

# The Structure of The Church

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A major position of the Protestant Reformation was "the priesthood of all believers"; that is, we are all priests. Consequently, this view insisted that every Christian has direct access to God. No one has to go through a priest or Church organization to reach God. In scriptural terminology, "He is not far from any one of us" (Acts 17:27). "The priesthood of all believers" has become an oft quoted statement in our own day. I believe the statement is true, but some have assumed conclusions from it that are not true. The issue is not whether we have to go **through** anyone else in order to reach God, but rather **how we fulfill God-given duties toward others**. This latter issue **will** affect our fellowship with God.

God requires that a husband treat his wife according to certain standards. If he does not, his "prayers will be hindered" (1 Peter 3:7). That is, God will not hear his prayers. He does not go "through" his wife to contact God. Neither does she stand "between" him and God. It is his own sin, in mistreating her, that stands between him and God (Isa. 59:2; John 9:31; 1 John 3:22). The same could be said about how a wife treats her husband. If she does not follow God's orders about such conduct, God's word is blasphemed, and she is responsible (Tit.

2:3-5). Indeed, how a man treats all his family members affects his standing before God! If he does not care for them, he has "denied the faith" and become "worse than an infidel" (1 Tim. 5:8).

God has given Christians responsibilities to carry out together with other Christians. But each is accountable for how he works with others in what God demands they do together. Failure to obey God in together-activities affects our "direct access to God".

Christians are obligated to assemble together, repeatedly and frequently (Heb. 10:25). Those who "forsake assembling" are out of favor with God. Some singing we do must be with other Christians (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16). We cannot obey those commands alone. The individual responsibility appears in that each individual takes a part in attending the assembly and singing with "one another". No one can fulfill such commands for the individual. He must do them himself.

## CHURCH

Another popular saying we hear often is, "When you think church, think people." **The Examiner**, January, 1986, page 25, says:

The word "church" is used (misused is the truth of the matter) for a translation of the Greek word "ecclesia". It refers to God's people as an assembly or congregation of these people under God and Christ.... "When you think 'church', think people!" That is right on target.

We are to "think people" in what ways? *Ekklesia* is a compound word, using the preposition *ek*, "out of", and *klesis*, meaning "to call". So, *ekklesia* means the "called out". However, if we translated *ekklesia* as "people" in every place it's found, we would not clarify anything. It MAY be used in places to mean "saints", "disciples", or "Christians". We must learn THAT from the context in which it's found. *Ekklesia* has a literal and figurative, physical and spiritual, meaning, with a wide range of applications. Problems of understanding it would exist whether we translated it as the above term or the familiar "church".

EKKLESIA was a commonly used word in Greek society of the day. It's not a word given by the Holy Spirit just for Christians. It was used of an assembly of citizens of a city as a legislative assembly. Our own United States Congress would even answer to this usage. Other derivative words were common in the first century as well. *Ekklesis* meant to call out, to issue a challenge. *Ekklesiastikos* referred to a member of the *ekklesia*. Add the word *argurion* to that, and it referred to the monetary compensation for time and effort received by the member of the *ekklesia*. *Ekklesiasterion* was the place for the *ekklesia* to meet. *Ekklesiasmos* meant to hold an *ekklesia* and debate therein, etc.

Acts 19 records three places where *ekklesia* is used to refer to citizens of Ephesus. In two places, it applies to a mob of unruly and confused people. In the other, it means the city council. In those two former instances, when you "think 'church', think people", you would think of an unruly and confused mob of unbelievers! Verse 32 says "the assembly was in confusion; and the more part knew not wherefore they were come together". The word "assembly" is from *ekklesia*. In verse 40, this riotous mob is called an *ekklesia* by the town clerk — "he dismissed the assembly". But, in verse 39, the town clerk said that this matter would be "settled in the regular assembly". There, *ekklesia* refers to the city officials' meeting to decide what was to be done about this matter. Notice there was a 'regular' *ekklesia*, in contrast with this confused and riotous *ekklesia*. From these passages alone, we can see different ways to understand what *ekklesia* means. Just identifying *ekklesia* as people and stopping there would not help us understand what was happening at Ephesus. Both the unruly mob and the city council were composed of "people". Yet, there was a world of difference between the two. To translate *ekkle-*

*sia* as "Ephesian people" would not help either, any more than to translate it as "God's people", in other passages. When you think church, think people, but think of them in what way?

Charles Holt, in *The Examiner*, previously cited, pages 25-27, says:

The New Testament never speaks of either "the local church" or "the universal church". It does speak often of "the church" and that term means the same thing in every instance. It always refers to disciples, saints, believers, God's people... In the New Testament expression "the church" (*ecclesia*), when referring to God's people, is always without any restrictions or limitations. It embraces all of them. Let me put it like this: "the church" equals all of God's people—everywhere! ... There is nothing inherent in the word "ecclesia" (*church*) to indicate it refers to anything more or other than disciples or saints, God's people... There is nothing inherent in the word itself to indicate that it has any 'local' use... *ecclesia* is always universal or comprehensive in its meaning ... One must learn from the context if there are any limitations or restrictions when we read of "the church". For example "the church in Ephesus" (Rev. 2:1), ... In these cases it is easy to see that the reference is limited to that portion or part of God's people as identified.

