

THE ORGANIZATION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH

I. INTRODUCTION.

- A. The Dictionary Defines Organization As: *"The Act Of Organizing, The Act Or Process Of Arranging And Getting Into Proper Working Order..."*
- B. To Consider The Organization Of Christ's Church, Therefore, Is To Consider The Process Of Getting The Church Into Proper Working Order.
- C. When One Speaks Of Arranging The Church Into Proper Working Order, Authority For The Arrangement Is Implied.
 - 1. Someone has the authority to determine the arrangement.
 - 2. Others, under authority, carry out the arrangement.

II. AIM.

- A. To Determine The Authority For Church Organization, And
- B. To Determine The Pattern For Church Organization.

III. OUTLINE.

A. THE AUTHORITY FOR CHURCH ORGANIZATION:

- 1. There are many who deny any Biblical authority to govern how a particular church is to be organized.
 - a. Such denial of authority results in churches (denominations/cults) being organized after the whims or business organizational genius of individuals, e.g.:
 - 1) Armstrong (World Radio Church).
 - 2) "Independent" denominations.

- 3) Various religious personalities: e.g. Billy Graham, Moon, the late Kathryn Kuhlman, etc.
- b. Attitudes such as those mentioned above take authority for church government or organization from the Lord and place it into the hands of men, subject to their judgment.
 - c. Many "main line" denominational bodies are organized so as to place authority into the hands of:
 - 1) Councils.
 - 2) General Assemblies.
 - 3) Conferences.
 - 4) Pope, etc.
 - d. By ignoring Christ as head of His church, denominationalism has, in the real sense of the word, dethroned Christ and, in changing the organization, has led to a change of laws, thus causing religious division.
2. The church established by Christ is not subject to any human ecclesiastical power or combination thereof, but rather is subject to the Divine authority of Christ.
 - a. Christ has all authority in heaven and earth. (*Matt. 28:18*)
 - b. All things in subjection under His feet... head over all things to the church. (*Eph. 1:22-23*)
 - c. Head of church...has preeminence over all. (*Col. 1:18*)
 - d. Christ will not relinquish this authority over His kingdom until His second coming. (*1 Cor. 15:24*)
 3. In preparation for His ascension, Christ delegated authority to His apostles through inspiration of the Holy Spirit. (*John 14:26; 15:26-27; 16:13; 20:19-23*)

4. On Pentecost following the Lord's resurrection, the apostles received the Holy Spirit, and Peter preached the gospel as a reality for the first time, giving the terms of acceptance. (*Acts 2: 1-4, 14-40*)
 - a. On that occasion about three thousand responded and the church became a reality under the authority of Christ. (*Acts 2:41, 47*)
 - b. From this victorious beginning, we now need to trace the development of the church, as it grew under the direction of the apostles.

B. THE PATTERN FOR CHURCH ORGANIZATION.

1. Christ has all authority as head of the church. (*Matt. 28:18; Eph. 1:22-23*)
2. Elders to oversee:
 - a. Authority was first invested in the apostles as they were guided by the Holy Spirit. (See above.)
 - b. Guided by the Holy Spirit, the apostles soon appointed elders and deacons in each congregation, e.g. (*Acts 6:1-4; 14:23; Titus 1:5 cf. Phil. 1:1*)
 - 1) From the above verses, note the plurality of elders in each congregation.
 - 2) This was the pattern throughout the lives of the apostles and for many years thereafter.
 - 3) To fully understand church organization as reflected in the New Testament, one must understand that *πρεσβύτερος* (*presbuteros*) is translated as elder and presbyter, *ἐπίσκοπος* (*episkopos*) is translated as bishop and overseer, *ποιμήν* (*poimen*) is translated as pastor and shepherd, and that all of these terms refer to one and the same office: That which we usually refer to as an elder. (*cf. Acts 20:17, 28; Titus 1:5, 7, etc.*)
 - c. For as long as the apostles were alive and available, certain problems were handled jointly by the apostles and elders. (*Acts 15: 2-6*)

