

# Godly Servants

A Glimpse Into  
The Subject  
Of  
Elders  
Deacons  
And  
Deaconesses

“Some Food For Thought”

Burley W. Moore

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All scripture references are taken from the KJV

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## Preface

When I wrote my first book, *Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage*, I was pastoring a church in Albemarle, NC, at the time. The local newspaper, Stanly News and Press, contacted me and wanted to do an interview. I was asked if I planned to write more books to which I replied in the affirmative. I said that I wanted to write a book dealing with the biblical role of a New Testament deacon. Also, I told them that when I retired, I wanted to write an autobiography. Well, after I retired from the pastorate, I did write my autobiography, *My Life as a Pastor, Shepherding God's Sheep and Herding Goats*. I'm just getting around to writing on what I see is the biblical role of a New Testament deacon. However, the more I thought about this subject, the more I realized that I needed to include the New Testament elder as well as the role of women in the church. To exclude either of these offices will not do justice to the subject to which I write.

I'm sure there will be many people to disagree with me concerning my views on this subject, but that is perfectly fine. Anytime that a writer puts his thoughts into print, he will be subject to public scrutiny. Besides, I'll admit to not having all the answers to all the questions. However, after serving the Lord and dealing with churches for all these many years, I would like to share my perspective on the subject and what I think the Bible is teaching when it comes to being a godly servant.

## **Chapter 1**

### **Hand Me Down Theology**

In my first book, I used a phrase that I called, “Hand Me Down Theology.” I used it in reference to what I had been told, but later came to realize that it was not really biblical theology. This can be said of many things to which we’re all exposed in our early years of trying to grow in the Lord and learning the Word of God. No person has all the answers and the truth of the matter is that as Christians, including pastors, we’re ever learning, but never arriving at knowing it all on this side of glory.

Now, don’t get me wrong! I’m not talking about sound Bible doctrine that needs to be handed down from generation to generation. The mighty truths of God’s WORD are not only ageless, but changeless and remain the same down through the years. However, humans are prone to put their slant on the Holy Scriptures, take it out of context, make it say what they want it to say, and then pass it on to the next generation without them ever digging into the WORD for themselves.

Let me illustrate what I’m trying to say by telling you this little story. There was once a newly married lady that wanted to impress her husband with a good meal. So, she decided to prepare a ham as the choice for a meat. When the husband sees her cutting off the end of the ham, his curiosity got the best of him and he asked as to why she was cutting the ham in such a fashion. She thought for a moment and said that it was because that is what her mother always did. That caused the new bride to give her mother a phone call and ask why she always cut the end off the ham. The mother thought for a moment and said that she didn’t know because that is what her mother had always done. With that, the new bride called her grandmother and asked why she cut the end off of the ham when she prepared to bake it. The grandmother replied, “Because it would not fit into my oven.”

I wonder how many times we’re guilty of the same sort of thing in the church. Things that are not clear cut from the Scriptures, but areas of practice that we’ve never questioned as to them being

truly biblical. When I became a Christian at the age of ten, I became an active member of a Baptist church. It just so happened to be a Southern Baptist Church and it was within those ranks that I spent most of my forty years of ministry before retirement. Very early in my pastoral ministry, I became convinced that expository preaching was the way to go; therefore, as the years passed and I preached through the Word of God, I began to rethink how the positions of pastor and deacon were viewed by the churches that I pastored.

Let me emphasize from the very beginning of this book that I'm not writing on the subject of church government and have no plans of dealing with this matter in-depth. That will have to be another subject for another occasion if I ever choose to address it. However, as we progress in our study, I'll simply touch on the matter of church government.

I grew up, pastored churches, and experienced congregational government at its worst. This caused me to look at the teachings concerning elders and deacons the way it had been handed down to me. In turn, I read the Scriptures to see what the Word of God had to say and compared the two offices.

It's so easy to adopt or make culture a matter of theology instead of simply relying on Holy Scripture. Let me illustrate and please listen to me carefully! I'm not against having Sunday School classes. That is, I'm not against having Sunday School classes that are taught by competent, God called, and God gifted Bible teachers. Do you know how many churches, big and small, qualify under those guidelines? Most churches that I know anything about will select anyone who has breath in their body to teach a Bible class. Oh, I know how it goes. I know what the thinking is. I know the "religious reasoning" that is behind the asking. The person we ask will have to study and learn the Word. It will be a good excuse for them to dig into the Bible. Well, that may sound good, but if a person does not bear evidence of being gifted to teach God's Word, they simply have no business with the job. PERIOD! You don't put someone in office and hope they'll become gifted. A person is to demonstrate his gift and then you put them in office.

Let me say while on the subject of Sunday School classes, that the majority of them today are in my opinion, pathetic. Some become a church within the church, or in other words a separate congregation within the local church doing its own thing. They have their own little “click” going that feeds their own egos. It becomes, like a lot of churches, nothing more than a religious social club.

Now, please do not misunderstand me. I think that they can be a good thing if and only if the Word of God is taught by competent Bible teachers who have the spiritual gift of teaching God’s Word. The Sunday School hour should be seen as a Bible Study hour; however, most of the time it amounts to a poor excuse. Someone has very accurately stated that the average Sunday School class is filled with ten minutes of drinking coffee, another fifteen minutes of discussing prayer requests and announcements, followed by about thirty-five minutes of haphazard study consisting of 25% instruction, 25% remarks by classmates, and 50% rambling by about two particular classmates.

As for me, I hate, yes, I deplore discussion classes! The teaching method that I prefer to follow has been called the master teacher plan. I don’t care what you call it, I prefer to sit under the instruction of one that has been gifted of God to teach, has spent time with God in the Word, and listen to what that teacher has to say without having to endure the opinions of everyone else in the class. I refer to a discussion class as the pooling of people’s ignorance. As for me, I don’t care to hear what a passage of Scripture has to say to someone else. I want to know what God has to say from a given passage of Scripture. There may be various interpretations from a given passage, but to the best of our ability, we need to dig deep and find the meaning that God has for us to glean as we study it in context. The point that I’m trying to make is that it takes study, a lot of study from the Word of God, and that is what the pastor is called to do in order to teach the flock of God.

As you’ll discover in this book, my position is that the pastor is the person whom God has entrusted with the care of the sheep. He is the primary teacher of God’s Word to the local church. In Ephesians, 4:11, the words, “pastors and teachers” are two words

that go together. Some have suggested that it be a hyphenated word because it is a single office of spiritual leadership in the church. It's referring to the shepherding or teaching ministry of the one who serves as the undershepherd of God's Sheep. If a local church has more than one pastor, then they are to share in the teaching ministry together. God calls and gifts pastors (elders) to work under the authority of the "Lord Jesus that great shepherd of the sheep" (Heb. 13:20). In the physical absence of Christ, God calls and gifts men to speak for Him from the precious written Word of God. More will be said about this when the time comes, but I simply mention this to make my point.

How do we biblically, go about choosing leaders for our local congregations? To me, that's a good question and one that I think needs to be answered from the Holy Scriptures. I don't know about you, but hand me down theology, that has no sound Bible basis, does not satisfy me. If you look at the nominating committee report in the average church, you will find a long list of "jobs" that need to be "filled." The Bible doesn't say anything about Sunday School classes, baptismal committees, etc., but it does speak of elders and deacons. So, let's put hand me down theology aside and make it real simple. Let's see what God's Word says about those who serve the Lord in the ranks of the local church.

That which I write about in my publications is often a matter with which I have personally struggled down through the years. This book is no different. I must confess that there have been times when I've been so close to the forest that I could not see the trees. Having to "unlearn" non-biblical teachings that were programmed into me from my early years has not been easy. I understand how hard it is to get beyond deep-seated beliefs that "go against the grain" of what we think is correct. But, this one thing I know, truth is liberating. It was a glorious day when the Lord Jesus revealed Himself to me and saved my unworthy soul delivering me from the bondage of my sin. Likewise, I find it spiritually liberating to study God's Word and discover truth that delivers me from the bondage of legalism, churchanity, and self-righteousness.

As you read this little book, I trust that it may challenge some of you to let go of your hand me down theology and embrace truth



that will set you free. It might require some of you to take your blinders off and be willing to question if that which we have been taught in the past is really biblical. As we begin our study, let me ask that you try to the best of your ability to think in terms of first century Christianity rather than in terms of the modern day church. I believe that most churches of today are a far cry from anything like the early New Testament church. Try to put all of the modern machinery that comprises today's average church aside and get back to basics. That may be a helpful key to properly understand many of the truths taught in Scripture, besides the fact that the Holy Spirit is the One Who reveals truth to our hearts (Jh. 14:26).

It is God who brings the sinner to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ and He alone can open our eyes to see the truths of His Word. The New Testament Scriptures make it very simple when it comes to godly servants. There were men whom God called as pastors and then there were men and women who served Him in various ways in a local assembly. Let's see how it was done in the early days of Christianity and how it can be applied today. Regardless of the type government that a church practices, a congregation will rise or fall depending upon the spirituality of its leaders who are surrendered to Almighty God without any thought of selfish gain or self-glory.

## **Chapter 2**

### **What About Elder Government?**

What about elder government in a local church? To the average Baptist congregation as well as many other denominations, that may be a foreign concept and very quickly rejected because of how people like to boast about their congregational democratic government. Many Baptists like to claim one of their denominational distinctives to be its government by congregational rule and what they say is practicing the priesthood of the believer. By the way, I think that many people have greatly misunderstood the doctrine concerning the priesthood of the believer and used it in ways that are not biblical.

Let me say that I've always been a Baptist, but my allegiance first and foremost is to my God and His Holy Word. God got a hold of me before the Baptist did. In my opinion, one of the biggest things wrong in the average Baptist church is their style of congregational government. Some years ago, I'll never forget a DOM (director of missions) in our local association of Southern Baptist churches look me in the face and say the same thing. I was shocked to hear it coming from him, but I completely agreed with him. I'm not saying that you'll never find a Baptist church with elder government, but today it will be the exception rather than the rule. Past history records some Baptist churches with elder government dating back to the 1800's. Today, it appears that some eyes are being opened and elder government is beginning to once again make an entrance into some Baptist congregations.

The question that I raise is how can anyone read, much less study, the New Testament and not see elder government? I don't see congregational government in the pages of the New Testament the way it is generally practiced today in most local assemblies. However, that doesn't mean the congregation is not involved in the affairs of the church. The truth of the matter is that the issue of church government is not clearly addressed in-depth in the Scriptures. Therefore, if you were to do a study of church government, you'll find all sorts of variations in both elder and

congregational government styles. Actually, from my perspective, I would hold to what one might call elder-led government with a limited amount of congregational participation.

