

How Many Offices Are In God's Assembly?

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The Bible speaks of elders, ministers, deacons, bishops, pastors, evangelists, apostles, teachers, and prophets. Are all of these offices? What does the Bible say about offices? What does it say about each, and how are they different from one another? What does the Bible say about clergy? In this series of articles, I am going to answer these questions by addressing these functions a couple at a time. But I am going to begin the series by discussing church offices in general, the clergy, and answering the question posed in the title.

What Does the Bible Say About Offices in the Assembly?

The word "office" appears in the King James Version of the Bible only eight times in the New Testament. In three of those times (Luke 1:8, 9; Hebrews 7:5), it is translated from a word that refers to the Old Testament priesthood. Since these three references are off topic, we won't discuss them further. But let's look at the remaining five times that "office" is found in the King James Version.

Romans 11:13: "For I speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch as I am the apostle of the Gentiles, I magnify mine office." Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, says that by speaking to the Gentiles, he magnifies (*doxazō*—"adds honor to") his "office." The word "office" is translated from the Greek word *diakonian*. This word comes from *diakonos*, which means "a servant" and itself derives from words that mean either to flee or to kick up dust when one runs. It is the common word for a servant. The word Paul uses in this verse is simply the occupation or function of serving. *Diakonian* does not mean "office." It means "service." The context shows that Paul is speaking about his hope that more Jews will be saved. He hopes that by his service of speaking to the Gentiles, he will provoke Jews to an interest in the Gospel that might result in their salvation, thus adding honor to his service. But for the purposes of this article, the thing to remember is that *diakonian* does not mean "office."

Romans 12:4: "For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office." I am going to be examining this chapter much more in subsequent articles. For now, let's just notice that the Greek word translated "office" here is *praxin*. *Praxin* is related

to our English word "practice." It is a mode of acting or a function. "Office" is not a proper translation of *praxin*. This should be obvious even from the context. Paul is making an analogy between our physical bodies and the Body of Christ (see verses 5ff). He is talking about the many members or parts we have in our bodies. We would certainly not say that the hand has a different office from the foot. But we would say that it has a different function. Just as the members of our physical bodies have different functions to perform in our bodies, so the members (the believers) of the spiritual Body of Christ have different functions to perform in that Body. So, the word here should not be "office," but "function."

1 Timothy 3:1: "This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work." I will have more to say about this chapter when I discuss bishops and deacons. For now, let's examine the word "office." What word is "office" translated from in this verse? Guess what? There is no Greek word corresponding to "office" in this verse. The phrase, "office of a bishop," is translated from the one word *episkopēs*. *Episkopēs* merely means "overseership." The *Apostolic Bible Polyglot* translates this verse as, "Trustworthy is the word. If any reaches for overseership he desires a good work." We will get back to this later. For now, just remember that "office" should not be in this verse.

1 Timothy 3:10: "And let these also first be proved; then let them use the office of a deacon, being found blameless." What word is "office" translated from? If you suspected that it might be translated from no word, you're catching on. Again, there is no Greek word here that corresponds to "office." The phrase "office of a deacon" is from *diakoneitōsan*, which is a form of the verb *diakoneō*. It is in the imperative and simply means "let them serve." There is no hint of "office" here.

1 Timothy 3:13: "For they that have used the office of a deacon well purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus." "They that have used the office of a deacon" is all translated from the one word, *diakonēsantes*. It merely means "those having served." Once again, "office" is an uncalled for insertion.

The Clergy

According the *Merriam-Webster's 11th Collegiate Dictionary*, clergy is "a group ordained to perform pastoral or sacerdotal functions in a Christian church." A cleric is a member of the clergy. You might

already know that the words "clergy" and "cleric," so often used in churches, are not found in the Bible. But there is a word in the Greek of the New Testament that is related to these words. It is *klēros*. It is variously translated "lot," "lots," "part," "inheritance," and "heritage." The etymology of the word evolved from the word *klaō*, meaning "to break." The broken pieces of stone used to cast lots came to be called *klēros*. Then, what was obtained by lot, the allotted portion or part, came to be called *klēros*. Then, because it is apportioned, an inheritance or heritage came to be called *klēros*.

In Acts 1:17, Judas is said to have been "numbered" (*katērithmenos*—"counted among") with "us"—meaning the twelve apostles. He is said to have obtained "*klēron tēs diakonias*"; that is, "part of this service." The "service" was specifically the service of the twelve, who apparently had to remain twelve for some time after Pentecost. When Judas fell, a replacement had to be found for the "*klēron tēs diakonias*" (verse 25). In verse 26, we read, "And they gave forth their *klērous*; and the *klēros* fell upon Matthias." That is, they gave their lots and the lot fell to Matthias. He was then counted among the twelve. This is the closest in the Bible that you will find *klēros* associated with people serving in the assembly in a special way. But it does not at all mean what clergy does today. It is simply being used in its two simple meanings of "lot" and "part." Its use in these verses just happens to be associated in sentences with the service function of the twelve apostles. But it does not mean "service" or the apostles.

To see the inheritance and heritage meanings of *klēros*, let's begin by looking at Acts 26:18. Here, Paul recounts how Jesus told him He would use Paul to deliver people from the Gentiles, "to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance [*klēron*] among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me." Those who receive the inheritance or *klēron* are not a special group of ordained people, but all believers.

In Colossians 1:12, Paul writes, "Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance [*klērou*] of the saints in light." It is all the saints who are partakers of the inheritance or *klērou*.

In 1 Peter 5:3, Peter writes to the elders, "Neither as being lords over God's heritage [*klērōn*], but being ensamples to the flock." This is crystal clear. The elders are not to lord it over God's heritage or *klērōn*, but instead are to be examples to the flock. Notice that it is not

the elders who are the *klērōn*, but those to whom they are to be an example—the flock. Certainly, the elders may be included in the flock and heritage, but they are not a special class. They are simply to set a good example. I will have more about this verse and its connection to Matthew 20:25-28 in future articles. The Bible knows nothing of a special class of ordained people called clergy.

So, what does the Bible say about offices in the assembly? Nothing. How many offices are in God's assembly? None. What does the Bible say about clergy? Nothing, although the etymological root of the word "clergy" is applied to all of God's people. But the Bible does have much to say about several functions of service in the Body of Christ, and I will begin discussing these in the next installment of this series.