

GOD'S LOVING CHURCH STRUCTURE AND LEADERSHIP PROTECTS GOD'S FLOCK, INSPIRES GROWTH, HELPS UNIFY GOD'S CHURCH AND PROMOTES THE PREACHING OF THE GOSPEL

“Humility makes great men twice honorable.”

~Benjamin Franklin

One of the incredible character traits of David was his devoted shepherd's love that he had for the flocks he cared for. Another was his humility. He risked his life to save the sheep from the mouth of the lion and the bear (1 Sam.17:34-35). He was a real shepherd. After God made him shepherd over all the house of Israel, he often put himself at risk, in order to do the right thing. He did not let his position of being king “go to his head.” He remained humble before God, and he ruled by God's Statutes and Judgments.

Jesus said that hireling shepherds flee when they see the danger of the wolf coming (John 10:12). That is because they are HIRELINGS, who are more concerned about their wages and personal safety than the sheep! True shepherds love the sheep, and are willing to suffer personal loss, if necessary, to protect and guide the sheep to fresh, calm waters and safe green pastures.

Eph.4:11-12 contains a list of servant leadership positions appointed to us by God for the benefit of and the equipping of the saints. They are given to us out of God's wisdom in His love and concern for all His people. When we do not look at this passage with preconceived eyes, it is really quite clear. Let's look at this passage – more closely – and see the loving wisdom behind it:

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

12 For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:

13 Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ:” (KJV)

God has given to us (in the New Testament Church) the “**apostles**” (via their **apostolic writings**). Jesus Christ was the First and remains the leading apostle (Heb.3:1). We, in this dispensation, are given Jesus’ words by way of the four Gospels, as well as the other God-inspired writings, primarily of or about the work and messages of the apostles. This is called the New Testament canon, and is given to us for the equipping of the saints. The apostles, by way of their examples and their writings, will serve to equip the saints until Christ’s return!

God has given us the Old Testament Holy Scriptures, written by God’s inspiration (2 Tim.3:16), primarily through the holy “prophets” (2 Pet.1:20-21). The prophets too, by way of their examples and their God inspired writings, will continue to serve and equip the saints up to the time of the return of Christ (2 Tim.3:15-17)!

Between the apostles, prophets, Gospels and writings – we have the entire scriptural canons, or the entire TORAH (Old and New Testaments). They recorded God’s Word for us in order to help equip and perfect us, and for the work of the ministry, so that the ministry would not go astray.

The evangelists, pastors and teachers have God’s words and examples in both the works of the apostles (New Testament) and prophets (Old Testament) to keep them on track as shepherds, and to help them edify the body of Christ with the meat of God’s Word – His Statutes, Precepts and awesome Testimonies. This is what brings us into the true unity of God’s Word and the common bond of love.

How then was the Church of God organized Biblically?

“APOSTLES:” The apostles first received the Word of God and faithfully taught and preserved it for us. Their mission was primarily to spread the Gospel and to instruct teachers who would carry on (Mark 16:14-15 & John 17:20 & 1 Cor.14:19). Guided by God, they ordained others to serve as pastors and elders, thus freeing up the apostles for the special unique Gospel commission that Christ gave to them (Act.14:23). As we have already seen, they (and their work) are part of the very foundation upon which the church is built. As such, they held the primary positions setting forth the teachings that they received from God. All other offices of the ministry are for the purpose of carrying out those teachings (2 Tim.2:2 & John 17:20). There is NO evidence that there has ever been an apostle from Biblical times forward, although many have made such claims. Once the foundation is laid, it does not need to be added to.

Apostles were part of the beginning foundation of God’s Church. In the days of the apostles Paul and John, many claimed to be apostles (as is today also), but they were found to be false apostles and liars. Should we not still “test” those who claim such preeminence today, and prove all things (2 Cor.11:13 & Rev.2:2 & 1 Thes.5:21)?

“EVANGELISTS:” Today an evangelist has come to be many things. While we now

have and have had some very Godly and effective evangelists in modern times, some have been ordained as evangelists who could not even preach or teach God's Word effectively. The term "evangelist" became known to some in church "hierarchy" as a "rank" that was sometimes given as a "reward."

