

# **SECTION 4**

## **LEADERSHIP IN THE CHURCH**

# LEADERSHIP IN THE CHURCH

By Dr. Horace S. Ward

The form of church government is an important issue to those who love the church and want to see it succeed in its mission. It has led to much debate and many divisions in Christendom over the centuries.

## DENOMINATIONAL PATTERNS

Differing opinions on church government are reflected in three common forms of denominational structure: congregational, presbyterian and episcopal.

Congregational groups consider the local church to be autonomous, and the denomination to be a loose fellowship without significant authority at the local level. Churches of Christ, Assemblies of God, Baptist churches, and all independent groups are congregational.

Presbyterian groups are governed by elders (the name comes from the Greek word, *presbuteros*, which means elder). These may be lay leaders as well as ministers, exercising authority in boards at the various levels. The authority of the denomination is exercised by legislative bodies composed of elders from the local churches. The Pentecostal Holiness Church and various Presbyterian bodies employ this form of government.

Episcopal groups are governed primarily by bishops (the name comes from the Greek word, *episkopos*, which means bishop, superintendent or overseer). This form of government is found among Catholic, Orthodox, Episcopal and Methodist churches.

The Church of God began with a strong, antidenominational bias. Early leaders opposed creeds, rules, and human institutions. Early General Assemblies were open to all members, including ministers and laity, both male and female. The purpose of an Assembly was to study the Bible to determine God's will for His church. Over a period of time, women lost their voice and laity were permitted to act only on matters brought to them by a council of ordained ministers. Recently the General Assembly restored both voice and vote to women.

The denomination now exercises greater authority over its local congregations, but many issues of real concern to the local church are decided locally. Denominational authority is exercised mainly by overseers. From this it can be seen that the Church of God is episcopal in its form of government. These differences, and the ongoing debate over denominational structure, result from the fact that the

Bible does not give a clear picture of how the church was organized in the days of the Apostles, nor does it give many specific directives for church government. I believe that this silence is God's way of giving freedom for the church to meet differing needs in different ways at various times and places.

I believe that the following principles are both biblical and necessary:

1. The local church is not autonomous, but is a part of a larger group, which constitutes the body of Christ (Hebrews 12:23);
2. The local church must continue in the Apostles' doctrine, and in fellowship with the rest of the body of Christ (Acts 2:41, 42);
3. God establishes leadership over individual believers, local churches, and groups of churches, to exercise His authority over the body of Christ (Romans 13:1-7);
4. All of us must be subject to those who are over us in the Lord (Hebrews 13:7, 17);
5. Authority over God's people is given only to those who are called of God and who are themselves under authority (1 Peter 5:1-4).

I was personally directed of God to join the Church of God, and I believe this church allows me to serve God in accordance with these biblical principles. I am convinced that this denomination is the best organized and most efficient of all the Pentecostal bodies, and that it offers a closer fellowship than any other group I know. I submit to its authority, and enthusiastically support its programs with my time, energy and money. It is my sincere hope that our entire congregation will do the same.

## **LOCAL PATTERNS**

There can be no doubt, among those who know the Scriptures, that God's people should be a theocracy in which God controls and governs. When Israel chose to become a monarchy (governed by a king) like the nations around them, they committed a grave sin. God said, *They have rejected me, that I should not reign over them* (1 Samuel 8:7). The head of the church is Jesus Christ (Ephesians 5:23, 24). He is chosen by the Heavenly Father to be Lord over all things (Philippians 2:9-12). The Holy Spirit is the executive agent by whom Christ governs the church (1 Corinthians 12:4-14). The very gospel preached by Christ and His Apostles was the Gospel of the Kingdom X a message establishing the rule of God over the lives of men.

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The problem is not to convince Christians that God should be in control of His own church. The problem is to determine how God exercises His rule over the church, and to recognize His voice when He speaks. Church structure often becomes a human institution, much like a club or a business, and fails to be God's instrument. The following patterns, with disappointing results, are found in congregations from all the denominational types described above.

