

Biblical Church Structure (Baptist Government)



**By
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Dedication

**To my wife, Janice, whose beauty physically
is surpassed only by her character.**

**Nearly 3,000 years ago a king prophesied
about Janice. The reader may read it in
Proverbs 31:10-31.**

Table of Contents

Forward.....	.i
Chapter 1 Historical Background	1
Chapter 2 Pastoral Office	7
Chapter 3 Office of Deacon	16
Chapter 4 Conclusion.....	30
References	32

Forward

There are many battles across this land being fought in local churches. The enemy, who would destroy us, delights as we destroy ourselves.

After conversing with laity, pastors, and deacons, I find much has to do with a total lack of the knowledge of Biblical instruction on church structure or government.

To the pastor that reads this booklet, I want to let you know, I preached this book in my own church. If you choose to do so, do it in love. Do it as a leader, not as a lord. In my own church, many thanked me and stated that they had never been instructed on this subject. That was a shame when I noticed many were gray headed people who had been in church for years.

If you are a deacon or lay person reading this book, I ask you to consider all Scripture that is given and allow the Holy Spirit to teach you, resisting all the preconceived ideas.

The local church is somewhat like a football team. There is a coach and on the field is a

quarterback and ten teammates. The quarterback is given instruction for the team from the coach and calls the play. Imagine several linemen saying, "We have decided that another is better," or "We have worked out our own game plan and you had better do it our way. We will replace you if you do not." Of course that team will lose, because it lacks leadership. Our Lord Jesus is the coach; and He places a pastor as His quarterback and deacons as His linemen. There is only one leader in the huddle. There is only One that calls the plays. They are the plays sent in by the coach. God has always built great works in the past with leadership.

Finally, upon completing this series in my own church, I came across a book by Dr. Roy L. Branson, titled Church Split. Although I do not agree with all that he wrote, many of the Scriptural truths I have included in this short book are in his volume. The book is two hundred and eighty-three pages and very provocative. He will challenge you to think. He goes into greater detail and extent than I have in this book.

I trust this book will be beneficial to pastors, deacons, and whoever may read it.

Chapter 1

Historical Background

"Pastor, people do not know what the responsibilities of a deacon are. They expect a lot!" The exasperation in the deacon's voice was an honest evaluation. As a pastor, I have a patent reply, "It is not 'what do the people expect' rather, it is 'what saith the Scripture.'" No self-respecting fundamentalist could argue with that answer. Later, upon reflection of this good man's statement, I could not dismiss from my mind, "He is right, people really do not know what is expected of a deacon."

After much prayer and a diligent search of God's Word, it was apparent to me that I needed to teach a series on Biblical Church Structure. In all my years of pastoring I had only made mention, without teaching in depth, this doctrine of local church polity. This book is an outgrowth of that series.

Where does one begin when teaching on Biblical Church Structure? The first step is to consider Church History, not the past one hundred years which have taken on more corporate world policy, but rather the historical and biblical early church polity.

If you are a Baptist, you are not really a Protestant. Protestantism actually got its most publicized beginnings with Luther, Zwingli, Calvin, and others of that era. During that time, the Baptists were considered a cult by these men as much as we would consider Jehovah's Witnesses a cult.

The Baptists were called Anabaptist which means "rebaptizers." How bold and sacrilegious these people were! They actually would not accept infant baptism, nor the baptism of pagan religions, or any other baptism that took place before salvation. "Tell it not in Gath," was David's statement at the announcement of King Saul's death; however, King Saul died a backslidden, out-of-the-will-of-God King. The old baptisms were sacred to these people, but they were traditions that had replaced Biblical doctrine.

Please understand, I am not about to say that the first church in Jerusalem was a Baptist church, or that they named their church Baptist; but I am saying there is a historical as well as a biblical structure.

