

# The Sword AND Staff

*"Preach the Word." (II Timothy 4:2)*

*"Feed the Flock." (I Peter 5:2)*

## "Earnestly Contending for the Simplicity of Church Government..."

By James E. Gibbons

*(This message was scheduled to be preached January 1st at Paw Paw, West Virginia, on a new year's day rally. However, a snow storm hindered the speakers from getting there. Thus, we are presenting it now for your consideration and, we trust, edification—Ed.)*

WE HAVE BEEN ASKED to speak on "Earnestly Contending for the Simplicity of Church Government Found in the First Century Church." The expression, "earnestly contending," has its origin in Jude 3. Jude had intended to write to them on the theme of their "common salvation," but (he says) "it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints." False teachers and trends of apostasy in the church prompted him to change his subject.

It would be wonderful for us to develop the theme of our "common salvation" and together rejoice in it, but it is very needful and timely that the assigned subject be presented. The many trends and departures of today prompt us to examine this subject of church government anew.

The root word from which our term "government" is derived means "a steering, piloting, directing." How we need the proper "steering, piloting, and directing" in the Lord's church today!

How we need to be earnestly contending for the simplicity of government found in the first century church! Our best defense against the wrong way is to contend earnestly for the right way. (This seems



to be what Jude is saying). And then we marvel at how effective the early Christians were in spreading the gospel (Colossians 1:23; Romans 10:18).

Now let us examine this basic subject concerning the simplicity of the government of the early church and then earnestly contend for it. \*

### 1. THE EARLY CHURCH WAS A KINGDOM WITH AN ABSOLUTE MONARCH.

First, let us establish a point which is not usually emphasized. The early church was a kingdom with an absolute monarch—it was a monarchy, not a democracy. Keep this in mind, and it will help you understand the simplicity of the government of the Lord's church.

#### *The Coming of the King of Israel*

The Jews had long looked for the Messiah who would bring in their golden age and reign forever on the throne of David. Isaiah through prophecy wrote, "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given:

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## Found in the First Century Church"

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## Proverbs of Today

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*As Christians we are to bear witness to the people of the world; but if they reject us, we immediately become a witness against them.*

*"The most fitting, costly, and rewarding prayer that one can pray is: 'Have thine own way, Lord.'"*

*The New Testament does not mention missionaries, but it does speak of evangelists, whose work is to establish churches, and not to start a mission.*

*"Following the path of least resistance is what makes rivers and men crooked."*

*If we pray to God for help, it is altogether fitting and reasonable that we should be willing to help others.*

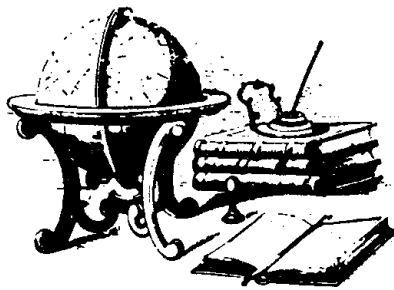
*"Claiming to be a Christian and not going to church is like claiming to be enrolled in a school, but never attending classes."*

*What have you done today that you would not have done if you were not a Christian? (And what have you refrained from doing that you would not have refrained from doing if you were not a Christian?)*

*"If you would give the world to go to heaven, then that is just exactly what it takes."*

*Fill each day with good deeds, and you will have a full life.*

*"You cannot help men permanently by doing for them what they could and should be doing for themselves."*



## EDITORIAL COMMENTS...

DEAR SUBSCRIBER, READER, AND FRIEND:

As we begin another year of publishing, we wish to thank you personally for making this printing project a success. We thank those who contribute articles when called upon to do so (although busy themselves). We express our appreciation to the ones who provide the backbone for this endeavor by their financial assistance. Yes, we thank all of you, and we have reason to believe that much good is being accomplished.

These are evil and unstable times in which we live. Apostate religion is all about us. Men are more open and unashamed in their sins. Those who claim the simple, undenominational, New Testament message need to be sure they are backing up their claim in reality, then sound forth the truth of God to this lost world! Our "burden" in getting out this paper is to do that. We believe there needs to be a closer examination of the Scriptures.

