

SCRIPTURAL ORGANIZATION OF THE CHURCH

Outline for "First Principles Class"

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INTRODUCTION:

1. How is the Lord's church to be organized?
2. To function successfully it is imperative that every institution have some form of government.
3. The denominations of the world are ruled by their ecclesiastical forms of government.
4. Why are the denominations of the world usually governed by "synods," "presbyteries," "councils," "general assemblies" and "conferences?"
5. These groups are used to legislate, make rules and laws to govern their organizations.
6. God never gave a group of uninspired men the authority to legislate rules for the Lord's church.

I. THE LORD'S CHURCH IS A MONARCHY.

- A. There is the universal church, the church of Christ, the church for which Jesus died, which Jesus purchased with His blood, over which Jesus is the head and to which all who obey the gospel of Christ are added.
- B. Jesus is the supreme head of the church (Col. 1:18; Eph. 1:22,23; Matt. 28:18-20).
- C. Jesus promised to send the apostles the Holy Spirit, who was to teach them all things, and bring all things to their remembrance, (John 14:26; 15:26,27; 16:13).

II. JESUS IS THE HEAD OF THE UNIVERSAL CHURCH, BUT HE HAS PROVIDED THE SCRIPTURAL ORGANIZATION FOR THE LOCAL CHURCH.

- A. The local church is autonomous.
 1. The local church, congregation, is a group of Christians meeting in a village, town or city.
 - a. There was a congregation located at Jerusalem (Acts 2).
 - b. Paul writes to the church at Rome, Corinth, Ephesus, Philippi, and Colosse.
 - c. Paul said, "the churches of Christ salute you" (Rom. 16:16).
 2. Autonomy is defined as "right of self government; a self-governing state; and independent body."
 3. In the first century each congregation was such. Each was independent of every other congregation.
- B. The local church, congregation, functions in one of only four ways..
 1. Scripturally unorganized – The Bible describes that a congregation can be scripturally unorganized (Acts 2-11; 14:21-24).
 2. Unscripturally unorganized
 3. Scripturally organized – God's plan for the local congregation – elders, deacons, etc.
 4. Unscripturally organized

III. SCRIPTURAL ORGANIZATION REQUIRES ELDERS.

- A. Who are the elders?
 1. Elders and/or presbyters are two terms applied to the same group of men.
 - a. The terms elders or presbyters refer to the same thing.

- b. The two terms (elders and presbyters) come from the same root word (presbu'teros).
 - c. This word is translated elder 64 times, old man one time (Acts 2:17), and eldest one time (John 8:9).
 - d. Another word (presbuter'ion) is translated elders one time (Luke 22:66), estate of elders (Acts 22:5), and presbytery one time (I Tim. 4:14).
 - e. The terms elders and Presbyters indicate spiritual age.
 - 1) It is well known that the term elder is an adjective in the comparative degree, and that its primary meaning is older.
 - a) The word elder first appears in Genesis 10:21 and the word elders first appears in Genesis 50:7.
 - b) This term was used with respect to the nation of Isarel (Ex. 12:21).
 - c) The term later was used to designate "overseers" (Ex. 18:13-26).
 - 2) It is well known that many words have, in addition to their primary meaning, a technical or official signification.
 - 3) The context of a word determines its meaning.
 - 4) The word translated elders (presbu'teros) means "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."
 - a) This word also carries with it the meaning of "those who presided over the assemblies" (Acts 20:17,28; Titus 1:5,7).
 - b) The word elder is sometimes used in the New Testament as an official title (Acts 14:23).
 - c) When the context shows that the persons spoken of sustain an official relationship to the church, the word elder must be understood in its official sense.
2. Bishops and/or overseers are two terms applied to the same group of men.
- a. The term bishop or overseer is translated from a word (epis'kopos) which means "an overseer, an man charged with the duty of seeing that things to be done by others are done rightly, a curator, guardian or superintendent" (Thayer).
 - 1) This word is derived from verb whose primary meaning is "to look upon; but in usage it conveys the idea of looking upon with a view to inspect or control."
 - 2) This word is translated bishop four times (Phil. 1:1; I Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:7; I Peter 2:25) and overseer one time (Acts 20:28).
 - b. Since each congregation had a plurality of men serving in this sacred work of the church there is no such thing as just one overseer or superintendent over a local church.
 - c. Bishops or overseers do not possess legislative powers within the doctrinal realm; they must operate only in the framework authorized by the Chief Shepherd and Bishop of all souls, Jesus Christ (Heb. 3:1).
 - 1) Bishops or overseers certainly could not do all the work that needs to be done in a given congregation, but all the work performed in a local congregation is under their oversight.
 - 2) Bishops must oversee the work of the church. They must oversee all the work of the church all the time.
 - 3) They must not allow their wives, the preacher, the deacons, or anyone else to usurp their authority in this work.
 - 4) This work must be accomplished in harmony with God's will.