Often churches become dictatorships, where control is exercised by one powerful person who makes the important decisions. The dictator may be the pastor, or a strong layman who reduces the pastor to a figurehead. The Apostle Peter warned ministers against being *Alords over God=s heritage* (1 Peter 5:3). The Apostle John denounced the bossy layman, *Awho loveth to have preeminence among them* (3 John 9-11). Dictatorships are not theocracies.

Other churches try to be democratic in government. This seems noble and patriotic for an American church, but democracy is government by the people, not by God. The last of the letters to the churches in the Book of Revelation was addressed to one that was spiritually blind and dead. Of all the churches it received the most severe rebuke. It is significant that their name was *Laodecia*, a word formed by two Greek words, meaning, *Agovernment by the people.* It is also noteworthy that other churches were identified as being in their cities (Revelation 2:8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7). The last letter was for *Athe church of the Laodecians* (Revelation 3:14). The most contemptible of all the churches *X a church about to be vomited from the mouth of God X* was a church of the people, by the people and for the people. It sounds like the best a democracy can be, but it was the worst a church could be. Democracy is seldom government by all the people, since it operates by majority vote. It becomes a tyranny of the majority over the minority. It leads to the development of shifting political coalitions, which seek enough votes to impose their wills on others. On most occasions in the Scripture, when vital spiritual decisions were made, the majority were out of the harmony with God's will.

Some churches are governed as oligarchies, which is government by a few. In this form of government, the decisions are made by a small group of people. During the days of Jesus, Jewish leadership was an oligarchy composed of the Sanhedrin. Those in leadership were the most adamant in rejecting the claims of Christ. An oligarchy is not a democracy, for it represents the tyranny of a minority over the majority. Neither is it a theocracy. Board-dominated churches are oligarchies.

## **THE BIBLE PATTERN**

First, the biblical pattern for church government is based on the fact that the church belongs to God, and that He must control it (Matthew 16:18). The Lordship of Christ is the foundational principle and the primary goal (Ephesians 1:22, 23; 4:15; 5:23, 24; Colossians 1:18).

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Second, the biblical pattern employs humans as the instruments of God's will. Christ gave humans the authority to speak and act in His name: acting for Him with His power of attorney (Matthew 16:19; 18:18, 20; 28:19; Mark 16:15-18; John 16:23, 24; 20:23; Acts 4:10, 20). He works through human vessels who can make mistakes or even fail. His vessels must always remember that they are mere men. Though they act as the official agents for God, they are not God. Only God is to be Lord over the church.

Third, the biblical pattern employs a divinely-ordained chain of command (Ephesians 5:21-6:9; Colossians 3:18-4:1; 1 Peter 2:11-3:7). God established the chain, and He honors it when He deals with His people. David illustrated this pattern when He wrote, *AHe [God] made known his ways unto Moses, his acts unto the children of Israel* (Psalm 103:7). God leads through His chosen leader. He gives His plan to the leader, and the results to the people. The Bible goes so far as to say, *ASurely the Lord God will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets* (Amos 3:7).

Fourth, God requires that His chosen leaders be regarded as His personal representatives:

1. They are to be treated with respect (1 Timothy 5:1, 17);
2. Their authority is to be honored (Numbers 12:1-11);
3. Their reputation is to be protected (1 Timothy 5:19);
4. They are to be supported financially (1 Timothy 5:17, 18);
5. They are to be obeyed (Hebrews 13:7, 17).

Jesus said to His ministers, *AHe that heareth you heareth me; and he that despiseth you despiseth me; and he that despiseth me despiseth him that sent me* (Luke 10:16).

Fifth, God allows His chosen leaders to delegate their authority to others who are also anointed of the Holy Spirit to help do the work (Exodus 18:14-27; Numbers 11:24-30; Acts 6:1-6).

Sixth, God assigns positions, functions, talents, traits and gifts to every member of the body of Christ, so that each can function fruitfully, responsibly and harmoniously in the work of the church (Romans 12:3-8; 1 Corinthians 12:4-14:33; Ephesians 4:7-16).

