

The DIAKONATE

Deacons – Elders – Traveling Ministries

by Dale Rumble
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There has been much light shed in recent years on the ministry of elders and traveling ascension gift ministries. However, very little has been written on the relationship between these ministries and elders, or between elders and deacons. I am attempting to set forth some thoughts on these two relationships from scripture and from what I see the Lord doing in our midst. I submit them in love, and in the desire that they may encourage others in building the Lord's house.

All scriptures are from the “New American Standard Bible.”

–SERVANTS–

Only the Lord can build His church; He alone knows the pattern, He chooses the workers and the material they are to work with. The diverse structures of churches in Christendom make it apparent that man has tried to organize into being what can only grow out of the life of Christ. Biblical structure comes out of divine life. One important spiritual principle of life often neglected concerning those chosen as builders and leaders in the church, is the fact that they are called to be servants who lead, rather than leaders who serve. The priority is on what they are rather than what they do; it is on being servants. The Greek word “DIAKONEA,” which denotes the function of such men, means “to serve.” This principle was clearly set forth in our Lord's teaching as well as the example of His life.

“But Jesus called them (His disciples) to Himself, and said, `You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. It is not so among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave; just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.’” (Mt. 20: 25-28)

The richness of Jesus' ministry as the chief apostle, prophet, teacher, shepherd, etc., was a result of His coming as a servant; and it can be no other way for His ministers. It is what we are in Christ that determines the worth of our ministry.

The first requirement of anyone in leadership is a willing commitment to lay down his life in order to serve others. For this reason I use the word “DIAKONATE” to

denote all ministry involved in leadership within the church, not just the function of deacons. In particular, I am concerned with the service and interrelationship of deacons, elders and traveling ministries in the local assembly.

–The Corporate DIAKONATE–

Paul's epistle to Phillipis is addressed to both the saints and to those elders and deacons who cared for them. Elders and deacons provide a “corporate DIAKONATE” for each assembly, being those who jointly serve the flock. I have often heard it said, “deacons are to serve, but elders are to rule.” We need to settle it in our hearts that all ministry functions, all roles of leadership in the church are servants. Elders and deacons constitute a group of individuals who are united in their commitment to the Lord, to serve one another and the flock. The functions of elder and deacon are different, and the mantle of leadership does rest upon the elders. However, both are servants, and if serving is not the basis of eldership, the tendency will be for elders to lord it over the flock, resulting in a “man directed” church. This was Peter's concern in his exhortation to elders

“...I exhort the elders among you...shepherd the flock of God among you, not under compulsion, but voluntarily - nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock.” (1Pet. 5: 3)

What better example of eldership can be set for the church than a group of godly men who so love each other that they will humble themselves and function in shared oversight; brothers who have committed themselves to be accountable to one another, so that through any circumstance they agree to stand as one person, with one mind in covering the flock. It was Paul's concern that this kind of a bond be established between the elders at Ephesus in order to protect the church. He didn't warn them about Satan, but about their own hearts and their attitudes toward one another.

“Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God—I know—savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things to draw away the disciples after them.” (Acts 20: 28-30)

I am surprised by the number of times I meet ministers building a local expression of the body who are uncertain of the role of deacons. Deacons are intended to provide a vital, functional undergirding for elders; without deacons there can only be weak

and limited eldership. What usually happens when local churches are formed without deacons is that the elders must handle many tasks and functions that sap their time and strength away from that which they are anointed to do. As the church grows and greater demand exists for teaching and counseling, many of the “lesser tasks” are assigned to elders who are less capable in public ministry of the word. Eventually the need for proper order becomes necessary when it is apparent that the ministry is not adequate to bring forth the life and growth that should characterize the body of Christ. Another problem arises when men are set in place as elders who lack the anointing to oversee and feed the flock. This can happen when a man is appointed to the eldership simply because he is a good administrator. It is at best unpleasant to “unappoint” an elder, but this must often be done when a man is appointed prematurely or without proper qualifications. A distinction must be made between elder and deacon functions.

A local church is a valid expression of Christ's body, only if His life is visibly present in character and ministry among the people. As a new church grows, in time some members will manifest this life in roles of serving. Some as deacons, while others will manifest what is clearly a God-given ability to oversee and equip others. These are elders and will be recognized as such even before they may be set in place. The key is His life!