Biblically however, "evangelist" means "preacher of the Gospel." An evangelist was usually a minister who traveled and preached the Good News over a regional area, such as did Timothy (2 Tim.4:5) and Philip (Acts 8:5-12). They would often oversee several regional churches that were set up by the preaching and work of the apostles (1 Cor.4:17). Sometimes they too would raise up new churches through their preaching the apostle's message (same verse). They assisted the apostles and carried on the apostles' message, but without quite the same level of authority of office that was unique to the apostles (as it was with the prophets of old). But they also ordained elders, and assisted the elders in serving and overseeing the local churches (Tit.1:5). However, they did not always administer these churches. Their primary functions were in teaching, and helping enable the elders to oversee the churches in their circuit, while they preached the Gospel to both the world and the church.

"PASTORS and TEACHERS:" Pastor comes from the word "shepherd," which is what a true pastor is supposed to be. **All pastors are teachers, but not all teachers are pastors.** Elders are also called shepherds Biblically, but not all elders are pastors. All offices of the ministry are referred to as "elders," as Peter even referred to himself as an elder (1 Pet.5:1). A pastor is the primary "overseer" of the church congregations he serves (1 Pet.5:1-4 & Acts 20:28). James was both an apostle and the pastor over the Jerusalem congregation. Biblically, pastors, like evangelists, often had the oversight of more than one church congregation, and they worked with the elders in that function. Pastors however, were more directly involved in and responsible for the oversight of the congregations they served.

Thus pastors were, and are, also responsible to be sure that, if possible, there are faithful elders in each congregation they serve; to faithfully expound and live God's Word as shepherds in the service of the local churches (2 Tim.2:2). Pastors also preached the Gospel to the world, as God provided opportunity, but usually not to the same degree as did evangelists or apostles.

Each of these different servants of the Lord worked together in harmony and humility to build the House of God, and spread the Good News of God's graces and His coming Kingdom. There was NO PYRAMID. That is why we do not see any kind of a "central church government" system. The many church congregations all around the world did not answer to a "presiding one," or a "Pope Peter" figure or even to the apostle James at the main Jerusalem church. Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles. His administration was different from Peter's. Peter's was different from Matthew's, etc. They stayed in touch and worked together in a collegial manner, coming together as needed. But they did not have a single centralized organization or governance over the whole church worldwide. It was a

more regional concept.

Each separate region was taught to “stand up” and function in more of an affiliated way, cooperating and coming together as the need arose. Such was the case concerning the “Jerusalem conference” of Acts 15 (and in a few other cases).

Neither did they have a payroll system, where ALL the ministers were paid from the one ruling over the whole church – controlling all of the ministry by the power of the purse strings. **Such an evil system encourages hirelings, and is not Biblical.** You can’t find an example of it anywhere in the Bible, because it is not there. The closest thing to it of which this author is aware of, is the abuse by Diotrephes who sought to prevent the brethren from directly contributing financially to and supporting those who were sent to them by John (3 John1:5-9).

Biblically, each church contributed to and supported those who cared for them spiritually by faithfully teaching them God’s Statutes, Precepts, and the whole counsel of His truth (Luke 10:7 & 1 Cor.9:4-14 & Gal.6:6 & 1 Tim.5:17).

God’s system of true apostolic Christianity would have prevented the gross apostasy wherein one man recently was able to persuade the majority of people in a well-known Church of God, to turn away from God’s Sabbaths, Holy Days, and many other truths. One man took the church in a completely different direction with an entirely different Gospel message.

He was able to do this because the membership had been taught and had come to believe in a false form of Church Government, and because they had been taught that the “church” was the (corporate) organization! It was good to see some finally make a stand for God’s Truths. However, unfortunately, many offshoots from that church organization have chosen to organize themselves with variants of the same flawed unbiblical system of controls. It’s like a man building a house upon sand – and though it falls, he builds it over and over again (1 Cor.3:9-16)! We all ought to humbly take heed as to how we do our part in building the temple of God!

Since God gave us the offices of the ministry, and gifted many with the gift of understanding and teaching His Word, should we then rebel against what God has ordained for us? Should we not rather do as God instructs us – PROVE ALL THINGS (1 Thes.5:21) – and then encourage and share in the spreading of the Gospel with those whose fruits show evidence of their being true ministers of Jesus Christ?

When one thoroughly and carefully studies the New Testament, that person will find neither a pyramidal hierarchy, nor a leaderless anarchy in the apostolic Church of God.

