

# United Church of God, *an International Association*

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## **Godly Governance**

### *Doctrinal Paper*

*Approved by the Council of Elders*  
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All scriptures are quoted from *The Holy Bible, New King James Version* (© 1988 Thomas Nelson, Inc., Nashville, Tennessee) unless otherwise noted.

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## **Introduction**

Government, in the hands of God, is a tremendous blessing, insuring peace, orderliness, goodness and security for its subjects. Likewise, government, when in the hands of humans guided by God, extends the same blessings to all social institutions—family, school, community, business, nation or church. However, government, in the hands of self-serving humans, invariably ends in a curse, fomenting strife, abuse, fear, distrust, confusion and uncertainty.

The whole issue of government was succinctly summarized by Solomon in Proverbs 29:2, “When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice.”

Righteousness. In that one-word concept lies the heart of the biblical teaching on governance. Righteousness flows only from godliness, and one of the great lessons of the Bible is that the value and benefit of an individual (or group of individuals forming any institution) is directly proportional to the degree of submission to the Spirit of God and conformity to His model of holy conduct and behavior. This paper deals, therefore, not with the perfect government of God in the spirit realm, but with godly government in the human realm.

In that domain, human history bears sad testimony to the rest of Solomon’s observation: “. . . but when a wicked man rules, the people groan.” We have experienced in every field of life far more groaning than rejoicing, but seemingly seldom learn to trace our troubles back to our rejection of God’s government—His way—over our lives.

Unfortunately bad experiences at the hands of man oftentimes prejudice people against the idea of government per se. Righteous government is an institution of God; it is the rule of God applied to all aspects of life ranging from the governing of an individual’s mind to the oversight of the entire universe. Indeed, Christ’s promise to return, reign and establish God’s government over all the earth—the heart of the gospel message—represents the good news of humanity’s hope for survival and happiness (Isaiah 9:6-7; Matthew 2:6; Romans 15:12). In the meantime, although God sometimes controls the course of human governments (Daniel 4:17, 25), Christ has not yet exercised “all authority [which] has been given to Me in heaven and on earth” (Matthew 28:18).

Instead, the primary place we see Him executing authority is in His leadership role over His Body, the Church. Speaking of the Father’s promises to His people, Paul noted in Ephesians 1:20-23 the authority given to Christ:

“. . . Which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come. And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.”

Since each Church member is in training, preparing to rule with Christ when He returns (2 Timothy 2:12; Revelation 2:26-27; 5:10; 20:4), how we learn to be ruled by Him is of paramount importance.

The Scriptures repeatedly drive home one great and consistent lesson about governance. That is, from the beginning God consigned to humanity limited authority (Romans 13:1) in both the secular sphere and in the Church, intending for us to learn how to righteously govern and rule. Since authority originates from God, it is inherently good and necessary, but the application of authority can only be righteous if an individual, Church or nation exercises godliness. To do so we must first learn to be governed and ruled by God, and that has been the ongoing great test for mankind in general and for members of the Body of Christ in particular.

When it comes to church government, far more significant than the issue of church administration is the primary question of governance: “To what degree are we individually and collectively learning to allow God to rule our hearts and minds?” All discussion of administrative structure of the Church is moot if the people involved lack godliness. Conversely, when leaders righteously shepherd God’s people, history shows several different styles of administrative systems prospering.

## **PART ONE—FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF GODLY GOVERNMENT**

### **God’s Intent for Man: Govern and Be Governed**

The first two chapters of Genesis reveal God’s intention from the beginning to have humans learn to govern, first over the creation (Genesis 1:26-28; 2:19) and, second, within the family structure. God delegated this responsibility to directly connect His children to His great purpose for creating them in the first place. Some commentaries and translations explain that God’s instruction to “subdue” the earth (Genesis 1:28) connotes the sense of “husband,” or care tenderly for, His creation. Authority is thus shown from the beginning to be beneficent.

When God created Eve, a new level of government came into existence. Prior to her creation God led Adam to realize he was incomplete and needed a partner (Genesis 2:18, 20). That Eve was to be his helper indicates Adam was to be the leader (confirmed by Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:3, “. . . the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God”), not because of any inferiority on her part—she was “comparable” to him—but rather as a difference in family function. Governmental authority within the family structure was thus established by God with the creation of the first family, prior to sin entering their world. The key to their capacity to properly govern their lives in all respects lay in their ability to be governed by God Himself, to obey Him instead of relying on themselves. God intended the family structure of government to be a blessing, but a properly functioning relationship could only come from living His way.

Enter Satan, the original rebel, the unseen but powerful force behind all resistance to God’s government. His ill-fated but persistent goal remains to this day—to overthrow God’s rule and assume His authority. That quest includes spiritually destroying the humans made in God’s image with the potential of being in God’s family. Satan’s impact was immediate, as he deceived Eve and influenced Adam to reject God’s loving authority over their lives. He planted the seeds of distrust of God, but in rejecting God’s rule they simply became slaves to Satan’s. They

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unwittingly accepted the devil's government when they rejected God's, and plunged not only themselves, but all generations to follow, into a lifelong struggle with a destructive carnal nature. Satan's mindset drives the attitudes at both ends of the spectrum—when humans govern, their tendency is to misuse their power and abuse the governed (Matthew 20:25); and when they are governed, they tend to “despise authority” (2 Peter 2:10). Whether in the world or in the Church, we will always suffer from this until the rule of Christ displaces Satan's authority and influence. But again, the great lesson is that government and/or authority is not the problem; rather, it is the misuse and abuse of it.

Adam and Eve's disastrous choice to reject God-centered authority and follow Satan's lead in self-centered governance led to dismal failure in their personal lives and family. Unrighteous self-reliance opposes righteous self-control (that is, self-governance under God, controlling the choices we make in life based on the will of God) which makes one capable of functioning judiciously in society and suitable for assuming oversight of his or her own family leadership responsibilities.

The next few chapters in Genesis go on to chronicle the futility of human attempts to organize social orders without a relationship with God. Only a handful of righteous men and women faithful to God provide exceptional examples. Again, these cases confirm the essence of the matter: Good government—godly government—functions only to the degree each individual in the system is ruled by the Spirit of God and conforms to the standards of His Kingdom.

### **Structure: The Key to Righteous Governance?**

From the time of Eden, when it comes to organizing various aspects of society, humans have experimented with countless forms of governmental models, some of them appearing good in theory, but all of them sooner or later failing in practice. All forms of government are subject to manipulation by individuals, and no structure can account for or control the inherent weaknesses of human nature. Problems with government are not always, or necessarily, due to the system; they more often spring from problems within the individuals governing or being governed.

The most striking, undeniable example of this fact is the government of God itself! Consider this: At one time all the angels in the universe existed under the perfect governmental structure, with perfect organization, perfect laws and a perfect Overseer—God Himself! Yet that perfect system did not—could not—prevent one-third of these spirit beings from being deceived and foolishly rebelling.

Therefore, as this paper later addresses questions of church administration, it is important to ask whether its form of structure is the greatest issue, or if there is a far more important factor that causes controversies and problems. Many well-meaning Christians believe that defining a one-mold-fits-all-circumstances form of church government would end confusion and launch the work of God into a powerful and effective effort. But God has simply not clearly revealed any such framework. The Bible nowhere outlines “God's government” on earth as one monolithic, immutable, unchangeable structure in place from the beginning, to the present and into the

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future. On the contrary, His Word shows that over time He has employed a number of systems which have altered somewhat as the needs and realities of His people changed. It is simply inaccurate to state, “God’s government is . . .” and then outline a favored structure.

What is certain, however, is that God guarantees that Christ remains as the Head of His Church (Ephesians 5:23-32; Colossians 1:18; Matthew 16:18; 28:20) and that He never changes, even if earthly circumstances shift and alter. As Paul noted, “There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all” (1 Corinthians 12:5-6). From the beginning God has never deviated from His objective of “bringing many sons to glory” (Hebrews 2:10)—creating a family of His own children—but His methods of working with humans have varied considerably. When working with groups of people, He has used several governmental structures as organizational tools, but none of them has proven to be the spiritual cure for human problems. Repeating once more, the critical factor is the conversion and submission to God of both the leaders governing and the people governed. Without that, no structure will work well.

Therefore, asking “what is *the* right way” [meaning, the *only* way] to accomplish the work of God as a church?” is asking an unanswerable question because there is no single pat answer. God’s Word offers only a smattering of organizational advice. We find little about what structure looks like, but we find much on what godly leadership looks like. The Bible is rich with instruction that defines leadership responsibilities and how they should be discharged. We find that God focuses on what is constant for humans through all times and circumstances: attitude and character. The Bible reveals the character of God and shows how humans can attain His character through a submissive attitude that first allows God to govern them.

Therefore, the critical questions to ask concerning church governance center on character issues: How well are the servants of Christ working together? How yielded are we to His explicit directives to love, respect, serve and submit to one another? God identifies these as crucial, because He seeks to instill His attitude and create holy, righteous character in those who will share His rule over the world in the future. Any behavior hindering that is the real underlying cause of dissension, not only in the world, but also in the Church. Paul chastised the Corinthians, writing, “where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men?” (1 Corinthians 3:3). These were, and are, common character problems. They cannot be controlled or overcome by any structure of government, but only by the power of God’s Spirit ruling our hearts and minds.

