

## CHURCH GOVERNMENT, ORGANIZATION AND ADMINISTRATION

*"The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit."* Jn 3:8

No book about the church would really be complete without the author addressing such subjects as church government, church organization and church administration. Therefore we are going to take some time to discuss these subjects from a scriptural point of view.

In the Old Testament, everything which pertained to the service and worship of God was clearly defined and laid out in order by God for the Jews. When they should worship, how they should worship, where they should worship, and many other related things were all carefully explained to them. The office of the priests, all their functions, their garments, their duties, how they should live—everything was delineated step by step, point by point for them. The same was true of the Jews' worship. The offerings they were to bring and the way in which they were to offer these sacrifices were carefully ordered. Even the tabernacle itself, with all the different items and objects it contained was organized in detail by God. In short, everything pertaining to the worship and service of God was structured and organized in the minutest detail. There need not be any question among the Jews as to how, when or where they should worship God.

In striking contrast to this we find in the New Testament that things simply are not that way. There is no detailed, step-by-step set of instructions laid out for us which show us how we should proceed with the practice of the church life and with the various administrations and operations of the church. Although by reading the New Testament and learning what the early apostles did we can pick out a few details of how they practiced the church life, yet no clear step-by-step, point-by-point organizational structure such as we have in the Old Testament is ever prescribed in the New. Perhaps the closest thing we have to something of this nature in the New Testament is the Apostle Paul's instruction to Timothy concerning the qualifications of elders and ministers.

Since there is no such formal exposition of the structure and organization of the church in the New Testament, men when they read the scriptures often have perceived things quite differently. This fact is well illustrated by the situation among Christians today, many of whom are divided one from another on the basis of their disagreement about such things as church government, organization and administration. The Presbyterian Church, for example, is founded in part upon a particular view of the scriptural function and work of the presbyters or elders.

No doubt God has a very good reason for not prescribing to us an exact formula for the administration and organization of the church. Undoubtedly His purpose was not to be ambiguous or confusing. Perhaps there is some spiritual understanding we can obtain from this apparent lack of clearly defined organization and structure in the New Testament.

In order to have a scriptural understanding of these things and why God has not chosen to provide us with a detailed format for the church it will first be necessary to have a good understanding of two basic scriptural principles. These two principles are, number one: the life of God, which is living in His body; and number two: the headship of Jesus Christ by which He is leading His body. If God will grant to us a spiritual revelation of these two basic principles, we will then have a proper understanding of how the church should be organized, administered and governed today. How we need Him to open our inward eyes to see what He is doing.

Please allow me to spend a little time here elaborating on point number one. There are three Greek words in the New Testament which we in English translate "life." These words are "BIOS," "PSUCHE," AND "ZOE." Although these words have different meanings in the Greek language, in English they are translated by the same word, "life." The word, "BIOS," refers mainly to our means of maintaining our physical life or our "living." "PSUCHE" refers to our soul life, or our self life, and is also translated in some places, "self." The third word, "ZOE," as it is used in the New Testament, means "God's life." W.E. Vine, in his "Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words," defines "ZOE" as "life as God has it."

God really has life! In the scriptures we read: "In Him was life (ZOE) (Jn 1:4)." This "ZOE" life which God possesses, is an eternal, immutable, immeasurable, all-powerful, never-ceasing, life. His life is without beginning and it is without end. Did you realize that God never began, and also He will never have an end? He was never born and He cannot die! By definition, God's life is eternal. It is a kind of life which can withstand anything, create anything or do anything. This is the life which God possesses. And this is the kind of life to which the Bible is referring when it says "eternal life" (IONIAN ZOE; Gk).

All this is simply to say that God has a life, which before Jesus Christ came to the earth and died for our sins, no man, or any other creature in the universe possessed. Only He had it. But today, through His son Jesus Christ, God is sharing His own uncreated life with human beings! This fact is so grand and glorious that it is extremely difficult for the mind to even comprehend it. Yet, Jesus said: "I am come that they might have life (ZOE) (Jn 10:10)." Through Jesus Christ, this new life which had never before been given to men has been made available to us. The scripture reads: "For God so loved the world, that He gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have eternal life (IONIAN ZOE) (Jn 3:16)." ASV

So we see that every true believer has become a partaker of this divine life. Each one now has access to supernatural motivation and experience. God wants nothing more than for His people to be open to Him and to be full of His life. As each one is filled with new life and allows this life to live in them, they express Jesus Christ. This is the life of God living in His body.

Now let us go on to point number two, which is Christ as the Head, leading His body. The head is the part of a body which controls all the functions, movements and activities of the different members. It is the part that tells the mouth to speak, the feet to run or the hands to move. It is also the part that interprets what the eye sees and what the ear hears. The head is the organ that coordinates and leads every function of the

entire body.

As it is with the human body, so it is with Jesus Christ and His church today. He is our supreme authority. It is by His command that we work, live and minister in His body. He is the one who is to be leading and guiding every movement of every member.

Interestingly, no other member of the body of Christ is ever said to be the head. No other part of the body ever replaces this primary, important function of Jesus Christ. Even the greatest apostle in the church (aside from Jesus Christ) can never become the head of the body. No matter how gifted, how eloquent, or how endued with spiritual gifts and powers anyone may be, he can never be the head. All he can be is simply another member of the body.

While God may use the more spiritual members of His body to transmit His will and His leading to the other members, they never receive the authority or the power to initiate any movement or action themselves. No one but Jesus is the head of the body. The members' responsibility is simply to obey the leading which they receive from the head.

