



CHURCH GOVERNMENT

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principles of the Scriptures

The ultimate authority to follow, is God's Word and the congregational if it is true to this Word, will put aside all human ambition, and be led by the Holy Spirit and adhere to God's word. Hear God Word Psalm 133 ***"Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity! It is like the precious oil on the head, running down on the beard, on the beard of Aaron, running down on the collar of his robes! It is like the dew of Hermon, which falls on the mountains of Zion! For there the LORD has commanded the blessing, life forevermore."***

It is both good and pleasant when a church lives its life together in a unified manner. It is like the anointed blessing of God in so much abundance that it covers us with God's blessing from the top of our head to our feet. It is here (in unified fellowship), that God has commanded the very blessing of eternal life. In other words, when we live in a unified manner, we experience a taste of the world to come, where we will live eternally in perfect unity.

Therefore. we are to get together to prayerfully process under the leadership of the Holy Spirit the vision and ministry of the church.

the pre-eminence."

It is clear to those who would follow God's Word that the modern "*elder*" rule is not of God and if not instituted of the Lord is out of His will. A man or group of men can do many things in the flesh, but if what they do comes from the flesh God is not a part of it. To ignore God's clear teaching on church organization is a serious error which will bring God's wrath.

God instituted the local church to be an assembly of **born again**, believers who join themselves into a flock to worship, have fellowship, and to propagate the Gospel from their location and into the *uttermost parts of the earth*. As exemplified in His word in both the Old and New Testament God calls a man to lead His people and to deliver His message to them.

A spiritual congregation being also lead of the Lord will see God's hand and wisdom and in unison with their elder/pastor carry on God's work. Furthermore, no man is given the authority to lord or exercise controlling authority over God's people. He is simply God's instrument to serve the Lord and the God's people.

The man is called by God and the local congregation seeing God's hand on him ordains him to lead them at God's direction. The pastor is not called to be the authority over the church or to rule over it. God's chosen leader is a pastor, a servant, and shepherd to the Lord's flock.

His and the congregation's authority is solely dictated by God's Word. God has given no one the authority to change His word, which includes biblical church organisation. Working together, praying together, studying together, coming together in unity, and following and putting into practice the

CHURCH GOVERNMENT!

Denominationalism is not Biblical in fact we could say that God does not approve of denominations. The early church in Acts was not divided into denominations; believers were added to a single, undivided church. Denominations often arose from loyalty to human leaders or specific theological interpretations rather than a direct command in scripture.

On the night before He was crucified, the Lord Jesus prayed "*Holy Father, keep them in Your name, that they may be one, even as We are one*" John 17:11. God desires the unity of His church, whereas denominations are divisive and are of human origin, and tend to become on the one hand worldly and compromising whilst of the other strict to the extent of being ultra strict.

Before moving on it is worth a quick mention of various denominations and methods of church government, yours truly has been involved in all four at one time or another, and all have their problems.

THEY ARE

Presbyterian asserts that the authority of Christ is administered through the congregation by the elected representatives of the congregation called elders or presbyters

Congregational emphasis on the priesthood of every believer, **Episcopalian**, this system of governance is based on a hierarchy of bishops.

Methodism is governed by a democratically elected body called the Methodist Conference.

The Kingdom Network (2021): Formed as an exit from the Reformed Church in America

Each have their own take on the matter, resulting in the

fragmenting into various sects or sub-divisions, for example the Bible Presbyterian Church in the USA was called the Spilt Pea Church. In each of these groups there are liberals, moderates, traditional, and strict even hyper strict sects.

The first fact we must keep in mind, is that the Lord Jesus Christ is the head of the church this means Jesus has supreme authority, leadership, and guidance to the church, which is described as His body, receiving nourishment and direction from Him, making Him both its source and ruler, as shown in the New Testament (Ephesians, Colossians). Christ is the ultimate authority, and the church's dependence on Him for existence and growth.

In the New Testament, there are only two official roles or offices elder and deacon.

Elders are also referred to in Scripture as “pastors, presbyters, and bishops” these are interchangeable terms, and do not place one in a higher position of authority.

