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THE GOVERNMENT OF THE CHURCH

By Clovis Ragsdale

NOTE: The following is a reprint of an excellent article by Clovis Ragsdale.

For all things that God created, he established laws to govern their existence. The many laws of nature were given to govern and direct the instincts of the animal life. Too, God established laws to govern the courses of the sun, moon and stars.

It would stand to reason that the church, which God ordained, and Christ came to earth to establish, would need a system of government to direct and control it.

Since Christ is the head over all things to the church, we would expect to look to him for the instructions concerning the government of the church.

Just before ascending back to heaven, Jesus called his apostles to his side, and gave them the great commission of taking his instructions to the whole world. He informed them that the Holy Spirit would come unto them, and guide them in all things necessary for this mission. The objective of this message was the establishment of the church.

In Acts 2, we see this promise of Jesus coming about. The apostles are filled with the Holy Spirit. They preach a message, which convicts the hearts of about three thousand people, who upon their obedience to this message were added to the church. Here we have the beginning of, or establishment of the first church.

Shortly after the church was established, local congregations were established in cities all over the world. After these congregations were established, the apostles set forth the system of govern-

ment to oversee the welfare of the church. In Acts 14:23 we learn that *"they had ordained elders in every church."* The elders were charged with the oversight of the congregation in which they were appointed. This is evident from Acts 20:17, 28 which states, *"And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the church."* Paul then gave them the charge, *"Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood."* The elders were to oversee and to feed the church. Overseer, as used here, is from the same Greek word that bishop is translated - *'episkopos'*. The 'feed', as used here, is from the Greek word *'poimaino'*, which is the same word from which 'pastors' is translated in Eph. 4:11. Here we have three terms applied to the same men. They are called elders, bishops or overseers, and feeders or pastors of the flock. These three terms describe the kind of men these are, and the work they are to do. The term elder refers to men of experience and spiritual maturity. The term bishop refers to their work in overseeing and directing the church. Feeding the flock refers again to the work of shepherding or pastoring, which involves teaching and protecting the flock from false teachers.

Each congregation was to have a plurality of elders, as is seen from Acts 14:23, Phil. 1:1, Acts 20:17, 1 Tim. 5:17, Titus 1:5, Heb. 13:7, 17, and 1 Peter 5:1. Never in the New Testament does the Bible speak of one elder, bishop, or pastor being over a congregation. In Acts 14:23 they *"ordained elders in every church."* In Titus 1:5 Paul left Titus in Crete that he should *"Set in order the things that were wanting, and ordain el-*

ders in every city."

In I Timothy 3:1-7 and in Titus 1:5-9 the qualifications are given for the men who are appointed to this work.

Too, in I Timothy 3:3-13 the qualifications are given for the deacons of the church. The office of a deacon is that of a special servant of the church. The deacons work under the oversight of the elders, and are to assist the elders in taking care of the various tasks of the church, such as caring for the needy (Acts 6:1-6), or what ever the bishops delegate for them to do. The work of deacons is not that of overseeing the church, and their qualifications are not as great as that required for the elders.

In conclusion, Christ is the head over all things to the church. His chosen apostles, inspired by the Holy Spirit, give the instructions of Christ for the church (Acts 1:2). The apostles were the chosen witnesses and ambassadors for Christ. Each congregation is to appoint qualified men for the governing body of the church. Deacons are appointed as special servants to the elders and the church. This is the only type of government that Christ gave for his church. There is no higher order of government, such as a pope, college of Cardinals, Synods, Conventions, Associations, and etc. designed to oversee several or all the local congregations. Scripturally each local congregation is self ruled by the local form of government. There is no instructions for any form of government outside the local congregation. This government is within the eldership, not by the majority vote of the congregation, nor by a pastor, or board or deacons.

Any system or means of government other than that set forth by the apostles is not Scriptural. Only the system of government, as authorized by Christ, can direct the affairs of the church in a way that is pleasing to God.

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EDITOR Mike Pace

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What Must The Church Do To Be Saved?

By Ordell Heavin

It is true that the divine part of the church shall never fail, and that the message of the church is impregnable (I Tim. 3:15; I Peter 1:25, Daniel 2:44). However, from the human standpoint, only eternal vigilance and unfaltering loyalty can prevent a major falling away from the "Rock of Ages". May I suggest seven points for deep consideration on the solemn theme: What must the church do to be saved?

1. Develop Elders Who Can Convict The Gainsayer. (I Timothy 3:1-7).

This is, of course, required of spiritual overseers (Titus 1:10). If the shepherds of the flock are to fend off wolves they must meet the qualifications of being "Apt to teach" (I Tim. 3:2; Acts 20:28-30). Therefore we must place the premium on spiritual growth rather than popularity when we select the elders, who are to oversee God's flock.

2. Train Young Men to Boldly Preach The Gospel.

We must give the best we have to the Lord's service. To much manpower is being sacrificed on the altar of secular pride and materialistic enterprise. The congregations are failing in their responsibility to perpetuate the gospel through succeeding generations. Elders, preachers, parents, and Bible teachers

must begin now to inspire, instruct, and instill within young men the urgency of preaching the Word.

