

Session 12

LOCAL CHURCH GOVERNMENT

STUDY CENTER

1 Corinthians 12:28 - ²⁸And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues.

From this Scripture, we can see that God's government is an important and vital part of His Church. To function smoothly, every nation or kingdom has to have a sound system of government in order to succeed. It provides peace and order for the citizens and when they abide by the law, they can avoid chaos, lawlessness and disorder.

As Christians, we are referred to in 1 Peter 2:9, as a holy nation and a royal priesthood. As God's citizens we also need government and boundaries so the Lord's Church can function correctly in the earth. God's Kingdom government first begins where Jesus is Lord and King of all. Then He has established rules and commandments, by which we are to live, that are found in the Bible. Then God appoints church leaders, which are apostles, prophets, evangelists, teachers, and pastors to teach, establish and hold the Church accountable to follow those guidelines. This is the most simple picture of church government that we will study in this lesson.

We find a prophetic picture of how government in the Kingdom of God is to flow in Psalm 133:1-2 which says, *Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard: that went down to the skirts of his garments.* You may be asking, how does brethren dwelling together in unity have anything to do with the garments of Aaron?

First, we must know that Aaron was God's priest. It was Aaron's job to go before God on behalf of the people. Now, we know that today we don't need a human priest to bring us to God, because Jesus was our eternal priest, giving us the ability to come to God directly. However, what we do still need are God's appointed individuals who can help bring the church together into an assembly of order so it can function as a unit. Aaron also functioned in this capacity under Moses. This was an Old Testament picture of church government.

Notice how verse two states that when the brethren come together in order and unity it is likened to oil running down Aaron's beard until it covers his whole body. Prophetically, we see that oil is a picture of the anointing as it runs down the Body of Christ. But notice that

this anointing starts with the head and runs down to touch the entire body.

Jesus, of course, is the head of the Church and the anointing begins with Him. But then that anointing flows from the head down to the beard, which is a prophetic example of full age and maturity, which can easily represent the maturity of proper church leadership. The beard was also a priestly requirement in Leviticus 21:1-5. Finally, after the anointing flows down and touches the beard, it then touches the rest of the body.

This is how leadership works. Notice that the oil flows down from the head first and is not flowing from the feet and then up to the top! Many people want churches to be set up so that the church members have the right to govern the leaders through some form of voting arrangement, council or committee, feeling this provides a good method of accountability for pastors. While accountability for leaders is important, the above method is not how God makes leaders accountable according to Scripture. We will study later how God *does*, in fact, make His ministers and leaders accountable. However, the reason we never find voting committees in the Bible as God's method to keep leaders accountable is because it doesn't work. In the end, it tends to create a mayhem of opinions, in which the pastor who is supposed to be the leader truly has little to no voice, or final decision, on much of anything, nor is he truly at liberty to establish the overall direction or vision of the church that was received by his time spent in prayer and fasting.

Many church members have tried to change their pastor's ideas, methods or even the overall direction of the church, believing this a good accountability for the pastor or simply because they feel they can hear from God just as well as the pastor. Perhaps, they can hear from God just as well as the pastor, however, what they fail to realize is that biblically this approach, when it comes to the church structure, is out of order! Again, the anointing does not flow bottom to top, but flows top to bottom! God will anoint, speak and impart the leadership, direction and oversight *first* to the pastor.

Remember Christ is the head of all things, Colossians 1:18. He then gave authority unto men, through the five fold ministry found in Ephesians 4:11. It is then *their* job to equip the body to do the work of the ministry.

Government and order are important. Have you ever considered that the first sins of heaven and of man had to do with government? Think about it for a moment. Lucifer's sin in Heaven was that he wanted to usurp his authority and position over God's, and we know

it failed, so he set up his own wicked kingdom against the Lord. How about the first sin of man? Adam didn't govern himself or establish the right governmental boundaries for his wife and allowed her to eat the forbidden fruit. Had he governed her correctly by estab-

There are 4 forms of government in the earth today.

- Self government—Genesis 39:9-13
- Family government—Genesis 1:26-28
- Church government—1 Corinthians 12:28
- Civil government: judicial, executive, legislative based on Isaiah 33:22

lishing rules, order, and boundaries they may not have sinned!

FOUR TYPES OF GOVERNMENT

Self governing is the bringing of order and governing to ourselves. We find an example of this when Joseph refused to sleep with Potiphar's wife. He governed himself by refusing to sin against God even when no one may have known. Secondly, we understand that **family government** is the setting of order and governing to the family structure which was the first governing institution in the earth. Man was to govern over all and be fruitful, multiply, replenish, subdue the earth and take dominion. Thirdly, **church government** is to govern the earthly structure of the Lord's Kingdom under the guidelines of the Bible as its constitution. Lastly, there is **civil government** that we see today in government and law enforcement.

