

CHURCH ORGANIZATION I

The New Testament speaks of only one church, that is the church of the New Testament. That church has Jesus as its builder, the teachings of Jesus and his apostles and prophets as its foundation, and it was begun upon the day of Pentecost 49 days after his resurrection. This is the church which must be restored to the 20th century from the 1st. If your denomination does not claim Jesus as its founder, neither his teachings as its foundation nor that it was on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2, it cannot be the church of the New Testament. And if it is not the church of the New Testament, then it is really no church at all.

Our topic for this morning, however, is the organization of the church. How should the church of the 20th century be organized? How was the church of the 1st century, the church of the New Testament organized? Yet, let us remember our principle of authority which is stated in Colossians 3:17. There Paul the apostle writes: "And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father." To something in the name of another, is to do it by his authority. Thus, Paul is commanding us that whatever we do in word (that is doctrine) and deed (that is practice) we must do it upon the authority of Jesus. If there is no authority from Jesus to do this or teach that, then no Christian or denomination has the right to do or teach it as part of the Christian religion. We are permitted, therefore, to only practice and teach those things we are commanded or sanctioned in the New Testament.

As concerns church organization, then, we can only organize the church according to the pattern of the New Testament, that is, upon the authority of Jesus Christ. Therefore, if any denomination does not organize itself according to the New Testament pattern, then it cannot be the true church, the church of the New Testament. It is, then, very important that we give due heed to this area of controversy.

Whenever discussing church organization, the first denomination which comes to mind is the largest, the Roman Catholic Church. This is true because of the unique institution it preserves, the office of Pope. Our question, however, is whether or not the office of Pope is taught or sanctioned within the pages of the New Testament. If it is, then we should all practice such, but if it is not, then there is no authority for it and it would be a sin to practice otherwise. More particularly, however, the question is whether or not Peter the apostle was the first pope. This is the constant claim of the Catholic Church, and upon it the whole superstructure of Catholicism is built. However, if it can be proved that Peter was not the first Pope, the corner stone of Catholicism is removed, the foundation crumbles, and the entire superstructure falls. In essence, the validity and truthfulness of the Roman Catholic institution rests upon the assumption that Peter was the first Pope, the first bishop of Rome, and it is this question which we will attempt to answer this morning. Was Peter the apostle the first pope, the first bishop of Rome?

To answer the above question, I want to set forth the following arguments. First, Peter was not the first pope because it is evident from his own teachings and writings that he did not consider himself such. In I Peter 1:1 he referred to himself as a "fellow-servant," and in I Peter 5:1 as a "fellow-elder." He never called himself or allowed himself to be called "Reverend, Father or Pope." In fact, he refused to be worshipped or bowed down to in Acts 10. It is from this example that the modern Popes could learn much. Peter did not permitted others to bow down to him, but today Popes do, and we are expected to believe that they each filled the same office. Further, Peter was poor in contrast to the Pope today. The apostle once said "Silver and gold have I none," a marked contrast between then and now. Also Peter did not claim to have the power to forgive sins on earth, as the Pope claims today. In Acts 8, Peter told Simon the sorcerer, after he had sinned, to repent and pray to God for forgiveness whereas the modern popes would have forgiven him themselves. Lastly, notice that Peter was a married man. In Matthew 8 Jesus healed his wife of a fatal sickness, and I Corinthians 9, Paul recognizes that Peter is still married. Yet, today one cannot be a Pope unless he is unmarried. Thus, on their own standards, Peter was not a Pope,

Second, Peter was not the first Pope because it is evident from the attitudes and writings of the other apostles that they did not consider him a Pope. In Galatians 2:11-14 Paul there rebukes Peter for his hypocrisy, and in this he certainly was not speaking to a superior. In fact, the church did not necessarily go to Peter to make all the decisions for the

church. Most of the time, the New Testament witnesses that churches went to Paul and not Peter to make decisions, and this certainly would be strange if Peter was the Pope. Further, Paul wrote a letter to the church at Rome about 57 A.D., in which he greeted some 20 persons by name in the sixteenth chapter, but not once did he mention Peter, nor did he mention that he had ever been there. In fact, Paul was anxious to go there because he wanted to impart some spiritual gifts to them (Romans 1:11), which would not be necessary if Peter had already been there. Furthermore, Paul wrote a number of letters from Rome and though he mentioned many other persons who were there in Rome with him, he never mentioned Peter. These facts are indeed hard to explain if Peter was the Pope.