We have already examined the scriptures that clearly teach that ministers are not to rule like lords. But faithful ministers do deserve our respect and support when they truly do

follow God's Word in their leadership in God's Church! It is sad that some translators have chosen to use words like "rule," when the Greek word means "lead," "led" or "leadership." **There is to be leadership in God's Church.** There is NOT to be lording or anarchy.

Heb 13:7 *"Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith."* (NAS) [*"Remember your leaders..."* (NEB, NIV, ALT, RSV, TLB, MOFFATT, etc.)]

The KJV uses the word "rule" where the original Greek is "led," as shown in many other versions. The point is that Paul is telling us to remember those who have led us – the apostles and prophets. Remember your leaders, and consider the outcome of the way they live(d). If it is good, follow them in the truth. If the fruits are bad and contrary to God's Word, don't follow them. As Paul said, *"Follow me as I follow Christ"* (1 Cor.11:1).

If a minister is following God and faithfully teaching God's Word in your area or Church of God fellowship, should we not encourage and share in this with him? If not, WHY NOT? Worse, would we want to be found resisting one who is faithfully teaching the words of God? Not that he is a lord, but why resist good? Paul said God's ministry is appointed of God for our good and that resisting them is not good for us. Let's do our God-given part to be sure faithful ministers serve God and His people with JOY (Heb.13:17). Joy is the second fruit of God's Spirit (Gal.5:22). Please, let's not quench God's Spirit (1 Th.5:19).

Here's another passage we ought to consider:

Heb 13:17 *"Obey your leaders, and submit {to them} for they keep watch over your souls, as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you."* (NAS)

This word "obey" is (*pi'-tho*); it means to be convinced or persuaded, to assent to evidence or authority. Be convinced by your leaders, as they prove (a show of evidence) doctrine and truth to you from God's Word (1 Thes.5:21) and then submit. This is what God's Word says. It is also what the Bereans did. They did not take Paul's word for things. They evidenced his doctrine by proving Paul's teachings from the scriptures daily, and then submitted and supported him in his efforts of the Gospel (Acts 17:11)!

Just as it is necessary to correct the abuse and misuse of so many scriptural passages that are twisted by those apparently seeking to support their positions and to bolster themselves, it is also vitally important to fully recognize the fact that there are many passages that do show a balanced loving form of leadership that is to be present in God's Church – and a balanced loving way of treating and showing respect for Godly leadership that must be present throughout God's Church.

"Let's not throw out the baby with the bath water." Let's not violate God's Word with

either extreme.

Jesus said, “*Let him who is the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as the servant*” (Luke 22:26). Leaders should not be setting themselves forward, seeking to exalt themselves or their offices in an attempt to be preeminent, as Diotrephes did (3 John 1:9). Ministers are instructed to act with humility, dealing gently as if they were the younger dealing with the older (1 Tim.5:1). But notice: Did God say that there shouldn’t be any leaders? NO! He simply details the attitude and conduct of the leaders in order for them to be Godly! Please, my brethren, let’s understand this.

We are called to be kings and priests, under Christ, in God’s kingdom (Rev.5:10). We are told to learn how to judge matters in the church, since we will eventually judge even angels (1 Cor.6:1-9). We are taught HOW to judge by applying God’s Statutes and Judgments. Clearly there are and will be offices of service with appropriate authority in God’s Church. God provides leaders, not to rule over our private lives, but for edification and instruction in God’s righteousness, and to equip and encourage us in the Good News of His Word – real servant-minded leaders who help us by sharing the hope and JOY of God’s Word with us (2 Cor.1:24)! Peter said it beautifully:

1 Pet 5:1 *“The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed:*
2 *Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly;*
3 *nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock;*
4 *and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.*
5 *Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for “God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.”*

God ordained that there be elders and pastors as shepherds or “OVERSEERS.” God does not want hirelings for a ministry of “yes-men” (John 10:12-13). God desires real men of character who love God, who faithfully teach God’s Word without regard to what other men say (Gal.1:10). Yes, the ministry is to be made up of real men who love and serve God’s flock willingly – not for pay (1 Pet.5:2 & Tit.1:7). God wants REAL MEN, “tall men” who do not shrink back in self-preservation (Rom.1:18), but who teach humbly and faithfully, yet bravely, THE FULL COUNSEL OF GOD (Acts 20:27-33).

