

## **Doctrine of the Church: Offices**

We are at the bottom of page 48 of *The Church* by Edmund Clowney, and we are working with church offices. Let us define a few terms. Ordination, according to a mid-17th century Presbyterian Church handbook is the solemn setting apart of a person to some public church office. I think that says that pretty well. The biblical data pertain to the setting apart of the first deacons.

Office, according to the shorter Oxford dictionary, is a position to which certain duties are attached, especially a place of trust, authority, or service under constituted authority. So having defined both ordination and office, let us talk about Christ's threefold office. Then we will talk about the structure of the New Testament church office. There is a relation between the two.

Christ is prophet, priest, and king. We see it in a number of places. Maybe the best place is Hebrews 1. The chapter begins speaking of Christ as prophet in the past. Hebrews 1:1 says, "God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son." Here Christ is first presented in Hebrews 1 as prophet. He is also presented as priest. The end of verse 3 says, "After he had provided purification for sins..." He provided purification for sins, which is priestly work. The major thrust of the epistle to the Hebrews is Christ's priestly office. The main office of Christ in Hebrews 1 is His royal office, His kingly office. At the end of 3 it says, "...he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven." It is a place of honor, authority, and power. The language of inauguration follows. His declaration as Son is attached variously in the New Testament to His resurrection from the dead, to exaltation. Here it has to do with His sitting down at God's right hand. That was a great demonstration and declaration of His sonship. In Verse 8 we have royal language: "Your throne, O God," the Father says to the Son, "will last forever and ever, and righteousness will be the scepter of your kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions [probably means earthly monarchs] by anointing you with the oil of joy" as His king. So Christ is prophet, priest and king. Revelation 1:5 also speaks of Christ's kingship.

How do we relate Christ's threefold office to the church? First of all, in a general sense, all believers are taught by God, by the spirit of God. Look at 1 John 2:27 for example. The false teachers claimed that John's readers had to listen to them, and if they did not listen to them they were falsified, they were not true believers and did not belong to the Lord. In contrast John says in verse 26, "I am writing these things to you about those who are trying to lead you astray. As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you." It is not an absolute statement. John is writing as an apostle and he expects them to accept his words as God's truth. He is not saying you do not need any apostles or human teachers. Remember also Ephesians 4 where the resurrected and ascended Christ gave teachers to the church. But he means they do not have to belong to the false teachers to belong to the church. They should evaluate the false teachers and any other claim of teachers by the Scriptures and also by the Spirit: "As his anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit—just as it has taught you, remain in him." You need to combine that with what 1 John says about, for example, testing the spirits in 4:1. He explains how to recognize the Spirit of God through the acknowledgement of the incarnation of Christ. He is not cutting the Spirit loose from the Word, but as always, Spirit and Word are joined. The emphasis in 1 John 2:26-27 is on the inner-teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit to every believer. All believers are also kings and priests. Look at Revelation 1. By virtue of Jesus' offices we are constituted priests to God, and we are a kingdom. Revelation 1:5 says, "Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come,"—a reference to God the Father—"and from the seven spirits before his throne,"—This is an unusual reference to God the Holy Spirit. It does not mean that there are seven of the Holy Spirit; it is just a way

of referring to the Spirit.—“and from Jesus Christ [Father, Spirit, Son], who is the faithful witness [prophet], the firstborn from the dead,”—a reference to His crucifixion, perhaps priesthood is implied—“and the ruler of the kings of the earth [His kingly office]. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood [priest], and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father—to him be glory and power forever and ever! Amen.”

So believers are taught by God, and they are priests. They have tremendous privileges of worship and access to God and His throne. They constitute a kingdom of the people of God ruled by King Jesus in a special way. His rule over believers is in a more intimate and special way than His rule over everything else. This is because believers bow the knee to Him and acknowledge His rule.

Individual believers are given gifts pertaining to Christ’s offices. Romans 12:6 says, “We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man’s gift is prophesying,”—a ministry of the Word—“let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving,”—the idea of mercy ministry—“let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach”;—again ministry of the Word—“if it is encouraging, let him encourage”;—That might be understood as a showing of mercy.—“if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously”;—this may again be mercy, if it is in a general sense—“if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.”—there specifically is a ministry of mercy.