The time of the editor is dominated in getting out THE SWORD AND STAFF. There is more time and work (and expense) involved in editing and publishing such a paper than most people could imagine. Since we have our own print shop, and since our printing takes about all of our time anyway, we might as well "push" for maximum results. We are able to do little personal promotion of the paper. About the only promotion we make for the paper is through the paper. Therefore WE NEED YOU. You good people who are in sympathy with the message of this paper, PLEASE HELP US FLOOD THE LAND WITH THE MESSAGE. If it has been a blessing to your life personally, chances are that it will do the same for others.

There are several ways you can help (AND WE NEED IT). Please pray for us. Tell others about THE SWORD AND STAFF. Show your copy to them, and, if you wish, we will send you a free bundle of samples to give to prospective subscribers. Or, if you will, send us a list of names and addresses, and they will be sent sample copies. Subscribe for others. Notice that when you send several subscriptions, you get a reduced rate. Special arrangements of even lower rates are made for sending a large number to one address (as to a church). When you renew your subscription, why not subscribe for others? (And you who have received this paper as a gift, renew your subscription—no notice will be sent). Then if you can make good use of our booklets, tracts, and free material, just let us know. Given a little time (if we don't have them on hand), we can supply your order for books by other publishers (and probably save you money). Let us know. Help us double our mailing list this year. Will you? Thank you.

A major problem in such a printing project is of a financial nature. The Lord has blessed that we have our equipment, and are getting out the paper again. However, it is a close walk of faith,

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## Earnestly Contending for...

(Continued from Page 1)

and the government shall be upon his shoulders; and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and with justice and henceforth even forever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this" (Isaiah 9:6,7). Centuries later the angel spoke to Mary concerning the coming birth of Jesus, "He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end" (Luke 1:30-33). When he was born, wise men came from the east looking for "him that was born king of the Jews." The priests and scribes directed them to Bethlehem, referring to an Old Testament prophecy, when they said, "And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel" (Matthew 2:1-6). Obviously Jesus was to be this coming king of Israel.

Upon reaching adulthood, John the Baptist began his ministry as the Herald of the coming king. He preached, "Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 3:2). He was the Harbinger, and was to prepare the way for this new king (Luke 1:76). After Jesus was baptized by John, beginning his public ministry, we read the remarks of one of the first disciples he called. Listen: "Nathanael answered and said unto him, Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou thou art the King of Israel" (John 1:49). When John was cast into prison, Jesus began to proclaim the same message his Herald had been announcing - "Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 4:12-17). Elsewhere we read of the eminent approach of this kingdom. Jesus remarked in Mark 9:1, "Verily I say unto you, That there are some of them that stand here, which shall not taste death, till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power."

As his public ministry was drawing toward a close (which had been largely devoted to teaching things pertaining to his kingdom), and after he had fallen into the hands of Pilate, Pilate put this question to him, "Art thou the King of the Jews?" He finally said, "My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now is my kingdom not from hence." Pilate, getting back to his original question, responded, "Art thou a king then?" Jesus answered, "Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth..." (John 18:33-37). When Jesus was crucified, Pilate had written over his head, "JESUS OF NAZARETH THE

KING OF THE JEWS" (John 19:19).

Some today, who are inclined to make the same mistake the Jews did, suppose Christ was destined to set up an earthly kingdom. They believe he came to do this, but because the Jews rejected him, he was unable to accomplish his purpose. They believe that with his second coming Christ will set up an earthly kingdom, and that all the Old Testament Scriptures about the kingdom will be fulfilled then. But is that the case?

No. The apostle Peter on the day of Pentecost, quoting from a Psalm of David, declared that God "would raise up Christ to sit on his (David's) throne." When did this raising up to sit on the throne take place? The next verse answers that: "He seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ..." (Acts 2:30-33). So Jesus became the king seated on the throne of David when his resurrection and ascension took place. He is now enthroned at the right hand of the Father in heaven.

### *The Reality of His Kingdom*

The apostle Peter further declared in Acts 2:36, "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus whom ye crucified, both Lord and Christ." He says the crucified Christ had then been made "both Lord and Christ." Perhaps we don't get the full force of him being called "Christ." This word means anointed. In ancient times when a man was made king of Israel, he was anointed with oil. This was the ceremony that made him king. Samuel poured the oil on Saul (I Samuel 10:1), and so it was with the other kings. Thereafter they are called the Lord's "anointed" (I Samuel 12:5; Psalms 2:2; etc.) This was the title of their office, signifying that they were the king.

