

# **CHURCH GOVERNMENT**

## Ministry Orientation Class

### Introduction:

- The Question of church government is a question of authority.
- Where does the authority of the church reside, and who has the right to exercise it?

1 Cor. 14:40 “Let everything be done decently and in order.”

- If we do not have a proper understanding of church government, then we will not understand God’s order.
- And where there is no order there is disorder.
- You can’t have order without authority.
- So God must intend for someone to have authority in the church.

1 Cor. 12:28 “And God hath set some in the church...governments...”

- God has established authority in the church, to keep order, by giving leadership authority to certain individuals.
- This authority in the church has been established by God Himself!

So the question is, “Who is God’s established authority in the church?”

That is the question we will attempt to answer in this lesson.

### **Government Defined:**

- The word “government” has been defined as:
  - The exercise of authority over an organization, institution, state, district, etc...; direction, control, rule, management.
  - A system of ruling, controlling, etc...an established system of political administration by which a state, district, etc...is governed.
- Government involves:
  - Territory
  - People
  - Leadership
- Thus we recognize that the church as God’s house, city and kingdom needs government.
  - Ps.127:1; Is. 2:1-4; Joel 2:25-28; Acts 2:17

## **Government Illustrated:**

- The Government of Heaven, the universe, and the angelic realm
  - Ps. 145:10-13
  - There is law and order in the government of heaven.
  - This law-order is demonstrated in the Godhead under leadership
    - 1 COR. 11:1-3
- The Government of the Home
  - Involving husband, wife, and children
  - Gen. 1:26-28
- The Government of the Nation
  - Involving the State and Human Government as established by God under the Noahic Covenant
  - Gen. Chap.6-8; Rom. 13:1-8
- The Government of the Church
  - 1 Cor. 12:28
  - Heb. 13:7,17,24

The church is a society within a society, a community within a community, a nation within the nations, and a divinely governed institution within humanly governed institutions.

It is His Kingdom – A Theocracy!

## **Government is God–Ordained**

- The powers that be are ordained of God.
- God has ordained that law and order be exercised and preserved in human society through appointed authorities
  - Rom. 13.1-8 (NIV)
- 1 Cor. 12.28
  - God has set governments in the Church.
- Isaiah 9.6-9
  - The government shall be upon His shoulders
  - There shall be no end to it.

## **Government is Needed**

William Barclay in *“By What Authority”* writes:  
*“Life without authority is unthinkable and would be unlivable. Life is surrounded by authority; we live in a context of authority. No kind of association is possible without authority... The whole business of living together in any way would be impossible without the existence and the acceptance of authority.”*

- Without government lawlessness and anarchy prevail...
  - There would be rebellion and chaos in the universe without divine authority
  - Israel's history records that "there was no King in Israel and ever man did that which was right in his own eyes."
    - Judges 17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25
  - Without discipline and authority, there is lawlessness and anarchy.
- People are created to be governed.
  - People seek leadership. It is instinctive to follow a leader.
  - If this need is not met then there is confusion and frustration.
    - Think of our schools without organization and rules.
    - Think of our Transportation
    - Think of society – with no ORDER.
  - If men do not have leadership they will create it.
  - Someone has to lead.
  - It is human nature to want government so badly that people will create their own.
    - Human nature demands leadership of some sort.
    - People fear being left without direction.
    - Ezek. 13: 6-7
- Nature itself teaches that someone must take the leadership
  - James Lee Beall in "*Your Pastor, Your Shepherd*" (pp.109-118) writes that setting up of government is seen even in the animal Kingdom.
    - In the chicken yard, roosters establish leadership by way of the "pecking order."
    - Animals with antlers, such as deer and moose, establish a "horning order."
    - Sheep and goats have a "butting order" until leadership is established.
    - A flock of geese in flight always have a lead bird, the others following in formation accordingly.
    - The lead bird takes the direction for the flock
  - So even nature itself teaches that someone must take the leadership.

