

Setting the Church in Order # 1

Int.

1. Aim: To discuss what the Bible teaches about organizing the church.
2. Tit. 1:5 “For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee:”
3. To set in order the things that are lacking (5a)
 - a. Paul, had been in the Island of Crete, South of Greece, and preached the gospel there
 - i. Titus was with him, and he had left him to remain in the island for a time
 - ii. Just when or how long Paul remained there we do not know, but it is certain that he labored there for a time and started churches.
 - iii. After preaching there he went other places to preach before the Christians had time to develop themselves in the work of the Lord.
 - iv. So he left Titus there to supply the needed teaching
 - v. As members matured and proved their ability and capacity to work then he put them in the lead in the work of the Lord.
 - b. To appoint **elders** in every city as Paul commanded him (5b)
 - i. Titus was going to appoint elders in the various churches
 - ii. This was God's plan of organization for the church and Paul left Titus there for the express purpose of getting the church grounded and scripturally organized
4. We will discuss the need to set the church in order by following God's plan for church organization.

Discussion

I. MANY FORMS OF CHURCH ORGANIZATION

A. Bishop

1. Pyramid - priest, bishop, cardinal, pope
2. This is an episcopalian type or form of government
3. There is nothing like this in the New Testament

B. Pastor

1. Most of the denominations are under the oversight of a Pastor.
2. He is the preacher / minister and called the pastor of the congregation.
3. He makes most of the decisions for the local church, sometimes with the input of a group of other men called deacons.
4. In the N.T. the word pastor was used in reference to the elders not the preacher. There was always a plurality of elders, not just one.

C. Multi-level organization

1. Usually city-wide, county-wide, district-wide, state-wide, nation-wide, and world-wide organizations.
2. They are known as presbyteries, synods, councils, conferences, assemblies, congresses, conventions and such like.
3. Some of the denominations elect delegates and they attend the conventions and make the rules and decisions.
4. They have a central headquarters with controls over the local churches.

- D. Nothing like this is found in the Bible. So we must turn to God's word for the correct form

II. GOD'S PLAN FOR ORGANIZATION OF THE CHURCH

A. Bible has given us a pattern

1. If the Bible had not given us a pattern then we would be free to choose what kind of organization we like.
2. But the Bible has given us a pattern and we must follow that !

B. Christ is the head of the church

1. Scriptures
 - a. Eph. 1:22-23
 - b. Col. 1:18
2. Jesus taught that human tradition and human judgment should not guide us in religion - Matt. 15:6-9
 - a. Jesus said "All authority has been given unto me in heaven and on earth" Matt. 28:18
 - b. This would mean that Christ has authority about church organization and that information is found in the Bible. It is not from man.

C. No succession of Leadership from Christ¹

1. The apostles were chosen by Christ and had authority directly from Him.
2. He delegated this authority to the apostles and commissioned them to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.
 - a. Never did the authority come from the apostles, but the apostles received authority from Christ.
 - b. Peter was not the first Pope as men have claimed. There is no proof of that to be found in the Bible. It is the invention of man.

- c. Peter did not have any authority the other apostles did not have. Paul, a fellow apostle withstood Peter "face to face for he was to be blamed" Gal. 2:11
 - d. There is no such thing as apostolic succession of authority.
 - e. This authority ended with the apostles and their gospel, which was confirmed by the signs and miracles and wonders of that time.
 - f. The apostles had no successors.
3. Men who claim to be successors of the apostles are ignorant of the authority of Christ and they are impostors. Paul wrote: "For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light." 2 Cor. 11:13,14
 4. Christ has no successors on earth.
 5. But Christ has revealed to us His plan for organization of the local church. That includes elders and deacons.
 6. Phil. 1:1 "Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons:"
- D. In the organization of the church it was always of a local congregation. There is no district, state, or national organizations of the Lord's church.
1. When the Bible speaks of "church organization" it is talking about a group of baptized believers in a town or community, who maintain together the work and worship of God as, the New Testament directions.
 2. All local congregations are independent of each other. Every church is organically separate from every other church.²
 3. Each congregation is independent and self governing.

E. Elders

1. Tit. 1:5-9
2. Acts 14:23
3. Jesus ordained that elders be appointed in every congregation to exercise the oversight of the congregation.
4. Elders are not self-appointed, nor elected, but selected by the congregation and appointed because of their qualifications.³
5. There has to be a plurality of elders
 - a. Some congregations existed for a while without any elders
 - b. But there is no record of any church with only one elder
6. Elders over one congregation only
 - a. The work of the elders is confined to their home congregation.
 - b. 1 Pet. 5:1 "The elders which are among you"
 - c. The governor of the state of Georgia is not the governor of the state of Tennessee when he goes there.
7. What about a congregation without elders?
 - a. Is it scriptural to be without elders?
 - b. Yes ! We find congregations of the first century existing without elders
 - (1) Acts 14:21-23
 - (2) Tit. 1:5
 - (3) Paul established a congregation in Philippi composed of women only - Acts 16:12-15 - women cannot be elders
 - c. A congregation that does not have men who meet the requirements of elders and deacons should not appoint someone just for the sake of doing so.

- d. It is better to remain scripturally unorganized than to become unscripturally organized.
- e. If unqualified men are appointed then there would be greater problems
- f. We should be working toward that goal of having elders.

F. Deacons

- 1. These are men who must meet certain requirements
- 2. 1 Tim. 3:8-13 lists the qualifications - Servants/ assistants
- 3. They help the elders perform the work of the congregation.
- 4. Good qualified deacons are a valuable asset to the congregation and are a part of God's plan for church organization.

CONCLUSION

- 1. Every congregation should want and have elders !
- 2. It is the will of God - Tit. 1:5
- 3. No congregation will be truly organized until the will of God is carried out in this area.
- 4. Since God's plan is best, let us see to it that we appoint men to serve as elders who are qualified.⁴
 - a. This does not mean they are perfect (cf. James 32) and without sin (I John 18).
 - b. But they are men who have demonstrated that they can live the Christian life and that they possess wisdom and judgment in affairs of administration.
 - c. One must be careful not to join that school of thought who often say none is qualified to serve as elders, because none possesses the qualifications to perfection.
- 5. Let us strive to set the church in order by selecting qualified men to serve as Elders and deacons.

Endnotes

1. What is the Church of Christ? By V.E. Howard P.44ff
- 2.Church Organization and Government by H.H. Gray, Jr. P. 10
- 3.Howard p. 46
- 4.Spiritual Sword Vol. 27 No 4 July 1996 The Organization of the Church by James Meadows p.4

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