It is interesting to note how the Septuagint version renders these references to the Lord's anointed in the Old Testament. (Of course we know the Septuagint version was a translation of the Old Testament Scriptures made, roughly, about 300 years before Christ. It was a translation from the Hebrew to the Greek language). Where it translates the word "anointed" into the Greek, it uses the word "Christos" (our New Testament word "Christ").

Therefore if Jesus has been made "Christ" (Acts 2:36), he is now king and his kingdom is a present reality. Paul calls Jesus "king" in I Timothy 6:15. Reading the history of the early church, several times it mentions preaching about the kingdom. Notice Acts 8:12, "But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ (anointed, king), they were baptized, both men and women." The same language is used to describe Paul's preaching in Rome (Acts 28:23, 30, 31). Then we find people are spoken of as being in the

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kingdom. Colossians 1:13 reads, "Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son." Looking to the end of the world, Paul writes, "Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father..." (I Cor. 15:24). This kingdom, now in existence, will continue to the end of the world, then be presented up to God the Father.

### *The Nature of His Kingdom and Reign*

To understand the government of the church perhaps it is necessary that we understand the nature of the reign of Christ in his kingdom. As we have before noticed, Christ was to reign on the throne of David over Israel. He was called, "King of the Jews." Yet, Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36). The gospel of Matthew (written primarily for a Jewish audience whose minds were oriented toward the concept of an earthly, Messianic kingdom) continually speaks of the "kingdom of heaven." Once the Pharisees pressed Jesus for more information about his coming kingdom. He replied, "The kingdom of God cometh not with observation: Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for behold the kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:20, 21). Could it be any more evident that the kingdom of Christ is a spiritual kingdom, and that his reign is in the hearts and lives of men? The primary government of Christ is a reign in the hearts of men.

Christ was to reign over Israel; he was to be king of the Jews. If that is true, how do we explain it in the light of a spiritual kingdom? Paul speaks of "Israel after the flesh" (I Cor. 10:18; Romans 9:6-8), and there is the spiritual "Israel of God" today (Galatians 6:16). Paul wrote these revealing words in Romans 2:28 and 29, "For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God." He further makes it plain that all Christians are children of Abraham through faith (Romans 4:11, 12). Therefore, the church is the spiritual Israel of God over which Christ reigns as king.

The Lord Jesus Christ reigns as absolute monarch in his kingdom, the church. He declared in Matthew 28:18, "All power (authority) is given unto me in heaven and in earth." That didn't leave any for the pope; that didn't leave any for you (as such). But since Christ is not here physically, and since his kingdom is a spiritual kingdom, he exercises his authority through the Spirit and the Word. During his ministry, Simon Peter had made the great confession as recorded in Matthew 16. Christ said that upon that confession he would build his church, and to Simon Peter he promised, "And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind

on earth shall be bound in heaven: And whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (And he in essence said the same to all the other apostles—John 20:23). The apostles could do this because the Lord had promised that "when he, the Spirit of truth is come, he will guide you into all truth..." (John 16:13; 14:26). Thus the authority of Christ was being revealed and exercised in his inspired Word.

### *Some Conclusions and Observations*

Now let us pinpoint some conclusions and observations since we are talking about the simplicity of church government found in the first century church.

*First*, since the Lord Jesus Christ is king with all authority in his church which is a kingdom (not a democracy), we don't have the right to change or alter the church government as practiced by the early church. We had better listen to our king and follow His Word, his decree, as related to us by inspired men. Herein we find his plan for church government.

*Second*, although Christ has in a sense delegated certain authority (Mark 13:34) (as we shall later see) to certain offices in the government of his church (Hebrews 13:7, 17; Titus 2:15), the authority is not so much in the office as in the Word as it is used in exercising the office. Christ has all authority, and he governs the church by his Word.

