. As revealed by the example in Acts 6, deacons can be tasked with identifying widows and other members of a local church who may be genuinely in need and helping to assist them (1 Timothy 5: 3-16). Quite incidental to benevolent work, deacons can be assigned the tasks of co-ordinating visitations and encouragements of the sick, widows, fatherless and weak brethren.
2. Part of the responsibilities of deacons can also include ensuring that adequate preparations are made for church activities and worship, sorting out logistics arrangements and many administrative tasks. They can see that the church premises are kept clean and tidy and that all the relevant items and equipment





needed for worship are in good condition and well-maintained. The deacons cannot carry out these tasks by themselves. They co-opt members of the local congregation to do these things whilst they effectively coordinate.

- 3. Ushering duties during the service are also part of the work deacons should coordinate with the participation of other male Christians. This task involves welcoming all newcomers and visitors and ensuring a good and lasting impression is left on visitors.
- 4. Deacons can also function effectively as treasurers and bookkeepers for the church and ensure that the church settles its day-to-day running costs with proper account given of incomes and expenses.

### CONCLUSION

The work of deacons in a local church is a noble work requiring noblemen to perform them. Whilst the work focuses more on administering the physical aspects of the needs of the flock, thus allowing the eldership more room to engage effectively in ministering the word of God, it is ultimately a service towards spiritual growth. Deacons who serve well grow to be more equipped to teach and encourage others as they acquire great confidence in the faith of our Lord Jesus (1 Timothy 3:13).

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# SELECTING AND ORDAINING BISHOPS AND DEACONS

by Osamagbe Lesley Egharevba

God desires every congregation of the Lord's church to be scripturally organized. By this, we mean that each congregation is to have elders and deacons ordained. We can see this taught in the New Testament by direct commands and approved examples. For example, in Titus 1:5, we read *"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"* (NKJV). Also, in Acts 14:23, we read: *"So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed."*

God wants elders to be ordained in every church. And since we are to be pleasing to God, we must be willing to obey correctly every instruction that God wants us to carry out. It is important to emphasize that the local church must be careful in its selection and ordaining of elders and deacons. This is because failure to ordain qualified men will lead to an unscripturally organized church. Carelessness in the selection and ordaining of these men can have long-lasting, debilitating effects on a local church. Therefore, caution and diligence are essential when selecting and appointing elders and deacons, as hasty or improper decisions can lead to trouble, discord, and harm to the church.

## Definition of Words

It is important to define some keywords as used in our topic from the outset of this discussion to be clear about what we mean. The keywords include *selecting*, *ordaining*, *elders*, and *deacons*.

**Selecting:** To *select* means to "seek out among you," or to "choose," as used in Acts 6:3 - *"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;"* This is an act entirely different from the appointment or ordination. It is an act performed by the church, but not as a matter of human judgment. The church cannot just select anyone to be an elder. God, in His Word (The New Testament), has given certain qualifications a person must have before he can be selected. Hence, the selection simply amounts to choosing out from the number, those who have attained the qualifications, so that actually what the church does is really what God is doing. If one should be selected who does not measure to the standard of God, the appointment would make him nothing in the sight of God. The qualifications determine whether a man may be

appointed to the eldership or not; the church simply looks out for those men who have the qualifications.

**Ordaining:** The idea of *ordaining* or *appointing* (depending on the Bible translation used) signifies a subsequent action to the selection of qualified men to be elders or deacons. We see this word used in Titus 1:5. This text in the King James Version reads: *"For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain (NKJV appoint) elders in every city, as I had appointed thee."* Ordain here is from the Greek word *kathistami*, which according to Thayer means "to appoint one to administer an office"

Selecting and ordaining (or appointing) are two different actions. Selection is the choosing out or determining certain ones from the church, and does not constitute the appointing, which is the "setting in" of those who are chosen. The selection must precede the appointment. The choosing out is determined by the qualifications outlined in the New Testament, while the ordaining or appointment is the designating to the office of those selected.

**Elders:** These are men who are selected and appointed as overseers of the church. They are also called bishops, pastors, or shepherds (Acts 20:28; 1 Timothy 3:1; Ephesians 4:11). The area of authority of these elders is not beyond the local church over which they exercise oversight (1 Peter 5:2). Elders hold the most important role in the world because they are to be overseers of the souls of those in the church.