The local church is birthed by His life; it reproduces and grows through His life. Therefore, the problem is not finding the “right structure” of elders and deacons in order to preserve His life in the assembly; it is the other way around. It is to recognize that His life must be allowed to come forth, for life alone can sustain the church and only His life will produce God's order. Our expectancy must be in Him, not the structure. While the DIAKONATE is responsible to function within a scriptural order of relationship, it must serve in a manner such that Christ is always kept central in the people's eyes. For example, good teaching, if those teaching are not watchful, can replace the people's need to daily seek the Lord in the scriptures for themselves. The same holds true for counseling. This must be avoided. When Christ occupies His rightful place of Shepherd and Head in the heart and priorities of each member, then His blessings and glory will be abundant in the church. This reflects the order of His life; where He is Lord, there is order!

Four essential elements of commitment by the DIAKONATE are the following

- to keep Christ in His rightful place as Head of the church
- to stand as one man in serving and covering the flock
- to their need for, and support of each other

to the unique ministry that each one has (whether as deacon or elder)

I believe these four areas of commitment are ordered correctly as to priority. If one man seeks to dominate by insisting on being the final authority, the virtues and value of plurality will be greatly weakened. One with a strong, more visible ministry in the DIAKONATE has a responsibility to set an example to the others in humility and a willingness to take the lowly place among them. This will strengthen, not weaken his ministry.

—Elders—

The task of shepherding a church was never assigned to one person in the New Testament. It was always committed to elders, a group of men who, although diverse in ministry, were collegial in sharing oversight (Acts 14: 23, 20: 17; Titus 1: 5; 1Pet. 5: 1-2). The Greek word for elder, EPISKOPOS, means “overseer,” “elder” or “bishop.” The word, PRESBUTERION, denotes elders in a plural sense, and is the word from which “presbytery” is derived (1Tim. 4: 14).

Some will say that plural leadership will not work; however, experience proves otherwise. If one believes himself to be greater than the others, then indeed there will be problems. There must exist a heart bond of mutual trust and accountability between each one. This kind of a union does not occur overnight, but must be developed through the difficulties and stresses they face together in real life situations. The quality of this relationship was the primary concern Paul had for the elders at Ephesus.

Why does scripture assign responsibility to elders for oversight, feeding and shepherding the saints, while the five-fold ministries are to equip them; and why does scripture define explicit character qualifications for elders but gives none for these ministries? The only possible answer is that elders must be men who have one or more of the ministry graces of Ephesians 4: 11. To equip someone is to shepherd, feed and oversee them. There ought to be young men in local churches with calls to be evangelists, pastors, teachers, prophets and apostles, who are being prepared and equipped by the elders for their ministry. This will include becoming elders, if and when, they meet the character requirements listed in Timothy and Titus. It is vital that each elder recognize and defer to the ministry graces resting upon peers. Elders will not necessarily have the same ministry visibility, the same experience, be equal in stature or equally gifted in pulpit ministry; however, each one has the same need to be shepherded and to be accountable, for no man will always clearly see the state of his heart or potential problems in his personal life.

We cannot delegate our ministry to another person, for it is derived from the anointing that rests upon us. Authority, on the other hand, can be delegated. All authority is held by Christ; whoever He entrusts authority to may in turn delegate it to others. Elders are responsible to exercise their particular ministries in the word and Spirit. However, authority for the oversight and management of certain church affairs can be delegated to responsible men (and women). It is not a question of shirking responsibility, but one of maintaining proper priorities between time and shepherding functions including the discipling and training of new ministries. There is the time required to prepare one's heart to minister, as well as the time spent with one another and with those who are being trained. This is not possible if elders are heavily engaged in administration or other functions, however necessary these may be in shepherding the church. I believe that the training (or discipling) of men in the DIAKONATE is a neglected and needed ministry in the church today. Plural leadership in concert with home churches provides the potential to make each local assembly a literal bible school for raising up ministries in the body of Christ. Philip, one of the seven men selected in Acts 6, later became a successful evangelist, probably due in large part to his earlier faithfulness in serving others.

