

## Church Government 6

If you've been following along in this study you have seen how we as the modern church have quite a different form than the early church. Instead of everyone a minister and an integral part of the body ministering to one another, there is a tendency to hire a staff to do the work. Most of the church expenses go into the building and staff. The early church seems to have spent the bulk of their offerings on helping the needy within their group, orphans and widows. They met in homes or synagogues. There is still some need for this ministry to the poor today, more abroad than at home. Today this may translate into missions. What do you think? I have personally experienced where the church was so wrapped up in large staff salaries that they could not help the needy in the church who were in desperate situations. How different from that early church!

The elders of a church in the NT seem to have operated independently from hierarchy making their own decisions. They were submitted to Apostolic direction and those who represented them like Timothy and Titus. The exceptions were major doctrinal controversy that crept into the church. Then a council of elders was formed from many churches and the issues were presented. Acts 15 is a record of the first of these councils. Testimony and Scripture seemed to both play an important role in determining the decision, as well as the leading of the HS.

But locally how would decisions be made? 1Tim 5:17 speaks of elders that rule well. Heb 13:17 tells us that submission to elders' authority was advantageous. These men of God, recognized by the flock as the spiritual overseers, were watching over the souls of the flock. They were a part of the body, with a ministry equally important as anyone's. Acts 20:17f is Paul's parting address to the Ephesian elders. In it he describes some of the responsibilities of these elders. They are called on to keep watch like a shepherd, especially for wolves.

In 1 Peter 5 Peter writes to fellow elders to be shepherds serving the flock with a willingness, not for the bucks but with an eagerness to serve. He warns not to "lord it over others" but instead to teach by example. Other translations are 'tyrant' or 'like a ruler'. So these elders were expected to be like Christ the Chief Shepherd. The Greek word used for shepherd is 'poimen'. Their job is to guide the sheep to green pastures and still water, to care for the injured sheep, to protect from dangers like wolves. They lead by walking out in front as an example of where to go. The sheep follow because they trust the shepherds to lead them. The shepherds have demonstrated a love for the sheep.

The world has a different idea of leadership that too often creeps into the church. It is a 'hire the best executive who can implement the best plan'

mentality. That is completely opposed to Jesus the head of the body OUR direction and strength without Whom we can do nothing.

That does not leave us with hard and fast rules as to how a church is to function but instead leads us back to the leading of the Spirit and his working in us as individuals. Some elder led churches have members vote on major issues. Others allow the elders quite a bit of leeway in making decisions for the body. Some gather like the council meeting of Acts 15 with all their regular attendees and discuss issues waiting until God brings a unanimous consensus before going ahead.

Because each church operates independently there is a great deal of room to allow the HS to operate uniquely in each church just as He operates uniquely in our lives. Why do we like to make formulas to follow?

What do we as a group sense the Lord is leading us to do? Acts 2:42 gives us an idea of the focus of the early church. Are we devoted to the same things? The apostles' teaching is the New Testament doctrine. Fellowship is the word *koinonia*. We find this as we meet together and have opportunity to tell about what the Lord is doing in our lives, meeting spiritual and physical needs. Is it deep enough to really help each other? Breaking of Bread may be communion or it may mean meals together. Communion was often observed after a meal together. Prayer is one area we are in special need of devotion. This seems to be the ingredients of the NT church. How can we encourage each of these in the fellowships where we meet? In this fellowship?

I have debated whether to cover the topic of women elders. Since we are from several different fellowships with different convictions on this topic I think we will let that one pass. Those of you who attend the Sunday gathering in my home can look forward to the topic someday soon in that setting.

This concludes our study on the NT government. I would like to continue the study group if most of you would like to continue until we leave for Japan in the end of September. I am thinking of teaching on the topic of 'Christ in the Pentateuch.' Comments or questions?

This is a good time for questions about NT government.