

SUBJECT 6 – THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH

Outline of
Subject 6- The Christian Church

of
Dr. Alva J. McClain's
Series on

CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY

DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH

INTRODUCTION

I. The English word “Church”

1. Derivation

From the Greek “kuriakos” - “the Lord's”; that which belongs to the Lord.

cf. 1 Cor. 11:20 - “The Lord's supper”; Rev. 1:10 - “The Lord's Day”.

2. Popular Use

- (1) A local congregation of professed Christians.
- (2) A denominational group of congregations.
- (3) The universal body of professed Christians.
- (4) A building used for religious worship.

Note. No Biblical authority for (2) and (4). A denomination has no Biblical authority for calling itself a Church. Better to say Brethren Churches, etc. There is only one Church, but many local churches.

3. Occurrence in Scripture

Not found in the Old Testament; 113 times in the New Testament. In every instance but one, it is the translation of the same Greek word “ekklesia”.

The exception is Acts 19:37 where the translation should be “temple”, cf. A.R.V.

II. The Greek Word “EKKLESIA”

1. Derivation

From “ek” - out from; and “kaleo” - to call. It means simply - A called out body.

2. Occurrence in the New Testament

Total of 115 times. Rendered “church” 112 times; “assembly” three times.

3. Pre-Christian Use

- (1) In Greek literature the word was in common use to designate an assembly of free citizens in a city-state summoned by a herald.
- (2) In the Septuagint it is often used to translate the Hebrew word “kahal” referring to an assembly of Israelites called together for worship or other purposes. Cf. Lev. 4:13 where the “assembly” seems to be distinguished from the general congregation.

Note: Thus the word “ekklesia” came into Christian use with definite associations. To the Greek it would suggest a democratic assembly of free citizens; and to the Jew a theocratic assembly of a people who belong to God. Lindsay thinks “both of these ideas may be found combined in the New Testament. “Ekklesia”, that is, a “Theocratic-democracy” in which all members are equal and free, but who acknowledge God as the ground of their freedom and the final source of authority, His will being realized in their deliberations and service.

4. General Use of “Ekklesia” in the New Testament.

- (1) A Political Assembly of free citizens. See Acts 19:32, 39, 41 and context.
This was an “ekklesia”, but not lawfully convened.
- (2) The Jewish Assembly of the Old Testament. See Acts 7:38 where the “ekklesia” in the wilderness” is simply the “Jewish congregation called together in solemn assembly.
- (3) The Christian Church of the New Testament. So all other New Testament passages, with two possible exceptions: Heb. 2:12 seems to be a reference to the Jewish synagogue assembly. But in Matt. 18:15-20 the context seems to indicate the Christian church is in view. cf. the similarity of 18 with 16:18-19.

Note: These three meanings are wholly distinct. The Jewish ekklesia in the wilderness is as distinct from the Christian ekklesia as the Ephesian ekklesia is distinct from both.

5. Different uses of “ekklesia” with specific reference to the Christian Church.

- (1) The Universal Church: the whole spiritual body of true Christian believers, regardless of location or time. cf. Eph. 1:22-23, Heb. 12:23.
- (2) The Local Church: a local group of professed Christian believers. cf. 1 Cor. 1:2, 16:19

- (3) **The Historical Church:** The whole body of professed Christian believers on earth during a definite period of its history. cf. Acts 9:31 A.S.V. and Rev., chapters 1-3.

Notes:

- (a) The above are not three separate churches. The Universal Church is manifested on earth in the local and historical churches. The Local Church is the Universal Church manifested, in any particular place. The Historical Church is the Universal Church manifested in any particular period of time.
- (b) For the terms used above I claim no exclusive authority. They are only intended to serve as instrumental in our study. Other terms have been suggested, such as Spiritual and External, Invisible and Visible, Ideal and Real, Organism and Organization. Thus my Universal Church would be the ideal, invisible, spiritual organism; while my Local and Historical Churches are the two aspects of that which others have called the Visible, the Real, External, or the Church in organized form.
- (c) My definitions, of course, must be regarded as tentative until they have been justified by our study of the Biblical material.
- (d) The definitions should be carefully compared and differences noted. The Universal Church contains only true believers, and includes those on earth and in heaven. The Local and Historical Churches have to do with members on earth only, but may include both true believers and mere professors.
- (e) The most important distinctions for our study are the Universal Church and the Local Church through which the Universal Church takes its form in any particular place. The Historical Church is simply the aggregate of Local Churches on earth during a certain period of history. And even this historical church is pictured symbolically by a local church. See Revelation Chapters 2 and 3.

THE UNIVERSAL CHURCH

The whole spiritual body of true Christian believers, regardless of location or circumstance. (From here on this will be simply designated The Church)

I. THE REVELATION OF THE CHURCH

1. In the Old Testament through types. I find no direct reference to the Church as such in the Old Testament. But there are many types - cf. The Temple, etc. A revelation in type is veiled until its fulfillment, however.
2. In the Gospels through prophecy. Christ predicts clearly the coming church in Matt. 16:18.
3. In the Acts through history. Here we find the church described as it actually was manifested in history.
4. In the Epistles through doctrine. The complete revelation of the church is given in the doctrinal Epistles, especially 1 Cor., Eph., and Col.

Note: There are two erroneous views on this point.

- (1) The Post-millennial view: that every prophecy of the glorious future of Israel is a direct reference to the church. cf. A.V., chapter heading of Isa. 60 and 59.
- (2) The Bullinger view: that the church is revealed exclusively in the Pauline prison epistles; nowhere else. Based on a mistaken interpretation of Eph. 3:5-6. The new revelation is not the church itself, but a certain aspect, namely, that Jew and Gentile enter it on same basis as fellow heirs.

II. THE HISTORICAL BEGINNING OF THE CHURCH

1. The first direct reference to the church is found in Matt. 16:18. Two things should be noted here:
 - (1) That the Church is not yet begun.
 - (2) That Christ promises He “will build” it.

Question: When did Christ begin to build?

2. The “Building” of the Church began on the Day of Pentecost. The proof is as follows:
 - (1) Christ bade the disciples wait for the Baptism of the Holy Spirit.

Acts 1:4-5

(2) On Pentecost the Spirit came to fulfill the promise. Acts. 2:1-4

(3) Eph. 2:22 speaks of the “building” of the Church as a work wrought “through the Spirit”. The very word of Christ’s prophecy is thrice repeated - “built” - “builded” - “builded”.

(4) In I Cor. 12:12-13 Paul declares that men are made members of the Body of Christ through Spirit Baptism. A.R.V. translates “were baptized”. And the preposition is “en”, the same as in Acts 1:5.

3. Conclusion - On the Day of Pentecost, the Lord began to build His Church, forming a spiritual body through the work of the Holy Spirit.

4. Note several erroneous views:

(1) Church began somewhere in Old Testament.

(2) Church began somewhere in Gospels.

(3) Church began at close of Acts when Paul wrote Ephesians (Bullinger).

III. THE UNITY OF THE CHURCH.

There is but one true church which is the Body of Christ. This is proved:

1. By the symbolic term used to describe it. The Church is called the “Body of Christ” of which He is the Head. As there is but one Head, so there can be only one body. One head with two bodies would be just as great a monstrosity as one body with two heads.

2. By the plain statement of Scripture. See Eph. 2:14-15 - “one new man--one body”, and Eph. 4:4-5 - “one body, spirit, Lord, etc.” We might just as well talk about two Christs, three Spirits, as to talk about several churches.

3. Can this one body be identified with any one existing Church organization? All such attempts are futile and foolish. Two organizations do make this claim - Mormons and Roman Catholics. The latter has tempered the claim by admitting salvation is possible outside her visible limits. But this does not make it tolerable. For any organization to claim to be the one true Church, means that all outside are lost, because there are no saved persons outside it. And that is a fearful claim. This leads to next point.

IV. THE MEMBERSHIP OF THE CHURCH

1. Includes ALL true Christians in the present age.
1 Cor. 1:1-2 shows this latter was written to all Christians in every place, and 1 Cor. 12:13 says all were baptized into the one body.
2. Includes only those who are true Christians.
Eph. 5:23 - Christ is the Head and Savior of the Church. Therefore, There can be no unsaved within it. And there can be no hypocrites in the Church!
3. Induction into the Church is the work of Christ through the Holy Spirit.
In Acts 2:47 - the Lord adds to the Church. In 1 Cor. 12:13 - the Spirit baptizes into the Church. This is not man's work in any sense. We can preach the Word, call upon men to believe, baptize them, write their names on church rolls - BUT only Christ through the Spirit can add a soul to the Body of Christ.
4. But unsaved persons may gain entrance to the local church. Gal. 2:4, Jude 4,

Acts 20:28-29
5. Question: Are the Old Testament saints within the one true Church of the present age?

V. THE NATURE OF THE CHURCH

The nature of the church is set forth most fully in I Cor. 12:12-31 under the figure of a human body. (Read this carefully). By the use of this figure Paul teaches that the church is a living organism, rather than a mere organization. There is a vast difference between the two.