In the year A.D. 253, Stephen, bishop of Rome, had excommunicated all the bishops (i.e. pastors) of Asia Minor for holding to the view of rebaptizing. He labeled them "Anabaptist" (Newman, 1899). This terminology was used in the same manner as some would use the terms "honky," "wop," or "nigger" today. It was intended

to be a derogatory term, as was the word Christian, in Acts 11:26 where they were first called Christians at Antioch. The Anabaptist, however, accepted the term as an honor. As a matter of editorial, I am personally alarmed at many churches that are changing their name from Baptist church to "Bible Church" or "Community Church." I am honored to carry the name that beams bright red with the blood of the martyrs. Our Baptist heritage is nothing of which to be ashamed. The only shame is that there are those that have deviated away from the biblical policy of the local church as taught in Scripture and the early church. Baptists are not Protestants! They derived much of their doctrinal belief and policy from the Waldenses (Newman, 1899). They were labeled Baptist as early as the second century. They did not protest or come out from something they were involved in. They were Baptist, not Protestants. I am proud of this heritage!

Who were the Waldenses? Founded by Peter Waldo, they were persecuted Christians who fled Rome carrying New Testament manuscripts with them. They went to great pains to copy the Scriptures. For instance, they would count the letters to the middle of the page. If it did not match up with the manuscript, they would do the whole page over. Each would check the other's work most vigorously. As children watch their mother to be sure that the apple pie is cut in even pieces so no one is cheated, in like manner, these checked one another's

work to be sure they were not cheated on God's Word by replacing an errorless document with a document that might have a mistake.

There was also another group that made manuscripts. They were the Alexandrians. The Alexandrians were well-intentioned, but used slaves to copy the manuscripts. Although the slaves were well-educated and knowledgeable men, the same precautions were not taken.

Why make these statements? Our King James Version of the Bible was translated from the Waldensian texts, which have become known as *textus receptus*. Other translations such as the New International Version, Revised Standard Version, or New American Standard are taken from the Alexandrian line of which Bishops Hort and Westcott paved the way. Personally, when a preacher states "a better translation would be..." my question is, "to which text are you referring?"

Although we do not have original manuscripts today, **God promised that His Word would be preserved forever.** Heaven and Earth may pass, but not His Word. That is why biblically and historically Baptists have believed that "forever, O Lord, Thy Word is settled in Heaven." That is, we believe that the Bible is the inerrant, verbally inspired Word of God. If God can birth a child

through a virgin, He certainly is capable of maintaining His Word through the ages, preserving its purity.

If we still had original manuscripts, I am afraid they would be like the Crucifix. That is, the object would be made an article of worship to bow unto and do it homage. Nevertheless, it is the doctrines of baptism, Biblical inerrancy, and our basic fundamentalism that has drawn the ire of many.

Dr. Albert Henry Newman was perhaps one of the most knowledgeable church historian scholars. He labored diligently to study the writings of the early church fathers. On pages 153-156 of his second volume on church history, Newman lists some of the characteristic beliefs of Baptists. The following are part of that list:

1. They believed in the premillennial return of Christ. Note: Newman was not a premillennialist. He listed this as one of their wrong beliefs. It is interesting that God used a man who was not premillennial to show the historical beliefs of Baptists.
2. They regarded the Lord's Supper as symbolical; however, only baptized believers were admitted to communion. In addition, all manners of church discipline and accusation were handled at this time to prevent partaking of the Supper unworthily.

3. first and highest abomination," as well as a device of Satan for the corruption of Christianity. This stand, They uncompromisingly held to baptism by immersion. Not only did the Greek word **baptizo** mean to immerse; immersion also pictured the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. During the Inquisition, up to and during Luther's time, Baptists would be martyred by their religious persecutors by holding them under water in the baptizing position until they drowned. That is one of the many reasons this author is proud of his Baptist heritage and refuses to allow some wayward Baptist today to make him drop the name Baptist. In Calvin and Luther's time, there were various branches of Baptists as there are today; but that has never been a reason to abandon the name.