### **Government is Opposed**

- Satan led an angelic revolt against God's government in eternity past
  - Isaiah 14.12-14, Ezek. 28.1-19, John 8.44, II Pet. 2.4, Jude 6
- He also brought the revolt of man against God's government in Eden
  - Gen. 3.1-6
- In Israel, Korah rebelled against divinely appointed authority.
  - Numbers 16
- II Peter 2.9-12

- There are those that are presumptuous, self-willed, and not afraid to speak evil of dignitaries.
- They despise government.
- This has been the history of the human race.
- The challenge against God's authority and government has been challenged over the centuries, and satanic power is behind it all
- Satan attacks all forms of government as ordained of God, because he is the lawless one, and wants to bring about a lawless society.
- Rejecting the government and the authority of God, he sets himself up as government and authority.
  - He who does not submit to authority sets himself up as authority.
  - He who rejects God's government sets himself up as self-governing.

## **The Call of Leadership**

### **Self-appointed Leadership: Korah**

- A self-appointed leader takes upon himself the authority and responsibility of a spiritual office into which he has not been divinely called.
- Korah is an example of self-appointed leadership
  - Numbers 16 and 17 provide the background
- Korah rebelled against the divinely-appointed leadership (Moses) and tried to advance himself as a leader.
- Korah followed a clearly defined process of self-appointment, which anyone will follow in pursuing a position to which God has not called him.
  - He caused others to rise up against spiritual leadership
    - Num. 16.2
  - He publicly criticized and questioned the existing leadership
    - Num. 16.3
  - He accused leadership of what he himself was guilty of.
    - Num. 16.3
  - He was not satisfied with the position that He had been given. He continually wanted more authority and a higher position.
    - Num. 16.10
  - He continued to murmur against leadership
    - Num. 16.11
- The epistle of Jude, vs. 11, refers to three men as examples of false ministries: Cain, Balaam, and Korah
  - Jude states that in these last days, some men will go the way of one or all of these false ministries.
  - The way of Korah is the man who will appoint himself to a divine office without the call of God.
  - He represents self-willed and presumptuous men who want authority that is not given to them.

- They rise up against God-ordained leadership, as Korah did against Moses.

### **Man-appointed leadership: Saul**

- Man-appointed leaders claim to receive a call from God, but the call is by the authority of human vessels who are not speaking by the unction of the Lord.
- Saul is an example of man-appointed leadership
  - I Samuel 8-10 (Background)
    - In I Samuel 8.1-4, we find Samuel appointing his sons as judges over Israel.
    - But they did not follow their father in the ways of the Lord.
    - So the people rejected them as leaders.
    - They asked Samuel to give them a King like all other nations.
    - Up until that time, Israel had no King but Jehovah.
    - Israel had a Theocracy (a God-ruled government), but they wanted a man to rule over them.
    - Samuel, very displeased, went to God
    - The Lord told Samuel to give the people of Israel what they wanted – a man to rule over them.
    - The Lord said they had not rejected Samuel as their leader, but they had rejected him.
    - Samuel returned to the people and gave them their request, a leader appointed only with earthly authority, a ruler who could draw only upon earthly resources.
- Samuel described the kind of leader they would have in I Sam. 8.11-17
  - Notice the phrase “he will take.”
- This description applies to the man-appointed leaders in the church today.
  - He is a hireling.
  - He is not concerned with the needs of sheep.
  - He is out to get what He wants and what He needs, at the expense of the sheep.
  - He is destined to rob and spoil the people of God.
- In I Sam. 10, we have the account of Saul’s anointing by the prophet Samuel.
  - Samuel anointed Saul with oil poured out from a vial.
  - All other Kings were anointed by the oil poured from the horn of an animal – NOT A VIAL.
  - David, being God’s choice, was anointed with the divine oil poured forth from the horn of an animal.
- God’s leaders are anointed with a horn and not a vial; by God’s Spirit and not by man’s.

## **God–Appointed Leadership**

- The Bible is still the handbook for the believer, setting the guidelines needed for all areas.
- God appoints leaders to function in a given capacity
  - They are God’s choice
  - God’s appointed and placed ministries.
- Moses was set aside to establish the tabernacle for God.
  - No other man at that time was given that responsibility.
  - God gave him a special call with a specific job.
- David was marked to be the King of Israel
  - He was not man’s choice, but God’s.
  - Man would not have chosen a young shepherd to lead the nation as King.
  - But God put his hand upon David and called him to fulfill a divine destiny
- All of the servants of Jehovah received a specific call from the Lord for their work.
  - The Lord has never lowered his standards in calling his servants.
  - He alone must appoint the leaders He chooses.
- If the church settles for man’s choice of leaders, the will of God will not be accomplished in this generation.