A microscope is an organization; an eye is an organism. In an organization the parts are joined together externally and mechanically, but there is no vital union. An organism is a complex thing made of a number of essential and mutually dependent parts, all of which partake of a common life.

The Church is literally the Body of Christ, having the following characteristics:

1. Unity - 1 Cor. 12:12 - "one"
2. Diversity - 1 Cor. 12:14-20 - "many"
3. Spiritually - 1 Cor. 12:13 - "by one Spirit"
4. Visibility - 1 Cor. 12:27 - "the body"
5. Universality - 1 Cor. 12:13 - "Jews or Gentiles"
6. Interdependency - 1 Cor. 12:21-27 - "necessary"

VI. THE POSITION OF THE CHURCH IN ITS VARIOUS RELATIONS.

1. Position in relation to God: the Temple and Dwelling-place of God. Eph. 2:21-22; 1 Cor. 3:16-17; 2 Cor. 6:16
2. Position in relation to Christ:
 - (1) a body of which Christ is Head - Col. 1:18a
 - (2) a temple of which Christ is the Cornerstone - Eph. 2:20-21
 - (3) a virgin of whom Christ is the Beloved - 2 Cor. 11:2
 - (4) a bride of whom Christ is the Bridegroom - Eph. 5:26-32, Rev. 21:9
 - (5) a city of which Christ is the Ruler - Rev. 21:9-10, 22:1
 - (6) a people of whom Christ is the Owner - Tit. 2:14 A.R.V.
 - (7) a flock of which Christ is the Shepherd - 1 Pet. 5:2-4, Jn. 10:27-30
 - (8) a household of which Christ is the Firstborn - Eph. 2:19, Col. 1:18b
 - (9) a new man of which Christ is the Creator - Eph. 2:15
 - (10) an elect race of which Christ is the Founder - 1 Pet. 2:9, 1 Cor. 15:45-48
 - (11) a royal priesthood of which Christ is the High Priest - 1 Pet. 2:9,

Heb. 4:14

- (12) an inheritance of which Christ is the Heir - Eph. 1:18

Each one of these figures is rich with meaning - no time.

3. Position in relation to all the Saved.

We must not forget there will doubtless be many bodies of saved; just as among the lost there are differences of place, so also here. Read Heb. 12:22-24 “church of the first born ones” - “prototokos”. The word indicates position rather than origin, priority of place, not of time. The Church of first born ones means that he held the highest place among all the hosts of saved in all ages, past and future. The primogeniture belongs to the Church.

4. Position in relation to Angelic World. Heb. 1:13-14, 2:15-16, 1 Cor. 6:3
5. Position in relation to Whole Created Universe. Eph. 1:17-23, 2:6-7

VII. THE GIFTS AND MISSION OF THE CHURCH

These two things are so closely connected in Eph. 4:8-13 that we must consider them together.

1. The gifts of the Church are given by the hand of the ascended Christ through the Spirit. Verse 8 (cf. also 1 Cor. 12:11, 27)
2. These gifts are enumerated as follows: Verse 11
 - (1) Apostles

(2) Prophets

(3) Evangelists

(4) Pastors and teachers

Notes:

- a. The Apostles and prophets founded the church and gave it the New Testament Scriptures. The evangelists spread the Word, extending the Church into new places, and thus prepared the way for the pastors and teachers.
- b. These Gifts are not to be confused with the offices in the Church which we shall discuss later. Officers are elected. The Gifts are immediately bestowed by a sovereign Christ.
- c. These Gifts are to and in the whole body, and hence are the possession of the whole church, not merely one section of it.
- d. Not all these Gifts were permanent. When the Church was founded and equipped with the New Testament Scriptures, there was no further need for the Apostles and prophets. These gifts, therefore, closed. But the work of enlarging the Church and pastoring and teaching it must continue. Hence we have evangelist, and the pastor and teacher today.

3. The purpose of these gifts is stated in verses 12-16

- (1) To build up the Body through the ministry of its membership (12). This is not the creation of a clerical order to monopolize the ministry of winning men to Christ. But to exercise this ministry through a trained membership. cf. our modern perversions.
- (2) To promote unity of faith and the knowledge of the Son of God (13).
- (3) To foster the spiritual growth of the church's members (14-15).

4. This brings us to the Mission of the Church. (16b)

The building up of itself by the winning of new members. If the Church could only get back to this simple mission, many problems could be settled and the church would make swifter progress.

VIII. THE DIVINE PURPOSE IN THE CHURCH

1. For Service - to be the instrument through which Christ accomplishes His will

in the world. Eph. 1:23, John 15:1-5, 1 Cor. 12:27-30

2. For Manifestation - to manifest the moral glory of Christ. John 17:10, 22-23, 1 Pet. 2:9, Phil. 1:20-21, John 9:5 with Phil. 2:15; Eph. 1:23 with Col. 2:9
3. For Exhibition - to exhibit to the universe the wisdom and the Grace of God. Eph. 3:8-11 - now; Eph. 2:6-7 - future.
4. For Fellowship - to be with Christ throughout eternity in the most intimate associations. John 17:24, Rev. 20:6b, Rom 8:17. Today He is with us - Matt. 28:20, someday we shall be with Him.

IX. THE CONSUMMATION OF THE CHURCH

1. The Church is being formed gradually today by the gathering of a people out of all nations.
Acts 15:14
cf. 1 Kings 6:7 and 1 Pet. 2:5
2. The completion of this Church is definitely fixed at the Second Coming of Christ. Acts 15:15
The Church will not continue until all are saved that can be saved (cf. 15:17). It is a special body of saved with definite limits. The last member of the Body may be added at any moment. What zest this should give to the ministry and to missionary work!
3. When complete, Christ will come to remove the Church from earth by resurrection and translation. 1 Thess. 4:15-17
4. The Blessed Consummation will be reached when the Church as the Holy Bride of Christ is united forever with here visible Head. Eph. 5:25-27, Rev. 19:6-9

X. THE EXTERNAL ORGANIZATION OF THE CHURCH

1. We have seen that the true church is not an organization but rather a living organism, universal and spiritual.
Is there any Scriptural warrant for its members to form outward organizations?
If so, what should be their character?
2. The New Testament clearly reveals the fact that the members of the one true Church did associate themselves into local groups called “Churches”.
Acts 16:5, Acts 8:1

3. The New Testament also reveals that a definite organization was developed in these groups as the new locals. To study this organization, we turn therefore to study the Local Church.

PROBLEMS:

1. How may I be sure I am a member of the True Church?
Only need to be sure that you are really saved. Rom. 10:9-13, 1 Cor. 1:2,
1 Cor. 12:12
2. How can we recognize the true Church?
Remember that the true Church is the Body of Christ. The Body must obey the Head. Look for the body of believers that most completely obeys the will of Jesus Christ. Church is not invisible in one sense. Better to say that its exact limits cannot be defined. cf. VIII 2.

THE LOCAL CHURCH

I. THE NATURE AND PURPOSE OF THE LOCAL CHURCH

1. Definition: A local group of professed Christian believers in any place associated together for certain specific purposes which will appear as our study proceeds.
Acts 8:1 - “Church...at Jerusalem”; Acts 13:1 - “Church...at Antioch”; Rom. 16:1 - “Church...at Cenchrea”; Rom. 16:4 - “Churches of the Gentiles”; Rom. 16:5 - “Church...in their house”.
2. Purpose: The first local church that appears is the church at Jerusalem, and its members were associated together for the following purposes: cf. Acts 2:41-7
 - (1) For teaching. (42 ARV) This followed a certain definite pattern laid down by “the Apostles”.
 - (2) For fellowship. (42 Grk.) The fellowship: Something unique, found nowhere else but in the Christian Church; participation in a common life centered in the Son of God.
 - (3) For worship (42 Grk.) The breaking of bread, not a common meal, but the love feast ending with the Eucharistic emblems (so the best commentators, Alford and Myers). Verse 4 supports this view. The temple offered no facilities for the meal. Therefore it was observed “at home”. The love feast with its Eucharistic elements was the visible expression of the spiritual fellowship.
 - (4) For prayer. (42 Grk.) The prayers, indicating stated meetings for this purpose.
 - (5) For mutual helpfulness. (44-45) They shared possessions according to the needs of one another. The particular method used in Jerusalem was not used elsewhere, but the principle was perpetuated in other churches.
 - (6) For testimony. (46) They continued “in the temple”. Here they had the greatest opportunity to bear testimony to the people of Jerusalem concerning Jesus; the place to which every Jew eventually came. Cf. Peter’s sermon from the temple porch (3:12-4-2). Notice that the testimony of this first church was “daily” and “with one accord”. There were no clashing views. There was also a testimony of life - “having favor with all the people” (47).
 - (7) For praise. (47) “Praising God”. An important element in the life of the

early church.