Therefore, church governance without the Spirit of God manifested in word and deed is nothing more than human government shrouded in religious wrapping.

### **Serving Versus Lording**

Character issues are ageless, and God spoke clearly to these issues as they relate to His governing of humans, or humans governing one another. We find one of the great summary statements concerning leadership and expectations of those who govern in Deuteronomy 17:18-20, where God set forth His requirements for a king.

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“Also it shall be, when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write for himself a copy of this law in a book, from the one before the priests, the Levites. And it shall be with him, and he shall read it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the LORD his God and be careful to observe all the words of this law and these statutes, that his heart may not be lifted above his brethren, that he may not turn aside from the commandment to the right hand or to the left, and that he may prolong his days in his kingdom, he and his children in the midst of Israel.”

It is certainly uncommon to find a king, or ruler of any kind, in this world who reverences the law of God and remains as humble as the people he serves. But this is the type of rulership God seeks, because it is productive for everyone. Godly leadership, whether in the family or the Church, is that which helps other people do what God wants them to do and get to where God wants them to be. In verses 16-17 God made it clear that the position of leadership was not to be misused to advance the king’s self-interests. He warned that even something such as personal vanity or feelings of superiority would turn the king away from His model of godly leadership; it would turn a king’s heart inwardly and he would start doing what he perceived to be best for himself, not the people, and that would eventually lead to abuse.

It is not coincidental that Jesus later continued with the timeless principles of Deuteronomy when He instructed the disciples about godly governing and condemned the abuses of ungodly rule. In amplifying the spirit of the law, one of the first things He taught was the importance of meekness as an essential requirement for inheriting and ruling (Matthew 5:5, “. . . the meek . . . shall inherit the earth”).

He was preparing the first disciples, as He has all of the saints since, to properly administer authority and justice as potential leaders in His coming Kingdom (Revelation 1:5-6, “. . . and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth. To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father. . . .” See also Revelation 5:10).

Nevertheless, even though disciples of Christ easily acknowledge the sense and value of these thoughts, they do not find it easy or natural to think God’s way or apply His standards (Isaiah 55:8, “For My thoughts are not your thoughts . . . nor are your ways My ways”). In stark contrast to His instructions was an occasion found in Matthew 20:20-28 (and Mark 10:35-45) where two of his disciples were politicizing and maneuvering, even with the aid of motherly influence, to see if they could obtain what they considered superior positions of authority next to Christ in the Kingdom. The reaction and great displeasure of the other 10 disciples shows that they, too, tuned in to this competitive thinking. Had they understood that the purpose of godly leadership is not for personal prestige or position, James’ and John’s request would not have threatened them.

However, they too were unwittingly under the influence of the “Gentile model,” the way the world thinks, and they played the political game at its finest! “Politics” is inherently related to human government, but godly government is not political. Politics involves people using position, power or influence to their personal advantage to get something they want, usually at the expense of someone else’s needs or interests. The fact that politics can exist among people—even the disciples—should not shock anyone. It is the standard method of using and

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manipulating government that humans employ by nature. It is the world's way of "me first!" It is the way all Christians have to grow out of.

Jesus sharply rebuked them, saying,

"You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

Such correction must have shocked these men, when they perceived their error in forgetting the principles of God's Word that prohibit a ruler from rising above his brethren in self-importance. Such thinking leads to strife rather than peace, to abusive lordship rather than beneficent service. Christians must grow out of this worldly way of thinking and reacting in order to govern by the mind of Christ.

Because it is wrong to lord it over others, and Matthew 23:8 teaches that "One is your Teacher, the Christ, and you are all brethren," some erroneously conclude that no one is subject to anyone else, and that any and all authority is unscriptural. Jesus obviously did not mean that He was taking all authority out of the New Testament Church structure and practice. He was simply strongly reinforcing how authority should not be used. God has always intended humans to have godly government, and both the Old and New Testament standards were given to define and promote righteous rulership so that no one would be burdened or oppressed. The apostle Paul captured the thought completely when he spoke of "the authority which the Lord has given me for edification and not for destruction" (2 Corinthians 13:10).

History is riddled with examples of both civil and church government abuse, but the problems have always been the ungodly manner and attitude in administering authority (or rebelling against authority, whether godly or abusive), not in the principle of authority itself. Whether in the family, nation or church, when government becomes dictatorial, insensitive, heretical or overbearing, it is worldly and against God.

In the Church of God, structure, authority and coordinating administration must exist, as it did in ancient Israel, in order to cohesively preach the gospel, "feed the flock," teach God's laws of righteousness, protect the Church from doctrinal heresy and sinful practices, and properly resolve the inevitable conflicts that arise among any group of people.

## **PART TWO—GOVERNMENT AND ADMINISTRATION IN ISRAEL AND IN THE CHURCH**

### **Does the Church Need Government?**

“Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Christ Jesus” (Hebrews 3:1). From the day the Church was established on the Feast of Pentecost in A.D. 31, it has always had one Apostle in charge—Jesus Christ (Ephesians 1:22-23; 2:20; 5:23; Colossians 1:18). He alone is the Head of the Church. He is the Master. We are the servants. He is the Ruler. We are the subjects.

Any examination of “church government” must therefore begin with understanding the answer to the question, “what was Christ’s purpose for building His Church (Matthew 16:18) in the first place?”

Jesus Christ gave His Church—this body of spiritually transformed believers—a responsibility to carry out a mission: to preach the gospel of the Kingdom of God and make disciples throughout the world, teaching them exactly what Jesus taught (Matthew 24:14; 28:19-20). The work of the Church continues; it did not cease when the original disciples died. The Church’s mission has been passed on to each generation of God’s people. Jesus promised to be with His followers as they accomplished that work until He returns at the end of the age (verse 20).

The gospel is God’s message of how salvation will be brought to mankind—starting with His Church—and the Church plays many roles in that. The Church stands as the light of the world (Matthew 5:14). It is the household or family of God (Ephesians 2:19; 1 Peter 4:17, NIV). It functions as the “pillar and ground of the truth” in a spiritually confused world (1 Timothy 3:15).

To effectively go into all of the world, make disciples of all nations and teach people God’s way of life takes cooperation and organization. To describe the organized functioning of the people of God, Paul drew the analogy of the human body in 1 Corinthians 12:27-28 (NIV):

“Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of [languages].”

Paul also explained that functions within the body of Christ are established by Him “to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the Body of Christ” (Ephesians 4:11-12, NRSV). In addition, he wrote that “there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone” (1 Corinthians 12:4-6, NRSV).

Among the functions God activated are specific appointments for spiritual leadership: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers (Ephesians 4:11). They are entrusted with

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the responsibility to serve, teach, nourish, protect and build the Church. Godly character and exemplary spiritual qualifications are required of those entrusted with such leadership (1 Timothy 3:1-10; Titus 1:5-9). They are to lovingly shepherd God's flock (John 21:15-17) so that all members of this spiritual body may "come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:13).

They are to lead the people of God to work together in unity—to love, respect and support each other. "But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other" (1 Corinthians 12:24-25, NIV).

Any practical application of all these instructions to have such a Church—composed of members scattered around the world, yet united in a common mission—demands having structure, organization and coordination.

In 1 Corinthians 14:40 Paul gives a broad principle of organization—"Let all things be done decently and in order"—to avoid, as the context shows, chaos and confusion. In verse 33 Paul presented the Church as a model for peace, "For God is not the author of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints." Organization is a major key, therefore, to preventing confusion and promoting peace.

### **A Blueprint for Governmental Organization?**

But how should it be organized and administered? Is there one, and only one, single form of church government instituted by God? If the answer is "yes," then we must discover and use it. If the answer is "no," then our task is to understand the governmental principles God gives and make sure we apply them to any administrative structure instituted.

A search of the Bible simply shows that Christ never laid out the exact blueprint for all aspects of the Church's governmental organization.

We find rather (in the analysis that follows) that God did not limit Himself to one structure as He led His people. There is, on earth, no one single structure which can be correctly called "God's government," ordained to be employed continuously throughout human history. God instituted, or allowed Israel to institute, a significant number of differing systems, and history suggests He has allowed spiritual Israel, His Church, to likewise be organized in varying ways based on the times and conditions, culture or leadership He raised up. The phrase quoted earlier in 1 Corinthians 12:6, "there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone," certainly seems to apply to church organization through the ages.

The common denominator among all structures, though, is that the governance that bonds God's people should safeguard the spiritual well-being of the governed while it advances the work of God as a whole.

The reason why this can be done under a variety of structures may be found by answering a fundamental question: Was man made for governance or governance for man? This variation of the statement Christ made about the Sabbath (Mark 2:27, “The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath”) captures a critical principle—we should not become so bound to any particular church governmental structure that it becomes an end in itself. Like the Sabbath, it is not complete in its own orb, but only gains merit and substance through its Lord, and the Lord, Jesus Christ, as Head of His Church is fully capable of using variations of structure if He deems it necessary.

### **Early Biblical Examples of Governmental Systems**

God’s Church unquestionably needs sufficient organization and structure to effectively handle the challenges it faces. As one should expect, God reveals the key concepts we need to know about government.

