

A SCRIPTURALLY ORGANIZED CHURCH

Text: Phil. 1:1

INTRO: The N.T. is God's pattern for the work, worship, & organization of the Lord's church. In this lesson, we shall consider the organization that ideally should exist in all congregations of God's people.

I. A SCRIPTURALLY ORGANIZED CHURCH.

A. It is God's will that bishops-- also called elders because of their spiritual maturity; called pastors or shepherds because they tend the local flock of God; called overseers because they oversee the work of the local church-- it is God's will that such leaders exist in every congregation as soon as such is scripturally possible.

So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed. (Acts 14:23).

For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, & appoint elders in every city as I commanded you. (Titus 1:5).

1. Elders are members of the congregation they oversee
Acts 20:28 READ I PETER 5:1-4
2. Their oversight is scripturally limited to the flock of which they are members. Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5: 1-4, & by implication, Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5; Phil. 1:1, etc.
3. All members of the congregation should submit to the oversight of their elders.

Obey those who rule over you & be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you. (Heb. 13:17).

4. Of course, this does not mean that elders may make

laws as if they were God, 1 Pet. 5:3 -- but they do make decisions regarding the work of the local congregation, & they do rule.

5. The men who are appointed to eldership must meet certain scriptural standards or qualifications.
READ I TIMOTHY 3:1-7 (Titus 1:5-9)

- a. Of course these men will not be sinless. Their families will not be sinless. There may well be room for growth in almost every one of the listed qualifications but each man to be appointed **MUST** have each qualification to some extent before his appointment.

- b. It should be noted that these qualification are not listed for the purpose of disqualifying men & keeping people from becoming elders, but rather to be used as a standard for recognizing those who should be given a place of leadership & as a pattern that men might follow to be of more and better service to God.

- B. Deacons will also be appointed in mature congregations to assist the elders in whatever capacity the elders deem wise to use them.

1. Deacons are not overseers, but servants.
And God has appointed these in the church: 1st apostles, 2nd prophets, 3rd teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues. (1 Cor. 12:28).

2. Deacons must also meet certain qualifications.
1 Tim. 3:8-12

3. It would be inexpedient to appoint deacons (helpers) without first appointing overseers to guide them

in their service.

NOTE: The Greek word for deacon is often used in a more general sense, not applicable to the appointed church “officer.” Some translators have blurred such distinctions.

II. A SCRIPTURALLY UN-ORGANIZED CHURCH.

- A. By the nature of things, a congregation will almost always exist for a time before any of its members are qualified to serve as bishops or elders. READ ACTS 14:21-23 Titus 1:5-6

- B. Until men are qualified & appointed as elders, a less-than-ideal system of oversight must be utilized. So far as I know, there is no plain Bible outline to follow that gives us an exact manner of decision-making in the absence of scripturally appointed elders, but common sense & scriptural principles should be applied. Usually, during this developing state of a congregation, the male members determine in some sort of business meeting the specific details of the work of the congregation. Hopefully, the members who are more spiritually mature will prevail when difficult decisions must be made. Obviously, this system is far from ideal, & every member of every congregation should work & pray for the day when the congregation of which is a member will be working under the oversight of such men as God has revealed should have the oversight among His people.

III. AN UNSCRIPTURALLY ORGANIZED CHURCH.

- A. Some churches get in such a hurry to appoint elders that they virtually ignore the standards of qualifications set forth in God’s word & appoint men who are not qualified or prepared to guide the church in a scriptural & orderly manner.

- B. Some elders are not content to oversee the flock in which they have been appointed but almost immediately begin to assume the oversight of some so-called “brotherhood project.” Elders in other congregations relinquish a part

of their oversight to these self-appointed sponsoring church elders. There is no scriptural authority for such behavior. No command, no example, no inference.

C. Some brethren hold to a theory that elders are some how representatives of the congregation & thus that each of their decisions should reflect the will of the majority of the members of the congregation. Obviously, this defeats the entire purpose of elders meeting certain rigid qualifications.

D. A few congregations, mostly small country churches, follow the church boss system. Diotrophes, 3 John 9

IV. AN UNSCRIPTURALLY UN-ORGANIZED CHURCH.

When a congregation has a plurality of men who have developed the qualifications set forth in Titus 1 & 1 Tim. 3, that congregation can no longer afford to remain unorganized. To do so is to ignore God's revealed will.

Each member of each unorganized church should pray frequently for those men who are in a position to become scripturally qualified to serve as elders--& each member should pray for the wisdom to recognize when men have so qualified themselves.

No congregation should ever be satisfied to fall short of God's plan for church organization. We'd just as well ignore God's pattern for the work & worship of the church as to ignore His pattern for church organization.

CONCLUSION: We should continue to work & pray for the day when this congregation will reach a state of maturity that allows for the appointment of elders & deacons in accordance with the revelation of God. And, in the mean while, let us continue to re-evaluate our situation from time to time, so that we will be aware when that day has come.

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