Now some may say, "What does all this have to do with church government, church administration and church organization?" Actually, these great truths are of the utmost importance to us if we are to properly understand how the church is to be operating. Every facet of the church's structure and operation must be through Christ's life and by His leading. The "church which is His body" is a living thing, not a machine or organization. Although it may appear to be highly structured, this is only the result of inward life. When we read the Bible, it is all too possible that we may only discern the outward form of the church and miss the inner content.

Please allow me to use an illustration to further clarify this all important point. When we look at a living human body we may notice many things about it which appear to be highly organized. When a hand moves to pick something up, the head turns to look in the same direction and the eyes focus on the object. When one foot moves ahead, the other foot follows it and the person walks. When the ears hear a sudden noise, the head immediately turns to look and see if there is danger. By examining a human body in this way we might perceive many types and levels of organization.

Yet, in our every day experience we rarely think of the body as being organized. Everyone realizes that the body acts as it does because it is full of life. The outward movements which it displays are simply the spontaneous result of the inward life. So it should be with the body of Christ. There is no need for men to govern, administrate or organize the church. In fact, one of the greatest needs of the church today is for men to stop their own organizing, governing and administrating and open up to God.

Unfortunately, many Christians do not realize these principles today. As they read the Bible, they think that they perceive some form of church organization or church government; and from this perception they begin to construct something which they believe to be the church. In spite of this prevailing methodology, God does not intend for things to be this way.

When Jesus Christ was on the earth with twelve (or should I say eleven) of His intimate associates whom we know as the twelve apostles, He no doubt had ample opportunity to explain to them all about the proper form of church government and organization. He had plenty of time to tell them how things should be arranged. He easily could have explained to them about the appointment of elders, the work of the apostles, the ministry of the deacons and all the different operations of the various parts

of the body. Yet, significantly, all He said was: "I am going away, but when I go, I won't leave you alone, but I will send the Holy Spirit, the Comforter to you; and when He is come, He will lead you into all truth (Jn 16:5-7,13)." This is the basis for all church government and organization today—the leading of Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit.

Interestingly enough, this is exactly the experience of the New Testament Fathers. When Jesus Christ died and rose again from the dead, He kept His promise and poured out the Holy Spirit upon them with power. After the outpouring of the Holy Spirit this same Spirit began to lead them into all truth. He began to reveal to them that there were elders. He began to reveal to those in the church of Jerusalem that they should appoint certain ministers to take care of the feeding of the widows. He began to reveal through the Apostle Paul the qualifications of men who should be elders. In short, He led them, step by step, day by day; and as He led them, the structure, the organization and the government of the church came forth. It was produced by the leading and the pouring out of the Holy Spirit.

Now, this is exactly the way church government, organization and administration should be happening today. Although we have an accurate Biblical record of what men of God were led by the Holy Spirit to do in the New Testament, it is not our job to try to reproduce this. It is our duty only to follow the Holy Spirit. The core, the basic message of the New Testament, is not what these men did, but how they did it. Who motivated them to do it? What was the source of their doing it? The key to understanding the entire New Testament is that God is living in the members of His body.

It may be altogether possible for us to manufacture something that would be similar to the things that we see in the New Testament. Yet, all we can produce is limited by our understanding of the truth. The other option is to simply do what the early apostles and church leaders did, and that is to follow faithfully the Holy Spirit in all of His leading. As we follow the Holy Spirit in His leading, the organization, the government and the administration of the church will come forth. It will be produced by the life of God, brought to us by the Holy Spirit being lived out through us. How we desperately need this experience today!

Some of you may think at this point that I am advocating throwing away the Bible. This is absolutely not true. The Bible, and especially the New Testament, is essential to us if we are to be rightly practicing the church life. However, we should not get the cart before the horse. We must not put the outward structures and formats which we think we perceive in the Bible ahead of the source of these things, which is God's life in the Holy Spirit. First, we must be full of God's life. Then, we must be led of the Holy Spirit. As He leads us to begin working, ministering and perhaps even organizing certain things in the church, we can check with the scriptures to see if what we are doing is in accordance with God's will. God's word is essential as our guide; for without it, we as men have no clear way of knowing whether or not what we are doing is of the Holy Spirit. No man is above being deceived. Therefore we need the scriptures as a guide, as a check and as a balance for us.

Another great value which we gain from the scriptures is to read what God did in the lives and church experience of the New Testament believers and to beseech God that He would lead us into the experience of these same things. Again, we do not need to strive to achieve them or to organize and manipulate other people to make things appear as we think they should be. We need only to seek God and ask Him that His Spirit would go before us and would lead us into the fulfillment of what we see. In this

way, our experience of the church life will be real and living and holy.

I realize that these subjects of church government, church administration, church organization, are very touchy ones. Great rifts and divisions in the church as Christ's body have been made because men perceive these things differently. Yet, the solution to these problems that have arisen is very simple. The name of the solution is Jesus Christ. To simply follow Him and to obey when He speaks or leads is to accurately and adequately express the church.

Although man has added to the church many things in all of these areas, and by doing so has kept Christians all over the world from experiencing the reality of Jesus Christ, still it is possible for believers today to walk in truth. We can walk in the Spirit, and the Bible promises us that He will lead us into the truth. May we so walk that God, when He comes, will find us doing what is right and pleasing to Him. May our motivation be the Holy Spirit and our source be Jesus Christ, so that our work and our church will be of that eternal substance which is going to endure for eternity.