- d. The term overseer is used as the equivalent of elder in its official sense (Acts 20:28,17).
- 3. Pastors and/or shepherds are two terms applied to the same group of men.
 - a. The term pastor is from Latin word “pasco.”
 - 1) This Latin word means shepherd.
 - 2) This word has come into common use from the influence of the Latin version of the Scriptures.
 - b. The term pastors is used but one time in our English Bibles (Eph. 4:11).
 - 1) The word pastors is translated from the same word from which shepherds are translated (poimen’).
 - 2) This word is translated shepherd 15 times (Matt. 9:36; 25:32; 26:31; Mark 6:34; 14:27; Luke 2:8,15,18,20; John 10:2,11,11,12,14,16), Shepherd two times (Heb. 13:20; I Peter 2:25) and pastor one time (Eph. 4:11).
 - c. This term has been perverted by sectarian usage, and designates in popular phraseology an entirely different office from the one to whom it is applied in the Scriptures.
 - 1) This term according to the Bible applies to the same office as elder, etc.
 - 2) There is no such person in the New Testament as THE PASTOR.

B. What are the qualifications for those desiring to serve as a part of the eldership?

- 1. Negative qualifications of elders (I Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9).
 - a. Not given to wine (I Tim. 3:3).
 - b. No striker (I Tim. 3:3; Titus 1:7).
 - c. Not greedy of filthy lucre (I Tim. 3:3).
 - d. Not a brawler (I Tim. 3:3).
 - e. Not covetous (I Tim. 3:3).
 - f. Not a novice (I Tim. 3:6).
 - g. Not self-willed (Titus 1:7).
 - h. Not soon angry (Titus 1:7).
- 2. Positive qualifications of elders (I Tim. 3; Titus 1).
 - a. Must be blameless (I Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:6).
 - b. The husband of one wife (I Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:6).
 - c. Having faithful children (Titus 1:6).
 - d. Vigilant (I Tim. 3:2).
 - e. Sober (I Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:8).
 - f. Of good behaviour (I Tim. 3:2).
 - g. Given to hospitality (I Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:8).
 - h. Apt to teach (I Tim. 3:2).
 - i. Patient (I Tim. 3:3).
 - j. Rule well his own house (I Tim. 3:4).
 - k. Of good report from without (I Tim. 3:7).
 - l. Lover of good men (Titus 1:8).
 - m. Just (Titus 1:8).
 - n. Holy (Titus 1:8).
 - o. Temperate (Titus 1:8).
 - p. Holding fast the faithful word (Titus 1:9).
- 3. There are qualifications for their wives (I Tim. 3:8-13).
 - a. Her conduct is to be a complement to his work.
 - b. Her character is to reflect the same consistency as his (I Tim. 3:11).

c. What are these qualifications for the wives?