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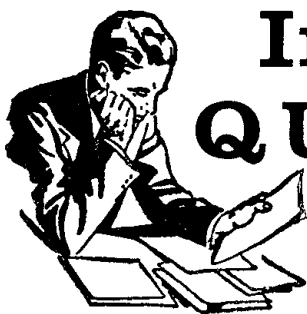


### *"Know-your-Bible" BIBLE QUIZ*



1. What was the name of the first judge of Israel (in the period of the Judges)?
2. What judge of Israel killed 600 Philistine men with an ox goad?
3. What ceremony or act was performed in making a man king in Israel?
4. What heathen man is called "my servant" by God in executing judgment in the O. T. prophets?
5. What gifts did the wise men present to the infant Jesus?
6. To which disciple did Jesus give a name that means a stone (a rock)?
7. What special men in the early church could make distribution of the Holy Spirit (or convey special spiritual gifts) by laying their hands on people?
8. According to Paul, the preaching of the cross is to them that perish what?
9. What "run away" slave did Paul win to Christ and send back home to his master?
10. To what does James compare the brevity of life in his epistle?

(Answers found elsewhere in this issue)



# Inquirer's QUESTIONS Answered

• By James E. Gibbons

A READER FROM OHIO presents a question concerning "Rebaptism." We do not gather from his letter WHY the person is supposedly rebaptized, but will comment on this matter of rebaptism. Should a person ever be baptized all over again?

To start with, let us emphasize that the purpose of New Testament baptism is to receive "remission of sins" (Acts 2:38; 22:16; Col. 2:11, 12; Romans 6:2-5; Rev. 1:5). It must be preceded by and accompanied by faith and repentance (Mark 16:16; Acts 8:36-38; Acts 2:38). All of this is done by the authority of Christ (in his name), and when accomplished, one is "baptized into Christ" and "puts on Christ" (Galatians 3:27)—in other words, he has become a Christian. There is "one Lord, one faith, one baptism (immersion)" (Eph. 4:5).

Baptism is highly a spiritual act, and when any of the above elements is missing, it tends to be an invalid form. If one has not believed and repented, baptism is merely a ducking, and one has not been baptized into Christ. He goes into the water a dry sinner and comes up a wet one. The baptism of infants is not valid because of the absense of faith. Then sometimes a youngster will submit to baptism not realizing what he has done, thus creating a problem in reference to his baptism being Scriptural. Rebaptism in these circumstances, when one has finally seen and met the prerequisites, is definitely in order. It may be a second immersion, but it will be the first time he has been baptized into Christ. Some men in Acts 19 were baptized again because they had the wrong baptism for the Christian age.

If our enquirer's question concerns the baptism of backslidden Christians, this definitely is improper. If one truly

has been baptized Scripturally in the first place, he is never to be baptized again. Scriptural baptism is a "one time" proposition. Backslidden Christians are told to repent and pray for forgiveness (Acts 8:13, 18-22), not be baptized all over again. John writes, "If we confess oursins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

However, denominational baptisms create a problem because, for the most part, they disbelieve and deny the Scriptural significance of baptism (Acts 2:38; 1 Peter 3:21).

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## New Off the Press:

TWO ITEMS of literature have recently come from our press.

The first is a second printing of our tract-booklet, *Objections to the Necessity of Baptism Answered*. This has been a good seller, and various reports and reorders have verified its effective use. It still sells for 6¢ a copy.

The second item printed is for free distribution. It is entitled *Lessons in Happiness From the Garden of Eden*. This is a practical and Scriptural approach to attaining that which seems to be so illusive in our modern world. Send for some FREE copies.

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## A Friend:

A FRIEND—his love for you is tops when you are at the bottom. He looks up to you when the rest of the world is looking down on you. He lets you step on his toes in order to help you get on your feet. He shows you the meaning of true friendship—not the meaninglessness of it. He shoots straight with you, not at you.

He knows most about your faults and still likes you. When you are wrong, he tells you—not the rest of the world. He doesn't complain when you neglect him, but "beefs" when you neglect yourself. When you flop, he never splits with you—except what he has. When you achieve success he wants nothing more than to know of it. He lets you worry him more than his enemies. He is your best press agent as he doesn't have to be paid to boost you. His friendship is the kind you can't lose, even when you deserve to. He stands behind you when you are taking bows, and beside you when you are taking boos. No greater love has man than to lay down his life for his friend.

