
Subject: Some definitions

Posted by [william](#) on Sat, 13 Sep 2008 04:37:00 GMT

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Recycled from Bible Issues (Just a starter message!)

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This was something I wrote in response to a question about different ministries within the Church. I believe all believers have gifts (1Cor 12) but in this discussion I'm limiting myself to those gifts that are closely related to Church Government.

First some terms:

Disciples: We are all called to be disciples, which means a "learner". (Acts 11:26). All Christians should be disciples!

Minister: One who serves! All of us are called to minister/serve.

Apostle: My understanding is that an "apostle" is literally "one who is sent" and specifically has come to designate one who is chosen and sent by God to accomplish a particular task. It is one of the "offices" of Church listed in Eph. 4:11f which to me indicates that as long as the Church is in existence the office is valid. Do I know any apostles personally? No. *grin*

Elder: There are two types, those who are the spiritually mature "pillars" of the church and those who are among the leadership of the church. The classic OT example is the 70 elders that Moses chose to help lead the children of Israel. These would be the elders with the anointing to rule, but there were many more elders in the nation of Israel, in fact these 70 were chosen from a much larger group of elders.

In the church there are usually many who are considered elders because of their spiritual maturity but only a few of these would be placed in overseer type positions. This latter group would be considered the (grk)"episcopate" or overseeing elders, in the NT.

Deacon: Again, there are two types of (grk)"diaconate" mentioned in the NT. The word means "those who serve." In our time the word is used mostly as a designation for those who serve the physical needs of the church (table-servers--taken from the example given in Acts 6:2.) But in the NT the word is also used as a designation for those who serve the spiritual food to the church, i.e. Word ministers. (see Acts 6:4 where the same term is used to describe the Word-servers!)

Shepherd: Could describe those with the pastoral gift (one who feeds the flock) as well as those who have been given the oversight (episcopate.) The term is loaded with imagery and meaning

from both the OT and new.

Overseer: Sometimes referred to as a "bishop," and falls into the category of the "episcopate." 1 Pet2:25 Refers to God as the "Shepherd" and "Overseer" of our souls. One translation uses the term "guardian" which accurately describe the "episcopate."

In summery, there are basically two groups in the NT Church that God uses to protect and mature His saints. The diaconate (specifically the "Word" servers) and the episcopate.

The diaconate can be summed up quite nicely by the list given in Eph 4:11f, apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. Each of these gifts are given by *God* to the individual and no one else has a say as to who gets what gift. These gifts are independent of men and are between the individual and God alone.

The episcopate gifts on the other hand are given only in the context of a group or groups of people and only have relevance with respect to that group or groups. The episcopate combines the ideas of overseer,(episkopos Heb.12:15--looking diligently) rulership,(heigeomai Acts15:22 Heb.13:7,17,24) and those who "stand before"(proisteimi Rm 12:8, 1Thess.5:12 1Tim.3:4; 5:12.)

Obviously, those with the diaconate gifts (Eph4:11f Pastors, Teachers, Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists) need a group of people to be able to discharge their gifts effectively, but their gift is *independent* of these groups. They are given their gifts apart from the hand of man and must answer to God for the use or misuse of their gifts. For example a person with pastoral gifts might travel to another assembly and if given an opportunity to speak his message will be pastoral in nature (not that he would become their pastor, but the gift would be in evidence by the "feeding the flock" nature of his message.) In other words, his gift travels with him! The same thing could be said for the prophet, teacher, etc..

The episcopate (ruling) gifts on the other hand only arise when there is a need for them and only exist as long as the need exists. A person might be called into the position of elder and begin to function in that capacity, but if he travels to another city his "episcopate" gift doesn't travel with him. He would exercise no authority in any other assembly. His gift would not have meaning apart from his "sphere of authority."

Sometimes the two different giftings overlap and this makes it hard to distinguish between the diaconate and the episcopate. Usually a person with the pastoral (one who feeds the sheep) calling will also be given episcopate gifts to oversee and rule in the local assembly. Paul was both apostle (diaconate) and elder/overseer (episcopate) to the gentile assemblies.

I hope I haven't bored you with all of this, it has always been a favorite subject of mine!

William