Notes:

- (a) Other aspects of church life appear as the churches increase in number and new problems and needs arise, but these seven activities indicate clearly the divine purpose in the local church.
 - (b) Obviously not every association of professed Christians constitutes a church. A.Y.M.C.A. is not a church, neither, is a Sunday School, nor a Christian Endeavor Society, nor any fraternal organization. Even though All members were Christians, these would not be churches.
3. Relation to the Universal Church: The local churches constitute the external and visible form in which the universal Body of Christ manifests itself upon earth.

To employ a Kantian expression: they are the external framework through which the ideal Church is schematized. See Gal. 1:13 with Acts 9:4-5. In persecuting the visible local groups of Christians, Paul touched the Body of Christ and therefore its Living Head. We must remember also that in the beginning the spiritual Body of Christ was in the local church at Jerusalem. There was for a brief season one Body and one local Church.

4. Relation to Christ: The local churches are directly related to Christ and are owned by Him.

Rom. 16:16 - “the churches of Christ”; 1 Thess. 2:14 - “the churches of God”.

Notes:

- (a) This must be affirmed against the view that the local church is a man-made affair, of little consequence compared with the spiritual Body.
- (b) We must remember, however, that a local church owned by Christ may have unregenerate persons on its roll.
- (c) Furthermore, a local church may depart so far from the New Testament ideal that Christ may disown it (Rev. 3:16). But even in such extreme cases, our Blessed Lord offers to maintain a personal relationship with any individual believers who may be within it (Rev. 3:20).

II. THE MEMBERSHIP IN THE LOCAL CHURCH

1. The necessity of membership in the local church is never questioned in the New Testament. It is taken for granted. Had we asked the believers of the Apostolic period whether it was essential to join a church, they would not have known what we were talking about. Every believer became a member of a church. It was involved in the very profession he made in Christ. Some of the most important of New Testament Epistles were addressed to a local church. Furthermore, when the history of the church upon earth is prophetically written, the Holy Spirit speaks of it as consisting of local churches. Rev. 1-3. Cf. the attitude of

certain evangelists and teachers. Circumstances might conceivably arise which lead one to leave one local church for another. But there is no authority for abandoning the local church altogether for a purely individualistic Christian existence. The very Christian profession involves fellowship with other Christians. How different from pagan religion.

2. The Nature of Membership in the local church. In what did it consist?

There are two possible views: (1) It was a wholly voluntary and spontaneous relationship with no formal roll or limits. (2) It was a definite relationship involving the use of a formal roll.

The local churches undoubtedly began spontaneously just as they begin today. (The church is first, not the church roll). But there is evidence that church rolls were introduced very early.

- (1) The numbers were known (Acts 1:15, 2:41, 4:4).
- (2) Special rolls were kept (1 Tim. 5:9 ARV).
- (3) Elections of officers assumes a roll (Acts 6:2-5).
- (4) Church discipline assumes a roll (1 Cor. 5:13). Surely this did not mean exclusion from the ordinary meetings of the church. How could the sinner be helped if thus excluded. Obviously, it meant formal severance of his membership in the local church. This would require a vote, and hence the determination of the voters.
- (5) Records of this kind had been kept by the Jews from earliest times. Josephus stated that his own name and family were in the records at Jerusalem. And the early church was composed of Jews.

3. Requirements for entrance into local church membership appear in Acts 2:22-41 as follows:

- (1) Repentance (38) - to change the mind. About what?
- (2) Faith in Jesus Christ as the Crucified, Risen, Living Lord. Peter's entire sermon intended to produce such faith. Repentance involves it - change of mind about Jesus. Baptism "in the name of Jesus" demands and assumes such faith. In other places "faith" is put without repentance.
- (3) Baptism as a visible confession of repentance and faith. It is not "for the remission of sins" in the sense of "to get", but "with reference to" (Grk. preposition is eis). "In the name" is not here a new baptismal formula, but the authority and ground of the rite - on the ground of the name (Grk. preposition is epi).

Notes:

- (a) Compare the case of Cornelius the Gentile (Acts 10:43-48). Faith only is required. But faith involves repentance. Baptism follows the gift of the

Spirit, proving it does not secure remission of sins.

(b) Were infants counted within the membership of the local church?

There is no clear evidence for it (See Acts 2:39), but against the idea is

- (1) Purposes of church membership are not possible for infants.
- (2) Children cannot repent or exercise faith.

4. It is the right and duty of the local church to determine its own membership.

- (1) To see that the entrance requirements are complied with (Acts 10:48).
- (2) To remove from its membership an unworthy member (1 Cor. 5:13).

Notes:

- a. Such an authority has only to do with membership in the local church. The local church cannot exclude a soul from the Body of Christ, nor remove one from membership in that Body. Human judgment too fallible for such authority. It would mean the determination of salvation itself.
- b. People say we have no right to exclude from the local church those who are saved but not baptized because they cannot see immersion. But this is not a question of salvation.
- c. Obviously the church can only deal with what can be seen. As to the entrance requirements, the church can judge the matter of baptism, but must take the confession of the person as to such matters as repentance and faith.
- d. What constitutes sufficient, reason for removing a person from the Church's membership will be discussed under Church Discipline.

III. ORGANIZATION OF THE LOCAL CHURCH

1. Its Existence: The New Testament writings clearly reveal the existence of a formal organization in the various local churches:

- (1) Officers (Phil. 1:1)
- (2) Elections (Acts 6:5-6)
- (3) Regular meetings (Acts 20:7)
- (4) Church Rolls (1 Tim. 5:9)
- (5) Standards of membership (1 Cor. 5:13)
- (6) Well defined relations between officers and members (1 Pet. 5:2, Heb. 13:17)
- (7) Definite religious forms (Acts 2:41, 1 Cor. 11:23-26)
- (8) Uniform practices 1 Cor. 7:17 14:33-34 ARV)
- (9) Systematic contributions (1 Cor. 16:1-2)
- (10) Order in worship and work (1 Cor. 14:40, Col. 2:5)

2. Its beginning: The first local church did not begin with a completed formal organization, but traces of such an organization appear very quickly.

Christ laid down no formal rules in advance for the organization of His Church, although His directions for settling disputes assumes the coming establishment of an organization (Matt. 18:15-18). No preliminary rules for church organization were required because the Apostles were the authorized leaders in the new movement. Furthermore, in the early days of the Church the manifested Kingdom was still a contingent possibility. Hence, to find a full-fledged organization at the church's beginning would be entirely incongruous and unhistorical.

3. Its Development: Church organization was a gradual development in which several factors are apparent:

- (1) It arose to take the place of direct apostolic authority. As the apostles passed away, something was needed to direct the affairs of the churches. They left no successors, but left an organization instead. For example, in the early days, unworthy and self-seeking men were dealt with by the Apostles. Later the church exercises this function. Acts 8:18-21 where Peter excommunicates. In 1 Cor. 5:13 Paul commands the Church to act. But in Rev. 2:6 the church acts upon its own initiative. This divine method teaches that the aim today of the minister and missionary should be to develop self-governing churches.
- (2) The organization grew in response to new needs and problems. The infant church was not burdened with a complex organization. It came into existence for the solution of definite problems. Cf. Acts 6:1-6.

Thus the organization is not an end desirable for its own sake. It is rather a tool for the solution of problems. Therefore, needs and problems of any local church should determine the complexity of its organization. No use to introduce ramifications of organization into churches where no need exists.

- (3) Church organization assumed definite and permanent forms as the New Testament writings came into existence. While the earliest New Testament writings contain evidences of organization (cf. Jas. 5:14), it is easily apparent that the later Pauline Epistles are specially concerned with matters of organization. (Cf. Epistles to Timothy). This is quite natural.

- (1) Preaching is the initial duty.
- (2) Apostles give directions for organizing the converts.
- (3) These directions are given permanent form as letters are written.

4. Its Nature: The form of Church organization was definite as to its basic principles, yet sufficiently elastic to allow for necessary adaptation to various situations. This will appear later when we consider the exact nature of the church's organization under the head of "Government". Cf. Acts 6:7 for the blessing which results from a proper organization of church offices and duties.

5. Wrong theories: (cf. Strong, 895-6)

- (1) The Spiritual Theory: The church has no formal organization, but is bound together solely by a spiritual union.
- (2) The Optional Theory: Organization is not definitely laid down but left to every church in every age to adopt what is best suited in the situation (thus Episcopacy justifies its forms).

- (3) The Rigid Theory: No detail of organization should be introduced without the authority of New Testament precedent. This confuses principles with By-Laws, and eliminates S.S., C.E., etc. This is legalism pure and simple.

IV. THE GOVERNMENT OF THE LOCAL CHURCH.

1. Local church government is Biblical in constitution:

Its authority, principles and rules of organization are to be found in the Word of God. (cf. 1 Tim. 6:3-5).