—SELECTED.

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## EDITORIAL COMMENTS...

(Continued from Page 2)

and our needs are supplied only on a month to month basis. Our biggest support comes from subsidizing gifts, and, secondly, subscriptions (for which we are very thankful). It would be wonderful if we had resources to expand our printing efforts. We need to flood the land with the pure and simple Word of God! Times are perilous, and time is running out!

Thank you again. Please pray for us in the new year. Remember how you can help. We need it.

Best regards in searching the Scriptures and spreading God's Word in 1971.

Sincerely,

  
James E. Gibbons

## ANSWERS TO "KNOW-YOUR-BIBLE" BIBLE QUIZ

1. Judges 3:8-11; 2. Judges 3:31;
3. 1 Samuel 10:1; 4. Jeremiah 25:9;
- 27:6; 43:10; 5. Matthew 2:11; 6. John 1:40-42; 7. Apostles—Hebrews 2:3,4;
- Acts 8:14-18; Acts 19:6; 8. 1 Cor. 1:18; 8. Philemon 10-16; 10. James 4:14.

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## Remember

the dates JUNE 28—JULY 2, and plan to be with us in our CAMP GATHERING: preaching, fellowship!

# EARNESTLY CONTENDING FOR THE...

(Continued from Page 4)

Third, since Christ's church is a spiritual kingdom, and he has all authority being an absolute monarch, and since he reigns in the hearts of men, when the governing influence of Christ through his Word is really strong in the individual's life (as Christ has intended), there is no need for a super-structure of human government in the church. No doubt that is the reason we find God's plan only calls for the simplicity of the local, autonomous church. People who are totally committed and personally governed by Christ need a minimum of human government. They need only the simple form of church government found in the first century church to get the job done. God works primarily through individuals, personally governed by him, not the stuffy organizations of men.

However, it seems that when the personal government of Christ is weak or not felt at all in religious circles, men seek a strong, ecclesiastical organization to hold the people together and to accomplish their denominational ends.

## II. THE GOVERNMENT OF THE EARLY CHURCH WAS LOCALLY BASED AND AUTONOMOUS.

Now, leaving our study from the viewpoint of the kingdom, let us notice that the government of the early church was locally based and autonomous.

*Not "the Church," But "Churches"*

Jesus declared in Matthew 16, "I will build my church." He was speaking of the church in a general, universal sense—not as a collective unit of organization. When the New Testament makes reference to Christ's followers in an organized sense in the whole world, or in any given region, it is never THE CHURCH, but CHURCHES. (There is no such thing as a universal church or a national church. There is no such thing as church organization on a state, regional, or district basis—just the local, autonomous church is all we find in the inspired Scriptures).

Let us say again: when followers of Christ universally, or in any given area, are spoken of in an organized sense, it is never THE CHURCH, but CHURCHES. It was never THE CHURCH OF CHRIST, but THE CHURCHES OF CHRIST (Romans 16:16). It was never THE CHURCH OF MACEDONIA, but THE CHURCHES OF MACEDONIA (II Cor. 8:1). It was never The CHURCH OF ASIA, but THE CHURCHES OF ASIA (THE SEVEN CHURCHES OF ASIA) (I Cor. 16:9; Rev. 1:4). It was never THE CHURCH OF GALATIA, but THE CHURCHES OF GALATIA (Galatians 1:2). It was never THE CHURCH OF JUDAEA, but THE CHURCHES OF JUDAEA (Galatians 1:22). And so we could go on!

Beloved, this is not without significance—in fact it is very significant! This means the followers of Christ in the world or any given area were not welded

together by an ecclesiastical organization on a universal scale, nor on the basis of some political region—but that each church was locally based, independent, and autonomous in its church government.

Therefore, we read the following which has reference to local, autonomous units of church government directly under Christ: "The church which was at Jerusalem"—Acts 11:22; "The church of God which is at Corinth"—I Cor. 1:2; "The church of the Thessalonians"—I Thess. 1:1; etc.

Colossians 4:16 is significant. The letter was to be read to THE CHURCH in one place and then to one in another place—distinct, local units called "THE CHURCH."