We find little in Genesis, before the nation of Israel existed, which sheds light on governmental principles. Abraham is referred to as a faithful servant of God who would properly “command his children” (Genesis 18:18-19), reflecting the common patriarchal system of the time.

Government comes more into focus when the family of Israel grew and their deliverance from Egypt immediately formed them into a nation. For this group of former slaves untrained to govern themselves, God first established His sovereignty and outlined His standards of conduct. He also clearly established Moses as His representative, the one by whom He would communicate. However, before they even arrived at Mt. Sinai certain limits to one man’s capacity to lead became obvious, as described in Exodus 18.

Moses’ father-in-law, Jethro, quickly observed that no one could continue under such a staggering workload (verses 17-18), so he proposed a revised judicial system designed for Moses to share the judicial duties with rulers over groups of thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens. This offered a commonsense, practical solution to the needs at hand, yet nothing in the context indicates that God inspired Jethro (who was a priest of Midian, not of God) or revealed this to him, or that it was the model to be used for all time. In fact, this structure lasted for only a brief time, soon replaced with a system directly from God.

Of greatest import to this account, however, are the qualifications Jethro listed for these judges. He wisely advised Moses to “teach them the statutes and the laws, and show them the way in which they must walk and the work they must do. Moreover you shall select from all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness. . . . And let them judge the people at all times. . . . So it will be easier for you, for they will bear the burden with you” (Exodus 18:20-22). The account in Deuteronomy 1:9-18 said he chose “wise, understanding, and knowledgeable men from among your tribes.”

This organizational structure was soon altered, but the high standards never changed. These character issues are timeless and are repeated in principle in the qualifications later listed

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for godly leadership in the Church. They speak to the essence of righteous authority, and God repeatedly emphasized these core values.

For example, He instructed Moses to tell the Israelites in Deuteronomy 16:18-20,

“You shall appoint judges and officers in all your gates, which the LORD your God gives you, according to your tribes, and they shall judge the people with just judgment. You shall not pervert justice; you shall not show partiality, nor take a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and twists the words of the righteous. You shall follow what is altogether just, that you may live and inherit the land which the LORD your God is giving you.”

What did He emphasize here? He certainly addressed their need for both a judicial system (with capable judges appointed to resolve conflicts and grievances) and an executive system (with officers who oversee administrative activities), but, as always, God stressed more than anything the critical importance of righteous character.

### **The Elders and Judges**

Soon after Israel left Mt. Sinai, again overwhelmed by his burden of leadership, Moses cried to God for help (Numbers 11:14). God’s solution was for him to single out 70 of the elders of Israel and appoint them to a special role in the governmental administration. Furthermore, God made an exceptional promise that He would “take of the Spirit that is upon you and will put the same upon them; and they shall bear the burden of the people with you, that you may not bear it yourself alone” (11:17).

We are told almost nothing about how they were selected or how they functioned, but the concept of elders was certainly not foreign. They are first mentioned in Exodus 3:16 and 18, where God told Moses to assemble the elders of Israel and that together they would petition Pharaoh to let Israel depart from Egypt. These elders, who are also mentioned several other times in the book of Exodus, clearly held leadership positions already, though the specific roles are not described.

The Numbers 11 story makes it clear that God established elders as an integral element of Israel’s government, and so it remained for a long time. They continued to govern under Joshua’s leadership after Moses died (Joshua 7:6; 8:10, 33), and when Joshua died they assumed the leadership responsibility in another structural shift. At Joshua’s demise God did not choose one man to take his place as He had done when Moses died. Instead, the elders apparently formed the leadership core of Israel (Joshua 24:31; Judges 2:7; 8:13-16; 11:4-11), but often in some sort of undefined association with “judges.”

This period known as “Judges,” which lasted for several centuries until the monarchy was established, was one of turbulence, discord and many defeats, and Israel often appeared to lack a strong central government. It is true that God raised up various judges to lead the people in specific situations, but it seems they acted more as deliverers in times of oppression than government administrators (Judges 2:16-19). The term “judge” does not necessarily mean one in

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a judicial position as in the modern implication. “These national heroes are sometimes called ‘deliverers’ (AV ‘saviours’) (3:9, 15),” says *The New Bible Dictionary*, “and of most of them it is said that they ‘judged Israel’ for a stated period of years. . . . It is clear that this imparts a new meaning into the word ‘judge’, namely, that of a leader in battle and a ruler in peace.”

An interesting observation of this time is that among the great heroes of Israel is Deborah, notable not only for her character and courage, but also for God’s stepping out of the traditional patterns of leadership and appointing a strong woman to judge and deliver the nation.

### **Kings, Prophets, Governors and Others**

During the time of one of their greatest judges, Samuel, the Israelites saw corruption at lower levels of the administration and demanded a change in structure, a king like the surrounding nations. God acceded to their request, after repeating in 1 Samuel 8:9 the warning He had given in Deuteronomy 17:14-20 about potential abuses of the kingship system. The core of the problem, He said, was not whether the leader was a king or judge, but that the people rejected Him as their leader (1 Samuel 8:7).

The monarchies that followed in Israel and Judah tended to be administrative and procedural disasters, with only a few good kings interspersed among numerous evil ones. Prior to the civil war, only David really provided decent administration, yet his reign was often turbulent. Solomon became so corrupted that the nation fractured upon his death. The history of the kings accentuated again the lesson that leaders who acknowledge and submit to God’s sovereignty succeed, and those who refuse fail; the people, of course, flourish or languish accordingly.

After Israel’s and Judah’s captivity, monarchical rule ceased to exist, but God did not cease to be with His people. The principle leaders, with the possible exception of Nehemiah, seemed to be priests, but the prophets also played a highly significant role before, during and after the captivities. Although the Church is “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets” (Ephesians 2:20), the prophets did not provide a governmental model. In fact, God often used concurrent prophets in both kingdoms, but none apparently had authority over another or over the nation. (In Judah, Obadiah and Joel were contemporaries with Elijah and Elisha in Israel. Later, Jeremiah, Zephaniah, Habakkuk, Daniel and Ezekiel simultaneously witnessed to Judah and the Diaspora.) Most of the prophets were not sent to exert authority over the land, but more to be spokesmen warning the nations of the consequences of their spiritual degeneration.

When God led Judah’s return from the Babylonian captivity, Ezra, Nehemiah and Zechariah shared leadership responsibilities in different capacities. In time the nation came to be guided to a great extent by the priests as both the religious and political leaders. Without scriptural record we cannot prove one way or the other how much God may have backed these leaders, but history indicates God still used individuals to lead Judah (the story of the Maccabees and their revolt against Antiochus and the Seleucid rulers is one example). Eventually, a governing body called the Sanhedrin governed until the destruction of Jerusalem around A.D. 70.

When Christ came on the scene, He had to relate to two very different forms of government, the Jewish authorities and Imperial Rome. He consistently taught submission to both governments unless it conflicted with God's law. He taught the people to pay taxes to both the Romans (Matthew 22:21) and the Jewish temple authorities (Matthew 17:24-27). He sent cleansed lepers to the priests. He taught people to be subject to the rulers, even when they were corrupt (Matthew 23:1-36). He even told them to tithe in direct support of these corrupt priests because they "sit in Moses' seat" (Matthew 23:2, 23). He never disparaged the Sanhedrin as a governing body, and even showed Himself submissive to its authority. On the other hand, neither did He endorse or advocate any specific form of human government.

### **The Great Lessons From the Old Testament Examples**

So, was Christ silent on the subject of governance? Not at all. As we will soon see, some of His most powerful and pointed instructions were about leadership.

But surveying the Old Testament examples shows that no single structure can be identified as "God's government," the one system to be employed at all times. In all cases, both good and bad government existed, demonstrating that it depended on the *governing* (or, in some cases, the reaction of the *governed*) not the system. Systems can never guarantee security or success. We conclude, therefore, that the Old Testament examples provide for the New Testament Church the model principles of righteous governance, but not the structure.

One of the most controversial questions is whether God's way is to have one man head the Church. While most of the Old Testament models are based on one-man rule, it is interesting to note that the law of God neither prescribes nor prohibits the rule of only one man. The law is silent on the human factor, stressing rather the sovereign rule of God as the Head of His people. This principle is even more strongly emphasized as we move on to examine the New Testament.

### **The New Testament on Government**

Two broad parallels between Old Testament Israel and the New Testament Church are readily apparent: 1) a central core of administration is necessarily present in both, for without it people lose common focus and unity, and 2) Christ never relinquished to any man His position as Head of either.

While He walked the earth, even as He was subject to the existing religious and civil authorities, He was laying the groundwork for a separate government—first within His Church and eventually expanding into His coming Kingdom. Virtually all of His teachings about governance centered on the ethics of righteous authority, not organizational structure. For example, He taught that the most important principle of governing is to humbly serve, not lord it over or take advantage of people as the worldly governments do (Matthew 20:25-28).

He also stressed two analogies about His Church that add a perspective to the relationship between all parties—God, leaders and members—which is missing in human governments.

