



Basic Bible Course

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The ORGANIZATION and GOVERNMENT of the CHURCH



Lesson Twenty-Six

INTRODUCTION: In Lesson 25 we were able to discover, from a careful study of God's word, that a clearly-defined **WORK and WORSHIP** is set forth for the **CHURCH** described therein. **SEVERAL DIFFERENCES** were noted between the **WORK AND WORSHIP OF THE CHURCH** as it was **IN THE BEGINNING** of Christianity and what has gradually come about in the so-called "**CHURCHES**" of **TODAY**. We asked **WHY, WHY** these differences exist. Also we demonstrated from the Scriptures that it was **CONTRARY TO GOD'S WILL** for them to continue.

In our present lesson, we turn next to consider the **ORGANIZATION and GOVERNMENT** of the church. Let us **SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES DILIGENTLY** to determine just what the church should be in these further respects:

I. THE ORGANIZATION OF THE CHURCH.

A. **WORLD-WIDE.** A careful examination of the New Testament reveals **NO ORGANIZATION** of the church as **OVER** or **BETWEEN** the congregations of Christ **ON EARTH**.

1. In the general sense of the word, Jesus Christ is the **HEAD**.

a. "And gave him to be the **HEAD** over **ALL THINGS** to the **CHURCH**, which is his **BODY**" (Eph. 1:22-23).

b. "Christ is the **HEAD** of the **CHURCH**..." (Eph. 5:23).

NOTE: Other than Jesus as the HEAD, the New Testament authorizes NO OTHER OFFICIALS over the congregations IN THE AGGREGATE. Neither is there any GOVERNMENT or ORGANIZATION for a GROUP of churches, or churches in a certain VICINITY or COUNTRY. Any other arrangement is strictly of HUMAN ORIGIN have NO STANDING WHATEVER in the Word of the Lord.

2. Under the **HEADSHIP** of **JESUS CHRIST**, the **CHURCH UNIVERSAL**, is styled as:

a. His **BODY** (Read Eph. 1:22-23; Col. 1:18-24).

b. His **WIFE** (Read Eph. 5:22-32; Rom. 7:4).

c. His **KINGDOM** (Read Col. 1:13; Rev. 1:9).

d. A **PRIESTHOOD**. Under **JESUS** as "**HIGH PRIEST**" (Heb. 5:6; 6:20) those who make up His church in the aggregate are "an holy priesthood" (1 Pet. 2:5), "a royal priesthood" (1 Pet. 2:9). Being **ROYAL**, this priesthood comprises **PRIESTS** who are also **KINGS** (Rev. 1:6). Rather than a particular class

WITHIN the church having this distinction, ALL its members are not only KINGS, but PRIESTS, also.

- e. A SPIRITUAL HOUSE. 1 Peter 2:5, 6 shows believers “as lively STONES... built up a spiritual house,” Jesus as the “CHIEF CORNER STONE” in the house. Verse 7 describes Him as “HEAD” of the corner.

B. LOCALLY.

1. In a CITY, PROVINCE, NATION or VICINITY. Although no organizational arrangements are given in the Scriptures as concerning more than one local assembly or congregation, yet, all the people of God in a given city, province, nation or vicinity are called the “church” in this or that area. EXAMPLES: “Church” in a city—1 Cor. 1:2; in a province—Acts 9:31; in a nation—Gal. 1:2; etc.
2. As a CONGREGATION. The only organizational arrangement for the church as authorized by the New Testament is for locally autonomous congregations or assemblies.
 - a. These local congregations (churches) could (and did) exist without being organized with officers of any kind for a time. As such they were merely groups of baptized believers maintaining together the work and worship of God according to his revealed will—groups of Christians banded together to carry out the will of God on earth.
 - b. Later on, when brethren grew enough in the grace and knowledge of Christ to qualify, two classes of “office” were authorized within the local congregations: 1) ELDERS, also called BISHOPS, PRESBYTERS, PASTORS, OVERSEERS, and 2) DEACONS.
 - c. Thus, when a local congregation was fully organized, as at Philippi, Paul could address his letter “to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the BISHOPS (i.e., elders) and DEACONS” (Phi. 1:1).

II. THE GOVERNMENT OF THE CHURCH.

NOTE: It should be noted and emphasized that the local congregations, as presented in the New Testament, were ALL on an EQUALITY before God; that they were ORGANICALLY SEPARATE; that they were ALIKE IN ORGANIZATION; that they were INDEPENDENT of each other; and that they all had the SAME WORK AND MISSION.