*Ekklesia* does not refer only, always, and everywhere, universally, to God's people! Nor are "disciples, saints, or God's people" inherent in *ekklesia*! We have just seen that a confused, unruly mob of citizens and a city council are *ekklesia*. The term refers to "called out people", without regard to who they are, where they are, how many there are, the circumstances, or the relationships involved. All these things must be determined from the context and other passages. In each case, we must determine if it refers to God's people in the same way. In actual fact, we must determine its "universal" meaning from the context of a passage. The fact that it means "universal" in Matthew 16:18 must be determined by the wording in that context. In the same way, we understand Revelation 2:1 refers to a "portion or part of God's people", a local church. However we translate *ekklesia* into English, context and other passages tell us to whom and what it applies. We would have to do that whether we translated it as "church" or "God's people".

Holt himself uses "universal" to refer to the church; he says it is "always universal" in its meaning. He also says the New Testament "never" speaks of the local church or the universal church. He's just playing with words; it's what the New Testament calls "striving about words to no profit". In referring to a particular church in a particular city, he prefers to call it a "portion

or part of God's people as identified". Well, that's what we mean by "local church". Holt's preferred phrase, "portion or part of God's people", is **not found in the New Testament any more than** "local" and "universal", in reference to the church, may not be used in the New Testament but the ideas involved in them are certainly there.

We have seen its references to pagan people, let us now investigate the varied applications of **church** in the New Testament to God people.

(1) Church may refer to Old Testament people. Acts 7:38 speaks of Moses "in the church in the wilderness". That reference takes us back to "the day of the assembling" in Deuteronomy 9:10; 18:16. In those passages, and many others in the Old Testament, the Septuagint rendered the Hebrew, *qahal*, as the Greek *ekklesia*. It is commonly used of a formal assembly of Jews. Psalm 22:22 is quoted in Hebrews 2:12, where *ekklesia* is used to speak of such an assembly.

→ (2) Church may simply identify Christians in a particular family, "the church in their house" (Col. 4:15; Rom. 16:5; 1 Cor. 16:19; Phile. 2). **Thayer's Greek Lexicon**, page 196, says that this usage refers to "the company of Christians belonging to a person's family; others less aptly understand the phrase of the Christians accustomed to meet for worship in the house of some one". (For a complete discussion of this point, see the chapter on "House Churches" in my book, **The Discipling Movement**).

(3) Church may refer to all Christians everywhere, universally. Matthew 16:18, "I will build my church", shows this. Also, every appearance of "church" in the Ephesian letter has this meaning. It identifies all Christians in **all places in all periods of history**, a figurative, spiritual meaning. No particular people, locality, or specific assembly is even implied. To translate *ekklesia* as "assembly", "congregation", "disciples", or "people", in such passages as these, would require as much or more explanation as "church" does.

(4) Church may refer to groups smaller than the universal church. These are stated, many times, in the plural. In the several places following, no specific location is mentioned: the churches of the Gentiles give thanks (Rom. 16:4); "the churches of Christ salute you" (Rom. 16:16); and Paul taught the same things in all the churches (1 Cor. 4:17; 7:17). There are also other instances of this same usage.

There are churches mentioned in particular districts or subcontinents by name of location: the seven churches of Asia (Rev. 1:20; 3:6); the churches of Galatia (Gal. 1:2); the churches of Judea (Gal. 1:22); and the churches of Macedonia (2 Cor. 8:1).

There is no doubt that to identify a church located in a particular city would amount to a local church. It's

obvious that the "churches" mentioned above are local churches. The seven churches of Asia in Revelation 2:1; 3:22 are mentioned by the name of the cities where they were "located" as are the church of God at Corinth (1 Cor. 1:1), the church of the Thessalonians (1 Thess. 1:1), and the church of the Laodiceans (Col. 4:16). There are also many other instances of this usage.

(5) Church may refer to a particular assembly of disciples in one place. In 1 Corinthians 14:19, Paul says that "in the church" he would rather speak five words in an understandable language than many in an unknown (foreign) tongue. Verse 28 says that if there is no interpreter, the tongue speaker is to keep silent "in the church". Verses 33-35 state, "As in all the churches of the saints, let the women keep silence in the churches... And if they would learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home: for it is shameful for a woman to speak in the church".

"Church" in these passages means an **assembly** of saints. That assembly had rules governing its order and collective function. These rules did not apply to individual Christians in other situations outside that assembly. Look at the following rule: "Let the women keep silence in the churches...ask own husband at home... it is shameful for a woman to speak in the church". There was something the women could do **outside** the "church" that they couldn't do **in the church**.

You may ask, Were not these people Christians **all of the time**, no matter where they were, "in the church" or "out of the church?" Were they not saints "in the church" whether assembled or not? Certainly! It's simple. The world "church", *ekklesia*, is used more than one way. **Each use carries its own ideas of relationships and responsibilities**.

1 Corinthians 11:18 says, "...when ye come together in the church...". The "ye" in that verse refers to the individuals, and "in the church (*ekklesia*)" refers to an assembly. If the "ye" were the church all of the time, why does it say that there is a condition of being "in the church" which they make possible by coming together. Any confusion is cleared up when we understand there are several meanings of "church".

