

(T) Welcome to **Discipleship training On The Air**. In this teaching series, you will have an opportunity to learn about the practical life of the Christian community. Two teachers will teach from the Bible about the Christian ceremonies. As you listen to this programme, make notes in a notebook or record the programme. Today's teaching is: **THE CEREMONY OF COMMISSIONING CHURCH ELDERS**. We will learn what the Bible teaches about the church leaders, how they should be chosen and how they should be commissioned as leaders of the church.

(S) **POINT 1. CHURCH LEADERS**

First. Jesus Christ and the apostles as church leaders.

One. Who is the real and only leader of the Church? According to Matthew 16:18 and Ephesians 1:22, Jesus Christ is the Founder, Builder, Owner and Head of the Church. He only is the Head of the Church world-wide and of every local church. No human being may assume this position. Jesus Christ exercises his authority in the Church through the Bible, the Holy Spirit as it speaks according to the Bible and the elders of the local church as they speak according to the Bible. Jesus Christ gave the Church its constitution, that is, the fundamental teachings according to which the Church should be governed. These teachings are embodied in the New Testament.

(T) Two. Are there still apostles of Jesus Christ today? No. According to Ephesians 2:19-20, the apostles of Jesus Christ were a unique group of men. They were the official eye-witnesses of his resurrection from the dead. They were endowed with special grace of the Holy Spirit in order to proclaim the truth in the beginning of the Church history, to record this truth in the New Testament books and to plant the first local churches everywhere. They were given authority to include or exclude people from God's kingdom, to formulate doctrine for the whole Church and to appoint the first instituted leaders of the local churches. The apostles of Jesus Christ consisted of the twelve disciples of Jesus Christ and the apostle Paul. They have no successors, because nobody in the following ages would qualify according to Acts 1:21-22. Today, they are no more apostles as foundational leaders of the Church. Nobody may call himself an *apostle* and act as if he has the same authority as one of the apostles of Jesus Christ.

(S) **Second. The elders and deacons as church leaders.**

One. Who should be the leaders of the churches today? Acts 14:23 and Titus 1:5 teach that when the new churches were founded, the apostles of Jesus Christ and their co-workers appointed *elders* in every local church. Thus, the leaders of churches today should be elders. The elders were appointed to lead the local church. The leadership of the local church was *never* the responsibility of just one person, for example, a pastor or a bishop. The Bible teaches very clearly that the leadership of the local church was the responsibility of a group of elders. 1 Timothy 4:14 calls this group of elders *a body of elders* or *a board of elders* or *a council of elders* (G: presbuterion). The Bible shows that the local churches were independent in authority, but maintained a healthy inter-dependence with respect to helping one another.

(T) Two. Are the deacons also leaders of the local church? No. The New Testament records only three local churches that had deacons. The New Testament teaches that elders were chosen for *leadership* and deacons were chosen only for *a special service*, if such a service became necessary. If a local church needs deacons, then deacons should be chosen according to 1 Timothy 3:8-13. Thus, today only elders should be the instituted leaders of the local churches everywhere in the world and deacons should not assume that responsibility. Deacons are chosen and appointed only when they are needed to serve in special tasks for which the other believers cannot or do not yet take responsibility.

(S) **POINT 2. QUALIFICATIONS AND TASKS OF ELDERS**

Acts 20:28, 1 Timothy 3:1-7, Titus 1:6-9 and 1 Peter 5:1-5 teach the biblical qualifications and the biblical tasks of elders.

First. The qualifications of the elders. The elders of the church should never be chosen because of their position, power or wealth in society. They should only be chosen on the basis of their personal behaviour, family life and ministry abilities!

Second. The tasks of the elders. The elders of the church have four tasks. The elders as a group, board or council should together be *the shepherds* of the people in the church, *the stewards* or directors of the activities in the church, *the teachers* and preachers of God's Word and in all this *the servants* of God and people.

(T) **The first task of the elders is to be shepherds and overseers of God's flock.**

This is recorded in Acts 20:28 and 1 Peter 5:1-4.

The word *shepherd* in the Latin is '*pastor*'. The leadership of the local church should *never* be the responsibility of just one person, for example, a pastor. The Bible teaches very clearly that the leadership of the local church should be the responsibility of a group of elders. As *shepherds*, the elders should *oversee* the local church just as Jesus, the Good Shepherd, oversees the Church world-wide.