There is a time and place for the congregation to get involved, but how silly and unnecessary are most congregational business meetings. To this day, my wife remembers the big fuss during a church business meeting prior to our marriage over cutting down a tree on the church lawn. During my forty years of ministry before my pastoral retirement, I cannot even begin to tell you all the junk that was brought up in one of those church business meetings. In my opinion, it opens the door for the devil to walk right in and do his dastardly deeds. Regardless of the type government that is practiced, but especially those who practice congregational government, everyone ought to be reminded of the need for church discipline. Biblically speaking, the general governing of the church ought to basically lie in the hands of the elders.

A plurality of elders is always mentioned in the New Testament. That is not to say that there were no churches with only one elder (pastor). I'm just saying that no single pastor churches are mentioned unless we look at the "angels of the seven churches" (Rev. 1:20) as being a reference to the elders (pastors) of those seven churches. Some believe the "angels" refer to literal angels while others interpret this to mean messengers such as pastors. I personally have always held to it being the pastors of the seven churches as I read the letters to the seven churches in chapters two and three of Revelation. In those two chapters "angel" is singular as it is addressed to each of the individual churches.

If the above passage is referring to a single pastor of a local church, then how would elder government work in such a case? That is a good question when a plurality of elders is required to prevent dictatorship. Scripture does not tell us the answer to that question. It is not my intent to deal with the subject of church government; therefore, I'll not go any further except to say that there are ways in which this could be dealt. I do not see anything wrong with a single pastor congregation, but if elder rule were to be practiced, then some modification would have to be made to prevent dictatorial rule.

There are some subjects that the Bible does not address in detail such as that of church government. We only have the two offices mentioned along with the qualifications. Those two offices are “bishop” and “deacon.” I believe that when the Scriptures are silent in such areas, that the church is given some degree of liberty like we see in Paul addressing the subject of diet in Romans, chapter 14. In other words, there can be some variation in the structure of church government from congregation to congregation depending upon the needs of that local assembly. However, the truth presented to us from Holy Scripture concerning the role of pastors and deacons must not be altered.

Lest anyone misunderstand me, I want to make myself perfectly clear in my belief concerning local church autonomy that is free from outside control of an ecclesiastical hierarchy. I believe Scripture teaches that every local church ought to be an independent autonomous body of born again believers. If a church gets started as a mission project from a larger church, then the goal of the larger church should be to someday see the new church start to become independent.

I’m afraid that life is not always lived in the ideal mode, including matters of church government. I don’t mean to confuse anyone concerning this subject of elder government because I’ve already said more than I had ever intended to say. This is a study unto itself, but I want to make my position perfectly clear that elder-led government doesn’t leave the congregation totally out of the loop. However, the governing of the church is not done by every Tom, Dick, and Harry with their names on the church role. Neither are decisions made by immature Christians who are babes in the Lord, nor by children who are instructed how to vote by their parents.

Just stop and think of what’s involved in allowing a child who is a church member, perhaps eight, ten, twelve, or sixteen years of age, to vote on major church business. Scripture teaches that the oversight of the church is done by spiritually qualified men whom God has equipped with a knowledge of His Word. Children, physically or spiritually speaking, have no right to make serious church decisions. The United States of America has better sense

than that in not allowing anyone to vote in a national election until they are eighteen years of age. Otherwise a household could carry more votes than it should on any given issue if parents told their children how to vote.

As one who spent his entire pastoral ministry serving Baptist churches with congregational government, I can tell you that it will take a long time to ever lead a church from one form of government to another. If a local church does not start out from the beginning as an elder-led government then it will take years and possibly never to see the transition. I learned that I had to do the best I could with what I had to work with. Then again, most of the congregations that I served were small and few if any had another man in the assembly that qualified as an elder. Therefore, in order to keep from being dictatorial, I had to work with the deacons, making them substitute as elders. I'll be the first to admit that wasn't ideal, but neither was I going to become a dictator (I Pet. 5:3) to the flock over which God had entrusted me. Pastors are to lead by example and not by force (Heb. 13:7).

The ideal is elder-led government, meaning a plurality of elders within a congregation. The way I see it, it's the only form of church government found in the New Testament. However, at this point comes division because those who hold to congregational government believe that is the teaching of Scripture while those of us who hold to elder-led government believe it to be biblical. I don't think God ever ordained for a local church to be ruled by majority opinion or by a single pastor. In a plurality of elders one has no more authority than another. I personally do not care for the term "senior pastor" because it gives the concept of one having more authority than another. Perhaps, using the terminology of lead-pastor, team-pastor, or co-pastor would be acceptable, depending upon church structure. I really don't see anything wrong with referring to them all as pastors. Some of the pastors may have a more designated duty and that may be attached to their title of pastor. For the sake of organization, I can see designating an elder to be the lead elder, especially when it comes to meeting together.

Eldership is a team effort; however, from the apostles we see that some were more visible than others and leadership arose from among them. It appears that Peter emerged as the apparent leader or spokesman for the apostles. Matthew begins his list of apostles by naming “the first, Simon, who is called Peter” (Matt. 10:2). The word “first” in the Greek is *protos* that not only means “first” but chief or principle. He had no more authority than the rest of the apostles, but he became their principle leader.

There are some that will argue the point of congregational government by using the selection of deacons from Acts 6:5-6. But, let me remind you that first of all these men were not elders, but deacons and once these men were chosen, they were brought to the apostles for approval. The apostles did not bring them to the congregation for approval. At this point, I want to remind you that I’m not going into detail on the subject of church government, but let me say that elder government should not totally eliminate the voice of the congregation. I believe there will be legitimate times when the elders will need to consult with the congregation. Such as, it may be in the selection of their elders especially one who is supported financially by the congregation, or in the event of a building project that will require a large expenditure of funds.

I remind you that elders are not dictators who cram things down people’s throats, but spiritual leaders that lead by example from the Word of God. It is my personal belief that the congregation should be routinely informed as to the matters of church income and finances in order to be open and not secretive. Elders are not to go around hiding things from the congregation that ought to be made public. But, at the same time, neither is it required that every little insignificant congregational matter be publicized.

The leadership of a local congregation will set the spiritual tone of the assembly. Therefore, it is all-important to have the right biblical elders. We don’t have to study far into the Book of Acts before we discover the appointing of “elders” in the churches (Acts 14:23, 20:17). When all the apostles died off the scene, the office of elder became the highest level of leadership in the New Testament church.

The elder is to be a loving shepherd over the flock that God has entrusted to him. He should never see it as his flock, but the “flock of God” (I Pet. 5:2) because the elder is no more than a steward over God’s possession. The church belongs to Christ. He called it “my church” (Matt. 13:18). For that reason I have tried to be very careful and not refer to the local congregation that I pastored as my church. It was my pastorate that God had entrusted to me, but it was His “church.” The “church” is His “body” (Col. 1:8) over which He is the “head.” What a privilege it is to serve the Lord of Glory as an undershepherd of his “flock,” but at the same time what an awesome responsibility!

Let me say in closing this particular chapter that regardless of the form of government that a church practices, it is most important she upholds high godly standards for her leadership. Notice that I used the feminine pronouns for the church. That is because the church is the “bride” (Rev. 21:9) of Christ. It’s not worth tearing up a church over trying to change the government as long as you fill it with biblically qualified godly leaders and servants. Regardless of the type of church government you find in a local assembly, you will be dealing with imperfect people subject to failure who must constantly seek to mature in the faith and grow in grace.

If you have elder government and those elders are corrupt leaders, then the congregation will not be the better off. In such a case, it would be better to have congregational government consisting of a body of truly regenerated people. I’m not suggesting that a church accept into membership those who are not saved, but to be honest, as Scripture tells us, there will be “tares” that will creep in and grow “among the wheat” (Matt. 13:25). I’m a firm believer in trying to maintain a regenerated membership, but few churches of today take it seriously. Herein lies a big problem with congregational government. However, regardless of government, the bottom line is that elders (pastors) ought to be God called and God gifted men who are empowered and led by the Holy Spirit to serve as undershepherds in the local churches where God places them.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Who And What Are Elders?**

There are three Greek words in the New Testament, all of which refers to one biblical office. We now turn to the Book of First Timothy, chapter 3, and read verses 1 through 7.

“This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work. A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach: Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre: but patient, not a brawler, not covetous: One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity: (For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?) Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover he must have a good report of them which are without: lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.”

To begin with, let me call to your attention that this is strictly a male position. Scripture says, “if a man” who is the “husband of one wife.” To be honest and true to the Word of God, the Greek word for “man” can honestly be translated to mean whoever. But, in the very next verse it is clear that it is a male position from the fact that if he is married, then he must be a “husband of one wife,” simply meaning that he is to be devoted to one woman. “Husband” is the Greek word, *aner*, which speaks of the male in reference to gender and narrows this “office” down to a masculine position. There is no indication in this passage that makes provision for a female bishop. Besides, the closing verses of the previous chapter (I Tim. 2:11-15) which leads up to this subject clarifies that position. (More will be said concerning this matter in chapter nine)

In this text, we are introduced to the “office of a bishop” as it is translated in the KJV. The NKJV translates it to read “position of a bishop” and the ESV says, “the office of overseer.” The Greek speaks of “overseer-ship.” Herein, we see the first of the three



Greek words that refers to this one position. Actually, in the Greek text, “office of a bishop” appears as one word, episkope. The word “bishop,” episkopos, means guardian and emphasizes the FUNCTION of this “office.” It speaks of the man whom God has placed in charge of spiritually supervising and overseeing the well-being of His sheep (Acts 20:28). The word “rule” refers to the “overseers” who lead the church (Heb. 13:17,24). “Oversight” comes from the same root word as “overseer” (I Pet. 5:2). Just because the “bishop” is the spiritual “overseer” of the church doesn’t make him a dictator (I Pet. 5:2-3). The “bishop” is to lead by spiritual “example” and not by dictatorial authority. No New Testament assembly is to be governed by mere personal opinion or by one “bishop.”

The Holy Spirit should rule the church as He brings us into harmony with the will of God through the instruction of His Word. Therefore, the spiritual health of a local church will have a great deal to do with its leadership and the focal point of that leadership is the “bishop” who does his job of being both elder and pastor.

Now, we come to the second word that is referring to the same “office” and that is the word “elder.” It’s a word that refers to the SPIRITUAL MATURITY of the man who holds the “office of a bishop.” The origin of the word “elder” comes from the Old Testament reference to the seventy tribal leaders who helped Moses judge the people (Num. 11:16, Deut. 1:9-18, 27:1). Later, in the life of Israel, these elders became involved in the leadership role of various cities (I Sam. 11:3, 16:4, 30:26). Sometimes in the Greek text, the word “elder” is used to refer to an aged person and at other times it speaks of spiritual leaders who hold the “office of a bishop.” The context in which the word is found must help determine the proper application of the word itself.

In referring to a “bishop,” the word “elder” speaks of his spiritual maturity for service. Because the early New Testament church was basically Jewish, it could easily relate to the concept of elders being their spiritual leaders. Therefore, the churches that we know about from the Book of Acts “ordained ... elders” to oversee their local ministry (Acts 14:23). The “elder” must never forget that those whom he teaches are not his, but “the flock of

God” (I Pet. 5:2) and that he is only a steward of what God has entrusted to him.

