

The Organization of the Church

John Isaac Edwards

A study of the organization of the church is of utmost importance for now and for generations to come. The organization of the church is simple and clearly revealed in the Bible.

1) Christ: The Head. No government or body can long exist without a head! In the church, Christ is the head and in all things has the preeminence (Col. 1:18).

Christ has all authority. Christ claimed, “All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth” (Mt. 28:18). If Christ has all authority, that leaves none for anyone else.

All is to be done in the name of Christ. Paul penned, “And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus...” (Col. 3:17). Doing all in the name of the Lord means doing nothing without His authority!

Christ is Head over all things to the church. Ephesians 1:22 affirms, “And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church.” There can be no other head of the church than Christ!

Since Christ is the Head of the church and is in heaven (1 Pet. 3:21-22), the headquarters of the church are in Heaven.

2) Apostles and Prophets: The Foundation. God set apostles and prophets in the church (1 Cor. 12:28). Their work pertained to the foundation of the church (Eph. 2:19-20).

Apostles. The word “apostle” means one sent. The apostles of Christ were “ambassadors for Christ” (2 Cor. 5:20); His official representatives sent out to reveal His will to men (Gal. 1:15-16).

Prophets. Prophets were inspired teachers. They edified, exhorted, and comforted the church in the absence of complete, divine revelation (1 Cor. 14:3, 31).

Since no one meets the qualifications of an apostle (Acts 1:21-22) and prophesy has ceased (1 Cor. 13:8-10), there are no apostles and prophets in the church on earth today.

3) Evangelists: Gospel Preachers. Christ gave some to be evangelists (Eph. 4:11). Their work relates to the extension of the Lord’s church.

Scriptural descriptions of evangelists. “Evangelist” (2 Tim. 4:5), “minister” (1 Tim. 4:6), and “preacher” (2 Tim. 1:11) describe the men and their work. “Evangelist” tells the nature of his message: good news, glad tidings. “Minister” describes his relationship to what he does: a

servant; not a master. “Preacher” tells what he does: proclaims a message.

Qualifications of evangelists. There are two qualifications of an evangelist: faithful and able (2 Tim. 2:2). Some may be faithful but not able, or able but not faithful. Both are essential!

The work of evangelists. Paul’s charge to Timothy gives, in a nutshell, the work of an evangelist (2 Tim. 4:1-5). His work in three words is to, “Preach the word...” (v. 2). This tells what he does. “...in season, out of season...” (v. 2) is when he does it. “...reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine” (v. 2) is how he does it. “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine...” (vv. 3-4) is why he does it.

4) Elders: Shepherds of the Flock. God has ordained that elders be appointed in every church in every city (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5).

Scriptural descriptions of the office. There are three different terms used to designate the office of elders: “bishop” (Phil. 1:1), “elder” (1 Pet. 5:1), and “pastor” (Eph. 4:11). “Bishop” describes him as one overseeing. “Elder” depicts him as one of experience and

maturity. "Pastor" portrays him as a shepherd tending sheep. These terms all refer to one and the same office (Acts 20:17, 28).

The work of elders. Their work is spiritual in nature, and limited to the local church — "...the flock of God which is among you..." (1 Pet. 5:2). They are self-examiners (Acts 20:28), example-setters (1 Pet. 5:3), overseers (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:2), flock-feeders (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:2), soul-watchers (Heb. 13:17), and rulers (1 Tim. 3:4-5). Their responsibilities are grave as they "must give account" (Heb. 13:17).

Qualifications of elders. There are general, family, reputation, ability, experience, positive and negative qualifications that must be met by men individually before they can be Scripturally appointed to serve in this capacity (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9).

Failure to understand and respect God's place for elders in the organization of the church has been the result of all kinds of problems down through the years.

5) Deacons: Serving the Lord's Church. The organization of the church includes deacons (Phil. 1:1).

Meaning of the word. The

work of deacons is suggested in the meaning of the word: a servant, an attendant. Deacons serve the local church under the oversight of the elders.

Qualifications of deacons. The work requires Scripturally qualified men. The qualifications are both positive and negative and are set forth in 1 Timothy 3:8-13.

No church is fully organized after the New Testament pattern until it has qualified men appointed to serve as deacons.

6) Teachers: Teaching Others. Christianity is a taught religion (Jn. 6:44-45). The Lord set teachers in the church for the purpose of teaching others (Eph. 4:11). There were teachers in the church at Antioch, some of whom were sent forth (Acts 13:1-3). As a result of their teaching efforts, souls were saved and churches were established. Older women are to teach the young women (Titus 2:3-5). The Hebrew writer said, "...ye ought to be teachers..." (Heb. 5:12).

7) Saints: Members at Work. Paul addressed his Philippian letter "...to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons" (Phil. 1:1). A saint is a

member of the Lord's church (1 Cor. 1:2). This term describes Christians as those called out of the world to be God's own people (1 Pet. 2:9-10). Every saint is important and must "...be... steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord..." (1 Cor. 15:58).

It is vital that every generation be grounded in these first principles. Whenever the Lord's people have gone astray, it has always started with organization. God had judges to lead His people and they said, "Give us a king..." (1 Sam. 8:6). Paul warned the Ephesian elders, "...of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them" (Acts 20:30). A distinction between elders and bishops which gave rise to the crowning of a Pope, church supported missionary and benevolent societies, the sponsoring church arrangement, women in positions of leadership in the church, and organizations and committees in the local church are abuses of organization that constitute a departure from the simple pattern of church organization in the New Testament. Let's keep the church pure in organization!

The Terre Haute **SPEAKER** is published weekly by the church of Christ at Terre Haute, Indiana.

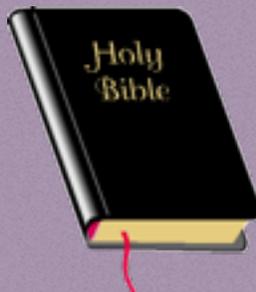
Assembling At:

4017 E Margaret DR
Terre Haute, IN 47803
[Exit 11 (I-70) W on HWY 46,
W on Margaret DR approx. 1 mile]

Assembling Times:

Sunday @ 10:00 a.m. & 3:00 p.m.
Wednesday @ 7:00 p.m.

Come be with us!



We Speak Where the Bible Speaks.

We Are Silent Where the Bible Is Silent.

We Do Bible Things in Bible Ways.

www.churchofchristatterrehaute.com