**Deacons:** These are servants of the church who assist with the church's more physical needs. The office of the deacons is a vital part of a local church. They relieve the spiritually focused elders and evangelists from the routine business and physical needs of the church. Though anyone may serve the church in a general sense, only qualified men may be scripturally appointed to this office.

## Basic Principles on Selecting and Ordaining of Elders and Deacons

A careful study of the scriptures on this subject would reveal the following about the selection and appointment of elders and deacons:

First, it is important that the church must be set in order (Titus 1:5). This demands that the gospel preacher teaches and preaches faithfully on the subject of elders and deacons and lead in getting the church properly







organized. Every church should have elders (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5). No congregation is scripturally organized unless it has elders and deacons.

Second, there must be a plurality of elders in every church (Titus 1:5; Acts 14:23). Paul said to "ordain elders in every city." Just one overseer in a congregation would not suffice to fulfill this principle.

Third, only qualified men should be appointed. We learn this from the fact that the Holy Spirit gave a list of qualities each man must have before serving in the office. It follows that only such men can be appointed to be elders and deacons.

Fourth, all things must be done decently and in order (I Corinthians 14:40). All procedures must be in a decent and orderly manner. Some orderly and decent method must be employed in selecting and appointing these men. Since they are to be appointed, and decency and orderliness must characterize the action, it follows that a method of doing this must be employed.

Fifth, nothing should be done by partiality. Paul charged Timothy to do "*these things without preferring one before another, doing nothing by partiality*" (I Timothy 5:21). Any method that would influence partiality would not conform to this principle. We do not determine whether a man is qualified to serve as an elder simply because he is very rich or well-educated. Only God's standard must prevail. Partiality in the church is condemned by God (James 2:1-6)

Sixth, the number of disciples in the congregation (that is, members of a local church) is to select the qualified men for the office as clearly seen in Acts 6:3. Although, this is a case of men selected to serve tables, it certainly would also apply in the case of elders. And the evangelist should appoint the qualified men who have been selected.

Seventh, we must please God rather than man. This is a vital matter for Paul says if we do seek to please men, we cannot be servants of God (Galatians 1:10). In far too many matters, many seek to please their fellowman rather than God. This should not be the case when selecting and appointing elders and deacons.

In the selection and appointment of elders and deacons, we must ensure that we do not violate the various passages where these principles are given. For example, the selection of these men should not be done by majority

vote election. This method automatically makes the winners elders and deacons. Also, neither elders nor deacons are self-appointed. It would be a disaster for any congregation to accept just any man who decides he should be an elder or a deacon and appoints himself to that work. All these methods are clear violations of the biblical principles outlined above. The requirements in the word of God would be worthless if the church could not "*look ye out among you*" those who meet the pattern given by God.

### Scriptural Method of Selecting and Ordaining Elders and Deacons

How can a congregation select and appoint elders and deacons and apply all the Bible principles? Brother H.E. Philips in his book, "*Scriptural Elders and Deacons*" gives three definite and separate steps to be taken in setting these men into the office and observes that not only are these three steps necessary, but they must be taken in the order given. The steps include: (1) Qualifications determined. (2) Selecting from among the number. (3) Appointing these to the office. Let us take a look at these three steps.

**Qualifications Determined:** The first step in selecting elders and deacons in the church is to clearly understand the qualifications. This demands careful study and teaching. The preacher should instruct the congregation on the biblical standards for elders, as outlined by God. Every church member must grasp these qualifications to make informed decisions. Selecting qualified leaders requires a deep understanding of God's standards, which cannot be altered or modified. Scriptural principles dictate that only individuals who meet the biblical qualifications can be considered for leadership roles. Therefore, our primary task is to learn and teach God's expectations for those who will oversee the church.