- 1) Grave (semnos) means “not merely earthly dignity lent to a person but is one who also owes his modesty to the higher citizenship which is also his, being one who inspires not only respect but reverence and worship. This word is translated grave (I Tim. 3:8,11; Titus 2:2) and honest (Phil. 4:8).
- 2) Not a slanderer (diabolos) “one who falsely accuses and divides people without any reason.” This word is translated slanderer only here (I Tim. 3:11), but it is translated false accuser 2 times (II Tim. 3:3; Titus 2:3) and devil 35 times (Matt. 4:1,5,8,11; 13:39; 25:41; Luke 4:2,3,5,6,13; 8:12; John 6:70; 8:44; 13:2; Acts 10:38; 13:10; Eph. 4:27; 6:11; I Tim. 3:6,7; II Tim. 2:26; Heb. 2:14; James 4:7; I Peter 5:8; I John 3:8,8,8,10; Jude 9; Rev. 2:10; 12:9,12; 20:2,10).
- 3) Sober (nephal'eos) signifies to be free from the influence of intoxicants. It is translated sober only here (I Tim. 3:11) and vigilant (I Tim. 3:2).

C. When should a congregation have elders?

1. The church of Jerusalem, Judaea, Derbe, Lystra, Iconium and Antioch functioned without elders (Acts 2:-15).
2. It took some time for men to meet the qualifications set forth by the Lord for elders and deacons.
3. A congregation should have elders when men meet the qualifications to serve.

D. Where are the elders to serve?

1. Elders are to serve and rule within the local congregation.
2. Elders of one congregation have no authority to oversee the affairs of other congregations.

E. Why should a congregation have elders?

1. The primary reason is that this is God's plan.
2. Elders have the responsibility to oversee the congregation.
3. This is one way in which the congregation should be able to do the work God would have it do in an efficient manner.

H. How are elders to rule?

1. The authority of the eldership is limited, there are some things they cannot change.
 - a. Elders do not have the authority to add to the law of the Lord.
 - b. They have no authority to set aside any of the commandments of Christ.
 - c. They do not have the authority to dispense with any of the acts which are necessary for a person to become a Christian.
 - 1) They have no authority to change immersion into sprinkling or pouring, etc.
 - 2) They cannot change the fact that baptism is necessary for salvation.
 - d. Elders possess no power to dispense with one or more of the acts of worship.
 - 1) They have no authority to bring in mechanical instruments of music into the worship.
 - 2) They have no authority to allow people to hum, whistle, or make the sound of instruments and call it singing, or vocal music.
 - 3) They have no authority to set aside the command to partake of the Lord's Supper the first day of every week.
 - e. They do not have the authority to put a woman into the pulpit to preach, into the