The third word that refers to the same “office” is the word “pastor” and it points to the TEACHING (feeding) WORK that the “elder” is to do as he serves in his role of “bishop.” The word “pastor” gives us a description of a shepherd who provides for and protects his sheep. It’s a word that emphasizes the pastoral attitude of caring, feeding, training, and protecting “the flock of God” (I Pet. 5:2). Both words, “pastor” (poimen) and “feed” (poimaino) comes from the same root in the Greek (Eph. 4:11).

Quite contrary to public opinion, the Bible declares that Christian ministry is “work” as Paul writes to Timothy in our text. It’s an insult to any hard working “pastor” for people to think that he only works one day a week. The pastorate is “a good work,” but it is also a very demanding “work” if it’s done properly. It demands a variety of activities that can become exhausting physically, spiritually, mentally, and emotionally. It’s hard “work” to bury yourself in the Word of God and dig out the mighty truths that God would have us to learn. That’s why Timothy was admonished by Paul to “study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (II Tim. 2:15). That same admonition is given to pastors today.

Not only is the pastor’s job hard work, but also it’s a warfare. Trying to be faithful in teaching the Word of God means that the pastor can expect to enter into hand to hand combat with the Devil and the forces of Hell (Eph. 6:11-18). Satan does not want God’s Word being proclaimed and the Lord’s work done. That in itself can be draining.

There are many different hats that a pastor must wear, but I cannot emphasize enough that he must keep the main thing the main thing. Not only must the pastor maintain his focus, but also the church that he pastors must maintain their focus. Christ must have the “preeminence” (Col. 1:18).

## **Chapter 4**

### **What Elders Do**

In the previous chapter, I gave three different Greek words, all of which refers to one office. Those who occupy this office are most frequently called by the title pastor, elder, or bishop. The most common title is that of pastor. Regardless of which title one prefers, the work that he does is the same. Although, I've already shared a brief job description of this "office," I'd like to elaborate a bit further as to what is expected from a local congregation and how that is often different from what the Bible describes.

I'm reminded of a joke concerning a preacher who bought a little fishing boat and named it VISITATION. If he was out on the lake doing some fishing in his little boat and his wife received a phone call from someone trying to get up with the preacher, she could honestly say that he was out on VISITATION.

I guess there have been more preachers crucified by their congregations for not doing enough "visiting" than just about anything else. At least, it would be high on the list of "things" over which people will find fault with their pastor. Regardless of how much I did as a pastor, I found that I could never do enough to satisfy most people. But, allow me to use this subject of pastoral visitation to illustrate what I'm about to say. First of all, please show me in the Word of God that this is what the God called pastor is to do and where he is to focus his greatest energy and effort.

When we think of pastoral duties, we can let our minds run rampant and read all kinds of ideas into what a pastor is supposed to do. Yes, he is to look out for the sheep and make sure that they are safe and have necessary provisions. When we think about the shepherds care of the sheep, we need to prioritize what is most important to what is least important. There are only so many hours in a day and what is it that God describes in His Word as the most important thing for the pastor to do? I believe it's very clear that the feeding of God's Word to the sheep is top priority. And, believe it or not, it takes time to prepare a good meal. A cook doesn't go into the kitchen and wave a magic spoon in the air and

presto, a meal appears on the table. Neither does a good sermon come that easily. It takes time. It takes a lot of time to prepare a decent message from the Word of God. If a church prefers a hand holder then something must go lacking, and no doubt, it will be study in the Word of God by the man of God. I can listen to a man preach and tell you if he has done any studying in God's Word and so can you if you hunger and thirst after righteousness.

Years ago, I heard of a pastor who got up one Sunday in the pulpit and announced to his congregation that he didn't have a sermon for them on that particular day. He told them that they had demanded his time in running to the hospitals and in other matters so much so that he simply did not have the time to study and prepare a sermon. He dismissed and they all went home. His tenure at that church was not very lengthy.

In my book, *My Life as a Pastor*, I tell of a pastor search committee that once met with me. One of the men, in fact, was the chairman of the committee that told me that it didn't make any difference to him if a pastor could preach or not. It was that same committee where another man told me that what he wanted in a pastor was a friend, a pal, and a buddy.

It's my opinion that a pastor ought to be a dear friend to the people to whom he ministers, but he must be more than a friend, he must be their undershepherd. Now, just what does it mean to be an undershepherd? First and foremost, we must understand that Jesus Christ is the Great Shepherd of His sheep, but in His physical absence, He calls men to serve in the capacity of shepherding His sheep. That means to guard the people of God from worldly wolves that seek to devour them. It means to feed and water them with the Word of God so that they might become strong in the faith and stand against the onslaught of the devil.

The Christian life is a constant battle against the forces of Hell and we must steadily grow in the grace and knowledge of God's Word. Unless we are daily progressing in sanctification, we'll slide down the hill of holiness and succumb to the ways of the world. Therefore, God knows our tendency to stray and in order to keep us on course, He provides shepherds to watch over the sheep. The primary responsibility of these shepherds is to feed and

water with the preaching and teaching of Holy Scripture. Without a steady diet of divine truth, we wither away and become easy prey for Satan. No preacher can hold every hand of every church member, but he can equip them with the Word of God so that when trouble and difficulty comes knocking at their door, sheep can be strong enough to face the trials of life and prepared to come through them victoriously. That's why God gives shepherds to the sheep. We call them pastors!

Do you have any idea how long it takes the average pastor to prepare a quality message so he can properly feed the sheep? I'm well aware that God has given different people different degrees of intelligence and comprehension. Some even have photographic minds. What a blessing that must be! But, I'm convinced that most of us don't fall into that category. If most expository pastors are like me, then I believe they'll have to admit that it would take at least anywhere on average from eight to ten hours to prepare one quality sermon that would last from thirty to forty-five minutes. Depending on everything else that a pastor is expected to do, there are only so many hours in a day to do what is expected of him. Most of my pastorates expected me to prepare and preach three messages a week, plus do all the hospital visiting, nursing home visiting, bereavement visiting, funerals, weddings, counseling, sitting with people through surgeries, committee meetings, listen to people's aches and pains over the telephone, etc. Now these are good and worthy things to do. The only problem is that one man can only do so much. The pastor needs help and that is where the deacons come into play.

## **Chapter 5**

### **The Purpose Of Deacons**

Deacons are servants, plain and simple. Say what you please or make it whatever you wish, but deacons in the body of Christ are people who serve the Lord in and through the ranks of a local church. Different denominations and various churches may put a little different twist on how they view or use deacons. Many churches have a particular "office" that they call "deacons." Some versions of the Bible use the word "office" (KJV) in reference to both the elder and deacon. It's a word that describes the "position" (NKJV) held by a pastor (bishop/elder) as well as a deacon. But, just how does the "office" (position) of "deacon" fit into the church?

It would be a good thing for anyone serving the Lord Jesus Christ in any capacity to meet the qualifications presented in the text of First Timothy 3:8-13, "Likewise must the deacons be grave, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre: Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience. And let these also first be proved: then let them use the office of a deacon, being found blameless. Even so must their wives be grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things. Let the deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well. For they that have used the office of a deacon well purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus."

There are three Greek words (DIAKONOS, DIAKONIA, and DIAKONEO) that are used in reference to "deacons." All three of these words have a wide range of meaning just like our English word, serve. In English, the word serve, can be used in reference to serving a tennis ball, serving time in prison, or serving tables in a restaurant. All Christians who serve the Lord can be called "deacons" in a general sense. However, in many local congregations of today there is an "office" for those with a designated job description that will assist the "pastor" in a specific way (Phil. 1:1). The bottom line is that deacons are not rulers.

They are servants. Deacons do not run the church. They are servants. Deacons have no authority. They are servants.

In many modern day church government structures, you find them serving on committees, doing outreach, visiting in hospitals or nursing homes, being greeters prior to the Sunday morning service, or numerous other functions. I believe you get the idea of what I'm saying. Not just a few select men who sit in the back room of a local church and try to run the place are to meet the criteria. It is my position that anyone and everyone who serves the Lord Jesus Christ should meet these qualifications. Serving the Lord, regardless of the job, is important. Being a "doorkeeper" in the house of God is an important job. The psalmist said that he would rather be a "doorkeeper in the house of my God than to dwell in the tents of wickedness" (Ps. 84:10). There are no unimportant jobs when it comes to serving the Lord of Glory.

Just think about the utensils that were used to tend the furnishings of the Tabernacle. We are well aware of the beauty of the furnishings, but even the very utensils were beautiful. The golden "candlestick" (Ex. 25:31-40) for example was made of "pure gold" and typifies the Lord Jesus Christ as the "LIGHT OF THE WORLD" (Jh. 8:12). The very equipment that was used to maintain the "candlestick" was also made of "pure gold." The "tongs" were used to trim and adjust the wicks. The "snuffdishes" were used to extinguish the flame. As we very well know, God set aside the tribe of Levi to be the keepers of the tabernacle and serve as priests. The point that I'm making is that every aspect of the tabernacle was important and sanctified by the Lord. So it is today in the New Testament church. Every worthy aspect of God's work should be taken seriously and those who serve within the ranks of the church should recognize their work as a sanctified position.

There is no way that a "pastor" can do all that needs tending to in a local "church;" therefore, "deacons" are to be selected to help him carry out his ministry. The word "likewise" in First Timothy 2:8, lets us know that just as a "pastor" should be chosen for what he IS and not for what he HAS, so should a "deacon." Deacons are SERVANTS who minister to particular situations within the framework of the institutionalized church.

Scripture does not teach that they are supposed to be a managing body of bosses. They are not to run the local church, but relieve the pastor from things that would rob him from spending time in "prayer" and the "word" (Acts 6:4). A common misconception of the average Baptist church regarding "deacons" is that they are perceived as a BOARD OF DIRECTORS or CHURCH MANAGERS. Managing carries the idea of control whereas leadership carries the idea of influencing by example and guidance. Scripture has little to say about exactly what "deacons" are supposed to do, but we do know that they are to help the pastor fulfill his ministry and not be a detriment to him. More is said in Scripture about what type of man is to hold the "office of a deacon" than the actual nature of his job. In the average Baptist church of today, the deacons have more authority than the pastor. Although it takes a majority vote (usually a rather high percentage) from the congregation to call a man as pastor, often only a few deacons can take it upon themselves to fire him. This is NOT biblical and is a stench to the nostrils of God.

Today's church structure is far more complex than that of the early church, but it's my personal conviction that anyone who served in any type of Christian service in those early days had to meet the deacon criteria. Down through the years, we have added more structure to the organization of the church and have not imposed the same requirements on the various positions available. We have added such things as Sunday School, choirs, and all sorts of committees. It takes no less spiritual maturity to teach a modern day Bible class than it does to hold the "office of a deacon." To entrust someone with the responsibility of teaching God's "word" is one of the most important tasks that could be assigned in the church. In fact, I see a person who serves in this capacity or any other area of church life as a servant (diakoneo) of the Lord Jesus Christ.

