

“The Essentials Of Our Faith”

Session XXVIII

May 8, 2011

“The Church”:

The “Body” and “Bride” Of Jesus Christ!

Part Four: “The Structure And Leadership Of The Church.”

*“What constitutes a **local church**? Does a church exist wherever and whenever two or three Believers are gathered in the name of Christ? If so, then every Christian home would also be a Christian church. How much organization is necessary to have a local church? Some say the less the better while others opt for a developed organization.*

*The New Testament does not contain a formal definition of a local church. However, it does describe the normal features of a local assembly. On the basis of these features we can formulate a **definition** of a local church. It is **an assembly of professing believers in Christ who have been baptized and who are organized to carry out God’s will.***

Notice the important facets of that definition:

- 1. Those who do not make a profession of faith are excluded. The profession may not be genuine, but it must be made.*
- 2. Without debating the mode of baptism, it is clear that the New Testament knows nothing of unbaptized church members.*
- 3. A church always has some kind of organization, and in the New Testament organization was instituted as soon as possible (Acts 14:23 – ‘elders’ appointed).*
- 4. A church exists for a purpose – to do God’s will. This includes a number of things: observing the ordinances, evangelizing, building up believers, worship, giving . . . A specialized ministry to a particular age group cannot be a church even though it may have features and activities similar to a church. (Youth for Christ; Young Life; Campus Crusade; Baptist Student Union; Reformed University Fellowship, etc.)*

*Just because there has been and continues to be debate over the specifics of organization of the church, there exist different basic types of churches. **But that the early church was organized is undebatable.*** --Charles C. Ryrie

Basic Types Of Church Government

A. The “Episcopal”:

1. The Name:

The name ‘*episcopal*’ comes from the Greek word *episkopos*, meaning ‘*overseer*’ (the word is also translated ‘*bishop*’ in the KJV), and identifies churches governed by the authority of bishops. (Methodist, Lutheran, Episcopal, Orthodox, and Roman Catholic churches, etc.)

2. Authority Structure:

*“In the episcopal form of church government the authority rests with the **bishops** who oversee not one church, but a group of churches. Inherent in the office of bishop is the power to ordain ministers or priests. Roman Catholics suggest that this authority is derived through ‘apostolic succession’ from the original apostles . . . with the ultimate authority vested in the Bishop of Rome, the Pope.”* --P. Enns

B. The “Presbyterian” or “Federal”:

1. The Name:

The name ‘*presbyterian*’ comes from the Greek word ‘*presbuteros*’, meaning ‘*elder*’, and suggests the dignity, maturity, and age of the church leaders.

2. Authority Structure:

*“Presbyterian designates a church government that is governed by **elders** as in the Presbyterian and Reformed churches. In contrast to the ‘congregational’ form of government, the Presbyterian form emphasizes representative rule by the elders who are appointed or elected by the people. The ‘session’, which is made up of elected ruling elders, governs the local church. Above the session is the ‘presbytery’, including all ordained ministers or teaching elders as well as one ruling elder from each local congregation in a district. Above the presbytery is the ‘synod’, and over the synod is the ‘general assembly’.”* –Paul Enns

C. The “Congregational”:

1. The Name:

The name ‘*congregational*’ does not come from a specific Biblical word, but comes from a focus on the structure of the local church as an autonomous (independent) organization – one which has no authoritative organizational structure above the local church.