- adult class of both men and women to teach, before the Lord's supper to officiate at the Table, before the congregation as a prayer leader, before the congregation as song director.
- f. They do not have the authority to change a single, solitary syllable of the great commission which forms the heartbeat of the mission of the Lord's church.
 - g. Relative to the specifics of the gospel their authority is in the word and they must see to it that God's Word and Work is preached and practiced just as the Bible demands.
2. The authority of the eldership is set forth by the Word of God.
- a. Acts 20:28; I Peter 5:2
 - 1) Elders are to feed the flock.
 - 2) This word feed (poimai'no) means "to feed, to tend a flock, keep sheep...to rule govern."
 - 3) This word is translated feed six times (John 21:16; Acts 20:28; I Cor. 9:7; I Peter 5:2; Jude 12; Rev. 7:17), rule four times (Matt. 2:6; Rev. 2:27; 12:5; 19:15), and feed cattle one time (Luke 17:7).
 - b. I Timothy 3:4,5
 - 1) Ruleth means to stand before, to be over, to rule, to superintend, to preside over.
 - 2) Take care of means precisely that.
 - a) Its significance for elders means that they are to take care of the church, taking forethought and making provision.
 - b) Its implied significance for the members means that they are to submit to this rule (in matters of expediency).
 - c. I Thess. 5:12
 - 1) Admonish is its precise definition and means to put into the mind, instruct, warn, admonish.
 - 2) Elders have the responsibility of admonishing the church, and seeing that it is done.
 - f. Hebrews 13:17
 - 1) Obey (pei'tho) means "to be persuaded, trust." This word is translated in the New Testament – persuade 22 times (Matt. 27:20; 28:14; Luke 16:31; 20:6; Acts 13:43; 14:19; 18:4; 19:8,26; 21:14; 26:26,28; 28:23; Rom. 8:38; 14:14; 15:14; II Cor. 5:11; Gal. 1:10; II Tim. 1:5,12; Heb. 6:9; 11:13), trust 8 times (Matt. 27:43; Mark 10:24; Luke 11:22; 18:9; II Cor. 1:9; 10:7; Phil. 2:24; Heb. 13:18), obey 7 times (Acts 5:36,37; Rom. 2:8; Gal. 3:1; 5:7; Heb. 13:17; James 3:3), have confidence 6 times (II Cor. 2:3; Gal. 5:10; Phil. 1:25; 3:3; Phe. 21), believe 3 times (Acts 17:4; 27:11; 28:24), be confident 2 times (Rom. 2:19; Phil. 1:6), agree to (Acts 5:40); make (one's) friend (Acts 12:20), yield unto (Acts 23:21), wax confident (Phil. 1:14), have whereof (one) might trust (Phil. 3:4), put (one's) trust (Heb. 2:13) and assure (I John 3:19).
 - 2) Rule (hege'omai) means "primarily to lead on or forward...to preside, govern, rule, whether in a temporal sense or in a spiritual one." This word is translated count 10 times (Phil. 3:7,8,9; II Thess. 3:15; I Tim. 1:12; 6:1; Heb. 10:29; James 1:2; II Peter 2:13; 3:9), think 4 times (Acts 26:2; II Cor. 9:5; Phil. 2:6; II Peter 1:13), esteem 3 times (Phil. 2:3; I Thess. 5:13; Heb. 11:26), have the rule over 3 times (Heb. 13:7,17,24), be governor 2 times (Matt. 2:6; Acts 7:10; be chief (Luke 22:26), chief speaker (Acts 14:12),

- chief (Acts 15:22) suppose (Phil. 2:25), judge (Heb. 11:11) and account (II Peter 3:15).
- 3) Submit one's self (hupei'ko) means "submit to." This is the only time this word is used in the New Testament.
 - 4) Watch (agrupne'o) means "to be sleepless, keep awake, watch...to be intent upon a thing...to exercise constant, vigilance over something. This word is translated watch 4 times (Mark 13:33; Luke 21:36; Eph. 6:18; Heb. 13:17).
 - a) The elders are to watch over the church, being on guard against wolves who seek to destroy the church.
 - b) They must watch for false teachers that call for the church to change to keep up with the times.
- g. Titus 1:7
- 1) The steward of God means administrator of God's house.
 - 2) The significance of this for elders means that they must be active, energetic, administrators of God's house, the church.
3. In view of all this overwhelming evidence how can one fail to see that authority inheres in the work of the elders.
 4. The authority is with the eldership not with one elder.
 5. Elders are not to be dictators (I Peter 5:1-4).
 - a. Peter refers to respect that elevates the leadership (I Peter 5:1).
 - b. Peter shows that along with leadership comes responsibilities and these responsibilities should simulate the leadership (I Peter 5:2).
 - 1) Elders are to be self disciplined (Acts 20:28).
 - 2) Elders are to be examples (I Peter 5:3).
 - 3) Elders are to care or watch over the congregation (I Peter 5:3).
 - 4) Elders are to feed or tend the flock (I Peter 5:2).
 - 5) Elders are to teach the Word of God (I Tim. 3:2; Eph. 4:11; Heb. 5:12).
 - 6) Elders are to exhort and convince the gainsayers (Titus 1:9).
 - 7) Elders are to take the oversight of the congregation (I Peter 5:2).
 - 8) Elders are to watch for grievous wolves (Acts 20:29-31).
 - 9) Elders are to support the weak (Acts 20:35).
 - 10) Elders are to admonish the church (I Thess. 5:12,13).
 - 11) Elders are to consider and decide on church problems (Acts 15:6).
 - 12) Elders are to take the lead in exercising discipline.
 - a) Private (Matt. 18:15-18; Luke 17:1-4; Mark 11:25,26).
 - b) Public (I Cor. 10:32).
 - c. Along with the responsibilities come restrictions and these restrictions were to regulate the leadership (I Peter 5:3).
 - d. Along with restrictions that regulate come regards that should dominate the leadership (I Peter 5:3-4).
 - e. There are rewards that motivate the leadership (I Peter 5:4; I Peter 1:4; Rev. 2:10; II Tim. 4:6-8).

