

Functions Of Elders and Deacons

What are they to do?



Functions of Elders and Deacons

Before launching into the study of the work of Elders, Shepherds, Overseers, Sentinels, or Guardians the activities and functions of the Church Body will be examined. The lesson Servants of Christ discusses the work of those called out of sin into righteousness.

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The Whole Church

“Whenever you come together EACH of you [man or woman] has for **edification** a Psalm, Teaching, Tongue, Revelation, or Interpretation.” Therefore, there are different functions – everyone is not expected to do the same thing. For the Body to grow and be healthy, Christians need to perform the function God gave to them. Who or what is to determine each Christians function? Is it the preacher, shepherd, individual, needs of the Body or the Holy Spirit? (1 Corinthians 14)

“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing, psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word [say (rd)] or deed [do (rd)], do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him” (Colossians 3:16-17). Don’t take glory from God unto yourself.

Romans 12:3-8 “For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, [I am more important than you – I can speak in tongues (rd)] but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith. For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another [Not based on ability or understanding but their Christian brethren (rd)]. Having then gifts [functions (rd)] differing according to the grace that is given to us, **let us use them.**” In the human body the heart is no more important than the intestines.

“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, **that you may proclaim** the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.” (1 Peter 2:9)

Therefore, the Church Christ built is a body of faithful, obedient and involved people organized a way that the body may grow and fulfill its mission by caring for one another and performing services that Christ, the Head of the Body, gave them to do.

During 1st century “God’s called out people”:

- a. **Devoted** themselves to apostles’ teachings Acts 2:42
- b. **Had everything in common** Acts 2:44
- c. **Met together daily**, ate, shared what they had, gathered at Solomon’s Colonnade Acts 5:12
- d. **Ignored** the Greek speaking widows, Jews from different parts of the Empire Acts 6.
- e. **Chose** servants to provide for the needs of the Greek Christian widows Acts 6
- f. **Buried** Stephen and mourned deeply for him
- g. **Remained faithful** while being persecuted Acts 8
- h. **Fled** persecution, abandoned their home and non-Christian family.
- i. **Taught** Gospel upon arrival in their new land they [no mention of preacher as everyone was a servant and priest] 8:4
- j. **Determined** everyone according to his ability, to send relief to the brothers living in Judea. Acts 11:29-30
- k. Gathered together **praying** (Acts 12:12)
- l. Gathered the church together for a **report** (Acts 14:27)
- m. **Choose** men from among them and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. Acts 15:22
- n. Gathered the multitude together - **deliver the letter** (Acts 15: 31)
- o. **Came together** to break bread (Acts 20:7)
- p. **Delivered** a brother practicing sin to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord. 1 Cor 5:4-5
- q. **Rebuked** sinning elders in presence of all (1 Timothy 5:20)

The Bible does not appear to provide specific instructions for the frequency of or location for meeting together. In fact, Jesus stated to the Samaritan woman that the location was not important. [John 4:3]

Assembling together was and is very important (do not abandon) as the primary purpose was to encourage faithfulness and the doing of good works. [Hebrews 10:25]

When the **whole church** came together in one place their meetings were of a functioning body, freedom, vibrancy, open participation but not necessarily always in unity. There appears to have been chaos – all talking at the same time, not in order (not sequential). 1 Cor. 14

“When you come together, **each one** has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done **for building up** ESV [edification -RSV, NIV, NASB].” 1 Cor 14:26-7

Under these conditions little could be learned and few, if any, were edified. Perhaps - “my function is more important than yours. I can speak in tongues.” Key points in their assembly.

1. Teaching was more important than being heard
2. Orderliness and understanding important
3. Participation by all Christians important
4. Edification necessary for faithfulness and growth
5. Respect of others enhances unity
6. Respect of law and customs cannot be ignored
7. Wives conduct dishonored a husband or someone else
8. Disrespect of others by trying to talk louder than them
9. Their actions needed to display their love for each other so any observing outsider would glorify God.
10. Pulpit preaching is not mentioned however, the Body as a whole discussed Christ’s teachings.