- (1) The basic and definite rules are laid down in the New Testament. (For proof see following discussion)
- (2) The Biblical constitution of church government is not legalistic. No detailed and systematic law-code is imposed upon the church, such as under the Mosaic theocracy. Its fundamentals are very simple, and leave room for a spiritual functioning and adaptability to various needs and situations.
- (3) However, any adaptation to meet new problems must not involve any departure from fundamentals, and also be in accordance with the general principle of the whole word of God. For example, 1 Tim. 5:17-18, dealing with support of the ministry, goes to both Moses and Christ, yet lays down no hard and fast rules.

2. Local church government is congregational in form:

Each local church has supreme authority in its own affairs. It cannot be dominated or interfered with by any power outside itself. This view supported by various considerations.

- (1) The local church has authority to judge own membership (1 Cor, 5:13). Even an apostle does not assume to excommunicate a member, but calls upon the local church to do it
- (2) The local church has authority to elect its own officers (Acts 6:1-6). Not even the apostles assume to choose the officers of a local church, but call upon the church to do it.
- (3) The local church has authority to guard and observe the ordinances (1 Cor. 11:23 “I delivered unto you”) Not to the clergy, the elders or bishops. This means that no church can be deprived of these sacred rites, as the hierarchy of Rome assumes. Even if all ministers should be withdrawn, the local church could elect others to lead its services.
- (4) The local church has authority to settle its own internal difficulties (1 Cor. 6:1-5). Paul doesn’t appoint a committee, but directs the church to look after the matter. We find an interesting suggestion in verse 5 - sometimes best for the church to designate a person of wisdom to decide rather than air a difficulty before whole congregation. But the church is responsible.
- (5) The local church has authority in matters involving the relations of different local churches (Acts 15:1-2, 22, 23, 25, 30). This was not a conference of ecclesiastical overlords, but of two local churches, each sovereign in its own affairs. One protests through chosen delegates

(2). The other answers through chosen delegates (22). Even the apostles do not assume exclusive authority in the matter.

(6) All “Church Government in the New Testament applies only to the local bodies”. (See Forrester in I.S.R.E.).

(7) The authority of the local church is final as far as its own affairs are concerned. (See Matt. 18:17). There is no higher court.

Notes:

- a. Pure congregational government does not forbid cooperation between groups of local churches. The Bible teaches cooperation. Local churches may submit themselves voluntarily to conferences which they have created, but they cannot surrender their own sovereign rights.
- b. Congregational government requires some degree of cooperation.
 - (1) In the reception of members: churches must agree upon standards. For one church to legislate in this matter for other churches would violate the rule of congregational government.
 - (2) Also in recognition of ministers: elders hold their office in local church. But if the local church expects other churches to recognize its own ministers, it should consult other churches in their ordination. To do otherwise would violate the rule of congregational government.
- c. Congregational government assumes that each local congregation is a “church of Christ”, related directly to Christ, and not through any higher ecclesiastical organization; and assumes also a regenerate membership. Such churches are wholly competent to govern their own affairs.
- d. What if a church finds itself unable to settle its own dissensions?
 - (1) Nothing to forbid it calling in the assistance of other churches.
 - (2) If it cannot even agree on such a course, best to let it die. Strong points out that the organizing of a power ecclesiastical machine to hold such churches together actually conceals the growth of decay.

3. Local Church Government is democratic in representation.

All members have equal rights and responsibility in the government of the church.

- (1) The nature of the church, which is a common brotherhood of believers in the Lord, forbids inequalities of representation. Gal. 3:28, Col. 3:11, I Cor. 12:21-22, I Cor. 12:26. cf. Jas. 2:1-6.
- (2) General exhortations to unity of mind and action are addressed to the entire membership. Rom. 12:16; 1 Cor. 1:10, Phil. 2:2-4. “The exhortations to unity are not mere counsels to passive submission, such as might be given under a hierarchy.... they are counsels to cooperation and to harmonious judgment” (Strong).
- (3) Specific responsibilities for the government of the church are laid upon the entire membership. Acts 6:2, 5 - “the whole multitude”. The first Corinthian epistle deals with

many problems of church government and is addressed to the entire church and every member in it (1 Cor. 1:1-2).

Notes:

- a. Sometimes members deliberately absent themselves from business meeting because they know unpleasant affairs are to be dealt with. This is disobedience to the revealed will of God (cf. Num. 15:35).
- b. Democratic representation does not forbid the delegation of authority in special matters. A case of immorality is best investigated by a committee of men of good judgment, but the membership must delegate the authority.

(4) The leadership of the Holy Spirit demands a democratic representation through which to function. (See next point 4)

Question: What about children voting? This is opposed to the general tenor of Biblical teaching. They are to be in subjection - obey parents, etc. But the New Testament recognizes “young” men and women (1 Tim. 4:12, 5:14). The problem is when does a child become a young man or young woman? Some rule is necessary doubtless.

4. Local Church government is spiritual in function.

The church is different from all merely political democracies. It is not governed by an aggregation of individuals, each a final authority in his own person. The church is a spiritual democracy: that is, each member is alike indwelt by the one Holy Spirit who is the true vicar of Christ and carries out the will of the Head through the various members of the Body. Thus church government, which externally appears to be a pure democracy, is internally a theocracy functioning through the Holy Spirit.

Acts 2:1-4 - “all together in one place” (1) ; “sat upon each one of them” (3) “all filled with the Holy Spirit” (4).

Acts 4:23,31 - “came to their own company” (23); “all filled with the Holy Spirit” (31).

Acts 13:2 - Holy Spirit said to the church - so Myers and Alford. 1 Cor. 12:4-11 - esp. 11

Notes:

- a. It is a very serious sin to deliberately absent oneself from the business meetings of the church. This may actually interfere with the Spirit’s functioning in the government of the church. For He works through the church’s members.
- b. Because the church is a spiritual democracy, it cannot function by means of mere majorities. If the leadership of the Indwelling Spirit is a fact, then the decisions of the church should reveal a large measure of unity. When the situation is otherwise, something is wrong.
- c. How to conduct business meetings:
 - (1) The pastor should prepare the congregation by teaching them the truth of the leadership of the Spirit, and their responsibility to serve as His instruments in the realization of the will of God in the church.

- (2) He should remind the people at the beginning of each meeting that there is but one Spirit and His mind is one. He cannot lead the church in opposite directions.
- (3) In the discussions, each member should state his views humbly, remembering that the Spirit also indwells the other members, and that the Spirit reveals His will through the whole church, not merely through any one or two individuals.
- (4) During the discussions, each member should be ready to change his mind when convincing reasons are presented. The Holy Spirit may use the words of one to make known His mind to others. Cf. Acts 15:22 - in yielding, we are yielding to the Spirit, not to man – cf. v. 28.
- (5) If any serious division occurs in a matter, ordinarily the church should defer action until any possible obstacles to the leadership of the Spirit be removed. The following are possible obstacles: (1) Insufficient information. (2) Lack of prayer. (3) Resistance to the Holy Spirit's leading. (4) Many unregenerate members. Great caution should be observed in mentioning. (3) and (4) It is better to assume that more information and prayer will get rid of (3). If the difficulty is (4), Little would be gained in making the charge, except to anger the unregenerate.
- (6) In all matters of policy, not involving any principle of morality or belief, the pastor should strive to avoid partisanship. Thus he can better urge the necessity of unity of action without creating the impression that he merely wants his own way. Always, the pastor should preserve the dignity of his office by refusing to descend to mere controversy, though he should give reasons for any course he is advocating.

The Various Systems of Church Government

1. The Papal system - authority centered in the Pope.
 2. The Episcopal system - the Bishops.
 3. The Presbyterian system - authority centered in the Elders.
 4. The Congregational system - authority centered in the local church membership.
- For criticisms of the first three, read Strong. His classification is “world church” and “national or provincial church”. The latter includes my (2) and (3).

V. THE OFFICES IN THE CHURCH

Introduction - General Nature and Definition

1. Church offices should be distinguished from Spiritual Gifts.

For Spiritual Gifts cf. Eph. 4:10-11, 1 Cor. 12:14-11, 27-28, Rom. 12:3-8

For Church Offices cf. Acts 6:1-6, 14:23, 1 Tim. 3:1-13

- (1) The Gifts are spiritual endowments directly bestowed by God according to His own will, and may be recognized by the churches, but cannot be conferred by them (1 Cor. 12:11).
 - (2) The Offices are wholly within the power of the churches to confer or withhold.
2. The distinctive characteristics of a church office are as follows.
 - (1) Local in scope. (Acts 14:23 cf. 1 Cor. 12:27-28)
 - (2) Elective. (Acts 6:5 cf. 1 Cor. 12:28 “God hath set”)
 - (3) Revealed standard of Qualifications. (1 Tim. 3:13 cf. 1 Cor. 12:11)

(4) Ordinate. (Acts 14:23 cf. Gal. 1:1)

(5) Ecclesiastical authority delegated by the church. (1 Tim. 5:17, 3:1-2)

Note: Spiritual Gifts belong to another category. They carry with them no necessary authority except that which is spiritual, not ecclesiastical.

3. On the basis of the above distinction we find that the offices of the church are two: the “deacon”, and that of the “elder”.

