

# Sound in the Faith

by Bob Pulliam

## Lesson 9

### The Organization of the Church



Memory Verses: John 8:31; II Timothy 2:15 (KJV); Ephesians 1:22f;  
Ephesians 5:19; Ephesians 4:4

**A**t first, the organization of the church might not seem terribly important. But God has established the church to function in a particular way. At first glance, that way may seem very inefficient. But upon closer examination, it's organizational structure is wise beyond measure.

#### *The Head of the Church...*

As we have noted in previous lessons, the church is the body of Jesus Christ, and Christ is the church's head. The church has no other head than Jesus Christ. Paul wrote to the Ephesians, "*And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church*" (Eph 1:22). And then, also, "*For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body.*" (Eph 5:23)

Since Jesus is the head, the church is subject to Him in all things. In the physical body, the hand does not have the option of providing alternatives to the instructions of the brain. The church, as Christ's body, does not have the option of providing alternative instructions either. And yet, that is what you find many churches engaged in today. They second-guess what Jesus has instructed the church to be and do, and follow the path they like best. This is precisely why there are so many different churches in the world today. If we all followed the precise pattern laid down in the New Testament, we would not be divided in matters pertaining to the church.

There are areas where the Lord has not given commands, in which we are expected to use our judgment. The time of day that we meet, for example. What portion of the Bible that will be studied at any given time? The Lord simply commands that His word be taught; but He does not tell us which particular portion, at any particular time. This is a matter of judgment called an "*expedient*". Expedients would include the use of song books to carry out the command to sing; the use of individual

containers for the fruit of the vine in the Lord's Supper; and a building in which to gather, to fulfill the command to assemble together. Notice that every case of an expedient requires authority for the practice it facilitates. We cannot decide that donuts on the Lord's table would be more appealing, and make the substitution. Violating what has been authorized does not constitute an expedient.

### *Denominational Structure...*

Typical denominational structure includes some type of headquarters, or governing body, here upon this earth. Various names for governing structures might be diocese, synod, conference, council, or district. These terms indicate that the churches within the structure are tied together by an organization foreign to what we find in the New Testament. While men had good intentions in setting up these arrangements, they are not according to the wisdom of God. If God didn't come up with them, then men must have been second-guessing God.

Usually, these are arranged in such a way that delegates are sent from each member congregation. The delegates gather at a "convention-like" event in which decisions will be made concerning that denomination. The Bible is not the final answer as to what the denomination will do (or believe). The final verdict comes in the way the members at the convention vote. This is why some of the major denominations have begun to allow homosexuals into their fellowship. It was not because they found reason from the scriptures. It was because the majority vote was cast in favor of it. Now, every member congregation of that conference must comply with the outcome of it's earthly head.

When we turn to the Bible, we do not find churches tied together by earthly power structures. Instead, each congregation was fully independent, making's it's own decisions concerning faith and practice. Think for a moment about the wisdom of this arrangement. In the denominational arrangement, all congregations are led away together by any apostasy that arises. With the Lord's arrangement, only one church is affected by any apostasy that might arise. This is why apostasy progressed so quickly in the Roman world at the beginning. Churches began to abandon the original arrangement established by God, and formed diocese to meet and discuss problems among them. As apostasy sprung up, all of the churches in the diocese fell prey to error.

As we shall prove shortly, every instance of the Lord's church in the first century was always independent of other churches in the Roman Empire. No church exercised authority over other churches. And no money went from one church to another, except in the case of benevolent

aid to needy saints; and that was always a limited endeavor (rather than constant, or ongoing). Today, it isn't uncommon to find churches lording it over other churches. It's also common to find funds being sent from one treasury to another for all manner of projects. They may seem very worthwhile; but they are a part of this power structure that is so wrong. Remember from our last lesson that, *"There is a way that seems right to a man, But its end is the way of death."* (Prov 14:12)

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### ***Question Set Number One***

- 1) What is the church, in relation to Christ?
- 2) What is Christ, in relation to the church?
- 3) "The church has no other \_\_\_\_\_ than \_\_\_\_\_"
- 4) What did the Father put under Jesus' feet?
- 5) In the physical body, what do the members not have?
  
- 6) In the same way, the church does not have...
  
