

CLASS 23

Understanding Church Government

Part I: *Theory and Practice*

CLASS OVERVIEW

In this class we will:

- Review God's form of "top down" but merciful government.
- Highlight the needs for godly Church government.
- Highlight the consequences of ungodly forms of Church government.
- Highlight *why* we must "look to the pastor" and "look to Headquarters" as the *earthly authority* in spiritual matters.

Opening Group Questions:

- What does godly Church government "look like?"
- How does it function?

"And although it is terribly neglected by most professing ministers of Jesus Christ, one of the primary emphases of Jesus' message was the coming *Government of God.*"

Meredith, R.C. (March-April 2005). *The Future of Democracy. Tomorrow's World* (p.7).

I. Introduction

A hallmark of God's true Church is government conducted with an attitude of servant leadership. From God the Father, to Christ the head of the Church, to human beings positioned by Christ on the earth, this chain of government and, ultimately leadership, is essential to the function of the Church.

Question (Pose to group if you like): What causes a breakdown or malfunction in Church government?

Answer: When people usurp authority not given to them or when they do things that are someone else's responsibility, or when they fail to communicate effectively.

We need to understand how to recognize, follow, and submit to God's government in faith. This is a subject that has been preached about, talked about, and studied, yet few really understand the importance of this action. If we are to serve in God's Church, we must understand, respect, and follow God's government in order to serve God and His people properly and set a right example.

Most worldly churches, although frequently well meaning, practice an unbiblical form of church government. The Presbyterian or democratic form of government places the "board" or deacons in positions where they direct the minister. The minister is expected to pastor the sheep, but only as far as the deacons or board sees fit. And when there is dissension among the board or deacons, the pastor does not have the ability to make decisions or solve the problems. Additionally, the pastor's position becomes a political one, as he must avoid teaching forcefully and addressing personal sins, lest he be terminated by board members or deacons who might be offended. Churches that practice a non-biblical, democratic form of government, wind up with the same political issues that face most nations of the world today.

"Because, in our modern "democracies" (whether pure democracies or representative republics), the politicians campaigning for public office must be very selective about which facts to tell the voters. Generally, they must tell the public only what the people want to hear—whether it is true or not. If the politicians confront the public with too much reality, it is equivalent to committing political suicide!"

Meredith, R.C. (March-April 2005). *The Future of Democracy. Tomorrow's World* (p.7).

Although Mr. Meredith's quote directly described governmental politics, the same can be said about church politics in democratic church governments. Today, in many churches run by boards, a minister can also commit professional suicide if he tells his congregations what they do not want to hear. Can God really use this type of government to inspire and direct His ministry to exhort and correct the brethren when necessary, and to provide "meat in due season?" No – in fact, it inhibits open, honest, God-inspired exhortation and admonition.

II. Government and the Bible

- What is the proper government for God's Church?
- How does it work?
- How are leaders chosen?
- Who keeps things on the right track?

Hierarchical Government:

Many today have been deceived into believing that this concept is "bad" and designed to put people down. In reality, it merely means a form of government organized with different levels or divisions of responsibility.

John 14:28—The Father is greater than Christ—this demonstrates hierarchy within the Godhead.

1 Cor 11:3—"But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God" – This demonstrates hierarchy in the family and the Church.

A. Christ Has Authority Over the Church

Eph 1:17-22—Christ is head over all rule, authority and power on earth, and over all things to the Church—His body.

Eph 5:23-24; Col 1:18—The Church is subject to Christ—He is the "head."

- Although the scriptures clearly show Christ to be the Head, the government of God does not stop with Him.

Matt 16:16-18—Peter (pebble) was lower than Christ (Rock).

v. 19—Authority was given to human beings to bind and loose.

Eph 2:19-22—God has structure—foundation of the prophets and apostles, Christ the chief cornerstone.

1 Timothy 3:15- The church is the pillar and ground (foundation) of the truth.

1 Cor 11:3- This governmental structure holds true in the family too.

B. Recognition of Church Government in the Bible

Ex 18:17-27- God set up his hierarchical form of government with Moses, who followed the wise advice of his father-in-law (Deut 1:1-18). This form of Church government is still practiced today.

Acts 12:17- Upon his release from prison, Peter commanded them to inform James and the other brethren in Jerusalem.

Acts 15:2- Paul and Barnabas were sent to the Council in Jerusalem (apostles and elders) to resolve the circumcision issue.

v. 7-21- Paul, Barnabas and Peter commented, and James presided over and concluded the discussion on circumcision.

Acts 21:18- Paul reported to James and the elders present in Jerusalem.

Gal 2:7-8- Paul and Peter made apostles to the gentiles and Jews respectively. They were the primary church leaders for their respective groups.

C. Church Offices

In the New Testament, the offices of Church government are fulfilled by the ministry, deacons and deaconesses. These are ordained positions.

Eph 4:11-16—Church offices—apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers → for equipping of the saints for the work of the ministry. v. 16—Every part of the body has its particular function.

1 Cor 12:12-13—Baptized into ONE body.

v. 18—GOD places members in the body as HE pleases.

v. 27-28—"Ranking" of Church offices: "...first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues."

1 Peter 5:1—An evangelist is ALSO an “elder.”

- All *Ministers* (apostles, evangelists, pastors, elders) are Elders but not all Elders are the same.
- Elders can differ in rank and responsibility.

God has given the ministry authority necessary to successfully guide and lead His sheep and not merely to preach truth without being able to enforce it within the Church.