I've seen local churches refuse to let a divorced man serve in their official "office" of deacon simply because he has been married before. However, at the same time, they let that same man be a Sunday School teacher, put him on all types of committees, and even make him chairman of the pulpit committee (pastor



search committee) when it comes time for the church to find a new pastor. Now, let me ask you to step back and look at that again. Be honest. Just how ridiculous can you get? Talking about spiritual ignorance, just how much worse can it get? What do you think this man is doing when he teaches a Sunday School class, or serves on a committee? He is serving the Lord by fulfilling the role of a deacon and if he's not doing it for God's glory then he ought not to be in the position. What can be more serious than for a person to stand before a class and teach the Word of God? In fact, being on a pastor search committee is one of the most important jobs in which a person can serve. Do you see what has happened in most churches with the "office of a deacon?"

It has been elevated to a position of superiority. I've seen good men go bad once they took the office because they got the big head. If a person is going to serve the Lord of glory in the local church, then their present character should be God glorifying. Regardless of their past, if they're living for the Lord today and meet the characteristics of a biblical servant, then they ought to be able to serve with gladness and humility. (Refer to my book on *Marriage, Divorce, & Remarriage* for more information)

Those who sing in a choir or lead the congregation through music in a worship service should also live up to high godly standards or else those who attend may see the mockery of singing praises to Jesus on Sunday and humming the tunes of the devil on Monday. As far as committees are concerned, it takes people of high Christian caliber to make spiritual decisions for the glory of God. So, regardless of the position that one holds in today's church, he should be spiritually mature enough to handle the task without bringing shame on the cause of Christ. The truth of the matter is that everyone who serves God in a public way ought to meet certain spiritual requirements. We may not all minister in the same way or in the same place, but Christian ministry will involve the purpose of glorying God and accomplishing His work on earth. We're not all gifted in the same ways; therefore, we shouldn't expect people to do what they're not gifted to do. But, as Christians discover and use their unique gifts (Rom. 12:6), the church will function properly as it ought. You don't necessarily have to be

ordained to use your spiritual gifts. However, "deacons" should actively be exercising their "gifts" under the influence of the "Holy Spirit."

Speaking of ordination let me say that the concept is usually attributed to either the office of pastor or deacon. These are two different ordinations for two different offices. To ordain someone to serve the Lord in a manner that will assist the pastor is to approve and appoint that person as a deacon. It is my position that no woman, but only a man who gives evidence of God's call upon His life to preach the Word ought to be ordained into the Gospel ministry. Such ordination qualifies one for the pastoral role in a local church. All other areas of service fall under the diaconship. Usually such ordination is by the "laying on of hands" (Heb. 6:2, I Tim. 5:22). Not every church staff position should necessarily carry with it elder ordination unless that man is called to preach. In other words, a man should not be ordained just so he can receive the benefits allowed a minister under the IRS. Being called of God to preach is a high and holy calling. It not only needs to be recognized by the person being called, but by the church that sees evidence of God's call upon the individual. (More in chapter seven)

## Chapter 6

### Comparison Of The Characteristics

In this chapter, I want to call your attention to the characteristics that should be found in the person who holds the office of a bishop and the office of a deacon. Let's compare the two and notice the similarities and any differences. Then I'll comment as to why they differ. For the sake of space, allow me to let the "B" represent the character of the New Testament bishop/elder/pastor and the "D" represent that of the New Testament deacon.

A brief list of these characteristics is found in the third chapter of Second Timothy to which I have already referred in the previous chapters of this book.

B-"blameless" v.2 {this doesn't mean perfection, but one of  
D-"blameless" v.10 integrity, seeking to live above reproach}

B-"husband of one wife" v.2 {literally, a one woman-man  
D-"husbands of one wife" v.12 being faithful to his one wife}  
D-"even so must their wives be  
grave, not slanderers, sober,  
faithful in all things" v.11 {expectations of the  
wives or women}

B-"vigilant" v.2 {circumspect, disciplined}  
D-"grave" v.8 {highly respected, serious minded}  
D-"not doubletongued" v.8 {consistent in speech}

B-"sober" v.2 {disciplined & able to make good judgments}  
B-"good behaviour" v.2 {modest & of good conduct}

B-"given to hospitality" v.2 {one who loves people}  
**B-"apt to teach" v.2 {gifted of God to teach the Word}**

- B-“not given to wine” v.3 {not addicted to  
D-“not given to much wine” v.8 beverage alcohol}
- B-“no striker” v.3 {not quick tempered or contentious}
- B-“not greedy of filthy lucre” v.3 {no unhealthy attraction  
D-“not greedy of filthy lucre” v.8 to money}
- B-“patient” v.3 {gentile and gracious}  
B-“not a brawler” v.3 {not argumentative, quarrelsome}  
B-“not covetous” v.3 {not greedy, but self-sacrificing}
- B-“ruleth well his own house v.4 {spiritually leads his home}  
B-“having his children in subjection” v.4 {have charge  
D-“ruling their children and their of his  
own houses well” v.12 underage children}
- B-“not a novice” v.6 {a mature believer}  
D-“first be proved” v.10 {bears evidence of his Christian  
commitment}
- B-“good report” v.7 {good reputation & testimony}  
D-“pure conscience” v.9 {applies the Word to daily living}

These brief descriptions are not intended to be exhaustive because much can be said about each characteristic. I simply want it to serve the purpose for the sake of simple comparison and if you will examine these comparisons, you will discover that the biggest difference in these two lists of criteria is theological. The bishop is required to have the gift of teaching God’s Word simply because that is his main responsibility in the local church. Deacons may be involved in public speaking like Stephen, the first New Testament martyr, who was a great evangelist (Acts 7). However, deacons can serve without having the gift of teaching.

## **Chapter 7**

### **The Origin Of New Testament Elders And Deacons**

The apostles of Christ were the first elders in the New Testament church. They were chosen and trained by Jesus during His earthly ministry with the intention of carrying on His work after His crucifixion. It's interesting to note that Jesus did not go to the rabbinical schools of His day to select these earthly trainees. He did not merely look for the white-collar guys, but to the everyday blue-collar working man. He's always chosen to use "the foolish things of the world to confound the wise" and "the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty" (I Cor. 1:27). Paul was the most educated of the apostles as he saw himself "born out of due time" (I Cor. 15:8-9) having been appointed on the Damascus road after the resurrection of Christ.

Soon after Christ's resurrection and before Pentecost, the eleven disciples that we know as the "apostles" were gathered together and sought the will of God in a replacement for Judas. Judas Iscariot was that disciple chosen by Christ in fulfillment of prophecy to betray Him. After selling Jesus out for thirty pieces of silver, he hung himself. The replacement was "Matthias" (Acts 1:15-26).

In the early stages of the New Testament church, these twelve men were the only elders until the church became established and additional elders were chosen by the apostles in the newly formed congregations (Acts 14:23, 15:2,4,6,22-23, 16:4, 20:17-18, I Tim. 5:17, Titus 1:5, Heb. 11:2, Jam. 5:14, I Pet. 5:1). From the sixth chapter of Acts, we discover what we believe to be the origin of deacons or at least a prototype of the office that was later taught by the apostle Paul.

"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 ministrations. 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 Nicannor, and Timon, and Parmanas, 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.” (Acts 6:1-7)

Our English word “deacon” comes from the Greek word diakoneo and the plural form “deacons” from diakonos. Both words refer to a servant or minister who follows the orders of his superior and comes to the aid of others. In the New Testament, the word diakonos is used thirty times, but only five of those times is it translated “deacon” in the KJV. All other times it is translated either “servant” or “minister” with it being translated most frequently to be “minister.”

Jesus taught that the test of greatness for spiritual leaders is not power nor authority, but humble servitude. Matthew 23 and verses 11-12, says, “But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant. And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted.” Literally, diakonos means through dust, with the concept of one raising in haste to serve his master and do his bidding.

Eventually, the word “deacon” came to represent an “office” of spiritual service within the New Testament church (I Tim. 3:8-13, Phil. 1:1). In other words, specific duties were carried out by those who were appointed by the church in service to the Lord Jesus Christ within the local assembly.

The 6<sup>th</sup> chapter of Acts records the beginning of helpers within the church, other than the apostles, who actively engaged in Christian service. These “seven men” are not called deacons in this

text, or at least that is not the way the word is translated in most versions, but they were chosen to do the work of a Christian servant and perform Christian ministry. For that reason, it's generally accepted that these "seven men" were actually the first church deacons and a prototype of what latter came to be known as the "office of a deacon" (I Tim. 3:13).

In the early stage of church history, it appears where a form of communal living was established. Apparently, it succeeded for a short time before sin exploded as we see from the story of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5) and from the "murmuring" that broke out between the "Grecians" and the "Hebrews." The Grecians were Greek speaking Jews who followed the customs of the Greco-Roman culture and the Hebrews were native Palestinian Jews who adhered to local customs. These two groups of widows felt that they were being neglected in their daily ministrations of benevolent aid. To identify with the work of a New Testament "deacon," this word "ministration" (Acts 6:2) claims our attention. The Greek word "ministration" is diakonia that comes from the word "deacon" and means ministry. The daily help that was being given to these widows was seen as ministry.

Now, the thing that we need to notice is the priority of the "twelve." They did not say that taking care of the widows was not important, but that "it is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables." They made it clear that they could not do everything themselves and they had to establish their priorities in order to "give" themselves "to prayer, and to the ministry of the word." These apostles were the first "elders" (pastors) in the New Testament church and they set a pattern that we need to follow in local church ministry today.

Every church needs to recognize that their pastor needs time to study the word of God. It is at this point where most congregations fail in their priority of their pastor. The average church is more interested in a pastor who will merely give them attention, represent them in the community, organize programs, and promote the church rather than "feed the flock" (I Pet. 5:2-3). Most churches of today want a CEO to make them look good instead of a man of God that will preach to them what thus saith the Lord!

Scripture makes it perfectly clear that no task is more important for a God called New Testament pastor than studying and preaching the word of God.

The modern day pastor, especially in the smaller congregation, is expected to be all things to all people. That is a total impossibility. I told the churches that I pastored, that there was only one of me and many of them, and in order for all the details of ministry to be carried out, it required help. Even the early apostles recognized this fact and requested helpers to serve along beside them as partners. In the case of the early church, “seven” spiritually mature believers were selected to assist the apostles. No reference is made in the Book of Acts concerning women or wives, but that the men were to be chosen from among the congregation of born again believers. They were to have an honest report, be full of the Holy Ghost, and give evidence of possessing wisdom.

