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RESTORING THE CHURCH - PRINCIPLES OF CHURCH LIFE

Church Government

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this lesson is to help the believer to understand the need for government, structure and order in the church, to understand God's plan for that government and to rightly relate to that God-given authority in their lives.

KEY VERSE:

"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."

Hebrews 13:17

I. WHAT AREAS OF GOVERNMENT HAVE BEEN ESTABLISHED BY GOD?

The Bible identifies clearly there main areas of government in society: the home, civil government and Church authority (see 1 Corinthians 11:1-3; Romans 13; Hebrews 13:17). In this lesson we will deal with Church Government.

II. WHAT ARE THREE MAIN BIBLE FACTS CONCERNING CHURCH GOVERNMENT?

A. The first fact that the Bible makes very clear is that God has established **government** in His House, the Church.

1. With no government, no structure or order there is chaos, lawlessness, anarchy and disorder (Judges 17:6; 21:25; 2 Thessalonians 2:4; 2 Peter 2:10; 1 Corinthians 14:33, 40).
2. There are those that rule in the House of God (Romans 12:8, Hebrews 13:17).

“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.”

Hebrews 13:7

B. The second fact clearly revealed in the Scripture is that God identifies the rules in His House as elders (1 Timothy 5:17).

1. God could have chosen any form of government for His House, dictatorship (one-man rule), democracy (rule by majority), central control (rule by headquarters) or many others.
2. God clearly chose that His house be governed by plurality of elders.
 - a. Plurality of elders means more than one (Acts 14:23; 20:17; James 5:14).
 - b. Plurality of elders includes the idea of a chief elder, or senior pastor (Acts 12:17; 21:18).
3. Another name for elders used in the New Testament is the word “bishop”. The word bishop simply means “overseer” and describes the function that an elder has (Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:1).

C. The third main fact concerning Church government is that God determines the kind of individuals that are to be the rulers in His House (1 Timothy 3:1-9; Titus 1:5-9).

1. They must have **proven character** blameless, temperate, sober, of good behaviour, not given to wine, not greedy of money, not covetous, not self-willed, a lover of good.

2. They must have **spiritual vision**..... not a novice, just, holy, having a good report among the unsaved, able to teach, holding fast the faithful word, patient, able to convince with sound doctrine.
3. They must have their **houses in order**..... husband of one wife, above reproach, children in submission, hospitable, ruling own house well.
4. They must be **gifted and skilled** for an equipping ministry by the Holy Spirit..... apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor and teacher (Ephesians 4:11-13).

III. WHAT ARE THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE ELDERS TOWARD THE PEOPLE?

The responsibilities of the elders fall into three main categories:

- A. **Ruling** (1 Thessalonians 5:12-14). This involves the general oversight of the ongoing affairs of the church. To rule means “to preside over, to superintend, to care for, to give attention to.” The elders are to the church what parents are to the home. As rulers, therefore, they stand accountable before God for the state of the assembly (Heb 13:17). God expects elders to rule with a spirit of gentleness (1 Peter 5:2-3).
- B. **Shepherding** (Acts 20:28-35). This involves feeding the flock, watching out for wolves, helping the weak, ministering to the sick and being an example for the sheep to follow.
- C. **Instructing** (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:9). By teaching sound doctrine, the elders are going to help bring stability to the Body and maturity to the saints so that all the members of the Body might become responsible with the use of their gifts, talents and ministries.

IV. WHAT ARE THE MAIN RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE PEOPLE TOWARD ELDERS?

God gives responsibilities both ways. If leaders are not righteous, the people groan; but if the people do not respond properly to their leaders, the leaders are grieved (Hebrews 13:17).

- A. The people are to esteem elders highly (1 Thessalonians 5:13).
- B. The people are to submit themselves to Godly leadership (Hebrews 13:17).

- C. The people are to financially support the elders (1 Timothy 5:17-18; 1 Corinthians 9:11-14).
- D. The people are to be careful about hastily charging an elder with wrong doing (1 Timothy 5:1; 19-20).
- E. The people are to pray for their leaders (1 Thessalonians 5:25)

CONCLUSION:

It is not God's intention that the relationship between elders and the people be forced or strained. God wants His church to be a family where all are able to enjoy the warmth of His presence in their midst. But God is a God of order and wants His family to reflect His nature. The structure is not intended to stifle the Body but to give it the strength and stability necessary to face the challenges of the coming days. God grant us all the grace that we need to flow together to the goodness of the Lord in the place where He has put us.