Deacon" comes from the Greek diakonos, meaning "servant" one who serves or has practical responsibilities to the congregation.

The New Testament church called men and were given specific responsibilities. They were responsible ultimately to the congregation. This also means that every Christian shares the responsibility of ministering to other members of the Christian community.

Every church member has the Divine right to have a voice in determining the direction of the church, so long as it is accordance with Gods Word. This form of church management is taught in the Bible which makes it clear that certain decisions are to be made by the congregation, not a council be it local or

that spiritual leadership can only come from an elite or special class of upper-class officers in the church.

These self-appointed people purport that only through these superior persons does God speak and gives authority to control and dictate to the congregation. It totally ignores the priesthood of the believer as being indwelt and being led of the Holy Spirit.

Historically, the congregation at Ephesus did not purge themselves of this unbiblical idea Today it is still around in various forms in such apostate churches as the Roman Catholic and many Protestant denominations. It is also prevalent in the Christian cults.

Every member of the body of Christ is a minister responsible to his Savior for his own spiritual relationship to Christ. No one can intercede between a believer and His Lord. Every Christian is a believer-priest and needs no one to intercede on his behalf save Christ Himself.

The institution of the local church (*ekkleisa* -assembly) was given by the Lord to edify, build up believers in the word of God and to evangelize the world. Each congregation is responsible to follow the Bible, God's Word which alone is "***given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness. That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works***" 2Timothy 3:16-17.

The Lord said He hated the deeds of the Nicolaitans who sought to put a congregation in bondage to their authority. If Christ said He hated the deeds of these people who sought to rule over the congregation how can any denomination, church or believer condone being ruled by a hierarchy of men? John in his third letter in verses nine to eleven pointed in condemning Diotrephes who it appeared "***who loveth to have***

congregation of the Lord?" Numbers 16:3. He argued that the congregation of Israel did not need Moses, and that he could lead better. Without God's approval, he proceeded to take the leadership of Israel upon himself. God severely punished him for his error and destroyed him, his family and those that followed him and 14,700 people died, Numbers 16:1-50.

Leadership within a local church is set by God in the man whom He calls. The pastor is to lead, guide and set the example. God's pastor should be warned not to abuse or to take their responsibility lightly. A church should not allow itself to usurp the pastors' role as God's under-shepherd, nor should the pastor allow his God appointed position to be degraded by the church. Hebrews 12:17.

In Revelation 2:6 Christ commended the church as Ephesus because they hated the deeds of the Nicolaitanes which the Lord said He also hated. The word Nicolaitan is made up of two Greek words, meaning "*Niko*" to conquer and "*Laos*" the people. It simply means that to these people there was a difference between the "laity" the people in the pew, and the clergy that were the church's religious leaders. The clergy is a group or body of ordained persons in a church that are distinguished from the laity who are the ordinary people in the prayer

In truth, there is NO difference in God's eyes between the "clergy" or the "laity." Every member of the local church is responsible to remain faithful to what God has called them too. There is no hierarchy in a church as all are on level ground in their service to the Lord.

The false hierarchical mentality in the early church eventually led to the establishment of popes and religious leaders ruling through a class-conscious church government. It is the idea

national.

These include: disciplining its own members Matthew 18:15-17,

1. The congregation chose the first "deacons" Acts 6:1-6.
2. The responsibility of church discipline is given to the entire church Matthew 18:15-17
3. The ordinances were committed to the entire church, 1Corinthians ch.11.
4. Commissioning missionaries Acts 13:1-3,
5. Providing accountability in ministry efforts Acts 14:27.
6. Several of Paul's letters were written to entire congregations—not to church leaders Romans, for example, Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Colossians, one and two Thessalonians,
7. The congregation chose its own representatives Acts ch.11; Acts ch.13; Acts ch.15.

Congregational government is not perfect, as it is like any other system, is only as good as the people within the system. So long as we live in a fallen world, problems will occur. Personal ideas and priorities will emerge but love in the truth must prevail and all personal thoughts etc, become subject to Gods Word and the Holy Spirit. We do not want to descend as some do to the level of party or personal politics.

