

**Church  
Government**

**Which  
Form  
Is  
Most  
Biblical?**

**Burley W. Moore**

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## Preface

Actually, this book on church government can be called a sequel to my book on, *Godly Servants*. In that book I tried to give *A Glimpse into the Subject of Elders, Deacons, and Deaconesses*. When I wrote that book, I touched upon the subject of church government, but had no intentions at the time of dealing with it in more detail. However, in hindsight, I now wish that I had done so because there are many people who never give any serious thought to church government. The truth of the matter is that to study the offices of pastor and deacon is to touch upon the matter of church government. Therefore, since hindsight is 20/20, I have chosen to write another small edition touching upon this long lost biblical issue.

Church government is certainly not an essential (cardinal) doctrine of the New Testament church. Therefore, we may disagree on the form and yet not be divided in our Christian fellowship. However, as it is with every area of the Christian life, it is important for us to try and be as biblically correct as possible. Presently, we're all "seeing through a glass darkly" (I Cor. 13:12) and do not have all the correct answers to all the questions. For that reason we need to prayerfully study the Holy Scriptures asking for the Holy Spirit to reveal truth to our hearts. When we differ with fellow believers, let us do so in love.

One of the booster band songs (see my autobiography, *My Life As A Pastor, Shepherding God's Sheep And Herding Goats*) that I would sing

with the children in my pastorate is, “He’s Still Working On Me, To Make Me What I Ought To Be.” I personally like that little song, because that is so true in my own life. I only wish that I knew fifty years ago, what I know today. But, life doesn’t work that way, physically or spiritually. Life is a learning experience. As we mature in the Lord and grow in the grace and understanding of God’s Word, our sanctification helps us see things more clearly.

May God use the books that I write, including this one, to help fellow believers in the Lord Jesus Christ to grow old gracefully. As we apply God’s Word to our lives, we’ll grow closer to Him and find life more satisfying today and our expectation of our future Hope more exciting.

## Introduction

To begin with, we need to understand that the New Testament church is not an organization, but an organism. A living breathing organism that ought to function in an organized manner. We are admonished in First Corinthians, chapter fourteen, and verse forty, “Let all things be done decently and in order.” That includes the way in which a local church conducts herself. I’ll be the first to admit that it can be a bad thing to either be under-organized or over-organized. Therefore, when it comes to church government we need to learn balance. We must remember that Satan is the author of confusion (I Cor. 14:33); therefore, to keep down chaos, there is a need for some degree of order and organization in church government. The terms that we use in referring to church government are “polity” or “ecclesiology.”

The study of church government can be as lengthy as you want to make it, just as the subjects with which I dealt in my book on *Godly Servants*. I had no intention of going into great detail on *Elders, Deacons, and Deaconesses* and for that reason, I called it a “*Glimpse*.” When I wrote that book, I casually mentioned the subject of church government on several occasions. However, after having the book published, I realized that the majority of people within the local church have never thought about the different types of church government found in various denominations.

For that reason, I felt that a short little book on church government might be helpful in how it applies to the

offices of pastor and deacon. Therefore, my goal is to give you a little glimpse into a subject that is seldom considered by the average church member. Please notice, that I'm calling this a glimpse just like I referred to the subjects of elders, deacons, and deaconesses. It will not be an in-depth study arguing the pros and cons found in the different forms of church government, but a brief look that I hope will be some more **“Food for Thought.”**

## Chapter 1

### A Theocracy

First of all, we need to understand that the church is the body of Christ with Christ being the “head” (Eph. 5:23) and having “the preeminence” (Col. 1:18). Also, we need to admit that most often when one thinks of the church, our thoughts are those of a building of brick and mortar. However, a local church only meets in a material building that we refer to as the visible church of congregated members. Some of those members are regenerated believers and some are not. Hopefully, we can agree that all church members ought to be saved individuals, but in reality that is not the case. Therefore, in referring to born again members in the body of Christ, we talk about the invisible church.

Those that make up the invisible church are the elect known only unto God Himself. Christians should give evidence with the fruits of the Spirit that they belong to Christ. Unfortunately, there are good hypocrites or pretenders that creep into the local church who may deceive us, but they will never deceive God. Judas Iscariot, one of the original twelve disciples, is a perfect illustration of what I’m saying. The Lord Jesus always knew his true identity (see my book, *The Twelve Disciples, Learning Discipleship From The Original Apostles*), but the other apostles had no idea that he was a betrayer. God knows His sheep. Jesus said, “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me” (Jh. 10:27).



The result of Christ being the “head” of His church, means that actually she is a THEOCRACY. Please notice how I use the feminine pronoun, she, when I refer to the Lord’s church. In Scripture, she is called the “the bride, the Lamb’s wife” (Rev. 21:9). Christ also uses the same analogy to teach us about how a husband is to love his wife.

“Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the savior of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing: but that it should be holy and without blemish, For no man ever yet hated his own flesh ; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church: For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. For this is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church.” (Eph. 5:22-32)

As born again believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, Scripture teaches that the third person of the God-head indwells us. Christ called Him the “Comforter” (Jh.

14:16,26, 15:26, 16:7). The “Holy Spirit” is the One Who convicts us of our sin and births us into the family of God at which time He sits upon the throne room of our hearts. We refer to this as the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Galatians, chapter two, verse twenty, describes it this way, “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.” We can say along with Paul, that it’s no longer I who lives now, but Christ Who lives in me. It means that we’ve turned the control panels of our heart over to Christ and that we want Him to rule and reign within us.

Now, that doesn’t mean as a Christian, we no longer sin, that we’ve reached a state of sinless perfection, and that the old nature has been eradicated. It has not and will not be the case until we die and go to heaven. However, it means that the old man of sin has been crucified and we’ve received the new nature of Christ. In other words, upon conversion to Christ we have a new Master. His name is Jesus and we recognize Him as the Sovereign Ruler of our lives. A theocracy refers to religious authority and in salvation, Christ becomes our Supreme “Potentate” (I Tim. 6:15).

