

Governing God's Church

Text : **Ephesians 4: 7-16 , I Peter 5: 1-5**

A. Have you ever wondered why we do the things we do the way we do them?

**S#1.
S#2.**

1. You look around and see religions that operate in a variety of different ways.
2. Most of the people in those organizations don't know why they do what they do.
3. Each of us should be able to explain why we believe and why we do as we do.

I Pet. 3: 15 – ... AND DO NOT FEAR THEIR INTIMIDATION, AND DO NOT BE TROUBLED,
15 but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to
make a defense **to everyone who asks you to give an account for**
the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence;

S#3.

B. Even in our town there are churches administered in widely varying ways.

S#4.

1. There are churches where the local church is controlled by a distant headquarters.
2. Some are required to send much of their contributions to a headquarters
3. One has their preacher assigned to them without their consent.
4. Some have elders and others are run by the “pastor.”

C. Why are they all so different and why don't we do what most others do ?

S#5.

1. It all boils down to authority. **Who has the right to decide ?**
2. God has never left man without directions; **HE** makes His will known.
3. Our previous lesson emphasized our need to desire to receive God's will.
4. We had a couple of classes on the necessity to do things God's way.

D. Our lesson today will center on how God wants His church to be governed.

I. How did Christianity end up so divided on this subject ?

S#6.

A. As we read in the N. T., the Apostles were the final arbiters of truth.

S#7.

1. They supervised the congregations and corrected their mistakes. e.g. **I Corinthians**
2. **Ax 15** ... They were the arbiters of doctrinal disputes and their decision was final.

B. Since there were not enough Apostles to be in every area at the same time, they appointed elders in every congregation.

S#8.

1. **Acts 14: 23** – **When they had appointed elders for them in every church,...**
2. **Acts 8: 14-23** ... When a new congregation was established, the Apostles gave some special gifts ... including prophecy. (**I Cor. 12: 10**)

3. **Remember** : The New Testament did not exist at this time. *Compiled .. 170 A.D.*

C. **Some congregations were started which were not visited by an Apostle.** S#9.

1. For example, the church in Rome.
2. Titus was sent to some of these congregations to appoint elders.
 - a. **Titus 1: 5** – **For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city as I directed you, ...** S#10.
 - *b. Bear in mind that Titus did not have the ability to give gifts of the Spirit.
 - c. **Therefore ..** there were congregations lead by men with no ongoing guidance.

D. **Satan - Problems in the church started even during the Apostle's ministry.** S#11.

1. **Galatians** ... was written to combat the Jewish heresy. (*From Jewish converts.*)
2. **I John** ... was written to combat the gnostic heresy. (*From Greek converts.*)
3. **Corinthians** ... denying Apostolic authority.

S#12.

E. **There was a gap between the death of the Apostles and the compiling of the N.T.**

1. John was the last Apostle to die somewhere between 96 and 99 A.D.
2. The Muratorian Canon was not compiled until 170 A.D.
 - a. Some books were passed around as independent scrolls.
 - b. There were many more false writings than true ones. (*Pseudepigrapha*)
 - c. The complete N.T. as we know it was agreed upon in 393 A.D.
3. Those taught by the Apostles and those with gifts of the Spirit mostly stayed faithful.

S#13.

II. **One of the first great Apostasies was the organizational structure of the church.**

A. **Those who were taught by the Apostles tried to hold the line, but could not.** S#14.

1. There were multiple elders in every place ... **Tit. 1: 5**
2. Men started elevating one elder above the rest and calling him "*the bishop.*"
3. **Polycarp** was taught by the Apostle John and stood steadfastly against this practice.
 - a. Polycarp was an elder in Smyrna.
 - b. When martyred he said he had been serving God for 86 years. (*Born 69 A.D.*)
4. **Clement of Rome** thought no Christian should be above another.
 - a. Even though he was against the concept of a bishop, he was later called a bishop.
 - b. Clement believed that every Christian existed for the same purpose .. EVANGELISM

B. As the disciples of the Apostles passed, the error became entrenched. S#15.

1. **Ignatius of Antioch** was martyred in 107 A.D.
 - a. There was strong resistance to the appointment of bishops in Antioch.
 - b. Ignatius acknowledged that bishops existed and approved of them.
2. By 200 A.D. **Tertullian of Carthage** recognized a clear distinction between clergy and laity.
3. About 210 A.D. **Clement of Alexandria** lists the offices of the church as being, the bishop, presbyters, deacons and widows.
4. From 135–193 was a period of “acute hellenization” of the church

C. Bishops began to vie for power. S#16.

1. Bishops in larger churches had more influence so bishops often moved to larger ones
2. Bishops ruled over cities and began to expand boundaries forming diocese.
3. As boundaries expanded there were constant disputes over territory.
4. The battle over supremacy ultimately came down a struggle between the five largest Rome, Alexandria, Antioch, Jerusalem and Constantinople.
5. 312 A.D. .. Constantine stepped in and began to reorganize the church like Rome.
6. In 606 A.D. the Bishop of Rome was given the title “Universal Bishop” = the papacy

S#17.**D. During the reformation men argued over how much reformation was enough.****E. The restoration movement is about going back to the blue print n start over.****III. The biblical pattern is clearly set forth. S#18.****A. The Apostle Paul referred to the congregation as being composed of saints, elders and deacons. S#19.**

1. **Phil. 1: 1** – Paul and Timothy, bond-servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints **S#20.**
in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers and deacons:
2. Surely, if there had been a bishop, Paul would have mentioned him.
3. There are other functions, but no other office is mentioned.