The proper way of eating the Lord's Supper is discussed in 1 Corinthians 11. Notice some similar distinctions made in verses 22 and 34, as compared with verse 35 of chapter 14. They were to eat their common meals "at home" and to come together in the church to eat the Lord's Supper. Twenty-seven years before that, the same distinction is made. In Acts 2:46, the disciples did things together in assembly at the temple, and ate their meals "at home". Women were to ask their husbands "at home" and keep silent "in the church". To translate *ekklesia* as "God's people" in these places would be ridiculous! They would read, "When ye come together in

the God's people". Or, "Let your women keep silence in the God's people". Will such translations work? Indeed, not!

So, when you see the word "church" in some passages think an "assembly" of people meeting together, doing together, and **following rules that apply to just those assembly activities.**

→ (6) Church may refer to a local group of saints with a fixed membership, existing as an entity **whether assembled or not.** In 1 Corinthians 14:23, Paul speaks of "the whole church" coming together in one place. He was talking about the church at Corinth, not the universal church. There must have been a fixed membership that identified them as the church at Corinth.

1 Timothy 5:16 says, "If any woman that believeth hath widows, let her relieve them, and let not the church be burdened; that it may relieve them that are widows indeed". "It may relieve" is third person singular, referring to "church". This refers to a group of saints who have a collective responsibility *whether in an assembly or not.* A distinction is made between individual and collective responsibility; that is, individuals take care of their own, and the congregation takes care of "widows indeed".

→ Certain people are identified with certain groups of Christians. Acts 13:1 gives a list of teachers and prophets "in the church that was at Antioch". The phrase, "in the church" in this passage is not limited to the meaning of "assembly". They were identified just with Antioch. Also, Phoebe was a "servant of the church that is at Cenchreae" (Rom. 16:1). Even though she would be in Rome and so unable to "assemble" with the others at Cenchreae, she was still identified with that particular "church". In other words, her being with saints at Rome did not change her identity with Cenchreae. Moreover, Epaphroditus was the messenger of the church at Philippi (Phil. 2:25). Though with Paul at Rome, he was still identified with Philippi.

Acts 15:22 says, "Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men out of their company, and send them to Antioch". "out of their company" meant the church at Jerusalem. That reference identified them with the church at Jerusalem as distinct from the church at Antioch or any other such church.

John said he "wrote somewhat unto the church" (3rd John 9). The particular church is not named, but, a director who controlled the church to whom John wrote is named "Diotrophes". Yet, it is still referred to by John as "the church". John said that Diotrophes did it, so it **must have been possible to do.** "Church" here couldn't mean just God's called out in general, because no one but God could "cast them out of" that. It must be a local entity, or group, with which it is possible to be denied identity or association. You could be "cast out" of that one. It was

the Apostle John who said so!

Another term for these local groups is "flock". 1 Peter 5:1-3 uses "flock" twice where it refers to the saints that a particular group of overseers were to "tend". It says, "Tend the flock of God which is among you...make yourselves ensamples to the flock". This required a close association between these elders and the flock. Each local group was identified as a particular flock with a particular group of elders identified with them alone. This same fact is seen in Acts 20. Verse 17 says, "And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called to him the elders of the church". He said to these elders, in verse 28, "Take heed unto yourselves, and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit hath made you bishops, to feed the church of the Lord which he purchased with His own blood". These men were made bishops in only one flock, the one at Ephesus. The statement, "Take heed to the flock, feed the church", makes flock and church the same. They were elders of the church at Ephesus and no other. The Ephesian flock was connected with that one group of elders and no other.

(7) Church may refer to the local group of saints **distinct from** its elders. As just seen, the bishops, elders, were set apart from the "flock". The Ephesian elders were told to "feed the church". Were they not a part of the church of the Lord? Yes, verily. Why would they be listed as distinct from the church? Because the Holy Spirit was teaching us about the local structure of the church and says in Acts 15:4, "And when they were come to Jerusalem, they were received of the church, and the apostles and the elders". "Church" is noted separately from the apostles and elders. Further, verse 22 says, "Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church". Here the "whole" church is distinguished from apostles and elders. It meant all of the church at Jerusalem other than the apostles and elders. We see this again in Acts 16:4, which says, "They delivered them the decrees to keep which had been ordained of the apostles and elders that were at Jerusalem". Apostles and elders were singled out again. The Philippian letter was addressed to "all the saints in Christ Jesus that are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons" (1:1). This is just like "the whole church" in Acts 15:22; here it is "all the saints". Were not the bishops and deacons also saints? Certainly so. Then, why were they distinguished from "all the saints" at Philippi? **To teach us about the structure of the local church!** Yet, all of them are included in Paul's statement in Philippians 4:15, where he says, "And ye yourselves also know, ye Philippians, that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church had fellowship with me in the matter of giving and receiving but ye only". (It would seem that if there is **only** the universal church, Paul couldn't say no church had fellowship with him except for

Philippi, for fellowship with one would be fellowship with all.) 1 Timothy 3:5 says, "But if a man knoweth not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God"? Isn't "he" a part of the church? Yes. Why is "he" one thing and the "church of God" something "he" is to "take care of"? Well, it's given that way as instruction on the structure of the local church.