## **Chapter 2**

# **The Need For Local Church Government**

With the Holy Spirit indwelling every Christian, one might ask, “What is the need for local church government?” That’s like asking, “why are there certain laws based upon age?” Such as, the legal age for obtaining a drivers license. There are different levels of maturity, ranging from childhood to adulthood. Likewise, there are various levels of Christian maturity as well. I’ve already mentioned that the body of Christ, the church, is an organized organism. It is made up of people at all levels of spiritual growth all the way from “babes” in the faith (I Cor. 3:1, I Pet. 2:2) to more spiritually mature believers.

“For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness; for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.” (Heb. 5:12-14)

With this in mind, I also call to your attention the fact that Scripture tells us to do all things “decently and in order” (I Cor. 14:40). God is the One Who instituted government and the judiciary system way back in the

Old Testament for the sake of law and order. Likewise, without a proper form of church government, anarchy and disorder will prevail because not every Christian is maturing at the same pace. We are all a work in progress. As a pastor I often had a children's time during the Sunday morning service when I sometimes sang with them. In the Preface of this book, I called your attention to the little song, "He's still working on me, to make me what I ought to be." Thank God He is! I've spiritually grown some down through the years, but I still have much more spiritual maturing to do.

Bible believing people need to take seriously the teachings of God's Word and apply church order to their local congregations. Before we get started taking a brief look at the three major types of church government, let me remind you that there are only two major offices defined within the organizational structure of a local church. These two offices are those of "bishop" and "deacon" (Phil. 1:1).

Not only do we need to notice these two offices, but also the absence of any denominational hierarchy outside the local church. Every local church is totally accountable to Christ alone, thus being free and independent from any human ecclesiastical authority outside the local congregation. Local churches may certainly cooperate with and work with other congregations of like mind and faith, but they are not accountable to one another, but to Christ.

It's very common for people to divide the church into a division of clergy and laity. Much can be said about this, but I've never liked such a classification. To me,

the word clergy sounds like a disease! Neither of these words appear in Scripture. Every “member” of the body is important (I Cor. 12:14-20). It’s true that some “members” serve a more vital purpose, but we should never minimize the importance of every single “member.” We should all see ourselves as servants of the Lord Jesus Christ. If you are saved, then you have been saved to serve. There are various levels of service; however, God’s work in the local church requires both leadership and follow-ship.

The priesthood of the believer is a lovely biblical doctrine, but it must not be misused or misunderstood. It is clearly taught in the New Testament, but it does not eliminate the need for spiritual leaders within a local church. The priesthood of the believer doesn’t mean that a Christian has the right to establish his own theology, reject being taught the Word of God by spiritually gifted pastors (Eph. 4:11), or refuse submission (Heb. 13:17, Mk. 12:17) to God’s order of government (spiritual or national). In other words, this doctrine does not make a bunch of renegades out of God’s people.

We have the privilege of entering into the throne room of God’s grace in prayer without having to go through any earthly priest. Every Christian has access to God in prayer because of the indwelling Holy Spirit and Christ sitting at the right hand of God the Father interceding for us (Rom. 8:26,34). The priesthood of the believer means that every genuine believer has access to the heavenly Holy of Holies.

“Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; And having an high priest over the house of God; Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.” (Heb. 10:19-22)

The church is a body of believers where each member is responsible to Christ. The spiritual leaders within a local church have no right to police the congregation, but to function within the boundaries established by God. If church members are caught up in public sin, then it's the responsibility of the local church to biblically deal with them (I Cor. 5:1-13). The only authority bestowed upon those leaders are established in Holy Scripture. All authority found in a local church remains directly in the hands of God. Matters, such as church discipline, are clearly laid out for us in the Bible.

“Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican. Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall

bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.” (Matt. 18:15-20)

Knowing and doing God’s will is the responsibility of every believer. We are to discover our spiritual gift or gifts and use them for God’s glory within the local church in hopes that every Christian can be brought to spiritual maturity. God has given pastors to churches to teach the Word of God in order for believers to learn and grow in spiritual truth. With that in mind, we see the need for church government and how pastors fit into this scenario. There are three main forms of church government most commonly found. I’m not saying you’ll never find other forms because there is also a non-government concept. There may very well be some deviations to these listed, but I’d like to share the most predominate forms.

## **Chapter 3**

# **The Episcopal Form Of Church Government**

The word, episcopal, comes from the Greek word that is translated, “bishop.” It should not be necessarily confused with the Episcopal denomination. This form of church government is patterned after the Roman Empire’s authoritative leadership. Just as the emperor was supreme over his nation, the church hierarchy was supreme over the church. In other words, it is the rule of the church by a system of monarchical bishops. One man may govern those under him in lesser rank.

The danger of this form of government opens the door to propagating corruption as history will attest in the Roman Catholic Church. All you have to do is study history and see this for yourself. Episcopal church government still exists today, but I don’t see it taught in the Word of God. When it comes to human nature, too much power corrupts. That can apply to both the national government of a country or to the government of a local church. An honest study of Scripture will clearly dispel practicing this type of church governmental structure.



## **Chapter 4**

# **The Congregational Form Of Church Government**

Usually, those who hold to a congregational government will claim priesthood of the believer as one of the reasons for doing so. In my opinion, that is a very poor excuse because to me personally, the priesthood of the believer has little if nothing to do with church government. However, congregational government pretty much dominates most Protestant congregations. It is the form of government that is found in most Baptist churches.

Those who adhere to this type of church government will recognize the positions of bishop/elder/pastor and deacons. However, the power of daily operations lies in the members of the congregation with usually each member being given a vote in a business meeting. Every voting member of the church has the same authority. In my opinion, this is downright “stupid” (please pardon my bluntness). I’ve seen children voting on issues that they know nothing about, but merely vote as they are told by their parents. Some churches may put voting restrictions on members pertaining to age or other matters such as giving or attendance, but that is seldom the case.

I consider myself a Baptist, raised in a Baptist church, and pastored Baptist congregations, but I’ve seen first-hand the errors of congregational church government. I’ve been victimized by ungodly church members who

have been given the “right” to vote in a church business meeting (see my pastoral autobiography, *My Life As A Pastor, Shepherding God’s Sheep and Herding Goats*). This is just a good example of how no denomination has everything correct, not even most Baptist that practice congregational government.