- A. THREE THEORIES have been devised by man for the government of religious people in the congregational capacity, giving rise to THREE DIFFERENT FORMS OF CHURCH GOVERNMENT. Let us dispose of these first that the NEW TESTAMENT teaching of church government may stand out the more emphatic:
 1. EPISCOPAL. This form of government recognizes three orders of the clergy – namely, deacons, who are generally young men serve a kind of apprenticeship; priests, who have charge of parishes and exercise large powers; and bishops, who have the oversight of a number of parishes. The entire district over which the bishop presides is known as a diocese. The Roman Catholic, Greek Orthodox and Anglican churches are examples of this form of church government. The Methodist Episcopal churches have a modified form of this kind.
 2. PRESBYTERIAL. This form is an attempt to reproduce the practice of the New Testament churches in which there was a plurality of elders. This form of government makes a distinction between the teaching elder, who is ordained as a minister and preacher, and the ruling elders, who are laymen selected for their ability in leadership.

They together form the session and decide matters of ecclesiastical business. The Presbyterian Church is one example of this form of government.

3. CONGREGATIONAL. This form of church government is based on the theory that each local church is a self-governing institution. All matters are settled by the vote of the members. The churches are loosely organized into associations, conventions, and congresses, but they retain complete independence. The Congregationalist and Baptist Churches are examples of this form of church government.

NOTE: The churches, as authorized by the New Testament, are governed by NONE of these forms.

- B. All the authority for governing the church that Jesus left on earth has been vested in the ELDERSHIP of the church.
 1. When Paul “called the ELDERS of the church” to Miletus from Ephesus (Acts 20:17), he told them to take heed unto themselves “and to all the FLOCK, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you OVERSEERS” (v. 28).
 2. Paul instructed Timothy, “Let the ELDERS that RULE well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and in teaching” (1 Tim. 5:17).
 3. Paul besought the Thessalonian brethren to “know them that labor among you, and are OVER YOU IN THE LORD, and admonish you; and to esteem them exceeding highly in love for their work’s sake” (1 The. 5:12).
 4. Again: “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).
 5. Again: “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).
 6. And again: “The ELDERS which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder,...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 ensamples to the flock.... Likewise, ye younger, SUBMIT yourselves unto the ELDER” (1 Pet. 5:1-5).
- C. In the infancy of the church in the New Testament, Paul declares Jesus “gave some, APOSTLES; and some, PROPHETS; and some, EVANGELISTS; and some, PASTORS and TEACHERS” (Eph. 4:11).
 1. In order to be an APOSTLE it was necessary that he be especially chosen from among those who companied with Christ’s disciples “all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, Beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us,...to be a witness...of his resurrection” (Acts 1:15-26). Note especially verses 21 and 22. It must be evident that since all such qualified “witnesses” of Jesus’ resurrection are DEAD, there can be no LIVING apostles in either the organization or the government of the church today. Of course, they are still with us through “the apostles’ doctrine—Acts 2:42—i.e., the New Testament, which they wrote as inspired from on high.
 2. PROPHECY was a special “gift,” not given to all, but to those whom the Holy Spirit chose. (Read 1 Cor. 12:1-11). However, prophecies were not to continue forever. As Paul said, “Charity never faileth: but whether *there be* PROPHECIES, they SHALL FAIL;...we PROPHECY IN PART. But when that which is PERFECT is come, then that which is in PART shall be DONE AWAY” (1 Cor. 13:8-10). As to what is “perfect,” David prophesied that “The law of THE LORD *is* perfect” (Psa. 19:7). This

did not refer to the OLD TESTAMENT law, for, referring to THAT law, Hebrews 7:19 declares “the law made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope *did*; by the which we draw nigh unto God.” Well, what law is it by which we obtain a better hope. James calls it “the perfect law of liberty” (Jam. 1:25). This almost **has** to refer to the **New Testament** Scriptures, as 2 Timothy 3:16-17 says that “All scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be PERFECT, throughly furnished unto all good works.” At the time Paul wrote that prophecy, being “in part,” should be “done away,” when “that which is perfect is come,” the New Testament was the COMING—but not fully revealed. It was not until John laid down the pen of inspiration in A.D.. 96, forbidding more to be added (Rev. 22:18) that the words “IS COME” could be applied to that which “is perfect”—the perfect law of liberty, the New Testament. Prophecy thereupon being “done away,” there were no longer LIVING prophets in the church. Of course, we still have them insofar as their prophecies are recorded in the New Testament.