In Christ a united body is one where the many different parts functioned as a whole. No one was inferior or superior - all are necessary for the Body to function properly. The Body is one in Christ and united in Him and His purposes rather than in agreement of opinion and interpretation.

Elders, Shepherds, Sentinels, Guardians, Watchmen

Introduction

“He gave some *to be* **apostles**; and some, **prophets**; and some, **evangelists** [proclaimers of the Good News (rd)] and some, **pastors and teachers** [some consider this to be teaching pastors]; for the perfecting of the saints, unto the work of ministering [serving] **unto the building up of the body of Christ.**” (Ephesians 4:11-12)

In 1 Timothy and Titus Paul tells us about the character and qualifications of these teaching pastors “pastors and teachers” who are to perform a specific function. They are also known as:

Elders {*presbuteros*} – an adjective to denote seniority older or old man. KJV changed it from an adjective to a noun.

Shepherds {*poimen*} - provider of nourishment and protector against dangers (a feeder ISBE)

Overseer {*eepiskopeés*} - one who alerts others of pending danger, oversees or watches over - a guardian (inspection, visitation -Thayer). The English translation of the Greek Septuagint translates *eepiskopeés* as sentinel. Luke 19:41-44

Qualifications

“This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good **work.**” (1 Tim 3:1 KJV)

“The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble **task.**” (1 Tim 3:1 ESV)

Notes:

- a. The “office of a bishop” in KJV was translated from *episkopeés*, meaning watchman, sentinel, guardian. But, *episkopeés*, in biblical Greek that act by which God looks into and searches out the ways, deeds, character, of men, in order to adjudge them their lot accordingly, whether joyous or sad; inspection, investigation, visitation when he shall search the souls of men; i.e., in the time of divine judgment – Thayer's Greek Lexicon
- b. Desires a good work is a function, not an office. Work (Greek *érgou*) - an act, deed or a thing done.
- c. Faithful and Trustworthy – [Thayer - one who is convinced that Jesus is the Messiah and the atoning sacrifice; Strong -sure, true and faithful].

God has specified the kind of Christian men He want to fulfill such important functions.

1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1	Personal understanding
hold firmly to the message	be faithful to Christ - to know Him and His apostles’ teachings
above reproach	not open to censure
good reputation, blameless	good reputation with outsiders
the husband of one wife	not a polygamist
temperate, sober minded	uses good judgment
self-controlled	disciplined, not a loose cannon
respectable	orderly, good behavior
hospitable	takes care of needs of others
able to teach [apt KJV]	powerful in communicating
not given to drunkenness	not drink excessively, no brawler
not a striker (violent)	not combative or quick tempered
gentle	kind and considerate of others
not quarrelsome	not contentious – argue; e.g., “my understanding is from the Bible” implying your is not
not greedy	does not put material things first
manage his own family	family lives within income – not a spendthrift
not be a recent convert	need to face trials as Christian
Children-not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient	children not rebellious whether a Christian or not a Christian

SO - Biblical Shepherds, [guardians, watchmen or sentinels] need to have:

- d. A close relationship with God and those in the Body of Christ
- e. A good knowledge and understanding of the teachings of Christ and His apostles’ doctrine [teaching] to prepare Christians for ministry (serving) to bring them to maturity into God’s nature.
- f. Ability to recognize false teachings and provide opportunity for those under their care to learn, recognize and acquire ability to refute such teachings. [For example, in their time a prevalent teaching was all flesh is evil., Jesus could not have been in an evil human flesh, therefore He was just a phantom – Gnosticism]
- g. Knowledge of difference between an understanding/opinion and a false teaching?
- h. Ability to lead without forcing your opinion on others
- i. A clear understanding of the spiritual tools needed for performing the shepherding functions and proficient in their use to defend those under his care, to lead fellow Christians to spiritual food, to mature them into the likeness of Christ and to defend them from spiritual predators which requires:
 - a. The desire to protect your brethren even if it cost your life
 - b. Ability to communicate effectively [apt -KJV; *didaktikos* Greek (skillful in teaching -Thayer)]
 - c. Patience - not to fly off the handle or quick to judge
 - d. Compassion