Why we need government in the church.

We need church government for the same reason we need other forms of government. It provides order and safety in the dangerous and lawless society that we see today. 2 Timothy 3:1-7 lists the types of behavior that people will have in the last days. We can see from this list why we need government both in the earth and the church. Look at what it says:

Men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, Traitors, heady, high minded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away.

For of this sort are they which creep into houses, and lead captive silly women laden with sins, led away with divers lusts, ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses, so do these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, reprobate concerning the faith.

From this list you can see the importance of having God's order and standards in order to protect and govern His church. If these types of people exist in the earth today, then we can expect them to also infiltrate our churches! In the church, we are dealing with peoples lives, mindsets, emotions, hurts of their past or present, their opinions, the way they were raised, and their doctrinal beliefs to name a few. In that setting you can expect there to be varying views on the way things are to function. It takes an anointed leader and a system of Bible-based, governing boundaries to provide a righteous standard and order to the church.

In Scripture, we simply don't find a committee carrying the weighty responsibility of holding the people accountable to a godly standard. Nor do we find that responsibility resting upon a volunteer board to bring the anointing to the people each week. Volunteer or elected committees, however good-hearted or godly they may be, are not equipped to be the preacher! It is probable that if every voting member in churches across the globe had the job of preaching every week, as people are sitting there expecting to hear a word from God's throne, they would probably change their mind

about wanting to interfere with the direction the pastor feels the church should go!

That anointing rests upon the pastor and five-fold ministry. Committees also don't have the job of dealing with the people's needs each week as they go off to work at their respective jobs. The pastor is the one who ends up dealing with people's issues on a daily basis. And many of those issues come right from the list we read above!

In that light, the anointing and wisdom that comes from the pastor's daily ministerial experience is the best safeguard against problems in the church. From his hours of prayer, study and dealing with ministry on a daily basis, he is better equipped to pinpoint the specific needs of the church and command a standard of righteousness. He is also better positioned to hear from God for the direction of the church in a way that is not just built on natural wisdom, but founded in faith. From that knowledge the pastor and his staff will set boundaries and guidelines to prevent unruly, sinful, divisive and ungodly behaviors in the church.

Now to some that sounds very restrictive and controlling, but they don't realize that a pastor, or five-fold ministry in their proper role, will actually protect the church from a range of problems. The restrictions many don't want to live by are the same restrictions of the Bible and are the very thing that keeps the church anointed and on the straight and narrow path Jesus talked about. A pastor determined to command government in the church brings protection, order, and holds evil back in the people's lives and the church.

This is why the Apostle Paul tells us in 2 Thessalonians 2:7, that once the restraining force of the Holy Spirit and His church are removed from the earth then evil and those who are evil will manifest and govern in unrighteousness.

The apostle Paul had to deal with governmental issues in his ministry especially with the Corinthian church. He said in 1 Corinthians 14:40 that all things must be done in decency and order. Let's look at a number of issues that Paul faced in the Corinth church that we see today that further reveals to us the importance of Church Government.

Examples of issues Paul spoke to the church at Corinth about:

- *Carnal fleshly behavior* —1 Corinthians 2
- *Immorality and carnality* —1 Corinthians 3
- *Unfaithfulness and lack of dependability* —1 Corinthians 4
- *Immoral issues* —1 Corinthians 5
- *Legal issues and carnal issues* —1 Corinthians 6
- *Marriage issues* —1 Corinthians 7
- *Murmuring and complaining* —1 Corinthians 10
- *Strife issues* —1 Corinthians 11
- *Disorder, competition, and interrupting each other* — 1 Corinthians 12

Paul had many governmental issues to deal with but in every case it came down to the root of fleshly carnal behavior from the people. This is why true spiritual government in the church is important.

This same fleshly carnal behavior is the reason most people will leave a good solid church, with faithful leadership of integrity. They don't want to be spiritually governed but rather, like what the Apostle Paul dealt with, be carnal. We will study later some the methods Paul used to govern the church.

Every government needs a leader.

Every government, if it is to function correctly, needs a leader. This is why Judges 21:25 says that where there is no one to lead then people will do what is right in their own eyes. This is why lawlessness, disorder, chaos and unruliness will come as a result of either no leader or a lack of submission to a leader. The Bible calls Israel the church that was in the wilderness (Acts 7:38). When we read the many examples of Israel and their leader, Moses, we can see it as Old Testament examples of a pastor and his congregation. Moses, the leader, was chosen by God to be the spiritual shepherd over God's flock, Israel. Moses was not chosen by man but was a God appointed leader.

