

Lesson One

CHURCH GOVERNMENT

A. CHURCH GOVERNMENT IS ORDAINED OF GOD.

Scriptural Reference:

"And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healing, helps, governments, diversities of tongues" (I Corinthians 12:28).

Sometimes there is much unwise criticism of organization. The unwise and unjust criticism comes mainly from the following two sources:

1. A person who has been saved from the denominational church world desires to be set free from the bondage of the traditional church structure, and therefore, swings to the other extreme of discarding all church government.
2. A person who refuses to submit to discipline, and therefore, adopts an independent attitude and spirit, and promotes the so-called "free" church.

One may meet other reasons for criticism being directed against church organization. It is very important and necessary that the Christian be fully persuaded that God has ordained church government and the Bible clearly teaches a divine plan for organization in the church.

Without organization there can be no government nor discipline in the church; and, if these are both Scriptural and necessary, the logical conclusion is that organization is of God.

Let us quote I Corinthians 12:28 from Weymouth's translation: *"And by God's appointment there are in the church, first apostles, secondly prophets, thirdly teachers. Then come miraculous powers, and then ability to cure diseases or render assistance, or POWERS OR ORGANIZATION, or varieties of the gift of tongues."*

To remove all misunderstanding let it be understood that the church is not an organization but a living organism indwelt by the Holy Spirit. The true church knows no denominational or organizational barriers. Walls erected by the will of man cannot restrict the body of Christ. The church of God cuts across denominational lines. Definitely, the church is not an organization but an organism - a body through whose veins and arteries pulsate the very life and Spirit of Christ Himself.

Knowing this truth the question can now be asked: IS ORGANIZATION OF GOD? Is it Scriptural? Is there a necessity for it? To all three questions we may reply emphatically without hesitation, YES, ORGANIZATION IS OF GOD.

One of the conditions of the days just prior to the Coming of the Lord is the spirit of lawlessness and anarchy in the land. *"For lawlessness is already at work in secret; but in secret only until the man who now restrains it is removed, and then the lawless one will be revealed" (WEYMOUTH).* Here it is seen that the antichrist is spoken of as the "lawless one" and the mystery of iniquity as the "spirit of lawlessness." This spirit of lawlessness can be seen

everywhere today. Crime, juvenile delinquency, divorce and strikes have all been greatly increasing in recent years. Man desires to be a law unto himself; he does not wish to respect government or acknowledge the rule of any man over him. This lawlessness has entered our schools and colleges until teachers have an almost impossible task to keep order. This same spirit of lawlessness has entered our homes until the children rule the home and rebellious and disobedient wives break up marriages. This same spirit of lawlessness has entered the church until many professing Christians no longer are willing to abide under the preaching of sound doctrine.

Where there is no church government, every man is a law unto himself, and there can be neither divine order nor discipline. This can lead only to confusion, disorder, and the divine harmony and order of God's government is entirely disrupted. *"God is not the author of confusion, but of peace" (I Corinthians 14:33)*. Everything that is created by or ordained of God has beautiful order and form. So it is with church government.

Church government and discipline is needed in the local assembly as well as in the church as a whole. The ministry is subject to government and discipline as well as the laity. Any man who cannot humble himself to obey those whom the Lord has placed over him is disqualified from ruling over others. *"Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves" (Hebrews 13:17)*. This applies to both ministry and laity; no man is exempt.

B. THEOCRACY IS GOD'S FORM OF CHURCH GOVERNMENT.

The form of church government given in God's Word is a THEOCRACY. It is God ruling His people through God-called Holy Ghost ministry.

There are two extremes in church government, both of which are wrong:

1. **RULE OF THE PEOPLE:** This is a democratic form of church government which is best for the country but has not been ordained by God for His church. Certainly the laity should never be ignored. They should be consulted and they should be permitted to freely express their desires and convictions. They may influence the decision of the ministry, but at the same time they must submit themselves to the final decision of their pastor.
2. **RULE OF THE PRIESTHOOD:** This is a totalitarian form of government, which causes the pastor to become a lord over God's heritage and creates a dictatorship.

