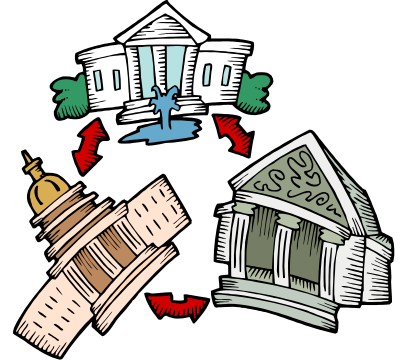


Learn Your Bible

Lesson #11

THE GOVERNMENT OF THE CHURCH

Few realize that the organization of the church can be discerned from the Bible. We don't need to be named after a specific method of government (Methodist, Presbyterian, Congregationalist) because the Bible gives us one example. When we say "Christian" in its biblical sense, we identify ourselves. Our purpose in this lesson will be to construct the government of the church.



THE HEAD OF THE CHURCH

One of our first questions is going to be, "who's the boss?" Every organization, country, etc. has to have someone in charge. That "someone" in the church, is Jesus Christ. "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth." (Matthew 28:18). "And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all. Ephesians 1:22,23). "He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything." (Colossians 1:18).



That Jesus alone is given the headship or preeminence of the church is very clearly shown. To call someone else by the title, "Your Eminence," is to deny the preeminence of Jesus Christ. To have a government or a system different from the revealed will of God (the New Testament example) is to deny that Jesus has "all authority:" in the realm of religion. The only authority for adding someone or something to the government of the Church (i.e. the Pope, Missouri Synod, Diocese, Southern Baptist Convention, etc.) is of man.

The first thing that comes to mind after thinking along these lines is that "this sounds like a monarchy or some form of

authoritarian government." The answer is, of course, correct! "He who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords," (I Timothy 6:15). While Jesus is a loving God, we must never forget that to go beyond what He has decreed in His new covenant is to usurp His authority, to rebel against his kingship! The government of the church then, is revealed through the completed Word. If we'll be governed by it, then we are his subjects.

THE EARTHLY ORGANIZATION OF HIS CHURCH

There is of course, no earthly head. The head is Jesus Christ in heaven. Another thing that becomes clear with only a light reading of the New Testament is that the congregations were autonomous. Each congregation is separate from any other. When Jesus came back for a final admonition to the churches, (Rev 2 & 3) He did not address the diocese of Asia, but addressed each congregation individually.



There are three offices, as such, within each congregation. These are the "Elders" (Pastor, or overseer), "Deacons", and "Evangelist", (or preacher). The three positions are clearly distinguishable and must not be confused, as the denominations have confused preacher and pastor. A preacher can also be a pastor (see I Peter 5:1) if qualified.

The office of Elder is appointed the job of overseeing the affairs of each congregation. There are three titles or descriptions given for the same office. These come from three different Greek terms. The first is "Presbuteros" translated Presbyter, or Elder. It refers to one advanced in life, an older person. The word itself was used of men around the age of 50. We can see then, from the label alone, this is no job for a young man. This label has the man himself in mind, as our first name (for example John) has us in mind.

The second Greek term is that of "Episkopos," translated "Bishop" or "Overseer". It refers to a Superintendent. The one in charge of seeing things are done properly. This label has the office of the man in mind, like the term husband or father would.

The third Greek term is that of "Poimen," translated "feed, pastor or shepherd." It refers to the actions of the person, specifically the function, the Bishop (or Overseer) is given to perform.

With the three terms in mind, it becomes easy to understand their meaning when seen in use. Paul called the Elders of the church before him (Acts 20:17). In his farewell address to them, he said, "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 which He purchased with His own blood." Acts 20:28).

It is obvious that the Elder was to oversee and to feed the church. Another translation might have the Presbyter, bishoping and pastoring the church. Different translations may be a little confusing, but if the three Greek terms are kept in mind, it helps.

Peter also helps to clarify this issue, "Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as {your} fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to {the will of} God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness;" (I Peter 5:1,2).

Note that Peter gave them charge to "feed the flock," Moffatt's translation renders it, "be shepherds to your flock of God." They are told to shepherd or pastor the flock. The modern denominations have altered the word of God when a preacher is the pastor! the Elders are the Pastors.

A Deacon is one of those "less clear" roles in the New Testament. Most of our knowledge of the role of a Deacon comes from the title itself. The word means "a servant." Apparently the deacon is an office of servant under the elders. In Acts chapter 6 the apostles told a congregation to



choose out seven men to serve tables in order that the apostles were free for spiritual things. Most agree this was an early example for the role of a deacon, though this is before deacons as such were instituted. The only conclusion to be drawn is that the deacons (as the seven in Acts 6 served under the apostles) serve under the Elders.

The Evangelist is the last of the offices in the church. He is somewhat separate from the congregation. His primary role is to teach, whether from a pulpit, a street corner, or a kitchen table. Paul told the evangelist Timothy, "Pay close attention to yourself and to

your teaching; persevere in these things, for as you do this you will ensure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you. (I Timothy 4:16). "The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also." (II Timothy 2:2).

Whether as a traveling preacher (the normal for Timothy) or a located preacher (Phillip), the preacher's job is to teach and preach. "preach the word; be ready in season {and} out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction." II Timothy 4:2. He is also given the responsibility of appointing elders (Acts 14:23).

He has the job of visiting the sick, but no more than any other Christian. He is not anymore a marriage counselor than any other Christian. (These roles are that of an elder.) This is an often abused concept, the preacher is not a "hired Christian!" He is not the clergy, but is a brother to all the congregation. He is no more a priest than the other members of the congregation. All are priests under the Christian dispensation (I Peter 2:5, Rev 1:6). Our High Priest is in heaven, so is our Father, or "Reverend"!