Most important in this respect, is the attitude of Paul with respect to the apostleship. He did not consider himself subordinate to anyone but Christ, especially not to any other apostles. He was equal with the other apostles, they had nothing over him. In II Corinthians 12:11, Paul complains that some Corinthians did not respect him as much as some other apostles. He writes this: "Actually I should have been commended by you, for in no respect was I inferior to the most eminent apostles." Once and for all then, it must be maintained that no apostle had no more apostle than anyone other. The apostles all possessed equal authority, Peter included. Therefore, Peter could not have acted as Pope, and could not have been the first Pope.

It is objected by the Catholics that in Matthew 16:19 Peter was given some authority over the other apostles and over everyone in the church except Christ. In Matthew 16:19, here is what Jesus says to Peter: "whatever you shall bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you shall loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven." That this gives Peter authority there is not doubt, but that it gives Peter authority over the other apostles is incorrect. For two chapters later, in Matthew 18:18, Jesus gives the same authority in exactly the same words to the rest of the apostles. Peter was not unique, he was one of twelve, in fact, actually one of thirteen because in II Corinthians 11:5 Paul writes: "I consider myself not in the least inferior to the most eminent apostles."

The New Testament knows nothing of a papal office, especially with respect to Peter. No one is ever called Pope in the New Testament. No man ever accepts worship from another man, nor does any apostle ever claim any authority above that of any other apostle. Since, therefore, it is a sin to practice or teach anything not taught or sanctioned in the New Testament, if one continues to bow down to a Pope or be apart of an institution which preposes to be Christianity yet has a pope, he does so in sin. If we are going to restore New Testament Christianity, we cannot have a Pope of any kind. We must only submit to Jesus Christ and the writings of his apostles, and not to any living man.

CHURCH ORGANIZATION II

Last week we discussed the very important question whether or not Peter the apostle was the first Pope of the Roman Catholic Church? We concluded on the basis of Scripture that he was not, and since there is not any authority in the Scripture for such an office, we must not associate with any institution which has a Pope. As Paul asserted in Colossians 3:17, we can only practice and teach those things which are founded upon the authority of Jesus Christ in the New Testament. Since the office of Pope is not in the New Testament, we are commanded not to participate in or sanction its existence.

This morning, however, we want to be a bit more positive in our approach to the question of church organization. How should the church be organized? How was the church of the New Testament organized? To do this we must lay down three basic and Biblical principles.

The first principle is that the church of Christ, the church of the New Testament is a monarchy. It is a Kingdom with only one King. Jesus Christ is the supreme head of the church. Listen to what Paul says as he writes in Colossians 1:18: "He is also the head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the first-born from the dead; so that He himself might come to have first place in everything." Again, listen to Paul in Ephesians 1:22,23: "And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all." Thus, the inspired apostle Paul

states quite clearly that Jesus Christ is the head of the church of God, and everything in the church is subjection to him. Jesus is the head of the church, and the only head of the church. No Scripture ever refers to any visible head but of only one head--Jesus Christ himself. Christ never made any man to be his visible head on church. Rather, there is one body, and only one head--that head being Christ himself, and the whole body subject to him. Jesus himself made this plain in Matthew 28:18 when he declared: "All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth."

Jesus did, however, promise to send the apostles His Holy Spirit who was to teach them all things, and bring all things to their remembrance, whatsoever he had said to them (John 14:26). The ~~teaching and testimony~~ of the apostles would be sanctioned in heaven, for they received their teaching from heaven. They had the authority to bind and loose on earth what had already been bound and loosed in heaven (Matthew 18:18). Christ never delegated this authority to any others than the apostles, nor to any one apostle in particular. But it was given to all the apostles and only to the apostles so that the modern conventions, councils and synods when they assume such authority is but an insult to the King on his throne.