4. Baptists were conspicuous by their separation from worldliness. They were tea totalers. Although many teach today that total abstinence is a relatively new doctrine, historical evidence proves otherwise.

5. They were profoundly convinced that the practice of infant baptism was not only unscriptural, but was also incompatible with the maintenance of the church of the regenerate. They never wearied of denouncing it as "the pope's

perhaps above all other stands, distinguished the early Baptist movement.

6. They insisted the church be composed of members who were saved and baptized after salvation.

7. They viewed Christ as the sole head of the church with each congregation being autonomous. There was not an ecclesiastical board over them. The pastor led the congregation as an overseer delegated by God. This made the Bible to be the rule for faith, practice, and government, not a religious hierarchy of men, or a written set of man made rules such as a constitution.

8. They were enthusiastically evangelistic. They had a real passion for lost souls; however, their views of separation and baptism made them objects of persecution.

9. They vehemently opposed popery and Catholicism.

10. They did have some embarrassments. For example, some believed war as a carnal act; therefore, in self defense or in defense of their country many would passively suffer even unto

death, rather than bear arms. They were conscientious objectors in many cases.

As one can plainly see, Baptists have always been distinctive and controversial. II Timothy 3:12 says, **"yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution,"** has been a staple of the Baptist church.

The Diet of Speier in 1529 bears this out. The Catholic Church would tolerate the Lutheran; but with Lutheran consent, they excluded Baptists from toleration. It was made obligatory upon all to destroy the Baptist. "It was enacted that `rebaptizers and rebaptized', all and each, male and female, of intelligent age be judged and brought from natural life to death without antecedent inquisition of the spiritual judges." No one seems to have thought the measure too severe, and it was remorselessly executed.

"A Lutheran member expressed the sentiments of his coreligionists when he said: 'Christ again is in the hands of Caiaphas and Pilate' (Newman, 1899). Many Lutherans who were not a part of that council joined to oppose the decree, although they vehemently opposed Baptists.

Chapter 2

Pastoral Office

As interesting as history can be, we must now move on to structure. History is found in books, but church structure is found first in the Scriptures.

In reviewing structure, the first person who should come under the microscope of interrogation is the pastor. Interrogation is the right terminology. After completing this study, I found my carnal spirit shaken and on the verge of resignation as I became more aware of my accountability to God and His judgment. The greatest tears at the Bema Seat may not be those of the Christian that backslid, rather, it may be preachers who did not understand their responsibility and accountability.

Ephesians 4:1 I in telling us that God gave offices to the church mentions: "...pastors and teachers." Literally it means pastors who are teachers. I love the style of evangelists who preach in exhortative terms that make us laugh, cry, or squirm. As pastors we have the responsibility to exhort, reprove, and rebuke, but we are to teach- teach doctrine, teach Biblical principles, and teach soul winning. In short, as pastors, our sermons are not all to be in the style of the Jolly Green Giant or Goliath challenging the people to come down the aisle

for another new commitment. Personally, I believe in having invitations after sermons; but I also understand that some sermons are stated in such a manner that not many will come. Suffice it for now to say the pastor has a responsibility **to teach.**

"But I desire to be a pastor." He that desires this office desireth a good thing. I cannot argue with that, however, I may desire a Corvette which is a good car; but there is also the responsibility of paying for it, the insurance, and controlling the gas pedal (what preacher ever did that!), which would automatically eliminate me. Now read James 3:1, "My brethren be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation."

As many times as I have preached about the judgment seat of Christ and warned believers, I must ask myself if I really believe that it is true. Is there really a judgment seat? Will I appear there? Yes, I believe it! This verse is saying I will have more required of me than those I am preaching to will have required of them. If that does not shake you up, then read II Corinthians 5:10,11. "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that everyone may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad. Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men." "Therefore" of verse 11 refers back to verse 10. The "terror" is not referring to what God is

going to do to men without Christ, rather it is written in the context of verse 10. In verse 10, Paul uses the word **we** which includes preachers. Since we will not go to Hell, the tenor looks at chastening and loss right now. Paul, in short, is saying, "I fear the terror of the Lord on me personally if I do not persuade men!" In I Corinthians 4:15,16, Paul talks of their desires to be instructors when the Lord wants them to be spiritual fathers, that is, soul winners.