The word *overseer* in the original language of the Bible is '*bishop*' (Greek: episkopos). The leadership of the local church should never be the responsibility of just one person, for example, a bishop. A church should not appoint a bishop to oversee the elders, but *the elders are the bishops or overseers* of the local church! As *shepherds* or *overseers*, the elders feed, protect, care and guide the members of the local church with a view to their spiritual growth and well-being. The elders should keep watch over one another and over the members of the local church. The elders should be wide awake against false teachers.

The elders should also show concern and loving care to the really needy members of the local church, like orphans, widows and new converts. Elders should visit and pray for the sick.

(S) **The second task of the elders is to be stewards of God's household.**

This is recorded in 1 Timothy 3:5 and Titus 1:7.

As *stewards*, the elders are entrusted with the activities and possessions of the local church. They should manage the functions of people, the activities of the church and be responsible for the administration of the local church. The elders, and not the deacons, should direct the affairs of the local church. However, the leadership style of elders may not be one of *lording it over* those entrusted to them, but one of *leading by example*. If an elder does not manage his own family well and his wife or children need more attention, he should resign as an elder in order to give his family what they need. The body of elders should manage all the meetings within the local church, like worship services and training. They should also manage the outreach meetings into the world, like evangelism and missionary work.

(T) **The third task of the elders is to be teachers or preachers of God's Word.**

This is recorded in 1 Timothy 3:2 and 5:17 and Titus 1:9. As *teachers*, the elders should use the Bible to instruct the members of the local church in the whole will of God (Act 20:27) and in anything that would be helpful (Act 20:20). They should *teach* the members to *obey* all that Jesus Christ has commanded (Mt 28:19). The elders should use the Bible to *preach* God's Word to non-Christians and Christians alike. They should use the Bible to *teach* the members of the local church, to *encourage* them and to *warn* them. They should use the Bible to *discuss and decide doctrinal issues* and to *refute false teachings*.

(S) **The fourth task of the elders is to be servants of God and people.**

This is recorded in Matthew 20:25-28 and 1 Peter 5:1-4. As *servants* of God and people, the elders should carry out tasks for the benefit of others. This task summarises *the leadership style* of the elders. The leadership style of the elders in the church should be radical different from the leadership style of leaders in the world. The elders should serve *willingly, freely and eagerly*. They may *not lord it over* those entrusted to them. They should *be examples* to the believers. Rather than leading by commands, they should lead by example. Rather than being served, they should serve the members.

(T) **POINT 3. QUALIFICATIONS AND TASKS OF DEACONS**

A local church should only chose deacons when the ordinary members are not able or willing to serve in necessary tasks in the church. When a local church chooses deacons, they should look for men who meet the biblical qualifications and who are able to do the biblical tasks.

First. The qualifications of the deacons. The biblical qualifications for all deacons are recorded in 1 Timothy 3:8-13 and Acts 6:3. Deacons should never be chosen because of their position, power or wealth in society. They should be chosen on the basis of their personal behaviour, family life and ministry abilities.

Second. The tasks of the deacons. The tasks of the deacons may be divided into two categories. Deacons should take care of the new conditions that need immediate attention. Deacons should also take care of the needy people.

(S) **The first task of the deacons is to take care of the new conditions that need immediate attention.** This is recorded in Acts 6:1-7. There are two things that deacons may NOT do. Deacons may *not be the leaders of the local church*. Deacons may not direct the affairs of the local church, because that is the task of the body of elders. Deacons may also *not be the servants that do all the service* within the local church, because that is the task of all the believers. Deacons should only take care of the new conditions that arise as a result of the preaching of the Word and of church-growth. They should especially take care of the needs that require special skills or that are still neglected by the body of

believers. Therefore deacons are often *the leaders of specific assigned tasks* within the local church, like being Sunday school teachers, youth leaders, evangelism co-ordinators, etc. While the elders are leaders in the leadership tasks, the deacons are leaders in the service tasks.

(T) **The second task of the deacons is to take care of the needy people.** This is recorded in Acts 6:1-7 and 2 Corinthians chapters 8-9. The deacons were chosen because the elders did not have the ability, time and energy to take care of the needy people in addition to their own tasks. One special task of the deacons is to gather the offerings that Christians make to God and then to distribute these gifts in the proper spirit to the needy people within their own church. Another task of the deacons is to administrate the gifts that are intended for helping other churches in need or intended to help the needy in their society.

