

## **LESSON 8 – THE ORGANIZATION OF THE CHURCH**

### **1) INTRODUCTION**

- a) In our studies regarding God’ standard of authority, we made several observations:
  - i) It is from the Apostles’ doctrine that we derive our authority for the beliefs and practices of the New Testament church
  - ii) The Apostles’ doctrine is contained in the writings of the New Testament as we read how they instructed and dealt with local churches of Christians in the 1<sup>st</sup> century
- b) The NT provides for us a pattern that was followed by the NT church
  - i) This is obvious from the fact that immediately after conversion, the Christians of the bible “continued steadfastly in the Apostles’ doctrine” – **Acts 2:42**
  - ii) Paul also mentioned to the Corinthians that the Apostles taught their doctrine “in every church” – **1 Cor 4:17**
- c) The kinds of “patterns” that we find recorded in the NT include God’s will regarding the organization of the local church, the worship of the local church, and the work of the local church
  - i) This must be true since Paul told us that scripture’s purpose was to equip us for every good work – **2 Tim 3:16-17**
  - ii) Since we have every good work revealed to us in scripture, we can have confidence that a pattern exists for how a local church is organized, how it is to worship, and how it is to work
  - iii) The next two lessons will focus on the God’s will for the organization of the church

### **2) WHY SHOULD WE BE CONCERNED WITH CHURCH ORGANIZATION?**

- a) One of the first things we need to realize is that organization reveals purpose
  - i) Our God is a God of order. All around us we can see this principle about God

**Question 1:** Of all the things that God has created, what jumps out at you the most as things that have order and organization?

---

---

---

- ii) From Noah’s Ark, to the building of the tabernacle, to how the Israelites were to camp around the tabernacle, to how they were to march in battle, etc, God has always shown that order and organization is important
- iii) This is also true in the NT, as we will shortly see. God demands organization in the local church

**Question 2:** Read **1 Cor 14:40**. In what two ways does God desire his local church to run?

---

- b) Since organization reveals purpose, understanding the organization of the local church will help us to see God’s purpose for the local church
  - i) This will help us understand the “work” of the local church that we will study in a few weeks
  - ii) In the following lesson, we will study the apostasy of the church from the 1<sup>st</sup> century until now and we’ll see that without proper organization, the purpose of the church becomes cloudy and chaotic
  - iii) But what we need to understand for this lesson is that God had a purpose in mind for the local church, and He organized it to fulfill that purpose

3) **THE ELDERSHIP**

- a) Elders are to oversee a local church
  - i) When a local church becomes fully developed, one of the most important things that should take place is the appointment of qualified elders

**Question 3:** Read **Acts 14:21-23**. In these verses, Paul has returned to churches he established years prior. What does vs. 23 tell us took place as he visited these churches?

---

**Question 4:** Read **Tit 1:5**. In addition to setting in order what remained, for what other reason did Paul leave Titus in Crete?

---

- b) The office of the eldership is described 3 different ways in the New Testament:
  - i) **Elders** (Grk. “presbuteros”, presbyter) because they are older men – **Acts 14:23; 20:17**
  - ii) **Bishops** (Grk. “episkopos”, overseer) for their task is to oversee the congregation - **Acts 20:17, 28; 1 Pet 5:1-2**
  - iii) **Pastors** (Grk. “poimen”, shepherd) for their task is to shepherd and feed the flock of God - **Acts 20:17, 28; 1 Pet 5:1-2**
- c) It is important to note that these are not three distinct offices; they are different descriptions of the same office
  - i) We saw this same thing in a previous lesson about the descriptions of the church. The church is also called the “body”, the “temple”, the “kingdom”, the “vineyard”, the “household”, etc
  - ii) For further proof, see **Tit 1:5-7** where Paul, in talking about the eldership, uses the Grk. word “presbuteros” in vs. 5 and then “episkopos” in vs. 7.
  - iii) In Acts 20:17, 28, Paul uses all three descriptions when talking to the same men. This is because all three description apply to the same office

	Elder/Presbyter (Grk. “Presbuteros”)	Overseer/Bishop (Grk. “Episkopos”)	Shepherd/Pastor (Grk. “Poimen”)
<b>Acts 20:17, 28</b>	√	√	√
<b>Tit 1:5-7</b>	√	√	
<b>1 Pet 5:1-2</b>	√		√

- d) Elders are appointed only after meeting very specific qualifications
  - i) These qualifications are mentioned in detail in **1 Tim 3:1-7** and **Tit 1:5-9**

**Question 5:** Read through the qualifications to be an elder in **1 Tim 3:1-7** and **Tit 1:5-9** and answer these questions. Can an elder be a single man? Must he have children? Can he be a new convert? Must he be hospitable?