(1) In the New Testament the term “bishop” refers to the “elder”, not a separate office. Acts 20:17-18 with 28 ARV, Titus 1:5-7, 1 Pet. 5:1-2 Grk. Words refer to two aspects of one office: (1) Elder - position; (2) Bishop - one of its functions - overseer.

(2) Practically all the highest authorities agree today that there is no biblical warrant for making separate offices of the “elder” and “bishop”; that this separation was a gradual development in church history. cf. Lightfoot.

(3) The most important passages, dealing with the officers of the church, mention but two, 1 Tim. 3:1-13 - qualifications of two offices, Phil. 1:1 - an ideal church, needing no correction apparently Saints with the “bishops and deacons”.

4. Both the offices of “Elder” and “deacon” are in the local church.

(1) There is no evidence that such offices were ever held apart from a local church.

(2) This view is supported by the results of our study under the head of Government, which we found to apply only to the local church.

(3) The offices are derived from the local church and the sphere of their ecclesiastical authority is limited to the local church.

A. OFFICE OF THE “ELDER”

1. ORIGIN

1. Greek word - presbuteros - lit. an aged person

2. Development into name of an office - In ancient nations and tribes often the older men were accepted as rulers. Thus the term gradually came to designate a group of rulers regardless of age. cf. Iliad and Old Testament.

3. Usage in New Testament. Generally of a ruling office. Elders of the Jewish nation (Acts 4:8). Elders of the Christian Church (Acts 14:23).

4. Church eldership not derived directly from Jewish eldership. The common name used (presbuteros) indicates no more connection than the term “president” does between the highest official of the United States and that of a missionary society.

II. QUALIFICATIONS OF THE ELDER (1 Tim. 3:1-7, Tit. 1:5-9)

1. Life - “blameless” mentioned 3 times - lit. giving no handle. (Tit. 1:6-7, 1 Tim. 3:2). Of good behavior - orderly (1 Tim. 3:2). Righteous - holy (Tit. 1:8).

2. Temperament - No striker - not a brawler (1 Tim. 3:3). Not self-willed - not soon angry (Tit. 1:7). Patient - gentle (1 Tim. 3:3). Temperate - self controlled (Tit. 1:8).
3. Disposition - Not given to wine (1 Tim. 3:3 ARV marg.). Given to hospitality - Not greedy of filthy lucre - No lover of money (1 Tim. 3:3). Not given to unfair gains (Cam. Bible) - Abuse of spiritual office for financial gains (Ellicot). A lover of good (Tit. 1:8).
4. Family Relations - Husband of one wife (1 Tim. 3:2, Tit. 1:6) - For various interpretations see Cambridge Bible. Modern divorce produces the most vicious type of polygamy. One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity (1 Tim. 3:4). For reason see verse 5. Having faithful children, not accused of riot or unruly (Tit. 1:6 - children that believe, ARV - not accused of riotous living, Cam. Bible).
5. Reputation - In good report of them that are without (1 Tim. 3:7) - Most damaging situation to have an elder known to be ungodly by outsiders.
6. Faith - Holding fast the faithful Word as he hath been taught (Tit. 1:9). See ARV - “according to the teaching.” The elder needs this qualification that he may be able “by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers.” See ARV - “convict”. This is tremendously important. The elder must be settled on every great fundamental doctrine, with no mere loose grip or smattering of the truth. Such an eldership can hold a church from drifting into apostasy.
7. Judgment - Vigilant - temperate - not hasty - sober minded - of sound mind. A man who can think a problem through and arrive at a sound conclusion (1 Tim. 3:2, Tit. 1:8).
8. Ability - Apt to teach (1 Tim. 3:2). Some have this ability as a natural gift. Others must develop it. It certainly assumes a knowledge of what is to be taught.
9. Experience - Not a novice (1 Tim. 3:6). He should be an experienced Christian. Why? A novice cannot be entrusted with authority (cf. latter part of verse 6).
10. Sex - The elder must be a man. No woman is eligible. No woman elder appears in the New Testament record. Furthermore, the nature of the office excludes women. Since it is a function of the office to rule, a woman elder would violate the divine order of the sexes in the church (1 Tim. 2:11-12).

Note: - Does the New Testament furnish any basis for demanding educational preparation? Yes, because such qualifications as Faith, Judgment, Ability, and Experience can be developed by education of the right sort. (cf. Tit. 1:9 “as he hath been taught”)

III. DUTIES OF THE ELDER.

1. Administrative - to rule the Church. “Made you overseers” - bishops (Acts 20:28)
“Elders that rule well” (1 Tim. 5:17). “The steward of God” (Tit. 1:7, cf,

Luke 12:42). The Bible is careful to define the nature of this “rule”. It is not dictatorship. Nor rulership in the political sense. But rather by example (1 Pet. 5:2-3).

2. Pastoral - to shepherd the Church. “Feed the Church” (Acts 20:28 Grk.) “Feed the flock” (1 Pet. 5:2 Grk.) See also the warning of Jude 12 - These leaders looked after themselves First, instead of the flock.
3. Educational - To teach the Church. “Apt to teach” (1 Tim. 3:2). “Who labor in the Word and Doctrine” (teaching” - 1 Tim. 5:17 ARV). This teaching includes correction and exhortation (Tit. 1:9). Note how the pastoral and teaching functions seem to be joined in Eph. 4:11. To “pastor” is to “feed”, and to “feed” is to “teach”.
4. Officiative - To preside and lead in the functions of the Church. “Let him call for the elders of the church” (Jas. 5:14). This suggests the proper procedure in the observance of the various ordinances of the church and its worship. But this order does not imply any exclusive priestly authority in the elder. All believers are priests and could therefore lead in such matters if the need should arise. But since God is a God of order, and He has ordained the office of the eldership, the presiding function should be committed to the elders in all ordinary cases where that is possible. The Church, however, is never dependent upon any official clerical class in its functions. The Church is always greater than any offices it may create.
5. Representative - To represent the Church when necessity arises. See Acts 20:17 where Paul, desiring to discuss the affairs of the Ephesian Church and give certain directions, calls for a meeting with the “elders”. NOTE: On the basis of 1 Tim. 5:17 some regard the eldership as of two classes - teaching and ruling elders. The teaching elders are those who act as pastors. The ruling elders are popularly known as lay elders. This view has merit. In some churches the deacon acts in the capacity of the ruling elder. In others the members of the official board act thus.

IV. AUTHORITY OF THE ELDER

1. Ecclesiastical in nature. The authority he may have as a teacher is wholly spiritual, not ecclesiastical. What is the difference?
2. Delegated by the local church which elects. The elder has no ecclesiastical authority not delegated by the church. He does not rule by any inherent right. And this authority bestowed by the church can be withdrawn by the church.
3. Limited to the local church in which the office is held. The authority of the elder as such cannot extend beyond the limits of the church in which he is an elder. If elected as Moderator or Superintendent of a conference or group of churches, he is not the elder of the churches. Even as a Moderator, his authority is confined to the conference, but not over the local churches which created the conference. For a fuller discussion of this point, see VI - ELECTION OF ELDERS.

V. NUMBER OF ELDERS

1. A plurality of elders seems to have existed in each of the earlier New Testament churches. See Acts 14:23, 20:17, Phil, 1:1.

2. A single elder in the church, however, seems to be suggested in Paul's latest and most definite directions about this office. Compare 1 Tim. 3:1 where he speaks of "the bishop", with verse 8 where he speaks of "deacons". Too much stress should not be laid on this difference, however. The singular number may only indicate that one of the local elders had been selected as the "president" or head of the group.
3. No definite number is laid down in the New Testament as an absolute rule in the local congregation. This matter, doubtless, should depend upon the size of the church, the scope of its activities, and the number qualified for such an office. Dr. Strong points out that a local church might conceivably have but one male member. On the other hand, large local churches exist today which require the services of a staff of ordained elders in its various tasks. The material and the need, probably, is the best guide in determining the number in any particular church.
4. Equal authority need not be delegated to all alike, where the rural eldership exists. It is wholly within the power of the local church to give priority to one local elder, or as we might say today, elect one as the pastor and the others as his assistants. Or one may be delegated to do the public teaching and preaching, and another to give his time to pastoral duties.
5. The plural eldership is the New Testament ideal wherever possible. That is, the church should elect a number of godly laymen who can meet the New Testament qualifications of ruling elders, to serve as assistants in the administrative and pastoral work. See Jas. 5:14. These specific directions can be carried out only with a plurality of elders.

VI. THE ELECTION OF ELDERS

1. This office may properly be sought by the man. See 1 Tim 3:1 ARV - "If a man seeketh the office".
Some

NOTE: Paul does not rebuke such a seeker, but reminds him only that he is seeking "a good office". The Scripture justifies the method used by many churches in allowing men to present themselves as applicants or candidates for the eldership.

2. On the other hand, the Church may seek the man. See Acts 14:23 ARV. Certainly this does not mean the drafting of men who have no consciousness of a divine call. But the Spirit may arouse such a consciousness through the influence and ministry of the church.
3. In either case, the church should take care that the New Testament qualifications are met.

