

Ecclesiastical Government (10th)

(The study for today continues looking at the officers in the congregation that the Lord Jesus Christ appointed and their particular function.)

In our last broadcast, we were reviewing Chapter twenty-six, Article eight, of the *London Baptist Confession of 1689*. We covered that the officers are (1) appointed by Christ; (2) chosen and set apart by the congregation; (3) for administration of the ordinances. The **fourth** item listed is “for execution of power or duty which God entrusts with, or calls them to.” Obviously, no officer has the right or authority to function in any capacity that is not authorized by the Holy Scriptures; for example, no minister or deacon has the power to rule over any congregation in which he does not pastor or reside. Neither are there denominational heads or officers authorized by the Lord, but we plan to discuss this more when we specifically look at the officers individually.

While the pastor is to be a shepherd (i.e., Christ’s under-shepherd) and watch for the souls of the people under his care, he must not be a lord over them to dictate every event of their lives. For example, while it is the minister’s duty to teach modest dress, it is not his job to regulate colors and other trivial matters of dress. Also, the deacon is to be a help and support to the ministry, but it is not his function to regulate what the minister is to preach and teach the congregation. If the officers of the congregation would continually bear in mind that they are servants of, and to, the congregation, I believe, it will go a long way in preventing them from exceeding their duties and obligations in honoring the Lord. With this being said, they must execute the duty entrusted them by God. They must not shirk their responsibility. They must preach and teach **all** the counsel of God. Too often, many ministers fail to preach certain subjects because it will cause them hardships or they will lose popularity. For example, there have been times when ministers agreed with me in private about a sensitive matter to later oppose me in public when discussing it because they wanted to go along with the majority. They did not want the people to think ill of them. They desired the praises of men more than being faithful to the truth of the Word of God. They failed to execute their duty to the Holy Scriptures. The minister must maintain the proper balance of being faithful to the Lord and His Word on the one hand, but he must not lord it over the conscious of the saints on the other. Sometimes this is extremely difficult, but for the honor of the Lord and the purity of the house of God, it must be done.

The **fifth** point given is “that these officers are to continue to the end of the world.” By this we find that these are the only officers that Christ gave to the assembly and that no others are to be added. Equally, this point declares that the congregation of God will be in existence somewhere on this earth until the return of Christ. I Corinthians 11:26, when speaking of the Lord’s Supper, declares that this is showing “the Lord’s death till he come.” Various congregations come and go, but there will be at least one (I believe there will be more) congregation that is truly contending for the faith when our Lord Jesus Christ returns to this earth. Obviously, there must be an assembly practicing this ordinance when the Lord returns. Since the congregation will be here when our Lord returns, likewise His officers will be present until that time.

Now we come to the **sixth** item listed which declares “that such officers are bishops or elders, and deacons.” This is the heart of the matter regarding the officers that Christ established for the congregation to properly function. Therefore, we shall give specific attention to these words and their use in the New Testament. Though there are many words used to describe these officers and the office they occupy, there are basically three that we will consider. The Greek words are as follows: for bishop the word is ἐπίσκοπος; for elder the word is πρεσβύτερος; for deacon the word is διάκονος. To see that the words for bishop and elder refer to the same office, see Acts 20:17, 28. Verse 17 says, “And from Miletus he” (i.e. Paul) “sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the church” (congregation). In verse 28 Paul said, “Take

heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church” (congregation) “of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.” The Greek word for overseer is ἐπίσκοπος from which bishop is translated. Therefore, when Paul addressed his epistle to the congregation at Philippi saying, “Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons,” he was identifying the two officers of the congregation: bishops (or elders) and deacons.

Before looking at the Greek words behind these offices, it must be noted that nothing is said in the Scriptures about qualifications for women officers in the congregations. In fact, the Word of God is plain regarding this subject. I Timothy 2:11-14 states, “Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression.” Why is this? First is because God said so. Second is because Adam was first created and, therefore, the man is to have the leadership role. Third is because the basic nature of the woman is of such that she is more easily deceived than the man. Notice that God said that the man was not deceived, but the woman was deceived in the garden. Equally, the Lord instructed the congregation at Corinth regarding the role of women in the assembly. He said, “Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law. And if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church.” While this is not popular with many people, these passages should satisfy any Bible believing Christian. We are well aware that the general trend of modern religion teaches contrary to this; even many professing Christians believe today that women should have equal role in the congregation. However, nothing can be plainer than what God has given. Obviously, the older women are to teach the younger women in a domestic setting (Titus 2:2-5), and women such as Phebe, Clement, and Priscilla and others have their place in the kingdom (see Romans 16:1-4; Philippians 4:3; Acts 18:26), but there are no official offices ordained by the Lord in the house of God; no, not even women missionaries. I Corinthians 9:5, says “Have we not power to lead about a sister, a wife, as well as other apostles, and as the brethren of the Lord, and Cephas?” Though Peter and others had wives that travel with them, nothing is mentioned of their wives being officers in the congregation or preaching and teaching the Scriptures as they traveled with their husbands. And since the Sunday school program is a modern invention of men it, too, is not authorized by the Lord for men or women to teach. Again, I want to be clear. Women do have an important role in the kingdom and their work is extremely valuable. The Lord willing, I may say more about this later, but our subject matter is ecclesiastical government in the congregation and the role of the officers ordained by the Lord.

As previously stated the Greek word for bishop or overseer is ἐπίσκοπος and the basic meaning is superintendent. It is found five times in the New Testament: Acts 20:28; Philippians 1:1; I Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:7; and I Peter 2:25. To fully understand the office with the use of this word, there are two related words that should be considered. They are ἐπισκοπέω and ἐπισκοπή and the *first* word is found in Hebrews 12:15; I Peter 5:2; the *second* word is found in Luke 19:44; Acts 1:20; I Timothy 3:1; and I Peter 2:12, respectively. We previously noted that the word overseer in Acts 20:28 and bishop in Philippians 1:1 are the same Greek word, ἐπίσκοπος. In I Timothy 3:1-2 and in Titus 1:7 we see that ἐπισκοπή and ἐπίσκοπος are used together regarding the qualifications of this officer. It is interesting that the character and conduct of the man is given far more than his ability to stand before an audience and preach a sermon or teach a lesson. In fact, the only qualifications given for teaching or preaching are (1) apt to teach, I Timothy 3:2; (2) hold fast faithful words taught to him so that he is able by “sound doctrine” to exhort and convince gainsayers, Titus 1:9. The word ἐπισκοπή as found in Acts 1:20 refers to Judas’ office as an apostle. This lends to the idea that while the apostolic office was unique and limited to the age of the New Testament, the function of that office was much like that of the bishop or elder in the congregation. It was an office that functioned as an overseer *within* the congregation and did not rule *over* it. We saw this previously as

we discussed the conference at Jerusalem as found in Acts chapter fifteen and in I Corinthians chapter five regarding the instructions given to the congregation at Corinth by the apostle Paul regarding the discipline of the man who was sleeping with his father's wife. The word ἐπισκοπέω is found in I Peter 5:2 where Peter teaches that the elder is to take the oversight of the flock. The word *oversight* is from this Greek word. Notice the context of I Peter 5:1-3: "The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight *thereof*, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over *God's* heritage, but being ensamples to the flock." While the elder or bishop is to take the oversight of the flock, it is to be done in such a way that he is not a lord over the flock; he is to do so in such a way that he leads by example. Notice that Peter not only makes a connection of eldership and overseeing the flock, but includes himself in this office and does not elevate or separate himself as an apostle to govern over the congregation. However, our time is up for today, but the Lord willing, we will discuss this passage more in our next broadcast.