3. Practice Church Discipline Constantly and Consistently.

In order to preserve truth and strengthen the children of God, there must be, as the Bible directs, discipline within the body of Christ. When Bishops of the local church allow the name of the Lord to be degraded and scoffed at by worldly, insincere members it sets the church back for years. Required reading on this subject is Heb. 12.

4. Demand a Much Higher Moral Tone.

Corinth of the first century and America today would in many ways make almost identical twins. The appalling decline of moral fiber in our nation, and around the world plays right into the devil's hand. Sadly, we are not teaching and preaching and practicing the high standards we once did. Immodesty and adultery can be found in our midst as well as out in the world. Let's stop compromising with the devil and start living for Jesus.

5. Do More Teaching On Church Identity.

A generation ago gospel meetings were conducted to introduce our neighbors to New Testament principles of worship, doctrine, and organization. Exceedingly clear denunciation of false doctrine could be heard from most every pulpit. Today in so many places it is different. Some of our own children seldom, if ever, hear lessons on instrumental music, the Lord's Supper, church membership, and how Christians should live daily. Just a few more years of failure to "Preach the Word", and we will preach ourselves right out of the picture. It take sound doctrine to be the church of our Lord. (Titus 2:1).

6. Preach The Word And Not Emotionalism.

The one commodity we have to offer the world is the pure message of the Lord. Nearly any actor in Hollywood can jerk more tears than we can and most lawyers are sharper in swaying audiences. But the one precious ingredient we have, by God's trust in us, is the gospel of His grace (Acts 20:24). When we resort to playing on people's emotions and become "Response crazy" we walk the road of insincerity and sectarianism. What is more powerful than the gospel? (Romans 1:16.) The word is the sword of the Spirit (Ephesians 6:17).

7. Above All Be Christ-Centered.

This is the truth of all that we could ever say regarding keeping the church safe and secure in the Lord's bosom. A step away from Christ is a step into darkness (John 8:12). Walking with Him in love and truth sheds constant light upon our pathway of life (Col. 1:10). When the church is centered upon the Lord, there is no room for indifference or worldliness. When Christ is the point of focus we will proclaim His message, follow His example and obey His commands. Nothing short of that will save your soul. **WHAT IS YOUR DECISION?**

Friend of mine, I appeal to you to search the New Testament. Learn of Christ and His church; obey His will, and live faithful to Him all the days of your life. You can become a member of His body by: believing in Christ as the Son of God; turning from your sins; confessing the name of Christ; and being immersed in water for the remission of sins. The Lord will then add you to His church (Acts 2:47), and you will be able to assist His cause as you go through life. You will be a part of that immovable kingdom, and your name will be enrolled in Heaven (Heb. 12:23-28). In Matthew 16:18 Jesus promised to build His church. Won't you hasten to be a member of that divine and glorious kingdom?

LET'S HAVE UNITY, NOT STRIFE

By Charles L. Billingsly

Listed among the works of the flesh, which the inspired Paul warns to be destructive to the soul (Galatians 5:19-21), is "strife" (KJV) or "factions" (ASV); translated from the Greek word *eritheia*. The destructive attitude embraced by this word is demonstrated by the etymological degenerancy of the word. Originally it simply meant "working for wages." As time passed, however, the word's connotation deteriorated and took on the acquired meaning of "working only for wages"; it came to describe work which is done for no other motive than for pay. William Barclay depicts *eritheia* as describing "that utterly selfish and self-centered ambition which has no idea of service and which is in everything for what it can get out of it for itself". (*The Letters to the Corinthians*, p. 264). This word, then, came to refer to those whose

principal concern is with selfish gain and to those who are ready to do things only for profit.

In Aristotle the word denotes a self-seeking pursuit of a political office by unfair means; it pictures a politician whose sole motive for his diligent thrust for office, is, not to serve state or community but to gratify his personal ambition, personal desires, or to exalt his political party. By this we can see the word describing the attitude of the man who is in public service for what he can get out of it and would resort to unscrupulous methods to accomplish his selfish purposes.

Among Christians, the consequence of such a self-seeking, partisan attitude could only be contention, rivalry and division. Only factions can develop around those who "seek their own, not the things of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 2:21). James warns "For where jealousy and factions are, there is confusion and every vile deed." (James 3:16).

With the above explanation, we can see that the New Testament use of the word "strife" has reference to that selfish ambition which has found its outcome in quarrelings and factions within the body of Christ. This attitude is exemplified in Diotrefes: "I write somewhat unto the church: but Diotrefes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not. Therefore, if I come, I will bring to remembrance his works which he doeth, prating against us with wicked words: and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and them that would be forbiddeth and casteth them out of the church" (III John 9, 10). Paul also identified this spirit in the church at Corinth: "for ye are yet carnal; for whereas there is among you jealousy and strife, are ye not carnal, and do ye not walk after the manner of men?" (I Cor. 3:3).