The Church of God is a monarchy, and no one possesses any authority except it be delegated to him by Jesus Christ because he is the head and ruler of the church. No man today has the authority to legislate for the church, for only the apostles possessed such authority. Jesus rules today only through the writings and teachings of his apostles in

the New Testament. Jesus Christ is the one and only head of the church.

The second principle of Biblical church organization is that of the autonomy of the local congregations which make up the church universal. Autonomy means the right of self-government, an independent body. And each New Testament congregation was such. Each was independent of every other congregation. There was no tyranny of one church over another. The church in Rome or Jerusalem had no authority over any other congregation. Men outside the congregation had no right to exercise authority and power within the congregation. Each church was free and independent, under the teaching of Christ and the apostles, to govern itself, carry on its own work, and manage its own affairs. There was no system of church government larger or smaller than the congregation. All congregations had the same head, foundation and mission; preached the same gospel; constituted the same one body. But each was independent to direct its own work.

The scripture support for these assertions will be presented when we discuss the role of bishops or elders in next week's lesson. Yet, this simple organization without any large or burdensome superstructure failed to satisfy many. Hence, they made changes whereby their unchristian aspirations for ecclesiastical lordship could be realized. History records the first great departure from the truth of the New Testament was in the area of church government. In fact, the Roman Catholic church of the 6th century A.D. was organized in the same fashion as the Roman Empire of the 3rd century. Instead of following

the pattern of the New Testament, they went after the pattern of the pagan Roman empire.

The third basic principle which must be understood before a Biblical form of church government can be established, is that which affirms the priesthood of all believers. In the Old Testament, as is true in many denominations today, only a select few could be priests, only a select few could offer certain sacrifices. In the Old Testament it was only the Levites which could offer certain sacrifices, and in some modern denominations only the clergy can administer the sacraments, that is, only the clergy can baptize a person or only the clergy can administer the Lord's Supper. However, does the New Testament teach or sanction this select priesthood in Christianity? What does the Bible have to say about the Christian priesthood?

The apostle Peter answers our question in I Peter 2:4,5 Listen carefully as we read the text: "Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected by men, but choice and precious in the sight of God, you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." Thus, all those who come to Christ are a part of the priesthood. There is no distinction between priests and non-priests in Christianity, but all who are Christians are priests. Peter himself reemphasizes this point in verse 9 of the same chapter where he calls the elect of God, the Christian body, a "royal priesthood." All Christians are indiscriminately priests, no one is a priest above another.

The apostle John also makes this same point with respect to the priesthood. Let us begin reading in Revelation 1:5 and continue to verse 6. There John writes: "Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the first-born of the dead, and the ruler of Kings of the earth. To Him who loves us, and released us from our sins by His blood, and He has made us to be a Kingdom, priests to His God and Father; to Him be glory and the dominion forever and ever." Notice that all who have been cleansed by the blood of Christ and all who are apart of the Kingdom of God, that is, all who are Christians are also Priests to God himself. All Christians are priests to God, Christ himself being our high priest. There is no separate priesthood in New Testament Christianity, and therefore, if any denomination does make such a distinction, it cannot be the church of the New Testament. It cannot be the true church. The true church of God recognizes all Christians as priests, all Christians able to partake of and administer the sacraments, that is, baptism and the Lord Supper.

In this lesson, then, we have establish three important principles with respect to church government. First, Jesus Christ is the one and only head of the church. Second, each congregation is autonomous with respect to other congregations. Third, all Christians are priests. If any denomination violates any of these principles in any way, it cannot be the church of the NT. Therefore, it cannot be the true church of God for only the church of the NT is the true or right church before the eyes of God.

CHURCH ORGANIZATION III.

