

Lesson 1

The Government of God's People

INTRODUCTION:

- A. Paul said in I Cor. 12:28: *"God hath set...in the church,...governments,..."*
 - 1. Vine: *"...Said of those who act as guides in a local church."*
- B. The only function to which the word "government" can be correctly applied is that of elders in the local church (Acts 14:23).

I. THE SCRIPTURES TEACH THAT ELDERS HAVE GOVERNMENTAL RULE.

- A. Elders *rule* (Heb. 13:17, 7; Rom. 12:8; I Tim. 5:17).
- B. Elders are *over us* in the Lord (I Thess. 5:12-13).
 - 1. There is an over and an under relationship (Heb. 13:17).
- C. Elders are *"stewards"* of God (Tit. 1:7).
 - 1. They have the *charge and care* of the souls of the flock of God.
 - 2. The church is God's Heritage, they take care of it for Him (I Tim. 3:5; I Pet. 5:3).

- D. Elders take “*the oversight*” (I Pet. 5:2).
- E. Elders are “*overseers*” or “*bishops*” (Acts 20:28; I Tim. 3:1).
- F. Elders are “*shepherds*” or “*pastors*” (Acts 20:28; Eph. 4:11).
 - 1. They are to *tend, protect* and *feed* the flock.
- G. They are “*elders*” and “*presbyters*” (I Tim. 4:14; Acts 20:17).
 - 1. These terms denote age and experience.
 - 2. He is not to be a novice (I Tim. 3:6).
- H. Elders are Examples (I Pet. 5:3).
 - 1. They serve as a pattern to be imitated (Heb. 13:7).

II. EVERY CHURCH IS TO HAVE ELDERS BECAUSE THIS IS GOD’S ARRANGEMENT FOR GOVERNING HIS PEOPLE.

- A. Paul *ordained* them *elders* in *every church* (Acts 14:23).
- B. Paul told Titus to ordain elders in every city (Tit. 1:5).
- C. God’s people cannot ignore God’s government without sinning.
- D. There are FOUR ways a congregation may exist:
 - 1. *Scripturally organized* (Phil. 1:1).
 - 2. *Scripturally unorganized* (congregation just beginning).
 - 3. *Unscripturally organized* (unqualified men as elders).

4. *Unscripturally unorganized* (men qualified, but have not been put in as elders).

III. SOME THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND WHEN SEARCHING OUT MEN FOR ELDERS:

- A. The *responsibilities* of elders are *so great* that the *very best men* are required to fill the place.
 1. They are watchmen (Acts 20:31).
- B. Elders come from the *mature teachers* in a congregation (Heb. 5:12-14).
 1. Men who have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.
- C. No man who *fails to appreciate* the *work and responsibilities* of elders should attempt to fill that place.
- D. Elders should come from the *natural leaders* in a congregation.
- E. They should be men who *desire to do the work* (I Tim. 3:1).
 1. Not for gain (I Pet. 5:2).
 2. Not to be a "lord" or "boss" (I Pet. 5:3).
- F. They should be men who *love good men* (Tit. 1:8).
- G. They must be men of *strong convictions* who will *stand against* all error and sin (Tit. 1:9-13).
- H. Men who can *rule their own houses* (Tit. 1:6; I Tim. 3:4-5).
 1. Men who *cannot rule* their own houses *cannot* rule the church (I Tim. 3:5).

2. Men who are *not the heads and rulers* in their own homes *cannot* take care of the church of God.
 - I. They must be men who *give priority* to TRUTH.
 1. Truth must have priority *over friendship* (John 8:32).
 2. Truth must have priority *over courtesy* (II John 9-11).
 3. Truth must have priority *over peace, unity, and fellowship*.
 - a. These things are *results, not goals*.
 - J. They must be men who are *easy to be entreated* (James 3:17; Tit. 1:7).
 1. Easy to talk to, and reasonable.
 2. Not self-willed.
 - K. They must be *men of foresight* who can *see ahead* – vigilant (Acts 20:20-31).
 - L. Remember, no organization is going to rise above its leaders!
 - M. Elders will need *courage* – must be men of courage.

IV. CONGREGATIONS OF GOD'S PEOPLE ARE NOT RULED BY THE MAJORITY, BUT BY ELDERS.

- A. The church is *not a democracy* in any sense – it is a KINGDOM.
 1. Jesus is KING and HEAD (Col. 1:13; Eph. 1:22-23).

2. The King said elders are to rule and oversee the church (Acts 20:28; Heb. 13:7, 17; Rom. 12:8; I Tim. 5:17; I Pet. 5:2).
- B. The church of our Lord is ruled when the will of God is carried out by the head of the church, and *He rules through the eldership*.
 - A. Just as God ruled through Judges in the Old Testament.
 - C. Elders are to *rule as fathers* – with *wise heads* and *loving hearts*.
 - D. They are to *rule with consideration* (I Pet. 5:3).
 - E. Elders should *rule without attracting attention* to the fact that they are ruling.
 - F. *Majority rule is wrong* in the Lord's church for the following reasons:
 1. Majority rule *does not discriminate between experience and inexperience*, nor does it regard knowledge as anything (Heb. 5:12-14; Prov. 11:14; 15:22; 24:6).
 2. Majority rule *makes elders subject to the church* instead of the church subject to the elders and reverses the N. T. principle (Heb. 13:17).
 3. Majority rule *encourages preachers to disregard and ignore the elders* and cater to the wishes of the majority in the church.
 - a. This causes division many times.
 4. Majority rule *breeds disorder in the church* – leaves the church in a state of uncertainty without permanent leadership (Acts 20:28).

5. The demand for majority rule always comes from an *uninformed* and *unruly* element in the church.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Discuss the rule of elders:
2. Discuss the elder's work from the standpoint of "stewards":
3. Discuss the meaning of the words "overseer" and "bishop":
4. Discuss their work from the standpoint of being "shepherds" or "pastors":

5. Discuss the meaning of the word "elder" or "presbyter":

- (1) The New Testament speaks of *young men* and *old men* (Acts 2:17; I Tim. 5:1; Tit. 2:2, 6).
- (2) Paul was a young man (Acts 7:58) at the time Stephen was stoned. J. W. McGarvey said, "He must have been at the time over thirty years old." (*Church Government*)
- (3) Paul told Timothy, "Let no man despise thy youth." (I Tim. 4:12). J. W. McGarvey said, "He must have been over thirty while still called a youth." (*Church Government*)
- (4) J. W. McGarvey said, "We ascertain that a man could not be regarded as an elder until he had passed into the neighborhood of forty years of age." (*Church Government*)

6. Discuss the example of elders:

16. Discuss why no organization is going to rise above its leaders:

17. Discuss why elders need *courage*:

18. The church is a KINGDOM; discuss the difference between a democracy and a kingdom:

19. Discuss why majority rule is wrong in the Lord's church:

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Church Leadership
by Donald Townsley
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