3. EVANGELISTS were in the church from the start, but **not** as **rulers**. Evangelists, preachers, ministers and such like were all one and the same. For instance, the young preacher Timothy was told to “PREACH the word” (hence a PREACHER)...“do the work of an EVANGELIST”...and to “make full proof of thy ministry” (hence a minister) (Read 2 Tim. 4:1-5). The word “evangelist” means one who tells glad tidings or a preacher of the gospel. Since this work was to go on “always even unto the end of the world,” it follows we still have evangelists, preachers or ministers. However, since God gave them no part in church government IN THE NEW TESTAMENT, it would be WRONG TO INCLUDE THEM IN IT NOW.
 4. PASTORS (i.e., elders, bishops, presbyters, overseers) we still have. They alone are authorized to “rule” in the churches. However, in order to be ordained to this high office, brethren must first prove themselves qualified, which qualifications are given in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. These brethren are members of the congregation of which they are a part. Their authority does not go beyond the boundary or membership of their own congregation. No elder (pastor) has any authority over more than one congregation. As Acts 14:23 shows Paul and Barnabas ordaining elders (pastors) “IN” every church (NOT OVER SEVERAL CHURCHES). Any system of church government that extends the authority of elders beyond the confines of their own local congregation is contrary to the New Testament teaching and perverts God’s order for the government of his people. If one elder or all the elders of a congregation had authority over other congregations, then the congregation of which that elder or elders are members would be superior to the church over which this elder or elders rule. This would destroy the independence and equality of the churches; it would nullify the autonomy of the local congregation.
 5. TEACHERS, too, continue in the Divine plan. Teaching was to continue to the end of the world (Mat. 28:19-20). It was a self-continuing arrangement (Read 2 Tim. 2:2). However, the New Testament nowhere authorizes teachers to RULE but only to TEACH. Therefore, teachers are no part of the GOVERNMENT of the church.
- D. DEACONS and DEACONESSES:
1. Although their office carried no authority to govern, yet as we have already noticed, there was a certain class of officials in the New Testament church known as “DEACONS.”

- a. The word *diakonos* translated “deacon” means ministrant, i.e., servant. Thus deacons were brethren specially designated to serve in the church. Qualifications for their appointment are found in 1 Timothy 3.
 - b. Since the Scriptures make no provision for deacons to **rule**, they have no part in the church government.
 - c. Since the bishops (elders) ruled, deacons evidently served under their oversight, as directed by them.
 - d. The seven brethren who were looked out to look after the Grecian widows (Acts 6:1-6) are commonly referred to as deacons. They **MAY** have been deacons; but if so, the Bible is silent about it.
 - e. There were no differing **ORDERS** of deacons, arch-deacons, etc. As far as revealed scripture is concerned, deacons were all of equal rank.
2. Phebe (in Rom. 16:1) is described as “a servant of the church” at Cenchrea.
 - a. This word “servant” sometimes is translated “deaconess.”
 - b. Qualifications for deaconesses are not given in the New Testament.
 - c. Nothing is said in the Scriptures giving deaconesses authority to rule.
 - d. Because of her good work, Paul commended Phebe, asked the brethren to **RECEIVE** her in whatever business she had need. However, no indication is given that she had authority to enforce this request.

E. STEWARDS

1. Although the words “steward” and “stewardship” appear in God’s Word, they are not used to designate an office in the church.
2. In 1 Corinthians 4:1-2, Paul and Sosthenes (who wrote the book together) described themselves as **MINISTERS** of Christ and **STEWARDS** of God.
 - a. Paul was an apostle—and a steward.
 - b. Sosthenes was not an apostle—but he was a steward.
3. Bishops also are stewards (Tit. 1:7).
4. In fact, **ALL** of God’s people are stewards. Peter teaches, “As **EVERY MAN** hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good **STEWARDS** of the manifold grace of God” (1 Pet. 4:10).

NOTE: Since “EVERY MAN”—INCLUDING APOSTLES, BISHOPS, AND ALL—is a STEWARD, it should be apparent to all that THIS WORD CANNOT REFER TO CHURCH GOVERNMENT. By definition, it simply means MANAGER. God holds ALL CHRISTIANS RESPONSIBLE for GOOD MANAGEMENT of resources and opportunities, the idea of “steward” or “stewardship” is in THIS SENSE ONLY in New Testament Scriptures, NEVER in the sense of an OFFICE.