Philippians 4:15 is especially significant. The latter part reads: "NO CHURCH communicated with me concerning giving and receiving, but ye only." By CHURCH he means the local church, for he is saying this in contrast with the local Philippian church, and this implies that Paul was not expecting CHURCHES to communicate as an organized unit to support him—for the extent of the government and organization of the church was only local (This implies that he was not expecting help from an organized unit as a district or national church, nor from local churches working through a crystalized district or national organization beyond their local boundries: NO CHURCH communicated).

### The Local, Autonomous Church

Now, turning our attention more in detail to the government of the local, autonomous church, we read Philippians 1:1. "PAUL AND TIMOTHEUS, the servants of Jesus Christ, to ALL THE SAINTS in Christ which are at Philippi, with THE BISHOPS and DEACONS." In a "nutshell" we have the whole picture of the local church here.

#### Paul and Timothy, Evangelists

Paul and Timothy with some other preachers (Silas and Luke) had started the church at Philippi. Now, years later, they are writing to them. Although Paul was an apostle (having reference to the extraordinary

#### IT MAY BE EITHER WAY

*The weight of sin may show upon a face;  
The back may bend in sin its burden bear;  
The feet may fail then falter in their pace;  
The head of hair may turn to gray by care.*

*Or...*

*The glow of grace may show upon a face;  
The back that's bent perhaps a cross may bear;  
The feet may yet lift and in purpose pace;  
The head of gray is filled with wisdom rare.*

*By A. BROTHER*

phase of his work as an official eyewitness of Christ), he was an evangelist like Timothy and they were doing the same work (I Timothy 2:7; I Cor. 16:10; I Thess. 3:2; II Timothy 4:5). Paul, years before, had been sent out from the local church at Antioch in Syria (Acts 13) to engage in preaching and evangelistic endeavors. He had reported back to the Antioch church several times. At one of the churches which he had help plant in the region of Derbe and Lystra of Asia Minor, he recruited a young man named Timothy to join him as as a preacher of the gospel (Acts 16:1-3). The elders of the local church there had ordained Timothy, sending him out to work with Paul (I Tim. 4:14; Ephesians 4:8,11; II Timothy 4:5; I Timothy 1:18).

What is the work of the New Testament evangelist? What is his relation to the local church? How does he fit into the government of Christ? As evangelists (messengers of the good news), Paul and Timothy won souls to Christ, started churches, established them in the truth, trained and ordained leaders, set churches in order, and confirmed and edified the churches. This constituted the work of the evangelist. He was sent out by the local church as the representative of Christ in the world. He had been given enough authority, which was inherent in the Word he preached, to get the job done (Titus 2:15). It is conceivable that under certain circumstances, which the Scriptures bear out, he might spend indefinite periods of time working in conjunction with an established local church—evangelizing, setting things in order, etc. But he should not be looked upon as a necessary permanent fixture in the established local church, nor should he usurp the responsibility of the elders.

### *Bishops*

Let us skip over “all the saints” for now, and examine the “bishops.” The word “bishop” means overseer. A modern translation of the word would be “supervisor” or “superintendent.” The word translated “bishop” in Philippians 1:1 is once rendered “overseer” in the New Testament. That is found in Acts 20:28 where it is obvious that Paul is speaking to the elders of the local church at Ephesus (Acts 20:17). Paul charged these elders in Acts 20:28, “Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers (BISHOPS), to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.” Titus 1:5-7 also makes it very plain that the elder and bishop refer to the same man or office in the church.

What is the extent of the governing of the bishop or elder then? Acts 20:17, 28, Philippians 1:1, and Titus 1 associate them with the local church. A plurality of them are mentioned as being in the local church. The apostle Peter (who was also an elder; Paul was an apostle and an evangelist) speaks to the elders (bishops) in I Peter 5:1-4. He said, “Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof...”

So the extent of the bishops oversight or governing responsibility is the autonomous, local church. In the churches mentioned in the New Testament, more than one bishop was over each local church (just the opposite of what we see in denominationalism today, one so-called bishop being found over many so-called churches.).