- d. As the church matured to full development, elders were to assume the oversight in the congregation over which they were appointed. (*1 Pet. 5:1-4 cf Acts 20:28*)
- e. Qualifications of elders. (*1 Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9*)
- f. Authority of elders:
 - 1) Over the membership, to admonish. (*1 Thess. 5:12-13*)
 - 2) Authority to rule (but not lord) over a congregation. (*1 Tim. 5:17 cf. 1 Pet. 5:3*)
 - 3) To be obeyed. (*Heb. 13:17*)
- g. Responsibility of elders. Of the many responsibilities which elders have, the three listed below seem the most awesome:
 - 1) Feed the flock, i.e. make sure sufficient and pure doctrine is taught. (*Acts 20:28; Titus 1:9-11*)
 - 2) Watch in behalf of souls under their oversight. (*Heb. 13:17*)
 - 3) Be the proper example to the congregation. (*1 Pet. 5:3*)
- h. Responsibility of congregation to elders:
 - 1) Know them...esteem them highly for their work. (*1 Thess. 5:12-13*)
 - 2) Count worthy of double honor those who labor in word and teaching. (*1 Tim. 5:17*)
 - 3) Obey and submit to their authority. (*Heb. 13:17*)
 - 4) Receive not an accusation except at mouth of two or three witnesses. (*1 Tim. 5:19*)

3. Deacons to serve:

- a. Deacon comes from the Greek word *διάκονος* meaning "one who executes the commands of another, especially of a master; a servant,

attendant, minister, ... 2. a deacon, one who, by virtue of the office assigned him by the church cares for the poor and has charge of and distributes the money collected for their use." Thayer, Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, p. 138.

- b. Since the basic meaning is servant, and all Christians are servants of our Master, Jesus Christ, some have denied a special office of deacon. This is seen to be false when we consider:
 - 1) There are special qualifications for deacons. (*1 Tim. 3:8-13*)
 - 2) Paul refers to the "office" of deacon. (*1 Tim. 3:13*)
 - 3) The church at Philippi is addressed with its elders and deacons. (*Phil. 1:1*)
 - c. When a congregation is fully organized, therefore, it has both elders and deacons.
 - d. The general work of deacons may be inferred from the definition of the name, as well as the description given in *Acts 6*.
4. Though not an office per se, evangelists were those who labored in preaching the word and, in addition, were charged to teach those who would be faithful in teaching others also. (*1 Tim. 4:6; 2 Tim. 2:2; 4:5*)
5. Congregations of the Lord's church.
- a. The church, made up of all those who are saved (*cf. Acts 2:47*), has many congregations throughout the world. (Cf. church at Jerusalem, *Acts 8:1*; the church at Antioch, *Acts 13:1, etc.*)
 - b. The local congregation, to be scriptural, must remain autonomous, subject to the authority of Christ under the oversight of its local elders. Brother H. Leo Boles well observed: "The wisdom of God is seen in such an arrangement for His churches. If one became corrupted in doctrine or affected by evil practices, other churches would not be

so affected. If dissension arose in one, it would not spread to the others; if one perished, the others would not be dragged down. If a window is made of one large pane, a break injures the entire pane; but if it be made of several panes, it is not so bad to break one. The independence of the churches is a protection for each one." Gospel Advocate, February 15, 1940, taken from Why I Am A Member Of The Church Of Christ, Brownlow.

IV. CONCLUSION.

- A. The Church Of The New Testament Recognized Christ As The Sole Authority For Its Doctrine And Practice. It Had Neither A Clerical Hierarchy Nor A Congregational Democracy. Instead, It Was A Congregational Theocracy With Christ As Its Head. Christ Possessed (And Possesses) All Legislative And Judicial Authority. Evangelists Preached The Word, Elders Cared For The Souls And Deacons Served To The Glory Of God.
- B. Concerning The Pattern Authorized In The New Testament, There Was No Organization Of The Church Larger Than A Local Congregation To Pressure Churches Into A Particular Work, Though Congregations Did Cooperate To Accomplish The Work Of The Lord. Every Christian Recognized Christ As Head Of The Body, Of Which The Individual Christian Was A Member, And There Was A Fellowship Among The Faithful.
- C. The Church Today, If Scripturally Organized, Follows The Same Pattern.