## **Democracy vs. Theocracy**

### Democracy defined

- The word “democracy” is made up of two words:
  - Demos – “the people”
  - Kratis – “to rule”
  - It means “the rule of the people.”
- Democracy is government by the majority of the people.
  - It is the people’s rights
  - the people’s voice
  - the people’s rule.
- It is government of the people, by the people, for the people by popular vote, directly or through representatives.
  - It is worthy to note that Laodicea means “mass rule” or “the rule of the people.” (Rev. 3.12-21)
  - Christ, the Head of the Church, was sadly outside His own Church seeking to get in.
- The congregational form of government is democracy.
  - It places the power and authority and the government in the hands of the people, whereby they control the leadership of the Church.
  - Decisions are made by vote, and the opinion of the majority rules.

F.F. Bruce Quote

*“The divisive effect of the vote is one which cannot be tolerated in the Church, for the Church is uniquely one. It cannot be forced to take sides and remain true to its nature. The vote approach to decision making must always do just this; it must force individuals to argue and attempt to convince, rather than help them work together to reach mutually agreeable solutions.”*

*“What do the words committees, elections, majority rule, boards, board members, parliamentary procedures, voting, and vote have in common? None of these words is found in the New Testament. We have imposed an American form of government on the church and, as a result, most churches are as bogged down in bureaucracy as our government is.”*

Rick Warren

- To observe most United States churches, you would think concepts ingrained in the democratic process must be foundational biblical truths. But they are not.
- **Biblically, a better case can be made for casting lots than for voting.**
  - Concepts such as checks and balances, parliamentary procedure, rule by the majority, and so on are simply not biblical principles for church organization.
    - For example: A study of the Old and New Testaments would show the majority was wrong far more times than they were right.
  - This is not to say there aren't certain principles in the democratic process that are biblical.
    - It's also not to say a church cannot or should not vote on various issues.
  - However, the idea that all decision making done in the church should be democratic is wearing out leaders and congregations alike.
    - The only way pastors can survive in these systems is to become astute politicians, carefully lobbying their views and making sure they get what they want passed.
    - This is not the role God intended for these shepherds.
  - We need to recognize that the democratic system may very well be given by God, but it is a system that is designed primarily to work in a world that is largely ungodly.
    - It is not designed for the church.

### Appointing Leaders

- Following the line of authority that went from Christ, through the apostles, Paul and Barnabas commissioned leaders in the new churches:

- “When they had appointed elders for them in every church, having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed” (Acts 14:23 NASB).
- Instead of following the biblical example and having the best-qualified leaders choose other leaders, some of today’s evangelical churches do it backward.
  - They charge a nominating committee with placing names on the ballot for selection of leaders.
  - Some churches even choose names from the floor of the annual business meeting; the only qualification becomes a single person’s opinion.
  - Without discussion, names are voted on.
- However, the example of Scripture shows us that leaders select other leaders, based upon objective criteria.
  - Such a system greatly reduces the chances of favoritism, subjectivism, and political infighting, which create poor choices.
- Those most qualified to choose are those most qualified to lead.
  - However, there is nothing wrong with the congregation confirming recommendations by means of a vote.

### **Theocracy Defined:**

- Theocracy is the rule of God under God, and thus through his chosen, appointed and anointed leaders.
  - Theos = God
  - Kratiēn = to Rule
  - Thus = “Theocracy” is “God-Rule.”
- But how did God rule in Israel?
  - He ruled through instruments of HIS choice, HIS representatives, through HIS appointed officials or rulers.

Side Note – Sometimes the choice was made sovereignly, by God Himself  
Other times it was God’s choice revealed through Human Instrumentality  
(Kevin Conner, p. 85)

- Government in the church is not man made like Israel saying, “Make us a King like other nations” (1 Sam. 8.7)
- God’s government of the church must be through divinely gifted people he has chosen.
- Human forms of governments have advantages as well as disadvantages, but the church is not called to imitate these.
- God has his form of government for the church. It is Theocratic not DEMOCRATIC!