After countless efforts by the people to usurp authority over God's appointed leader, Moses, it always failed and in the end God defended the man He appointed.

To further illustrate how God chooses and speaks to His appointed man. Look at the examples of how many times the scripture says that God spoke to Moses giving him instructions in leading and governing the people. Remember this was an Old Testament example of the church. Where was the voting board to appoint this leader? Where was the committee to approve, question or decide Moses' decisions, governing, or what he was hearing from God? We can see here how many times the Bible uses the phrase, "and God spoke to Moses."

Exodus 4:30	Exodus 19:3, 9, 10, 24
Exodus 7:8, 9, 19	Exodus 20:2, 22
Exodus 8:5, 16, 20	Exodus 24:1, 12
Exodus 9:1, 8, 13, 22	Exodus 25:1
Exodus 10:1, 12, 21	Exodus 30:11, 22
Exodus 11:1, 9	Exodus 31:1, 12
Exodus 12:1, 43	Exodus 32:7
Exodus 13:1	Exodus 33:1, 11, 17
Exodus 14:1, 15, 26	Exodus 34:1, 27
Exodus 15:25, 26	Exodus 35:1
Exodus 16:11, 28, 34	Exodus 40:1
Exodus 17:5, 14	

God spoke to Moses first and expected him to tell, instruct, lead, and govern the people in what He said to him.

From these many examples with Moses, we can see that the Lord does in fact speak, give instructions, govern, and give direction to the leader He has appointed.

Now this doesn't mean or imply that Moses was infallible or unaccountable. Make no mistake about it, God will hold the leader responsible for their leadership and how they handle what God has entrusted them. This is why God didn't allow Moses to enter the promise land because he mishandled what God told him by striking the rock that gave water a second time rather than speaking

to it. Remember Eli the priest? It was God who ultimately held this priest responsible by removing him from his priesthood.

Never forget the scripture says in James 3:1, that the ones who teach the Word receive a greater judgment. God hasn't changed that standard today and will expose leaders who mishandle His Church and ministry! In no way can we suggest that the leader is not to be submitted or accountable to anyone, but rather he is first accountable to God and should have others around him that can help provide him sound wisdom and input in the vision God has given him. According to Bible examples, those he is directly accountable to in his life and ministry should be other five-fold ministers, as we see with the early apostles.

That accountability safety net is not for the purpose of deciding the vision or restricting the leader in his vision. Rather it is where spiritual fathers, ministerial colleagues, and similar relationships come in to bring order in the leader's life to help him in his character and vision. It is similar to the example of Moses' father-in-law giving advice to Moses in how he should handle the counseling of the people (Exodus 17). From there a pastor should have a pastoral staff. The pastoral staff are the elders, which biblically are ordained ministers, not elected members—Titus 1:5. Then he should have deacons, which are leaders who serve the people in order to help the pastor, not tell the pastor how to lead. These groups are there to provide the pastor a support system in which he can gain insight, ideas and help for the common good of the ministry. A smart pastor will have these biblical structures in place, knowing no leader can go the course alone.

Contrary to many modern church structures seen today, it is not for a deacon board, which is a serving body and not a governing body, to make decisions for or have authority over the one God appoints. Neither is it an eldership board made up of laymen who aren't called to pastor nor have the grace to usurp authority or be the governing voice of the church. We simply cannot find this arrangement in the New Testament church. Why? Well for example, except for computer programmers, what do most people know about computer programming? Computer programmers know the in's and out's of computers and a heart doctor cannot do their job for them. They can provide some wise business ideas, but in the end, their limited knowledge and experience in the field will limit their ability to help precisely. In the same way, what do laymen and businessmen, even godly ones, know about the daily responsibility of pastoring and governing a church spiritually?

Many have wrongly understood church government along these lines. So they have installed a deacon or leadership board voted in by the congregation to govern the pastor and the church. This is not scriptural and is dangerous. It is more dangerous in fact, to have this kind of leadership of democracy than a true theocracy, meaning God ruled, God appointed and spoken.

The example that many use to adapt what they say is a spiritual church voting pattern, *they say*, is

found in Acts 6 where the Bible says apostles asked the other leaders to look out among the disciples and choose men to serve in meeting the daily needs of the widows who were being neglected.

First, the ones that were chosen weren't voted or selected by the people but rather by the governing board of apostles. Secondly, it was leadership chosen not to govern the leader or the church but to do the work of a deacon which, again, simply means one who serves. They weren't governing but appointed to watch over the serving! In fact, after these new deacons were chosen they were brought before the Apostles, who were the ones that were governing, to be commissioned and prayed over for them to serve in that capacity! That is certainly different than what many modern churches have adapted. Let's look at the scripture below.