I am borrowing Dr. Jones’ work again. We have individual believers given gifts pertaining to the ministry of the Word (corresponding to Christ’s prophetic office) and the showing of mercy (corresponding to His priestly office). Some, not all, believers are called to govern the church (corresponding to His royal office). We should not even draw the lines of connection too clearly, but it is instructive to see Christ’s three offices and how all believers partake of that in a general sense. Specifically individuals are gifted in one or more of those areas.

Let us talk about the structure of New Testament church office. Three things need to be said. First, the New Testament distinguishes between elders and deacons. Philippians 1:1 says, “Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus at Phillipi, together with the overseers and deacons.” The saints are distinguished from their leaders, who are called overseers. It is a synonym for the office of elder. Here we have a church that has leaders who are designated as overseers (elders) and deacons. In 1 Timothy 3 when Paul describes qualifications for church leadership, we again have the two offices. In 1 Timothy 3:1 Paul says, “Here is a trustworthy saying: If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task. Now the overseer must be above reproach...” It gives a list of qualifications for overseers. To see the word “elder” in such a context, look at Titus 1:5-6. Another list of qualifications is given. This time it calls them “presbyters,” the Greek word for “elders.” In 1 Timothy 3:8 Paul says, “Deacons, likewise, are to be men worthy of respect.” We have a distinction between the offices of elder and deacon.

I am assuming the elder and overseer are the same. My reference to the Titus passage was to show that a similar list of qualifications is given for what looks like the same office called by a different term: elder instead of overseer. In Acts 20 Paul warns the Ephesian elders who he met at Miletus in verse 28. In Acts 20:28 he says, “Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers [bishops]. Be shepherds [pastors] of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.” We have “overseer” and the verbal form of shepherd or “pastor” there. In verse 17 we read, “Paul sent to Ephesus for the elders of the church.” They are elders. They were made overseers by the Holy Spirit and they are to do the work of shepherds. It is not hard to show that “overseers” means both elders and shepherds. In 1 Peter 5:1, Peter calls himself a fellow elder. He tells the other elders to be shepherds again.

The New Testament seems to distinguish not only between elders and deacons, but also between teaching and ruling elders. In 1 Timothy 5:17 Paul says, “The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor,”—it seems to be a reference to monetary rewards—“especially those whose work is preaching and teaching.” We seem to have a bigger circle here of “elders” who direct the affairs of the church well. And there is a subset of that when it says, “especially those whose work is preaching and teaching.” Thus “elders” constitutes people who rule and teach, and a subset of the rulers is “especially those whose work is preaching and teaching.” The implication is that some who rule do not work at preaching and teaching, but some who rule do. This is the basis for the distinction between teaching and ruling elders.

The New Testament distinguishes between elders and deacons. It seems to further distinguish between elders who rule and those who work in preaching and teaching. We are at the top of page 50 of *The Church*. All elders must be able to teach, but all do not have to occupy the teaching office. They need to be able to explain the Scriptures to people. But they do not all have to take part in platform ministry. They should be able to sit down and explain the Christian faith to somebody else. For example, they should be able to lead a Bible study. The elders need to be able to teach even to be qualified to be elders. In 1 Timothy 3:2 Paul says, “Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach.”

On the other hand, 1 Timothy 5:17 distinguishes some elders whose work is teaching and preaching from those who rule. In general, all have to be able to teach, but it is not the work of all to preach and teach.

Let us move on and talk about women in church service. I want to project a very positive theology of women. We are too negative sometimes, and that is not right. If there are prohibitions in the Scriptures, we need to stand on this without apology. On the other hand, we should not have a negative theology of men, women, children, or families.