### ELDERS AND THE LOCAL CHURCH

There are in the New Testament churches located in specific cities (local churches) who did not have elders; none are mentioned at all. Other churches did have them. But they were all organized to function. They had to be, because they did function.

Though the church at Antioch had prophets and teachers, it so far as the record goes, did not have any elders. Obviously, no one was qualified. Decisions were made about what work was to be done or problems to be solved by mutual consent and agreement of the members (Acts 11:29-30; 15:2). However, when they sent funds for the relief of brethren in Judea, the funds were sent *to the elders in Judea*. When the problem arose about Judaizing teachers from Jerusalem, they sent Barnabas and Saul *to the apostles and elders in Jerusalem*. Those that met privately with them to discuss the matter were the apostles and elders. Also, the apostles and elders wrote the letter and led the church in getting the matter resolved. See, also, Acts 16:4.

Though a local church can function without elders, according to God's wisdom there is something lacking that needs to be there: qualified overseers. Titus 1:5 says, "For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that were wanting, and appoint elders in every city, as I gave thee charge". "Set in order" comes from a word that means "set right or correct in addition" (to what has already been corrected) *ta leiponta what remains* Titus 1:5" (Arndt & Gingrich 292). Wanting refers to "what is lacking, the defects" (Arndt & Gingrich 471). There were some things within the churches of Crete that were lacking and needed correcting by some action of Titus. What Titus was told to do was "appoint elders" city by city. *Appoint* means just that. The term is used in places like Hebrews 5:1 where it refers to Jesus' being appointed high priest on man's behalf, or in Hebrews 8:3, to speak of the high priest's being appointed to offer gifts. Acts 20:28 says the Holy Spirit "hath made you bishops, to feed the church of the Lord". "Hath made" means to "appoint". It is the will of God, through the Holy Spirit, that this arrangement exists, and it is from the Holy Spirit through His word also that we know about it and know what to do. Though a different word is used in the original, Acts 14:23 exemplifies Titus 1:5. It says, "And when they had

appointed for them elders in every church". The word "appoint" means just that.

1 Peter 5:3 says that the flock is "the charge allotted to" these elders/overseers. Thayer, page 349, says it means, "of persons, *hoi kleroi*, those whose care and oversight has been assigned to one (*allotted charge*), used of Christian churches, the administration of which falls to the lot of the presbyters." This looks at the process from the other side. Elders are appointed as elders, overseers, and pastors, and the flock is a charge allotted to their care.

Occasionally, I read of someone saying that the Bible nowhere speaks of "eldership", so they conclude the term must be of human origin to uphold an un-biblical idea. However, in 1 Timothy 4:14, Paul writes of "the laying on of the hands of the **presbytery**". The translators have here transliterated the original term; and thus made an English word out of the original Greek word. The Greek word for elder is *presbuteros*. The plural, *elders*, is *presbuteroi*. The word in 1 Timothy 4:14 is *presbuterion*, which means **all** of the elders *as a group*. In other words, **presbytery** means **eldership**, and the phrase could read "the laying on of the hands of the **eldership**". You will also note that this particular presbytery/eldership was a particular group in one place; the presbytery laid hands on Timothy. All of these facts fits in well with the plural, elders, in passages like Acts 14:23, 20:17, 1 Peter 5:1.

Some insist that "elders" are just older men, who, perhaps, have some experience and knowledge. These people claim there are no special qualifications for one to be an elder: certainly, they say, that there are no special family qualifications to be met. Further, they contend that one just grows into that category by growing old. However, any lexicon will show you a variety of meanings for the word *presbuteros* (elder). Arndt & Gingrich Greek-English Lexicon, page 706, gives as one of its usages, "as designation of an official". Thayer's Lexicon, pages 535-36, also say, "A term of rank or office; as such borne by...among Christians, *those who presided over the assemblies (or churches)*...That they did not differ at all from the (*episkopoi*) bishops or overseers...is evident from the fact that the two words are used indiscriminately." The term "elder", as in passages like Acts 20:17, cannot refer to all elderly male Christians. There are many elderly men who have no experience or knowledge; in fact, some don't have any sense at all. Whenever you say they have to have experience as a Christian and a knowledge of the Bible to be an "elder", you have admitted a special sense of the word! Whenever you qualify some older men as distinct from other older men by certain qualifications and characteristics, you change the nature of the name. The term "elder" then becomes a word of distinction for that type of man. He is not just

an older man; he is an older man with age, experience, knowledge, and judgment to go with it. To him and others, the name "elder" declares a special meaning.

Qualifications are clearly stated in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. He "must" be the husband of one wife, having his children under control, ruling his own house well, along with other character traits. These qualifications are stated clearly enough. On the basis of qualifications given, such men are appointed as elders. They had to be older men before their appointment, but they could not serve as elders until appointed.