First, the Church is the Body of Christ. God inspired Paul to compare it to the human body (Romans 12:4-5; 1 Corinthians 12:12-31; Ephesians 1:23; 4:4, 11-16; 5:23, 30), stressing that all parts of the body must work and function together. This not only is essential for survival, but it aims for the totally unified example of the Father and the Son. The body cannot compete against itself, and therefore both the governors and the governed must always seek to work for the welfare of the whole. Otherwise it fragments, and fragmentation of the Body of Christ strikes against the God-ordained principles of government (1 Corinthians 1:10, 13, “Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. . . . Is Christ divided?”).

Second, the Church is a family (Ephesians 3:15; 5:22-32). That has a direct bearing on the governance to be exercised in the Church. Writing to Timothy about the qualities for an elder, Paul emphasized he must be “one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence (for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?)” (1 Timothy 3:4-5). The word “well” in verse 4 in Greek is *kalos*. It means more than “effectively.” It carries the concept of “winsomeness” or “attractiveness.” In other words, in the right family relationship, with the husband and father righteously leading and “ruling” his family, it is something beautiful to see, a positive, uplifting relationship that is wholesome and attractive even to observers outside the family. He said this is the basis of the relationship the ministry should have with the congregation—leadership and authority used in a way that produces a healthy atmosphere.

Family, and marriage in particular, illustrates another lesson: Government in marriage is of godly origin, but how that government is administered from marriage to marriage can differ widely (such as in different cultures and eras) and still remain within godly boundaries. For example, the common North American family may have a very different functioning than what an Asian family would be comfortable with. Some people grow up in cultures where they want and need absolute authority, where others want and need government that is more collaborative.

### **The Added Dimension of the Holy Spirit**

The capacity for members to work together as a God’s body and family is dependent upon an aspect of government unique to the Church—the working of God’s Spirit within us. The Isaiah 7:14 messianic prophecy calling His name Immanuel, “God With Us,” foreshadowed a new dimension of life for God’s people as a whole—the Father and Son through the Holy Spirit would dwell in us (John 14:15-20, 23). Therefore, the Body of Christ—when subject to God’s Spirit—will function in a manner reflecting the relationship of love and unity between the Father and Son:

“ . . . that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us. . . that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one” (John 17:21-23).

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This is undoubtedly why, when we examine the organizational structure of the early New Testament Church, we find little to define the spheres of operation based on organizational boxes, but do find heavy emphasis on the bonding element of God's Spirit with Christ at the Head.

### **God-Ordained Offices and Responsibilities**

For some time before the Church began, Christ was preparing its future human leaders. "He called His disciples to Himself; and from them He chose twelve whom He also named apostles" (Luke 6:13). Along with the prophets, these 12 formed the foundation of the Church, with "Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone" (Ephesians 2:20).

It is instructive that He called 12 disciples, not one, and although several (Peter most notably) had more outwardly demonstrable leadership qualities, nowhere can we find that Christ ever appointed one to be over the others. At times it even seems like He pointedly avoided it when circumstances offered a great opportunity to define the Church hierarchy. For example, when James and John appealed in advance for superior positions in the Kingdom (Matthew 20:21-28), Jesus ignored singling out anyone in particular. Instead, He corrected their competitive nature, shifting their focus to the role of service rather than the role of ruling. Serving, rather than grasping for power and position, was the hallmark of Christ's example and His teaching.

As time went on, though, Christ did establish, beginning with the original apostles, official ministerial duties within His Church for humans to lead and serve His body of members. God directly established and sanctioned these responsibilities, and He "calls" ministers, just as He "calls" Christians into His way of life. "The Holy Spirit said, 'Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.' Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away" (Acts 13:2-3. See also Romans 1:1 and 1 Corinthians 1:1).

Paul clearly recognized the divine origin of this role. As he told the church at Corinth, "*God has appointed* these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers" (1 Corinthians 12:28, emphasis added throughout). To the Ephesian members he wrote, "And *He Himself gave some* to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers" (Ephesians 4:11). Addressing the Ephesian elders he said, "Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which *the Holy Spirit has made you overseers*, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood" (Acts 20:28). About himself, Paul wrote, "And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me, because He counted me faithful, *putting me into the ministry*" (1 Timothy 1:12). He instructed Archippus that the ministry was not some humanly-devised position, but a service received from God—"Take heed to *the ministry which you have received in the Lord*, that you may fulfill it" (Colossians 4:17).

## **What is a Minister?**

In modern usage, “the ministry” is the general term for all the various functions Christ outlined. However, a Greek-speaking member in the early Church would have read and heard several different words that are today rendered simply as “minister” in the English. Lost in the translation, unfortunately, are the original meanings and nuances that shed light on God’s intent. For example, *diakonos* literally means “a servant, attendant, minister, deacon”; *leitourgos* is “firstly, ‘one who discharged a public office at his own expense,’ then, in general ‘a public servant, minister’”<sup>1</sup>; *huperetes*, is literally “an under rower,” an expression that came to denote a subordinate acting under another’s direction. W.E. Vine explains, “Other synonymous nouns are *doulos*, ‘a bondservant’; *oiketes*, ‘a household servant’; *misthios*, ‘a hired servant’; *misthotos* (ditto); *pais*, ‘a boy, a household servant.’ Speaking broadly, *diakonos* views a servant in relation to his work; *doulos*, in relation to his master; *huperetes*, in relation to his superior, *leitourgos*, in relation to public service.”<sup>2</sup>

These words are variously used in many places in the New Testament of Jesus Christ, of the apostles, of elders in general and of rulers of human governments. Always they embody God’s intent for righteous leadership. One could express it in two seemingly opposite ways—“serving by leading” and “leading by serving”—but both views would correctly reflect the mind and example of Jesus Christ. Proper service makes for powerfully effective leadership, and such godly leadership is driven by a spirit of service. It is a profound blend of the authority to lead, derived from God, with the heart to serve, also derived from God. It is, as Peter put it, “serving as overseers” (1 Peter 5:2).

## **The Ministerial “Job Description”**

The first four verses of 1 Peter 5 encapsulate nearly all the New Testament instructions about the role and responsibility of the ministry.

“The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by constraint but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.”

Christ is the Head of the Church, which is the flock of God. He is not dependent on humans to do His work, but He clearly chose to work through human instruments to do it, and He has clearly chosen to work through a human ministry to coordinate and govern the Church’s activities and to help the members in many ways. God intends that ministers educate, care for, protect and provide an environment in which people can spiritually grow and flourish. He gave these specific “job descriptions” for all to understand:

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<sup>1</sup> W.E. Vine, Merrill F. Unger, William White, Jr., *Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Thomas Nelson Publishers).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

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- Ministers are to be “fellow workers for your joy” (2 Corinthians 1:24).
- They are to be “examples to the flock” (1 Peter 5:3; 1 Timothy 4:12). Peter undoubtedly drew his admonition to the elders from the words directly given to him by Christ, many years earlier, to “feed my sheep” (John 21:15-17).
- Paul told Titus that he should “set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you” (Titus 1:5), showing he was to make sure the congregation’s affairs were organized and to oversee developing leaders (see also 1 Timothy 5:22; 2 Timothy 2:2).
- They are to teach the Church as well as the world in general. “How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, who bring glad tidings of good things!’” (Romans 10:14-15).
- The ministry is given, Ephesians 4:11-16 says, “for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry” (“ministering’ [serving] not in the sense of an ecclesiastical function”<sup>3</sup>), “for the edifying of the body of Christ. . .that we should no longer be children.” This charge specifically includes the elements listed in the Pastoral Epistles of teaching (“if you instruct the brethren in these things, you will be a good minister of Jesus Christ,” 1 Timothy 4:6; “Preach the word!” 2 Timothy 4:2); correcting fellow elders (1 Timothy 5:19-20) or members (2 Timothy 2:25-26; 2 Timothy 4:2); exhorting (1 Timothy 6:17; 2 Timothy 2:14; 4:2; Titus 2:1-10, 3:1-2); guarding against heresy invading the congregation (Titus 1:9-11) and taking disciplinary measures to protect the congregation (Titus 3:9-11).
- Implicit in Ephesians 4:16 is that the ministry should facilitate ways for every member to contribute to the Church what he or she can, helping every part do its share so that the body, collectively or locally, can spiritually grow and prosper.
- Paul wanted the ministry to be a conduit of information to the Church about his efforts to preach the gospel in other parts of the world (Ephesians 6:21-22).
- All the while, a minister should never exercise the authority of his office as a tyrant or lord over his brethren (1 Peter 5:3).

### **Accountability is Heavy**

Such responsibilities are serious and weighty. Paul recognized the power an overseer or teacher can have on people, for good or bad. He warned the elders at Ephesus, “For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

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among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves” (Acts 20:29-30). Because their office is one of persuasive influence, God holds His Church’s leaders highly accountable. “My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment” (James 3:1). On the positive side, however, He also says, “Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine” (1 Timothy 5:17).

The mantle of leadership should be worn with all gravity, which is undoubtedly why Paul told Timothy not to “lay hands on anyone hastily” (1 Timothy 5:22). Paul’s statement is only one of many we find in the New Testament that elaborate in detail on the broad principles of governing that Moses had given to the Israelites and Jesus to the disciples. As always, because they so directly affect people’s lives, the very requirements themselves mirror God’s principles of governance.