1 Tim 5:17—“Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine.”

1 Cor 5:1-5, 9-11—Paul gave the Corinthians charge to “put out” a blatant sinner and not “keep company” with him.

1 Cor.11:34—The *Apostle/minister* Paul promised to set things in order when he arrived.

Titus 2:15—Paul told the pastor Titus, “Speak these things, exhort and rebuke with all authority. Let no one despise you.” 3:1—“Remind them (brethren) to be subject to rulers and authorities, to obey, to be ready for every good work...” v. 8—“This is a faithful saying, and these things I want you to affirm constantly...” v. 10—“Reject a divisive man after the first and second admonition/warning.”

Titus 1:5- Titus was also personally told to appoint elders in every city.

Review: The Bible reveals that God’s form of government is hierarchical and shaped like a pyramid. Church is governed through its leaders or officers. The deacons and deaconesses serve under the direction of the elders (Acts 6:3-6); the elders/ministers, according to their individual rank and function, serve under the direction of Christ, Who is subject the Father.

D. But... Who Appoints to Church Offices?

Ministers, deacons and deaconesses are *appointed* to their responsibility by other ordained ministers.

John 15:16—Christ chose and appointed His twelve apostles.

Acts 6:2-6—The Church selected *candidates* for the office of deacon, based on visible fruits, but the apostles *appointed* and ordained them (through prayer and laying on of hands).

Acts 13:1-3—Paul and Barnabas were ordained by other ministers (prophets and teachers), through laying on of hands, after the ministers had fasted and were moved by God through His Holy Spirit to do so.

Titus 1:5—Paul told the minister Titus to “appoint” elders in every city.

- The process of ordination is not (and should not be) at the whim or personal desire of the person performing the ordination.
- Those being ordained must qualify for the office by showing visible proof through their fruits, that they are chosen by Christ to be ordained.
- Mistakes are occasionally made when ordaining, due to the shortfalls of men and women. Remember, though, that if God allows something and it needs to be corrected, He will correct it.

From the time of Moses and the rebellion of Korah, through the time of the apostles, and down to today, Christ has shown that there is government and that He has the ability to:

- Run His Church
- Place men and women in positions of leadership and service
- Discipline those who need it
- Reject from His Church those who are not fit to wear the mantle
- Admonish, guide, exhort, and encourage His Church

III. Governmental Structure in the Church Today (Handout)

The following is a brief description of how Church Administration and the congregational Church structure is organized today (adapted from the Living Church of God (2001), *Pastoral Policy Manual*).

Obviously Christ is the Head of the Church, and this structure falls under Jesus Christ (Col 1:18).

- A. Presiding Evangelist (advised by the Council of Elders)
- B. Director of Church Administration
- C. Regional Pastors
- D. Area Pastors
- E. Assistant Pastors—a position delegated by the area pastor—in process today of being trained for and filled as needed.
- F. Church Elders (will be explained further in the lecture on "Roles")
- G. Deacons/Deaconesses

"Throughout the entire Bible, it is made very clear that there will be no "democracy" and no "voting" in Christ's Government. For as we read in Hebrews 13:8: 'Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever.'" (Meredith, R.C. (March-April 2005). *The Future of Democracy. Tomorrow's World* (p.8).

IV. Conclusion

God's *form* of government is clearly laid out in His inspired word, the Bible. God's government begins with the father, followed by Christ, then down through the leaders that God puts in place in His Church. These leaders submit to each other, and ultimately to Christ and the Father. Government God's Church is designed to mirror the Father's relationship with Jesus Christ, teaching us more about Him. It includes the creation of offices and responsibilities in the church, and was designed to facilitate order, peace, and decency (1 Cor 14:33, 40) and to eliminate confusion.

God wants His people to learn more about Him and His government. He outlined His form of government for the Church and the family, because His government will be implemented globally *Tomorrow's World*. God's form of government teaches us to humble ourselves before Him and to submit to each other—in accordance with the example that Christ left for us. Ultimately, following God's form of government requires *faith* in the leadership that God places in His church. Godly leaders must earn and maintain that faith by exemplifying and practicing the fruits of His spirit, including love, patience, and mercy. These Godly characteristics should permeate and exemplify God's government. Practicing God's form of government now, not only enables God to work effectively through leaders in His Church to do His work, but it will also enable us to easily transition into His government in His Kingdom!

"Although democracy may be one of the best humanly devised forms of government, it is not the "wave of the future" by any means. Truly, we all need to learn and understand God's form of government, for the true saints of God will soon be called on to administer that form of government in *Tomorrow's World*."

Meredith, R.C. (March-April 2005). *The Future of Democracy. Tomorrow's World* (p.27)

Optional Homework for Next Class:

- Review and discuss (with a partner) the **qualifications** and **responsibilities** of ministers, deacons and deaconesses outlined in 1 Timothy 3, Titus 1 and elsewhere.

Quotes on the Importance of Government

The state is a bankrupt institution. The only alternative to this bankrupt 'humanistic' system is a God-centered government.
—R.J. Rushdoony

When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice; but when a wicked man rules, the people groan.

—Proverbs 29:2

Handout 1—Class 23

Governmental Structure in the Church Today

The following is a brief description of how Church Administration and local congregations in the Church are organized today. Jesus Christ will ALWAYS be at the head of this list (Col 1:18).

(adapted from the *LCG Pastoral Policy Manual*, 2001)