I’ve said (in jest) that I’m Baptist born, Baptist breed, and when I die I’ll be Baptist dead. I say that simply because it sounds humorous and I do believe that the doctrines found in most Baptist churches are about as close to being correct as you will find in any “denomination.” But, listen to me closely! My allegiance is not to ANY denomination, but to the Lord Jesus Christ and His WORD.

I don’t follow a denomination in order to please people or to advance therein. I’m not a ladder climber and never will be. I try to base my beliefs and convictions on the Holy Scriptures and not on the opinions and mere traditions of men. If a statement of Faith held within a denomination agrees with the Word of God, then I will hold to that statement, but if Scripture teaches otherwise, then I will hold to what I believe is taught in the Word of God. I don’t get caught up in denominationalism because no one denomination has everything right. I’ll fellowship with other believers where we can agree on the essentials. Let me reiterate that the matter of church government is not one of those essential doctrines.

I believe that every congregation stands independent from outside control and should be governed from within. But, congregational government opens wide the

door for Satan to bring division. Why do you think Baptists are known for fussing, fighting, and splitting? Recently, some headlines appeared in our local newspaper that spoke of how the Quakers were fighting like Baptists! I hate to say it, but Baptist have earned this reputation because of their congregational government. I personally do not see congregational government in the Bible in the manner in which it is practiced by the majority of churches.

## **Chapter 5**

# **The Presbyterian Form Of Church Government**

Although this is called Presbyterian Church Government it does not mean that the Presbyterian Church is the only one that uses it. The word, Presbyterian, comes from the Greek word, “elder.” Congregations that practice this form of government are basically ruled by multiple elders, not one man nor by equality vote of the entire church membership. The elders are chosen from within the congregation. The manner in which this is done is determined by the local church.

The Presbyterian Church distinguishes between “ruling” elders and “teaching” elders. I personally, do not see this distinction in the Bible, but I don’t consider it a hair splitting issue. Other churches besides the Presbyterian congregations use this form of church government. There are Baptist churches today that are beginning to “see the light” and adopt elder-led government. The Moody Church pastored by Dr. Erwin W. Lutzer patterns its government after this style because they believe it is more biblical. I agree with him 100%. The Presbyterian form of church government is led by a plurality of elders who are assisted by deacons. The church body will have a limited voice in making decisions on the major issues of the congregation. The elders will share the weight in the daily decision making process.

## **Chapter 6**

### **Biblical Government**

“The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over God’s heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away. (I Pet. 5:1-4)

After pointing out the three most common forms of church government that are found in churches today, I raise the question, “What does the Bible say about church government and which form is the most biblical?” I realize that there are arguments for and against all three forms that I’ve mentioned. A detailed model of church government is not given in Scripture. If you’re looking for chapter and verse that addresses the subject of church government in great explanation, then you’re not going to find it. However, that does not mean the subject is totally avoided. The Bible does not deal with it in explicit depth, but gives us enough general information to reach some correct conclusions. When we study the office of pastor and deacon, we’re actually dealing with the subject of church government.

I think that one reason God does not go into depth on this matter is because all local churches are like all

individuals regarding their uniqueness. Every person has their own personality just as every local church. That means the needs are different and one size does not fit all. What I'm saying, is that every congregation must tailor the specifics of their structure to meet their needs. For instance, a small congregation will not have the same exact design as a large congregation. The basics are the same, but the custom design may differ. Therefore, God has given us the basic biblical government structure in His Word. As we examine the Scriptures, we'll discover that out of the three forms of church government that I've just presented, elder government best fits the biblical model.

The three Greek words for elder, bishop, and pastor are pointing to one and the same person (Titus 1:5-7, Acts 20:17,28, I Tim. 3:1, Eph. 4:11). Each word describes the uniqueness of their position. A plurality of "elders" were "ordained" in "every" local "church" (Acts 14:23, 20:17, Phil. 1:1).

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

"And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the church" (Acts 20:17).

"Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons" (Phil 1:1).

These elders were to have the oversight of the local church. According to Acts 20:28, Paul charges the elders of Ephesus to, “Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.” Then again, in First Peter 5:2-3, Peter exhorted the elders to, “Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over God’s heritage, but being ensamples (examples) to the flock.”

According to Scripture, these elders were to be assisted in ministry by the deacons (Acts 6:1-6, Phil. 1:1, I Tim. 3:8-13). The first deacons were chosen by the congregation and confirmed by the elders (Acts 6:3-6). Let’s pause for a moment and take a look at this passage in Acts, chapter six.

“And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration. Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, it is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables. Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word. And the saying pleased the whole multitude: and they chose Stephen, a

man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas a proselyte of Antioch: Whom they set before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them. And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith. And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people” (Acts 6:1-8).

Without doing an exegesis of this passage, I will limit my remarks for the sake of our subject on church government. To begin with we have a reference to “the twelve” speaking of the twelve disciples. At this time Judas Iscariot had been replaced with Matthias (Acts 1:26) who was now numbered among “the twelve.” This is just one of the reasons why I believe the apostles were correct in choosing Matthias.

As I pointed out in my book on the twelve disciples, some believe that it should have been Paul (see my book on *The Twelve Disciples*). I do believe that Paul was chosen by Christ and granted apostolic authority, but Paul’s conversion doesn’t occur until the ninth chapter of Acts. The Greek word for apostle means to send out as someone’s personal representative. We use the word in the New Testament in two senses. In one sense the original twelve disciples were the original apostles. There were other men that we refer to as apostles in a general sense, such as Barnabas (Acts 14:14), Epaphroditus (Phil. 2:25), Andronicus and



Junius (Rom. 16:7), and James the half-brother of Jesus (Gal. 1:19).

