

IS EPHESIANS 4:11 LISTING OFFICES OF AUTHORITY FROM THE TOP DOWN? IF NOT, WHAT DOES IT TEACH US?

“The welfare of the people in particular has always been the alibi of tyrants, and it provides the further advantage of giving the servants of tyranny a good conscience.”

~Albert Camus

A Church leader explained why his position on church government was reverting back to what it used to be in years past. He justified his change in position from what he once taught so eloquently, by saying he was previously **trying to help people** come out of a former church organization that had turned to heresy, in order to gain their support in preaching the Gospel. To do this, he explained, he expounded certain scriptures and emphasized them in a certain way. When he felt that those who were going to leave that organization and join him had done so, he modified his teaching and position. He said that he then began emphasizing different scriptures to convince these people of the need to stay, submit to his authority, and support the work of his church organization. He commented something like this: “You know, to make a point, you might exaggerate something on one side, and later to make a different point, you exaggerate it the other way.” ASTONISHING! Especially so, for a respected evangelists! Perhaps he tells himself that he is doing what is best for the people, and doing what he thinks is the best way to keep a tithe base strong enough to “do an effective work.” This man seems to love God and must love to preach, but where does TRUTH and honesty fit in? He now teaches the very opposite of many of the truths about church government that he once very clearly showed from the scriptures. This type of thing may be well-meaning, but it is still sad.

So what did Paul teach about how the church was structured? Did Paul teach a pyramidal structure? Those who claim he did, often refer to Eph. 4 as “proof.” Let’s see:

Eph 4:11 *“And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers...”*

Are these offices of service listed in order of authority over each other, like a pyramid? Is

this verse teaching that the apostles are (or will be) “over” the prophets, who are in turn “over” the evangelists, who are in authority “over” pastors, who are in turn “over” the teachers? Do you see a pyramid here, or is it a listing of different offices of service for the good of the church?

Consider. If this were a pyramidal listing in terms of authority from the top down, then one would have to believe that all of the apostles (Paul for example) would be over Moses, Abraham, and King David in authority. As you may know, several men have claimed to be apostles today. Is this Biblical? My opinion does not matter, and neither does yours. We need to seek God’s words, for only God’s words count.

Matt 19:28 *“So Jesus said to them, “Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”*

Here Jesus’ plain words say that the twelve apostles will sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. Luke 22:30 conveys the same truth. But notice in Ezekiel, chapters 34 and 37, where God says that King David will rule over ALL TWELVE TRIBES of Israel as one nation, and thus he would be over each of the 12 apostles in the world to come! Jeremiah records the same prophetic truth, and the context makes it clear that David will rule over all of Jacob (Israel). (See also Jer.30:10.)

Jer 30:9 *“But they shall serve the LORD their God, and David their king, whom I will raise up unto **them.**” (KJV)*

“Them,” plural is all twelve tribes. So God’s Word teaches very clearly that the apostles are not, and will not, be over all the prophets in the world to come. What about now? Well today, the prophets are dead, so they don’t rule over anybody in a pyramid or otherwise, and no one rules over them. Their souls are in God’s Hands. It is absurd to try to make this passage into another supposed example of a pyramid structure of church government. **No, the Gospel IS NOT all about (church) government – it is so only in the minds of men who are confused, or in the minds of men lacking humility and/or understanding, or whom are seeking power.**

We also see the same very important pattern clearly laid out by Paul in his teachings to the church at Corinth.

1 Cor 12:28 *And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues.*

“**FIRST:**” God gave us the apostles to set down the very teachings of Christ which they received during their 3½ year discipleship with Him, plus those things that He later relayed to them in spiritual vision – such as 1) with Peter’s vision of the cleansing of the Gentiles

(Acts 10 & 11), 2) with Paul's visions teaching him, since he was not among the twelve (2 Cor.12:1), and 3) John who later received the Revelation of Jesus Christ (Rev.1:1).

“SECOND:” God gave us the foundation and recorded teachings of the **prophets** (throughout the Torah or Old Testament). The New Testament continues and builds upon this foundation, and quotes extensively from it.

“THIRD:” God gave us **teachers** to carefully teach God's words, as they are taught through the words of the apostles and of the prophets, and scriptural writings, i.e., the complete Torah [or Holy Scriptures] (Col.2:6-7). God has given different people in His Church different special gifts, for the service and equipping of His people. Some are gifted by God as **TEACHERS** of His words (1 Cor.14:5). God enables some to have a keener understanding of His Word, and the ability to communicate it to others in a helpful way. But this gift is also learned by studying the Statutes, maturing in God's Word over time, and **REMAINING HUMBLE** (Heb.5:12-14 & Gal.6:1)!

“AFTER THAT:” Some have, in times past, been given the special gift of **miracles and healing to confirm God's Word** (Mk.16:20). We hope and expect that this will occur again as time progresses toward the coming of the Lord. Other people have been gifted specifically to be **HELPFUL** to others. They are the ones who are always encouraging others, and are always there when you need them – letting God's light shine for the help of others. Do you have the gift of **“HELPS?”** If not, you can receive it by earnestly desiring and asking God for it (1 Cor.12:31)! Others are given the special gift of **“ADMINISTRATION.”** God gives some the gift of being good organizers, accountants or administrators for the “business” aspects of the Church. Jesus established that the New Testament church would have a treasurer to care for the needs of the church – the House of God – and her duties, just as the Levites did for God's House (1 Chron.9:26 & Jn.13:29 & Acts 6:1-3). This too, is a gift of God. Not all have this gift. Oh! Don't we need and appreciate those who do, and who use it in a godly way! God also gave some people the special gift of tongues in order to be able **to teach God's word in a different tongue or language, or as translators.**

Notice that each of these special gifts makes use of the foundation laid out by the work of the apostles and prophets, for the equipping of the saints, not having dominion over the saints (1 Pet.5:3), but helping them attain the fullest extent of their spiritual growth in Christ, unto perfection (Eph.4:13).

God's system **BUILDS UP SOLIDLY** each member of the Body of Christ. It is a system based upon true family love and genuine humility, and submission to one another in patient forbearance. Satan's way is filled with pomp and parading oneself as being great – it is one of domination of others, competition and condescension. It leads to division, envy, and hate.

Godly families find ways to stay together, not reasons to separate. God's way (and

leadership) is based upon love, which is the true sign given to identify us as Christ's disciples (John 13:35). Are you Christ's disciple?