My second point about the structure of New Testament church office is that there prohibitions. As a matter of fact, there is even a prohibition in terms of family leadership. But first all, positively, women share equally with men in spiritual blessings and privileges. There is thus equality here. There is spiritual equality before God. Women equally share spiritual gifts with men. They are given the same privileges of worship. They are able to serve the Lord in all kinds of capacities and to be involved in diaconal ministries. There is debate as to whether they should hold the office of deacon or not. But there should not be debate that they should do the ministries of deacing, if you will, of serving in that capacity.

Women share equally with men in spiritual blessings and privileges. And they have equal spiritual standing before God. Galatians 3:26 says, “You are all sons [and daughters] of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.” That is a remarkable statement. Regardless of the social distinctions, which were huge, in their culture, they were of equal spiritual equality before God. This even applies to slaves along with free men. Men and women enjoy spiritual equality before the Lord God. By virtue of union with Christ they are the sons and daughters of the living God, and they are absolutely, spiritually equal before God. For example, God does not value a man’s prayers more than his wife’s. Even though it sounds silly, we need to talk about this. There is an extremism that takes the prohibitions and ends up with what I call a negative theology of women. It is an

embarrassment, in my estimation, to evangelical Christianity, and we need to do much better than that. We are emphasizing the obvious, but it needs to be emphasized.

In Roman 12:5-6 there is no distinction made between male and female regarding spiritual gifts. Members of the congregation in Rome, regardless of their sex, are given the various gifts of which Paul writes. Romans 12:4 says, “Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body,”—does not exclude women—“and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given to us.” When it says in the very next sentence, “if a man’s gift...” it means if a person’s gift. It does not mean a male’s gift. So women are part of the body of Christ as men are. They are also gifted by Christ, according to how He has distributed the gifts.

Men and women share equally in terms of access to God in worship. Look at 1 Corinthians 11:5, which says, “And every woman who prays or prophesies...” I am not going to get into the details of the head covering. James Hurley’s book, *Man and Woman in Biblical Perspective*, is a very helpful one. He gives help on this and many other matters as well. He also projects a very positive theology of women, acknowledging the biblical prohibitions from ruling or teaching office in the church. He says women ought to do everything else—everything that they are not prohibited from doing. We ought to encourage them in that. I like his spirit. The context of 1 Corinthians 11:5 is the early church gathering for worship. Usually when it mentions the congregation of worship we imply both men and women are involved. I point this particular verse out because it specifically mentions women involved in acts of Christian worship.

Women also share equally in service. Dr. Clowney pointed out how Phoebe was involved in serving the Lord. Philippians 4:2-3 also evidences this. I am sure Euodia and Syntyche were embarrassed because they were singled out for disunity in the church. Maybe they were spiritual giants enough to say they were thankful they could be a bad example to help others. But notice how Paul praises them for their work: “I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to agree with each other in the Lord. Yes, and I ask you, loyal yokefellow, help these women who have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers whose names are in the book of life.” Paul, who gave the prohibition passages, could welcome women as fellow workers at his side who contended with him for the Gospel. He could call them his fellow workers. We should do the same. The church has sometimes been disparaging of women, the use of their gifts, and their functioning ministries in the church. That is a shame.

We have already spoken of Phoebe serving in diaconal ministry. Romans 16:1-2 says, “I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant of the church in Cenchrea.”—Maybe it means deaconess. In the least, we know it means servant. Our churches ought to have servants, women servants.—“I ask you to receive her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints and to give her any help she may need from you, for she has been a great help to many people, including me.”

Women share equally with men in spiritual blessings and privileges. There is spiritual equality before God. Women as well as men have spiritual gifts and equal access to God and worship. They are encouraged to serve the Lord. The truth of the matter is believers, among other things, are servants of God. It is unhealthy for us not to be involved in the Lord’s service. I will say it positively. It is healthy for us to be serving the Lord, even if it is in some small capacity. We need to be active for God, and that goes for women as well as men. It is understandable for a woman to pull away from major service in the church during childrearing years while taking care of a baby. That is an all-encompassing task for many women. Likewise men could pull back over certain periods of time because of things on the job or other

family responsibilities. But the normal state of affairs is for Christians to be active in God's service, whether they are male or female. Women are to be involved in diaconal ministries. That is not debatable. Whether or not there is an official office of deaconess in the church is debatable. Let us not argue that. But women are to do the work of deacing, of mercy ministry for example. There is a woman's touch in ministry that I think wise pastors appreciate, foster, and encourage. That is the positive theology of women.

