

Introduction:

1. Over the years, there have been many misconceptions about the organization of the church.
2. Many believe in a clergy/laity setup where there are the “ordained” people (clergy) and there are those common people who are just the members (laity).
3. Others have a pyramid scheme in mind:
  - a. The Pope at the top, then a college of cardinals under him which are over certain areas, then bishops over smaller areas, and then priests over individual Catholic Churches.
4. Still others believe in a one-man (or in some cases, a one-couple) rule over a group of people.
  - a. This is sometimes called the “Pastor system” and it is very prevalent in many denominations.
  - b. All you have to do is look around McCloud at some of the religious groups and see whose name is plastered on the sign.
    - i. Jesse and I saw one sign which said “we serve a risen savior Reverend. Jerry Smith”
  - c. These people usually run everything in their group.
  - d. The rest of the group is viewed many times as simply the common people.
5. However, these (and many other) ideas are foreign to the Bible.
6. Exactly how is the church set up in the New Testament?
7. This is our study for today.

- I. All Christians are members (I Corinthians 12:12-27) of the one body: the church.
  - A. A human body has many individual parts (members).
    1. Eyes
    2. Ears
    3. Hands
    4. Toes
    5. Knees
    6. Etc...
  - B. The church is the body of Christ, but has many individual members (I Corinthians 12:27).
    1. Old and young
    2. Male and female
    3. Black and white
  - C. The various parts of the human body each have different roles to fulfill.
    1. You cannot hear without your ears.
    2. You cannot speak without a mouth.
    3. You cannot walk without feet.
    4. You cannot write without fingers.
  - D. The various members of the church each have different roles to fulfill.
    1. Some are teachers or preachers.
    2. Some are leaders (elders).
    3. Some are encouragers.
    4. Some are servants (deacons).
    5. Some help with the physical work of the church (cleaning the building, mailing bulletins, recording lessons, correspondence courses, etc...).
  - E. Each part of the body provides a necessary function for the entire body.
    1. The mouth eats; the stomach digests; other parts of the body deliver the nutrients to the rest of the body.

2. The lungs intake oxygen, and then that oxygen is delivered by the heart and veins to the rest of the body.
3. The “waste” carbon dioxide is delivered back to the lungs which exhales it out.
- F. Each member of the church provides a necessary function to the entire body.
  1. The song leader chooses songs to put the rest of the members in a right frame of mind as they worship; the members sing, encouraging themselves and others.
  2. The one leading the prayer guides the thoughts and minds of the entire congregation as he offers up prayer to God.
  3. The preacher encourages the members, who in turn also encourage him and others.
  4. The elders lead the congregation so that they are safe from the influence of false teachers and are fed the spiritual bread they need to grow.
- G. When a part of the body is missing or not functioning properly, the body as a whole suffers.
  1. If someone breaks their foot, the entire body has to readjust to make up for the deficiency.
  2. If the gallbladder stops working, it can bring on heart-attack-like symptoms as waste seeps into your system.
  3. When part of the body does not function as it should, the whole body is less able to function as it was intended to do.
- H. When an individual Christian stops fulfilling their responsibility, the whole church suffers.
  1. When a Christian stops attending, they are no longer encouraging others to live faithfully.
  2. When a song leader gives no thought to the songs he chooses, the service can lack continuity.
  3. When the one leading prayer does not think about the words he is saying, he begins to offer up “vain repetitions” on behalf of the congregation.
  4. When the elders do not fulfill their responsibility, the congregation will often drift into liberalism and fall under the control of false teachers.
  5. When the preacher does not study and provide substantive lessons, the membership can end up with a superficial faith which has no depth to it at all.
- I. Everyone who is “in Christ” is a member of the body of Christ.
  1. In order to be “in Christ” where all spiritual blessings are found (Ephesians 1:3), one must be baptized “into Christ” (Galatians 3:27, Romans 6:3).
  2. All who are baptized “for the remission of sins” are “added” to the church (Acts 2:38-47).
  3. The church is the body of Christ (Ephesians 5:23, Colossians 1:18, 24).
  4. Therefore, all Christians are members and each has a role to fulfill!
- II. From the members, some are chosen for leadership roles.
  - A. When the church first began, the apostles were seen as the leaders of the church.
    1. After all, they had miraculous abilities (see Acts 3 and many other places).
    2. They were promised the Holy Spirit to guide them into all truth (thus their words were inspired).
    3. They had been with Jesus personally (Acts 1:21-22).
      - a. This likely even includes Paul, though some disagree.