In the general sense, these early New Testament apostles were chosen by God and sent out for a specific ministry. However, when it came time to choosing a replacement for Judas Iscariot, the requirements were that the man must have witnessed Christ's ministry from the time of His baptism to the time of His ascension and that he must have personally witnessed Christ's glorious resurrection (Acts 1:21-22). There is no question that Paul was an apostle and given apostolic authority which he made perfectly clear as he wrote under divine inspiration (II Cor. 1:1, Gal. 1:1, Eph. 1:1, Col. 1:1, I Tim. 1:1, II Tim. 1:1) thus qualifying him as a church elder.

I've said all of this to say in reference to Acts, chapter six, concerning the selection of what I believe to be the first deacons, that herein is recorded the initial organizational structure of the New Testament church. The twelve apostles as well as Paul, were the first elders, but they needed help. Therefore servants were chosen by the members of the church and then brought to the apostles for approval. The Bible does not speak of church membership by that terminology per se, but who else do you think it's referring to in this passage? Herein, we discover that a congregation may at times vote on major matters of importance, but the elders have general ruling authority. This is a good pattern laid out for us in Scripture to use as an example of handling church government.

With that being said, I want to back up to the three main words in the New Testament that all refers to the same person and position. The word “elder” in the Greek is presbuteros. It is a term referring to a man’s mature spiritual experience in contrast to a novice. When New Testament congregations were established, the Bible tells us that “elders” were “ordained” in “every” local church (Acts 14:23).

The words elder and bishop were used interchangeably. For instance, the “elders” are also called “bishops” in Acts 20:17,28. In listing the qualifications for this biblical office, Paul refers to them as bishops (Titus 1:6-9). Elders were to be men of biblical characteristics (I Tim. 3:1-7). These elders were responsible for the spiritual oversight of the congregation and the teaching of God’s word. Those who ruled and taught well were to be counted worthy of “double honor,” which is probably speaking of compensation (I Tim. 5:17-18).

“Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine. For the Scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn, And, The labourer is worthy of his reward, Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses. Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear. I charge thee before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, and the elect angels, that thou observe these things without preferring one before another, doing nothing by partiality. Lay hands suddenly on no

man, neither be partaker of other men's sins; keep thyself pure" (I Tim. 5:17-22).

With that being said, let's now move on to look at the word bishop which is translated from the Greek word episkopos. It's a term meaning overseer and refers to the office which the elder holds. As we look at the two church offices outlined for us in the Bible, the office of bishop and the office of deacon, the very name "bishop" tells us which is the principal officer of the church. The word elder speaks of a man's wisdom and dignity, whereas the word "bishop" speaks of his work as superintendent and leader. The development of an ecclesiastical hierarchy consisting of such things as bishops, archbishops, a pope, and cardinals is nowhere found in the Bible and is totally unscriptural.

The Lord Jesus Christ is spoken of as the "bishop of our souls" (I Pet. 2:25). In First Peter, chapter five, and verse two, it is referring to the work of an overseer by saying, "taking the oversight." Then, in First Timothy, chapter three, and verse one, it literally says, "if anyone seeketh overseership" or "if anyone reaches out to overseership." It's not actually using the word for office or position, but is none the less clearly referring to it.

After looking at the words, elder and bishop, we now come to the word pastor. In the Greek it is translated poimen meaning shepherd and refers to the work of the elder. What is an elder to do as he serves in the office of bishop? He is to feed God's sheep. That's what Jesus told Simon Peter to do, one of the original twelve apostles, who also served as one of the first elders. I'm

afraid that there are so many men in the office of pastor today who just don't "get it." God's under-shepherd is called to feed God's sheep the Word of God. God's sheep want sheep food. They don't want goat food. That is why Simon Peter went on to write and tell the elders to "feed the flock of God which is among you" (I Pet. 5:2).

Tom Ascol, in his article entitled *The Pastor's Chief Duty*, found in the 1996 Winter Edition of *The Founders Journal*, quoted from John MacArthur when he preached to the Southern Baptist Pastor's Conference in New Orleans, Louisiana, in 1990. Regarding preaching being a pastor's priority, this is what MacArthur said. "Fling him into his office, then tear the 'Office' sign from the door, and replace it with a sign that says, 'Study'. Take him off the mailing list. Lock him up with his books and his typewriter and his Bible. Slam him down on his knees before texts and broken hearts and the flick of lives of a superficial flock and a holy God. Force him to be the one man in the community who knows about God. Throw him into the ring to box with God until he learns how short his arms are. Engage him to wrestle with God all the night through, and let him come out only when he's bruised and beaten into being a blessing. Shut his mouth from forever spouting remarks and stop his tongue from forever tripping lightly over every non-essential. Require him to have something to say before he breaks the silence. Burn his eyes with weary study. Wreck his emotional poise with worry for the things of God. Make him exchange his pious stance for a humble walk with

God and man. Make him spend and be spent for the glory of God. Rip out his telephone. Burn up his success sheet. Put water in his gas tank. Give him a Bible and tie him to the pulpit. Test him, quiz him, examine him. Humiliate him for his ignorance of things divine. Shame him for his good comprehension of finance, batting averages, and political party issues. Laugh at his frustrated effort to play psychiatrist. Form a choir, raise a chant and haunt him night and day with, 'Sir, we would know God'. When at long last he does assay the pulpit, ask him if he has a word from God. If he doesn't, then dismiss him. Tell him you can read the paper. You can digest the television commentary. You can think through the day's superficial problems and manage the weary drives of the community and bless the assorted baked potatoes and green beans better than he can. And when he does speak God's Word, listen. And when he's burned out finally by the flaming Word, consumed by the fiery grace blazing through him, and when he's privileged to translate the truth of God to man and finally is himself transferred from earth to heaven, bear him away gently. Blow a muted trumpet. Lay him down softly and place a two-edged sword on his coffin and raise the tune triumphant, for ere he died he had become a Man of God." From what MacArthur has said, I believe that you can get the point. He "gets it" and if you don't, then may heaven help you.

"So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love

thee. He saith unto him, Feed my lambs. He saith to him again the second time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my sheep. He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep” (Jh. 21:16-17).

Jesus referred to Himself as the Shepherd of His sheep. He said, “The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly. I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep. But he that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth: and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep. The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep. I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine. As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep. And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd. Therefore, doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father” (Jh.