The training process is not simply one of learning how to minister the word, but also of establishing a character basis to support the ministry. Qualifications for elders focus more on personal character and home life than on an ability in ministry. One merit of collegiality is the protection afforded against deception and error because each personal life and character is open to the correction and admonishment of his peers on a daily or weekly basis. Therefore, training will involve learning how to share one's life with others and be open to correction. Some vital character traits listed in the Scriptures for elders are the following

“. . . must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, not addicted to wine, not pugnacious, gentle, uncontentious, free from the love of money, able to manage his own household, possessing a good reputation outside the church, not accused of dissipation or rebellion, not self-willed, not quick tempered, loving what is good, sensible, just, devout, self-controlled” (1Tim. 3: 2-7; Titus 1: 5-9).

Character is not formed by just listening to good teaching; it involves the dynamics of putting teaching into practice, making mistakes, being corrected, going through the dealings of God and learning from example. When appropriate, it is useful that those undergoing training be given the opportunity to sit with elders in their meetings and to travel with them as they minister. The life of Christ in a person is as much the

basis for discipling others by being seen in day to day conduct as it is by preaching. We can impart no more to others than we possess of Him our self.

Great insight into what the Lord requires of shepherds concerning feeding and serving His sheep is found in His admonition to the shepherds of Israel, which remains a valid prophetic word for today.

“Woe, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flock? You eat the fat and clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fat sheep without feeding the flock. Those who are sickly you have not strengthened, the diseased you have not healed, the broken you have not bound up, the scattered you have not brought back, nor have you sought for the lost; but with force and severity you have dominated them. And they were scattered for lack of a shepherd . . .” (Ez. 34: 2-5)

The Lord is raising up shepherds today, men after His heart who will seek out scattered sheep and gather them together in good pasture, where they can be fed, healed, cared for and protected.

The dominating attitude of the shepherds of Israel toward the sheep raises the question of how elders are to exercise spiritual authority in the church. First of all, it is not a matter of how much authority one has, but how well others submit to it. The role model that Jesus set for us was His coming to earth as a bond-servant (Phil. 2: 5-11). It is easy to submit to one who lays down his life to serve us as Jesus did. Submission is the proper response to godly character. Paul's apostolic ministry was submitted to by early Christians, for the same reason, as he points out in his epistle to Thessalonica (1Thess. 2: 4-13).

Unfortunately, it has become common practice for ministers today to employ the world's practice of using titles and offices rather than God's anointing and character to validate their authority. Titles such as apostle Jones, Reverend Jones, Senior Pastor Jones, etc., are used to convey to the sheep that the one with a title has authority. Jesus forbid this practice (Mt. 23: 8-12). Also, the concept of authority resident in an office is also used. However, there are no offices in the church. The Greek word “EPISKOPE” means “overseership.” Thus the following scripture

“. . . if any man aspires to the office of overseer. . . .” (1Tim. 3: 11) literally states, “. . . if any man aspires to overseership . . .”

—Deacons—

The first scriptures in the New Testament relating to the need for the supporting functions of deacons are Acts 6:1-6. Some observations of these verses help to provide a valid understanding of this form of ministry.

The primary need was not to perform a menial task, but to maintain proper relationship between the Hebrews and Greeks.

The choice of men was based on certain qualifications (full of the Spirit and wisdom, and having a good reputation); qualities that the people themselves could recognize, and by which they were to select them. Thus, they were approved by the people for their ministry primarily on the basis of their character.

They were appointed (or set in place) by the apostles who delegated authority for this task to these men.

The end results of their ministry served to support the apostolic ministry of teaching and prayer.

Deacons function out of the authority delegated by elders. For this reason their role is not to be viewed as permanent, but subject to change both from the growth and needs of the assembly, as well as the particular person's spiritual growth. Delegated functions should never be viewed as “non-spiritual” in nature, because they are a necessary part of the spiritual whole that comprises shepherding. Some of the better known responsibilities of deacons are the following

- financial (bookkeeping, insurance, records, etc.)
- building facilities and maintenance

- transportation requirements

- publishing (printing, distribution, tape duplication and libraries, etc.)

- assembly responsibilities (welcoming new people, meeting notices, various facilities, etc.)