Yes, to desire the office of a pastor is a good office to desire; but understand there is a greater scrutiny of your life, and often a more swift and greater chastening in this present life for the pastor. If you do not believe that, you are also lacking in the fear of God.

This thought is further magnified in Revelation 2 and 3. In addressing the seven churches, he starts out each address with "Unto the angel of the church..." Most fundamentalist scholars agree that the Greek word **angelos** (messenger) refers to the pastor. When God speaks to the church, He speaks through the pastor. In Acts 6, it was through the Apostles, who were acting pastors, that He led them to give orders in taking care of widows, and assigning men to do so. In the Old Testament, God spoke through His messenger, Moses, to instruct the people concerning the building of a tabernacle. Moses did not personally do the work, but as God's messenger he gave the orders. This is a pastor's

job, to walk with God and receive His message for the church. God does speak to all the members individually, and they should each walk with Him, but when direction is given to the church as a group instead of individual persons, God speaks through the pastor (Manford, Baptist Bulletin, June 1982).

Revelation 2 and 3 are then addressed to the pastors of the churches. The candlestick represents the church. The pastor is being threatened with the removal of his church if he does not repent. The message is for the whole church, but God is holding the pastor accountable. My personal library contains a book on Revelation by J.A. Seiss. I am pretribulational, while he is midtribulational; but most of his book had great depth and insight (by the way, it was over 600 pages of fine print.) Seiss makes these interesting observations (Seiss, 1909):

1. The pastor is not a Lord. (I Peter 5:2-4)
2. His office is an office of service. The pastor is a servant. The Apostle Paul called himself a bond slave.
3. This service is not to be commanded by man or held accountable to man, rather the pastor is commanded by God and held accountable by **HIM**.

4. The pastor is to hear for the church and deliver the message.

Whatever the situation in the first church, by the end of the first century, the local church was led by one responsible individual, the pastor, who was charged with the oversight of the congregation and was accountable to God for it. Now think of these terms from the Scriptures we have shared: "terror of the Lord"; "candlestick removed"; "greater condemnation." Logically speaking, it would be better to be accountable to a board of men than to God. For what is their terror compared to His? The reader may scoff, but the Scriptures are clear concerning God's judgment on disobedient pastors- whether we believe it or not.

The pastor is accountable to God. The idea that a church functions better with one overseer instead of a board of overseers is exactly what Baptists have historically believed, and what they believe the Bible teaches (Kober, Baptist Bulletin, June 1982.) Hebrews 13:7,17 serves as a sobering responsibility to the pastor, and a like responsibility to the church, the board of deacons, the board of trustees, or any other group within the church.

- 7: "Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the Word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation."

Notice two specific points. The first point is that within the church, there are those as God's servants who are appointed to have rule, that is, to carry out the leading of the Holy Spirit. The leader is the one "who has spoken unto you the Word of God." That is the pastor. The second point is that the people of the church are to submit to the pastor's God-given authority, (See Acts 20:28). Verse 17 therefore identifies who has the rule.

17: "obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you."

This verse gives responsibility to the pastor, the deacon board, trustee board, and membership. Let us consider the people first.

The people and the various boards are to submit and obey their pastor. **Submit** and obey sound repetitious. Actually, they are not. In Scripture, children are told to obey their parents, whereas wives are told to be in submission to their husbands. What is the difference? A child may obey, that is, do it cheerfully or grudgingly. Submission is to place yourself under the authority of another. It is an act one does willingly, however, the authority is then in the hands of another. If I say I will submit and then refuse to submit later in some areas,

I never really submitted in the first place. If I have control to obey or disobey after I submit, then I am in control and have not submitted. One can obey grudgingly, but one cannot submit grudgingly. That is why children obey, and wives submit. Submission takes more maturity. In like manner, the people are to submit to the overseer whom God has designated as the pastor.