These are the New Testament standards for recognizing and appointing a minister in the Church:

- He must be “of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom” (Acts 6:3).
- He must not only be “blameless,” that is, not open to charges or accusations (1 Timothy 3:2, 10; Titus 1:6), but have “a good testimony among those who are outside” (1 Timothy 3:7).
- He must be committed to his marriage and handle his family responsibilities well (1 Timothy 3:2, 4-5; Titus 1:6). Look to this carefully, God says, because a man will reveal in his family relationships how he will lead a congregation.
- He must have emotional maturity broadly demonstrated by qualities such as a temperate nature, “sober-minded. . .gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous” (1 Timothy 3:2-3); “not self-willed, not quick-tempered. . .not greedy for money. . .self-controlled” (Titus 1:7-8); “not given to wine” (1 Timothy 3:3; Titus 1:7).
- He must love hospitality (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:8).
- He must not only be a well-grounded and capable teacher, but a trusted one, “holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict” (Titus 1:9; 1 Timothy 3:2).
- He must not be “a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the same condemnation as the devil” (1 Timothy 3:6).
- He must conduct himself with the gravity of being “a steward of God” (Titus 1:7).

Who would not want an overseer of their congregation who behaved like this in both character and administration? Would not such a leader set a wonderful example, create a healthy environment for learning and spiritual growth, and foster a warm family atmosphere? Godly

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leaders are always needed, and in their work in a congregation one will inevitably see a fulfillment of Proverbs 29:2—the people will rejoice.

### **Various Definitions of Ministers**

The New Testament uses several other terms in addition to “minister,” with all its previously explored meanings, to describe various God-given offices or responsibilities. (See W.E. Vine’s comments on these words in Appendix A). The meanings of these words are important for what they do, and do not, convey.

Vine notes that certain of these words listed in Ephesians 4:11 (apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers) make “clear the distinctiveness of the function in the church.” This section certainly indicates that apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor and teacher are primarily areas of function and responsibility, undoubtedly based on the will of God when each elder is ordained or as God places these responsibilities upon them at any given time.

While the need for organization and oversight of the Church is very clear, Christ simply did not specify any details for administrative structure. Neither did He prohibit any. The definitions of all the words used to describe the ministerial responsibilities of and by themselves simply do not speak to an ascending ladder of ranks or positions within the ministerial structure. As will be noted below, the apostles clearly did have authority over the other ministers, but the meaning of *apostolos* carries no implied authoritative or administrative function. Bear in mind that in the early Church there were a number of apostles at the same time, with no evidence proving that one was over the others.

Why is this? Is it not because Christ either expects His servants to respectfully and submissively work together to organize the administration, or that He reserves to Himself the right to institute the type of structure He wishes at any given time—or both?

### **Do Ministers Have Authority Over Other Ministers?**

Peter, Paul, John and the other apostles clearly led, instructed and admonished other elders. Although Peter humbly viewed himself as a “fellow elder,” he obviously accepted the God-given responsibility to direct the elders he addressed in his letter (1 Peter 5:1-5). Similarly, Paul instructed and admonished the elders collectively (Acts 20:17-38) and individually (Timothy and Titus). All indications are that the elders acknowledged these men as their ministerial overseers. They were obvious leaders and highly respected among their peers, the elders undoubtedly recognizing the principle Paul told the church at Corinth: “For though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet you do not have many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel. Therefore I urge you, imitate me” (1 Corinthians 4:15-16).

Little is said about how to deal with an elder who does not adhere to the ministerial requirements examined earlier. Presumably, peers or administrative supervisors would deal with

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him, as Paul did Peter (Galatians 2:11). Paul instructed, “those [elders] who are sinning, rebuke in the presence of all, that the rest also may fear” (1 Timothy 5:20). According to the context, “the presence of all” would indicate all the other elders.

The ministerial standards are high, but not impossible, and it is only sensible that the Church must have some form of authority to ensure they are maintained.

### **Does the Ministry Have Authority in the Church?**

To see authority and government in every level of godly life—in the marriage, in the family, in the nation, in the spirit realm, in the coming Kingdom of God—and then deny or question whether it should exist in the Church is inconsistent and illogical. The New Testament is replete with examples of Church leaders exercising leadership, organizing, teaching, protecting, solving problems, correcting, disciplining—all in the name of godly, and God-given, authority.

In the early Church’s first months, when the brethren sold many of their possessions in order to share with others, how did they handle the funds? “Having land, sold it, and brought the money and laid it at the apostles’ feet” (Acts 4:37). They must have believed the apostles could and should have the responsibility of overseeing the disbursement.

As the congregation grew the apostles’ burdens increased, so much so they could not adequately oversee the distribution, and some of the needy were neglected (Acts 6:1). The 12 gave the Church the criteria for recommending seven men from among themselves “whom we may appoint over this business” (verse 3).

When the first major doctrinal question arose, it was the ministry that came together to make the determination (Acts 15:6-21). Grappling with the sensitive and controversial questions of circumcision and salvation was a grave matter, since the decision would greatly impact the future of the Church, and Christ apparently expected the ministry to be sufficiently spiritually mature to reach an inspired decision. They would also be accountable for their decision (Hebrews 13:17).

The author of the letter to the Hebrews wrote, “Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct” (13:7). “Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you” (13:17). “Greet all those who rule over you, and all the saints” (13:24).

As time passed, Christ inspired several of the apostle Paul’s letters and preserved them as His Holy Word. In them we read often of Paul not shirking his responsibility to exercise godly authority for the benefit of the congregations, even though more often than not he was not even present with them. Note these numerous examples:

- His letters to the churches at Thessalonica and Corinth in particular illustrate that he had considerable oversight. It was his determination to make a “manpower decision” in both

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areas. “For this reason I have sent Timothy to you. . .who will remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach everywhere in every church” (1 Corinthians 4:17; see also 1 Thessalonians 3:2). In addition to assigning Timothy, it seems clear he wanted them to be unified with all the other congregations in their doctrinal understanding.

- When Paul heard of a young Corinthian member involved in fornication, he strongly commanded the congregation by the authority of Jesus Christ to remove the man from their fellowship (1 Corinthians 5:4-5, 13). The context makes it obvious that the congregation had fallen down on its job to police itself, whether by its local overseers or everyone in general, so Paul issued the excommunication order. When the man later repented, though, Paul not only made the decision that he should rejoin the congregation, but also said that he was going to watch the members’ reaction—“Therefore I urge you to reaffirm your love to him. For to this end I also wrote, that I might put you to the test, whether you are obedient in all things” (2 Corinthians 2:8-9).
- He spelled out how they must deal with the problem of speaking in tongues (1 Corinthians 14); he urged them to submit to a family who labored among them in the congregation (16:15-16).
- He commanded a “fundraiser” for needy brethren. “Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also” (1 Corinthians 16:1).
- It is sad that some members became “puffed up” against Paul (1 Corinthians 4:18). In response he stated, “What do you want? Shall I come to you with a rod, or in love and a spirit of gentleness?” (4:21). To say that Paul had authority in no way means that he treated people first and foremost with the “rod.” As he indicates here, that type of authority would only be wielded if someone persisted in causing problems.
- Paul was in jail when he wrote Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians, yet through his letters he was very much involved in those congregations. He corrected, exhorted, pleaded and encouraged on many different issues.
- One can judge from the following scriptures in the Thessalonian letters whether Paul believed his and others’ authority directly came from Christ and reached into the members’ lives:
  - “Nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others, when we might have made demands as apostles of Christ” (1 Thessalonians 2:6);
  - “Therefore he who rejects this does not reject man, but God, who has also given us His Holy Spirit” (4:8);
  - “And we urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love for their work’s sake. Be at peace among yourselves” (5:12-13);

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- “But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us” (2 Thessalonians 3:6);
  - “For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat” (3:10);
  - “Now those who are such we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ, that they work in quietness and eat their own bread” (3:12);
  - “And if anyone does not obey our word in this epistle, note that person and do not keep company with him, that he may be ashamed” (3:14).
- In a personal letter to Philemon, Paul said, “though I might be very bold in Christ to command you what is fitting, yet for love’s sake I rather appeal to you” (Philemon 1:8-9).
  - It wasn’t only the apostles who had authority in the Church. Paul told Timothy to “command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty” (1 Timothy 6:17). He told Titus, “Speak these things, exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no one despise you” (Titus 2:15).

One should not conclude from the preceding examples that Paul was authoritarian or overly harsh. He clearly understood the proper purpose for authority. In 2 Corinthians 10:8, we read, “For even if I should boast somewhat more about our *authority, which the Lord gave us for edification and not for our destruction*, I shall not be ashamed.” Certain ones despised him (verse 10) and twice he addressed those challenging his qualifications. Later he repeated, “Therefore I write these things being absent, lest being present I should use sharpness, according to the authority which the Lord has given me for edification and not for destruction” (13:10). Paul dealt with problems in a direct manner, but never in a manner of lording it over anyone.

So, was Paul overboard on the authority issue, the only one emphasizing it? Not at all. The elderly apostle John in his letter to Gaius wrote that, “Diotrophes, who likes to put himself first, does not acknowledge our authority” (3 John 9, RSV), and said that he would deal with this malcontent when and if he could visit.