Although such functions require commitment and faithfulness, they have limited value for training men who, like Philip, have a call of God to a ministry of the word. It is not sufficient for an assembly to claim it is a “New Testament Church” just because people are being saved, spiritual gifts are in operation, there is great teaching

and a good missionary outreach. If an assembly does not produce “New Testament ministries,” it is not a “New Testament Church.” Local assemblies, not bible schools are to be the source of the five-fold ministries, and this begins with men who prove faithful in small things.

The following are other examples of delegated responsibilities that are more directly a part of the shepherding role and which can afford opportunity for men to grow into greater ministry. The key element in each instance is the component of personal interaction.

outreach ministry (coffee house, evangelistic endeavors, etc.)

children's ministry

jail/hospital ministries

personal support ministries (homes for those with needs that require family or community support; i.e. drug addiction)

home church leadership

In general, the oversight of home churches should be shared between two (or more) leaders who learn to serve, support and cover one another and be responsive to those over them in the Lord. This practice is basic for developing an understanding of how to flow in plural leadership. They will learn how to receive and give correction, to encourage and build up what they see lacking in their co-workers. Over time, their commitment to those they are yoked with will grow into a visible reality, and become an example to those they are serving. When personality conflicts arise, each instance becomes a battle ground that must be won if their ministry is to mature. Many heart attitudes will surface that must be dealt with in honest confrontations. Spiritual competition, desire for personal recognition (often seen in attitudes that say, “Look, I am more experienced, so do as I say.”) are human characteristics that are out of place in a servant of Christ. Hearts must be stretched to receive one another just as Christ has received us.

Delegation of oversight for such functions should not be done lightly. In particular, the selection of leaders and initial phases of ministry require much time and prayer. False starts can be expected. This is probably what Paul had in mind in his exhortation to Timothy on deacons

“And let these also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons if they are above reproach...” (1Tim. 3: 10)

As with elders, qualifications are more focused on character and home life than on ability to perform in ministry.

“Deacons likewise must be men of dignity, not double tongued, or addicted to much wine or fond of sordid gain, but holding to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. Women (deacon's wives or deaconesses) must likewise be dignified; not malicious gossips, but temperate, faithful in all things. Let deacons be husbands of only one wife, and good managers of their children and of their households. For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a high standing and great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus. . . .” (1Tim. 3: 8-9, 11-13)

Any house where a home church is located should be a home in spiritual order with God's peace resting upon it. Since the husband of that family is responsible for whatever occurs there, if possible, he should be one of the leaders. Regular periods of mutual sharing, teaching and counseling should be set aside by the elders with these respective leaders. This is needed to ensure that there is a flow of life taking place, both in the people and in those serving them in leadership. A meeting that has all the necessary mechanics, but which produces no life over time, has little value. In addition, there must be a consistency maintained in any personal counseling offered within these groups with that coming from the elders. Counsel in any group can only extend as far as its leaders have achieved victory in their own lives.

Some may find it difficult to see home churches functioning under the oversight of deacons. However, it should be recognized that these meetings are not to be miniature versions of the main central gatherings. When the whole church comes to together, it is (from a ministry point of view) to hear what God is saying to the church through a prophetic flow of worship, gifts and teaching. The home churches, become places where that word is worked out in lives. If we consider where churches in general have failed, it is not so much in what has been preached as in the failure to obey and do the word. Rather than teaching, home church emphasis should be on establishing an atmosphere where there is mutual support to help each one grow up in Christ. This can involve worship, prayer, testimonies, evangelism, exhortation, spiritual gifts, communion, table fellowship, working together, recreation and, in general, sharing together the practical as well as spiritual areas of lives. “What I am and what I possess belongs to the Lord, so let me share it with you” becomes a primary focus of ministry. Meeting oversight therefore is not so much concerned with

directive ministry as ensuring that nothing hinders the flow of life that develops as people open their hearts to the Lord. Occasional teaching sessions by elders to address specific needs can prove valuable. The objectives of home churches are essentially threefold

to help one another walk in personal victory with Christ

to attain a victorious corporate (group or collective) redemption in their relationship with one another. This will entail the “nitty gritty” aspects of personal interaction, confrontations and ministries of relationship. “Iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.” (Pr. 27: 17)

to provide to their community a witness of the truth of the gospel as seen in their love for one another, and thus be a place of evangelism (Jn. 13: 34, 17: 2: 23)

Those put in charge of home churches should, where possible, be men who have a call of God to become evangelists, prophets, teachers, pastors, etc. This period of responsibility will help prepare them for their later ministry. It will serve both to give proof of their ministry and develop the character necessary to support the ministry. This will include proving faithful in such things as employment prior to full time support, in the management of their household, and in their relationship with people both in and outside the church. It is these things that require so much time which prompted Paul's warning concerning novices (1Tim. 3: 6). In the context of training, it is more correct to speak of discipling rather than educating, to speak of “watch my example,” rather than “learn this concept.” The discipling of Timothy by Paul is a good example of such training, since it included the practical aspects of their traveling together for several years.