- 7) What do many people do regarding Jesus' instructions concerning the church?
- 8) What is this the reason, or cause of?
- 9) What would not exist if we all followed the precise pattern laid down in the New Testament?
  
- 10) Matters of judgment left to us by the Lord are called ...
- 11) What does an expedient require?
- 12) Typical denominational structure includes what?
  
- 13) What various names are used for denominational power structures?
  
- 14) These terms indicate what?
  
- 15) What are sent from each member congregation?
- 16) By what means do they determine faith and practice?
- 17) In the Bible we find that each church was...
  
- 18) Who is led astray in denominational arrangements?
- 19) Who would go astray in the Lord's arrangement?
- 20) "No church \_\_\_\_\_ over other churches."
- 21) The way that seems right has what end?

## *Denominations and the Church...*

To understand the difference between the church and denominationalism, we must better understand why a denomination is what it is. “Denomination” refers to *the act of naming or calling by name with a view to distinguishing from an original and or between various differing kinds*. There are three distinct features of denominationalism: Departing from an original; division; and naming that division. Denominationalism approves outright division in religion, and fully sanctions modern innovation in its structure and practice.... Division is the basis of denominationalism, its practices are merely the symptom of it.

The question often arises, “Why isn’t the church of Christ a denomination?” And many would prefer to think of it in that way. In fact, just because the sign out front says “church of Christ” doesn’t mean it isn’t a denomination. Many so-called “churches of Christ” have followed the paths of denominationalism. But what about churches of Christ that have not strayed into denominational ways? Why wouldn’t they be considered denominations anyway? The answer is that they have not divided themselves from the original pattern found in the New Testament. They also do not try to distinguish themselves among other churches as one choice among many “acceptable” choices. Denominationalism says, “Worship at the church of your choice.” In denominationalism, all churches are acceptable. But the Lord’s church will remain true to the pattern of New Testament Christianity.

The closest thing you will find to denominationalism in your Bible is in First Corinthians. There Paul wrote: *“Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. For it has been declared to me concerning you, my brethren, by those of Chloe’s household, that there are contentions among you. Now I say this, that each of you says, ‘I am of Paul,’ or ‘I am of Apollos,’ or ‘I am of Cephas,’ or ‘I am of Christ.’”* (I Cor 1:10-12) They were denominating themselves by assigning differing names to themselves. Paul and Apollos both taught the truth. And if the converts of each of them followed the truth, there would be nothing different between them! And yet they were indulging in names that threatened to divide the church at Corinth.

Division is a concept totally foreign to the **body** of Jesus Christ. Division does not exist when all have the same head. Division comes about when we seek other sources of authority (emotion, scholars, creeds, etc...). Paul told the Ephesians to be *“endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace”* (Eph 4:3). His very next words were, *“There*

*is one body*” (v4). Division is not acceptable to the Lord. The command is that disciples “*speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.*” (I Cor 1:10) God has given us a message that provides the hope for unity. That message is not the source of other organizations. Those organizations arise from the desires of men to have something different from the church that Jesus built.

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### ***Question Set Number Two***

- 1) What are the three distinct features of denominationalism?
    - a)
    - b)
    - c)
  - 2) Denominationalism approves...
  - 3) What does it sanction?
  - 4) What is it's basis?
  - 5) What is merely it's symptom?
  - 6) If the sign says “Church of Christ”, you know it's not a denomination. T F
  - 7) Why aren't churches of Christ considered denominations?
  - 8) They also do not distinguish themselves in what way?
  - 9) Denominationalism says...
  - 10) To what will the Lord's church remain true?
  - 11) Paul pleaded what three things with the Corinthians?
    - a)
    - b)
    - c)
  - 12) How were the Corinthians denominating themselves?
  - 13) Division does not exist when...
  - 14) Division comes about when...
  - 15) Give examples of other sources...
  - 16) God gave us a message that does what?
  - 17) From where do other organizations arise?
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## *The Elders, Deacons, and Saints...*

The New Testament contains an established pattern for each local church. This is quickly seen in Paul's epistle to the Philippians. He wrote: *"Paul and Timothy, bondservants of Jesus Christ, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons:"* (Phil 1:1) Here we find three groups called forth. First of all, there are the saints. These are all of the Christians there at Philippi. Among these saints are men who have been appointed as bishops, or elders. Also among the saints are men who have been appointed as servants, or deacons. These groups are not necessarily exclusive of each other. Every bishop must be a saint. But not every saint can be a bishop. The same is true of deacons. Some religions make a distinction in terms when it comes to the eldership. There is no difference between an elder, bishop, pastor, or presbyter. The term "pastor" does not refer to the preacher in the New Testament. It refers to an elder, or bishop.