10:11-18). I'm afraid that the modern day pulpit is full of a bunch of hirelings.

Jesus is also called the "GREAT SHEPHERD" (Heb. 13:20) Who has laid down His life and shed His blood for His sheep. In His absence, He has called and continues to call out men to serve as His under-shepherds to care for His sheep. The pastor's primary job is to feed God's sheep with the Word of God. A shepherd was one who tended to the herds and flocks by feeding, guarding, caring, protecting, and defending them. This word is used metaphorically of New Testament "pastors" as "teachers" of God's Word (Eph. 4:11). The work of feeding the sheep is clearly given to the New Testament "elders" in the local church (Acts 20:28, I Pet. 5:1-2).

Having spent most of my life pastoring small congregations, I'll be the first to admit that trying to find enough qualified elders in order to practice elder government is not always an easy matter to resolve. I do not have the final answer to that problem. (See the last chapter of this book on **A Possible Solution**) I never pastored a church with elder government. Trying to change the government of a church is not worth splitting or tearing it up. A man will have to pastor a church long enough to lead the church into a change of government. It will require much patience if it ever happens.

If a local church is starting from scratch then that is the ideal time to do it right, which is with elder government. However, that is where the problem often comes into focus. If you don't have enough elders

(more than one) to form a plurality, what do you do? This one thing I do know, the pastor is not to be a dictator and neither are the deacons to be dictators. For that reason, I had to use the deacons as, shall I say, substitute elders (not good terminology and not the ideal), but it kept me from being a dictator.

Local churches ought to see how much they can conform to the Scriptures rather than how little. According to the Bible, there are only two offices (positions) for every local assembly. Those two offices are elders and deacons with both being a plurality. When it comes to elders, all have equal authority; however, it's possible for one of them to be the primary pastor-teacher who may receive compensation. I believe errors concerning church government have arisen oftentimes due to our failure to search out and compare Scripture with Scripture.

In the beginning of the apostolic age, the apostles were the only ruling authority over the believers. In other words, they served as elders until elders could be chosen from within the local congregations. If you'll notice from what Peter wrote in First Peter, chapter five, and verse one, he said, "The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder." Church government developed under the inspired writing of Holy Scripture and the two offices came into existence. The ideal is for a congregation to have a plurality of elders; however, due to size most churches are too small to support more than one full time pastor. There is nothing wrong with compensating a vocational elder,



but neither is it wrong for a pastor to be bi-vocational like the apostle Paul who was a tentmaker (Acts 18:3).

“Take heed therefore unto yourselves and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch, and remember that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears. And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified. I have coveted no man’s silver, or gold, or apparel. Yea, ye yourselves know, that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me” (Acts 20:28-34).

Elder rule is not ruling by physical force, but loving leadership in light of scriptural knowledge, insight, and discernment. Elders are not the originators of authority, but administrators of authority. First Peter, chapter five, and verse three puts it this way, “Neither as being lords over God’s heritage, but being ensamples (examples) to the flock.” The actual authority of an elder lies in the Word of God. A congregation is expected to submit to the leadership of their elders as long as they rule according to Holy Scripture. Hebrews, chapter thirteen,

and verse seventeen, exhorts us to, “Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you.”

If an elder errors, then the local church is responsible to show him his wrong. First Timothy, chapter five, and verses nineteen through twenty, declares, “Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses. Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear.” Just because a man is an elder doesn’t mean that he has arrived at perfection or is above sin. If the elder is not growing in the “grace” and “knowledge” (II Pet. 3:18) of the Lord Jesus Christ, then he, like anyone else, will be susceptible to spiritual or moral failure.

There is no clear method given in Scripture as to how a church should go about choosing its elders. We often speak of a God-called preacher when it comes to a pastor. The truth of the matter is that it’s the only type of pastor that a local church should desire. I’m afraid that many congregations of today want a CEO to keep their machinery oiled and to run their show! They want him to play “big shot” in the denomination and make the congregation popular in the community. Most churches now want a man with a list of degrees, thinking that will qualify him to be a servant of the living God. Well, just look at the original disciples! Perhaps one reason why God didn’t give us more detail concerning a church calling their elders is because He is the One Who does the calling in the first place.

The responsibility of the local church is to recognize a man's spiritual calling from God. Maybe we're doing it wrong by a church looking for a pastor when it ought to be the pastor looking for a church. In other words, instead of a pastor search committee seeking out the kind pastor they desire, could it be that it's the pastor who should seek out the local church where God might lead him? The manner in which such a man is received by a local church, especially when there are no plurality of elders in place, is not given in Scripture. Therefore, it could very well be by vote of the congregation if the local assembly is already established. I say this based upon how the church in Jerusalem selected their deacons and then had them approved by the apostles.

There are some major issues of importance when a congregation needs to vote. That's the way it was in the Jerusalem church. Eldership is perhaps one of the most important matters of a local church. If the pastor is planting a local church himself, then it's already established as to who is the elder. Then, the matter of finding a plurality of elders comes into play. There's no easy answer to that question. I could offer some suggestions (which I'll try to do in the last chapter of this book), but I have no definite answer that would meet the needs of every congregation. What we do know is that it is the Holy Spirit Who appoints elders over the church, like He did the apostle Paul, and that God's ideal is a plurality of elders in every church.

We also know that the "laying on of hands" (I Tim. 4:14), which we refer to as ordination (Acts 14:23), expresses a congregations approval of an elder or

deacon into either one of those particular offices. It's clear from the establishment of these two offices, that God wants local churches to avoid confusion and disorder. In order for a congregation to function properly, God grants spiritual gifts to the born again members (I Cor. 12). Under the Old Testament patriarchal system the father was the family priest as he administered circumcision and sacrificed offerings. Under the Mosaic Law, a special priesthood was instituted to regulate the spiritual life of the Israelites. Later, there were kings, prophets, and synagogues that led Israel with Godly instruction. Under the New Covenant, Christ arranged an order for His church making it perfectly clear that He is the "head" of His "body" (Eph. 1:22-23, 5:23) with elders (overseers) in every local church.