God does not need or want anymore “lords” in His church. There is ONE Lord – Jesus Christ! God is looking for faithful, humble overseers who will skillfully serve God’s people with care and lead them by setting a good example (1 Pet.5:3).

We’re talking about real MEN who fear God, clear-headed ones, who lead without regard to men. Brave men who will stand up to the lions of politics, compromise and

power. Men who will stand up to tyranny and not flinch. Men who will look you in the eye and speak the truth, even to their own hurt (Ps.15:4). Yes, fearless men who love God and love God's people, and who follow God's Word instead of the dictates of others; strong men of character and renown, real men who cannot be bought by the spoils or lusts of office nor intimidated into clouds of compromise. Clear thinking men with a zeal for God, and His Statutes and Testimonies, and the Good News message. Men who are unaffected by office, but who answer to and are rewarded by God, and know it (Heb.11:6). Yes, leading men who are led by God's Holy Spirit and who lead by God's Holy Spirit. Faithful leaders whose feet make glad as they carry the Gospel of peace (Rom.10:15).

Such ministers are to be followed, as they follow Christ (1 Cor.11:1). **Such ministers are to be respected and shown favor (Lam. 4:16)!** Such ministers are to be given respect and obeyed as they faithfully preach and teach GOD'S WORD. **Such men are worthy of receiving double honor from us** (James 4:16-19). Do not receive an accusation against such a one as this, unless you have two or more reliable witnesses (verse 19), for they have otherwise earned the "benefit of the doubt" and give honor to the office they serve in.

Friends and fellow saints of the Most High, please let's not let the vain puffed-up ministers who are set upon their own importance and greatness, (nor the weak ones who as "yes-men" blindly follow among the ministry) cause you to lose respect for the true ministers of God who shepherd humbly, yet boldly with a loving care and great conviction in God's truth. God has given us some faithful godly men of courage and scriptural understanding. They are helpers of our joy and they will be rewarded with a crown of glory for faithfully teaching God's Word and for their loving care of God's people when the chief Shepherd appears (1 Pet.5:4). God's laws are loving, so faithful ministers will be teaching them (1 John 2:4)! As a matter of fact, **God says that any minister who does not teach His Statutes and Testimonies, it is because there is NO LIGHT IN THEM (Isa. 8:16-20)!**

When faithful ministers and brethren teach and keep God's awesome Statutes – even the smallest of them – they will have the blessing of being called one of the "greatest" in the kingdom of God (Matt.5:19).

Yes, there is to be a ministry – a ministry that preaches the positive wonderful Good News of God's coming Kingdom, as well as the warnings from God (Mk.16:15). Yes, there is to be a respected ministry who "feed God's lambs" (Jn.21:15). Yes there are to be evangelists, pastors, teachers and wise men (Matt.23:34) who all contribute to the Body of Christ. We are all part of the Body, and all parts of the Body are needed. Not all are ministers. Not all are like the mouth teaching God's Word, but all are equally important and necessary. One is not better than the other. Each of us is to have humility, love and appreciation for the part that each one contributes (1 Cor.12:13-31).

True stewardship of God's flock is to be carried out in humility by loving, gentle shepherds; caring for those entrusted by God into their care. Not as lords or tyrannical

dictators. Ministers are teachers, not policemen! There is much more to faithful pastoring of God's flock than merely saying "servant leadership." We must actually practice it. "By their fruits you will know them (Matt.7:16-20), not by words of self-proclaiming importance. True stewardship of God's flock is to teach God's Statutes (which express love toward God and love toward fellowman). Of course it is also absolutely vital to teach the wonderful loving and awesome Good News that Christ was sacrificed for us (1 Cor.5:7 & 1 Pet.4:1-2).

Our sins are atoned for by our High Priest and Intercessor (Heb.7:25-26). We are saved by His life in and for us (Rm.5:10). That's why it's called the Good News! The Gospel is the news of the coming time when God heals all His people, and restores Israel to their own land, in a soon coming time of utopian peace and paradise with our loving majestic Father (Isaiah 11). It is a unifying family time when all the family is brought together as spiritually-born children of our great Daddy God and awesome Father, and when He places His name on us (1 Cor.15:27-28 & Eph.3:14-15).

Then Christ will be King of kings and Lord of lords, and **THEN the government of God in His Church will clearly be seen for what it is and always has been – UPON JESUS' SHOULDERS (Isa.9:6)!**

Thy Kingdom Come LORD!