Acts 6 (The Message)

¹⁻⁴ During this time, as the disciples were increasing in numbers by leaps and bounds, hard feelings developed among the Greek-speaking believers—"Hellenists"—toward the Hebrew-speaking believers because their widows were being discriminated against in the daily food lines. So the Twelve called a meeting of the disciples. They said, "It wouldn't be right for us to abandon our responsibilities for preaching and teaching the Word of God to help with the care of the poor. So, friends, choose seven men from among you whom everyone trusts, men full of the Holy Spirit and good sense, and we'll assign them this task. Meanwhile, we'll stick to our assigned tasks of prayer and speaking God's Word."

⁵⁻⁶ The congregation thought this was a great idea. They went ahead and chose—Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, Nicolas, a convert from Antioch. Then they presented them to the apostles. Praying, the apostles laid on hands and commissioned them for their task.

Respect and submission to authority.

In order for church government to function correctly the way the Lord intended, you need to enforce His spiritual government and have good solid leadership to carry it out. You also need willing people to correctly discern and understand the constitutional instruction of this godly government according to scripture. This will require a willingness from the people to embrace God's way of church government and submit to it as well. Another crucial key in fruitful church government is a right attitude and submission toward pastoral authority. Again, since submission to authority is something most of us don't like to accept, we must learn what the scripture says concerning submission to pastoral authority.

"Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation" (Heb. 13:7).

"Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you" (Heb. 13:17).

God has placed a great emphasis on the local church in the New Testament and it is undeniable. It is God's will that every Christian be a loyal, faithful, fruitful, contributing member

of a sound church and that His church is governed well. With that in mind, it should not come as a surprise that we are exhorted to obey those who have rule over us. The verses quoted above are strong; we are to obey our church leaders. These leaders are not to be dictators, or abuse their authority, however, they ARE rulers. We can see from these verses in Hebrews that plain language is used in biblical submission to authority. I believe it means exactly what it says. We must remember not all Christians have equal authority in this world. Some are rulers and the others are to obey those rulers.

The pastors of a church have a major responsibility before the Lord for the teachings, practices, and direction of that church. The Bible warns that the church leaders watch for our souls and that we must not cause them grief for that is unprofitable for us. Why? Because our wrong behaviors can pull the leader's attention out of the anointing, onto more trivial issues. In the end, we lose out on what is really important for our lives.

Submission to authority also requires the leaders who govern, rule or lead, to lead with right motives coupled with love and serving. Jesus said the greatest in the Kingdom is the servant of all. Leaders must remember that while they are called to lead and govern they must do it with a servant attitude. 1 Peter 5:1-4 says, *The elders which are among you exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed. Feed the flock of God, which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind, Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being examples of the flock. And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.*

These verses show us that every pastor should handle their ministry carefully, taking care of God's sheep because one day Jesus, the Chief Shepherd, is going to judge his ministry.

This is why it is important to find a church that is following the Word of God, so we can obey and be a blessing to the leaders in that church. We must then support that church in every way possible. That is the will of God for every Christian. The leaders, in turn, will give an account to the Lord for their teaching and decisions. It is the pastors and leaders that have the great responsibility and judgment before the Lord concerning the church.

We must submit to our leaders as they follow Christ and His words. This is what the Apostle Paul said, follow me as I follow Christ. Obviously, this does not mean we are to close our eyes to false doctrines and deliberate sin, but it does mean that we are not to try to impose our views in all matters upon the church and its leaders. We are not to try being the ones at the helm of the church trying to govern it, either directly or subtly among our fellow church members, by voicing our disagreement around the church. We are not the pastor of the church, and to try would be dangerous. This happened with Korah, in the Book of Numbers, who tried to become the newly found pastor of Israel, the church in the wilderness, as he began to voice his disagreement with Moses. God was angry with his attempt to usurp authority and the ground opened and swallowed him and those that followed him.

Congregational members do not have the grace to be the pastor of the church they attend. They don't have

the anointing, the unction, or the responsibility for it. Instead, they should submit to those who are the pastors, and must allow the pastors to make decisions that we may not agree with, submitting ourselves because God has told us we are supposed to.