“And the things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, these entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also.” (2Tim. 2: 2)

The role of sisters who serve as deaconesses is more important than most realize, probably because their work is usually done more in the background and is thus less visible than that of men. However, Paul made it clear in his epistle to the Romans how valuable their work was to him personally, as well as to the church.

“I commend to you our sister Phoebe, who is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea; that you receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints,

and that you help her in whatever matter she may have need of you; for she herself has also been a helper of many, and of myself as well. . . . greet Mary, who worked hard for you. . . .” (Rm. 16: 1-6)

I suspect that it is a common failure among those overseeing churches to not move men into places of delegated responsibility soon enough. We tend to look for all the qualifications to be visible first. However, God sees the heart; He alone knows the needs of the people, how these needs can be met and how the responsibility and difficulties involved can help mature the candidate.

–The Old Testament Patterns of Elders and Deacons–

The tabernacle of Moses is a type (or shadow) of the house that God is building today.

“Now Moses was faithful in all his house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken later; but Christ was faithful as a Son over His house whose house we are . . .” (Heb. 3: 5-6)

The following illustration show how the Levitical priesthood in its relationship to the tabernacle is a shadow of elders and deacons in the local church (i.e., the house of God on earth).

The following observations of the various functions assigned Aaron and his fellow Levites, and their relationship together, provide a pattern of elders and deacon in the church.

The entire tribe of Levi (which included Aaron) was set aside from the rest of Israel as special to the Lord. They belonged to Him in place of all the firstborn in Israel; they were His to serve in the tabernacle. This tribe is a type of the DIAKONATE who are called by the Lord to serve His people in a local church (Num. 3: 12, 18: 1-7).

Aaron and his sons were ordained and consecrated for their office over a seven day period. They were anointed with holy oil to set them aside in their priesthood. The Levites were appointed to their tasks (Ex. 29: 7-35; Num. 4). Elders are anointed as shepherds, and they appoint deacons.

The Levites were assigned to perform all tasks related to service of the tabernacle.

They were literally “given to” Aaron and his sons to serve them so that the Aaronic priesthood could function as required by the Lord (Num. 36: 10). This is analogous to the supportive functions of deacons.

The garments that Aaron and his sons wore were for beauty, glory and holiness. The Lord instructed Moses how each item of clothing was a part of their consecration, and each piece was designed to express some significance of ministry. For example, on each of the two shoulder pieces of the ephod there was mounted an onyx stone, upon which was inscribed six of the twelve tribes of Israel. Over the heart, a pouch (or breastplate) was fastened which had twelve unique stones set in it, one for each tribe. Within the pouch, the urim and thummin were carried by which God gave direction to the nation. These picture for us the responsibility elders have to bear the burdens of the whole church, and how their ministry of service must be from the heart for all the body. The urim and thummin speak of the responsibility elders have for prophetic guidance and direction of the church (Ex 28).

As a part of the consecration of Aaron and his sons, Moses was instructed to place some blood from the ram of ordination on the lobe of their right ear, on the thumb of their right hand, and on the big toe of their right foot. This speaks of the character requirements of elder show they listen, what they do and how they walk (Ex. 29: 20).

The emphasis on character is also seen in the record of Aaron's rod (Num. 16, 17). When rebellion broke out in Israel against Moses and Aaron, God had each tribe place a rod representing them in the sanctuary overnight. The next morning Aaron's rod for the tribe of Levi had sprouted and put forth buds, produced blossoms and bore almonds. By this sign the Lord showed Israel that His authority for them rested upon Aaron. When leadership exercises authority in the church, the validity of that authority is to be a character in which there are buds (new life); blossoms (a fragrant, sweet spirit), almonds (fruits of the spirit).