Some may say, "Do you think that it is right that the pastor has no accountability?" That statement means two things. First, it means they want the pastor to be the servant of man, not of God, and thereby become their servant. The person that makes that statement will usually be on a board to which they want the pastor accountable. Secondly, it shows that they do not really hold the fear of God in practice. In other words, they really do not believe that the pastor will be judged by God.

The pastor's responsibility is to watch for their souls. He must preach against sin and the ways of error. The pastor will give account. If the pastor preaches it and you did not respond, then the pastor will report it with a broken heart, and that will be unprofitable for you at the judgment seat. Pastor, you have a great, as well as a grave, responsibility. The failures can result in chastening now **and** great loss at the Bema Seat.

Perhaps we would do well to understand some Biblical terms. "Pastor" means shepherding and is the first, most important duty a pastor has. As noted earlier in Acts 20:28, he is to feed the flock of God. In II Timothy 2:2, Timothy was instructed to ordain elders in every city who will "teach." God wants pastors to teach their people.

Pastors are also referred to as elders. It is the same office. Bishop, elder, pastor- all three are the same office in Scripture. "Elder" refers to the dignity of the office, and the maturity in Biblical knowledge of the man. That is why the Scriptures say he is not to be a novice or a new convert. If someone is unstudied in God's Word, how can they feed God's flock? (By the way, feeding the flock is not theological brain teasers or questions with which to create strife. Avoid Bible study groups from which people go away with a combative, argumentative spirit or a holier-than-thou, can't-go-to-church-because-it's-too-shallow-to-feed-me attitude).

The office of bishop is the same as pastor. It means **overseer**. The first duty of the pastor or bishop is to feed the flock. His second duty is oversight. This is where many Baptist church splits are born. The people have not been taught this until there is a problem in the church, then the subject sounds more like a theory than a Scriptural principle.

It is important to look at the Greek rendering of

this word. The Greek word is **episkopos**: in its verbal form it means "to look over, to oversee, to superintend, to exercise oversight or care over." The word generally came from secular life referring to the foreman of a construction gang or supervisor of building construction, which is interesting when one considers that the church is referred to as a building in Ephesians chapter two. Thayer defines the word as "an overseer, a man charged with the duty of seeing things to be done by others are done rightly; any curator, guardian, or superintendent" (Wuest's Word Studies, 1952).

What are we to deduce from this? In hearing from God and delivering to the people, the pastor is a servant; but he is a servant of God, not men, or a board of men. He is under the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ and is directed by the Spirit.

Perhaps this is not the best illustration, but it is close enough. My father-in-law would send his dog, an English shepherd, to run up the side of a mountain on his North Carolina farm to "fetch" his milk cow. I enjoyed watching the dog pick out the one cow from the entire herd, bark at its hooves, and drive it back down to the barn. The herd may not have understood nor appreciated what the dog was doing. The cow would start bawling. Certainly she was upset with the dog. But when she arrived at the barn she got "udder" relief and a can of grain which the other cows did not receive.

Sometimes we feel that the pastor is barking at us, not realizing he was sent of God; and although it is humbling, there is a reward in it for us. As the fanner did it for the good of the cow, so God gives us a preacher whose message might upset us, but it is for our own good. Do you really believe God is in control? God can remove that preacher at any time.

The Old Testament priestly office gives us an analogy of the pastor/people relationship. The high priest offered for himself and then the people. Remember, he had to offer for himself as he was still under the rulership of God and he had better not enter within the veil without first offering for himself. The other priests and the people would be equivalent to the board of deacons and the membership. They could not order or direct him in this, they could only bring the offering, they could not make the atonement offering.