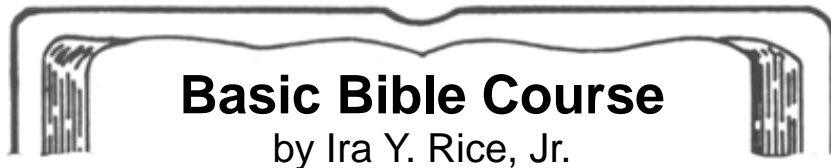
CONCLUSION: Contrary to modern custom, the organization and government of the church, as taught in the New Testament, is a simple, uncomplicated arrangement. With Christ as its only **HEAD**, the church universal has no hierarchy or superstructure of any kind over the congregations. Rather, as His body, wife, kingdom, priesthood and spiritual house, the church comprises locally autonomous congregations or assemblies, each responsible solely to Him and not to any human agency in between. Locally, these congregations can exist in an unorganized state until they can qualify a plurality of men to be appointed as **BISHOPS** (elders) to oversee the work and other men as **DEACONS** serving under the bishops. Bishops and deacons are to be appointed **IN** each church, not **OVER** a plurality of churches. The bishops rule; deacons do not. Not only the deacons (and deaconesses, if any), but also the evangelists, teachers, and any and all other members of a local church are under the “oversight” of the bishops. **ALL** are stewards.

Church organization and government, as described in the New Testament, applies to the PEOPLE involved therein, not to the TERRITORY where they live. The “parish” or “diocesan” idea, as under an episcopal form of government, nowhere is to be found in the New Testament.

Within a congregation, there is no such distinction as TEACHING elders and RULING elders, as all are required to be “apt to teach” and all are equally authorized to rule. Likewise, decisions are not made by majority vote of the congregations where elders have been ordained; neither by a majority vote of the elders and deacons jointly. Such would destroy completely the rulership of elders. And, as we have seen, God has given the RULE to ELDERS.

No distinction is made in the New Testament as to “clergy” and “laity.” Since all Christians are referred to as stewards, priests, and kings, without discrimination as to CLASSES of same, it follows that the whole clergy-laity concept is contrary to the word of God.

When Christians follow the New Testament pattern, all of these artificial forms of church organization and government, invented by man, will be put aside. In their stead, all local congregations will be independent from each other, equally autonomous under God, yet interdependent as in the same body of Christ. The elders of each congregation will rule over it, and it alone. All other members in each congregation will submit to that rule. Order and peace, according to God’s Word, will prevail; and denominations will all end.



**The
ORGANIZATION and GOVERNMENT
of the CHURCH**



Questions on Lesson Twenty-Six

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

REFERENCE NO. _____

GRADE _____

1. From your study of the New Testament, do you find any organization of any kind as OVER or BETWEEN the congregations of Christ on earth? _____ If yes, cite the Scripture:

2. According to the New Testament, who is the HEAD of the church? _____
3. Under Jesus, does the New Testament authorize other officials over the congregations in the worldwide sense? _____ If yes, cite proof: _____
4. Under Christ, list five terms describing various concepts authorized by the New Testament for the church universal: _____

5. List the passages of the New Testament authorizing the following officers in the church: pope, cardinal, archbishop, archdeacon: _____
6. In the event you cannot list any scriptures authorizing the foregoing, please explain whether they are SCRIPTURAL or UNSCRIPTURAL: _____
7. Organizationally speaking, what is the largest unit of the church in the New Testament?

8. How many "offices" are listed in the New Testament for the local congregation? _____
Name them: _____
9. When a church is organized as taught in the New Testament, list the officers it has:

10. When a congregation develops to the point it can appoint elders and deacons, which brethren have the rule? _____
11. List four other names meaning the same office as ELDER: _____

12. List three theories of church government, invented by man, now in use among so-called Christian churches, not taught in God's Word: _____

13. How does the EPISCOPAL theory of church government differ from the teaching of the New Testament? _____
14. Is the PRESBYTERIAL form of church government, as practiced, the same as found in the New Testament? _____ If not, point out the difference: _____
15. When a congregation develops to the point of having elders and deacons, are matters to be decided by CONGREGATIONAL vote? _____ If not, then how? _____

- 16. Does the church still have APOSTLES and PROPHETS living today? _____ Explain:

- 17. Define the word “evangelist”: _____

- 18. Do evangelists, preachers, ministers or teachers have an “OFFICE” in the church? _____ Cite proof: _____
- 19. What function is performed by DEACONS? _____
- 20. In the New Testament, which is authorized? A plurality of bishops and deacons WITHIN A SINGLE CONGREGATION OR a plurality of CONGREGATIONS under A SINGLE BISHOP?

DO YOU HAVE A QUESTION? _____