(S) **POINT 4. QUALIFICATIONS AND TASKS OF WOMEN WORKERS**

In 1 Timothy 2:12 and 1 Corinthians 14:33-38 the Bible clearly teaches that the leadership in the Church should be male. The apostle teaches, "I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man." He is not just talking of the *wives*, but of the *sisters* in general. He says that this is the Lord's command and warns that whoever ignores this command, will be ignored by God.

However, the sisters in the church are just as valuable and just as important as the brothers in God's eyes! The sisters are equally a part of the Body of Christ and should equally serve in the Church. But God has assigned a different set of functions to the sisters. *In the physical area* she bears children in marriage. *In the social area* she is the helper of her husband. In the spiritual area she is not a part of the leadership of the church, but takes special responsibility in ministry to children, to other women, to the sick, the poor and the needy. God has assigned the function of leadership in marriage and in the Church to men.

(T) **First. The qualifications of women workers.** When the elders of a local church chooses to have sisters as workers, they should look for women that meet the biblical qualifications and who are able to do the biblical tasks. The biblical qualifications of women workers are recorded in 1 Timothy 3:11. They must be worthy of respect and not be gossips. They must be temperate, that is, be moderate and well-balanced with respect to their tastes and habits. And they must be trustworthy in everything. Thus, also the women workers should be chosen on the basis of their behaviour and abilities.

(S) **Second. The tasks of women workers.** In 1 Timothy 3:11, the women workers function as the *assistants or helpers* of the deacons. They especially help the deacons in their task towards the needy and the poor. The women workers should perform the tasks for which women are better adapted. In 1 Timothy 5:9-16, there existed a group of older widows with definite functions. From early church history we know that the women had the following functions. They gave counsel to younger women, as Titus 2:3-5 also teaches. They prayed and visited the sick. They prepared women for baptism and took them to the Lord's Supper. And they gave guidance and direction to widows and orphans who were supported by the local church.

(T) **POINT 5. CHOOSING AND COMMISSIONING CHURCH ELDERS**

First. The selection of elders must be based on the biblical qualifications and their abilities to do their biblical required tasks. Those men in the church, who are already demonstrating their leadership abilities by the way they live and serve, are the best candidates to become elders.

Some elders may be called and equipped to serve the local church fulltime. Such fulltime elders are generally called 'pastors', but they have no higher status or authority than the other elders in the body of elders. Their training in a Bible School or Theological Seminary does not give any of them the right to become a fulltime church elder!

Some men and women in the church may have spiritual gifts like serving and helping, or administration and giving that could enhance their ministry as deacons or women workers.

(S) **Second. The appointment of elders** for *the new churches* should be done by the missionaries and their co-workers that planted those churches. The appointment of new elders for *the established churches* should be done by the existing elders together with the believers of the church. Acts 1 and 6 relate that the ordinary believers took part in *choosing* an apostle and the deacons. Therefore, it seems probable that the ordinary believers of the local church also took part in choosing the elders. The existing elders should guide the choice of the believers by calling attention to the necessary qualifications and tasks required by the Bible.

Elders, deacons and women's workers in the New Testament period were chosen, not by voting, but in accordance with the biblical instructions and with general approval of the members of the church. The Christian Church never made decisions by democratic voting, but by consensus, that is, by general approval and agreement of everyone in the church!

(T) **Third. The term of office for elders** *should be limited* to a few years. The Bible does not mention how long the elders stayed in office. Therefore each local church may make a wise decision about the term of office. However, in order to safeguard against abuse of this office, a limited term of office is wise, practical and advisable. This also gives other leaders with different strengths a turn to serve as elder. The term of office for deacons need not be limited, because their task is not to rule, but to serve! According to Acts 6-8, the deacons continued in their function until their task was completed.

(S) **Fourth. Commissioning of church leaders.** According to Acts 6:6, 14:23 and 1 Timothy 4:14, elders and deacons were entrusted to the Lord's care and protection with *prayer* and *the laying on of hands*. The laying on of hands *symbolises* the transfer of authority and spiritual abilities to do their tasks. 1 Timothy 5:22 warns that the church should not be hasty in the choice of elders and also not hasty in the laying on of hands. Elders should be carefully and prayerfully chosen, appointed and commissioned!

(T) **ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK**

First. Teach new believers how the church leaders ought to be chosen.

Second. See the workbooks "Go and build Christ's Church" and Internet on www.dota.net

Third. Listen every SATURDAY to WEDNESDAY on the radio to "Discipleship training on the air".