The word “business” in our text is better translated to mean duty. The most important business or duty of the church is serving the Lord Jesus Christ. This word business gives no grounds whatsoever for dividing the Christian ministry into a secular and spiritual division. There are many congregations today who think deacons are to be in charge of running the church and taking care of the business affairs. The old mind-set looked upon the office of deacon as only that of business administration. It could very well involve such as that; however, deacons should NEVER be viewed as a BOARD with ruling authority, but as a group of believers who work alongside the pastor in helping him in the shepherding ministry of the church.

Serving as a deacon should not be seen as a mere honor bestowed upon someone, but the assumption of a spiritual responsibility. Deacons are not a board of directors or business managers who have the final authority over a local church. In fact, they have no authority at all. They are servants. With so many varying needs found within a congregation, no pastor can ever begin to meet all of them alone. Therefore, to help him shoulder the load, it is the duty of deacons to minister to the flock as well as to reach out to a lost world. I hope you can see that you don't make a person a deacon to honor them, to recognize them, or to



make them a church boss. A deacon is a servant and there are many different areas of service that need to be rendered in a local assembly.

Deacons should free up the pastor's time for him to spend it in the spiritual feeding of God's sheep. Even though ministerial duties, such as visiting the sick, are important, a pastor's top priority should always be expounding the word. From what I have previously stated, deacons should see themselves as ministers and not managers of God's affairs. They should see themselves on mission for Jesus Christ along with the pastor. Every Christian has been called to serve the Lord Jesus and some positions in the church are of a leadership nature. It's sad when pastors and deacons become adversaries and one tries to control the other. Biblically speaking, they should consider themselves co-laborers together with God and respect one another accordingly. At the very heart of their ministry, lies the building and maintaining of Christian fellowship within the local assembly. How sad it is for some pastor or deacon to get the big head and put a stranglehold on the church. If God has forbidden the pastor from being a dictator over the church, then what right do deacons think they have to be "lords over God's heritage?" (I Pet. 5:3) Deacons are not to be lords over either the pastor or the church.

In order to get a better idea of what type of ministry these "seven men" had, all we need to do is read a little further into the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> chapters of Acts. We discover that Stephen became the first martyr in the Christian church. Not only did he tend to the needs of the widows, but also he was a bold witness for Christ, which ultimately cost him his life.

According to our text in Acts, once the deacons were selected by the church, they were set apart by the laying on of "hands." There was nothing magical about such a practice. It simply was a sign of identification as the church recognized within these men the qualities necessary to render spiritual service for the Master. It was a practice that came from the Old Testament sacrificial system (Lev. 4:24, 16:21). When "elders" were "ordained" (Acts 14:23) it spoke of being set aside for spiritual leadership in the Christian ministry as the pastor-teachers of God's Word. Deacons are

ordained as helpers to those spiritual leaders that God calls “overseers” (Acts 20:28) over the flock.

Many if not most, churches of today have a very inadequate understanding of what it means to be a deacon. Different denominations view the role of a deacon in various ways, but most Baptist churches are all messed up with what I consider to be a biblical role of a deacon. Because I spent most of my life dealing with Baptist deacons, I speak from my experience. I’m a Baptist, but from my perspective in examining the Scriptures, I see a deacon as a person who is set aside by the church to serve the Lord. As I’ve stated previously, that does not simply mean a group of men who meet in the back room of a church playing like a big shot. Any job that needs to be done in the church needs to be held by a humble servant who is qualified spiritually for the task.

## **Chapter 8**

### **Prophet And Prophetess**

The dating of the prophetic institution goes back to the time of Moses. God raised up prophets very early in the nation of Israel to speak to them on His behalf. In fact, God promised that Christ would be the greatest of all the prophets (Deut. 18:15-19). Just as the priests represented the people before God, the prophets represented God to the people. The devil has always had his imitators of the truth. False prophets have sought to deceive just like the “magicians” did when Moses pronounced the plagues upon Egypt (Ex. 7-8). True prophets were accredited in their theological integrity as well as the manner in which their prophecies were fulfilled (Deut. 15:20-22).

The true Old Testament prophet was simply a vessel of God’s revelation to man. They would often warn people of God’s coming judgments, but also look forward to the coming Messiah. False prophets were often aligned with Israel’s organized religion and merely told people what they wanted to hear. In this regard, they would remind us of the “hireling” in today’s modern pulpit (Jh. 10:12-13).

Reference to prophets and prophetesses are mentioned throughout both the Old and New Testaments. However, it was during the life of Samuel that we discover the schools of the sons of the prophets. Generally, Samuel is attributed as their founder. The earliest mention of these schools is found in I Sam. 10:2-5. In I Sam. 19:20, we discover “the company of the prophets prophesying and Samuel standing as appointed over them.” When Jezebel determined to destroy the Lord’s prophets, it was Obadiah who “took an hundred prophets and hid them by fifty in a cave and fed them with bread and water” (I Kings 18:4).

It appears that the teachers of the sons of the prophets were Samuel, Elijah, and Elisha. We can only assume that the Old Testament law was taught including the significance of the ceremonies and rituals associated with the Old Testament worship. We believe that what they learned included the psalms as well as

the use of “harps, with psalteries and with cymbals” (I Chron. 25:1-7). These men devoted their lives to the things of God and most likely were often supported off the offerings given by Israel (II Kings 4:1-7).

There are several references in the Old Testament concerning prophetesses. Let’s begin by looking at those mentioned and the possible meaning of their position. First there is Miriam (Ex. 15:20) the sister of Moses. Secondly, we find Deborah (Judges 4:4). Thirdly, Huldah (II Kings 22:14, II Chron. 34:22). Fourthly, there is Noadiah (Neh. 6:14). Fifthly, there is one who is called “the prophetess” (Isa. 8:3).

In the New Testament the only biblical prophetess directly named is Anna (Lk. 2:36) in reference to the birth of Christ. However, we are told that Philip the Evangelist had “four daughters, virgins, which did prophesy” (Acts 21:9). Peter quoted from the Book of Joel when he preached his powerful message on the Day of Pentecost and said, “your sons and your daughters shall prophesy” (Acts 2:17-18). In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul referred to “every woman that prayeth or prophesieth with her head uncovered dishonoureth her head” (I Cor. 11:5). The last book of the Bible mentions Jezebel as one who “callet herself a prophetess” (Rev. 2:20).

I must admit that the biblical role of prophetess is not clearly defined in Scripture. However, we do know that the Bible speaks of true and false prophets. A true prophet or prophetess was a man or woman chosen by God to speak for Him. This could involve either the forth telling of divine truth or the foretelling of future happenings. God warned in both the Old and New Testaments about false prophets (Jer. 5:31, 29:9, Matt. 7:15, 24:11, Acts 13:6, II Pet. 2:1, I Jh. 4:1). Just as God has called and appointed His spokesmen, so has the devil appointed his. Today, in the New Testament, if a preacher speaks contrary to divine truth, then he is not to be accepted as a messenger from God.

Now, that does not mean we’ve got to agree on every point of theology because we all at present only “see through a glass darkly” (I Cor. 13:12). However, as Protestants we are to agree on the major points of doctrine that we call the cardinal truths of

God's Word. Otherwise, we have every right to call one a heretic and false teacher. Both men and women can fall into such a category. In fact, women have been some strong leaders in the establishment of cults as well as the modern charismatic movement. Noadiah was a false prophetess in the Old Testament as well as the famous Jezebel. Gender is no obstacle for the devil in his satanic attacks. He can use one as easily as the other.

When I mentioned the charismatic movement, I didn't intend to suggest that there are no saved people who are involved in this movement. However, I do believe that those who follow such teachings are deceived in this area. There is no perfect church or denomination on this side of heaven. If we can agree on the cardinal doctrines, then we ought to learn how to get along down here on earth if we're planning to spend eternity together in heaven. We all have a bunch to learn when it comes to the deep doctrines of God's Word. Our goal should be to learn it as correctly as possible and when we disagree on doctrine, let's disagree agreeably and try to maintain the truth in love.

Let me also say a word about the cardinal doctrines of Christianity. Some may define them differently, but when I speak of these cardinal truths, I'm including the following beliefs concerning Jesus Christ: The Trinity, The Deity and Incarnation, The Virgin Birth, The Bodily Resurrection, The Atonement, Salvation by grace alone through Faith alone in Christ alone, Biblical Inspiration and Inerrancy, and the Second Coming. We may differ in areas of eschatology, but we must agree that Jesus is coming again.

## **Chapter 9**

### **Women And Silence In The Church**

In First Timothy 2:11-15, Paul continues dealing with the conduct of women in the local church assembly by saying, “Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection.” When we read that, it no doubt is referring to the same basic truth that he wrote in I Cor. 14:34-35, “Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak, but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law. And if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church.” In his epistle found in First Timothy, chapter 2, he goes on to write in verses 12 through 14, “But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression.”

In the previous verses of First Timothy, chapter two, "Paul" dealt with a woman's appearance, but in verses 11-15; he speaks of her attitude in Christian service. In verse 11, he describes a godly "woman" as one with the attitude of a submissive learner. (“Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection”) When it comes to the role of "women" in the New Testament church, many congregations take extreme positions. Some go so far as to ordain "women" preachers while others may refuse to let "women" hold any position whatsoever. Somewhere in-between these two extremes, we need to find a happy medium of biblical balance.

There is no question that "women" were a vital part of Jesus' earthly Ministry. "Mary and Martha" (Jh. 11) were some of the closest friends of Jesus. It was this same "Mary" who "anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped His feet with her hair" (Jh. 12:3). As Jesus traveled throughout Galilee with His "twelve" disciples there also followed Him "certain women" who had been demon possessed until the power of Christ transformed their lives (Lk.8:2-3). It was some of these same "women" who came to the

tomb of Jesus to anoint His body after the crucifixion and were the first to discover the resurrection (Lk. 23:55-24:11).

"Women" have always played a vital part in the New Testament church, but that doesn't mean that their role is without restriction. The truth about the matter is that the average "church" of today would be suffering even greater than what it is, if it wasn't for our willing "women" workers. It's a sad indictment against any "church" whose men will not step up to the plate and assume their God ordained position of headship, sitting back and letting the "women" do what God has committed unto them.

For a "woman" to "learn in silence" doesn't mean that she is not allowed to speak in church service. Some people incorrectly take this verse to the extreme and fail to dig out the meaning of what is being said. "Silence" comes from the Greek word, *hesuchia*, which refers to ones composed and discreet behavior. The same basic word, *hesuchios*, is found in verse two of our text where it's translated "peaceable," and again in Peter's writings referring to a "quiet spirit" (I Pet.3:4). Therefore, this passage is forbidding a Christian "woman" from being harsh, belligerent, disruptive, and crude. A mild, peaceful, and humble demeanor is the mark of a woman's true spirituality. "Women" (Acts 2:13-14) are not forbidden from singing, testifying, praying, or taking an active part in a service, but they are forbidden from being disorderly.