### **What is a Godly Attitude Toward Authority?**

In a scathing denunciation of the abusive and self-righteous Pharisees, Jesus admonished, “But you, do not be called ‘Rabbi’; for One is your Teacher, the Christ, and you are all brethren. Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven. And do not be called teachers; for One is your Teacher, the Christ” (Matthew 23:8-10). Is this contradictory to Ephesians 4:11, where Paul said Christ Himself gave some to be teachers? No. Christ was rebuking those who used offices for self-aggrandizement, and followers who looked to them instead of God. As He said next, “But he who is greatest among you shall be your servant. And whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted” (23:11-12). Proper humility recognizes that all of God’s children are brothers, related to each other by

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having the same spiritual Father and His generative seed of the Holy Spirit, and being redeemed by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

These verses do not mean, however, that authority has been rescinded in the Church, or that some are not appointed to responsibilities and jurisdictions within the Church and its congregations. The core of the matter is as Paul said, “according to the authority which the Lord has given me for edification and not for destruction” (2 Corinthians 13:10).

We conclude from the New Testament that the questions about church government clearly do not revolve around whether authority exists, but what are its applications, what are its limits and how will each individual respond to it.

God has repeatedly witnessed a resistance to authority ranging from both angelic and human rebellion against Him to humanity’s hating its own self-imposed governments. He inspired Paul to make this powerful statement about a Christian’s attitude and response to government in general:

“Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same. For he is God’s minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God’s minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil. Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience’ sake. For because of this you also pay taxes, for they are God’s ministers attending continually to this very thing. Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor” (Romans 13:1-7).

Those are strong words. If God tells us that the nature of government in principle is for our good, even human government, and that it exists by His will (either directly or de facto), how much more would He have us hold the principle of Church government in high esteem? Authority in the Church is not intended by Christ to lead to an adversarial relationship, but one of mutual respect, esteem and admiration for everyone and the part each person plays in the work of God. Any problems of government that arise will stem from either the God-given authority being misused, or someone not being properly subject to that authority, or possibly both. When it is used and responded to properly, “the people rejoice.”

The weight of evidence shows that authority must exist in the Church to deal with the inevitable problems that arise, to protect the congregation, and to keep it heading the right direction. If those in authority abuse their disciplinary power as an overlord, and are not concerned with the members’ welfare, then trouble, discontent and division will assuredly develop. When those in authority are following the Chief Shepherd (1 Peter 5:4), and are truly ministering as lesser shepherds of Jesus Christ, then a basis exists for peace and unity. They will teach and administer the laws of God in the spirit of Deuteronomy 17 and Matthew 20, will serve and love in an even-handed manner, will not be pompous, vain or self-important. By acting in

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the power of the Holy Spirit, true ministers will function as both shepherds and spiritual brothers in ways that will edify, build up and encourage individual members and the Church as a whole.

Also, by acting in the power of the Holy Spirit, true disciples of Christ will honor and highly esteem the functions and offices God has instituted for the benefit of His Church.

#### **What are the Limits to Authority?**

All authority of humans over other humans is limited. First of all, humans rule only at the indulgence or institution of God. Pilate rashly stated to Jesus, “Do you not know that I have power to crucify You, and power to release You?” Jesus answered with a statement that applies in principle to all forms of rulership, not just Pilate’s: “You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given you from above” (John 19:10-11).

Not only has authority been given from above in many areas of life, but the parameters for godly leadership have been spelled out. Much of what has been examined already has dealt with that, and most of the limits speak about proper approach and attitude. Implicit in these scriptures is the understanding that a godly ruler cannot step outside those boundaries. The history of the kings of Israel and Judah shows many mistakes have occurred when they did not recognize where their authority *ended*.

Paul made an interesting statement in 2 Corinthians 10:13-17, showing that even as an apostle he did not see his authority as unrestricted: “We, however, will not boast beyond measure, but within the limits of the sphere which God appointed us—a sphere which especially includes you. For we are not overextending ourselves (as though our authority did not extend to you), for it was to you that we came with the gospel of Christ; not boasting of things beyond measure, that is, in other men’s labors, but having hope, that as your faith is increased, we shall be greatly enlarged by you in our sphere, to preach the gospel in the regions beyond you, and not to boast in another man’s sphere of accomplishment. But ‘he who glories, let him glory in the LORD.’”

Even in an administrative matter Paul operated within limits, saying he would preach the gospel only where Christ was not named, “lest I should build on another man’s foundation” (Romans 15:20).

More important, as it relates to other people, Paul also noted, “Not that we have dominion over your faith, but are fellow workers for your joy; for by faith you stand” (2 Corinthians 1:24). No human can rule or control the spiritual life of another. Humans can help, encourage, give understanding, etc., but to “have dominion” over that realm is impossible and to try to dictate one’s spiritual standing is highly improper. The faith Paul mentioned is but one of the fruits of the Spirit, and it stands to reason that it is just as impossible to control another person’s level of love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, goodness, meekness or self-control.

In any form of governance, whether dealing with the spheres of administration, law or attitude, one must take care not to extend beyond what God allows. One of the great lessons of

history—secular or church—is that many problems have arisen due to people stepping beyond their spheres of influence, or not knowing where their authority ended.

### **Models for Minister/Member Relationships and Cooperation**

The early history of the Church as recorded in Acts offers an insightful perspective of how Christ led the members and ministry to resolve both administrative and doctrinal problems. Obviously led by the Holy Spirit, they set a precedent not only for general organizational principles, but more importantly, for working together in unity and mutual submission.

Even before the Holy Spirit was given on the Day of Pentecost, Peter brought to the disciples the need to replace Judas (Acts 1:15-20). Since this stemmed from the need to act on an unfulfilled prophecy (verse 20), we cannot conclude this was because of a governmental/administrative need or a precedent to replace apostles after they die. In order to “let another take his office” (verse 20), “they proposed two” (verse 23) and through prayer (verse 24) and casting lots chose Matthias (verse 26).

After this point, the practice of casting lots is never again mentioned in the Bible. The reason is clear, since in a matter of days they received the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:1-4). Until that time, casting lots was a manner for the people of Israel, who did not have the Holy Spirit, to determine God’s will. That would all change, Christ promised, with the coming of the Holy Spirit, which would “be in you,” “teach you all things,” “guide you into all truth,” “tell you things to come” and “take of Mine and declare it to you” (John 14:17, 26; 16:13-15). God would now direct and honor the decisions of His Spirit-led children, especially when they appealed to Him through prayer and fasting for wisdom and discernment (for example, see Acts 13:1-3).

They were soon tested. Acts 6 gives the first look at the Church’s attempt to establish a governmental system to deal with internal needs. Explosive growth resulted in problems administering food to the needy—the apostles were simply too stretched with preaching to oversee all the needs springing up. So first, they brought the Church members together (verse 2), explained the problem, then enlisted the membership to help them solve it. “Therefore, brethren,” they instructed, “seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business” (verse 3). This “pleased the whole multitude” (verse 5). Luke does not tell us how the members went about the process of nominating the seven, only that it worked (verses 5-7). Even with a church of several thousand they were apparently given the latitude to figure out a procedure for implementing the apostles’ directive.

The account of Acts 6 is a striking parallel to what Moses did with Israel. In Deuteronomy 1:13, recounting the events of Exodus 18, he said, “Choose wise, understanding and knowledgeable men from among your tribes, and I will make them heads over you.” In both the Old and New Testament we see a collaborative process in which the “laity” had a major preliminary role in nominating people for certain positions, but the final decision rested with the appointed leader or leaders.

The entire process in Acts 6 blended the principles of consensus, gaining input from the brethren, then sanctioning their input by the laying on of hands. We see structure, organization, procedure, involvement and ratification. The apostles expressed confidence toward the membership, and the members in turn toward the apostles. In this first governmental issue in the Church we see first the acknowledgment of God's will, then wisdom in problem-solving, concession that no one person or group had all the answers, respect for the members and submission to the spiritual leaders who had the final say. All in all, it was a well-handled process that God blessed—"the word of God spread, and the number of disciples multiplied greatly" (verse 7). Presumably, their physical needs were well attended from then on, overseen by these seven, generally acknowledged to be the first deacons.

We also see that God conducted the entire process through His leaders. W. Robertson Nicoll in *The Expositor's Greek Testament* says, "The passage has been quoted in support of the democratic constitution of the Apostolic Church, but the whole context shows that the government really lay with the Apostles." He goes on to cite three reasons: 1) they decided how to solve the problem; 2) they determined the qualifications for those who would be chosen; 3) they laid hands on those selected.

### **King Hezekiah's Rare Example—A Role Model for Acts 6**

The process described in Acts 6 is reminiscent of another wonderful Old Testament example of godly cooperation found in 2 Chronicles 30 in the account of King Hezekiah restoring the law of God in the land. Circumstances prohibited them from keeping the Passover at the appointed time, so an unusual decision was made to observe it in the second month (verses 1-3). Although Hezekiah had full authority, he brought others into the decision-making process. "For the king and his leaders and all the assembly in Jerusalem had agreed to keep the Passover in the second month" (verse 2). A few days later, riding on the inspiration of a wonderful Feast of Unleavened Bread (verse 21), "the whole assembly agreed to keep the feast another seven days" (verse 23). In this unique, highly unusual circumstance ("they ate the Passover contrary to what was written") God blessed them (verses 18-20). The entire process was, in fact, through God's inspiration: "Also the hand of God was on Judah to give them singleness of heart to obey the command of the king and the leaders, at the word of the LORD" (verse 12). So the precedent of rulers working with other leaders and all the followers is found long before Acts 6.