2. Authority Structure:

*“In congregational church government the authority rests not with a representative individual but with the entire local congregation. Two things are stressed in a congregational governed church: **autonomy** and **democracy**. A congregational*

church is autonomous in that no authority outside of the local church has any power over the local church. In addition, congregational churches are demo-
cratic in their government; **all** the members of the local congregation make the decisions that guide and govern the church. This is particularly argued from the standpoint of the 'priesthood of all believers'." --Paul Enns

*"That ultimate authority rests in the local church under Christ headship does seem to be clearly taught in the New Testament. This does not preclude fellowship with other congregations, **but it does not allow for organizational structure above the local church.**"* --Charles C. Ryrie

(Baptist, Evangelical Free, Congregational, Mennonite, some Lutheran, and some Independent churches follow the congregational form of church government)

Important Observations About Church Government:

1. Concerning "Episcopal" or "Hierarchical" Government.

*"Clearly the two offices of elders and deacons existed in the New Testament times. But a third distinct office, that of bishop, is not seen in the New Testament, 'bishops' and 'elders' usually being considered as referring to the same office. However, the ascendancy of a single 'bishop' **over** other officials began as early as the second century. But such transference of power from the 'apostles' to the 'bishops' is never enjoined or regulated in the New Testament. . . . The hierarchical church was a postbiblical development."* --Charles C. Ryrie

2. Concerning "Presbyterian" or "Federal" Government:

"In practice many churches are a blend of congregational and federalism. Too much federalism often places too much authority in some organizational structure above local churches. If doctrinal defections come into a denomination, history teaches that it is difficult, if not impossible, for local churches to call the superstructure to account; and if the local church feels it necessary to leave the denomination it can do so often only at considerable cost and sometimes even the loss of all the property." --C. Ryrie

3. Concerning "Congregational" Government:

"Too much congregationalism fails to profit from the gifts of leadership. It also allows immature and carnal believers to have equal say with others." --C. Ryrie

4. Summary:

*"The early church did have a governmental structure. Local churches, though they fellowshiped and cooperated with each other, were not organizationally linked together. The congregation was involved in some matters. Leaders did take the reins in other matters. **The New Testament seems to include a blend of congregational and federal government, limited to the local level.**"* --Charles C. Ryrie

The Leadership Of The Local Church

I. The Office Of “Elder”.

A. The N.T. Words:

1. “presbuteros” = “elder” or “presbyter”.

a. Emphasis: “age” (“older”) and “maturity” (“dignity” → I Thess. 5:12-13).

This term is applied throughout the O.T. to leaders in the Nation of Israel.

“The aged of the tribes were the depositories of the traditions of bygone generations. The old men . . . had the most experience and were the heads of large families, over whom they exercised supreme authority. Great reverence was paid to the aged among the Hebrews . . .” --Merrill F. Unger

b. N.T. Church “Office”:

1) These men held the authority for leadership in the N.T. Church.

--“presbuteros” means “to stand before” or “maintain rule over”,
Acts 20:17; I Pet. 5:1. (See: I Thess. 5:12-13)

2) These men were appointed and ordained everywhere in each Church and each town, Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5.

c. Function: Provide spiritual leadership in the N.T. Church, Acts 6:2, 4; 20:17; I Peter 5:1-4, 5. (see: Heb. 13:17)

2. “episkopos” = “elder” or “bishop” or “overseer” (“a watcher or seer”)

The verbal form, episkopeo, means “to look upon, observe, examine, look after.” In N.T. *“the work of shepherding the flock”.*

a. Emphasis: “watchful care” → Heb. 13:17. (“duty” -vs- “dignity”)

b. N.T. Church “Office”:

1) These men were responsible for oversight in the N.T. Church, I Pet. 5:2.

2) These men were held to careful examination or scrutiny as “examples”, I Pet. 5:3. The “qualifications” are listed in I Tim. 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9.

c. Function: Provide spiritual oversight in the N.T. Church, Acts 20:28.

*“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 won blood.”* (Also see: I Thess. 5:12; I Pet. 5:2)

--Observation: These two Greek terms/titles are “synonymous”.

“The same officers of the Church of Ephesus are alternately called ‘presbyters’ and ‘bishops’ . . . two terms for persons having the same essential functions . . .”

(See Acts 20:17, 28)

--Merrill F. Unger

B. The N.T. Qualifications: I Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9.

--A combination of these passages produces the following summary.