The bishop is limited to the local church in his governing responsibility, and the extent of his governing responsibility includes all phases of the work of the local church. He is over “all the flock” (Acts 20:28). He feeds the flock and sees that it is taken care of. He is over the “spiritual” and “material” (if such distinctions can be made). Acts 11:29, 30, indicates that he is over the “material” as well as the “spiritual.”

Other terms are used to apply to this office besides “bishop.” As we have noticed, the words “overseer” and “elder” are used (elder means older). I Timothy 4:14 speaks of the “presbytery,” which refers to the elders as a collective group (it could have been translated “eldership” here). And the elder is also called “pastor.” The word “pastor” is found in Ephesians 4:11 and referred to in I Peter 5:2-4. This word actually means shepherd, having to do with one who takes care of sheep. Peter instructs the elders to “feed the flock of God,” and then he says, “And when the chief Shepherd (Greek: chief pastor) shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.” Jesus is the chief Shepherd (or Pastor), and who is implied to be the pastors serving under the chief One? The elders, of course. Ephesians 4:11 distinguishes the evangelist (preacher) from the pastor (elder). The evangelist should never be called “the pastor” inasmuch as he is not an elder, let alone the elder.

### *Deacons*

The deacons are singled out as a distinct group in the Philippian church (1:1). The New Testament doesn’t say too much about their work. The word “deacon” means servant. Their position is not described as a governing one in the church. We might think of them as assistants to the bishops to serve in whatever way they are needed. Some pinpoint their work as being along the line of the “material,” but we would not limit it in such a way. Paul wrote in I Timothy 3:13, “For they that have used the office of a deacon well purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.”

### *All the Saints*

The church of the Lord Jesus Christ operates in two ways, in an organized sense and on an individual basis. On an individual basis every Christian is to teach and exhort daily, etc. (Acts 8:4; Hebrews 3:13; 10:25); every Christian personally is to engage in benevolent work, etc. (James 1:27; 2:15, 16; I John

(Continued Next Page)

3:17). He doesn't have to be told to do these things. But when the church acts as a collective unit, it must come through the organization of the local, autonomous church. Christ has delegated authority to the elders (and evangelists) in the function of the church (Mark 13:34; Acts 20:28; I Timothy 5:17; 3:4,5). As these qualified elders (they MUST meet the qualifications) humbly exercise themselves (I Peter 5:3; Mark 10:35-45) in this divinely decreed and delegated office, all the saints are commanded to "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).

Inasmuch as the elders and evangelists work under an arrangement of delegated authority from one who has all authority, they do not have authority to delegate further their authority to others. They have been authorized to regulate and guide the collective work of the church (even to assign temporary tasks to others, we believe), but their delegated authority does not give them the authority to delegate their authority to others in forming definite, new offices with crystalized, continuing organizations besides the one the Lord has given to get the job done. Nor is the church a democracy whereby the individual members can decide to start other religious organizations. The Lord has not authorized competing organizations within or without the local church—nor "churches" within the church. The organized life of the church is one.

Although the church is not a democracy, yet principles of personal consideration and respect should prevail. It is the spiritual kingdom of heaven. Although the elders have the responsibility of "rule" (and final decision) in the local church, the thoughts and feelings of others are taken into consideration. Of the church at Antioch, we read, "Then *the disciples*, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judaea" (Acts 11:29). In settling the circumcision question in the church at Jerusalem, we notice, "Then it pleased the apostles and elders, *with the whole church*, to send chosen men of their own company" to notify the Gentiles of their conclusions (Acts 15:22). □

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*Clock upon the mantle shelf,  
Ticking, tocking constantly,  
How you seem part of myself,  
Rhyming with the heart of me.*

*"Time is precious! Time is dear!"  
Is your never ending song.  
"Use it wisely while it's here;"  
You repeat, "before it's gone!"*

*Day and night without a rest  
You admonish me that Time  
Is a fleeting, passing guest  
And is but a moment mine.*

*Every tick is Time consumed;  
Every tock no more will be;  
Soon will Time itself be doomed,  
Yielding to Eternity.*

*Time is pulsing with a throb  
In each passionate tick tock.  
"O prepare to meet thy God!"  
Is the sermon of the clock.*

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