## The Headship of Christ

- Every government has a head. Without it, government could not function.
- The Scripture is clear: Christ is the Head of the Church and no other can usurp His Headship.
- The Scriptures teach the principle that it is “first the natural, afterwards the spiritual”  
(1 Cor. 15.46, 47)
  - Because of this principle there are some major lessons to be learned from natural headship of the body.
  - The HEAD in the natural body is the seat of the mind, the seat of control and direction
    - Christ is the Head of the Spiritual Body, the Church.
    - Therefore, he is the brain, the mind of God in the Church.
    - He gives directions and exercises control.
  - The Head governs and directs every member of the natural body.
    - By a thought from the head, every member obeys.
    - Every member submits and responds to the direction of the head.
    - So every member of the Body of Christ should be submitted to Christ, as the Head, and obey His will and thought.
  - The Head in the natural body is responsible for all food and nourishment being supplied to every member.
    - Christ, the Head, nourishes and cares for the Church, His Body; cleansing, purifying and nourishing the Body (Eph. 5.27-32).
  - The Head holds the center of the nervous system, which connects the whole body to it in sensitiveness.
    - Christ the Head is vitally connected to every member and the members to Him by the Holy Spirit, who is the Divine “nerve system” in the Church, His Body.
    - There has to be sensitivity to His Spirit.
  - The Head is incomplete without the body, and the body is incomplete without the Head.
    - Each belongs to the other.
    - We cannot conceive of a bodiless head or a headless body.
    - So Christ is incomplete without the Church, His Body, and the Body is incomplete without Him. (Col. 2.17-19, Eph. 1.22, 23; 4.11-16).
- The order of Headship is revealed. God is head over Christ, Christ is head over the Church by the Spirit.
  - Christ is the Governor, the Director and God’s authority is invested in Him.
  - The Church, both universally and locally is under His headship.
  - Rulers in the Church can only exercise headship as they are submitted to and governed by Christ’s infallible Headship.

Government of the local church is by Jesus Christ, but He Himself governs the Churches in various localities through local ministries.

The Question now is who has God divinely chosen to serve as officers in the New Testament Church?

## Government of the Local Church

- The basic structure of leadership in the local church was extremely simple.
  - It consisted of two, and only two, classes of administrative officers.
    - These are: Elders and Deacons.
      - Note: **Five-fold Ministry Gifts are Elders.**
        - Consider 1 Peter 5 where Peter (Apostle) calls himself an Elder. Peter also tells the Elders to “feed” (Grk. Poimaino (poy-MY-no)-- “to feed, to tend to a flock, keep sheep, to rule, govern.”
          - A derivative of this word, poimen (poy-MAIN), is translated Pastor in Ephesians 4.
          - So the five-fold ministry gifts are elders in the sense that they are mature in the things of God.
    - Apart from these two, no other administrative offices of the local church are recorded in the New Testament.
- To those who are familiar with only the King James Version of the New Testament, it might appear that there are, in addition to Elders and Deacons, two other classes of church officers: Bishops and Overseers.
  - Close examination reveals this is not so.
  - The three titles, “Bishop,” “Overseer,” and “Elder” are merely three different names for the same office.
    - 1 Peter 5.1-2, Acts 20.17,28, Titus 1.5-7

## Deacons

- We all have heard horror stories about “board-run” churches.
  - Many churches are governed incorrectly.
    - Aubrey Malphurs *Planting Churches for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (pp. 136-137)
    - Rick Warren Quote (pp. 145) (Klopp)
    - Tommy Barnett *The Deacon Ministry*
- In favor of this structure it might be argued that this system in fact works well in contemporary businesses.
  - There is no New Testament precedent or support for such a form of church government.
- There are three factors that have influenced strong lay leadership of church boards.