JESUS CHRIST IS THE HEAD OF THE LOCAL CHURCH! The pastor is the under shepherd. As the barking dog that looks like the sole authority to the cows, the pastor is sent and is in big trouble if he does not carry the message and do the job. The pastor operates not in his authority, but **God's** authority. That is Scriptural and not theory.

The elder servant of Abraham's household commanded the other servants. Gehazi, the elder

servant of Elisha, commanded other servants. In both cases the servants were answerable to their masters not to the other servants; although other servants were answerable to them. As the unjust servant in Jesus' parable, the other servants could go to the master and complain; but they could not order the elder servant. By the way, Gehazi was given more responsibility. He misused his authority, and was struck with leprosy. That is also an illustration for each pastor to heed.

Perhaps your question is, "Who called the pastor? Perhaps we should have a new vote of confidence!" You did not call the pastor, the Holy Spirit called him. Acts 20:28 states that "...The Holy Ghost hath made you overseers..." The pastor is not made an overseer by a committee, board, or church, but by the Holy Ghost. A church led by the Holy Ghost extends a call, and a pastor led by the Holy Ghost accepts. I did not accept my present pastorate because the people called me. It was a result of days of fasting and all-night prayer.

Notice the command to the flock in I Timothy 5:1,19: 1.

"Rebuke not an elder, but entreat him as a father; and the younger men as brethren," 19.

"Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses."

Since these are warnings from God, the fear of God should prevent you from rebelling or speaking against

your pastor, not the fear of your pastor. The pastor had laying on of hands, that is, the anointing. Psalms 105:15 states: "...Touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm." A vote of confidence is then highly unscriptural.

Of course, this will anger some people. Perhaps it is because we do not believe God will judge those men. God will! If a pastor is involved in immorality, yes, he should be removed. He should be confronted, brought before the church and removed, but not by "railing accusation" without proof. Those bringing accusation without proof should be disciplined for their behavior.

In Acts 23, Paul rebuked the high priest for having him slapped in the face, which was contrary to the law. When Paul understood that he was the high priest, he apologized because Scriptures state "...Thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people." In Matthew 23, Jesus told the disciples to "observe and do" whatever the scribes and Pharisees commanded because they sit in Moses' seat. In Matthew 23 and Acts 23, the authorities are in left field, yet notice the respect and honor commanded. We have rebellious children because we have rebellious churches. Rebellion towards God's servant in authority is equated with rebellion toward God.

Much more needs to be written about the pastor/people relationship. This portion is to acquaint us

with the Scriptural points of the local church. God has an order for the local church and wants everything done decently and in order. That leads us into our next chapter and the role of deacon in Biblical church structure.

Chapter 3

Office of Deacon

In the last chapter I stated that the pastor is a watchman and overseer. A watchman, as regards the spiritual oversight of the congregation; and an overseer, as regards the physical and financial decisions of a church.

Living near Gainesville, Florida, much is boasted about the University of Florida Gator football team. There is no lack of license plates, banners, bumper stickers, pins, or clothing that honors the Gators. Do not say anything good about the University of Georgia Bulldogs to the Gators. The Georgia Bulldogs are not a popular subject with Gator fans. In like manner, the pastor/deacon relationship is not a subject that stirs sentimental and fond memories for many churches. That is why I did more in-depth study of the history, Greek, and technical commentaries for this book. This chapter comes at the expense of study and prayer with the hope that men will look at "what saith the Scripture" and not "but I was always told..."

In the last chapter 1 mentioned the word submit. It is from the Greek word huppotasso. It is used in speaking of the wife and her submission to the husband,

and the child to the parent. It is also used in the pastor's relationship to his people. The Greek word *hupotitho* used in Hebrews 13:17 means "to yield, be weak; to surrender; submit self" (Strong's Concordance).

In the New Testament, there were only two offices for a local church, pastor-singular and deacons-plural. The pastor and board (or group of deacons) are never in Scripture placed on an equal level of authority. Never is a pastor indicated as being accountable to the Board of the local church (Hebrews 13:17). By the way, if you really believe in the chastening and judging hand of God, that is more fearful than being accountable to a board of men. Those that would say, "Do you think it is right that the pastor has no accountability?" show a total lack of knowledge of God's judgment or they simply do not believe it.