**Selection From Among The Number:** The selection of elders and deacons depends entirely on their qualifications. God sets the standards, but He doesn't directly select individuals. Instead, He calls people through conditions they must meet. There are five possible groups that could select leaders: God, the individual themselves, other elders, evangelists, or the church. However, scriptural principles rule out the first four options. God doesn't select people directly; instead, He sets qualifications. Individuals can't select themselves, as this goes against biblical principles (Hebrews 5:4). Evangelists and apostles also didn't select leaders; instead, they





involved the church in the selection process (Acts 6:1-6). This leaves the church as the responsible group for selecting its leaders. By studying biblical examples, such as the church in Jerusalem selecting men to serve tables (Acts 6:3), we see that the church is to choose its overseers based on God's qualifications. Other scriptural examples, including Acts 13:1-3, 1 Corinthians 16:3, and 2 Corinthians 8:18-19, 23, demonstrate the church's role in selecting men for various duties. This principle applies to selecting elders and deacons without violating any scriptural teachings.

**Appointing These To The Office:** According to the New Testament, evangelists or preachers were responsible for appointing qualified men selected by the church. This is evident in Acts 14:23, where Paul and Barnabas appointed elders in every city where they preached. Similarly, Paul instructed Titus to appoint elders in every city in Crete (Titus 1:5). The role of evangelists is to designate qualified individuals, chosen by the church, as elders and deacons. This appointment is a formal recognition of their role, and the method of appointment may vary. However, it must align with the principles outlined in God's Word.

## CONCLUSION

We have looked at the selection of elders and deacons in the church of the Lord. The process may seem somewhat difficult, but we must let the scriptural principles guide us through this process. A period of time should pass between selecting and appointing elders and deacons to confirm their qualifications. Personal biases and bitterness should be set aside. Rushing the appointment process can lead to trouble if a selected individual's unfitness is unknown to some members. Sufficient time allows all members to consider each candidate's fitness for office. After this period, the preacher can appoint the selected men. Transparent methods should be used to select elders and deacons, avoiding secret balloting, which can conceal wrongdoing. Any selection process must align with New Testament principles. If a man meets the qualifications outlined in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1, faithful church members will likely recognize their suitability. By teaching members to act without bias and prejudice, seeking to please God rather than themselves, the process of selecting and appointing elders and deacons can proceed with minimal difficulty.

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# ENCOURAGING AND TRAINING MEN FOR THE POSITIONS OF BISHOPS AND DEACONS IN THE CHURCH

by Kayode Adekunle

## Introduction

In revealing one of the natures of God, the Holy Spirit says, "God is not the author of confusion but of peace as in all Churches of the saints" (1Cor 14:33). The Holy Spirit equally commands thus: "Let all things be done decently and in order" (1Cor 14:40). So that there will not be confusion in the local Churches and for things to be in order, God ordained the positions of Bishops to run the affairs of the churches. In Ephesians 4: 11-12, the Bible states, "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". Christ used the Apostles and the Prophets to establish, and help the Church stabilize in its infancy. They are no longer in the churches today. The Pastors who are also the Bishops and also called the Elders are the ones to act as shepherds and equally oversee the affairs of the Church today. (Acts 20: 28; 1 Peter 5: 1-5). The Bishops are also expected to "rule over the Church" (Hebrews 13:7, 1 Tim 3:4-5). In carrying out these responsibilities, the Bishops are to be assisted by the Deacons. A fully grown local Church is expected to have Bishops and Deacons. An example of this is the Church at Philippi. (Philippians 1:1). The importance of a fully grown local Church having Bishops and Deacons is underscored when the Holy Spirit, through Paul the Apostle instructed Titus, an evangelist to "set in order the things that are lacking" in Crete "and appoint elders in every city" (Titus 1:5).

## Training Men for the Positions of Bishops and Deacons in the Church

The foundation for attaining the position of Bishops in the church is the desire of any would-be Bishop. "This is a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work." (1Tim 3:1). Before men can be appointed as bishops and deacons, however, they must meet the qualifications set by the Holy Spirit (1Tim 3: 1-7; 8-13; Titus 1:6-8).

The work of training men to attain these offices is solely given to the Evangelist. Paul gave a specific command to Titus to "set things in order" in Crete (Titus 1:5). The fundamental work of the Evangelist is to teach the Church the sound doctrine of Christ to facilitate growth (Eph 4:11-16). Paul charged Timothy to "instruct, command and teach" the brethren sound doctrine (1Tim 4:6-11; 11Tim 1:13). Titus was commanded to teach men who desire to

become elders "to hold fast to sound doctrine so they can exhort and convict those who contradict" (Titus 1:9).