“Therefore, an overseer, *episkopon*, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable [take care of needs], able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church? He must not be a recent convert [even if elderly], or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.” (1 Tim 3:2-7 ESV)

“Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, 3 not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. 4 He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect. 5 (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?) 6 He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil. 7 He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap.” (1 Tim 3:2-7NIV)

Paul wrote during the persecution of Christians by the Jews and Romans. Those desiring this work were willing to put their lives on the line to protect his fellow brethren. The spiritual wellbeing of the brethren was more important than his physical body. It was not a position of honor, power or prestige but a dangerous work. These men were to be known by the Body, not pretenders, intent on identifying Christians to deliver to the persecutors.

Functions

Is the shepherd function the most important function of the Body? NO – Every function is equally important; e.g., our body will cease to function if the colon and intestines cease to function. So, Christ Body will cease where the Gospel is not proclaimed, works are abandoned and obedience to God becomes unnecessary.

Perhaps an understanding of shepherding sheep and goats will provide the key to understanding the function of shepherding spiritual sheep.

A good shepherd cares for his sheep and wants to take on the responsibility of their wellbeing. He will constantly be with them calling them by name for they must recognize his voice [trust] in order to follow. It is the shepherd's responsibility to locate pastures near still or slow-moving water but away from danger. He must have knowledge of and remove toxic plants in pastures so they won't be able to eat them and become sick and die. He must be physically strong to protect them from thieves and predators. It is not a job for anyone who just needs a job or money. Recall David's 23 Psalm “The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. ... You prepare a table before me in the presence of mine enemies.” [I trust HIM for He takes care of me.] On the other hand, goats are independent, inquisitive and difficult to herd whereas sheep are followers and require continual care and protection.

As a young Jewish boy your father has decided it is time for you to assume the responsibilities of a shepherd. You have been with him or your older sibling while they were shepherding. Are you prepared for the function of sheep herding?

- a) Do you know the sheep by name so they will follow you?
- b) Do you know how to lead or are you a driver; e.g., a cowboy?
- c) Do you know where to find green pastures and still water?
- d) Can you identify and remove food they must not eat?
- e) Can you recognize predators that are intent on killing or rustling?
- f) Are you physically strong enough to fend off the enemy?
- g) Do you have the tools necessary for tending the sheep and taking care of your safety such as a sling, pouch, stones, rod, staff and tunic? Are you proficient in their use?

If qualifications for shepherds of Christ's church were viewed as character traits or tools to accomplish shepherding work, they take on a different meaning; e.g., not combative, not a loose cannon, not contentious; but gentle when expressing concerns.

Functions sheep herders, shepherds, - NOT some hireling - are to:

- a. Teach, feed, equip and bring to maturity
- b. Exhort, admonish, edify and strengthen
- c. Convict false teachers and their false teachings
 - o One who denies Christ as God in human body
 - o One is saved without being cleansed by Christ's blood
 - o Salvation is received, earned, by what a person accomplishes
- d. Promote unity and harmony
- e. Comfort weak and sick [physically but primarily spiritually]
- f. Seek and restore those who have drifted or are drifting away
- g. Pray for self, those under your care and the lost
- h. Warn of dangers lurking in the pathway of life
- i. Prepare God's saints for work of service [show & tell].
[1 Timothy 3:2-7; Titus 1:6-11; 1 Peter 5:2-4; Acts: 20:28-30; Ephesians 4:11-15; Ezekiel 34:2-5; 1 Thessalonians 5:12-14; James 5:14 and Luke 15:3]

Warning

The words spoken by Ezekiel long ago to God's shepherds of Israel under the Old Covenant are also applicable to His spiritual shepherds under the New Covenant who are not performing the tasks given to them by God Himself.

