

Numerous are the names and titles given to the church within Scripture—she is a city, a temple, a body, and a bride—but the one description I want to draw your attention to tonight is that of a house—the house of God, 1Tim.3:15—“the house of God, which is the church of the living God...”—and if the church is God’s house then it only seems right that He would have a say as to what takes place within it—what is its purpose, how is it to be organized, who are to be members of it, and how is it to be governed...

If the church is God’s house then who are we to deviate from His revealed will—doesn’t it seem logical that He would provide us with the necessary data to know how the church is to be run—are we left to our own devices and our own wisdom—some would have us to believe so—as it’s the opinion of some that the Scriptures say little or nothing about these things, and so we are left to our personal preferences or to what seems to work in any given setting—but such thinking is sheer nonsense as it’s in total opposition to the clear testimony of Scripture—for God [as I am anxious to show you] has not left to our own ignorance when it comes to the nature, purposes, and government of His house—the church of the living God...

Thus it’s my desire for the next several Lord’s Day evenings, to address the subject of Church officers—I have several purposes or goals with reference to this study—[1] to identify what the offices are, [2] to describe the basic responsibilities of each office, [3] to identify the churches responsibilities towards office bearers, [4] to explain the qualifications to hold these offices, and [5] to discern the proper steps in recognizing and ordaining qualified men to these offices—tonight I will address but the first of these—to identify what the offices are—or, to determine how many offices has Christ sanctioned or established within His church...

Now right at the outset I want to state very simply that the Scriptures know of only two abiding offices within the new covenant church—elder and deacon—an assertion in harmony to our confession, for we read in Chapter 26 entitled Of the Church and paragraph 8—“A particular church, gathered and completely organized according to the mind of Christ, consists of officers and members; and the officers appointed by Christ to be chosen and set apart by the church (so called and gathered), for the peculiar administration of ordinances and execution of power or duty, which he entrusts them with, or called them to, to be continued to the end of the world, are bishops or elders and deacons...”

- I. The Two Office View Proved
- II. The Two Office View Clarified
- III. The Two Office View Applied
- IV. The Two Office View Fulfilled

I. The Two Office View Proved

A. The Scripture uses interchangeable terms of a single office

1. I believe one reason behind the confusion concerning how many officers are in the church comes from the failure to understand that several terms are used to describe the office of elder...
2. In fact there are at least three Greek words used to describe this single office which are translated as elder, overseer [bishop], and pastor [shepherd]...
3. Tit.1:5—“for this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you—if a man is blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children, not accused of dissipation or insubordination. For a bishop must be blameless, as a steward of God...”
4. Acts 20:17, 28—“from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called for the elders of the church...(v28) 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...”
5. Notice here the apostle Paul referred to the office bearers within the church at Ephesus as elders (v17), overseers (v28), and shepherds (v28)...

6. 1Peter 5:1-4—“to the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ's sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed: 2 Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; 3 not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. 4 And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away...”
7. Notice again the same three words—[1] elder, v1—“the elders among you...”—the Greek word is *presbuteros* from which we get the word presbytery—it comes from the Greek word *presbus*—meaning “an old man...”
8. The word seems to originate from the OT and the elders established by Moses within the old covenant community...
9. Within the nation of Israel the leaders were taken from the older men—men who would have been characterized by wisdom...
10. Notice [2] shepherd, v2—“be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care...”—Peter here uses the verb form of the word translated “Pastor” in Eph.4:11...
11. Wayne Grudem—“It may be surprising to us to find that the word *pastor*, which has become so common in English, only occurs once in the NT when speaking about a church officer...Although the noun *pastor* is not used of church officers elsewhere in the NT, the related verb which means ‘to act as a shepherd’ or ‘to act as a pastor’ is applied to elsewhere applied to elders [Acts 20:28; 1Pet.5:2]...Therefore, although the noun *pastor* is only used once to refer to elders, the related verb is used twice in passages that explicitly identify the task of shepherding with the office of elder...”
12. Notice [3] overseer, v2—“serving as overseers...”—the Greek word is *episkope*—from which we get the term Episcopalian...
13. Literally the word refers to “an oversight of something” or “a guardianship of an entrusted object...”—they are to oversee the flock of God...
14. At times our English translations render this word “bishop”—which means to oversee, govern, or inspect with the idea of supervision...
15. Wayne Grudem—“Although in some parts of the church from the second century A.D. onward, the word *bishop* has been used to refer to a single individual with authority over several churches, this was a later development of the term and is not founding the New Testament itself...”
16. Thus we find that these three terms, elder, shepherd [pastor], and overseer [bishop], refer to a single office...