Organizationally, a godly "woman" is to submit herself under the "authority" of the "man." ("But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence" I Tim. 2:12) We need to note as we move from verse 11 into verse 12 of First Timothy chapter 2, that the word "silence" is used in connection with the word "teach" as it relates to the public instruction of the pastor teacher. Within the church, "women" are restricted from the position of being the pastor teacher. This doesn't mean that "women" cannot "teach" in some capacity, such as, (Titus 2:3-5) children, other women, or in unique settings when "Aquila and Priscilla" instructed Apollos (Acts 18:24-26), but it does limit the ordination of "women" into the pastoral ministry. Expounding scripture in the "church" by the pastor is exclusively

designated for men who have been called and gifted by God to do so.

Let's remember that the early church did not have the fancy "stuff" going on that we find in the modern day assemblies. There were no Sunday School classes, children's programs, or Women's Missionary groups. The passage is dealing with church order and the place of women in the teaching of God's Word to the assembly. I remind you that is the primary function of the pastor. We must not fail to lose focus of this in the context of our Scripture. Various gifts were given to the church (I Cor. 12:28-29, Eph. 4:11). The pastor or pastors were the primary teachers whom God equipped with authority to instruct the church in matters of doctrine and interpretation.

Women are not "to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence." The words, "usurp authority" means, "to exercise dominion over." When it comes to the teaching position of pastor, the woman is to keep silent. Women are not to be ordained into the gospel ministry. A woman may be involved in proclaiming the gospel as a servant, but not ordained as an elder. This in no way whatsoever gives a "man" the right to be insensitive to a woman's feelings or to harshly dominate her. But, it is establishing the biblical role of the "man" as the spiritual leader in both the home and the church.

The question one may ask is, "WHY does Paul seem to place restrictions on women in the church?" He goes on to answer that question in First Timothy 2:13-14 by saying, "For Adam was first formed, then Eve. For Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression." In other words, the answer is found in God's original order of creation dealing with the circumstances of man's fall into sin. One may not like the answer, but it is God's Word and to reject it is to rebel against the teachings of Scripture. Reasons for this biblical mandate takes us back to creation itself. Headship was written into the very course of nature by the fact that "Adam" was created "first." God (Gen. 1:27) created both "man" and "woman" and neither is described in Scripture as being more superior or inferior than the other (Eph.



5:21). "Woman" was not created as an inferior second rate person, but rather as a side by side equal partner with "man" (Gal. 3:28).

Despite a woman's spiritual equality with a man, she is the one who was "deceived" by the serpent (Gen. 3:1-6). Nothing has elevated womanhood from heathen degradation and given her more liberty than the "gospel" of Jesus Christ, but she is still declared to be the "weaker vessel" (I Pet. 3:7) because of her being the one "deceived" to fall into sin. "Women" are considered to be more susceptible to error due to their emotional make-up and to have a greater potential in being guided by their feelings. However, when men allow "women" to assume spiritual leadership over them, then they are following Adam's example of weakness. Just as Satan got his foot into the Garden of Eden through "Eve," he often gets his foot into the "church" through some misguided "woman" who steps over God's boundary line of leadership and over men who have no spiritual backbone.

As I mentioned in the previous chapter, "women" have played a big role in the establishment of false cults as well as the modern charismatic movement. Because man was "first formed," he is the established "head of the woman" (I Cor. 11:13). Today, it is the "man" who comes from "woman," but in creation (Gen. 2:21-22), it was the woman who came from "man" (II Cor. 11:8-9). The leadership of "man" over the "woman" was God's design for both the government of the home and the "church" (Eph. 5:22-23). If a "husband" fails to provide godly leadership for his "wife" and family, then he has failed in the worse possible way.

The curse of sin pronounced in the Garden of Eden affected every individual that has ever been born. Eventually, Christ came through the "seed" (Gen. 3:15) of woman to pay the penalty of our sin. It was through a "woman" that sin was brought into the world, but it was also through a "woman" that the Savior from sin was brought into the world. Today, salvation is known to all those who place their trust in Jesus Christ alone by "grace" alone through "faith" alone. (Eph. 2:8-9). These restrictions of Christian service placed upon "women" are no hindrance to salvation. In fact, no one has a greater contribution to make in society than a godly

mother who will teach her children by her example of "faith and charity and holiness with sobriety" (I Tim. 2:15).

Even though Scripture does limit the role of "women" in the "church," it does not restrict them from serving the Lord. A godly "woman" will accept God's Word and her divinely appointed role without question. Instead of trying to argue the teachings of God's Word, we simply need to accept it by "faith" and put it into practice. As we study this passage from First Timothy, let's not forget that it's the inspired Word of God (II Pet. 1:21) and not merely the opinions of some bigoted man. God's Word is clear about the organizational role of "women" in both the home and the church. One reason why the modern day "church" is so fouled up is because "men" have failed to be the spiritual leaders that God has divinely appointed them to be.

## **Chapter 10**

### **Can Women Preach?**

In the New Testament, there were men servants called deacons and women servants that we refer to as deaconesses. There were also women prophetesses that we read about in Scripture. Therefore, we raise the question, what does the Bible have to say about women preachers and women deacons? As we begin looking at that question, let's remember that a woman preacher is one thing and a woman pastor is another. With that being said, let's fasten our seat belts and thrust full throttle ahead.

In the New Testament, there are several women who are mentioned in relationship to Christian service. Scripture directly calls "Phebe" a "servant" (diakonos) of the church. These women servants were deaconesses; however, the word "servant" is usually used in the translation such as with Phebe in Romans 16:1. We do not know in detail just how these women served the Lord, but the Word of God tells us that they were His servants. Jesus Christ did more to liberate the woman than any other man who has ever lived. He set the example for both men and women to serve the Lord of Glory by the way He "came not to be ministered unto, but to minister" (Mk. 10:45). Once again, I call your attention to the words "ministered/minister" which is the Greek word diakoneo.

I also remind you that it was the women, "his mother, and Mary the wife of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene" (Jh. 19:25) that stood at the cross when Jesus died. It was "Mary Magdalene" (Jh. 20:1) who was the first to find the tomb of Jesus empty. When the disciples returned to Jerusalem to wait for the promise of the Father to be fulfilled, Scripture says "these all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren" (Acts 1:14). Lydia is also named as a significant woman (Acts 16:11-14,40) providing one of the house churches of that day and time.

Aquila and his wife, Priscilla, were very important people in the life of Paul and it appears that they BOTH gave spiritual instruction (Acts 18:2,18,26, Rom. 16:3, I Cor. 16:19, II Tim.

4:19) along with him and always remained very dear to his heart. Now, I want you to get this. Acts 18:26 says that “they” BOTH “expounded unto him (Apollos) the way of God more perfectly.” A woman along with her husband taught Apollos doctrinal truth! Apollos went on to become a biblical teacher in the church at Corinth (I Cor. 3:4-6). The Bible does not fail to mention the fact that the converts to Christ were not just the men, but many women (Acts 5:14, 17:4) and as I’ve already mentioned, women played an important role in serving Him. The very mention of this in Scripture is profound considering how the first century looked upon women as something to possess and not worthy of recognition.

In Christ “there is neither male nor female” (Gal. 3:28), but all are free to serve Him to the glory of God. That does not mean there are no distinctions between genders, but it does mean that God values the services of both male and female. One of the most controversial passages of Scripture is found in Eph. 5:22, when it says, “wives submit yourselves unto your own husbands as unto the Lord.” First of all there are other principles in Scripture that we must apply and the basis for this verse is that the “husband is the head of the wife” (Eph. 5:23). This passage is presenting the picture of a godly husband that is surrendered to Christ and who is trying to love his wife like “Christ also loved the church” (Eph. 5:25) and “gave himself” for her. A wife does not have to violate her spiritual convictions to satisfy a wicked husband. But, no wife should have any difficulty submitting to a husband who loves her so much that he would die for her. Christ never puts women in bondage, but as I’ve already said, He is the One Who truly liberates them. That doesn’t give them the right to do as they please no more than it does any man.

Now, with that being said we come to the subject of women preachers? Well, let’s just look at the word preacher and see what it means. It literally means to herald or to proclaim (Rom. 10:14). People can preach from various locations. You can herald something from behind a classroom desk, on a street corner, from a church pulpit, or various other places. To ask about women

preachers, one is asking if it's wrong for women to share the gospel of Jesus Christ. Of course not!

Then, one might call attention to the passage from First Corinthians that a woman is to keep silent in the church and if she wants to know something, then she is to go home and ask her husband (I Cor. 14:34-35). What does that mean? Does it mean that a woman is to enter the assembly and button her lip, never say a word or sing a song? All of this gets rather ridiculous doesn't it? The passage in Corinthians is dealing with the tongues issue, the ecstatic tongues speaking issue.

Exactly what was taking place in the Church at Corinth, we are not certain, but Paul was addressing this tongues problem and the involvement of the women. To me, it sounds like he was forbidding women from using the gift of tongues, especially during a church service. The Corinthians had misused and abused the gift of tongues. We know from Scripture (Acts 2) that the tongues gift was the supernatural ability to speak a foreign language that one had never learned or studied. The purpose of this gift was to preach the gospel to those of other languages. The Corinthians had misused the gift and Paul was trying to correct their wrong. Besides, I remind you that the pastor is the teacher of the congregation and there were no Sunday Schools or para-church ministries back in that day. Women may serve the Lord, but are not permitted to serve as pastors. Therefore, there are times under certain situations when they need to keep silent in the church. I must admit that this is a rather difficult passage and we need to use discernment in trying to interpret it correctly. This is not a put-down on women, but a regulation of something in the Corinthian church that had gone wrong. Women are simply prohibited in Scripture from being pastors.

Now, let's return to the title and try to answer the question. Can women preach? Notice that I did not ask "do" women preach? Some preach to their husbands all the time about something! Seriously, there are women preachers and I've heard some do a really good job. By the title of this chapter, I've tried to get your attention. The question is, biblically speaking, are women allowed to preach? In trying to answer that question, I guess that depends

on how you define preaching. As we saw in the previous chapter, there have been women prophetesses (women who spoke for God) throughout the Old and New Testaments.

Some people like to make a distinction between preaching and teaching. There are all sorts of preachers and teachers throughout the world. However, generally speaking when we think of a preacher in the Christian church we think of one that proclaims the Word of God. There are many within the ranks of Christendom that oppose women preachers, but have no problem with a woman “sharing” or “teaching” or call it anything you want except preaching. What do you think a woman is doing when she “shares” or “teaches” truth from Scripture? She is proclaiming! It’s really ridiculous how we have no problem with a woman “speaking” from the Bible to a church congregation just so long as we don’t call it preaching. As far as I’m concerned, it’s a play on words or a matter of semantics. We’ve also studied thus far in this book that this matter of women being “silent” in the church pertained to the position of pastor (elder) who is the primary teacher in a local church.