See 1 Tim. 3:1-13, Tit. 1:5-9 for these. NOTE: This justifies careful investigation of the man's life and record, and also a searching examination of his beliefs and knowledge of the Word.

4. If a local church desires to have its elders recognized as such by other local churches, the approval of these churches should be secured before election and ordination. This would be required by the principle of congregational government.

To demand recognition from other churches without consulting them in the selection of elders would violate this principle. One church would be assuming the right to legislate for other churches. Denominational groups of churches generally provide the necessary machinery for the consultation of one another in selecting elders. It may be the entire eldership in a certain district (Presbyterian), or an examining committee appointed by a conference of local churches with

definite rules of procedure (Brethren). In those denominational groups where the local church has the right to elect its own pastor without outside interference, this problem is solved to a certain extent by this act of election. While there may be no reordination, the local church may conduct a searching examination of the candidate to determine his fitness before election. Nothing could be more repugnant to New Testament doctrine than for one local church to be compelled to accept as an any man in whose election that church was given no voice.

5. When all requirements are met, the local church should formally elect by vote.

See Acts 6:1-6 where “the whole multitude” of the Jerusalem church “chose” the Seven. Acts 14:23 ARV declares that Paul and Barnabas “appointed for them elders in every church”. The Greek word here is “cheirotongo” which means to elect by stretching out the hand. In other words, Paul and Barnabas appointed these elders by the democratic method of congregational voting; that is, they directed the churches to elect them. See Meyer, Alford and Barnes in support of this view. NOTE: Titus 1:5 ARV only says that Titus was to place elders in every city, saying nothing about the method, which would be by vote of the local church under the direction of Titus, following the rule of Acts 14:23.

6. Regarding the length of the term of the eldership, there is no definite Biblical testimony, but several inferences may be drawn:

a. Since the office is wholly in the power of the local church, and cannot exist apart from such a church, it follows that a man is an elder in any particular local church for the period specified in his election. Ordinarily this is for one year. In other cases it may be for an indefinite period, depending on the custom or rules of the church.

b. Practically, however, we generally a distinction between the title and the office. Once elected and ordained as an elder, the man holds the title for life. But he exercises the office only for the period of his election. Another method is to distinguish between the office and its exercise, or again between the ordination and the office; the former being for life and the latter for a limited term. Compare the use of military titles after the office is no longer exercised.

c. Since the office cannot be held apart from a local church, it follows that an elder cannot move his office from one local church to another by merely transferring his membership. In every case he must be elected in order to secure the right to exercise the office in any particular local church.

d. By following this simple rule certain ministerial abuses could be avoided. It would prevent the building up of an inactive or floating clerical class, men who exercise authority without serving. The ecclesiastical authority of an elder should be exercised only by those elders who are actually serving as elders in a local church or under its jurisdiction. Such service might be of various types. This does not mean that an elder without office may not exercise his spiritual gifts. But that is another matter.

e. Furthermore, the observance of this rule would guard against much trouble in the local church where an ordained elder, not the pastor, enters as a member and claims the right to exercise the authority of an elder without being elected as such.

- f. A man may, of course, retain and exercise his spiritual gift as a teacher or an evangelist even though he may not have been elected to act as an elder by any local church. But he cannot retain and exercise the office of the eldership in any church without the specific vote of that church.
- g. This rule also would solve the problem of dealing with unworthy elders. At present, in some congregations governed denominations, if an elder sees trouble for him rising in his local church he simply resigns and transfers his letter of membership to another church. The first congregation cannot touch him because he is no longer an elder there, and the second has never elected him. Nor can any conference cancel his office because of the principle of congregational government. The simplest solution is to regard his office as having ceased with his resignation until he is reelected by some other congregation. Thus unpleasant church trails may be avoided. A man may cease to be fit for the eldership without losing his fitness for membership in a church. Of course, another way to handle the problem would be for a conference to refuse to recognize him as an elder and then refuse credentials to any local church which received him as an elder. But such actions often cause serious reactions and dissensions.
- h. Finally, we may cite the opinion of Dr. Strong, great theologian of the Baptist church and staunch defender of the principle of congregational government, who writes as follows: “‘Once an elder always an elder’ is a piece of Popery based on the idea of the Romish ‘indelibility of orders’” (Theology, 923-4). This Roman Catholic notion is based on the mistaken idea that ordination somehow confers a special divine grace which inheres in the one ordained. For criticism of this see my following point.

VII. ORDINATION OF ELDERS

1. The English word “ordain” in the AV never refers to the ceremony popularly called “ordination”. Compare the Greek in Mark 3:14, Acts 1:22, 14:23, 1 Tim. 2:7, Tit. 1:5. There are five different Greek words, all translated “ordain”, yet all refer to the act of appointing not to the formal ceremony of induction into the office. See the ARV for proper translations. If possible, it might be well to drop the word “ordain” altogether in this latter sense because of its sacerdotal associations, but it is hard to fight usage. Perhaps it is better to accept the English word and insist on its proper interpretation and use in connection with the Biblical doctrine.
2. The New Testament does reveal the use of a solemn ceremony, however, in connection with the induction of men into the church offices and services. Compare the following:
Acts 6:6 - “Prayed...laid their hands on them”
Acts 13:3 - “fasted and prayed, and laid hands”
1 Tim. 4:14 - “laying on of the hands of the presbytery”
1 Tim. 5:22 - “Lay hands suddenly (hastily) on no man”
3. The elements of this “ordination” ceremony are as follows: a. The imposition of hands. b. Prayer. c. Fasting (sometimes). NOTE: Undoubtedly in such ceremonies it is appropriate to read the Biblical qualifications and charges, require pledges of faith in public vows. But the time to ascertain fitness is when electing, not at the ordination. Compare marriage vows - trustworthiness determined beforehand.

4. The Ordination Ceremony should be in charge of the Elders, as in other similar functions of the Church. See 1 Tim. 4:14 - “laying on of the hands of the presbytery”.
 - a. It should be remembered that the elders here are only acting in their representative capacity for the church. They are not a self-perpetuating succession.
 - b. A church wholly isolated and without any elders could ordain its own elders. This might happen very rarely. But the church is never dependent on any clerical order or body.
 - c. A local church having but one elder, or none, should whenever possible invite elders from other churches to assist. See Acts 6:6 where the Apostles acted in the capacity of elders in conducting the ordination for the church.

5. The Meaning of the Ordination Ceremony.
 - a. Negatively, it does not confer miraculously any spiritual authority, gifts or grace. See 1 Cor. 12:11,18 with context.
 - b. Positively, ordination is simply the church’s recognition of spiritual fitness in its chosen officers, and their public induction into office, with prayer for them. See Acts 6:3-6 where the men chosen were full of wisdom and the Holy Spirit before ordination, not by virtue of it. NOTE: Timothy’s “gift” was given him by prophecy Grk. *dia* with Genitive, cf. Eph. 4:8,11). The “laying on of hands” was not even the channel or instrument of this grace, but only an attendant circumstance (Grk. *meta*. so Exp. Grk. New Testament. Also Winer-Moulton notes that instrument is never expressed by *meta* in good prose).

6. The Ordination Ceremony not confined to induction of Elders, but also used for Deacons and any others called into any important special service of the Church. See Acts 6:1-6 for deacons, and Acts 13:1-3 for missionaries. Thus the same man might conceivably be “ordained” several times: As a deacon, as an elder, and as a missionary.

VIII. DIGNITY, RESPONSIBILITY, AND REWARDS OF THE ELDERSHIP

1. Its High Dignity. Our Lord was called a “bishop” (1 Pet. 2:25). Peter was named a “fellow-elder” (1 Pet. 5:1 ARV). John was an “elder” (2 Jn. 2). Furthermore, the Church exhorted to recognize the dignity of this office. See 1 Thess. 5:12-13, Heb. 13:7, 17, 24 Gal 6:6 with 7 in Grk. The man who really qualifies for this high office and discharges it’s obligations deserves such respect. If he does not, he has no right to the office.

2. Its Solemn Responsibility. The elder is “the steward of God” (Tit. 1:7). See also 1 Cor. 4:1-2. Men sometimes seek the dignity of the office without understanding or desiring to share its responsibilities.

3. Its Rich Reward. Increased authority (Lk. 12:43-44) and an eternal crown of glory (1Pet. 5:1-4). This crown is not for all Christians, but will be the special reward of the elder who has faithfully discharged his obligations.