### **Lessons From Acts 15**

Another precedent-setting example for church government is the famous Jerusalem conference in Acts 15, where the ministry as a whole met together to determine an important and sensitive issue that was polarizing the Church. After "no small dissension and dispute" failed to dissuade a segment of men from Judea who were teaching that gentile members had to be circumcised (verses 1-2), everyone agreed that Paul and Barnabas should "go up to Jerusalem, to the apostles and elders, about this question" (verse 2). The opinions and interchanges at the ensuing conference were carefully and passionately debated ("there had been much dispute"), and rightly so. After all, the conclusion would result in a major doctrinal position that demanded

a radical change in understanding for some members and ministers alike. Peter's and James' perspectives and reasoning from Scripture proved pivotal (verses 7-21).

The next thing we read is that they had evidently reached a verdict, because they are writing a letter for all the churches to explain the doctrinal decision. Again, we are not told how they did it procedurally, probably because that is not the most important issue. What is important is the phrase imbedded in the letter (verse 28), "For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us. . . ." True submission to the Holy Spirit, reflected by seeking first God's will and not one's own, will eventually lead to unity and understanding.

The ministry made the doctrinal decision (16:4), "the decrees. . . which were determined by the apostles and elders at Jerusalem"), but we find a significant statement in 15:22, "Then it pleased the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas, namely Judas who was also named Barsabas, and Silas, leading men among the brethren." Again, the salutation of the letter states, "The apostles, the elders, and the brethren" (verse 23). Although we are again not privy to the actual process, the members must have been well informed and considered and assenting for this to have their satisfied approval. Their inclusion indicates once more that a high level of consensus and mutual respect existed among the ministry and membership in the early Church.

These examples in Acts are a model of principles, and a testimony that those principles work. The Church in the 21<sup>st</sup> century finds itself in a radically different world in many respects ranging from social and political climates to communication and transportation methods. The modern-era Church has never taken the position that everything done in the apostolic Church has to be strictly followed. For example, if we exactly followed the early Church's example we would have a division of the work for the Jew and another for the gentiles. As the world has changed over the centuries, undoubtedly the organization and administration of the Church has altered as well. Nonetheless, the leadership principles of Acts are timeless, and the model of unity, collaboration and cooperation remain the righteous standard.

### **Was Peter in Charge of the Early Church?**

Probably all Western religions have debated the "preeminence versus prominence" issue of Peter's leadership, for it is highly consequential concerning church government. Was Peter appointed sole head of the early Church, thus setting the precedent?

No doubt Peter was the dominant apostle among the 12. Matthew wrote, "Now the names of the twelve apostles are these: first, Simon, who is called Peter" (10:2). The Greek word for "first" is *protos*, and it can mean foremost in time, place, order or importance. Many commentaries and dictionaries agree that here it means something akin to prominent or chief, and he was in many respects. It was Peter who was usually the first to step into action (even if somewhat rashly on occasion), to answer Christ's questions, to walk on water; it was he who proposed selecting another to replace Judas, who led the preaching on the Day of Pentecost, who addressed the lame beggar and called in faith on Christ to heal him, who condemned Ananias'

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and Sapphira's deception and Simon the sorcerer's attempt to buy an office. His name is mentioned more than any other in the New Testament except Jesus'.

One of the most commonly quoted sections used to support the theory of Peter's preeminence, or primacy, is the discourse in Matthew 16:13-19. When Jesus asked the disciples who they thought He really was, Peter correctly answered, and Jesus responded that this was revealed not by human reasoning, but from God. He went on, "And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." Peter in Greek is *petros*, "a detached stone or boulder, or a stone that might be thrown or easily moved"<sup>4</sup> while "this rock" (*petra*, or "a mass of rock"<sup>5</sup>) refers to Christ, who is the "chief cornerstone" (Ephesians 2:20).

Was Christ proclaiming Peter the human head of the Church here? That is hard to deduce. As *The New Bible Dictionary* points out, "Peter received these powers first, as he also received the pastoral commission to feed Christ's flock (Jn. 21:15), but he did so in a representative, rather than in a personal, capacity; for when the commission is repeated in Mt. 18:18, authority to exercise the ministry of reconciliation is vested in the body of disciples as a whole, and it is the faithful congregation, rather than any individual, which acts in Christ's name to open the kingdom to believers and to close it against unbelief. None the less, this authoritative function is primarily exercised by preachers of the word, and the process of sifting, of conversion and rejection, is seen at work from Peter's first sermon onward (Acts 2:37-41)."

Furthermore, if Peter was the head of the early Church, the Bible is strangely silent on his role. The evidence shows Peter was a great leader, but actually supports a unity of leadership among the apostles. We simply see no example of any one man given or exercising sole authority. In reality, a number of issues call Peter's primacy into question:

- If Peter was the head of the Church, why did he not just make the decision and settle the doctrinal matter in Acts 15? Rather, we find him making a convincing speech, but not making a singular determination.
- If we were to judge by the volume and tone of the written instruction to the Church, Paul would certainly seem to be the leader, not Peter.
- Paul corrected Peter ("I withstood him to his face, because he was to be blamed") over Peter's hypocrisy concerning the Jews and gentiles (Galatians 2:11-14)! Would it not seem out of place for him to publicly reprimand the leader of the Church?
- Also in Galatians 2 Paul states that he was given the commission to preach the gospel to the gentiles, and Peter to the Jews (2:7-9). Nowhere is it stated that it was Peter's call, but that "James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that had

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

been given to me” and “they gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised” (verse 9).

- We read in Acts 8:14 that it was “the apostles who were at Jerusalem” who “sent Peter and John” to lay hands on the converts in Samaria. If Peter was the head, why would the other apostles be the ones making the decision to send him?
- Ephesians 2:20 simply states that the household of God was built “on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone.” Why not mention Peter as head? Revelation 21:14 confirms this, showing the names of all 12 apostles will be written on the foundations of the New Jerusalem, but highlighting no one individual.

Peter was a great leader, a highly respected apostle through whom God’s Spirit worked powerfully, but the biblical evidence that he was the head of the Church is very weak, at best. We find nothing showing any one apostle was over the others, or even claimed such authority.

### **What About Submission?**

Considering the ramifications of Proverbs 29:2 (“when the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice”) eventually raises another self-evident truth about governance: If someone is *in* authority, someone else is *under* authority. God’s Word also gives significant instructions on that aspect of life, showing us how to righteously follow as well as righteously lead.

The Bible is very honest in its portrayal of the men and women of God, in that it tells of their faults as well as their righteousness. The message is clear that any man filling the office of the ministry will have human frailties, as do all the people of God; nevertheless, the responsibility is one ordained of God, the standards are highly honorable and intended for the benefit of all. For that reason, God instructs His followers to be submissive—first to Him, then to one another, and also to those in God-ordained positions of authority and responsibility.

Christ Himself set the example both as a child toward His parents, being “subject to them” (Luke 2:51), and as an adult toward His heavenly Father. We are to follow Him by “submitting to one another in the fear of God” (Ephesians 5:21). Anyone who has a healthy fear of God will have a healthy respect for fellow Christians and a positive understanding of the value of submission. Godly submission is a spiritual concept, springing from humble submission to God Himself—“Therefore submit to God” (James 4:7).

The mindset then extends toward fellow human beings. In addition to the aforementioned section in Romans 13:1-7, we read injunctions such as:

“I urge you, brethren—you know the household of Stephanas, that it is the firstfruits of Achaia, and that they have devoted themselves to the ministry of the saints—that you also submit to such, and to everyone who works and labors with us” (1 Corinthians 16:15-16).

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“Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility” (1 Peter 5:5).

“Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account” (Hebrews 13:17).

Although they don’t directly state it, these verses plainly imply that submission is totally voluntary. Just as Paul said he could have no dominion over another’s faith, it is likewise impossible to control another’s attitude of submission. Every human has to submit in many different ways, to many different people at many different points in life. But every human also has to learn to do so in a godly manner.

### **Living With Leaders’ Flaws**

The 12 disciples, during their years of training with Christ, had to learn to walk in godly submission. At one point, Jesus told them that in the Kingdom they would “sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (Luke 22:30). Of great interest is the exchange that immediately preceded these words: “There was also a dispute among them, as to which of them should be considered the greatest” (verse 24). At this point He reprimanded them about the evils of exercising worldly lordship versus the godly manner of servant leadership, but then He made the remarkable announcement that they would be given significant positions of rulership in the Kingdom.

What did this tell them, and us? If nothing else, it had to be encouraging—it let them know He was fully aware of their carnal tendencies but that He would always work with them. He had a lot of the world’s influence to remove from them, but He expected they would learn from their mistakes and grow into God’s standards. And from what we read later, we do not see this sort of rivalry problems any more among them. Certainly they had to grapple with other personal problems, but they were in a continual process of maturing spiritually. They will rule over the 12 tribes because they learned righteous governance.