Actually, we could say that according to Scripture, the church is a spiritual monarchy with Christ abiding and ruling by means of the Holy Spirit through His written Word. Christ used the early apostles to plant local churches in the world and to feed the sheep by inspired teaching. As the church grew numerically, the apostles were unable to attend to all the duties that began to surface. For that reason, as I've already pointed out in this book, deacons were chosen to assist the elders (Acts 6:1-6). I would like to mention that one of the spiritual gifts which causes a local church to properly function is "governments" (I Cor. 12:28) as it is translated in the KJV. The same word is also translated "administration" in the NKJV. The Greek word from which this comes means steer or pilot a ship.

It speaks of one in spiritual leadership of a local church. From the two offices that God has established within the church, we clearly see that the elders are involved in ruling and the deacons in serving.

The Bible doesn't actually record the origination of elders, but only the calling of the twelve disciples. Soon after the office of deacon was instituted, the office of elder came into existence. Just remember, that up until the office of elder was established, the apostles served as elders to all the churches. Neither the office of deacon or elder is for the purpose of dominating, but serving. Pastors are forbidden to be "lords over God's heritage" (I Pet. 5:3). The only authority one has within the church is that which has been authorized by the "head" (Col. 1:18). It did not take long before God's biblical form of church government to become corrupted. With the organizing of the episcopate, there came a distinction that lifted up a ruler above the local church elder thus creating a spiritual hierarchy.

I would be wrong if I told you that elder government is without problems because where people are involved there will be problems. Nothing is perfect on this side of Glory. There is no such thing as a perfect congregation and no local church with perfect government because it is governed by imperfect people. However, if you knowingly have non-qualified elders, then you've got big problems and you're asking for trouble. Eldership can be abused, but when it is abused, the church is authorized by God to follow biblical steps to correct it. Elders ought to fulfill their office in fear and trembling as servants of the Most High God.

From the very beginning of the local New Testament assemblies, they were begun under the preaching of the Gospel as converts repented and believed in saving faith. These congregations were not mere social gatherings, but organized and orderly assemblies meeting together to fulfill the Great Commission. They were started under the direction of the apostles and then continued by the setting apart of elders and deacons. Scripture says that “elders” were established in “every church” (Acts 14:23).

Christ is the “Chief Shepherd” of the church; however in His physical absence, He has delegated the spiritual oversight of His flock to human under-shepherds that we call “pastors” or “elders.” These elders are to do the work of pastoring the flock being assisted in temporal matters by the deacons. Let me say very clearly that a plurality of elders is not needed to be a functioning church, but they are needed in order for the church to be what God would have it be organizationally. Perhaps this is what Paul had in mind when he wrote to Titus in the Book that bears his name. “For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee” (Titus 1:5).

There is no way that an exact number of elders and deacons can be determined for every local church. To force people into an office is to fill the position with unqualified individuals. It’s best to have no elders than the wrong elders and no deacons than to have the wrong deacons. Through the years as the visible church has waned in spirituality and power, the plurality of elders

has slowly diminished from the New Testament Church. Today, the majority of congregations do not have elder government, but, as I stated previously in this book, there are people who are beginning to “see the light” and rediscover the truth of biblical government. This includes Baptist congregations.

I believe that the greatest and best thing that can happen to an individual is to be birthed into the family of God by the power of the Holy Spirit. I’m talking about being saved and being a “born again” (Jh. 3:3) believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. Every Christian is saved to serve and use their spiritual gift to the glory of God and the benefit of a local church. I also believe that one of the greatest privileges given to mortal man is the high calling of God in Christ Jesus to preach the glorious Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is indeed amazing that God would allow any mortal man to do such a thing, but He has promised to use the “foolish things of the world to confound the wise” (I Cor. 1:27).

It appears that whatever crowns one might receive in heaven will be laid back at the feet of Jesus (Rev. 4:4) because He alone is worthy (Rev. 5:20). Scripture speaks of several different crowns that will be given to the saints in heaven. From First Peter, chapter five, and verse four, we read about what is commonly referred to as the pastor’s crown.

“And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away” (I Pet. 5:4)

The pastor (elder) will not receive this crown because of his own personal worthiness because he has none. It is a crown of eternal reward that is promised to the faithful pastor for his service unto the Lord during his ministry upon earth. Christ is the Good Shepherd Who laid down His life for His sheep. Christ is the “head” of His church, thus making Him the “Chief Shepherd.” But, in His physical absence from this earth, He continues to rule His church by the power of the Holy Spirit in and through His God called (ordained) pastors (elders/bishops).

I’ve never met a God called pastor who did not struggle with his call into the ministry. That’s the way it ought to be. Any man who wants or demands the position (office) will usually want it for selfish reasons. Oftentimes, that’s the way it is with the modern day deacons in many if not most Baptist churches.

In my pastoral autobiography, *My Life As A Pastor, Shepherding God’s Sheep And Herding Goats*, I tell about men who lusted over and fought over being a deacon because they saw it as a position of power and prestige. Being a New Testament deacon according to Scripture is a lowly position of service with no authority.

Men don’t go looking for the office of a bishop no more than they go looking for Christ in salvation. It is a sovereign call of God to both salvation and service. God alone can convert the soul of a sinner and give that sinner a desire for Christ. Likewise, only God can give a man the genuine “desire” for the “office of a bishop” (I Tim. 3:1).



In our salvation, we surrender to the Lordship of Christ and discover the words of the Psalmist in chapter thirty seven and verse four, “Delight thyself also in the Lord; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart.” God gives under-shepherds to His church to feed and nurture them in the Word of God. There is no greater work on the face of the earth that carries with it rewards that are “out of this world.”

## **Chapter 7**

### **A Possible Solution**

I've saved this chapter for the last as I try to offer a possible solution to how small congregations that are lacking in spiritually qualified elders may practice elder government. Mega-churches seem to be on the increase, but the truth of the matter is that small congregations having only one pastor remain in the majority. With a local church consisting of forty, fifty, and even a hundred members trying to find a sufficient number of elders may be difficult. In order to have a plurality, there must be at least two and I can conceive of more if at all possible. No specific number is given in Scripture.