B. THE OFFICE OF THE DEACON

1. ORIGIN OF THE OFFICE.

1. Greek term is “diakonos”. Meaning “one who serves”. Derivation uncertain, but one suggests “to raise a dust by Hastening” (cf. Thayer).
2. Usage in the New Testament (A.V.) Rendered “minister” 20 times (Eph. 3:7), “servant” 7 times (Matt. 23:11, Jn. 2:5), “deacon 3 times (Phil. 1:1, 1 Tim. 3:8. 12).
3. Thus originally used of service in general, the term came to be applied to a special office of service in the church. cf. usage above. This is a very common development in the usage of words. See “represent” and “representative”.
4. Whether the office originated with the appointment of the Seven is disputed. The Seven are not called “diakonia”, but three times a form of the word is found in Acts 6:1-6. (See Grk. for “ministration”, “serve”, “ministry”). Certainly the idea is present out of which the office finally arose.

II QUALIFICATIONS OF THE DEACON. (1 Tim. 3:

1. Character (8). “Grave” – “not “double-tongued” - “not given to much wine” - “not greedy of filthy lucre” (cf. popular opinion of the deacon in money matters, and also his duty to handle funds for poor).
2. Faith (9). “Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience”. The deacon does not need the gift of teaching, but he must know the faith and hold it sincerely without reservations.
3. Family Relations (12). “Husband of one wife” - same as the elder. “Ruling their children and their own houses well”.
4. Reputation (Acts 6:3). “Of honest (good) report”.
5. Judgment (3). “Full of wisdom” - not knowledge necessarily. Not same thing.
6. Spirituality (3). “Full of the Spirit” - handling poor funds and serving tables requires more than mere business or worldly wisdom.
7. Sex. Women are eligible for this office (1 Tim. 3:11 ARV - “women”, not “wives”). Note their special qualifications (“not slanderers” - since their work is often in visitation, the office has no place for gossipers).

III. DUTIES OF THE DEACON

1. Specifically, the administration of the church’s help to its own poor. For the original occasion see Acts 6:1-6. The language of 1 Tim. 3:8 suggests the handling of funds. See also the Grk. of Rom. 16:1-2
2. Generally, any service in the church which would relieve the elders of burdens tending to interfere with their spiritual ministry. See Acts 6:2,4, which however does not suggest that such work is

beneath the dignity of the elder, but only that business affairs should not interfere with their ministry of the Word and prayer. Compare also the meaning of the Greek word originally - one who serves in any capacity. Thus the deacons of both sexes should be the helpers and assistants of the elder who serves as pastor and teacher. They should stand behind him, relieve him of burdens. Happy the church with such a group of men and women.

IV. ELECTION, NUMBERS, TERM, ORDINATION.

1. Select those who have been “proved” (1 Tim. 3:10). This injunction could be carried out either by careful investigation before election, or a period of probation.
2. Formal election by the Church (Acts 6:1-6).
3. The number was plural in early church (Phil. 1:1, 1 Tim. 3:8). The action of the Church in Acts 6:1-6 suggested the number “seven”, but there was no set rule.
4. The term of office is not specified. Here the student should read again what was said under the discussion of Elders as term. Since deacons do not as a rule move about from church to church, it has been the custom today often to elect the deacon for an indefinite term or for life. But there is no more reason for a local church to elect a deacon for life than to elect an elder as pastor for life. The most sensible method is to elect for a definite term. Thus the church can clear the office of inactive or unworthy incumbents. Otherwise the church must proceed to impeach, which is unpleasant work, or to wait for death. Election for a definite term would also stimulate to better service. The very name of the office means to serve. When there is no service, there should be no office.
5. Ordination should be conducted by the elders for the Church. On this point the student should review the ordination of Elders.

V. DIGNITY AND REWARDS OF THE DEACONATE

1. Its Unusual Dignity. This office has unfortunately been made the occasion of worldly jest and ridicule. But the very usage of the Greek term chosen to designate it invests the office with peculiar honor. The Apostles were called by this term (2 Cor. 3:6 Grk.). The same term is used of angelic service (Matt. 4:8-11 Grk). It is also used of our Lord’s ministry (Matt. 20:28 Grk). Such a usage sheds the very glory of Christ upon the most trivial or lowly tasks assigned to the deacon.
2. Its Special Rewards (1 Tim. 3:13). (a) Objectively, the deacons who serve well “gain to themselves a good degree”. This does not refer to a higher ministerial office. According to Alford it means “a good standing place”; doubtless now in the Church, and finally before the “bema-seat” of Christ (Rom. 4:10). (b) There is also a subjective reward - “great boldness in the faith”, that is, an inward feeling of assurance which comes from the consciousness of work well done. But note the boldness is in the faith, not in self.

C. RELATION OF CHURCH OFFICES TO SPIRITUAL GIFTS

1. Spiritual fitness for the church offices is provided for by the bestowal of Spiritual Gifts.
 - a. The Elder must be qualified to Rule, to Teach, and act as a Pastor. For the necessary gifts see 1 Cor. 12:28 and Eph. 4:11.
 - b. The Deacon must be qualified for various types of assistant service. See the gift of “helps” in 1 Cor. 12:28 Greek.
 - c. On the entire point see also Rom. 12:6-8 and 1 Pet. 4:10-11.
2. The Church cannot produce these spiritual gifts in its officers by any process of education or act of ordination. They are bestowed directly by the Holy Spirit according to His own sovereign choice and will. See 1 Cor. 12:11, 18, 28.
3. However, education of the right kind may bring to light the possession of such gifts and develop their more efficient and complete exercise. See 1 Tim. 4:14- “Neglect not the gift”; and 2 Tim. 1:6- “Stir up the gift”. Timothy had the gift, but needed the instruction and exhortation which Paul gave him in these Epistles. Ministerial education must be centered in the Written Word of God.
4. The Church should elect to its Offices those who manifest the possession of the necessary Spiritual Gifts.
 - a. See the case of Phillip, an Evangelist by gift, who is elected to the Office of the Deacon (Acts 21:8, Acts 6:1-6).
 - b. See also 1 Tim. 5:17 where we find men elected to the eldership who possessed the Gifts of “government” and teaching.
 - c. Here we find an added argument against the habit of hasty ordination. This matter should be delayed until the Church is sure that the candidate manifests the necessary Spiritual Gifts. Otherwise the Church and its work must suffer with an accumulation of officers with no spiritual fitness for their peculiar tasks.

VI. DISCIPLINE IN THE CHURCH

Note: (There is a change here from the preceding notation. This main point is to be treated as coordinate with V, The OFFICES OF THE CHURCH.)

1. DISCIPLINE A SOLEMN DUTY

- a. See Matt. 18:15-18, 1 Cor. 5:1-13, 6:1-11, 2 Cor. 2:5-7, 7:8-12, 2 Thess. 3:6-15, 1 Tim. 5:19-24 for importance of Discipline.

This is not something which the Church may do or not do as it feels. The obligation of Discipline is as definitely commanded as the Lord’s Supper. Churches neglect it become they follow the line of least resistance. Thus in trying to get away from trouble they always get into worse trouble by this neglect.

2. DISCIPLINARY OFFENCES

- a. Difficulties between numbers. Matt 18:15-17, 1 Cor, 6:5-6
- b. Disorderly Conduct. 2 Thess. 3:6-14
- c. Gross Sins. 1 Cor. 5:11-13. Here we have sins of sex, money, religion, speech and appetite. Note that fornication and covetousness are put together.

3. DISCIPLINARY PENALTIES

- a. Private admonition. 2 Thess. 3:15; 1 Thess. 5:14
- b. Public censure. 1 Tim. 5:20. This applies especially to the elder, but can not be restricted to him. Nothing said about the nature of the sin thus dealt with. Probably any sin inconsistent with the Christian profession which is known to the Church and public.
- c. Social ostracism. 2 Thess. 3:6,14, 1 Cor. 5:11. This does not necessarily involve excommunication. It means the withdrawal from the offender the ordinary forms of social fellowship. See the words “eating” and “company”. It does not involve total ostracism, however. cf. verse 15 of 2 Thess. 3. Such treatment would be a powerful instrument if used in the right spirit.
- d. Church excommunication. 1 Cor. 5:1-13. This means complete removal from the roll of church membership. Commentators are not agreed as to the precise meaning of verse 5, but there is nothing ambiguous about verse 13. The wicked person is to be put away from the midst of the church.

4. DISCIPLINARY PROCEDURE

- a. Thorough investigation and clear proof. 1 Cor. 5:11. 1 Tim. 5:19.
- b. Solemn action by the whole Church. 1 Cor. 5:4-5 – “Ye being gathered together”; 2 Cor. 2:6 - “punishment...inflicted by the many” ARV.
- c. Restoration to fellowship on evidence of genuine repentance. 2 Cor. 2:6-8.

5. DISCIPLINARY PURPOSES

- a. For the honor of Christ: 1 Cor. 6:15
- b. For the protection of the Church. 1 Cor. 5:6 “a little leaven”
- c. For the good of the sinning member. 2 Thess. 3:14-15 “that he may be ashamed”; 1 Cor. 5:5 “that the spirit may be saved”, Severe action unpleasant as it may be, often brings men to their senses.

