

# CHURCH GOVERNMENT

**The Church is not a governmental organization** - though in the church, God has set governing bodies, gifts of administration and other ministries to help church function orderly and effectively. (1 Cor. 12:28. 1 Peter 2:5)

**The Church is the body of Christ with Christ as its Head** - it is made up of all people who through faith in His substitutionary death on the cross, have been brought back into fellowship with God the Father. (Eph 1:22, 4:15, 5:23 Col. 1:18, 2:19)

**Church government is for the benefit of the many members of Christ's body.** The individual members are not for the benefit of church leaders or church governments. Although there is only one true church of which all believers are members, we believe every Christian should be joined to a local fellowship. (Heb. 10:25 Mark 2:27 Eph. 4:4-6)

**The purpose of church government within a local fellowship** is to provide an environment where the gifts and ministries of that body have the freedom to function according to the Spirit's leading. God has set ministries within the church whose function is to equip the individual members for the work of the ministry (*according to their own unique giftings*) for the greater goal of the building up of the body of Christ. (Eph. 4:10-14)

**The ministries within the church are not to be confused with Church Government.** What one sees when he looks at the church should be the life of the church, and not church government. Local church government is a restraint for those who follow their own initiative and not the leading of the Spirit. (1 Tim. 3 Act 20: 17-36 Eph. 4)

**God in His wisdom instructed** the authors of the New Testament to **describe define** and **give examples** of the way to govern the local Church. God's way of governing His church is *theocratic in character*. That is to say, God *chooses calls and equips certain* persons to be leaders and overseers of His people, investing and delegating them with *degrees of authority according* to His will. In the New Testament these persons called to lead were most commonly called "Elders". (1 Pet. 5 Act 20: 17-36 Titus 1:5)

**We believe that the Scripture clearly teaches that God has chosen to govern the local church through a group of recognized elders.** It is vitally important to the health and stability of local churches to recognize which persons are the ones God has called to lead them.

## WHAT IS AN ELDER AND DEACON AND WHAT DO THEY DO?

### Elders

The term **bishop**, **elder** and **shepherd** are words used to describe the office of elder. The term **bishop** places emphasis on the function of the man, the word **elder** describes the character of the man, and **shepherd** emphasizes the role of caring, feeding and guarding the flock of God. Peter brings all three terms together when he instructs the elders to be good bishops as they care for the church.

*"Therefore, I exhort the **elders** [presbyteros] 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, **shepherd** [poimaino] the flock of God among you, exercising oversight [episkopeo] not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God." (1 Peter 5:1-2)*

#### **The functions of the elders are:**

- **Preach and teach the Gospel** (\*) (1 Tim 3:2; Tit 1:9)
- **Give pastoral oversight** (Acts 20:17-36; 1 Peter 5:2)
- **Exercise leadership by example** (1 Peter 5:2)
- **Visit and pray for the sick** (James 5:14)
- **Administer church discipline** (James 5:14)
- **Administer executive powers** (Heb 13:17)
- **Labor in word and doctrine** (1 Tim 5:17)
- **Ordain and send out others into ministry** (Titus 1:50)

**The qualifications** for the office of **Elder** are laid down by the Apostle Paul in (1Tim 3:1-7, 1Peter 5:1-5)

\* **Note:** All elders are not teachers but all must be able to instruct and defend the truth (1Tim 5:17-19, Rom. 12:4-8, James 3:1-2)

### Deacons

The term **deacon** comes from the Greek word [*diakonos*], meaning "**servant**." The New Testament describes deacons as persons set apart to take care of the administrative side of church life in order to free those with the more specifically "*spiritual*" gifts for the work to which God had called them. Their office was formed out of necessity in order to lighten the elders' load. They are governmentally under the elders' authority - assisting the elders in caring for the needs of the church. (Acts 6:1-2)

#### **The functions of deacons are:**

- **Attend to benevolent finances** (Acts 6:1-2)
- **Assist in the administrative duties** (Acts 6:1-2)
- **Exercise leadership by example** (1 Timothy 3:8)

**The qualifications** for the office of **deacon** are laid down by the Apostle Paul in (1Timothy 3:8-13.) It is clear from this passage as well as from (Acts 6:1-6) and (Philippians 1:1) that the office was clearly recognized in the early Church probably because there was a close similarity between this office and that of the Levite or synagogue attendant with which Jewish Christians would have *been familiar*. It is of note that the word "deacon" is used of Jesus Himself (Rom 15:8, translation. [*servant*]; (Ga 12:17), translation. [*agent*]).