## **THE FUNCTION OF CHURCH LEADERS**

The spiritual leaders of the early church exercised a strong administrative role. Paul and Barnabas appointed pastors over local churches (Acts 14:23, NIV). Paul placed Timothy as overseer in Ephesus (1 Timothy 1:3) and Titus in Crete (Titus 1:5), giving them authority to appoint pastors (1 Timothy 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-16) and to oversee various functions of the local churches. Ministerial leaders had oversight of financial and business matters (Acts 4:34-37; 1 Corinthians 16:1-4; 2

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Corinthians 8:1-9:15), disciplinary control over church members (Acts 5:1-11; 1 Corinthians 5:3-5), and authority over who was welcome as guests in their homes (2 John 10, 11) and in their churches (3 John 10, 11).

As the churches grew, multiplied and spread over the earth, new ministers were called, trained and appointed. Almost 30 persons are named in the New Testament as apostles, including one woman. Others (men and women) are identified as prophets, evangelists, teachers, pastors and deacons. Paul identifies, as the highest gifts in the church, those who are called to be apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastors and teachers (Ephesians 4:11; 1 Corinthians 12:28). Peter specifies their major responsibility as the ministry of the Word, saying, *It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables...but we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word* (Acts 6:2, 4). Paul declares the purpose of their ministry to be, *For the perfecting of the saints for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ* (Ephesians 4:12).

Because the ministry of the Word is so important, Peter refused to get involved in administrative detail, so he delegated it to anointed subordinates. Because the ministry of the Word is so important, Paul sent handkerchiefs and aprons to be laid on sick bodies, instead of going to visit them himself (Acts 19:11, 12).

Those of us in spiritual leadership are to prepare you for ministry. That is our highest obligation. This requires your respect for our calling, your obedience to our instruction, and your active participation in the work of the church. Please note the biblical emphasis on ministry (service) not on elections, office, position or control.

## **THE MEANING OF MINISTRY**

It is the duty of every Christian to serve. Jesus said, *Whoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; and whoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many* (Matthew 20:26-28). A minister is a servant. Those who declare the Word do it to perfect the saints for the work of ministry X for serving. That ministry is in doing the works which are known as Aspiritual gifts.

We have become so institutionalized that we think of Christian service mainly in terms of offices that we fill and positions that we hold. We think in terms of being appointed as something or elected to something. Very often we see our function primarily in terms of controlling others and telling them what to do.

Our official positions are important to the work of the church, and I cannot imagine how we would do the work without people to fill these posts, but our work is not defined by our titles.

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It is the Holy Spirit who determines our calling. The Holy Spirit places in us, as gifts from God, certain traits, interests and motivations, that equip us for the work we are to do (Romans 12:3-8). Some are given a passion to proclaim and defend the Word of God; they have the motivation of prophet. Some are given a desire to help others with their work; they have the gift of servanthood. Some enjoy studying, applying and explaining the Word of God; they have the gift of teaching. Some like to lift up others and encourage them; these have the gift of exhortation. Some have an intense desire to help with financial needs and to give they have the gift of giving. Some have the ability to set goals, organize workers and delegate responsibilities; they have the gift of leadership. Some have the desire to help the needy, visit the sick, tolerate the intolerable, forgive the unforgivable and perform acts of kindness for others; these have the gift of mercy. All of us will function best in those ministries which allow us to exercise the motivations and abilities given to us by God.

The Holy Spirit will also move on us from time to time to say and do things which are beyond our normal abilities (1 Corinthians 12:4-11). We may be given a message helping others to understand difficult situations, solve problems or resolve dilemmas; this is a word of wisdom. We may be given a message involving facts we did not know; this is a word of knowledge. At a particular moment we may have the ability to believe for something supernatural X to believe for more than we normally could; this is a gift of faith. At times we may be able to pray for the sick with a special ability to bring them healing; this is a gift of healing. At times we may be used to accomplish the supernatural; this is a gift of miracles. At times we will be given words to speak, which are the very words of God, Himself; this is a gift of prophecy. At times we may be able to recognize the spirits which are present, active, or speaking, and we will know whether those spirits are from God; this is a gift of discerning spirits. At times we may feel the urge to speak to others in a language that we never learned; this is a gift of tongues. At times we may be given understanding of the message spoken in tongues, or given words to explain or interpret its meaning to others; this is a gift of interpreting tongues.