It is also important for us to note the action of the apostles and the churches they planted during the first missionary journey. In Acts ch.14 we have the missionary report, and then in v23 the setting apart the elders, ***"And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed."***

The word ***ordained*** originally meant to vote by show of the hands, to appoint with the approval of an assembly, so this is not new to modern thinking, The act of ordination does not

entail an ornate fancy dress religious ceremony.

In brief congregational administration is built on the following considerations.

1 There is no superior organizational level to which churches are accountable, no conclusive evidence exists implies that local

2, The power to exercise discipline is assigned to the local church not to regional elders or bishops Matthew 18:15-17 and 2Corinthians 2:6.

3, The New Testament local church chose qualified men to meet practical needs Acts 6:1-6, commissioned by Paul and Barnabas Acts 13:1-3, and was involved in the discussions and decision of the Jerusalem Council Acts 15:4, 12, 22.

This means that the Church must meet and pray together as did the infant Church.

So having said that let us take it a little deeper. As we have said the titles elder, bishop, overseer, and pastor all refer to the same minister and leader in a local church, there is no senior authority implied. The consequence being that the one who oversees a local church has the multiple tasks of being a mature spiritual leader, who oversees, and teaches God's word to his local church.

Furthermore, and this is a fact often neglected today and that is, it is the Holy Spirit who calls and appoints the "overseer" to the local Church, look at Acts 20:28 *"Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood."* Clearly this passage tells us that the Holy Spirit knows the need of the local congregation and the qualifications of the man needed to meet those needs.

Going back to Acts ch,2 we read verses 42-44. What do we notice? Let me read it to you: *"And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. And fear came upon every soul: and*

pastor. This shows there was one man, called of God to lead the saints. The word *angel* does not mean a heavenly being, but it simply identifies one as the "messenger.

It is important to note that the pastors of the seven churches derive their message from Christ. A church is ruled by Christ, who is its Head, which He brought it with His own blood, The Lord Jesus Christ by addressing His message to the pastor was putting him and his position in the proper perspective to the church. Christ is the head of the church. The point can be made here that God did not speak to any group in the churches, but spoke directly to the pastor whom he had appointed as the elder. The pastor then communicates God's message to the congregation.

It cannot be ignored that God always, throughout the Bible, spoke to individuals whom He called to lead. He never spoke to or gave instructions to a group of people except through His appointed servant. The precedent is firmly established that He speaks to a church through their pastor, that He through the Holy Spirit, set as the overseer of the congregation. A church that ignores this principle of Scripture is out of God's will.

Often those whom God had **NOT** called, tried to elevate themselves, ignoring God's servant and taking leadership upon themselves. Miriam and Aaron rebelled against Moses' leadership falsely concluded that they were better qualified to lead Israel.

However, despite Moses' shortcoming God's choice was Moses. Numbers 12:1-16 God struck them down for their arrogance and disobedience. Korah also rebelled against Moses saying, *"Ye take too much upon you, seeing all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the Lord is among them: wherefore then lift ye up yourselves above the*

doctrine while correcting, rebuking, and refuting false doctrine. They must discern when what is being taught is sound doctrine, a disputable matter, unsound doctrine, or heresy and teach and respond appropriately. Teaching sound doctrine will encourage God's sheep to pursue His purpose for their lives.

Elders are called to a ministry of prayer (Acts 6:1–4). Each member in the church needs prayer. Prayer should be a central component of our individual lives, our meetings, and our time together. Elders need to make the time to pray as prayer is easily neglected. Elders cannot change a life or move mountains, so we come before the God who can.

James reminds us in chapter five that the elders have a ministry to pray for the sick in our midst. This is an endearing ministry the Lord has called his elders to on behalf of His people. Being fully dependent on God in this spiritual war, is a critical component of leadership knowing that He can do more than anything we ask or imagine.

