

Church Government

April 23, 1995

- **Christ is the Head of the Church**

Colossians 1:9-18

9 For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; 10 that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; 11 strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy; 12 giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light. 13 He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, 14 in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins. 15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. 16 For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. 17 And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. 18 And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence. (NKJV)

- Any discussion of church government needs to begin with a complete acknowledgment of Christ as its head. As head of the Church, Christ is responsible for her. Not only is He her supreme authority, He is her purifier, protector, righteous Judge and priest. Christ presides over the church as a righteous servant. His purpose is to declare His wisdom to all of the powers and principalities in the heavens by means of the church. Ephesians 3:8-12
- All authority on earth and heaven is subordinate to Him and all authorities among men have been established by Him. Specifically, He created the offices within the church and gave them to her to ensure her sanctification and maturity. Once equipped, the Church must be faithfully disciplining the nations. Ephesians 4:11.
- **Three basic church governmental structures**
 - **Independent (Congregational)**

A form of Church polity which rests on the independence and autonomy of each local church. It confesses a fundamental belief in Christ as the sole head of His Church. All of the members of the Church, being Christians, are "priests unto God".

- **Presbyterian**

A form of ecclesiastical polity wherein the Church is governed by presbyters. Classically, this form of government has included a hierarchy of courts with the highest court consisting of ministers and Elders and the lower courts consisting of ministers and representative Elders of the Churches within a prescribed area.

- **Episcopalian**

A form of church polity commonly attributed to the Anglican Church. Its structure consists of many tiers of increasingly more authoritative Bishops all culminating in the highest authority, the Pope. Although this structure is wide spread today, its Biblical justification is very difficult.

- **An Elder is a Bishop, is an Overseer, is a Pastor**

Elder (presbyter)

4245 presbuteros {pres-boo'-ter-os}

comparative of presbus (Elderly); TDNT - 6:651,931; adj

AV - Elder 64, old man 1, eldest 1, Elder woman 1; 67

1) Elder, of age,

Bishop (overseer)

Pastor (shepherd)

4166 poimen {poy-mane'}

of uncertain affinity; TDNT - 6:485,901; n m

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| 1a) the Elder of two people | 1985 episkopos {ep-is'-kop-os} | AV - shepherd 15, Shepherd 2, pastor 1; 18 |
| 1b) advanced in life, an Elder, a senior | from 1909 and 4649 (in the sense of 1983); TDNT - 2:608,244; n m | 1) a herdsman, esp. a shepherd |
| 1b1) forefathers | AV - bishop 6, overseer 1; 7 | 1a) in the parable, he to whose care and control others have committed themselves, and whose precepts they follow |
| 2) a term of rank or office | 1) an overseer | 2) metaphorical |
| 2a) among the Jews | 1a) a man charged with the duty of seeing that things to be done by others are done rightly, any curator, guardian or superintendent | 2a) the presiding officer, manager, director, of any assembly: |
| 2a1) members of the great council or Sanhedrin (because in early times the rulers of the people, judges, etc., were selected from Elderly men) | 1b) the superintendent, Elder, or overseer of a Christian church | so of Christ the Head of the church |
| 2a2) of those who in separate cities managed public affairs and administered justice | | 2a1) of the overseers of the Christian assemblies |
| 2b) among the Christians, those who presided over the assemblies (or churches) The NT uses the term bishop, Elders, and presbyters interchangeably | | 2a2) of kings and princes |
| 2c) the twenty four members of the heavenly Sanhedrin or court seated on thrones around the throne of God | | |

Titus 1:5-7 Elder = Bishop

1 Peter 5:1-4 Elder = one who shepherds (pastors) = overseers

Acts 20:17, 28 Elder = Overseer

- These terms are used interchangeably in reference to an office in the Church. Unfortunately some words have developed a particular stigma and are therefore not used correctly. But Biblically, these terms all describe the same office.
- **Elder and Deacon are distinct offices (Presbuteros versus Diakonos)**

Philippians 1:1

1 Paul and Timothy, bondservants of Jesus Christ,

To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons: (NKJV)

1249 diakonos {dee-ak'-on-os}

probably from an obsolete diako (to run on errands, cf 1377); TDNT - 2:88,152; n m/f

AV - minister 20, servant 8, deacon 3; 31

1) one who executes the commands of another, esp. of a master, a servant, attendant, minister

1a) the servant of a king

1b) a deacon, one who, by virtue of the office assigned to him by the church, cares for the poor and has charge of and distributes the money collected for their use

1c) a waiter, one who serves food and drink

- We have an acknowledgment of the separation of these two offices in this verses as well the fact that Paul gives Timothy two sets of eligibility criteria; one for Deacons and one for Elders.
- **Bishops serve in a plurality**

Phil 1:1 - Bishops and Deacons in the church at Philip

Acts 14:23 - Elders appointed in each church.

Acts 20:17 - Elders in Ephesus

Titus 1:5 - Elders in every city

- The modern Christian church has taken its design for a board of Elders from the corporate world. In a large corporation, there is a President with subordinate staff under him. Then there is a board of directors which act as a policy making board and the President reports to the board. These policies are then implemented by the staff. The directors don't actually perform any of the corporate functions. In a board of Elders, the Elders are the ones who are doing the work. They are laboring on behalf of church and are those who will have to give an account for those whom they lead. This word for laboring has the meaning of working to the point of fatigue or weariness. 1 Thess 5:12. This fact should play a tremendous role in deciding the number of Elders and for the commitment necessary for the candidate.
- Although there is a distinction of some of the duties performed by the Elders, there is no distinction of rank among them. The only reference to a Senior Pastor is in 1 Peter 5:4 where Jesus is referred to as the Chief Shepherd. On a board of Elders each man has a vote that *counts* the same but may not necessarily *weigh* the same. There may arise an issue that a particular Elder is more equipped than others to deal with. His opinion should weigh heavily but his vote should count the same as the others
- Unless commissioned by the board, the authority of an Elder exists when the board is in session. An Elder should speak in such a way that he realizes that the church authority of the church does not reside in him autonomously but in the entire group of men,
- **Authority of Elder/Bishop is real**

Hebrews 13:7, 17

1 Thess 5:12-13

1 Timothy 5:17

- This is an area where the modern church has become lazy. The appointment of church officers isn't taken seriously enough. Frequently there is a casual or social consideration of the candidate but not the rigorous application of the qualifications laid out in the Scriptures. But nevertheless, the body is told to submit to these leaders because the Lord has given them real authority and jurisdiction. If the church had a proper understanding of the degree to which she was to submit to these leaders, then there would be much more consideration and involvement by the congregations.
- All of the Elders rule over the flock and as such are worthy of honor. There are those Elders who are more given to ruling than others; they are worthy of double honor. This is especially true with those who labor in word and doctrine. In context, this honor must have financial implications because of the OT verses he uses to substantiate his claim are financial in nature. And Christ warned against using honorific titles Matthew 23:8-10.
- **Selection of new Elders or Deacons ordained by existing government**

Acts 6:1-6

Acts 14:23

- The church is not a democracy. The placement of church officers is not done primarily by a popular vote. The existing leaders will do the final installation of a candidate one he has been selected from the people in compliance with the scriptural requirements in I Timothy and Titus.