NOTE: How should the Church deal with those who cease attending services and show no interest? In such cases no discipline is necessary. When people leave the Church and show no response to genuine efforts to bring them back, the Church need not other to put them out. They are already out. All the Church needs to do is remove their names from the roll so as to make the roll conform with the facts. The churches should have definite Biblical standards on this point written into their by-laws before the need arises, and thus keep their rolls cleared by action each year.

NOTE: What part should the pastor take in cases of discipline? Unless absolutely necessary he should act only as a presiding officer. It is best for him not to take a partisan position unless the situation demands its. When he finds a case requiring disciplinary action, let him inform his officers of the facts and let them investigate and bring the charges. Thus the pastor preserves himself from the role of prosecutor.

NOTE: Can these Biblical rules be applied successfully today? They can in any church which knows and believes the Word of God. In churches not well taught, the pastor had better put on a campaign on doctrinal teaching being attempting to introduce discipline. He should remember that the Church must do the work. He cannot do these things himself. It is for him to teach the church what to do and lead.

NOTE: How to teach these matters. The pastor should not wait for the occasion to arise. Neither should he begin his teaching ministry with this matter or people suspect an ulterior motive. Let him preach a series of sermons or studies on the general subject of the CHURCH, and

this particular doctrine can be taught naturally as it is a part of the whole doctrine. Or give a series of studies on the Corinthian Epistles.

VII. RELATION OF LOCAL CHURCHES TO ONE ANOTHER.

Introduction:

1. Congregational Government is always exposed to two opposite tendencies:
 - a. Toward extreme centralization
 - b. Toward extreme individualism
2. Therefore, generally three distinct types of Congregationalism may be found:
 - a. Theoretical - in name only - abandonment of the central principle.
 - b. Individualistic - Stand in isolation from others.
 - c. Cooperative - This is the Biblical type. See the following notes.

A. EXTREME INDIVIDUALISTIC ATTITUDES AND CONDEMNED BY THE WORD.

1. Within a local Church. (1 Cor. 1:10-13) This is a fine example of divisions based wholly on human leadership. No fundamental doctrinal differences.
2. Toward workers and members of other local churches. (3 Jn. 9-11)
3. Among a group of churches. (James 3:13-17)

NOTE: The great Ideal in Phil. 2:1-5.

B. MANY COOPERATIVE TIES ROUND TOGETHER THE EARLY LOCAL CHURCHES.

1. Unity in Doctrine (1 Cor. 4:17, Eph. 4:5, Col. 4:16).
2. Common Practices (1 Cor. 7:17, 11:16, 14:34, 16:1-2).
3. Association in projects of work (2 Cor. 8:1-11).
4. Reception of each other's members and workers (Acts 18:27-28, 3 John 5-8).
5. Fraternal Communications (1 Cor. 16:19a, 16:16).
6. Cooperation in Discipline (2 John 9-11)
7. Appointment of workers and representatives (2 Cor. 8:18-19 "chosen of the churches").
Grk. "cheirotoneo" is to vote by raising the hand. This done by the churches)
8. Support of missionaries (2 Cor. 11:9 with Phil. 4:15).
9. Seeking and receiving counsel (Acts 15). When a church cannot settle its own problems, it ought to call in the counsel of others. This is not a denial but an assertion of congregational rights.
10. Such associations (above) were regarded as both voluntary and obligatory. See Rom. 15:26-27 "It hath pleased them" - "And their debtors they are".

C. BIBLICAL EXAMPLES OF COOPERATION AND ASSOCIATION

In representative conferences (Acts 16). See verses 2-6 for representatives of each church. This first conference arose out of a actual problem. Can be no united work and testimony with problems. The blessing of God was upon this conference. A. They solved the problem. B. Formulated a policy. C. Applied the policy in the various churches (Acts 16:4). D. The result was good (16:5).

Thus the great principle was laid down early in the history of the church: Mutual problems must be worked out together by the conference method.

1. In Geographical Associations (Gal. 1:22, 1:2, 2 Cor. 8:1, Rom. 15:16, 1 Cor. 16:19). These groups were evidently formed according to the Roman political and geographical divisions. Cf. the church today. Such associations or conferences are obviously more workable if not too large and unwieldy. If too large the principle of congregational government easily becomes submerged in the effort to cooperate in too wide a territory or with too many churches.

CONCLUSION: IS THERE ANY JUSTIFICATION FOR THE DENOMINATIONAL SCHEME?

1. Factors in the rise of denominations.
 - a. Locality - Geographical, National, Language, Culture, Political.
 - b. Practice - Worship, organization, and work.
 - c. Doctrine - rise of error, omissions of truth, matters of emphasis.
2. Liabilities of denominationalism.
 - a. Unnecessary duplication.
 - b. Wasteful competition.
 - c. Misleading example to world.
3. Values of Denominationalism.
 - a. Wholesome competition - keeps pastors and churches on their toes.
 - b. Practical efficiency - an organization can get too large for efficiency.
 - c. Insures religious freedom without anarchy.
 - d. Witnesses to the Christian passion to know and follow God's will. Better have division than indifference to the truth.
4. Present Day tendencies: In general we are shifting from a state of external division with a large measure of internal unity to a state of external union with grave internal division. To borrow a geological figure, the cleavages yesterday were vertical. Today they are becoming horizontal, running alike through all the denominations. Some immediate possibilities are as follows:
 - a. New set of denominational splits
 - b. Inter-church association of the dissatisfied and seceders
 - c. Secession of congregations to become independent units
 - d. New alignment of membership affiliation

NOTE: In the present situation, considering inroads of liberalism and its control of many denominations, many churches are genuinely perplexed as to their proper course. The answer is that no one set rule can be laid down which will cover every individual case. There should be much prayer and careful thought before taking any final action. At present (1940) it seems increasingly clear that the highest Christian testimony is being borne by individual pastors and congregations, both inside and outside the denominations. Another thing is becoming clearer than it was once, namely, that in any new alliances which may be formed, the only protection for future is found in New Testament congregational government, which leaves the local church supreme in its own affairs and possessions.

VIII. THE “WORSHIP” OF THE CHURCH

INTRODUCTION: We hesitate to use word “worship” here. True worship is an attitude of the spirit in the adoration of God, dependent upon neither time, place of ceremony (Jn. 4:24). But in common usage the term has come to mean those various acts performed by the church in its assemblies, and therefore by accommodation it is so used here. We should understand, therefore, that none of the “acts” to be discussed are to be regarded as “worship” in its ultimate sense. These may be, however, acts through which the spirit may truly worship God. In fact, without such an inward attitude all these external acts become worthless forms. There may be some justification for saying, “Let us worship God in spirit, if we are careful not to think of the act in itself as worship.

1. Meeting of the Church

- a. Meeting together of the members was a prominent characteristic of Christianity from the first (Acts 2:1, 2:46, 4:23, etc.)
- b. This passion of meetings caused both much wonder and misunderstanding among the pagans. (The pagan worshipper could worship by himself in the temple)
- c. To forsake the assembling together was a very serious matter in the early churches (Heb. 10:25).
- d. The final goal of the Church is a great and permanent Assembly (Compare 1 Thess. 4:17, also 2 Thess. 2:1 with Heb. 10:25 in Greek).

2. Places of Meeting

- a. The Jewish Temple (Acts 2:46)
- b. Synagogue Buildings (Jas. 2:2 ?)
- c. Public buildings (Acts 19:8-19, 20:20)
- d. Private Homes (Acts 20:8, 12:12, 1 Cor. 16:19)
- e. Church Buildings (a much later development)

3. Times of Meeting

- a. Daily (Acts 2:46)
- b. Weekly (Acts 20:7, 1 Cor. 16: ?)
- c. Special Times (Acts 12:5 with 12)

NOTE: First day of the week to have been the regular time of meeting.

The first daily meetings were for the purpose of bearing witness in a Great evangelistic meeting.

4. Types of Meetings

- a. Public (1 Cor. 14) Time not stated,
- b. Private (1 Cor. 11) In the evening (Acts 20:7-8)

5. Purposes of Meetings

- a. The private meeting was to keep the Lord’s Supper which does not seem to contemplate the presence of any outsiders. Secrecy aroused pagan accusations. The Didache commands privacy. Its institution was private.

- b. The public meeting was for the edification of believers and also for the winning of unbelievers (1 Cor. 14:23-26).
6. Nature of the Public Meeting - Note the various elements:
- a. Reading (1 Tim. 4:13) (Col. 4:16, Rev. 1:3)
 - b. Discourses (Acts 20:7, 1 Tim. 4:11-16, 2 Tim. 4:2-5 cf. our sermon)
 - c. Praise (1 Cor. 14:26-32) cf. our prayer-meetings
 - d. Singing (Acts 16:25, Mk. 14:26, 1 Cor. 14:15,26, Eph. 5:19, Col. 3:16, Jas. 5:13)
 - e. Prayer (Acts 1:14, 4:23-31, 6:6, 12:12, 1 Cor. 14:14-17, 11:5)
 - f. Offerings (1 Cor. 16:1-2)

No attempt is made here to deal with the Ordinances of the Church. They are discussed fully in a separate course of lectures.