1. In relation to personal character: An Elder must be . . .

- a. "Blameless" or "above reproach" – of such character that no accusation of serious wrong can be brought against him;
- b. "Husband of one wife" – "at a time" (A.T. Robertson), but more likely, a stronger statement meaning, "prohibiting being married twice", unless a widower (C. Ryrie);
- c. "Temperate" – the original word meant "wineless", avoiding extremes;
- d. "Of sound and sober mind – sensible, serious, earnest, discerning, discreet;
- e. "Orderly" – from the word *kosmos*;
- f. "Hospitable" – open heart and home, a lover of strangers;
- g. "Able and willing to teach" – instructing others and refuting error;
- h. "Not given to wine" – no abuse of wine, no addictions;
- i. "Not given to physical violence" – physical abuse;
- j. "Forebearing" – not insistent on getting what is rightfully his;
- k. "Not contentious" – one who argues for argument sake or over little things;
- l. "Free from the love of money" – no greed or irresponsibility in use of money;
- m. "Not self-willed" – one who demands his own way.

2. In relation to family life:

"In order to be recognized as an overseer, a man must 'rule his own house well', having his children in submission to him. This qualification would apply as long as a man's children are living in his home. . . . If a man 'rules his own house well', he will avoid the extremes of undue harshness and of unrighteous leniency."

--William MacDonald

"The smaller, intimate circle of the home serves as the proving ground for an elder's ability to guide the church."

--Charles Ryrie

3. In relation to spiritual maturity:

"An elder must not be a new convert lest he be lifted up in a cloud bank of conceit and that pride cause his downfall, as it did Satan's."

--Charles Ryrie

4. In relation to community life:

"Elders are to be typified by . . . a good reputation with unbelievers: he is respected in the community at large."

--Paul Enns

C. The N.T. Ministry of the Elder:

"The duties of the elder involve shepherding the flock (Acts 20:28), teaching (I Tim. 3:2), ruling or general leadership (I Tim. 5:17), and guarding against error (Titus 1:9)."

--Paul Enns

--In general terms, the Elder is to be an 'example' to the flock, I Pet. 5:3.

II. The Office Of “Deacon”.

A. The N.T. Word: diakonos = “a minister or servant or helper.”

--“diakonos” = from the emphatic preposition dia and koneo (“to minister, regulate, adjust, or set in order”).

“It is not as servile as doulos (‘slave’), but voluntary, as an ‘attendant’.

Those who serve at a feast are douloi (‘slaves’), but those who execute the king’s sentence are diakonoi (‘attendants’).” --Spiros Zodhiates

(See: Matt. 22:13-14 → the king’s diakonoi)

B. N.T. Background: Acts 6:1-4.

1. The **purpose** of the position or “office”:

→ **“Service” to the needs of the Assembly.**

“ . . . a complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic Jews against the native Hebrews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving of food,” Acts 6:1.

→ **“Help” with the workload of the Elders.**

“ . . . it is not desirable for us to neglect the Word of God in order to serve tables . . . but we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the Word,” Acts 6:2, 4.

--“The care of the Churches came to rest upon the deacons as the helpers of the Elders who held distinct offices.” --S. Zodhiates

2. The **spiritual requirements** of the position → **“Integrity” in heart and life.**

“ . . . select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit, and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task,” Acts 6:3.

C. The Emphasis: Spiritual maturity and willingness to meet practical needs.

D. The Biblical Qualifications: I Timothy 3:8-13.

“The qualifications for deacons are very similar to those of bishops (elders), although not quite as strict. One notable difference is that it is not required that a deacon should be ‘apt to teach’.” --William MacDonald

E. The N.T. Church “Function”:

“In the N.T., a deacon is simply ‘one who serves’. It is generally understood that a deacon is one who cares for the temporal affairs of the local Church, whereas ‘bishops’ (elders) care for its spiritual life.” --William MacDonald

F. An Eternal Promise/Motivation: I Timothy 3:13.

“For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a high standing and great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.”