I’ve always said that good preaching must contain the element of teaching. If you hear a message, but don’t learn anything, then what’s the purpose of listening to it? As an expository pastor-teacher, I’ve always found it rather interesting that when I deliver the very same message to a Bible study class, they may accuse me of preaching. But, when I deliver it in a Sunday AM service, they may claim that I’m only teaching. I remember the time when I spoke during a revival effort in a church and someone said that it was a good Sunday School lesson. People have difficulty with their definitions and understanding of Bible exposition, especially when it comes to expository preaching.

There are many excellent women “speakers” today and although they do not qualify for elder ordination, I consider them preachers regardless of what you want to call them. The famous missionary from by-gone days, Lottie Moon, as well as Anne Graham Lotz of today are known for proclaiming the Word of God. Call it what you will, it is what it is. Call it whatever makes you happy. When I speak to either a class setting or a Sunday

worship congregation, I do what God has called me to do. I expound the Word of God, usually verse by verse. Whatever people call it that which I do does not change.

Romans 10:14 asks the question, “and how shall they hear without a preacher?” In the very next verse it says, “And how shall they preach, except they be sent? As it is written, how beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!” In this case, a “preacher” is one who declares, proclaims, or publishes the truth of the gospel. No gender is given, but it merely uses the word, “they.” Women missionaries are nothing new and neither are women whom God has chosen to speak for Him.

I think the bottom line in this matter concerns the position of women in the pastoral role. There can be a time and place for women to take part in a church service, but the exhortation of the Word to the church is given to the pastor. That is a male position as we’ve already seen from previous study. Therefore, women can proclaim the Word of God at a proper place and time, but are not considered for ordination into the Gospel Ministry. Such ordination qualifies a man to be a pastor (elder) and eliminates women from that office.

## **Chapter 11**

### **Deaconesses And The Greek Translation**

Sometimes, it is difficult to determine certain meanings of Greek words and most often the context of Scripture will help us understand what is being said. For instance, the word elder, presbuteros {pres-boo-ter-os}, can mean either an older person or the pastor of a local church. The word wine, oinos {oy-nos} is much the same way in trying to determine whether it's referring to fermented or unfermented wine. In that case you may find it distinguished as either "new" or "old" wine (Lk. 5:37-30). A study of Greek words will help us better understand the truth of what Scripture is teaching.

I'm not a Greek scholar by any stretch of the imagination and don't claim to be one, but I study after those who are. However, as much as I admire and appreciate these scholars and theologians, it is not upon them that I'm totally dependent to learn God's Word, but the Holy Spirit (Jh. 16:13). He is the One that reveals "truth" to our hearts.

Let me remind you that originally the Books of the Bible were not written in chapter and verse format. That was later added for the sake of convenience in referencing Scripture. I've said that to say that from First Timothy, chapter two, we continue into chapter three without a break. Chapter two is laying the foundation for what is about to be said in the upcoming verses especially pertaining to the role of women in the church and this matter of them being silent in the pastoral teaching position.

One reason for the difficulty in understanding what is meant concerning the deacon role in First Timothy 3:11 is because the same Greek word, gune {goo-nay}, is used in referring to either a wife or a woman. The Greek word, gunaikeios {goo-nah-ki-os}, is from the feminine gune and in First Peter 3:7, it is linked to the husband and speaks of his wife. It says, "Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge giving honour unto the wife (gunaikeios), as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered."



Gunaikēios {goo-nahee-ki-os} is a feminine word speaking of a female and in this verse apparently refers specifically to a wife.

The phrase, “husband of one wife (gune)” (I Tim. 3:2) literally means a one-woman man or a one woman at a time sort of man. It helps define the position of “bishop” (pastor/elder) as a male (I Tim. 3:1), as it is taken in context following First Timothy, chapter two. The same phrase, “husbands of one wife” (I Tim. 3:12) is very clearly speaking of the men who hold the “office of a deacon” with the same literal meaning applying. Like pastors, married male deacons are to only have one wife and not be guilty of polygamy.

Deaconesses are women servants. In the Greek, there is no masculine and feminine for the word diakoneo {dee-ak-on-eh-o}. Therefore, that doesn’t mean that a church cannot have deaconesses whether they serve alongside the men or have their own separate office of deaconess. I never pastored a church that elected women to serve in the “office” of deacon along with the men. However, I never pastored a church that didn’t have dedicated women who loved the Lord and served Him. Or better yet, let me put it this way. I never pastored a church that elected women to serve in their conceived “office” of deacon alongside the men. However, we did have women (deaconesses) who served the Lord in a wonderful way. These were usually elected by the church from the nominating committee recommendations. They were not ordained deaconesses, but they were deaconesses.

Because of the lack of clarity and the structure of First Timothy 3:11, I’m prone to believe that this can have a dual meaning. Because of the structure found in First Timothy 3:11-12, with the reference to “husbands of” as well as the Greek word (gune) used for “wives/women,” it appears to me that this could be referring to both the wives of men serving as deacons, but also inclusive of other women in general who serve Christ in the local church. It would depend upon how a congregation interprets this passage and their church government as to how they group the women into areas and titles of service. The fact remains that there are women servants in the local church. Some churches may automatically consider the wives of the men selected to the office of a deacon to be deaconesses. The only problem with this is that a single man or

woman may be overlooked to serve. I personally don't believe that a person must be married in order to serve the Lord, but if the person is married, they ought to exhibit a godly marriage.

The translation and interpretation of First Timothy 3:11 is not all that easy regardless of what some people have to say. There is a good argument on both sides of the fence "for" and "against" this verse referring to women serving as deaconesses in an official office. In fact, I believe that there might be some truth in both arguments. I'm not trying to straddle the fence on this issue because it's the utmost desire of my heart to "rightly" divide the "Word of God" (II Tim. 2:15). Therefore, let me explain my thinking.

To begin with, I can see that the "wives" of the deacons need to meet some criteria as well as their husbands. You do not want a man serving in the "office" of deacon with a wicked loudmouth trouble-making wife. I think the same truth can also be applied to the elder's wife. Then again, I can also see characteristics that ought to be found in the unmarried women (deaconesses) who serve the Lord within the ranks of a local church.

The KJV uses the word "office" three times in First Timothy, chapter three. Once for the "bishop" and twice for the "deacon." When the words "even so" or "likewise" (depending on your version of Scripture) are used in First Timothy 3:11, the word "office" does not appear again. It could be argued that this is not a third "office" (position) because of that fact, or that it is the same "office" but inclusive of "women" (deaconesses) who serve the Lord. There were women in the New Testament that loved and served the Lord and by that simple fact, we can refer to them as deaconesses whether or not they were considered to hold a designated third "office." Other versions of Scripture, such as the NKJV and the ESV do not use the word "office," but merely refers to those who "serve as deacons" in the position of deaconship. When we use the word "office," we're simply identifying a recognized position of Christian service in a local New Testament church.

In today's understanding of the "office of a deacon," those who hold deaconship, would include individuals who are assigned

particular job descriptions within a local church that would lift the pastor's load and at the same time minister to the various needs of the congregation. I believe that both men and women who serve in the name of Jesus Christ ought to bear a testimony that will glorify our Lord and Savior. The greater the position of responsibility, the greater the requirement of service. To me personally, I can see both sides of the argument concerning women deacons (deaconesses) serving in an official "office." Therefore, I don't think God fearing conservative Bible believing Christians ought to split hairs over this matter. The most important issue at stake is that churches have servants within the local body of believers who are empowered by the Holy Spirit to exalt Christ in whatever activity they are appointed and whatever task they are assigned.

In the remainder of this chapter, allow me to summarize what I've already said by repeating and reminding you again that from the third chapter of First Timothy, some have concluded that the translation of "wives" from chapter three and verse eleven could also be "women." If so, this was referring to deaconesses who served the Lord in the church. Remember that the Greek word found in this verse is translated, "wives," in most Bible translations. It is the Greek word *gune* {goo-nay} that means "women," but is also used in reference to the marriage relationship to mean wife. There was no feminine form of *diakonos*. By the use of this Greek word the door is opened to the possibility of it referring to women servants and not just wives.

Greek scholars, such as Kenneth Wuest and A.T. Robertson as well as the more contemporary theologian, John MacArthur, Jr., take the position that this should be translated "women." Not the wives of the deacons nor women in general, but "women" who have been set apart for service within the church. Many people commonly view this verse as referring to the "wives" of the deacons, but from the Greek structure of this verse comes disagreement. To begin with, the words "even so" are translated from the Greek word, *hosautos* {ho-sow-toce}, to mean "likewise" or after the same manner. It's a word commonly used in a series causing one to take the position that it's referring to the women

who hold the position of deaconess. Therefore, some have suggested that this was a third group while others simply include deacons and deaconesses in the one “office” with both genders represented.

Since it is the same word found in First Timothy, chapter three and verse eight (hosautos), when the “deacons” are addressed and referred to as an “office” in First Timothy, chapter three and verse ten (hosautos), then there is possible grounds for it to be a separate office. I also call to your attention that the words, “must their” are italicized in the KJV meaning that they are inserted words not found in the Greek text. A literal rendering of First Timothy 3:11, would be something like this, “Women, likewise, reverent, not slanderers, calm, dispassionate, and circumspect, faithful in all things.” If Paul had been referring to the “wives” of the deacons, then he might have used the pronoun “their” in referring to them. It is confusion brought about by the insertion of a word not found in the Greek text.

As we move down into First Timothy 3:12, the men are addressed as being the “husbands of one wife.” Nothing is said about the married state of the women. That could be an argument to say that First Timothy 3:11 is not talking about women, but the “wives” of the deacons. However, if men who served the Lord ought to meet spiritual qualifications, so should the women. All we can do is go back to the Greek text and best determine the meaning. Regardless of how one views this passage, we must do so in love and try to rightly divide the “Word of God” (II Tim. 2:15) to the best of our God given ability.

I personally don’t think this issue ought to divide churches. To some, it is a big matter of doctrinal concern, but I don’t think we have a right to let it divide us when we look at the rendering of the Greek text. The only problem that I would have is when a deaconess would want to act like an elder. Due to the aspect of congregational government and having to rely on the deacons to fill in the “eldership gap,” that is where I would have a problem. However, if a church practiced elder government, that would not present such a problem. There can be a fine line for a pastor to use

the deacons to avoid him becoming a dictator because deacons, regardless of gender are technically not the same as elders.

If a church practices either elder or congregational government and has women (deaconesses) serving in the “office of a deacon” along with the men, then it might be worth considering separating them into a third office, which the Greek may allow in First Timothy 3:11. By using the words “even so” or “likewise” (hosautos) as I pointed out previously in reference to it being used in a series, this would create an “office” (position of deaconship) for the men and an “office” (position of deaconship) for the women. Godly men and godly women from within the assembly would be selected to serve in designated capacities. Their duties would be carried out from within the framework of their “office” (designated position of service). There would probably be no need for any such thing as a nominating committee along with many other modern day committees with this type of structure in place.