For the past several weeks we have been discussing the organization of the church. How was the church of the New Testament organized. Thus far, we have established three basic principles from Scripture with regard to church government. First, Jesus Christ is the one and only head of the church of God. He alone possesses legislative authority in the church. Second, each congregation is autonomous. No local congregation has any authority over another local body of the church. Third, every Christian is a priest of God. In Christianity, there is no separate priesthood, but all believers are priests. No denomination, therefore, has the right to violate any of these principles, and if they do it can be considered nothing else but sin and a basic disregard for the authority of the Bible.

This morning, however, we want to discuss church government a little further than this. As our beginning point let us read Paul's introduction to his letter to the church in Philippi. In Philippians 1:1, the apostle writes: "Paul and Timothy, bond-servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the bishops and deacons." In this salutation, Paul addresses the church at Philippi, particularly the bishops and deacons of that congregation. These two offices constituted the internal organization of the church there. The office of Bishop and the office of deacon, therefore, have New Testament authority for their existence, and we must submit to the New Testament by appointing such offices in our congregations where there are qualified men.

But we must ask the question: what does the New Testament mean by "bishop"? Is a bishop in the New Testament church the same as the bishop in, say, the Roman Catholic Church today? To answer these questions, we must examine the New Testament teaching concerning the office of Bishop.

The first point that needs to be made is that a Bishop in the New Testament is the same office as that is called elder or Pastor. In other words, the offices of elder, pastor and bishop are all really the same office. A bishop is a elder and a pastor is a bishop and an elder is a pastor. In the New Testament, there is no distinction between the names. They are simply different names for one and the same office. Yet, let us turn to the New Testament to demonstrate this.

First, there does exist an office which is called in the New Testament "the office of bishop." This is established by Philippians 1:1 which we quoted a little earlier, and also by I Timothy 3:1 where men are encouraged to desire the office of bishop. Second, there does exist an office which is called in the New Testament "the office of elder." Peter in I Peter 5:1,2 says that he possessed such an office with other elders, and Acts 14:23 records that Paul and Barnabas appointed elders in every city where there was a congregation. Third, there exists an office which is called in the New Testament "the office of Pastor." This is the way Paul designates it in Ephesians 4:11. Pastor, simply means, "shepherd," and Peter enjoins the elders of I Peter 5 to "shepherd" or pastor their flocks. Thus, these three names do exist for offices in the New Testament. But the question which must be

asked and answered is whether or not these three names represent three different offices or one and the same office. The only way to answer that question is to turn to the Scripture itself.

According to the record of Luke, as Paul is on his way to Jerusalem after his third missionary journey, he stops at the port of Miletus. While in Miletus, Luke tells us in Acts 20:17, that Paul sends for the elders of the church in Ephesus so that we might speak with them. Thus, the elders of Ephesus come to Paul, and in 20:18 he begins to speak with these officers of the church, here termed "elders." For our purposes, however, it is only important to note verse 28 of this speech by Paul. Let us read the verse: "Be on guard for yourselves and for 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." Notice that these elders are also called "overseers." which is another translation of same greek word often rendered "bishop." Thus, Paul here calls the elders of the Ephesian congregation "bishops." Further, he also commands them to "shepherd" the flock. The word "shepherd" is the verb form of the word "pastor"; so that Paul is actually commanding them to pastor the flock of God. Therefore, Paul addresses these same officers from Ephesus by three different names, he calls them "elders", "bishops," and also "pastors." These are merely three different names for one and the same office. However, this is not the only place where this equation is made. The apostle Peter also uses these names interchangeably.

In I Peter 5:1,2 the apostle affirms that the elder functions as a bishop and pastor. Here is what he wrote: "The elders therefore among you I exhort, who am a fellow-elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, who am also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: shepherd the flock of God which is among you, exercising the oversight not of constraint, but willingly; nor yet for filthy lucre but of a ready mind." The apostle Peter while addressing "elders" enjoins his readers to "shepherd" their flock, that is, pastor their flock. Elders then are pastors. Further, he enjoins his readers to "exercise oversight." The greek word behind that phrase is episkopountes which is the root of our modern word "episcopal", that is, bishop. Thus, Peter is commanding these elders to be bishops in their work. Therefore, Peter as well as Paul declares that elder, bishop and pastor are all different names for the same office. A bishop is an elder, an elder is a pastor and a pastor is a bishop. There is no distinction in the New Testament between these offices, they are one and the same.