We might note the same thing in regard to *deacons*. The word simply means *servant*. We might ask, Are not all male Christians servants? Yes, they are. Yet, there is a meaning of *diakonos* (deacon) that is special, a name for particular men. Philippians 1:1 shows this. Bishops and deacons are mentioned, but the deacons are listed separate from the "saints" at Philippi, and also from the Bishops. Were not the Bishops and other male members servants? Yes, but the passage is showing us a special group of men with the name *deacon*. These men had to meet certain God-revealed qualifications to become deacons (1 Tim. 3:8-13). Deacons had to have some family and character qualifications, just like elders.

Even the word *apostle* had more than one application. It was used in a general sense of one sent, a messenger. You can see this in regard to Barnabas, Epaphroditus, and others in such places as Acts 14:4, 14; Philippians 2:25; and 1 Thessalonians 2:6. Yet, it was a title for the Apostles of Christ, whose qualifications were given in Acts 1:21-26. However Paul was made an Apostle directly by the Lord.

To clearly see the place of elders in the local church, we must look at other terms they are called and specific duties *given to them from God*.

**Bishop:** From *episkopos*, it means "persons who have a definite function or a fixed office within a group...*superintendent, guardian, bishop*" (Arndt & Gingrich 299). Thayer, page 243, says, "*An overseer, a man charged with the duty of seeing that things to be done by others are done rightly, Any curator, guardian, or superintendent*". *Elder* and *bishop* refer to the same person. Acts 20:28 says that the elders at Ephesus were appointed bishops of that church by the Holy Spirit. Both terms are used of the same persons in Titus 1:5, 7 and 1 Peter 5:1-4. While *elder* emphasizes maturity, *bishop* tells us about his function. Their function in the local church is to see that things done there are done according to God's will; that is, its work and conduct are overseen and superintended by them.

Another word with similar meaning is "rule". Two Greek words, translated as "rule", apply to elders. First, *proistemi* means, "Be at the head (of), rule, direct...manage, conduct...Of officials and adminis-

trators in the church". Arndt & Gingrich 713. Thayer, p. 539, says: "To be over, to superintend, preside over...rule". The term is found in Romans 12:8; 1 Thess. 5:12; 1 Tim. 3:4-5, 12; 5:17. The same term is used to tell us an elder must "rule" his own house and "rule" the church. If he is unable to do the one, he certainly can't do the other. The other term is *hegeomai*. It is found in Heb. 13:7, 17, 24. It means, "Lead, guide...of men in any leading position...ruler leader...also of leaders of religious bodies" (Arndt & Gingrich, 344). Thayer, page 276, says, "To be a leader; to rule, command; to have authority over...leading as respects influence, controlling in counsel...with gen. of the pers. over whom one rules, so of the overseers or leaders of Christian churches". These terms are in keeping with the oversight or superintendency of bishops.

**Pastor:** From *poimen*, which means, "A shepherd...of those who lead the Christian churches" (Arndt & Gingrich 690). Thayer, page 527, puts it thus, "A shepherd...the presiding office, manager, director, of any assembly...of the overseers of the Christian assemblies". In the form as *poimaino*, it means to tend, feed, and protect a flock of sheep. Acts 20:28 says, "Take heed unto yourselves, and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit hath made you bishops, to feed the church of the Lord which he purchased with his own blood". This was said to the elders at Ephesus, namely, they were appointed overseers of that church and told "to feed" (*poimaino*) the church, the flock. It is a statement of their function. In 1 Peter 5:2, the elders were told to "tend the flock of God which is among you, exercising the oversight". "Tend" means to "pastor" the flock. The terms go together. Notice that all three terms (elder, bishop, and pastor) are found here, and that they all refer to the same individuals.

So, these overseers, superintendents, the men who see that things that are done by the congregation are done correctly have the role of pastors. The specifications of this role of pastors are not found in the name only. Other passages tell us what it means.

Pastors are to feed the flock Ephesians 4:11 lists "pastors and teachers". A rule of Greek grammar requires we understand this phrase as "pastors who are teachers". 1 Timothy 3:2 requires they be "apt to teach", which means skilled in teaching. Some might be able to give more time and effort to the work than others (1 Tim. 5:17). Those elders who rule well are to be given double honor, i.e., support, "especially those who labor in the word and teaching". Those who give virtually full time to the work are to receive monetary support, according to the next verse.

Pastors are to protect the flock Titus 1:9 says, "Holding to the faithful word which is according to the teaching, that he may be able both to exhort in the sound

doctrine, and to convict the gainsayers". It requires pastors to know God's word, to be able to exhort others with it, and to "convict the gainsayers". The gainsayer is one who "says against" — who opposes and speaks against the truth; thus he is an enemy of truth, a false teacher. To convict means to refute, with the idea of putting the gainsayer to shame. That result requires knowledge in the word of God with skill in handling it and the gainsayer. Verses 10-11 say, For there are many unruly men, vain talkers and deceivers, specially they of the circumcision, whose mouths must be stopped". To "convict" means they must be able to "stop the mouths" of such false teachers. Hebrews 13:17 says that they "watch in behalf of your souls". They are guardians who protect, feed, and encourage the charge allotted to them.

Pastors are to tend the flock, according to 1 Peter 5. This is amplified in 1 Tim. 3:5, which says, "But if a man knoweth not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?" To "take care" requires thoughtfulness and caring as well as making prior provision for their welfare. The same term is used in Luke 10:34-35 of the good Samaritan's care for the injured man. It says, "He took care of him". He paid the innkeeper for his service and told him to "take care of him".