There may be other gifts which will operate in us, coming to us by the Holy Spirit. He helps us to say and do helpful things in ministering to the needs of others. We minister to them; they minister to us; we strengthen and help each other; and the church through this process grows to be more and more like Jesus (Ephesians 4:11-16).

No one has to elect you to anything in order for you to be useful in ministry. You should accept election and appointment when the Holy Spirit chooses you for a task, but you will have daily opportunities to use your gifts, even without an official position. Look for needs around you. Listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit within you. Consult with those over you in the Lord to gain understanding of how to be sensitive to the Holy Spirit. To be effective, you must: know the Word of God, understand how the church is to operate, be in harmony with the rest of the body, be in submission to those over you in the Lord, and know both how to recognize and yield to the working of the Holy Spirit in you. Those of us in ministerial leadership are to help you learn these things.

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## THE MANNER OF MAKING DECISIONS

The function of decision-making in the church is only to find the will of God. When His will is clear, the church has only one choice *X* to obey. The conclusion of our deliberation must be, *Alit seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us* (Acts 15:28). How can this be done?

The church must judge what it hears (1 Corinthians 14:29). We are commanded, *AProve all thing; hold fast that which is good* (1 Thessalonians 5:21). This is not a matter of personal preference, it is a matter of spiritual discernment.

Debate, argument and majority votes do not lend themselves to spiritual discernment. They call on the intellect for logic, become a contest of wills, and stir up the emotions so that they drown out the still small voice of the Holy Spirit speaking to our spirits.

Discussion is in order. There should be an understanding of the issues, the needs, the obstacles and the resources. There should be an openness to the operation of the spiritual gifts, such as the word of wisdom, the word of knowledge, faith and the discernment of spirits.

There should be a searching of any Scripture which clarifies God=s will in the matter, or which gives any guiding principle for the decision being made.

There should be readiness to hear what the Lord has said to His chosen leader, and what vision God has given to Him. One who has often heard the voice of God will usually know whether or not it is God speaking to Him.

There should be willingness to let God confirm His voice by opening and closing doors in accordance with His will. Rather than prying doors open with manipulation, pressure or force, we must be willing to wait for God=s timing, and for the full revelation of His will.

When the Lord=s will has been found, those who are spiritual will sense peace and joy, even when their opinion did not prevail. Unity, love, joy and peace are the earmarks of the Holy Spirit (Romans 14:17-19; 1 Corinthians 14:33; 2 Corinthians 13:11; 1 Thessalonians 5:11-13; 2 Timothy 2:22).

Brethren, we must be God=s church. We must do His work His way. We must let the Holy Spirit be the controlling agent in all decisions. Nothing else will prosper.

This may sound like an unrealistic dream, but it is the way God expects His church to work. Jesus said that the Good Shepherd has a very special relationship with His sheep: *AThe sheep hear his voice: and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out. And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice. And a stranger*

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*will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers .... I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine*≡ (John 10:3-5, 14).

## **PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

As churches become institutionalized they often stray from these biblical principles. Power struggles beget power blocs. Elders [mature leaders of spiritual ministries] and deacons [servants] become boards of directors. The authority of God is usurped by groups of men.

I have observed this tendency first-hand, in the bylaws by which one leading congregation governed its operations for nearly twenty-five years. The original intention might have been noble, but the result was a system which strangled initiative and denied the authority of divinely anointed leaders.

Those bylaws did not result from nor lead to growth. Growing churches are so consumed with a passion for ministry that they do not take up their time writing bylaws. Bylaws are usually written by churches in decline, when its members are more interested in gaining power to control other people, than in finding ways to serve other people. By creating a board-dominated organizational structure, those bylaws virtually guaranteed a continued decline. Research in church growth proves that board-dominated churches do not grow.

Instead of honoring the biblical role of the pastor, the bylaws virtually ignored him. An entire system was created for the operation of the church as if it did not have a pastor. Important church records were kept from him, locked in rooms and cabinets to which he was given no keys. He had no authority to employ, supervise or evaluate any staff person. The staff ministers served under the supervision and evaluation of boards, which held full authority over them. Jesus said, *ANo man can serve two masters*≡ (Matthew 6:24). The staff ministers were placed in the impossible position of trying to serve five or seven masters X the members of their respective boards. The pastor was placed in the impossible position of being responsible for the church, but having almost no authority with which to lead the church.