Side Note – See Aubrey Malpurs Planning Growing Churches pp. 137

### **Deacon Defined:**

- Diakonos: A servant, minister, attendant, helper)
- Deacons are a serving office in the church.
- Nowhere in the New Testament do Deacons have ruling authority over the church.
- Knowing this helps Deacons keep a proper perspective on what their role is in the Church. Not to control, but to help serve.
- According to The Bible Knowledge Commentary
- “The role of the Deacons is to carry out, under the elder’s oversight, some of the more menial tasks of the Church, so that the elders can give their attention to more important things.”

Side Note – See Pros. Mem. Class

### **The Deacons authority is delegated and limited.**

Their authority comes by the appointment of the elders to do designated and specific areas of work in the Body of Christ.

The measure of their responsibility is the measure of their authority, which is given to them by the Eldership.

Deacons are not called to rule in the Church, but to serve with those who do rule, that is, the eldership.

### **Elders**

**In the New Testament, church government is entrusted to the eldership, which includes the five-fold governmental ministries of Ephesians 4:11-12.**

- The question of church government is a question of authority. Where does the authority of the church reside? And who has the right to exercise it?
  - 1 Timothy 5:17, 1 Thessalonians 5:12, Hebrews 13:17
- While recognizing that Christ is the Chief Shepherd and Bishop, it is also evident from Scripture that, within a local church, He will place a mantle of leadership upon some one elder to direct the people of God (See Connor pp. 94-95 O.T./N.T.

### **The Pastor as the Chief Elder**

#### **• Ephesians 4:11**

- “Pastor” defined
  - *Pastor*--Greek *Poimen* (poy-MAIN)-- “a herdsman, esp. a shepherd. Metaphorically used of the presiding officer, manager, director, of any assembly: so of Christ the Head of the church and of the overseers of the Christian assemblies.
  - A shepherd in the east was responsible for watching out for enemies trying to attack the sheep, defending the sheep from attackers, healing

- the wounded and sick sheep, finding and saving lost or trapped sheep, loving them, and sharing their lives and to earn their trust.
- God didn't use the title Pastor or Shepherd without a purpose.
  - The Shepherd has the authority and responsibility to govern the flock because he is entrusted by God with the oversight of the Flock.

### **I Peter 5:1-4**

- “Feed” defined (*Poimaino*--from *Poimen*-- translated *Pastor* in Eph. 4.11)
- Notice the phrase “taking the oversight thereof.”
  - Oversight-Episkopos-(epi-over; skopos-to see)
    - The Pastor is given the responsibility of oversight of the local church.
    - God gives the Pastor the vision for the house.
- The pastor's two primary responsibilities are: Feeding and Leading.
  - Notice it is a command!

### **Revelation 2.1**

- “Angel” defined (Angelos – messenger)
  - This is not an actual angel for several reasons.
    - A messenger is one who gives a message
      - When was the last time Gabriel showed up at your church to deliver a message?
        - The messenger is the pastor of the church
    - It's also doubtful because Chapters 2 and 3 contain reprimands
      - You reprimand someone for doing something wrong.
- God holds the pastor responsible for the error that gets in the church
  - The pastor is the overseer, he is in charge, therefore he is responsible.

### **Pastors are qualified to lead for the following reasons:**

- Appointed by God (Eph. 4)
- Usually Full-time
- They are Trained

### **A Pastor's desire should be to lead, not dominate**

- The example of the Nicolaitans (Rev. 2.14,15)
- The example of Diotrephes (III Jn. 9-11)
- Peter's Warning (I Peter 5.1-5)
- The teaching of Christ (Matt. 20.20-28)

### **Conclusion**

Government is God-ordained and needed. The government of the church is not democratic but theocratic. That is to say, God chooses, calls, and equips certain persons to be leaders and rulers over His people, investing and delegating them

with degrees of authority according to His will. The basic structure of leadership in the local church consists of two classes of administrative officers: Elders and Deacons (The Five-fold ministry gifts of Ephesians are considered Elders). Apart from these two, no other administrative offices of the local church are recorded in the New Testament. Many have misunderstood the role that deacons play in the church. The office of deacon is a serving office not a ruling office. Elders are given the authority to rule in the church, not deacons. While Christ is the Chief Shepherd, it is also evident that within a local church, He will place a mantle of leadership upon some one elder to direct the people of God. That person is the pastor.