Some insist that elders have no authority **whatever**. However, that observation depends on what one means by authority. Luke 22:24-26 teaches us that no Christian is a ruler over others **as** the kings and lords of the world are over physical nations. Christians are not just abject citizens of the elders' domain. 1 Peter 5:3 forbids them to "lord it over" the charge allotted to them. Thus there are limits to what elders can do.

Nevertheless, they are certainly authorized to oversee and superintend a local group of Christians. They are authorized to take care of, protect, teach, feed, and discipline a local church. God has given them, in these areas, unilateral authority to function. Hebrews 13:17 tells us to "obey them that have the rule over you, and submit to them". **Obey** is from **peitho**. It basically means to "persuade". Thayer, p.497 says, "**To be persuaded, to suffer one's self to be persuaded; to be induced to believe...to listen to, obey, yield to, comply with**". That group of definitions is a wide range of meanings. Members must have a willingness to follow the lead of, to be persuaded by, and to yield to the leadership of the elders. **Submit** comes from **hupeiko**. It is found only in this passage. It originally referred to a combatant who yielded to his opponent. Thayer, p. 638, says, "To resist no longer, but **to give way, yield...metaph. to yield to authority and admonitions, to submit**: Heb. xiii:17." There are areas of elders' duties that require immediate and unilateral action. They just be constantly on guard against false doctrine and its teach-

ers. They don't need consultation with anyone to convict gainsayers. They are to feed, tend, care for, and watch for the flock. These are duties that are given to them by the Holy Spirit, and that they **must** fulfill. They cannot abandon their post as such shepherds and guardians. Other decisions, in seeing that things done by others are done according to God's word, are open to persuading the members of the rightness of that course.

The position of elders is that of ruling by leadership, not of ruling by authoritative command. Their role lies between the two extremes of authority of **lordship** and having no authority at all. The Scriptures clearly show what they are authorized to do.

## ORGANIZATION

The American College Dictionary says that **organize** means, "To form as or into a whole consisting of interdependent or coordinated parts, esp. for harmonious or unified action". It lists **organization** as "a body of persons organized for some end or work...any organized whole...an organism". Under **organism** it says, "Any thing with a very complex structure and parts which function not only in terms of one another, but also in terms of the whole".

God designed the local churches to be organized for unified function. They answer to the definition of "organization". Each one has a definite boundary of members, a specific geographical location, and, where some are qualified, their own overseers for that group alone.

Even the contribution/treasury is the peculiar property of that particular congregation. In 1 Corinthians 16, Paul gives orders to Corinth that a special contribution was to be made for poor saints in Jerusalem to be sent directly to the place of need. The money collected belonged to Corinth. Paul could order the collection, could see to its transport but could not take control of it. He said, "Whomsoever YE shall approve, them will I send with letters to carry your bounty unto Jerusalem" (v.3). The church at Corinth had to approve those to take the money, and Paul said it is "your" bounty, i.e., it belonged to Corinth. Paul also told Corinth, "I robbed other churches, taking wages of them that I might minister unto you" (2 Cor. 11:8). He told Philippi, "No church had fellowship with me in the matter of giving and receiving but ye only" (Phil 4:15). In short, local churches acted as independent units.

Elders were limited in their function to the flock "among" themselves. No group of elders has any function in any other flock than the one where they have been made bishops (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:1-4). Each congregation is local and independent in the taking care of its own business.

## PRESENT REFORM MOVEMENTS

There have been many reform movements through the centuries. Such movements thrive on what they consider gross errors in their churches. They set about to "reform" those churches but usually wind up as separate groups. Two such reform movements, associated with churches of Christ, are the Boston faction of the discipling movement and the individualism movement led by Charles Holt. Much could be said about both movements, but our subject here is church structure.

Boston has very quickly developed a universal structure similar to Catholicism. The universal nature of it is emphasized, while independent, autonomous congregations are denounced. Gordon Ferguson, in the Boston bulletin of June 5, 1988, says:

One real hinderance to brotherhood unity has been an ungodly view of church autonomy. Although each congregation obviously has responsibilities on a local level, we are still **one body**. The idea of a non-cooperative, and often prideful separation from each other as congregations is absolutely non-biblical. It guarantees that the that the world will never be evangelized. It is therefore contrary to the very purpose of God and is **sinful**. The early church knew nothing of such isolation. Each member was a part of one body on a brotherhood basis...In other words, the church is the first century considered leaders to be brotherhood leaders rather than simply congregational leaders...The example of congregational independence, produced by leadership independence, is absent from the pages of Scripture. 'Church autonomy' as we have practiced it is an invention of sinful man — an ungodly tradition...I personally have repented of my pride and erroneous thinking, and am now a **world Christian**.