### *Elders...*

Elders are appointed by qualifications listed in the scriptures. For example, Paul wrote to Timothy:

*"This is a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work. A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach; not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous; one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence (for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?); not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the same condemnation as the devil. Moreover he must have a good testimony among those who are outside, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil."*

(I Timothy 3:1-7)

An elder will be a married man who has (or has had) children. This eliminates a practice becoming more and more common. I refer to appointing female bishops. It also indicates the error of the Mormon church in sending out young men and calling them elders. Just the term elder (found in passages like Acts 11:30; 14:23; 15:6; I Tim 5:17; Titus 1:5; and I Pt 5:1) refers to an older man. He need not be an old man; but

he would need to have the years of experience that earns him the respect he'll need to lead.

You might notice that many of these qualifications are essential for every child of God. But it is essential that there be no recurring problems with any of these matters. The elder must not only be above reproach; he must be trusted to remain above reproach. For this reason, the church must carefully consider anyone desiring this “good work”.

Elders are not appointed by anyone other than those over whom the elders will serve. Titus was told to appoint elders in every church (Titus 1:5). How did he accomplish this? We are never told. We do have an example of an appointment of servants in Acts six. There, the apostles told the disciples to “*seek out from among you seven men of good reputation*” (Acts 6:3). It is very likely that Titus used this same general procedure. This would allow the church to speak up about those who will be respected enough to be followed.

### ***Deacons...***

Deacons are men who serve ***under*** the elders. In some denominations, deacons are the leaders. In these denominations, they call the preacher a “pastor”, whereas the Bible has the pastor as being a bishop. If that seems confusing, don't feel too bad. Anytime men deviate from God's plan, everything gets confused and twisted around.

Deacons, like elders, must meet certain qualifications. Paul wrote:

*“Likewise deacons must be reverent, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy for money, holding the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience. But let these also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons, being found blameless. Likewise their wives must be reverent, not slanderers, temperate, faithful in all things. Let deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well.”*

(I Timothy 3:8-12)

The word “deacon” means *servant*. In the first century, they would oftentimes be entrusted with money or food to distribute to widows as the elders saw fit. While all saints are servants, these qualifications make it clear that a distinction was made in appointing certain men to their tasks.

### ***Saints...***

In our day and age, the word “saint” has come to refer to someone

dead, who performed superhuman feats of faith, suffering terribly in the process. But in the Bible, the saint was a follower of God. The word “saint” simply refers to the fact that we are sanctified by the blood of Jesus, and strive to live according to His will.

***Elder Rule...***

The elders in a church are said to “rule” the church. They do not do so by making law. They do so by using the law of God. Their particular concern is the spiritual condition of God’s people. They are described as shepherds (pastors) tending a flock (Acts 20:28; I Pt 5:1f). They are not to become dictators, lording it over God’s people (I Pt 5:3). Instead, they rule with love, mercy and compassion; watching over the souls entrusted to them (Heb 13:17). And of great importance is the fact that elders have no authority outside of the church over which they serve. They are to shepherd the flock “*among*” them (Acts 20:28; I Pt 5:1f). As we saw at the beginning of this lesson, there is no room for organizational ties between churches.

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***Question Set Number Three***

- 1) What does the N.T. contain for each local church?
  - 2) What three groups does Paul address in Philippians?
    - a)
    - b)
    - c)
  - 3) There is no difference between what four terms?
    - a)
    - b)
    - c)
    - d)
  - 4) What is the preacher called in some denominations?
  - 5) But who is called by that term in the New Testament?
  - 6) What was a saint in the Bible?
  - 7) What is one word describing what the elders of the church do?
  - 8) How are they described?
  - 9) Elders are not to become...
  - 10) What do they rule with?
  - 11) What are they watching over?
  - 12) What’s the maximum number they shepherd?
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