---

- ii) Note that when it comes to these qualifications, an elder must meet all of them. It is not a matter of finding men within a local church who are the closest to meeting all the qualifications, but finding men that meet all the qualifications
- e) Also, in every congregation, there were to be a plurality of elders overseeing the local church
  - i) **Acts 14:23** reveals to us that there were “elders” in every church
  - ii) The church in Jerusalem had “elders” – **Acts 15:2, 4, 6, 22-23; 16:4; 21:18**
  - iii) The church at Ephesus had “elders” – **Acts 20:17; 1 Ti 5:17**
  - iv) When one was sick and needed prayer, they were to call for the “elders” – **Jas 5:14**
  - v) Younger people were to submit to the “elders” – **1 Pet 5:5**
- f) Also, the authority of the elders in their overseeing was limited to the local church in which they were appointed
  - i) They were to take heed to the flock of God “among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers” – **Acts 20:28**
  - ii) They were to “shepherd the flock of God which is among you” – **1 Pet 5:2**
  - iii) These verses tell us that no elder or group of elders had any authority beyond their local congregation
- g) Finally, what we learn about the eldership teaches us that every local church is independently autonomous. We know this for the following reasons:
  - i) First, each local church has its own independent organization (Acts 14:23). We never read of an earthly organization that spanned multiple local churches
  - ii) Second, elders are limited in their oversight to the flock among them (1 Pet 5:2) – their independent local church
  - iii) Third, each local church has its own treasury and would use that money for its own individual work (Phil 4:15-16; 1 Cor 16:1-2). We will develop this doctrine further when we discuss the work of the church
  - iv) What we conclude from local church autonomy is that each local church is responsible for organizing, worshipping, and working independently from other local churches and no local church should govern another
  - v) However, though local churches work independently from one another, they still work concurrently
  - vi) We can go to other local churches and help with teaching, preaching, evangelism, etc. But even in working together concurrently, we maintain our independence

#### 4) **DEACONS**

- a) Deacons are to serve the eldership and their congregation
  - i) The word “deacon” literally means “servant” (Grk., “diakonos”, servant, minister)
  - ii) The qualifications of deacons are found in **1 Ti 3:8-13**

**Question 6:** Read through the qualifications to be a deacon in **1 Tim 3:8-13** and answer these questions. Can a deacon be single? Must they have control of their household?

---

- iii) While not identified as deacons per se, the seven men appointed in **Acts 6:1-6** to serve tables may have been prototypes of the service rendered
- iv) If so, then deacons are certainly “ministers of mercy”

**5) MEMBERS OF THE CONGREGATION**

- a) Members of a local church are referred to as “saints”
  - i) This comes from the Grk. word "hagios" which literally means “holy one”, as found in **1 Cor 1:2; Phil 1:1**
  - ii) Other terms for “saint” that are used in the NT are “christian”, “disciple”, and “believer”
  - iii) Among such saints in a local church, we may find “evangelists” and “teachers” – **Eph 4:11**
  - iv) An evangelist’s role is to teach the gospel to the lost. A teachers role is to instruct and edify the members

**Question 7:** Read **Eph 4:11-16** very carefully. Discuss God’s purpose for organizing these different roles within local churches. Pay special attention to vs. 12-13 and vs. 16

---

---

---

- v) Some members may do the work of evangelizing and teaching in a local church – **2 Tim 4:5; 2:2**
- vi) But whether members serve as evangelist, teacher, preacher, or minister, within the local church they likewise submit to the oversight of the elders
- vii) There is no indication they had “evangelistic oversight” or authority akin to that given to the bishops (elders, pastors)
- viii) They are to “take heed to the word”, whereas elders are to “take heed to the flock” – **1 Tim 4:16; Acts 20:28**