A THEOCRACY is a balance between these two extremes. The pastor is recognized as the head of the church ordained by God and through whom God may lead His people. It does not make the pastor a lord over God's heritage, but rather a spiritual father, a shepherd of the flock, a leader of the people of God.

A theocracy concerns, affects and benefits only those who voluntarily submit to it. When a Christian rebels against the admonition and instruction of his pastor, he is actually rebelling against God. It is a very serious offence for any man to put forth his hand against the ministry. *"Touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm" (I Chronicles 16:22)*. *"Rebuke not an elder, but intreat him as a father" (I Timothy 5:1)*.

C. ORGANIZATION IS A MEANS TO AN END.

The church does not organize in order to build a strong organization but rather to evangelize the world.

The mission of the church is missions. The great commission given to the church is to preach the gospel to the whole world. The purpose of organization is to get the job done.

It is a well-recognized fact that a group of people united together with system and order can accomplish much more than if each of them were working separately from one another. This is possibly one of the main reasons why God ordained organization in the church.

Organization must always be a servant to the church, never the church a servant to organization. Like so many other things such as fire, organization is a wonderful servant but a very poor master.

Organization is not the end in itself; it is the means towards that end.

D. EACH LOCAL ASSEMBLY SHOULD BE SET IN ORDER.

Every local assembly should be affiliated with the organization, have a pastor who has been properly installed, and other church officers that may be necessary. In order to accomplish this the local church assembly should be set in order by the presbytery at the earliest possible date.

It is understood that a church cannot be set in order until there are some born again believers with the New Testament experience of salvation. In other words a church cannot be set in order until there is a church, a group of saints who are going to unite together to form a local assembly. However, as soon as there is such a group of saints, no matter how few in number, a meeting should be called, over which the District Superintendent or Sectional Presbyter should preside, and the church should be set in order.

The agenda for such a meeting should provide for taking care of the following matters of business:

1. Scripture reading and prayer.
2. Appointment of a recording secretary so accurate minutes of the meeting may be recorded.
3. Recording of the names of the charter members of the assembly.
4. Choice of the name of the assembly.
5. Reading of the Articles of Faith of the organization and the adoption of it by the assembly.
6. Installation of the pastor.
7. Reading of the Church Constitution for the local assembly and the adoption of the same by the assembly.
8. Election of church officers.
9. Appointment by the pastor of all other necessary church officers and ratification of it by the assembly.
10. Statement of affiliation by the presbyter to the assembly.

E. EACH ASSEMBLY SHOULD HAVE A PASTOR INSTALLED BY THE PRESBYTERY.

When the presbytery installs the pastor, he is given a measure of prestige and recognition of authority that is difficult for him to receive in any other way. It builds confidence and the assembly is given to understand that the church is united. The assembly understands that the entire organization is standing behind the ministry of their pastor and they would do well to recognize the authority behind their pastor. At the same time the assembly understands that they are given protection. In the event of their spiritual leader falling into sin, they would not be left helpless. The entire organization would be there to give them protection and support.

There are three main ways in which a pastor is chosen:

1. He may be a pioneer preacher and has raised up the assembly through his own ministry. In this event he would be installed when the assembly was set in order.
2. He may be placed there and appointed pastor of the assembly by the presbyter, bishop or superintendent of the district.
3. He may be called by the majority vote of the congregation itself. In this event the members of the assembly should only be permitted to vote on one prospective minister at a time. Never should there be an election of one man over the names of others. Otherwise there can be much confusion, disunity and dissatisfaction over the choice. Also, it should be remembered that only the names of men approved and recommended by the presbytery should be considered.

In every case the "Chief Shepherd" must place him there Himself. The method of choosing a pastor is of secondary importance. The will of God is the one thing that is all-important here. He must be there in the WILL OF GOD. No wrong motives must influence the choice either on the part of the pastor or of the people.

LESSON ONE

SELF HELP TEST

A. Write a clear definition of the following terms:

1. Theocracy -
2. Presbytery -
3. Mystery of iniquity -

B. Explain the difference between an organization and an organism.

C. Explain the meaning of the following statement: *"Organization is not the end in itself; it is the means towards that end."*

D. State THREE ways in which a pastor may be chosen:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____