The church member will never find a pastor he agrees with 100%. Think about it. There is no perfect church or leader! This would be impossible. The only one most people agree with 100% is usually themselves! Human beings didn't even agree with Jesus who was right 100% of the time! We all know this in theory but the practice of it is often a more difficult matter. We must understand that if we submit to a pastor, it will be to an imperfect one. But when we do have a pastor, who strives to uphold integrity and guides the church with wisdom and teaches righteousness, we should submit to his leadership. So many Christians have become masters at learning to "discern" what is wrong with a leader, but cannot discern what is right with him. Start using your discernment to find what is right with your leader and you will trust that God can guide the man He has placed over the church. It is necessary for there to be order so we can all get along in the church. God works in this world through all of our many imperfections and this is also how He works in His church.

Often, when it comes to submission to authority, people become afraid. They think the ruler will be manipulative, harsh, controlling and domineering. In some cases, there have been these kinds of leaders who have been a wrong example of church government. What this has helped to promote in the Body of Christ is a group of people who want pastors to adjust to them. They want the leader to adjust to the way they want to be talked to and the way they like things done because they fear being "hurt." Now, a leader must be sensitive and, of course, walk in love. However, they can't spend all their time walking on egg shells and remembering how each individual person must be treated or talked to because of an abusive past, hurtful experiences from previous harsh pastors/churches, spouses and even their upbringing. This would be impossible for any leader to do in trying to appease everyone.

So with that, we must remember love isn't always soft nor is it always harsh. We must look at Jesus and those in scripture to help us see how they led. Was it always soft, kind and suggestive, or did it carry a harsh command, directive, or firm rebuke at times? We will see from the examples below that the scripture does give many instructions for how leaders should walk according to love. We know those scriptures exist. However, not to exclude those scriptures that talk about the times when a leader may be firm and commanding. We cannot impose a doctrinal fear among the people to make them believe a leader cannot ever use a harsh approach in leading. Let's look at a healthy balance of the two.

First look, at Jesus—just how did He govern? To the people who would receive, He would speak softly and kindly, but coupled with great demands and requirements for them to live the kingdom lifestyle. Then other times, to His disciples and leaders, He would be rebuking, firm, demanding, commanding and give correction upbraiding them in how they led. Sometimes those rebukes appeared to occur in public! (Matthew 17:17)

With the religious leaders and those who were resisting Him and were not submissive, like the scribes and Pharisees, He was firm, commanding, rebuking and wasn't tolerant of their behavior or doctrine. He told them that they especially should have known better for their actions.

Commanded:

Acts 1:12 - Until the day in which he was taken up, after that he through the Holy Ghost had given *commandments* unto the apostles whom he had chosen:

Matthew 19:16-18- And the disciples went, and did as Jesus *commanded* them,

Matthew 28:19 - Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have *commanded* you:

Upbraided: (To correct harshly)

Matthew 11:20 - Then began he to *upbraid* the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not:

Mark 16:14 - Afterward he appeared unto the eleven as they sat at meat, and *upbraided* them with their unbelief and hardness of heart,

Rebuked:

Mark 8:33 - But when he had turned about and looked on his disciples, he rebuked Peter, saying, Get thee behind me, Satan:

How about the Apostle Paul? Was he always politically correct in his spiritual governing, words, and actions as he dealt with people? Again, we are not talking about the abuse or license to mishandle people, manipulate, control or be harsh just to be harsh. According to 2 Peter, we read how God's leaders should handle God's flock. Rather, we are looking at how at times every good leader may have to govern in a way people don't like and think is too hard, or even be firm to correct carnality or rebellion!

Paul had to be harsh at times. Notice the words he used governing the flock of God:

Command - 2 Thess 3:6

I beseech you (plead) - Rom 16:7, 2 Thess 2:1

I exhort (encourage) - 1 Thess 4:1

Gave commandment - 1 Thess 4:2, 2 Thess 3:10

Chastise (correction) - Heb 12:8

Rebuke sharply—Titus 1:13, Titus 2:15, 1 Tim 5:20

Admonish/Warn—2 Thess 3:15, 1 Thess 5:12, 14

Correction—2 Tim 3:16

He had to govern this way at times because the vision of the leader must be protected and followed and God's church treated respectfully. If the pastor is expected to handle the church with respect, so should the congregation. Offenses, gossip, and strife may try to affect the church. So there may be times for setting the church back in order, discipline to deal with sinful behaviors in the congregation, and also to address disrespectful attitudes, not just to the pastors, but to other church members as well. Paul had to be this way in the verses we read because he realized, in the scope of eternity, this life is but a vapor and very short. Leaders realize we all cannot be afforded the soft approach to eternity.

As we run our race, it is key we understand why God has placed government in His church. Rather than despise it, we should thank the Lord for providing the avenue of protecting us from the traps of the enemy and giving us the safe haven of the local church and its government!

Session 12

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