

Church Organization **02-12-07**

In Ephesians 4:11-16 (and a parallel in 1 Corinthians 12:28) we are told that when Jesus ascended to heaven, the church He had purchased was left with certain gifts to ensure it's proper function. It states in verse 11 that these gifts were Apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. We understand (particularly because of the parallel passage) that these are not ALL of the gifts (we ought to, for example, include the head of the church (Jesus) or deacons in this list), but we know that these are important parts of the church.

These gifts are broken into two categories: the universal church, to which belong the Headship, Apostle and Prophets, who gave us the foundation of the church (Ephesians 2:20), and the local church, to which belong evangelists, pastors, teachers and deacons.

There is something wonderful to learn about these offices. We know that Jesus is the Head of the church (Ephesians 1:22), but we may not know that Jesus also holds all of the other offices in the church as well. Jesus is an apostle (Hebrews 3:1), a prophet (John 6:14), an evangelist (Matthew 4:17), a pastor (1 Peter 5:4), a teacher (Matthew 23:10), and a deacon (Acts 3:13).

We often point out some of the errors in which the denominations participate on this issue. By calling preachers pastors, or creating new offices (pope, president or general assembly) or removing offices of the church, we know this is contrary to the design of Christ. This strange design demonstrates that there is no interest in being the church that Jesus built. But we ought to consider that many times even churches which esteem the design are in error on their thinking. Here are five examples of such mistaken assumptions.

1. All offices have qualifications

All of the offices of the church have qualifications. The offices of the universal church (headship, apostle and prophet) had qualifications (headship – Hebrews 7:16-21; apostle – Acts 1:21-22; prophet – Acts 8:14-17). We also know that offices such as elder and deacon have specific qualifications (elders/pastors/overseers/bishops - 1 Timothy 3:1-7, Titus 1:5-9; deacons/servants - 1 Timothy 3:8-13). But do we understand that teachers and preachers also have qualifications that must be met? In 1 Timothy 2:22-26 Paul lists their qualifications. ALL offices in the church have qualifications.

2. Offices are not optional

Many times churches lack qualified men to fill an office in the local church. They may come to believe that, since the church did not collapse, those offices are not necessary. This is a common error, to believe that a church has the option not to seek to fill the offices within the church. Jesus designed the church with a specific pattern. Would we say that without water nearby, it is not necessary to be baptized? Or would instead we seek for the place to accomplish that purpose? We are told not to add to nor take away from the words of Scripture (meaning, their authority) in Revelation 22:18-19. Not making an effort to fill an office because we do not believe it is necessary is as much as error as adding offices to the church.

3. All members work on the qualifications

When we look at the qualifications of the offices in the church, it is noted that they often are very similar or the same. This is because fundamentally, these qualifications are the virtues of spiritual maturity that all Christians are working to accomplish. For example, compare the qualification so elders and deacons in 1 Timothy 3 to the graces we are to grow in 2 Peter 1:5-7; we can look out our marital obligations in

Colossian 3:18-21, and compare this to elders and deacons as well. We all ought to be teachers at some point (Hebrews 5:12), not just those who serve the church. Every qualification found in scripture for the local church offices is found elsewhere for all Christians, with just a few exceptions (the requirements of gender or of being married, for example). Too, every local office is spoken of in a generic context as being a work of all Christians; Elders in Titus 2:2-3, Teachers in Colossians 3:16, Deacons in 1 Corinthians 4:1, and Preachers in Ephesians 4:15.

4. Church offices are not rewards.

Sometimes we have a mindset that if someone is not qualified to serve in an office, they are being denied some important honor. This is not the case. Not everyone is called to do every work (1 Corinthians 12:18-19). There is no shame or weakness in not being called to an office; Paul could not be an elder while Peter could; there is no shame in this. At the same time, events in our lives disqualify us from the offices of the church; there is no shame in this either.

5. Offices are not filled by officers

This might be a bit difficult to grasp at first, but church offices are not filled by officers, they are filled by Christians. One who does the work of an elder may be an elder, but there is nothing in that person that is different apart from their doing that work. Using the term officer means that, for example, an elder must be found to fill an eldership, or a preacher found to fill a preacher-position. Yet this is not accurate; they are all elder or preacher or deacon because they do that work, NOT because they are a distinct type of Christian. Denominations create the idea that there are two classes of Christian: the clergy and the laity. In Matthew 23:8-10 Jesus destroyed this thinking by demanding that we not have titles attached to a person. We are saved exclusively as Christians. There is no such thing as an elder without an eldership, a preacher without a pulpit, etc. The office is where the title is laid, not on the individual.

We know that there are many misconceptions about the structure of the church. It is of utmost importance that we identify where we may have erred before we attempt to remedy others (Matthew 7:1-5).