B. The apostle provided qualifications for only two offices

1. Here I refer to the fact that within 1Timothy, a book expressly written for the purpose to teach us how to behavior with the household of God, qualifications for only two offices are provided...
2. 1Tim.3:1-2—“this is a faithful saying: if a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work. A bishop then must be blameless, etc...”
3. And then down through v7 we have the various qualifications that must be true if a man is to be recognized as a bishop within the church...
4. But notice v8—“likewise deacons must be reverent, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy for money...”
5. And then down through v13 we have the qualifications for the office of deacon spelled-out—and so we have qualifications for two offices within the church...
6. Notice vv14-15—“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...”
7. Here we have the inspired purpose behind this letter—Paul wrote Timothy that he might know how to conduct the affairs of the church...
8. Throughout this letter we have clear directives concerning public worship, public rebuke of those sinning, and various responsibilities of the pastoral office...

9. But here in chapter 3:1-13 we have the qualifications of officers who might be qualified to fill the only two offices mentioned—bishop and deacon...
10. Now let me ask you—if you want to add a third office in addition to that of elder and deacon, how would you know whether or not a man was qualified...
11. If God has provided for us qualifications for only two offices then of necessity there exists only two officers...

C. The apostle greeted only two officers within the churches

1. Phil.1:1—“Paul and Timothy, bondservants of Jesus Christ, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons...”
2. This argument is perhaps less gripping than the other two, but I still think it’s worthy to mention, for the apostle describes the church at Philippi of consisting of two types of people...
3. Notice [1] there was the saints—“to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi...”—this refers to general population of Christians within this local church...
4. Notice [2] there were the officers—“with the bishops and deacons...”—bishops meaning overseers and the deacons...
5. Thus the apostle greets the entire church—the saints, bishops, and deacons—with the clear implication there is no other person in the church...

II. The Two Office View Clarified

1. We have just witnessed the clear testimony of Scripture that the church of the Lord Jesus Christ knows of only two offices—elder and deacon...
2. Yet I want to here provide two necessary clarifications the first of which concerns the office of elder, notice—[1] while this is a single office there may be a diversity of function within it...
3. In other words—while all elders are pastors and all pastors are elders—not every elder will be assigned an equal opportunity to preach and teach...
4. 1Tim.5:17—“Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine...”
5. Notice a few observations on this text—[1] the phrase—“be counted worthy of double honor...”—refers to financial support...
6. Notice v18—“for the Scripture says, You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain, and The laborer is worthy of his wages...”
7. Thus by “double honor” is meant monetary support, notice v3—“honor widows who are really widows...”—that is honor them in such a fashion that you take care of them financially...
8. Notice [2] this phrase—“be counted of double honor” is to be applied to all elders—“let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor...”
9. The point being—all elders regardless of their primary focus are worthy of financial support if they rule well...
10. Now this does mean that a man of necessity has to be financially supported—it could be that for whatever reason he gives up this right or else the church doesn’t have the present means to support him...
11. Notice [3] there is a distinction made between those elders who rule well and those elders who rule well and who labor in the word and doctrine...
12. In other words—while all elders rule, not all elders will labor in the word and doctrine to the same degree...
13. This of course must be understood in light of 1Tim.3:2—“a bishop must be...of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach...”
14. While every elder must be able to teach, this text simply recognizes the fact, that not every elder will be as gifted to teach...
15. It is very possible and dare I even say usual, that within a single church, one elder may be more gifted at preaching and teaching than the other elders...

16. Thus it's usual that such elders, who are gifted in this way, be the first within a church to be fully financially supported...
17. For example—let's say that a single church only has the ability to support one man, yet they have two elders...
18. In such a case it seems obvious that the one more qualified to give himself fully to the word and doctrine would be supported first...
19. This of course is not to deny that ideally, the second man could become supported later on as the church grew in size and financial stability...
20. Thus let me summarize—[a] this text does not teach two kinds of elders—one that rules and one that teaches...
21. No—it simply recognizes the fact that not all elders will be equally gifted in terms of teaching abilities, and that some elders may teach more than others...
22. Notice [b] neither does this teach that only those elders who do the majority of public teaching should be paid...
23. Notice the text—“let elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor...especially those who labor in the word and doctrine...”
24. This then brings me to a [2] clarification—while there are only two offices within the church there are a multiple gifts...
25. By this I mean that while there are only two formal officers [elder and deacon], there are other ways in which people can serve within the church that are not formal offices...
26. 1Pet.4:10-11—“as each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen...”
27. Notice Peter summarizes all gifts into two possible categories—there are those which have to do with speaking and others ministering [which is the verb form of the same Greek word elsewhere translated deacon]...
28. In other words—while this is a specific and formal office called deacon—there are those within every church who may or may not qualify for the office who nevertheless are gifted to minister...
29. Likewise Peter recognizes that there may be those who have a speaking gift that enables them to speak the oracles of God...
30. Rom.12:6—“having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy...he who teaches, let him teach...”
31. Here we find that there may be a man who has the ability to speak and teach the very oracles of God who are not ordained or recognized elders...
32. 1689 [26:11]—“Although it be incumbent on the bishops or pastors of the churches, to be instant in preaching the Word, by way of office, yet the work of preaching the Word is not so peculiarly confined to them, but that others also gifted and fitted by the Holy Spirit for it, and approved and called by the church, may and ought to perform it...”
33. Simply put—there may be certain men within a given church, who may never be recognized as an elder yet have the abilities to publicly teach...

