

No.7. The Government of the Church

The Lord Jesus Christ is "head over all things..." v.23. In considering these words last week we noted that Christ has universal power & authority, the same truth being presented in Matt 28: 18, Phil 2: 10-11. These Scriptures teach that as a reward and a consequence of His sufferings Christ is Lord of the universe and all creation. Therefore, these Scriptures essentially teach that Christ exercises this universal reign as the Mediatorial King. He has, of course, all authority by virtue of His essential Godhead. But in reigning as Lord of lords and King of kings He does so as the Mediatorial King, who has been exalted & glorified in reward for His humiliation.

CHRIST HEAD OF THE CHURCH IN PARTICULAR

However, in a particular and special sense Christ is Head of the Church. He is vitally and organically head of His church, His body, thus the Church of the redeemed draw their spiritual life from Him, and He exercises spiritual control over them, John 15: 1-8. But Christ is Head of the Church, not only because of His vital relationship to it, but also because He is its ruler, its legislator, and its King. Therefore, in its visible life & position in this world Christ rules the Church, and the Church is to recognise the authority of no one but Christ.

HIS SOLE AUTHORITY IN THE CHURCH REVEALED IN VARIOUS WAYS

This authority of Christ over the Church is manifested in various ways, some of which we have already noted in previous studies. For example, His authority over the Church is seen in that it is a *divine & spiritual institution*. Christ builds the Church, Matt 16: 18. Hence, He is its authority. Again, His authority or headship concerning the Church is seen in that *He provides the means of grace necessary for its well being* -- the Word & the ordinances. He who administers a constant, living supply of life and grace to the Church is surely its Head & sole authority and is to be recognised as such by His people.

However, Christ's Headship of the Church is seen in that *He provides for the government of the Church*. It is spiritual government, designed to secure the order and discipline of the Church and to maintain purity of doctrine and worship, see Eph 4: 11-12. The principle of these verses is that Christ has appointed certain offices for the governing of His Church. But the inference of His appointment of the offices of the Church is that He is its Head. Who else but its Head would have the right to order its government?

THE OFFICERS OF THE CHURCH

Christ provides for the government of His Church by instituting certain offices to be occupied by men who would exercise spiritual rule over the Lord's people. In the N.T. different kinds of offices are distinguished, thus a general distinction may be made between extraordinary and ordinary offices.

1. The Extraordinary Offices -- were basically three extraordinary offices.

(a) The Apostles -- the twelve and then Paul also, although the title is also applied to certain men who assisted Paul and were endowed with apostolic gifts, e.g. Acts 14: 4, 14. The Apostles had the special task of laying the foundation of the N.T. Church. Note in John 17: 20 that through the word of the Apostles believers of all succeeding ages are brought to know Christ. In that sense, therefore, they are just as much the apostles of the Church today as they were of the 1st century Church. The Apostle has special qualifications: *they were directly commissioned by Christ*, Matt 10: 1, 2, Gal 1: 1; *they were witnesses of Christ's ministry and especially His resurrection*, John 15: 27, Acts 1: 21, 22; *they were conscious of being inspired by the Spirit in their teaching both oral and written*, 1 Cor 2: 13, 2 Pet 1: 21; *and they had the power to perform miracles*, Heb 2: 4.

(b) The Prophets -- see such Scriptures as Acts 11: 28; 13: 1, 2; 1 Cor 12: 10; 13: 2; 14: 3; Eph 2: 20 etc. These Scriptures show that the N.T. prophet had a dual role: he was occasionally instrumental in revealing mysteries and predicting future events, Acts 21: 10, 11; and he also had the gift to speak to the edifying of the Church, Acts 15: 32. We would believe that this office was also temporary, although the gift to edify the church through speaking God's Word continues on in the office of the pastor.

(c) Evangelists -- It is true that Timothy for example was a Gospel minister, and as such was to evangelise, as all faithful Gospel ministers should, 2 Tim 4: 5. But, it would appear that the N.T. evangelist was a distinct office, Acts 21: 8, Eph 4: 11, 2 Tim 4: 5. Philip, Mark, Timothy and Titus belonged to this class. Not much is known about the evangelist, but they appeared to accompany and assist the Apostles and were sometimes sent out on special missions, 1 Tim 1: 1: 3, 4; Titus 1: 5.

2. The Ordinary Offices -- use the word "ordinary" by way of making a distinction between those offices that were temporary and have passed away and those that are permanent and continue on.

(a) The Elder or the Bishop -- this is the permanent office of ruling in Christ's Church. The two terms -- elder & bishop -- are employed interchangeably in the N.T., Acts 20: 17, 18. Moreover, within the office of the elder there is a distinction between the ruling and the teaching elder, 1 Tim 5: 17. Thus, while all elders exercise a ministry of ruling, some are engaged in both teaching and ruling -- in what is essentially the office of the pastor/teacher, the minister of the congregation, Eph 4: 11. Here the words "*pastors and teachers...*" are in a certain construction in the original language that indicates that one office, not two, is in view. Thus, the reference is to one office having two related functions -- teaching and ruling.

(b) The Deacon -- the *diakonoi* are separately mentioned in the N.T. as a distinct office, Phil 1: 1, 1 Tim 3: 8, 10, 12. The prevailing view is that Acts 6: 1-6 contains the record of the institution of the diaconate although some would dispute that view. But 1 Tim 3 is the classic passage showing the existence of an order of church officers -- the diaconate -- totally separate from that of the elder or bishop. Believing as we do that Acts 6 does record the institution of the office, then the nature of the deacon's work is clarified -- it is one of being engaged in works of mercy & charity. The reason for the introduction of the office was to enable the Apostles to attend to their spiritual duties in a fashion as free from hindrance as possible.

Therefore, Christ has delegated the government of the Church of the N.T. to those men who occupy the offices that He has constituted, and the Church has no mandate to deviate from the order of government that Christ has ordained. He is the Chief Shepherd and has appointed under-shepherds for the regulation of His Church. How important that all within the Church give honour to Christ by submission to the offices that He has ordained, especially the office of the elder, the one that is concerned with the spiritual well being of the flock.