Aaron and his sons were responsible for any sin in the sanctuary or in the priesthood (Num. 18: 1). Elders are responsible to deal with sin that is not repented of in the church (1Cor. 5).

–Elders and Traveling Ministries–

The relationship between elders and the ascension gift ministries is better understood by considering the three growth phases of a typical assembly.

The first stage is the birth phase. Through evangelistic ministry (such as that of Philip

at Samaria recorded in Acts 8: 5-12) people are brought to repentance, converted to Christ, and baptized in water and the Holy Spirit. One might say that material is being assembled to build a local expression of the body of Christ. This phase will continue through a period of teaching and instruction. Responsibility for oversight lies with the one who has fathered them in Christ. Ideally, that person (or persons) will have been sent out from another assembly and will report back for prayer and other support as needed. This phase is initially concerned with each convert's personal relationship with the Lord; later, there will be instruction on the believer's relationship together, and what it means to be committed as a member of the body of Christ. The second growth stage can be thought of as the "foundation phase." What has been lacking in the assembly to this point is local leadership. When elders are set in place, the assembly can begin to function as a local expression of the body of Christ.

"For this reason I left you in Crete, that you might set in order what remains, and appoint elders in every city as I directed you." (Titus 1: 5)

"And when they [Barnabus and Paul] had appointed elders for them in every church, having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed." (Acts 14: 23)

This phase is the end result of much teaching concerning the bond of covenant relationship that the people have been called to in their fellowship together. They are challenged to become a corporate expression of Christ to their local area, a people who have been discipled to function as members who are bonded together as one body in Christ. That does not imply that at this time it is a mature church, but rather that a proper foundation has been laid upon which lives can build and mature together in Christ. Apostolic and prophetic ministries, if not prominent in the first phase, will be in this one; for everything to be built in the future must be supported on this foundation being laid (1Cor. 3: 10). It is only when the foundation has been completed, that men who have committed themselves to what God is doing among the people, and who have the Lord's anointing upon them for leadership, will be appointed as elders to shepherd the flock. From this point on, the responsibility for that assembly rests on these elders who will share the oversight equally. Submission to the Lord and one another has been a key part of the foundation built in their lives. Because of this, they should be able to provide the oversight and correction needed in one another's life, so that they can walk in victory and be above reproach in their office. Collegiality serves to keep Jesus preeminent in His rightful place as the "Chief Shepherd" of the assembly (1Pet. 5: 4). It also sets an example to the flock of how they are to submit to one another (Eph. 5: 21). It is easy for sheep to follow men who go before them demonstrating a commitment to serve one another, and who stand

united as one man in shepherding them. They are visible as men who are both in authority and under authority. To be under the authority of someone in a distant assembly, one who cannot be a part of your every day life, has little value. The elders will be responsible for bringing in traveling ministries to help equip the saints for service as they see need for them. There should exist a “child-father” relationship between the elders and the one who fathered their assembly, so that instruction and correction may be offered from time to time (such as the relationship between Paul and the church at Corinth). The third stage of growth can be considered the “fatherhood phase.” Although the local elders share responsibility equally in the assembly, it will soon become evident that their ministries are different. Pastors in the eldership will manifest a greater burden and concern for nurturing and shepherding the flock entrusted to them. However, others will become concerned with building the body of Christ on a more global basis; their vision will include both the immediate locality and areas beyond. It can involve an outreach ministry of evangelism, or ministry oriented toward building up and equipping saints in other assemblies. These two ministry orientations of an “inward vision” and “outward vision” are valid. The presence of both emphases in the leadership helps to ensure a proper balance between missionary outreach and inward development in the vision imparted to the church. This phase is a necessary one if the assembly is to reproduce itself. Ministries are birthed from the womb of local assemblies, and assemblies are in turn birthed by these ministries. This is the life cycle by which Christ builds His church. For this reason, apostolic and prophetic ministries should be expected to emerge from the DIAKONATE of an assembly. Such men should be supported in their ministry and sent out by their peers; having been sent out they are to report back on the fruits of their ministry (Acts 14: 26-28). The recognition of their ministry should be made solely on the fruits of their ministry. It will be only as valid as what has been built in the lives of those they have ministered to. If they have been birthed from a “New Testament” assembly, they should be able to lay a foundation for such an assembly to be built in the lives of others. It will not be easy for elders to trust one another and flow together in harmony when they see this separation in vision. However, it is primarily these very differences that the Lord uses to melt hearts together in a stronger covering of the flock. It is this diversity in ministry that more completely reflects Christ to the church. Each leader must learn he cannot be independent; the Lord's ministers are not “Lone Rangers.” We really do need one another much more than we realize. What a contrast such a relationship provides when compared to each one doing his own thing, to seeking personal recognition, and putting down others who function differently! As long as those with the “outward vision” are resident and ministering locally, they are seen as elders. Each contributes the life of Christ within him as one enrichment of local shepherding (i.e., prophecy, teaching, counseling, etc.). When they travel, they are to be received for their specific

