

Redwater Restorer

"The voice of one crying in the wilderness..." (Matthew 3:3)

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The Organizational Structure Of The Church

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Church of Christ

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Every church known to man has an organizational structure. The question we must ask ourselves is whether it is a structure which was designed by God or by man. The design set forth in God's word is simple yet important. As we continue our search of God's word for the identifying characteristics of the Lord's true church let's consider what the Bible says about the church's organizational structure.

Unlike many contemporary churches, the New Testament church has no chain of command through which newly formed doctrine filters down to the masses. It has no clergy, earthly headquarters or human creed. Each congregation is autonomous and independent from every other congregation. The New Testament church is governed in matters of doctrine solely by God's Word, overseen by elders, served by deacons, taught by preachers and teachers, and supported morally and financially by all its members.

Heavenly Headquarters

Instead of an earthly head or a select group of men heading the church, the Lord's church is headed by Jesus Christ alone. Jesus has all authority in heaven and on earth (Matthew 28:18). Further, the Lord is the head of the body, the church (Ephesians 1:22-23). Jesus Christ has not surrendered His throne, but is ruling now (1 Corinthians 15:24-28). Not on earth, but from a heavenly headquarters, Jesus

exercises his headship over the church (Ephesians 1:3; Philippians 2:9-11; 20-23; Hebrews 8:1; Acts 7:55). The degree of and place from which Jesus Christ demonstrates his authority is concisely noted in Ephesians 1:20-23. *"Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own 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 world, but also in that which is to come: And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all."* Where in God's word do you read of Synods, Counsels, Diocese, etc. They simply are not there.

A Plurality of Elders in Each Church

Two or more elders were appointed over each fully organized church in New Testament times (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5). Scripture always refers to a plurality of elders serving a single congregation and only the church over which they were appointed. Appointment of elders was not regarded lightly, but men were carefully chosen to oversee a church only after the congregation ensured those candidates complied with divinely mandated qualifications (1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-11). Noting Christ is the head of the church and the qualifications for elders enumerated in God's Word, elders may not legislate doctrine, only see that the

The Organizational Structure Of The Church (Cont.)

New Testament is faithfully practiced in their congregation. In matters not addressed by Scripture, elders and the church may exercise liberty. Inspiration also calls these men "bishops" (1 Timothy 3:1), "the presbytery" (1 Timothy 4:14), "pastors" (Ephesians 4:11), "overseers" (Acts 20:28), and shepherds (1 Peter 5:1-4). In many churches today you find one "Pastor" rather than a plurality. Often this one man does not meet the qualifications set by God (1 Timothy 3:1ff). Does this fulfill the pattern set forth by God?

Deacons: Special Servants of the Church

Though every member of the church may and should minister to the needs of brethren and non-members alike, deacons are special servants of the church. Unlike the elders, their degree of responsibility is departmental and lies in service areas. For instance, different deacons may direct benevolence, the treasury, maintenance of facilities, evangelism, the Bible school or some other area of concern requiring special attention. Deacons also are chosen after determining they meet divinely given qualifications (Acts 6:1-6; 1 Timothy 3:8-13).

Preachers and Teachers Edify the Church

Gospel preachers (Romans 10:14-15), also called evangelists (Ephesians 4:11; 2 Timothy 4:5) and ministers (1 Corinthians 3:5), are charged to *"Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long suffering and doctrine"* (2 Timothy 4:2). Preaching is a serious undertaking because a preacher affects not only his own soul, but the souls of his listeners as well. Therefore, the Bible urges preachers and

teachers to be cautious (James 3:1) and prescribes a remedy to remove impenitent false teachers from their sphere of influence (Romans 16:17-18).

The infant church of the first century was armed with an array of miraculously inspired religious instructors (Ephesians 4:11-12). *"And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ."*

The apostles no longer walk the face of the earth. The temporary, miraculous, but partial knowledge has been replaced with written revelation (1 Corinthians 13:8-13; James 1:25), and inspired prophets are extinct today. However, pastors (elders), preachers and teachers equipped with the Bible are still charged with *". . . the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ."*

Conclusion

The differences in organization between the church about which one can read in the Bible and contemporary churches are striking. Yet, few souls seem aware of these vivid contrasts. Divine organization is a crucial, identifying characteristic of the blood bought divine church (Acts 20:28). The churches of Christ today practice first century Christianity in the present century by imitating the divine characteristics of the early church.

Mark Miller

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