As I approach this subject, let me say loud and clear that denominations may have their place and often serve a worthy purpose. However, my allegiance is not to a denomination, but to the Lord Jesus Christ. I've often referred to the written "Word" as God's Printed Voice and to Christ as the Living "Word" (Jh. 1:1-5,14).

One of my biggest problems with denominationalism is how politics comes into play. To me, "that stinks." However, I'm not going to chase that rabbit anymore and simply say that what I'm about to mention is not denominational. I'm going to speak of local churches of like mind and faith. Congregations that are on the same "theological page." I'm not in the slightest bit talking about denominational control, either on a local or national level.

My possible solution that I offer when a local church only has one elder is for at least two or more like-minded pastors, who both serve a one elder congregation, to form an elder council for the local churches in which they serve. Basically, this means that each pastor would be considered an elder of each congregation making up the elder council. Perhaps the pastors could take turns every month or quarter and exchange pulpits in order to stay in touch and acquainted with all the congregations over which they serve on the elder council. If and when a plurality of elders can be formed within a local church, then that pastor sitting on the elder council will drop from that position. I offer this suggestion for two basic reasons. One, it prevents a single elder from being a dictator. Two, I glean this idea from the fifteenth chapter of the Book of Acts and the second chapter of Galatians. Please let me explain myself.

Denominations as we know it today didn't come into being until many years after the Jerusalem Council met around 49-50 AD. This Jerusalem Council is sometimes referred to as the Apostolic Conference. Therefore, I'm not talking about denominational hierarchy to which I've already addressed and strongly oppose as non-biblical. There are two accounts in the New Testament of the historic Jerusalem Council, one in Acts and the other in Galatians. Both passages deal with the relationship of Gentile believers to the Mosaic Law. The specific target of the debate dealt with the subject of circumcision. Paul and Barnabas went up to Jerusalem to defend the fact that Gentiles were not

obligated to keep the Jewish ritual and that Justification was by faith alone.

Without getting into the subject of this council meeting, my point is the manner in which this matter of business was handled. Acts 15:2 tells us that “Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question.” I’m using this as an example as to how this matter was handled by the early apostles. It’s not necessarily a precedent for us to follow, but perhaps we can learn something from their coming together to transact the spiritual matters of the New Testament church which concerned them.

Certain Pharisees from the Jerusalem church went to Antioch and told the Gentile Christians that they could not be saved without first being circumcised. Paul, whose ministry was primarily among the Gentiles, had never preached such a false doctrine. He taught that salvation is based on God’s grace and not on man’s works. With the New Testament church becoming more Gentile, a real crisis arose among the Jews in Jerusalem. Paul and Barnabas decided to take the issue before the “apostles and elders” in Jerusalem.

Without being dogmatic and claiming to have all the answers, I’m just suggesting this type of arrangement among at least two or more congregations with each having a single elder. In forming such an elder council, it would be mandatory for the local churches to be in doctrinal agreement. What I’m suggesting is basically an unheard of thing, but I don’t see why it couldn’t work if and only if local churches and pastors have a

genuine heart for God and are doctrinally sound. That is probably where the biggest problem will come into focus.

## **Closing Thoughts**

Church government is a subject that is not heard nor talked about very often. In fact, it's actually a much neglected subject in the modern day church. Most Christians have no idea of any other type of church government than what is practiced in their local assembly. It's like eschatology, the study of last things, in the sense that most people have never heard, but one view. If they hear something different from what they have always known, then they most likely will be suspicious and skeptical.

Were there churches in the New Testament with only one elder? I personally believe that there could have been. I'm reminded of the letters to the seven churches in Revelation (Rev. 2-3). As John wrote to them, he began addressing each church by saying, "unto the angel of the church." The word, "angel," means messenger. There are different views as to who this "angel" could have been. Some think that it was a literal angel, but why would a letter be written to an angel? I believe that it was the bishop/elder/pastor of that particular local church. "Angel," as it appears in the seven churches, is in the singular and not the plural meaning that there was only one pastor.

In the Book of Acts as well as Paul's epistles, it emphasizes a plurality of elders in "every church." But, when we come to the Book of Revelation and these letters to the seven churches, if "angel" is speaking of the pastor, then there's only one. How did they practice elder government if they were following the inspired

teachings of Paul? That's a good question with no answer. Perhaps they did it like Paul and Barnabas when they met with the other apostles and elders at the Jerusalem Council. Like a lot of things, we'll never know on this side of Glory and when we get to Heaven, it will not make any difference whatsoever. I'm sure that when we get to heaven, church government will be the least of our concerns as we behold the Lord of Glory ruling over His people forevermore.

The same apostle Paul who wrote about ordaining elders in "every church" also met with the "apostles and elders" in the first recorded Jerusalem Council concerning resolving a serious spiritual issue facing the church. Then, under divine inspiration the Holy Spirit led him to establish for us the priority of ministry when he proclaimed to the Philippian jailor, "believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved" (Acts 16:31). Nothing is more important for a local church than to be engaged in evangelism and discipleship. These are two sides of the same coin, so to speak.

If you are not saved, then that is your greatest need. Repentance of sin and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is the only way to heaven when you die. (see my tract at the close of this book, *Where Will You Be One Minute After Death?*) Regardless of the type of church government you practice or your church membership, if you are not transformed by the miracle working power of the Holy Spirit in the new birth, Heaven will not be your eternal home. Church government is important, but it's not as important as a sinner's salvation! If you are saved, then you ought to be growing in the "grace

and knowledge” of God’s Word. This includes every area of doctrinal truth, including the government of a local church.

I trust that this little book has been helpful and enlightening. Hopefully, it will stimulate your thinking as to how we should be doing the work of our Lord in and through the ranks of the local church. Whatever we do, we ought to be doing it “decently and in order” and to the glory of God. Any church government that does not meet that criteria is a shame and disgrace to the cause of Christ. Each of us should have the attitude like that of John the Baptist when he looked at Jesus and said, “He must increase, but I must decrease” (Jh. 3:30).