Kip McKean continues to be the top, worldwide leader (Pope) of this faction. He is being **openly** likened to the apostle Paul, even by himself. Under himself, McKean has now created a small group called the **Focused Few**. The final number of the Focused Few will probably be twelve. The arrangement could more accurately be compared to Jesus and his apostles. The Focused Few, which includes the two Boston elders and lead evangelist, were appointed to control the major continents of the world, one to each. The Boston elders and lead evangelist, as a group, were placed over the United States. Each directs the churches and work in their assigned area. Kip McKean is over the Focused Few and directs the worldwide work through them. However, the Boston preacher and elders are on the same level as the other Focused Few, and this fact effectively demotes the Boston elders from some share in directing the worldwide work to just having authority over the United

States. Yet, Boston still has a prime position and has been designated the "Jerusalem of the movement".

Their concept of a universal church is denominational. It is composed of individuals and congregations, having a universal human head, universal oversight, and a universal treasury. The image is one of complete authority from the top down and complete obedience from the bottom up.

Their error begins with their false position on **discipling**. They compound that error by changing the role of inspired apostles in the first century. The work of the apostles among the churches was a unique condition limited to the first century. Apparently, they think we should have modern men take the place of the apostles in the church structure. We have already seen by New Testament teaching the church structure that abides for today. For a complete discussion of these points, see my book *The Discipling Movement*.

The individualism movement shares **some** similarities with Boston, such as a universal church concept, one church to a city, and tirades against church-owned property, and they both view themselves as the "remnant of the Lord". (See *The Examiner*, March, 1989, p.13). There are other similarities. However, individualists insist that there is no church structure at all, no organization, no treasuries, no "local" churches, and no one with authority in any sense. Everything is "individual". We have already seen some quotations from the movement's paper in regard to these things while, at the same time, we were showing what the Bible teaches. In the first issue of *The Examiner*, p.30, Holt says:

The only 'functional unit' that the Lord has is the **individual!** The individual is God's smallest, God's largest, and God's **only** 'functioning unit'. Jesus Christ, our Head and Ruler, has assigned responsibility only to the individual; and only the individual is accountable before God.

This is the clarion call of individualism. However, it does not tell the whole story of this reform movement. Charles Holt formed an organization called Truth & Freedom Ministry, Inc. It is an entity with a Board of Directors, composed of four men and two women who will oversee the contributions into their treasury and the work the Board has planned. In the first issue of *The Examiner*, p. 15, Holt says:

One important point should be made here: The tax deduction provision is the one and only reason for the formation of this non-profit organization. It is not needed for any other reason...The point is that the non-profit organization is for one purpose only, to provide a legal way for financial contributors to receive IRS approval for their contribution as tax-deductible.

However, when we look at the charter of the corporation, we find that the State of Tennessee and IRS were told:

The purpose for which the corporation is organized are: to preach and teach the Gospel of Jesus Christ as revealed through the Bible, as the word of God, publically and/or privately through the spoken and written word by way of publications, pulpit, preaching and classroom teaching through the broadcast media through recorded messages, whether video or audio, and by any other means lawfully available to spread the Gospel of Christ; to engage in religious, educational, benevolent, and other charitable activities following the example of Christ.

He just described there what we do as individuals and local churches. In passing I want to note that The Examiner has carried many caustic statements ridiculing preachers using "pulpits". Such "pulpits" are denounced along with "pews", "buildings", and even "corporations" and "organizations". Yet, here we have Holt forming a religious corporation/organization that will promote preaching from a "pulpit". Isn't that interesting?

In addition to a corporation/organization called Truth & Freedom Ministry, Inc., they also have an annual Truth & Freedom Forum/Fellowship. The 1988 meetings ran from Wednesday through Sunday. The Examiner for May, 1988, p. 10, gives us some details. Holt says that "those in charge have scheduled me". This meeting had a Sunday service with singing, praying, Bible reading and study, and the Lord's Supper. It also had someone in charge, overseeing the decisions. I'm sure they wouldn't call them "elders". Point (6) of the announcement state:

The Truth and Freedom Forum is for these (only) who are interested in studying these important subject (sic) in the spirit of brotherly love and acceptance. It is not a place for any antagonist nor a time for debate or controversy.

In other words, if you don't agree with them, don't come. There are some other interesting things about the Holt organization we will look at. I have seen several attacks made on the doctrinal errors of this movement. I have yet to see someone deal with the organization of the movement and its implications.

(1) Board of Directors: The Examiner issues, full of attacks on elders, liken them to a board of directors, or board of elders. Such a "board" of elders is condemned by the individualists because they oversee a local church, but a board of directors over their organization is proper. Their board of directors cannot possibly meet the quali-

fications of elders in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. Yet, they oversee the same realm of spiritual work that elders do. Their board oversees a treasury of money contributed by individuals to do work that is planned and carried out by that board. Although elders are limited to just a local church, TFM, Inc. receives and oversees funds from the universal church.

(2) TFM, Inc. Treasury: Constant appeals are made for contributions just like those made in a local church on Sunday. Notice, from the paper cited above, p. 15, the following: "This means that all monetary contributions are fully tax deductible, the same as if dropped into the plate or basket at what is called 'the worship service of the church'". However, they have constant tirades about Christians' contributing into a local treasury, but they want contributions, too, just like those in local churches. Holt says, on page 8, that "the church treasury" is: "a concentration of power; and power often corrupts". Why is that so about a local church, but not so about Holt's corporation?? He wants people to concentrate that source of power in his hands and those of his board of directors. Why should local elders be liable to succumb to such corruption and not Charles Holt and his board?? On the same page, Holt says that early disciples: "did not have a 'corporate treasury', because there was no corporation...They did not contribute money into 'the church treasury' to be used at the discretion of the organization and/or its officials". Though, by his own words, you can't read about a "corporation" in the New Testament. Holt has formed one. It has a corporate treasury, containing money contributed by individuals, "to be used at the discretion of the organization and/or its officials".