The partisanism that accompanies strife is in complete opposition to the teachings of the New Testament. In Gethsemane Jesus prayed that all believers "may be one". (John 17:21); and died that we might be reconciled "unto God in one body" (Eph. 2:16). Paul exhorts, "make full my joy, that ye be of the same mind, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind; doing nothing through faction, or through vainglory, but in lowliness of mind each counting others better than himself"; (Phil. 2:2,3).

There is no stronger rebuke found in God's word than the rebuke delivered against those who would create a faction within the body of Christ. Here Paul's words in I Corinthians 1:10-13, "Now I beseech you, brethren, through the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfected together in the same mind and in the same judgment. For it hath been signified unto me concerning you, my brethren, by them that are of the household of Chloe, that there are contentions among you. Now this I mean, that each one of you saith I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were you baptized into the name of Paul?"

How sad to note that this same spirit permeates the church today. Over the past years we have seen at least two major divisions in the body of Christ, and a number of smaller ones. It is not unusual to find two or more congregations within a city, not because of growth, but because of church "splits." We all recognize that conditions in the church today parallel the conditions so soundly condemned by the apostle Paul. However, and sadly, we are not as anxious and apprehensive about it as we should be.

Elders of the Lord's church should maintain vigilance over the actions of any man, or men, who would promote a party spirit, either within the local church, or in the brotherhood. Paul, accordingly, warned the elders from Ephesus: "Take heed unto yourselves, and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit hath made you bishops, to feed the church of the Lord which he purchased with his own blood. I know that after my departing, wolves shall enter in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. Wherefore watch ye, remembering that by the space of three years I ceased not to admonish every one night and day with tears". (Acts 20:28-31). Today's elders must be no less watchful for those who would "draw away disciples after them." The spirit of strife will continue to breed faction in the church whenever it is not checked.

It also needs to be understood that the group, or faction, that is led off from the rest of the congregation and from the

elders, is nothing more than a sect: a body that has separated itself from the church. Regardless of how loudly they may plead innocence, or how they may blame the elders — the ugly fact that they are guilty of dividing the precious body of Christ, still remains. And, unless the members of the congregation understand this, and support the elders in such a period of strife, that congregation will not stand the trial. To the brethren at Rome Paul said, "Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them that are causing the divisions and occasions of stumbling, contrary to the doctrine which ye learned: and turn away from them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Christ, but their own belly; and by their smooth and fair speech they beguile the hearts of the innocent" (Romans 16:17, 18).

We tend to think of those who crucified Jesus upon Calvary's cross as the outstanding sinners of history. That is not so; for they did so out of ignorance (Acts 3:17). The greater weight of guilt burdens those who, after twenty centuries, would deliberately rend the body of Christ and fill it with sects and schisms.

Conclusion

No conscientious Christian would for a moment favor the idea of compromising the truth. Unity and fellowship, bought at the price of truth, is bought at too great a cost. However, we should be just as determined that no strife or factions ever mar the fellowship of the saints.

Paul encourages those who would put away strife, as well as the other works of the flesh, to walk in the Spirit (Gal. 5:16). We must learn to "love one another from the heart fervently" (I Peter 1:22); to be "kind one to another, tenderhearted forgiving each other" (Eph. 4:32); and "see that none render unto any one evil for evil; but always follow after that which is good one toward another, and toward all" (I Thess. 5:15).

Let every Christ-loving soul among us earnestly covet the fellowship of all the saints to such an extent that his efforts and prayers may be for the things that produce unity and fellowship and that discourages division and strife. Let the ranks of the Lord's army be unbroken. Let the body of Christ, fitly knit together in the unity of unbroken fellowship, present to the world a perfect picture of salvation by grace and living by faith.

A Light For Someone

*As I journey down life's pathway
I want the world to see;
The light that I have burning
As God said it should be:*

*I want to work as here I travel
And hope that I can be;
A shining light for someone
Who may be lost to see:*

*If I live my life as a pattern
As here on earth I roam;
My light will help someone
Find the eternal home:*

*If the road is rough I travel
And dark may seem the day;
My light will still be burning
To help someone find their way:*

*If I get tired and weary
As day by day I trod;
My light is still shining
Guiding someone home to God.*

— by Glenda Smith

How to Become a Christian

The most important question ever asked is: "What must I do to be saved?" (Acts 16:30). Then, the **HOW** becomes equally as important. Notice the step by step process. First, we must have faith in the Author and Finisher of our faith, Jesus Christ. (Heb. 12:2). This faith comes by the hearing of the Word of God. (Rom. 10:17). "But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him." (Heb. 11:6). With the belief and trust that Jesus is the Redeemer, we must repent of sins. "And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent." (Acts 17:30). In repentance, we turn from sin, **STOP** serving Satan and **START** serving the Lord. (Matt. 3:8,

Luke 13:3). With this new attitude we are ready to confess our faith, "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." (Rom. 10:9-10). Read Matthew 10:32-33. Acknowledging our faith, repentance and confession, the last step into Christ is baptism. "For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ." (Gal. 3:27). Read Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38. Now that our past sins have been forgiven, the Lord has added us to His church and we are Christians. (Acts 2:47; Acts 11:26).

BECOME A CHRISTIAN

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