Rom. 12: 4-8 For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, **S#21.** ⁵ so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. ⁶ Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly: if prophecy, **S#22.** according to the proportion of his faith; ⁷ if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching; ⁸ or he who exhorts, in his

exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.

B. Every congregation is to have multiple elders to perform specific functions. S#23.

1. Elders protect the members. S#24.

Acts 20: 28-29 – Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. **29** "I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock;

2. Elders teach the members. S#25.

I Tim. 5: 17-18 – The elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching. **18** For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle the ox while he is Threshing," and "The laborer is worthy of his wages."

3. Elders exercise oversight of the congregation. S#26.

I Pet. 5: 1-4 – Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, **2** shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; **3** nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock. **4** And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.

4. Elders must mature the young and the weak Christians. S#28.

Eph. 4: 11-13 – And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, **12** for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; **13** until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.

S#29.

C. Elders are entitled to the proper respect and cooperation that the job calls for.

1. Elders must be loved and respected. S#30.

I Thes. 5: 12-13 – But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction, **13** and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Live in peace with one another.

2. We must submit to the leadership of the elders. S#31.

Heb. 13: 17 – Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.

- *3. Preachers are not elders, bishops, presbyters, pastors or shepherds. S#32.

D. Congregations are to appoint deacons as needed.**S#33.**

1. **Acts 6** ... A deacon is appointed for a specific task. (*not honorary position*)
 - a. Deacon : “diakonos” ... a servant, one who execute the commands of another
 - b. A deacon can be appointed on an ad hoc basis or permanently.
2. A deacon has no authority over any other member, only over his assigned task.
3. A deacon is an officeholder so he must be of the same moral standard as an elder.
4. The deacon who serves well earns the honor and respect of the church.

S#34.

I Tim. 3: 13 – For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a high standing and great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.

E. There are official functions which are not offices.**S#35.**

1. Evangelist ... a person who does a specific task ... proclaim the word.
2. Teacher ... Everyone is commanded to teach and all are expected to do so, but some are officially recognized as teachers.

James 3: 1 – Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment.
3. Widows ... **I Tim. 5: 9ff** ... The order of widows is referred to by ancient writers.

F. Anything more than these are too much and anything less is not enough.**S#36.****G. NOTE : The business meeting system is nowhere mentioned in scripture.****S#37.****IV. The church is a kingdom, a theocracy, ruled by God .. NOT a democracy.****S#38.****A. Jesus the Christ is the ONLY head of His church.****S#39.**

1. **Eph. 1: 19-23** – These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His **S#40.** might **20** which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, **21** far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. **22** And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, **23** which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all. (cf.— **Col. 1: 18**)
2. **Acts 20: 28** ... The church is His property to rule as He chooses.

B. Jesus is sovereign. No one can overrule Him or alter any of His commands.**S#41.**

1. **Matt. 28: 18** ... All authority is His in Heaven and on earth.
2. There is no one on this earth who may set in His seat as His **vicar**.

3. Elders administer His will and make decisions on expedients, **BUT**
 - a. They may not create new doctrine or even alter the old doctrine. (*modernize*)
 - b. Elders may not choose to ignore the doctrine that are inconvenient or unpopular.

CONCLUSION :

S#42.

A. Bottom-line : We must all obediently conform to the system our Lord ordained.

1. There are other systems of government which are very efficient that we may not use.
2. There are fads in worship that would attract more people, but they are unauthorized.

B. Our surrender to His will reflects our heart toward Him.

S#43.

1. "If you love me keep my commandments." **John 14: 15**
2. He has expressed His will concerning the administration of His church.
 - a. **Titus 1: 5** ... Elders in every place.
 - b. **I Tim. 3: 13** ... Deacons serving the physical needs.
 - c. **II Tim. 4: 1-2** ... Evangelists proclaiming the word.
 - d. **Eph. 4: 11** ... Teachers teach His word.
 - e. **Rom. 12** ... Saints using their abilities to serve Him in every way possible.

S#45.

C. It all starts with a confession of faith, obedience to the gospel and a commitment.

INVITATION :

Communion slide **Optional** S#46.

Lesson Text :**Ephesians 4: 7-16**

7 But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. **8** Therefore it says, "WHEN HE ASCENDED ON HIGH, HE LED CAPTIVE A HOST OF CAPTIVES, AND HE GAVE GIFTS TO MEN."

9 (Now this expression, "He ascended," what does it mean except that He also had descended into the lower parts of the earth? **10** He who descended is Himself also He who ascended far above all the heavens, so that He might fill all things.) **11** And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, **12** for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; **13** until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. **14** As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; **15** but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, **16** from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.

I Peter 5: 1-5

Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, **2** shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; **3** nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock. **4** And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. **5** You younger men, likewise, be subject to your elders; and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE.

Good Reference : The Early Christian's Speak ... By Ferguson (esp. footnotes)

<http://www.auburn.edu/~allenkc/openhse/clergy.html>