- 1) Paul was a Pharisee of Pharisees, and trained at the feet of Gamaliel, one of the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem (so Paul would have been in that area frequently).
  - 2) Jesus came to Jerusalem multiple times during His ministry, at which times He was constantly bombarded by the Pharisees (possibly including Paul).
  - 3) Some believe that after Paul saw Jesus on the road to Damascus, he spent three years in Arabia learning from Jesus personally.
  4. They had the ability to pass on miraculous gifts (according to God's will – Acts 8:15).
- B. It was not much later, however, that elders were put in place in many (possibly most) congregations.
1. What is commonly referred to as the "Jerusalem Council" took place to address the issue of Gentile converts to Christianity and what was to be bound upon them (Acts 15).
    - a. During this event, the elders of the Jerusalem congregation were active participants.
    - b. Every mention of the apostles in Acts 15 says "the apostles and elders."
    - c. The letter sent back with Paul was from "the apostles and elders."
    - d. It is possible that the elders (or at least a part of them) were the apostles themselves, and that this is two ways of describing the same people.
      - 1) Peter, James (the Lord's brother), and John were seen as "pillars" of the church at Jerusalem.
      - 2) Peter expressly states that he was "an elder" (I Peter 5:1).
      - 3) John calls himself "the elder" (II John 1).
        - i. This may simply indicate he was old, but could also mean he was an elder of the church.
  2. Paul and Barnabas specifically went back to congregations they had planted in order to make sure they were grounded in the truth, but also to ordain elders (Acts 14:23).
    - a. This was something they did not do when they first planted the congregations.
      - 1) You cannot immediately promote a new convert to a leadership role within a congregation.
      - 2) You have to wait until that person has proven himself as one who will hold steadfastly to the truth and be "apt to teach" (I Timothy 3:2).
      - 3) Some people hide who they are, and so no one should be made an elder unless they are well-known by the congregation (and meet the qualifications set forth by God).
    - b. The fact that they made a second trip to all these congregations for that reason shows the importance of an eldership in each congregation.
      - 1) By inspiration, Paul commanded Titus to do this same thing.
      - 2) Thus, God desires elders in every congregation.
- C. As the church grew, the elders were the leaders of the church.

1. Paul wrote letters to the churches, “with the bishops” at each congregation (Philippians 1:1).
  2. James informed his readers that if any were sick, they were to call for the elders of the church (notice it is not the apostles they are to call upon) (James 5:14).
  3. Paul commanded Titus to ordain elders in every congregation in Crete (Titus 1:5).
- D. Elders are not to be chosen based upon social status.
1. The qualifications for the elders are not based upon how much money he has (which seems to be a defining qualification in some locations).
  2. The qualifications, instead, are based completely on the man’s character and spiritual steadfastness.
  3. Some have said that there is only one qualification for being an elder: being blameless (I Timothy 3:2, Titus 1:7); and that the rest of the list is the areas in which he is to be found blameless.
- E. Elders are chosen from among the members as men who take on the responsibility of leading the rest of the flock to heaven!
1. This is not a “job” nor is it a dictator’s role.
  2. This is instead a position within the church for certain members (remember, not all members have the same role to fulfill) who are willing to take on the responsibility for the souls of others.
  3. It is NOT something to be entered into lightly!
  4. Elders/Pastors are NOT (as some denominations practice) people who are sent by a convention or synod to a local congregation to lead them.
  5. Elders were ALWAYS chosen from those who were already members of that congregation.
    - a. This is the only way anyone would know if he met the qualifications laid out in I Timothy 3 and Titus 1.
    - b. Titus did not bring men with him to leave as elders in the churches in Crete, but was sent to ordain elders in every congregation (Titus 1:5).
    - c. Then Paul gave the qualifications, so Titus would know what to look for.
    - d. People who just moved to a congregation would NOT fit the description of elders in the NT.
- III. From the members, some are chosen to by special servants (deacons).
- A. The word “deacon” is the English spelling of the Greek word DIAKANOS which means “servant.”
1. This word emphasizes the service which that servant does.
    - a. Seven servants (DIAKANOS) were chosen for the service of feeding the widows so the apostles could continue their ministry of preaching the gospel (Acts 6).
    - b. Phebe is called a servant (female form of DAIKANOS) (Romans 16:1), emphasizing the work that she did.
    - c. Jesus was called a “minister” (DIAKANOS) to the Jews to confirm the promises made to “the fathers” (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob) (Romans 15:8).
    - d. Governmental rulers are called “ministers” (DIAKANOS) of God, because they carry out God’s judgment (Romans 13:1-4).
    - e. Paul called himself a minister (DIAKANOS) of the gospel (Ephesians 3:7, Colossians 1:23, 25).