One of the qualifications of a Bishop is that he must "be able to teach" (1 Tim 3:2), it is the job of the Evangelist to facilitate this. Paul said to Timothy "And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also" (1Tim 2:2). Paul equally instructed Titus thus: "But as for you, speak the things which are proper for sound doctrine: that the older men be sober, reverent, temperate, sound in faith, in love, in patience" (Titus 2:1-2).

## Ways of Encouraging Leadership Roles in the Church

### The Evangelist's Way of Life

Since the Evangelist is the one to teach men to take up leadership roles, the number one encouragement for these men is his own (Evangelist) way of life. The Evangelist must be seen to live by what he teaches. Our Lord Jesus Christ is a perfect example of this, Luke records "all that He began to do and teach" (Acts 1:1). Paul also says to Timothy "But you have carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, perseverance" (1Tim 3:10). So it is not surprising that he further says this to him "Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you" (1Tim 4:16).

One of the most important roles of an Evangelist is to show examples of good works. If an evangelist teaches the truth about Jesus, but his way of life does not reflect his teaching, his teaching would be in vain. This does not mean an evangelist has to be perfect, but it does mean, that teaching and preaching always bring a level of examination for which he needs to be ready.

## A conducive Atmosphere must be created for Growth

This is not only the job of the Evangelist but the entire church. Brethren must relate to one another with love. Progress is attained faster in an atmosphere of love and faithful men are encouraged to aspire to become leaders in the church. Paul says to the Christians in Rome "Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good. Be kindly affectionate to one another with





*brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another"* (Rom 12:9-10).

Preachers must also be careful not to see the growth of brethren as a threat to their influence. Often, leadership attainment in local churches is stalled by the deliberate actions of the evangelist and in some cases some leading brothers, because they do not want their grip on the church to be loosened, thereby coming up with "Diotrephes like" spirit or attitude (11 John 9).

### Searchlight on the Homes

Attention must be given to teaching on Christian homes since the homes play an important role in men attaining leadership positions in the church. The Holy Spirit commands that men who want to rule the church must be seen to have *"ruled their own homes well"* (1 Tim 3:4-5). Concerted efforts, of course, led by the preacher, must be made by the church to see that men and women are taught how they need to obey the will of God in the way they handle their marriages. Husbands and wives must submit themselves to the will of Almighty God in contributing to making their homes godly, in the way they relate to each other and how they train their children (Eph 5:22-33; 6:4; Prov 22:6; Col 3:18-21). The children must also be taught to fear God and obey their parents (Eph 6:1-3).

### It is a call to Service

Faithful men in the church must see the chance to lead the church of the Lord as a call to service that comes with great reward. Paul says to the Colossians: *"And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ"*. (Col 3:23-24). Great lessons can be learned from the lives of Peter and John, although they were chosen Apostles of Christ, the two of them rose to become elders in the church (1 Peter 5:1; 11 John 1). So, it is a great privilege for men to occupy the office of Bishops because they are saddled with the great responsibility of taking care of the flock of God which is the Church of the living God (Acts 20:28).

### Prayers

With prayers, we get God more involved in the process. Prayers help to seek the face of the Lord. There is no doubt that one of the distinct features that sets the church of the Lord apart from the denominations is its organization. Satan who is the father of lies and divisions (Matthew 12:

26; John 8:44), wants to do everything possible in his power to see that the divine setting of the church as seen in the New Testament is not attainable. This he does by creating so many obstacles in the way of faithful men who desire leadership roles in the church. One such obstacle is fear. Men who would, out of fear, think that they cannot attain leadership roles and will thereby not desire it or work towards it, can be helped with prayer intercessions. Prayers to God will help men to realize their potential and dispel any spirit of fear (11 Tim 1:7). Paul remembered Timothy in his prayers *"night and day"* (11 Tim 1:3)

### CONCLUSION

A scripturally organized local church must have Bishops and Deacons to direct its affairs (Phil 1:1). This is the divine pattern from God. This cannot be achieved if men, yes, MEN, because they are the ones allowed by God to rule the church, (1 Tim 2:11-15), will not rise to the occasion to take up the challenge of taking up leadership roles in the church, after all, the Holy Spirit says it is a good thing to desire such roles (1 Tim 3:1). The will of God must prevail and His churches must be divinely organized.

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