On page 15 of his paper, after making an appeal for financial support, he says:

But the number and abilities of these committed supporters are far from adequate to underwrite financially, at least, this publication, other publications planned, and the additional works underway and planned.

They have more work planned an in progress than they have money. Just like the televangelists and radio preachers, he begs for more money to carry on his great work. He doesn't itemize the other work planned, yet he asks people to send him money for them. Some of the "works" were already "underway". These contributors had no say in such works. They only had the choice of contributing or not doing so. All of those "works" had already been planned or carried out by the board of directors. In the same issue of the paper, he spends considerable time and heat as he insists that the only scriptural way individuals can make contributions is

for the individual to **specify** the work he is supporting and  **earmark** his contribution for that work. Holt keeps insisting that you shouldn't give anything to something you don't have control over or, at least, a vote in how it's spent and what it's spent on. Yet, they want everyone to send their (his) human organization money for their board of directors to spend. The contributors are just asked to pay and pray.

(3) **Activation of the universal church:** The Boston/Discipling group has collected all of their followers worldwide, both individuals and churches, into a universal church with a human head. Holt's **individualism movement** has channelled its effort differently. The movement, has a high profile and talented leader in Charles Holt; in fact, if it were not for him, there would be no movement. The corporation he formed was originally named **HOLT MINISTRY, INC.** The only thing they changed was the name; Holt is still the head of it. The movement has a creed, which they have been proclaiming, primarily through **The Examiner**. The movement has an organization with a board of directors to oversee its work, through which the individuals can funnel money to carry out the aims of the movement. The movement has a treasury, amounting to some forty thousand (40,000) dollars a year or more, to use in spreading its creed. The movement has a special annual meeting to ground and solidify the faithful.

Whether or not they succeed in activating the universal church through their corporation is beside the point, for **they would do so if they could.** (By "universal church" I mean all Christians everywhere in our own time. Certainly, no one today could activate Christians from the first century).

We have looked at the structure of the church in the New Testament. There is no authorized organization other than the local church for the collective action of Christians. There is no organization larger than, smaller than, or other than the local church in God's orders. Over the last four decades, we battered the liberal institutional brethren about this very thing. See where they wound up.

Any attempt to channel the universal church through a human institution competes with the local church and thus make the local church just an option. **Truth & Freedom Ministry, Inc. sponsors a Sunday assembly under the auspice of Truth & Freedom Forum/Fellowship, in which they have singing, prayer, Bible study, and the Lord's Supper.** The contribution into the organization's treasury goes on constantly. It is not limited to Sunday. They do what every local church does on Sunday. According to their charter, they carry out a broad program of edification, evangelism, and benevolence. All of this program is under the **oversight** of their **board of directors.** What would they need a local

church for? They have established a human organization to compete with it, BUT WITHOUT any of the restrictions God placed on the local church. In addition, they attempt to accomplish their work by funnelling the financial power of individuals everywhere through that human organization. Holt then tries to tell us that the only reason the organization exists is as a tax dodge!

I'm afraid that many conservative brethren are a lot closer to this same thing than they realize. All agree that individuals can meet together under any circumstance to sing, pray, and study the Bible. Many now insist that the Lord's Supper is just an individual matter, i.e., we can eat it at home, alone, or in any combination of Christians anywhere. So, conservative brethren are having their own Sunday service. They have singing, prayer, Bible study, and the Lord's Supper down by the lake, at a family picnic, or now at some scheduled encampments with our young people. All they have to do is start taking up a collection wherever they are to make it complete. What do they need a local church assembly for? Indeed, I am convinced that some of my conservative brethren think that a human organization can do anything the local church can do, including having a Sunday assembly that mimics a local church. Up to now, the only thing they wouldn't include is the Lord's Supper. That is no longer an objection with them. No wonder we haven't seen much criticism of the organizational activities of the individualism movement. All some want to disagree with is a few doctrinal views.

Far too many conservative brethren see nothing wrong with activating the universal church through a human organization. This fact poses far more danger to us than the individualism movement.

The approach is as follows: if we can't tap the local church treasury for our scheme, then we can make an end run around it and go directly to the source of the money, the individual members! The Pentecostal Televangelists have been doing that for years. We all accept that a local church can have a television program, carrying out the work of evangelism. Yet, could we have our own "Oral Roberts" or "Billy Graham" preaching truth supported by individuals only? All it would take is a dynamic preacher with a lot of charisma, and an efficient organization. However, there is, simply, no authority **even to try to activate** the universal church through a human organization. Even the **attempt** to do it shows a lack of understanding about, and respect for, the Lord's church.

There is no more authority for an individually supported United Christian Missionary Society than there is for a congregationally supported Society. There is no more authority for an individually supported Herald of Truth than for one supported by congregations only. There is no more authority for a publishing enter-