Because of those bylaws, a small group, totaling about five percent of the church constituency, met annually on an off-night and elected themselves to membership on the boards and the Church Council. Their intentions were honorable, and they generally elected the same people who would have been chosen by the whole church, but a dangerous condition existed in which a very small group of self-elected people had full power to govern the whole church.

Those conditions were intolerable, and they were changed. When given the opportunity, those very people who held all the governing power gave it up. They returned to the entire church the right to make major decisions and to elect the Church Council. They surrendered necessary authority for

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decision-making to those responsible for doing the work of ministry. They officially recognized the divinely ordained roles of those placed as ministers over them.

The search for biblical principles of church government may require us to abandon familiar institutional procedures. We may need to find new names by which to identify various roles [such as elders and deacons], in order to avoid their identification with the institutional caricatures which have twisted the original biblical ideals. We must find the most biblical manner of functioning as a church. We must let God rule His church.

To be guided by biblical principles would require that all of us accept our assigned positions in the chain of command, that we submit to those over us in the Lord, and that we recognize our function is only to serve and not to rule. Biblical principles would require us willingly to receive guidance and evaluation from those over us in the Lord. They would require communication to be open, direct, warm and respectful.

The Lord will speak to me concerning those things that relate to the over-all ministry of the church. He will speak to the ministerial staff about the work under their supervision. He will speak to each of the directors and leaders concerning those ministries under their leadership. He will speak to teachers about their classes and to workers about their duties.

As much as possible, we must allow managerial decisions to be made by those closest to the task. They are the ones with the greatest burden for that ministry, with the best understanding of the problems and the most accurate knowledge of the needs. They are also the ones to whom God is most likely to speak. Policies and budgets may move in ever-broadening circles of approval, until the entire church is asked for certain kinds of approval, but authority must be delegated along with duty, and they both must be accompanied by patience and trust.

God will lead us all in the same direction and move the church forward in a spirit of harmony and unity. If some person or department tugs in a different direction or creates a crosscurrent, we will know something is out of order, and will search together for the will of the Lord. Any correction or realignment will be done in a spirit which is constructive and loving.

I believe that we have a large group of qualified workers who are eager to hear the voice of the Lord. We are organized into groups, teams and ministries, led by those individuals responsible for supervising the work done by them. All of these report regularly to the pastors, the Ministry Council and the Church Council, so that we can all move forward together.

It is important that we understand the system by which we operate as an organization, but it is even more important to remember that we are God's church, and He is the one who must always be in control.

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**A PERSONAL COMMITMENT**

The divine plan for church leadership can fall prey to the abuse of power by a leader. He may mistake his own will for the will of God; he may listen to the wrong voice. The church should follow a leader as he follows the Lord, but only when he follows the Lord (2 Thessalonians 2:4-9; Hebrews 13:7, 8).

Here are commitments I have made to my church in order to be a leader they can follow safely:

1. I will be a man of the Word, spending daily times in the study of Scriptures, so that God can speak to me and correct me by the written Word;
2. I will be a man of prayer, spending extended daily times before the Lord, not only speaking to Him, but listening for His voice to me;
3. I will stay alert to what God is saying through great preachers and teachers widely recognized by the body of Christ;
4. I will submit to the leadership of those placed over me in the Lord by our denomination;
5. I will seek a peer group of respected pastors with whom I can share openly and candidly, and from whom I can receive both counsel and rebuke;
6. I will listen to the advice of the ministerial staff which God has placed in partnership with me;
7. I will consult with our administrative elders and ministry elders, as well as other groups and individuals in the church, concerning those areas where God has given them experience and responsibility;
8. I will take to heart any counsel, advice, instruction or rebuke from even the least of the people, to see if the Lord is speaking to me through them;
9. I will encourage the church to maintain that spirituality which will allow it to recognize and discern the will of the Lord, and I will submit myself to such spiritual discernment.

By the grace of God, I will not be a lord over God's inheritance, but an undershepherd whom the Good Shepherd can freely use in expressing the tenderness of His care for His flock.

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