Paul exhorted the elders in the church at Ephesus to first take heed of themselves. The phrase is a warning or exhortation toward personal examination. They are admonished to fully consider and declare their calling ***“the whole counsel of God”*** both personally and to those whom the Holy Spirit had assigned them as overseers. They were to specifically “feed” the church of God that Christ purchased with His blood. The emphasis is to remind the overseer that the flock is not his, but Christ's.

Drawing the matter of church administration to an end, turn to Revelation chapters two and three and see what Jesus reveals about Church Organisation?

The first letter is addressed to the church at Ephesus through its pastor. The word ***“angel”*** means ***“messenger”*** and is singular. The Epistle was not addressed to a group of ***“elders”*** but to the

many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. And all that believed were together, and had all things common;”

Every day they continued to meet in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people. ***“And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.”*** After the Holy Spirit fills the church for ministry, after they experience fantastic growth, what do they do? They do many things, but notice v42. They devoted themselves to prayer. They had previously been devoted to prayer, and now they continue to be devoted to prayer. Prayer was a primary focus for them.

Having said that we return to the responsibility of those ordained as overseers, and this man's prime duty which is to feed the congregation God's Word as 1Peter 5:1-4 exhorts, ***“The elders (presbuteros) which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder (presbuteros), and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight (episkopeo) thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords (katakuriueuo) over God's heritage, but being ensamples (tupos) to the flock (poimnion). And when the chief Shepherd (archipoimen) shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.”***

Here we have clear instructions concerning elders in this passage, the mature leader to take the oversight of the congregation without being forced to do so. Therefore, doing so willingly and not for monetary gain, but being desirous of the calling. 1Timothy 3:1 states ***“If a man desire the office of a bishop (episcopal), he desireth a good work.”*** The word ***“episcopal”*** is made up of two parts: *epi*, meaning “over” and *scope* which means “to look.” This was the person God chose to “over-look” Christians in a given place.

The elder is not to "lord" over a church. Peter in 1Peter 5:3 restricts the position of oversight as not being a "lord" over God's heritage. Lordship refers to exercising "dominion over" thus these elders were not being instructed as having the control over the church, but rather being commended to be an example to them as the verse states. Nothing in the passage suggests having the elder having an authoritative rule over the church.

There are no examples in the New Testament any man or group of men/ elders ruling over a congregation. To the contrary, the example is that the congregation was not dictated to but ruled over itself led by the Holy Spirit.

In Acts we have instructions concerning leadership in a Church? ***"For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God. Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood."*** Acts 20:27-28.

The word or office of ***"overseer"*** is not a person who exercises dominion over a congregation, but rather of providing them with leadership and elder or pastor one who sets an example b. The elder is not the boss, having a distinct responsibility, the same responsibility as the Lord gave to Peter John 21:16-17. ***He saith unto him, Feed my lambs. He saith to him again the second time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my sheep. He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep.***

Church ministers are called to lead by example, serving as living illustrations of Christ-like character, faith, and conduct rather than merely managing from a position of authority. Based on biblical principles (1 Tim. 4:12, 1 Pet. 5:2-3), they set patterns in speech, love, purity, and integrity, guiding congregations through service, humility, and accountability. Key aspects of leading by example include:

Modelling Christlike Character: embodying qualities such as integrity, self-control, and hospitality, being "above reproach" in their personal and public lives.

They lead by serving willingly, not being greedy or domineering, showing a heart for God's people out of obligation or greed, serving as examples to the flock rather than "lording" over them. They lead by inviting others into their lives, creating a culture of mentorship, and fostering spiritual maturity, not just teaching. They must also demonstrate the ability to manage their own household well, which reflects their ability to care for the church.

The elders are called to oversee and direct the affairs of the church which is why they are sometimes referred to as 'overseers.' That is having the ability to prayerfully discern the whole of the church, in all it encompasses, including God's direction for that body of believers. Elders need to see the 'big picture' and understand how the various components fit together.

• The Responsibility of Shepherding is a key responsibility for elders (who are called to guard, feed and care for the flock God has placed in their care. There are those both without and within the church who want to distort the truth and devour the flock. Elders are called to protect their flock.

Elders are called to clearly declare and teach sound