The second important point with respect to the office of bishop is that there is to be a plurality of elders in every congregation. There is no authority in the New Testament for only one pastor or bishop over one congregation. In Acts 14:23, Paul and Barnabas appointed elders (plural) in every city. In Titus 1:5, Paul affirms that he left Titus in Crete so that he might establish elders (plural) in every city. In Philippians 1:1, it is stated that there are bishops (plural) in that congregation. Always, always in th

New Testament there is a plurality of bishops in the congregation. There is never one bishop over one congregation, but several bishops over one congregation. If we place only one elder or bishop over one congregation or one bishop over several congregations, we do so without the sanction and authority of the New Testament. But we are forbidden to teach or practice anything which is not founded upon the authority of the New Testament (Colossians 3:17).

Each congregation is autonomous, the bishops of one congregation cannot rule another congregation. The independence of each church must be maintained, no church or congregation is permitted any authority over another. They must each only submit to their respective elders who in turn submit to their head, the chief shepherd whose name is Jesus. There is no example or teaching in the New Testament to the contrary, and if in spite of the New Testament's silence, we do appoint elders over several congregations, or one elder over one congregation, then we do so without authority of Jesus Christ, and therefore, violate the apostle's injunction of Colossians 3:17. We must, however, abide by what is written, and not go beyond that point.

Elders, Pastors and Bishops are merely different names for the one and the same office in the New Testament. To set up the office of Bishop and then to set up a different office of the Pastor finds no foundation in the NT. They are the same office. Further, there must be a plurality of elders or bishops over one congregation, and they can only exercise authority over that congregation.

Please tune in next week as we continue this discussion of the office of the bishop in the New Testament.

CHURCH ORGANIZATION IV

For the past several weeks we have been considering what the New Testament says concerning church government and organization. The first point that we made was the fact that Peter was not the first Pope, In fact, there is no institution in the New Testament which in any way assimilates the office Of Pope. Peter as an apostle was not superior to any of the other apostles, but all of the apostles stood on equal ground with each other. The New Testament knows nothing about a Pope.

In our second lesson, we established from Scripture three very important principles which need to be heeded in every form of church government, and if any denominational organization violates any of these, they cannot be said to be the church of the New Testament. Briefly, these principles are (1) Jesus Christ is the one and only head of the church. He alone has legislative authority in the church. (2) Each local congregation of the universal church has its own autonomy, no congregation has the authority to dictate to another congregation. Each is independent of the other. (3) Every Christian is a priest. Within Christianity there is no authority for a separate priesthood, but all believers in Christ are priests.

Last week we began a discussion of the office of the bishop in the New Testament. The first point we made was that in the New Testament the names "bishop," "elder," and "pastor" all refer to one and the same office. A bishop is an elder, and an elder is a pastor and a pastor is a bishop.

In the New Testament, there is no distinction between these names as there exists in most denominations today. Any distinction which is made is in violation of the New Testament, and, therefore, wrong. Our second point was that in the New Testament there was always a plurality of elders over each congregation. Every congregation had more than one bishop, and that bishop had no authority over any other congregation. In the New Testament one never finds the situation which now commonly exists in the Episcopal and Catholic denominations. One never finds in the New Testament one bishop over several congregations. Rather, it is just the opposite. In the New Testament one only finds several bishops over one congregation. If, therefore, we are going to restore New Testament Christianity, we must reject the present superstructures of the Episcopal and Catholic denominations.