ministry, that which the anointing upon them will uniquely contribute to the assembly.

“He who receives a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward” (Mt. 10: 41)

For example, Peter was both an apostle and an elder (1Pet. 5: 10; Judas and Silas were elders at Jerusalem and also prophets (Acts 15: 22-32). Acts 13 and 14 provide an excellent record of the outward vision and ministry of Paul and Barnabas from the church at Antioch

–Commitment to Serve–

I believe the early church preached a greater call to commitment than we are accustomed to today. If new converts are not called into commitment and discipleship by other men, then we will not see ministries raised up that conform to the standard given in scripture. When we lead people to Christ, it is not an impersonal message we preach. We are committing our self to serve them in ministry so that Christ will become Lord of their lives. In turn, they are expected to respond by committing themselves, for this is the essential building block of church life. Paul's epistle to the Corinthians points out this element of relationship in the preaching and response of the gospel

“For we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your bond servants for Jesus' sake.” (2Cor. 4: 5)

“. . .and this not as we had expected, but they first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God.” (2Cor. 8: 5)

This depth of commitment builds character in hearts; hearts that can be read by all, for the lives that we build in ministry speak more clearly than the words we utter.

“You are our letter, written in our hearts, known and read by all men; being manifested that you are a letter of Christ, served [cared for] by us . . .” (2Cor. 3: 3)

A commitment to serve in the DIAKONATE means that your heart is to become a “carbon copy” of the letter being written in the hearts of those you are serving. This bond of relationship is key in the process of bringing responsible men of the

assembly into the ministries that God has called them to. A good example of this is the ministry of Elisha. The greatest miracle accomplished by Elijah was the building of his ministry into Elisha. The record of Elisha's miracles portray the pattern of Elijah's earlier ministry, but on a greater scale and without Elijah's failures (i.e., running from Jezebel and believing himself to be the only righteous one in Israel). Each generation of ministry produced ought to be one of ascension in quality (not the declension seen in church history). There should be greater results from the young men God is calling into ministry today, than from that of their fathers. Elisha spent much time with Elijah, learning from him and serving him. His commitment to receive the anointing of Elijah is vividly expressed in the record of II Kings 2.

Paul's discipling of the men who became elders at Ephesus provides great insight into the dimensions and depth of such training.

“Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears.” (Acts 20: 31)

For three years, Paul daily poured out his heart to establish these men in their personal character and relationship together, so that they would be able to stand as one man in shepherding the church. His teaching was not confined to character and commitment, but also in unveiling the purposes of God for the church.

“For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God.” (Acts 20: 27)

Furthermore, he lived before them the gospel he preached. His life was an example of how they were to serve one another and the flock.

“You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my own needs and to the men who were with me. In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, ‘it is more blessed to give than to receive.’” (Acts 20: 34-35)

Paul did not minister alone, but was accompanied by others assisting him (and possibly also being trained). Ministry teams were common in the early church; other examples are given in the following scriptures Acts 8: 14, 13: 2, 15: 27, 16: 1-4, 185, 19: 22; 1Corinthians 1: 19; 16: 17; Colossians 4: 7-9; and Philippians 2: 19-22.

Each believer is called to serve. Traveling ministries are sent out to equip saints for

their work of service. Elders and deacons serve the body and set an example by their relationship with one another so that the whole body learns to serve one another. Out of this service new ministries are born. It is from such an environment that the Lord's DIAKONATE will be continually raised up and His church built.
Amen.