*Where Will  
You Be  
One Minute  
After Death?*



**Death is not only the result of sin, but we can also say that death is TIME that has run out!** Each beat of the heart proves that your time on earth is running out and you're one second nearer death. Someday your life span on earth will end only to find eternity beginning. Time is so short with the contrast of eternity being so long. How long is eternity? It can be defined as, "time without end." There is only ONE eternity, but please remember that it has two destinies (Heaven for the redeemed and Hell for the unregenerate. Your next heartbeat could be your last. Whenever the last beat throbs in your chest, where will you spend the endless age of eternity?

*Questions, such as, "Why was I put on earth, what is life really all about, and what will happen to me after death?", have a natural way of raising the human curiosity. We can only answer such questions with true satisfaction and inner peace through the Holy Scriptures. The Bible is God's mouthpiece to man and the only divinely inspired Book that tells how to be prepared for the moment of death. God's Written Word reveals the Living Word and is our road map for living. Life is a journey, a pilgrimage, through this age of TIME. One thing that most people have in common is the crossing of death's chilling waters.*

When God created man, He gave him a physical body of flesh for this world, but a spiritual body of soul and spirit for the world to come. God created Adam and Eve with the intention of them having fellowship with their Creator. After the first couple sinned in the garden, God provided a means of restoring fellowship with fallen man through animal sacrifice that prefigured the coming of Jesus Christ in substitutionary atonement. God promised that Jesus would be the Supreme Sacrifice for man's sin. John the Baptist verified this by saying of Jesus, "behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world" (Jh. 1:29).

Ever since Adam, all mankind, except Christ Who was virgin born and God in human flesh, has inherited the same sinful nature. Believers in the Old Testament anticipated the coming of the Redeemer by shedding animal blood in sacrifice. Jesus was God's human sacrifice Who became the Substitute in paying the penalty of our sin. The only way man can be restored to fellowship with His Creator and be saved from the penalty of sin for all eternity is by trusting Jesus Christ in child-like faith. We often refer to this as God's plan of salvation. Head knowledge or intellectual belief is not enough to get you into Heaven. You must

repent and trust Christ as Savior of soul and Lord of life, meaning that you commit to His Lordship in full surrender. When we yield ourselves to Christ, we realize that He takes up residence in our eternal soul. Only the Holy Spirit can conquer our sinful nature and transform us within.

If you have never found new life in Christ, if you have never been changed by the miracle working power of God in the new birth, if unforgiven sin is keeping you from fellowship with God, then you have never found the meaning and purpose for living and you're not ready to die. God has done all that is required to purchase your salvation. How you respond to Christ in this life will reflect where you will be ONE MINUTE AFTER DEATH! Will you be as Paul said, "to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord" (II Cor. 5:8), or will you be suffering the torments of Hell? A person will not go to Hell because God is cruel, but because of man's own unforgiven sin, stubbornness, and pride. After death, you will be with Jesus in Paradise only if you are truly converted through repentance of sin and personal transforming faith in Jesus Christ. The way to Heaven is not through creeds, customs, religion, family inheritance, or denominations, but only by

God's plan of salvation. Christianity is not a religion, but a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

**Romans 3:23, "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God."** Every man has displeased God, no matter the bigness or littleness of the sin. Adam only ate a forbidden piece of fruit while King David committed adultery and murder. Both found forgiveness. The first step is confessing that you are a sinner, that your sin has separated you from Holy God, and that you need saving from the penalty of your sin.

**Luke 13:3** reminds us that "**except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.**" You must be truly sorry for your sin and turn from the old deliberate, sinful, and corrupt way of living. In conversion, Christ changes us, gives us a new nature, and demands that we walk in newness of life. As long as we are in fleshly bodies, we'll never be perfect, but our daily goal is to resist the flesh, separate ourselves from sin, and grow spiritually in Christ.

**John 3:16, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”** You will not go to Heaven because you’re good nor will you go to Hell because you’re bad. Salvation is a gift from God. It cannot be earned. You must respond by faith to God’s free gift of grace. God loved you so much that He gave His only begotten Son to die in your place on the cross. Three days after Jesus died, He arose proving His deity which only He has ever done. When you trust Him as your personal Savior, then He guarantees you victory over sin, death, Hell, and the grave at the time of your death.

**Romans 6:23, “The wages of sin is death: but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”** Just as a person receives wages from his employer, you will someday receive wages from your Creator as to how you lived life. Those that reject Christ will discover an eternity of pain and misery. But, the Christian will find himself in eternal joy having been forgiven and freed from all temptation, sin, suffering, sickness, sadness, and sorrow.

**Romans 10:9, “If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.”** There is no such thing as secret discipleship. Your commitment to Christ will be obvious. Genuine conversion will be evident. Heart belief is a surrender that produces a noticeable difference. To be truly saved from the penalty of sin will make one unashamed of the risen Christ.

**Heb. 10:25, “Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together.”** Going to the church house on Sunday will NOT give you a license to enter Heaven. Many people with their names on church rolls will end up in Hell. Don't look at the hypocrites or any other man for your example. Look to Jesus for in Him you will find no fault. The Bible teaches Christians to be baptized as an act of public testimony of their faith (Matt. 28:19-20) and to gather together for the study of God's Word. The only way to become a victorious believer is to study and apply God's Word to your daily living. Satan seeks to destroy a Christian's witness, but the power of Christ alone can defeat the devil as you daily arm yourself by faith in the

Word. Daily, we need to pray and read the Scriptures. Every Sunday, we ought to congregate with fellow believers for the teaching of God's Word. Unless we take in physical nourishment, then we'll become weak. The same is true spiritually, That's why we need to feast upon the Word of God and be taught life changing truths that can make a difference in the way we live once we put those principles into practice.

Only the Holy Spirit can give you a genuine hunger and thirst for Almighty God. Only God can convict you of sin, righteousness, and the judgment. He alone can give you faith to believe and a repentant heart with a disgust over your sin. Becoming a true Christian is trusting Jesus Christ as Savior of your soul and Lord of your life. Apart from Christ, you will never find life worth living and be ready to die!

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