

No “Office” of Authority for Pastor or Deacon

Many churches see the words “pastor” or “deacon” to convey “an office” of authority over people. Where did that thought originate? There are three places in scripture where the phrase “**office of deacon**” and “**office of bishop**” are used in the King James Version, and we will look at each one of them to illustrate the unfortunate English translation that leads to a concept of authority over others.

DEACONS: A *serving* ministry (Acts 6:2-4).

I don’t deny that there were those who were set aside to serve the saints in the first-century church. Acts 6 shows this as well as other passages (Read Acts 6:1-4). However, when New Testament believers used the Greek word *diakonia* (we use the English word deacon) to describe what was being done within that early congregation, they had in mind the attitude of Jesus who had “*made Himself of no reputation and took upon Him the form of a servant...*” (Philippians 2:7).

What they had observed in Him was a washing of human feet, feeding the multitudes, healing the sick, *always as one serving*, and thus, He left us an example that can only be explained with the Greek word *diakonia* (remember, we say deacon) which means ministering or serving. But there is no hint from Scripture that the early Christians considered deacons as having any authority because of “an office” in the church (like the “Office of President of the United States”). In fact, the general sense of the word *diakonia* is “*to assist*,” which indicates not just to work in general, but a work that benefits someone else. ***This is true whether it is a ministry of waiting on tables or a ministry of the word.***

Paul used the word *diakonos* to describe himself as a “servant of the Lord” (1 Corinthians 3:5), a “servant of God” (2 Corinthians 6:4), a “servant of the new covenant” (2 Corinthians 3:6), a “servant of the gospel” (Ephesians 3:7, Colossians 1:23) and a “servant of the church” (Colossians 1:25). Paul noted that many of his co-workers were also servants. For example, **the woman Phoebe**, was a *diakonia* of the Lord. However, when the King James translators in the year AD 1611 came across the Greek word *diakonos* linked to a woman, it is for some strange reason translated helper instead of minister (for example, see Romans 16:1). Other men like Tychicus, (Ephesians 6:21, Colossians 4:7) Timothy, (1 Timothy 4:6) and Epaphras, were called *diakonos*, just like Phoebe (Colossians 1:7).

Jesus said that all of his followers should be *diakonos* (read Matthew 20:26, 23:11 and John 12:26), which means that a *servant’s spirit* should characterize all of us. So, with all Christians doing the work of a deacon (*diakonos*) as deacons of Christ, deacons of His message, and deacons of one another, one is hard-pressed to find **authority** over in that word.

You can see there is no hint in the New Testament of anyone holding an office called deacon which gives one authority over other Christians. Since that is the case, where did the idea of the office of deacon come from in our churches? ANSWER: The King James Version translates the word *diakonos* in a manner that goes well beyond the true meaning of the word and winds up adding concepts to the original text that were never intended. For example, in 1 Timothy 3:13 where Paul says:

“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” (I Timothy 3:13).

The seven words, **“have used the office of a deacon”** were all used to translate (and define) one Greek word, *diakonea*, which according to the Greek scholar, A. H. Strong, is a word which means: **“To be a servant, attendant, domestic, to serve, wait upon.”**

W.E. Vine adds this about the word *diakonea*: “The Revised Version rightly omits **office** and translates the verb *diakonea* to mean simply **“to serve.”** Notice, the Greek scholar, W.E. Vine, admits that the word “office” is not found in I Timothy 3:13. Throughout the entire NT the word *diakonea* is **NEVER** used to imply or show an office and it certainly doesn’t imply rule. It is the service done by one who is serving another person. The use of the words **“have used the office of a deacon”** was an attempt by the King James Version translators, as it would appear, to identify an office that was already in operation at the time of translation and to continue it by including a phrase in the text to support it.

Thus, a hierarchical office is assumed by the King James Version translators, **but unauthorized by the writers of the New Testament**. I will restate the problem with the word “office” succinctly:

Having “an office of authority” called deacon within the church reflects a cultural bias of the 1611 King James translators of the Bible. They held a hierarchical view of spiritual authority, and they placed their interpretation of this spiritual authority into the King James Version.

This fraudulent concept of church authority is nowhere to be found in the sacred Scriptures. It is a system of authority that had already become a religious hierarchical system by 1611. The translators practiced what is called *eisegesis* in their translation of the Greek into English. They read into the text.

PASTORS: A serving ministry as well (I Timothy 3:1).

The KJV wrongly translates the Greek in I Timothy 3:1 as: “This is a true saying, if a man desires **the office of a bishop**, he desires a good work.” Again, the word “office” is not present in I Timothy 3:1. Further, the Greek word translated bishop is the single word *episkopos*, which means **“to tend or to oversee.”** So, the word office was incorrectly placed in the verse and the word bishop was used to translate oversee, because the translators had bishops in King James’ day, and they wished to maintain their hierarchical positions of authority.

A proper translation of 1 Timothy 3:1 would simply be: **“If a person sets their heart on overseeing, it is an honorable work they desire to do.”** There is no office of bishop at all in the text. It is just a person desiring a ministry of overseeing to which the Apostle is referring.

The only other instance in the New Testament where the English word “office” is found is in **Romans 12:4** where the KJV says, **“For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office.”** The English word “office” DOES NOT properly translate the Greek word “praxis,” which means “a doing or a deed or a function.” It is the same word used in Romans 8:13, **“...for if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds (praxis) of the body, you will live.”** NOT ALL JESUS FOLLOWERS DO THE SAME THING. Simply put, any idea of an office in the church with “spiritual authority over Christians” does not exist in the Bible.