There is negative theology as well. I receive it as coming from God who knows what He is doing. The regulative principle is in charge of all of these types of things. If the Lord says the church ought to have elders and deacons, then so be it. If the Lord says that women have equal spiritual privilege to men, we need to give that. If the Lord prohibits women from certain functions, then we need to receive that from the Lord as well. We are told these things are merely cultural, and now we have gotten beyond that and are in the age of egalitarian marriages. Women are to be pastors in the church. Respectfully, especially toward my evangelical brothers and sisters who disagree on this point, I must take issue with that and disagree. Paul does not ground male headship in home and church on custom. He grounds it on creation ordinance and redemption. First Timothy 2 is the chief text and the one which we will briefly examine.

First Timothy 2:11 and following says, "A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach." It is not an absolute statement. Obviously he encouraged women to teach and use their gifts. I agree with Hurley at this point. The meaning must be not to hold a teaching office in the church. After all, this is Paul's letter to his delegate Timothy. "I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent." Let us be ludicrous here. If you press "you must be silent," it would mean women never could talk. It is ridiculous. Obviously if they are praying and prophesying in the church (1 Corinthians 11), it is not an absolute statement in that sphere either. My understanding is that it excludes women from teaching and ruling offices in the church. Why does he say this? It is not that it seemed right to him in the present custom and it might change in the future. "For Adam was formed first, then Eve." In the book of Genesis, we have Eve being made as a helper for Adam. He is the head of the home and of the human race. It is the sin of Adam and not the sin of Eve that is imputed to the human race. That is not exactly something to his credit, but that was the role he occupied. "Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived." I agree with our own Drs. Yarborough and Doriani who recently participated in a book devoted to 1 Timothy 2:11-12. A whole book is given over to this verse and its context, because it is such a raging debate today. Baker published the book. Dr. Yarborough argues it does not mean absolutely Adam was not the one deceived. He was deceived. It means he was not the one first deceived. It was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. That is what we are to imply from verse 13: "Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not the first one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner." Thus 1 Timothy 2:11-15 teaches one or two prohibitions as far as women's roles in the church. They are prohibited from ruling and teaching office. That is the only thing they are prohibited from. The elders of the church would be wise to put women to work in the church in many different capacities.

I am not saying that women cannot teach in the church. And I am not even saying women cannot teach other men under the authority of the elders. Back East, in the school that I taught, the president of the seminary's wife was a great Bible teacher. In our school she taught in the evening. I hate to tell you, but she out throw all the rest of the faculty members of the school! She was so gifted, very humble, and not self-assertive whatsoever. The elders of her local church asked her to do adult Sunday school classes. She assented. Maybe she insisted that there be other classes at the same time so men would not have to take her class. But many men took her class. There was a case of a woman teaching adult Sunday school in her context under the elder's authority. They asked her to do it, and the class was open to men and women. Churches can disagree on the application of that particular thing, but she would not want to be a

ruling elder or pastor of the church. Yes, women are to be encouraged to teach. They have gifts of teaching too. They can use them with adults and with children in many capacities. The prohibition is merely from ruling and teaching office. Other than that, we need to put people to work.

There are a lot of female Sunday school teachers in the Presbyterian Church. Some churches would have men, especially elders and others, teaching the adult classes. Others have allowed women to teach. Many women are happy to have men doing the teaching. In some contexts men are not taking the leadership that they should take.

Let us close our time in prayer.

*Father, thank You for Your good Word and that we need it and it is sufficient to teach us for all areas of our life. We thank You for what Your Word says about the church, Lord. Help us to evaluate the things we have talked about in this lesson on the basis of Your Word, Father, not only for this class but in the years to come. Lord, equip us to better serve You in our own local churches. Make us a blessing to others, we pray, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*