The scriptures contain no central organization for the church, no Pope, Synod, Southern Baptist convention, big Bishops, little Bishops, little Priests, big Priests, committees, no democratic procedure, superintendent of Sunday School, Youth Director, etc. Where God has not given us authority, **we dare not go!!**

1) What form of government does the church have? _____

2) Who is the boss? _____

3) How does He rule? _____

4) His word is inspired, _____ and _____
(see also Jude 3)

5) What is the effect of altering the government of the church in any way? _____

See also I Corinthians 4:6, Matthew 15:9, Matthew 28:18

6) Who is the earthly head of the "entire" church? _____
What scripture would justify an earthly head? _____

7) Many want to place Peter as Head using Matthew 16:19. However, Matthew 18:18 gives the same authority to all apostles. Read II Corinthians 11:5 and 12:11 and Galatians 2:5-14. If any one thing, who could be argued to be the most authoritative of the apostles? _____ The word of God in Matthew 18:18 shows all apostles to be what? _____

8) The congregations in the New Testament a) had a central government or b) were autonomous. (circle one)

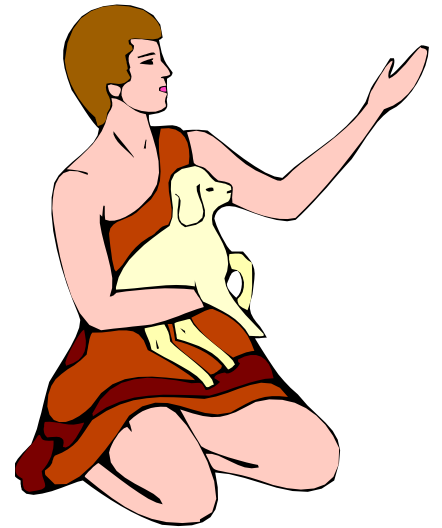


9) What authority is used for any organization larger than the congregation? (see Matthew 15:9) _____

10) When Jesus came to give his final admonition to the churches, He addressed the a) Diocese of Asia b) Synod of Asia c) Mid-eastern Baptist Convention d) each congregation individually.

11) Three terms are used to describe the office of elder (in Greek) What are they, and please explain each: _____

12) What is another way to say "feed, or "shepherd" the flock? _____



13) Who are the Pastors? _____ To who do most denominations give this job to (in defiance of the scriptures)?

14) What two passages discussed, show all three terms (in question 11) to refer to the same office?

15) Many want an elder (bishop, etc) to be over several congregations. Read I Peter 5:2. Over which flock do they have authority? _____

16) The Deacon is to be a servant. What example apparently should be used for their office's role? Acts 6:1-6 _____

17) The qualifications of Elder and Deacon are listed in I Timothy 3:1-14. Can an elder be a woman? (note: verses 2, 4, 5 and compare to 2:11,12)_____ Explain: _____

18) The Evangelist can be either a "traveling" or "located" preacher. Give an example of each _____ and _____.

19) What is the job of the Evangelist? (II Timothy 2:2, 4:2, Acts 14:23) _____

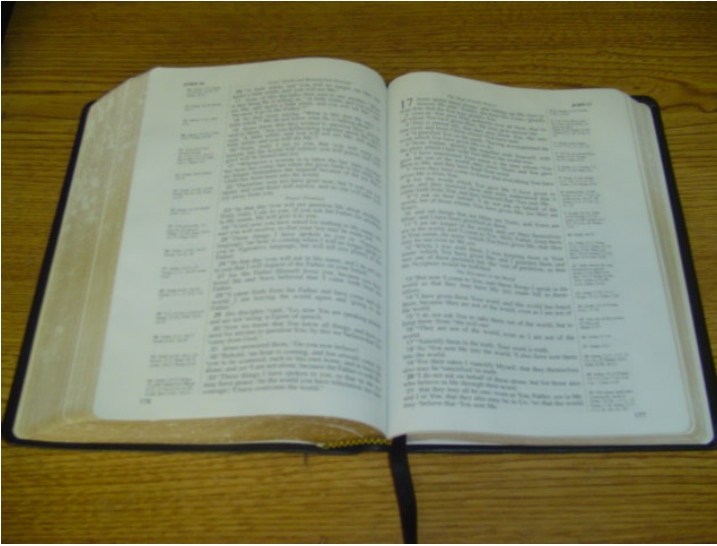
20) Read Matthew 23:8-10 and relate this to the practice of calling a preacher "Reverend" or "Father" _____

21) Read Psalms 111:9 This is the *only* place in the Bible that the term "Reverend" is used. (King James Version) "Awesome" is used in the NAS version. Who *alone* has the right to it? _____

22) Read I Peter 2:5, Revelations 1:6 Is there any justification for calling a preacher a priest? _____
Who are the priests? _____

- 23) Read John 3:25-31 A) What caused this discussion to come up?
Vs 26 _____
- B) What likely motivated John's disciples? _____
- C) What is John's attitude toward his lot in God's kingdom? Vs 27

- D) How is this relevant to study and Jesus' description of how He
wants His church to be governed? _____
- E) What attitude should we have as we seek to grow in God's
kingdom? Vs 30-31 _____



Let us be
content to abide in
the word of God.
"So faith {comes}
from hearing, and
hearing *by the word
of Christ.*" Romans
10:17

"Test yourselves {to see} if you are in the faith;
examine yourselves!"
II Corinthians 13:5.

Jerry Blount 5/80 revised 6/05