The lesson is the same for all Christians, who like the apostles are also in training for rulership in God’s Kingdom (Revelation 5:10). No one is exempt from personal problems and shortcomings. Oftentimes we have repeated the mistakes of the disciples at that Passover—slipping into comparisons, competing over who is the greatest, lording it over others. Ministers, members—no one is invulnerable to these pulls of the flesh.

That is why government in the Church, on the human level, has never been perfect. Actually, it shows plenty of imperfections. This reality should not disillusion or discourage anyone—it is simply a certainty of life. Even if one is trying with all his effort to govern in a godly manner his marriage or family, lead a godly nation, administer a godly congregation or run a godly workplace, he will do so imperfectly. Others will see those mistakes. Depending on the magnitude of the mistake, they may even suffer from them to a degree. That can pose problems, and sometimes severe trials, for both the leader and the one subject to the leader’s influence. Where the Church is concerned, overseers have to take this into account.

The logic of godly shepherding dictates that Church leaders should organize the congregations and work of the Church in a manner that guarantees solid spiritual instruction on these matters, proper administrative oversight, help for personal weaknesses, protection against abuse, an impartial system of judging conflicts or problems, and a commitment to openly admit and rectify errors.

The logic of godly submission dictates that all followers have a mindset of working patiently and in a godly manner with those who have responsibilities over them. Even when one is hurt by a leader's mistakes, if he or she reacts in an ungodly manner, that ungodly reaction is no better than the ungodly mistake. Ungodly reactions simply reveal a lack of God's government at work in one's mind—not being ruled by the mind of God.

When problems within the governmental structures of God occur, only one thing can stop them and turn them around—the fruits of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. This is where the government of God reaches deepest into the Church, when the mind and character of God penetrate and change the human heart. This is why the New Covenant did not promise a change in organizational structure, but a change in the structure of the heart.

Unless everyone's heart is transformed to comprehend and live God's way, no structure of government can legislate what humans will do. Nor will any structure of government of and by itself solve the problems.

The real key to effective, godly rulership is found in Paul's appeal in Colossians 3:15, "Let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body." God will bless His "one body" when it is under His government; that is, as each individual part of the body is governed by His Word, ruled by "the peace of God."

## **Conclusion**

The organizational and administrative form and structure may modify from time to time, but Christ will always lead His Church in the manner He sees fit. He works through imperfect humans. He honors our obedience and lovingly corrects our errors. He will use each and every one of the members of His Body in many different ways. And He will not only achieve His goal of "bringing many sons to glory," but in the process He will train us for much higher responsibilities of rulership in His coming Kingdom. In that Kingdom, "the government will be upon His shoulder . . . [and] of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end" (Isaiah 9:6-7).

Then, as now, when the righteous are in authority, the people will rejoice, because the true government of God is extraordinarily beneficent and beautiful.

**APPENDIX A**

Following, from W.E. *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, are a number of the various Greek words used in the New Testament that relate to ministering in its sense of a God-given office.

*BISHOP (Overseer)*

- I. EPISKOPOS, lit. an overseer. . . whence Eng. "bishop," which has precisely the same meaning, is found in Acts 20:28; Phil. 1:1; I Tim. 3:2; Tit. 1:7; I Pet. 2:25. Note: *Presbuteros*, an elder, is another term for the same person as bishop or overseer. See Acts 20:17 with verse 28. The term "elder" indicates the mature spiritual experience and understanding of those so described; the term "bishop," or "overseer," indicates the character of the work undertaken. According to the Divine will and appointment, as in the N.T., there were to be bishops in every local church, Acts 14:23; 20:17; Phil. 1:1; Tit. 1:5; Jas. 5:14. Where the singular is used, the passage is describing what a bishop should be, I Tim. 3:2; Tit. 1:7. Christ Himself is spoken of as "the . . . Bishop of our souls," I Pet. 2:25.
- II. EPISKOPE, besides its meaning, visitation, e.g. I Pet. 2:12. . . is rendered "office," in Acts 1:20, R.V. (A.V., "bishopruck"); in I Tim. 3:1, "the office of a bishop," lit., '(if anyone seeketh) overseership,' there is no word representing office. Note: The corresponding verb is *episkopeo*, which, in reference to the work of an overseer, is found in I Pet. 5:2, R.V., "exercising the oversight," of A.V. "taking the oversight."

*ELDER, ELDEST*

PRESBUTEROS, . . . (2) in the Jewish nation, firstly, those who were the heads or leaders of the tribes and families, as of the seventy who assisted Moses, Num. 11:16; Deut. 27:1, and those assembled by Solomon; secondly, members of the Sanhedrin, consisting of the chief priests, elders and scribes, learned in Jewish Law, e.g., Matt. 16:21; 26:47; thirdly, those who managed public affairs in the various cities, Luke 7:3; (3) in the Christian churches, those who, being raised up and qualified by the work of the Holy Spirit, were appointed to have the spiritual care of, and to exercise oversight over, the churches. To these the term bishops, *episkopoi*, or overseers, is applied. . . , the latter term indicated the nature of their work, *presbuteroi* their maturity of spiritual experience. The Divine arrangement seen throughout the N.T. was for a plurality of these to be appointed in each church, Acts 14:23; 20:17; Phil. 1:1; I Tim. 5:17; Tit. 1:5. The duty of elders is described by the verb *episkopeo*. They were appointed according as they had given evidence of fulfilling the Divine qualifications, Tit. 1:6 to 9; cp. I Tim. 3:1-7 and I Pet. 5:2. . . .

*APOSTLE, APOSTLESHIP*

- I. APOSTOLOS, is, lit., one sent forth. . . . "The word is used of the Lord Jesus to describe his relation to God, Heb. 3:1; see John 17:3. The twelve disciples chosen by the Lord for special training were so called, Luke 6:13; 9:10. . . . Paul was commissioned directly, by the Lord Himself, after His Ascension, to carry the Gospel to the Gentiles. The word has also a wider reference. In Acts 14:4, 14, it is used of Barnabas as well as of Paul; in Rom. 16:7 of Andronicus and Junias. In 2 Cor. 8:23 (R.V., margin) two unnamed brethren are called 'apostles of the churches;' in Phil. 2:25 (R.V., margin) Epaphroditus

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is referred to as ‘your apostle.’ It is used in I Thess. 2:6 of Paul, Silas and Timothy, to define their relation to Christ.” (From *Notes on Thessalonians* by Hogg and Vine, pp. 59, 60).

II. APOSTOLE, a sending, a mission, signifies an apostleship, Acts 1:25; Rom. 1:5; I Cor. 9:2; Gal. 2:8. Note: *Pseudapostoloi*, “false apostles,” occurs in 2 Cor. 11:13.

### PROPHET

PROPHETES, one who speaks forth or openly, a proclaimer of a divine message, denoted among the Greeks an interpreter of the oracles of the gods. . . . In the N.T. the word is used (a) of the O.T. prophets, e.g., Matt. 5:12; Mark 6:15; Luke 4:27; John 8:52; Rom. 11:3; (b) of prophets in general, e.g., Matt. 10:41; 21:46; Mark 6:4; (c) of John the Baptist, Matt. 21:26; Luke 1:76; (d) of prophets in the churches, e.g., Acts 13:1; 15:32; 21:10; I Cor. 12:28, 29; 14:29, 32, 37; Eph. 2:20; 3:5; 4:11; (e) of Christ, as the afore-promised Prophet, e.g., John 1:21; 6:14; 7:40; Acts 3:22; 7:37, or without the article, and, without reference to the Old Testament, Mark 6:15, Luke 7:16; in Luke 24:19 it is used with *aner*, a man; John 4:19; 9:17; (f) of two witnesses yet to be raised up for special purposes, Rev. 11:10, 18; (g) of the Cretan poet Epimenides, Tit. 1:12; (h) by metonymy, of the writings of the prophets, e.g., Luke 24:27; Acts 8:28

### EVANGELIST

EUANGELISTES, lit., a messenger of good, denotes a preacher of the Gospel, Acts 21:8; Eph. 4:11, which makes clear the distinctiveness of the function in the churches; 2 Tim. 4:5. Cp. *euangelizo*, to proclaim glad tidings, and *euangelion*, good news, gospel . . . .

### PASTOR

POIMEN, a shepherd, one who tends herds or flocks (not merely one who feeds them), is used metaphorically of Christian “pastors,” Eph. 4:11. Pastors guide as well as feed the flock; cp. Acts 20:28, which, with ver. 17, indicates that this was the service committed to elders (overseers or bishops); so also in I Pet. 5:1, 2, “tend the flock . . . exercising the oversight,” R.V.; this involves tender care and vigilant superintendence.

### TEACHER

I. DIDASKALOS, is rendered “teacher” or “teachers” in Matt. 23:8, by Christ, of Himself; in John 3:2 of Christ; of Nicodemus in Israel, 3:10, R.V.; of teachers of the truth in the churches, Acts 13:1; I Cor. 12:28, 29; Eph. 4:11; Heb. 5:12; Jas. 3:1, R.V.; by Paul of his work among the churches, I Tim. 2:7; 2 Tim. 1:11; of teachers, wrongfully chosen by those who have “itching ears,” 2 Tim. 4:3.

II. KALODIDASKALOS, denotes a teacher of what is good (*kalos*), Tit. 2:3.