IV. SCRIPTURAL ORGANIZATION REQUIRES SPECIAL WORKERS (DEACONS).

A. Who are these special workers?

1. Every Christian is a servant (Rom. 16:16-18).
2. There are three major types of servitude discussed in the New Testament.
 - a. There is the hired servant (Luke 15:17,19; John 10:12,13).
 - b. There is the save or bond servant (Col. 4:1).

- c. There is the willing servant, that is the one who serves willingly and free of charge. The word translated willing servant (diakone'o) is often rendered minister (I Peter 4:11; Mark 1:31; II Cor. 9:1; Matt. 20:26; Rom. 13:4; II Cor. 11:15).
- 3. Our word deacon is simply a transliteration of the Greek work diak'onos.
 - a. This word is translated minister 20 times (Matt. 20:26; Mark 10:43; Rom. 13:4,4; 15:8; I Cor. 3:5; II Cor. 3:6; 6:4; 11:15,15,23; Gal. 2:17; Eph. 3:7; 6:21; Col. 1:7,23,25; 4:7; I Thess. 3:2; I Tim. 4:6).
 - b. This word is translated servant 7 times (Matt. 22:13; 23:11; Mark 9:35; John 2:5,9; 12:26; Rom. 16:1).
 - c. This word is translated deacon 3 times (Phil. 1:1; I Tim. 3:8,12).
- 4. Every Christian is therefore, a deacon in the general sense (a willing servant of God).
- 5. There is a specific use of the term "deacon" in the New Testament in reference to certain members of the church.
 - a. Paul makes this very clear (I Tim. 3:1-13).
 - b. Deacons are likewise linked with bishops as men specifically recognized in the Philippian church (Phil. 1:1).
- 6. Deacons then are those who are appointed to a specific work of the church.

B. What are the qualifications for these special workers?

- 1. The "must" addressed to the bishops become a like demand to deacons.
- 2. Their character will be seen in their seriousness in demeanor as he is Grave, his singleness of mind (not double-tongued) as reflected in his truthful statements. His soberness as he refrains from wine and his satisfaction as he has no greed for ill-gotten gain (I Tim. 3:18).
- 3. They are in control. Here is a matter of orderliness and domestic responsibility as God would have it (I Tim. 3:12).
- 4. Their confidence can be seen. Great confidence comes from their character and conduct as they are aware of a job well done.
- 5. Here are men seen to be prepared as they show character, convictions, competence, control and confidence with good companions.

C. When are they to work?

- 1. There were seven men appointed to serve in Jerusalem (Acts 6:1-7).
 - a. These men are not called deacons.
 - b. But the work preformed by them may be considered typical of tasks that would be assigned to deacons.
- 2. Deacons are to work when work is to be done.

V. SPIRITUAL ORGANIZATION REQUIRES INVOLVEMENT OF ALL THE MEMBERS.

- A. For a local congregation to be scripturally organized it must have elders to oversee the work (Acts 14:23).
- B. The elders have responsibilities.
- C. Deacons have responsibilities.
- D. Every member of the local congregation has responsibilities.