I once again remind you that the word “their” is italicized indicating that it is an inserted word in the text. Those italicized words, such as the word “unknown” in First Corinthians, chapter 14, dealing with the “unknown tongue,” are supposed to be inserted for clarity. Most of the time it helps clarify the text, but sometimes causes confusion as in the cases with these two instances. In First Timothy 3:11, the text is speaking of women and not necessarily just the “wives” of the deacons. In First Corinthians there is no such thing as an “unknown” tongue. The tongues gift was a language gift.

Let me make this as simple as I can! When a church places an individual in a POSITION of service, that person is a SERVANT of the Lord Jesus Christ. A male servant is known as a deacon and a female servant is called a deaconess. Now, that is what the Bible is addressing when it speaks of the “office of a deacon.”

Regardless of the differences that we find in today’s church along this line, we all can agree that Christian women can and do serve the Lord. I don’t know of a local church anywhere that doesn’t have deaconesses, godly Christian women who serve their Lord and Master, Jesus Christ. It may depend on how a church wants to refer to them or the organizational structure of the

assembly, but say what you please, we are grateful for these faithful women. That does not change the fact that God has established the “man” as “head of the woman” (I Cor. 11:3) and he should assume his leadership role in the home as well as the New Testament church.

However, most local churches would be in a bad way without godly women that sacrificially serve in and through the ranks of the institutionalized church. Regardless of gender, to be a Christian means to be a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ. We all have different gifts; therefore, we are to discover the gift that God has given us and use it for His glory. This brings us to the subject found in the next chapter.

## **Chapter 12**

### **Spiritual Gifts In The Body of Christ**

Talents are abilities with which a person is born. Spiritual gifts are abilities supernaturally bestowed upon a sinner saved by grace (I Pet. 4:10). The Christian is to use both his talents and spiritual gifts to glorify God. Scripture makes it clear that various gifts are given to members in the body of Christ. Every believer has a gift to contribute to the usefulness of the church. Church government may vary depending upon the local assembly, but none the less, every person who serves the Lord ought to spiritually qualify to some degree for service. For example, the starting place for service is a testimony of salvation. Every believer needs to discover his or her spiritual gift and use it in the “body” to glory God (Rom. 12:4-8).

In First Corinthians, chapter 12, and verse 5, we find the word “administrations.” That verse reads, “And there are diversities of administrations, but the same Lord.” That word “administrations” is actually the Greek word, diakonia, meaning service or ministry. It is the same word from which we get the word deacon. This chapter reminds us that there are many different ways that a person can serve the Lord Jesus Christ. Scripture does not limit the work of a deacon to any particular role. There are a variety of ministries and those who are ordained to a particular function are usually assigned a job description of service that will directly help relieve the pastor of his workload and expectation of the congregation.

We are reminded in First Corinthians 12:12 that “the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body; so also is Christ.” At this time, I have no intention of doing a study on the spiritual gifts that God gives to His church, but it is my belief that every believer is given a gift to use for the Glory of God in the body of Christ. There are different gifts listed in Scripture, such as those found in First Corinthians 12:28, “And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues.”

These are what I'm going to call some headings of gifts and then we might define these headings with some sub-headings. My point is that there are many different gifts that God uses for the benefit of the local assembly and both men and women alike are given a gift to use.

I'm not saying that everyone who has a gift should be ordained (have hands laid upon them). If that be the case, then every believer would be ordained. I believe that some gifts are of a leadership nature while others are more follow-ship in nature. That doesn't mean that the lesser is not important. Men and women alike are given a gift to use in order for the body of Christ to work effectively. There are some things that a man can do better and there are things that a woman can do better simply because of the way God made their physical and emotional chemistry.

Most churches would be in sad shape today when it comes to Vacation Bible School without the precious women in the congregation. Usually, it's the women who carry the weight of having this outreach to children. In some of my pastorates, I was the only man present, but it's a wonderful opportunity for the men as well as the women to evangelize children.

When it comes to bereavement meals, usually it's the ladies that just have the knack for doing it right. That's not to say men can't cook. There are some excellent male chefs, but the women in the congregations that I've served just knew how to get the job done in fine fashion. I could go on and on describing how men and women can be suited for certain tasks within the church, but both are needed and appreciated.

Regardless of church structure and government, there is a place for men and women to serve in the body of Christ. When it comes to leadership, our thoughts turn to the position of elder. When it comes to service, our thoughts turn to the position of deacon. Depending upon structure and government, some of these deacons may be ordained while others are not. However, the greater the responsibilities of service the greater the expectation of qualification. Every believer should see himself as did the apostle Paul and Jude the possible half-brother of Christ. They called themselves a "servant of Jesus Christ."



The Greek word for “servant” is *doulos* meaning that they were bond slaves to Christ. They gave up their own wills for the will of their Master. They did not belong to themselves, but to Christ Who Himself submitted His “will” to the “will” (Lk. 22:42) of the Father and laid down His life to “save His people from their sins” (Matt. 1:21). If we want a perfect example of being a godly servant and living a godly submissive life, then we have to look no further than to our Lord Himself.

I’ll never forget one Sunday afternoon in one of my pastorates when a man came to the parsonage upset over not being asked to serve in the “office of a deacon.” What he wanted was to become a church boss. He was so mad and furious, ranting and raving that we didn’t think he would ever quit and leave. (I refer to this episode in my autobiography, *My Life As A Pastor, Shepherding God’s Sheep And Herding Goats*) His actions alone disqualified him for such “office.” Needless to say, he didn’t get what being a deacon is all about and I’m afraid that most people don’t. Instead of going around fussing and fighting over who can serve in the “office” (position) of deacon or if women can be deaconesses, we all ought to focus on trying to be godly servants. God has called every believer to serve him and use the spiritual gift that the Lord has bestowed upon him or her. May God help all believers to see themselves as sinners saved by grace and surrendered bond-slaves to do our Master’s bidding.

## **Closing Thoughts**

I've been reading the Bible since before I was ten years of age and trying to study it from my teenage years. Today, I feel like I know so very little of God's Word. When I began preaching, I wondered how I could ever get a fifteen minute message together, but now it's all I can do to bring my message to an end after forty-five minutes. I've said all of that to say; the precious Word of God is inexhaustible. I wish that I knew when I began my ministry what I know today, but learning the Word of God is a lifelong endeavor. The problem with some people is that they think they know it all and are not open to learning truth. In other words, they're simply not teachable. It's an on-going process of learning, but never arriving at knowing it all on this side of glory.

The subjects that I've dealt with in this little book are merely touching the tip of the iceberg, so to speak. An entire book can be written on any one of these subjects. However, my purpose was to simply stimulate the readers thinking and cause one to get into the Word of God. By getting into the Word of God, we'll get the Word of God into us as we allow the Holy Spirit to reveal truth to our hearts.

I don't claim to know it all. In fact, I consider myself the lowest of the low in intellect and ability. However, neither do I believe that the greatest and brightest theologian has all the answers to all the questions. If this little book has stimulated your biblical thinking in a positive way, then my purpose has been accomplished. I hope that it has been "some food for thought."

The desire of my heart is to try to the best of my ability to conform to the teachings of God's Word and do things God's way. Even though I'll often stumble and fail, I thank God that He is so very long-suffering with His children. This one thing I do know, there's a great need for godly servants in the local church.

Biblically speaking, when we refer to a pastor we are talking about an elder who holds the office of a bishop. Likewise, when we refer to one who holds the office of a deacon, we're talking about a person who serves the Lord Jesus either male or female.

The man is called a deacon and the woman is called a deaconess. Scripture presents qualifications for those who hold these offices in the third chapter of First Timothy.

In most Baptist congregations with whom I've been associated, they would have a "conniption fit" if you told them that they had women deacons. However, the majority have "committees" on which both men and women "serve." These various committees and jobs are usually chosen by a nominating committee that is elected by the local church. The nominating committee selects people to "fill" these "positions" with both men and women. Then, as congregational government goes, the church elects those presented on the nominating committee report by vote of the congregation.

On this list of workers, you will find a variety of positions, including Sunday school teachers, both men and women with some women teaching a mixed class of both men and women. These churches have no problem with such action, but at the same time they will object to calling these women, servants, and referring to them as deaconesses. Call it whatever you want to, but they are women servants who ought to meet the standards set forth in Holy Scripture. I personally think that we would be better off to trash the modern day committee structure and return to the biblical office of deacon and deaconess when it comes to those who assist the pastor in the ranks of a local church.

So often, we cannot see the forest for the trees, so to speak. In other words, we're so engulfed in doing things a certain way without ever questioning if it's really biblical. Tradition that is biblical is good, but tradition and church polity that is not biblical can be detrimental. Dare to look at the Bible through the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit and it might surprise you what you'll find.

I hope that we can see from a study of this book, that the office of deacon is the office of selecting qualified workers to serve the Lord in a local church. It's NOT an authoritative position of governing the church, but of serving. Church government is important and we ought to get it right. I would like to challenge all my dear brethren, and Baptist in particular, to take their blinders

off, step back, leave human traditions behind, and look at things biblically. As I've already pointed out in my book, some translations use the word "position" rather than "office" in the qualifications of pastor and deacon.

May God help us to understand the importance of being a godly servant in the positions of pastor, deacon, or deaconess. Stop fussing over a church having deaconesses when the vast majority of churches that I know anything about are filled with them. However, if the truth be told, most of them who hold a position in the modern day church are no more qualified than the men who hold the position of deacon. May God open our blind eyes and learn what the office of deacon and deaconess is all about. It's about SERVING THE LORD OF GLORY! It's not about us!

As I conclude this updated edition, I would like to remind you that I had no intention when I began the first printing of this book to write on church government. Afterwards, I realized that I should have done so because when you study the subjects of elders, deacons, and deaconesses, you cannot help but deal with the matter of church government. For that reason, in 2016, I wrote a book entitled, **Church Government, Which Form is Most Biblical?** I actually consider it to be a sequel to this book on **Godly Servants**. For that reason, I have included my book on church government in this expanded edition of *Godly Servants*. I trust that you will take the time to read it and may God use my books to help us better understand His Holy Word. You don't have to agree with me, but if what I say causes you to dig deeper into the Holy Scriptures, then I've accomplished my purpose in writing. "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (II Tim. 2:15). When we differ on the less-essential doctrines, let us do so in brotherly love.

**Sequel**

**Church  
Government  
Which Form is  
Most Biblical?**

## **Church Government Which Form is Most Biblical?**

My book on church government has been added to this updated edition of *Godly Servants* as a sequel. 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.

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 pastorates 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 The Subject of Church Government**

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.**”

## 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).

## **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 driver’s 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.

### **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.

### **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.

### **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.

### **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 that he 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 and let me

say that 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 and 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 some 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 congregation's 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.”

### **A Possible Solution**

I’ve saved this section 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.



## **Some Closing Thoughts To Ponder**

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. 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 these things I’ve written will be 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).