2. This word is used some times of those who were not “deacons” as we understand the term from I Timothy 3.
  - a. Phebe was obviously not a “deacon” because she was not “the husband of one wife” (I Timothy 3:12).
  - b. Those “faithful” seven men chosen to wait tables did not have the same qualifications given as those in I Timothy or Titus (Acts 6:3).
    - 1) These men’s only qualification was “of a good report” and “full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom.”
  - c. The church was not in existence when Jesus Christ was on earth.
  - d. Paul did not meet the qualifications that he gave to Timothy, for Paul was not married (I Corinthians 9:5).
  - e. The governmental rulers are by no stretch deacons of the church.
- B. A specific role existed for some to “hold the office” of a deacon.
  1. Because the word emphasizes a specific service or duty, a deacon ought to be set in charge of certain tasks or responsibilities within the church.
    - a. Educational materials for classes.
    - b. Building maintenance.
    - c. And many other roles.
  2. It is preferable to have deacons in every congregation.
    - a. There were deacons in the church at Philippi (Philippians 1:1).
    - b. Timothy was given the qualifications for selecting deacons while he was in Ephesus (I Timothy 1:3; 3:8-13).
- C. Some notes about the office of a deacon.
  1. A deacon is not a “Jr. Elder.”
  2. Deacons are not the leaders of the flock, but rather servants who do a specific service for the local congregation.
  3. Deacons are to be men of moral uprightness who have proven their dedication to the word of God (I Timothy 3:9-10).
    - a. Therefore, deacons are already members of the local church who are selected to fill a specific role as servants in specific areas.
  4. Deacon is a God-appointed office within the church (I Timothy 3:13), so we must treat it with other God-appointed things.
    - a. The plan of salvation.
    - b. Music of the church.
    - c. The role of elders.
    - d. The role of women in the assembly of the church.

Conclusion:

1. This is the way God ordained that congregations ought to be organized.
  - a. All Christians as members, each with their own specific role within the local congregation.
  - b. Certain members who are willing to take the responsibility and meet the qualifications are set as leaders to guide the local congregation to heaven.
  - c. Other members fulfill the role of deacons, special servants who do specific jobs so that the elders can devote more of their time to overseeing the flock.
2. Any other system of organization is not scriptural, and should be avoided.
  - a. The one-man rule (pastor system).

- b. The “synod” or “conference” system (where an organization tells you what to do and what to teach/believe each year).
  - c. The hierarchy system (the pyramid scheme like the Roman Catholic Church).
3. What if there are no qualified men to fill the offices of elder and deacon?
- a. For the answer to this, we need only look to the Scriptures!
  - b. Acts 2:5, 11 – there were men from Crete in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost who heard the word.
  - c. These, and others, went back to their homes and spread the gospel (Acts 8:1-4).
  - d. Some 25-30 years later, Paul told Titus to ordain elders in every city in Crete (Paul never set foot on Crete that we know of, so where did the congregations come from?).
  - e. Thus, the congregations existed for 25-30 years, apparently without any elders.
  - f. Remember that Paul planted congregations, and then went back later to ordain elders.
  - g. Would Paul have left the congregations after planting them, knowing they were in sin?
    - i. Of course not!
    - ii. There were no qualified men at that point (proven themselves faithful to the gospel) in those locations, there couldn’t have been yet!
  - h. Where no qualified men exist, no elders or deacons can exist.
  - i. Someone once said: “Better to be Scripturally Unorganized than Unscripturally organized.”
4. Paul once told the elders of Ephesus that God bought the church with His own blood (Acts 20:28).
- a. The blood of Christ is what washes our sins away (Revelation 1:5).
  - b. Ananias came to Paul with a message from Jesus: Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord (Acts 22:16).
  - c. Baptism is what puts you in contact with the sin-cleansing blood of the lamb!
  - d. Have you heard the good news?
  - e. Do you believe it?
  - f. Confess that belief before others. (Matthew 10:32-33).
  - g. Repent of your sins! (Acts 2:38)
  - h. Be baptized so you can have your sins washed away!
  - i. As a member of Jesus Christ’s body—the church—you can have continual access to the blood of Christ by simply walking in the light (I John 1:7).