E. What are the responsibilities of the members of a congregation?

1. Members need to have a working knowledge of the eldership.
 - a. Every member should know and be familiar with the designations by which elders are known in the Bible.
 - b. Every member should be acquainted with the Timothy and Titus tables of qualifications.
 - c. Every member should recognize what the mission or work of the elders is and what the work is not.
 - d. Every member should be right at home in discussing intelligently the work of the church as it is overseen by the eldership.
2. Members should know the elders, esteem them and be at peace with them (I Thess. 5:12,13).
 - a. Paul counseled the Thessalonian saints to know them who are over you in the Lord and those who admonish you with earnest exhortations as the need arises and necessity demands it.
 - 1) This knowing comprehends vastly more than simple acquaintance or the instant ability to designate them by name.
 - 2) Within this word is the exhibition of real respect for them.
 - 3) There must be ready recognition of their appointed leadership and constant submission to the same.
 - 4) Members cannot know them according to the apostolic intent if one ignores every exhortation they advocate toward the flock.
 - b. Elders are worthy of receiving real respect. If they are doing their work as commanded by Christ.
 - 1) Those who labor among the saints would have reference to the elders, preachers, deacons, teachers and all others who work with the congregation.
 - 2) Those over you in the Lord has reference to the elders not the deacons or preachers.
 - a) Deacons labor or work or assist in the work of the Lord, they are servants, they are not superintendents, elders are the overseers; deacons are the overseen by elders in their delegated spheres of service.
 - b) Preachers are to preach the Word of God with all authority (Titus 2:15), but preachers are not the overseers of the congregation.
 - c. Paul commands that we know them who are over us and who admonish us..
 - 1) This admonishing covers all the instructive teaching they convey to the congregation.
 - 2) The term which Paul uses is a very strong term.
 - a) It means for them to instruct in the way that is right.
 - b) It means for them to reprove of the wrong we are doing.
 - c) It means for them to warn us of the consequences of remaining in that wrong.
 - d. As part of the flock, the church, we dare not rebel against such earnest exhortations; we dare not ignore such admonitions; we dare not trifle with these weighty warnings.
 - e. Paul calls for esteem to be reflected at all times toward the eldership.
3. Every member should count the elders of all honor (I Tim. 5:17,18).

4. Every member should be slow and cautious in the criticism department (I Tim. 5:19,20).
5. Every member is to obey and submit to the eldership (Heb. 13:17).
6. Every member is to emulate their faith (Heb. 13:7).

VI. HOW CAN A CONGREGATION BE SCRIPTURALLY UNORGANIZED AND OPERATE SCRIPTURALLY?

- A. A congregation which has no men qualified to serve as elders must have some way of operating.
- B. When there are no men qualified to serve as elders who should not make the decisions?
 1. The preacher should not be the one to make those decisions.
 - a. An evangelist is not an officer in the church, he has a particular work to do – preach.
 - b. The responsibilities of the preacher does not include taking the oversight of a congregation.
 2. One man does not have the right to make decisions.
 3. The congregation does not have the authority to appoint a group of men to lead or rule who do not meet the qualifications of elders.
 - a. Some today are appointing “church leaders” instead of elders.
 - b. There is no God appointed office in the church known as “church leaders.”
 4. Women do not have the authority to lead, make decisions, for the church.
 5. Children do not have the right to make decisions for the church.
 6. Another congregation does not have the right to make decisions for another congregation.
- C. When there are no men qualified to serve as elders who should make the decisions?
 1. Christians can carry on the work without elders having been appointed just as was done in Paul’s day.
 2. If the decisions are left to everybody usually nobody will make those decisions and nothing will be accomplished.
 3. Every man of the congregation has a responsibility to do his part in making decisions.
 - a. The Lord did not give women the authority to take a lead in worship or in overseeing the work.
 - b. The Lord did not give children the authority to take a lead in worship or in overseeing the work.
 - c. God gave men the authority to take the lead in worship and the work of the church.
 4. Every man of a local congregation is responsible for the work of the congregation.

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