"The word of the LORD came to me: "Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel [their leaders (rd)]; prophesy and say to them: 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Woe to the shepherds of Israel who only take care of themselves! [they did not do work of a shepherd] Should not shepherds take care of the flock? You eat the curds, clothe yourselves with the wool and slaughter the choice animals, but you do not take care of the flock. **You have not**

- 1) strengthened the weak,**
- 2) healed the sick,**
- 3) bound up the injured,**
- 4) brought back the strays,**
- 5) searched for the lost."**

Isn't this the work or function of New Testaments shepherds!!! Therefore, who for local congregations makes decisions about?

- What teaching is scriptural or false?
- Who approve or authorizes where one can teach?
 - a. In a "church" bible class
 - b. Home bible study
 - c. Using correspondence courses
 - d. Individual
 - e. Home or one-on-one studies
- Where is the Body to assemble and do what?
- Acts of worship required for one to worship?
- Who is to take care of widows and orphans?
- How a Christians resources are to be spent?

- If one can give to a specific work; e.g., missions?
- Who confronts one is caught up in a practice of sin? such as:
 - a. Excessive drinking
 - b. Divorcing
 - c. Forsaking assembling together
 - d. Fornication, when commonly known
 - e. Greedy, liar, drunkard, gossiper, one not providing for family

Christ made these decisions for all congregations – Christ’s Body

- Be faithful to the person Christ and the Apostles teaching
- Do Good works – to glorify Christ
- Make disciples by teaching Christ crucified

Deacons

Continuing with 1 Timothy 3: “Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain. They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless.” (1 Tim 3:8-10 ESV)

Deacons is from the Greek word *diakonos*, without gender – either man or woman, meaning one who serves by assisting someone. The Latin for *diakonos* is minister, while servant is the English. *Diakonos* and its variants occur 28 times in the New Testament. When associated with shepherds *diakonos* was transliterated as deacon in the KJV apparently to distinguish them from servants deemed not to have these qualifications. This suggest they assisted the shepherds in performing their functions taking care of the spiritual needs of the church, especially those needs that are urgent. Men with these qualifications does not change or alter the fact that all men and women are servants to do the Fathers will.

Some scholars and non-scholars have concluded that deacons are to take care of the churches physical needs whereas the shepherds were to take care of spiritual needs. If this is true, then God’s Christian servants and priest, men and women, do not have any function to perform. So, they should not have been called servants?

Questions

1. What are the royal priests, those in Christ, to do?
 - a. ___ Assemble together for a worship service
 - b. ___ Proclaim the crucified Christ
 - c. ___ No required function

2. In the 1st century Christ’s called out people
 - a. ___ Devoted themselves to apostles teaching
 - b. ___ Built a meeting facility for assembling together
 - c. ___ Met daily together in fellowship
 - d. ___ Confronted a sinning brother to restore him

- e. All the above
 f. a, c, d
3. When whole church came together to edify one another they sang, interpreted and discussed a message
 True False
4. Key points to be learned by early Christian assemblies
- Participation was to be orderly speaking in succession
 - Teaching was to be done by a pulpit preacher
 - Respecting others enhanced unity
 - All gifts, function, was just as important than another
 - Local customs were to be ignored
 - All the above
 - a, b c
 - a, c, d
5. Everything done or said was to glorify the church
 True False
6. Pulpit preaching is more important than other activities
 True False
7. Evangelists and teaching pastors, shepherds, were to equip fellow Christians to serve to strengthen the Body
 True False
8. Teaching pastors were older men who were to provide spiritual food, watching out for dangerous teachings.
 True False
9. Biblical shepherds, sentinels, are to have
- Close relationship with God and fellow Christians
 - Good knowledge of Christ's teachings
 - Ability to recognize false teachings
 - Recognize difference in opinion and false teaching
 - Patience and compassion
 - Skill in communicating
 - All the above
10. Elders and deacons are church offices or positions considered above other Christians
 True False

11. Deacons care for the physical things of the church whereas elders care for the spiritual

True ___ False ___

12. Women cannot be servants, only men

True ___ False ___

13. If deacons take care of physical matters and shepherd the spiritual matters, there is no work or function left for others

True ___ False ___

14. Living a sacrificial life, one will be faithful and obedient, do good works and proclaim the crucified Christ.

True ___ False ___