This morning let us continue to develop our study of the bishop's office. Our third point is this: There are certain qualifications which a man must meet before he may become a pastor or bishop. These qualifications are listed in two places in the New Testament, one in I Timothy 3:1-7 and the other in Titus 1:5-9. These I hope you will read for yourself and see if your bishop meets them. Among the qualifications Paul listed in these two places were: he must be neither lover of money nor a beginner nor contentious, but he also must be able to teach, gentle, holy, and, lastly--and probably one of the most important in Paul's eyes, he must be the husband of one wife. The reason given for this last qualification is the fact that from his home life one can

discern whether or not a man is able to rule well, for if he cannot rule his own home, how shall he manage the house of God? Important as it seemed to the apostle Paul, this last qualification has been overlooked or even ignored by most denominations, so that even some rule that a married man cannot become a bishop unless he is unmarried. But Paul demanded that a man be married before he becomes a bishop. The apostle is plain, a man who desires to be a bishop "must be the husband of one wife." If he is not married or has more than one wife, he cannot be a bishop. Examine your bishop, does he meet the qualifications of I Timothy 3 and Titus 1? If he does not, then you know that something is wrong for the Bible is not being followed.

Our fourth point about the office of bishop is that he has several responsibilities to fulfill. He is to oversee the flock, feed the flock and watch in behalf of it. They have duties to perform in proportion to his responsibilities, and if he does not teach, watch and admonish, then he fails. These duties have been imposed by the Lord. However, the pastor or elder does not have the authority to nullify or modify the law of Christ. They have only the authority to enforce Christ's Law, and not to make laws to govern their charges. No council of bishops or synod of presbyters can change the law of God, they merely see that their members obey the laws of the Father. Christ is the head of the church, only he can legislate concerning doctrine and practice, only we can legislate matters of faith. The elder has only the authority to act within the law,

to deal with matters which concern only expediences. They never had the right to change or modify the laws of God. Elders legislate only concerning matters of expediences or opinion, never concerning matters of faith or doctrine.

Last week we read Philipians 1:1 where Paul addresses the "bishops and deacons" of the Philipian congregation. The office of deacon is an office which is sanctioned and taught in the New Testament as the above verse indicates. The word deacon literally means servant. A deacon is one who serves the congregation of a local place in an official manner. The first instance we have of this is probably Acts 6 where the Jerusalem church appointed 7 men who were to see to the daily benevolent activities while the apostles devoted their time to teaching and prayer. These deacons, then, served the church of Jerusalem under the authority of the apostles, and subsequently under the authority of the elders of the Jerusalem church. Thus, the office of deacon is one which operates under the authority of the elders of a congregation, and exists to serve the Biblical purposes of the elders.

In I Timothy 3:8-14, we have there a list of the qualifications which a man must meet if he is to be a deacon. The list is similar to that of the qualifications for a bishop, including the stipulation that a man if he wishes to be a deacon, must be the husband of one wife. This particular injunction is, as we know, often unheeded and broken. No one, in the eyes of the apostle Paul, can be a deacon or a bishop except he be married and demonstrated his ability to manage that marriage well.

The organization of the New Testament church is basically very simple, too simple in fact for some people. It consists of only one head, Jesus Christ. He is the King and governor, subordinate to no one. He alone legislates concerning the faith and practice of his congregations. This he has done in our present New Testament Scriptures. Each congregation is to have a plurality of bishops or elders or pastors over it. These elders have authority only over their particular congregations, and serve only to deal with matters of expediency, never do they seek to legislate concerning matters of faith and practice. Under the elders, deacons are appointed to serve the purposes of the bishops. They are there merely to help the elders, and are never to exert any authority over them. Jesus Christ is the chief shepherd of the churches everywhere. Human shepherds are appointed to preside over the separate flocks or congregations, and other personal, deacons, are appointed to serve the elders in carrying out their plans for the congregation. Christ is the final authority in all matters of faith, while elders or bishops are appointed to see to these matters being carried out and to decide on some matters of expediencies.

This is God's simple plan for church organization in the New Testament, but it has been greatly abused. Every attempt to improve it has resulted in apostasy and ecclesiasticism. If we are to restore the New Testament church, we must accept at face value the New Testament's plan for church government. We cannot have a New Testament church without an NT form of church government, and if we do not have a New Testament church, then we have, in fact, no church at all.