

The First Century Church - The Organization and Discipline of the Church - Part 1

Introduction: The Holy Spirit through Christ and the apostles organized the church perfectly to accomplish what God wanted to do in the church. The Church was not organized for worldly or fleshly success but for spiritual success. The way the church is organized has much to do with its character and its spirituality. We cannot improve on the wisdom of the Spirit when we organize the church today. What can we learn from the first century church as pictured in scripture?

1. Jesus is the only universal head of the church - Ephesians 1:22, 23. The scriptures and the early church knew nothing of a worldly head such as the pope in Roman Catholicism. The papacy evolved gradually as the church drifted from the apostolic arrangement of the first century into human ideas.
2. Christ set in the church five teaching ministries - (apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers - Ephesians 4:11) and one ministry for physical and material matters (deacons - Acts 6:1-6; 1 Timothy 3:8-13).
 - A. Apostles - Ephesians 4:11.
 - 1) Christ first chose 12 apostles and later added Paul as apostle to the Gentiles - Luke 6:12-16; Acts 9:15; 22:14,15; 26:15-18; 1 Corinthians 9:1,5; 15:8-10; 2 Corinthians 12:12; Galatians 1:1; Romans 11:13; Galatians 2:7-9. (In order that there might be 12 apostles at the founding of the church, the Lord chose Matthias to replace Judas who had betrayed Jesus and killed himself - Acts 1:15-26).
 - 2) Apostles had to be eyewitnesses of the resurrected Christ - Acts 1:8,21,22; 22:14,15; 1 Corinthians 9:1; 15:3-8.
 - 3) Apostles were ordained directly by Christ himself (There are some others referred to in scripture as "apostles" in an honorary way, or because they were "messengers" "sent" by the church ["apostle" = "one sent"], but these are not the apostles of Christ in the sense that the twelve and Paul were).
 - 4) The apostles were guided by the Holy Spirit into all truth - John 14:26; 15:26, 27; 16:13, 14. When the apostles taught and made rules in the early church, they were speaking with Christ's authority - Matthew 10:40; 1 Corinthians 14:37.
 - 5) The apostles had authority over congregations and Christians anywhere in the world, as seen from their work in the New Testament - Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 1:8.
 - 6) There are no apostles on earth today. The New Testament does not support the Roman Catholic idea that the apostles were to have successors holding the same authority. The work of the apostles was foundational - Ephesians 2:20. The original apostles still function today through their writings - 2 Peter 1:12-16; 3:15, 16; Ephesians 3:3-5; compare Luke 16:27-31.
 - B. Prophets - Ephesians 4:11.
 - 1) Through the Holy Spirit, prophets had the power to receive messages from God and deliver them to people - 1 Corinthians 12:4-11,28,29; 14:1-5,24,25,29-32; Acts 11:27,28; 13:1; 21:10,11.
 - 2) Some people prophesied after the laying on of Paul's hands following their

baptism - Acts 19:5, 6. Paul's command to tongue-speakers to pray for the gift of interpretation and his counsel to desire especially the gift of prophecy strongly infers that one could also pray for needed gifts - 1 Corinthians 14:1,13. The spirit gave the gifts just as he willed - 1 Corinthians 12:11.

- 3) The prophets were a great help to the early church in knowing God's teaching before the New Testament scriptures were complete and available to the churches. This work of the prophets, like that of the apostles, was foundational - Ephesians 2; 20.

C. Evangelists (preachers) - Ephesians 4:11.

- 1) Philip and Timothy are called evangelists; Titus and a number of other men mentioned in Acts and the epistles who did similar work are seen by inference to be preachers/evangelists - Acts 8:1-40; 21:8; 2 Timothy 4:5; 1 Timothy 3:1-7; 5:22; Titus 1:5-9; Ephesians 6:21,22; Philippians 2:19-30; Colossians 4:7-13; 2 Thessalonians 1:1; 2 Timothy 4:10-12,19,20; Acts 18:24-28; 1 Corinthians 3:6.
- 2) The work of an evangelist included these duties:
 - a. To convert, baptize, and teach Christ's commands to people - Matthew 28:19, 20; 1 Timothy 4:13-16; Titus 2.
 - b. To ordain elders (pastors, overseers) and deacons in local churches - 1 Timothy 3:1-13; 5:22; Titus 1:5-9; and to judge the cases of elders who sinned - 1 Timothy 5:19-22.
 - c. To counter false teaching - 1 Timothy 1:3; Titus 3:10, 11; 2 Timothy 2:23-26.
 - d. To be an example to the believers - 1 Timothy 4:12.
 - e. To train church workers - 2 Timothy 2:2.
- 3) Evangelists were ordained by the elders of a local church - 1 Timothy 4:14.
- 4) Sometimes an evangelist worked primarily with one local congregation, but at other times he worked with many at once. His responsibility exceeded the bounds of one local church - 1 Timothy 1:3; Titus 1:5.
- 5) Evangelists were generally to be supported to give their full time to the work of the word - 2 Timothy 2:3-7; 1 Corinthians 9:14; Galatians 6:6; Luke 10:3-8; compare Acts 6:2-4. But in some circumstances it was necessary or needful for them to support themselves by secular work while preaching - 1 Corinthians 9:12-15; Acts 18:1-4.

D. Pastors (elders) - Ephesians 4; 11.

- 1) This office was described by three different titles:

<u>Greek</u>	<u>English</u>
<i>Poimen</i>	pastor or shepherd
<i>presbuteros</i>	elder or presbyter
<i>episkopos</i>	bishop or overseer

In Acts 20:17, 28, 29 and 1 Peter 5:1-4, all three names or functions are attached to the same group of officers. See also Titus 1:5, 7, where elders and overseers are equated.

- 2) Every local church had its own elders (overseers, pastors) - Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5; Philippians 1:1; Acts 20:27; James 5:14. Thus the elders of any local church had authority only over that local church.
- 3) Every reference speaks of each local church having a plurality of elders.
- 4) No elder, (overseer, pastor) is ever spoken of in scripture as having an office superior to that of his fellow elders.
- 5) Elders were ordained by an evangelist - Titus 1:5; 1 Timothy 3:1-7; 5:22; and the cases of elders who sinned were judged by an evangelist, who was not to receive an accusation against an elder without two or three witnesses and was to publicly rebuke the guilty - 1 Timothy 5:19-22.
- 6) Before he was ordained, an elder had to have the qualifications given in scripture - 1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9. The evangelist who hastily ordained an unqualified man as an elder became a partaker in his sins - 1 Timothy 5:22.
- 7) Elders judged, ruled, taught, prayed for and led Christians of their local congregation and protected them from false and divisive teachers - Acts 20:28,29; 1 Timothy 5:17,18; 1 Peter 5:2,3; Titus 1:9-11; James 5:14-16. They were responsible to God for the welfare of those in their care - Hebrews 13:17.
- 8) Elders who gave much time to teaching the word were to be supported financially - 1 Timothy 5:17, 18; Galatians 6:6.

Conclusion: In our next lesson we will study the offices of teachers and deacons; the selection, ordination, and removal of church officers; the autonomy of the local church, and the subjects, purpose and procedure of church discipline.

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