III. The Two Office View Applied

A. Let us question the claim of some

1. Here I refer to those who claim to hold an office within the church of Christ that's in addition to the office of elder or deacon...
2. Where do we find within the New Testament Scriptures any office outside of elder or deacon—these are the only two for which we have qualifications to know how to fill them...
3. Thus we can with absolute authority reject any person who makes a claim to the office of Pope, Bishop, or Cardinal...
4. Such officers will be recognized within this church when I am shown their Scriptural warrant—until then we have the right to question all such claims...

5. But I want to take this principle a step further, and speak for just a minute of other offices that were formally held within the church...
6. I am thinking of such positions as apostle, prophet, and evangelists offices that were within the church as is plain from Eph.4:11...
7. Eph.4:11—“And He Himself gave some *to be* apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers...”
8. Now I have to state at the outset that I have no intention of addressing this admittedly difficult issue in great detail...
9. But all I want to suggest to you is this—where do we find the qualifications for such offices as apostle, prophet, and evangelist...
10. I suggest to you the reason they are not given is that during the first century church God appointed men to them in a sovereign and extraordinary way...

B. Let us abandon the practice of others

1. Here I refer to those who send young men away to be trained in seminaries that are staffed by men who are neither elders nor deacons...
2. This church does not nor will it ever do so—we believe it’s the church’s responsibility to train elders not a seminary that is detached from the local church...
3. 2Tim.2:2—“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...”
4. Let me ask you—where do we find anywhere within the Scriptures the qualifications for a man to be a fulltime professor of theology...
5. We have qualifications for elders and for deacons—but where do we find seminary professors—along as a man has the proper initials after his name he’s qualified to teach the next generation of pastors?!...
6. Furthermore, there are the committees which in many churches hold more sway than do the elders and pastors which are designed to give overall direction to the church...
7. Where do we find anywhere within the entire Bible the qualifications of a committee president—elders and deacons are the only sanctioned offices within Christ’s church...

C. Let us clarify the terminology used

1. I here refer to many of our fellow Baptist who have the tendency to make several umbilical distinctions within their leadership...
2. For example, they often make some radical distinction between the pastor and elders—the pastor is expected to go to seminary but not the elders...
3. Furthermore, we hear of associate pastors and senior pastors—but again I ask, where do we find this distinction anywhere within the Bible?!...
4. But I hear someone object—what’s the big deal—I mean who really cares about such things, when there are far greater matters to be addressed...
5. I mean we live in a world lost in nature’s night and who are dropping into hell every second—surely we should use this time rather to discuss such topics as evangelism or missions...
6. Well my friends I trust that that is not your thinking, but if it is let me attempt to answer your objection with this simply reminder...
7. If God has clearly determined how His church is to be run—what offices are sanctioned and who is qualified to serve as those officers—who we are to say such things are secondary in terms of importance...
8. Furthermore, I suggest to you that no small amount of confusion and lack of effectiveness that exists in our day is the direct result of poor church government...
9. For example—how orderly do you think a home would be if the husband failed to lead his wife, a wife failed to submit to her husband, and the children refused to obey their parents...
10. In order for this church to be effective it must be ordered, to the best of our ability, in the fashion that God has ordained...

11. Peter Jeffrey—“It is God’s will that his church should have structure and this includes the leadership of elders and deacons. This is because men and women need leadership. Without it things would not be done decently and in order because, as sinners, we are more prone to chaos than order...”
12. Let me finish this point with a recent experience that underscored for me the absolute necessity to use the Biblical terminology of elder and deacon...
13. A few weeks some of you may remember that Justice and I spent a day with a group of ministers from Bible Churches who associate together...
14. At one point every man was given opportunity to give a brief update on his church—one dear older man introduced himself by saying—The Lord never called me to be a pastor, but instead I am only an associate minister...

IV. The Two Office View Fulfilled

1. In closing let me simply point out that in the strictest sense every true church has but a single elder and a single deacon—for Christ perfectly fulfills the office of both...
2. What a mess we would all be in if we were left to the collective abilities and wisdom of our elders and deacons...
3. Thus the terms for both offices are never more fitly applied then to Christ, 1Pet.2:25—“[you] have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer [bishop] of your souls...”