I checked the history of the early church after the passing of the apostles and the writings of the New Testament. Newman makes the following statement:

Being listed in number and as holding an office instituted by the Apostles, were, in accordance with the same hierarchal tendency, elevated in rank above layman. Their duties consisted chiefly in the collection and administration of the finances of the church **wukrtheaction of the bishop** i.e. pastor. They assisted the bishop in exercise of

discipline. They attended to the preservation of order during the religious services and assisted in the celebration of the Lord's Supper and in the administration of baptism; but they were not permitted to administer either ordinance alone (Newman, 1899).

In Acts six the work was delegated to the deacons by the Apostles. With the passing of the apostolic office, pastors had the role of delegating work to the deacons. I Timothy three addresses the pastor first, then deacons. In Titus one, Titus is instructed to ordain pastors. No mention is made of deacons. One can start a church without deacons, but one cannot start a church without a preacher.

Perhaps an understanding of the word would help here. Deacon is a transliteration from the Greek word **diakonos**. In other words, the word was not translated, it was merely given an English sound. Its primary definition is "an errand runner." Usually, preachers and teachers will tell you the word **deacon** means "servant" and that is true in a general sense. **But**, in the Bible there were stewards. The stewards were also servants, but "steward" describes what kind of servant. A deacon is a servant, but the word **deacon** tells us what kind of servant: an errand runner. To be an errand runner, you do errands for someone in authority, or with delegated authority. For example, the elder servant of a household

had delegated authority from the master, just as a pastor does from our master, the Lord Jesus Christ. The elder servant would call for an errand runner to get something that was needed, and the errand runner was to obey. That errand runner was called a deacon. This was the purpose in the early church. The pastor would see a need and then have a trusted deacon that would do the work the pastor delegated, in order for the pastor to give himself to prayer and study. If the pastor is having to prepare defenses of his decisions instead of spending time in prayer, those deacons are no longer deacons. They are seeking leadership as Satan tried to do with God. Before jumping to an angry conclusion, however, I believe many men sincerely look on the office of deacon as a board of authority that keeps the pastor right; because they have never been instructed in righteousness and doctrine concerning this manner. They have been reared to believe the deacons run the church.

I Timothy 3:13 tells us that "they that have used the office of deacon well purchase to themselves a good degree..." It is a good degree because they meet the qualifications laid out in I Timothy 3:8-13 and Acts 6:1-4. In this day, there are few men in our churches who are full of faith **and** the Holy Ghost.

The need for deacons unfolds for us in Acts 4:34-37, which tells of the possessors of houses and lands

selling them and bringing the amount for which they sold them **In total** to the Apostles. Please understand that they did not sell the houses they lived in and move to the streets, rather they sold their land rentals and house rentals. By chapter six, the Grecians are murmuring that their widows were being neglected in the "daily ministrations." Meals were given twice a day, and some monies as needed. The Grecians felt their widows were not receiving as much food in the daily distribution as the Jewish widows who spoke Hebrew (Willmington, 1981). With that background, notice verse 3: "Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business." That was seven men for a church of over eight thousand people. The Apostles appointed them over the business. In other words, they gave them their instruction and laid their hands on them in prayer. Being "over" the business meant that the lay people were to follow their instructions. But they were **over the people, not the Apostles or pastors.** Imagine Peter saying to a deacon, "I want you to stop serving the tables now and run an errand for me to Joppa." The deacon replies, "I am not going to do that. I am a deacon now. You need to give an account to me. You are now accountable to this board." Of course that did not happen because each deacon understood that he was an errand runner. A careful reading of III John will show that Diotrephes tried to take the authority upon himself. I believe Diotrephes to be a deacon. He sought to run the

church. He was not satisfied being over the business the pastor designated to him, nor would he humble himself in submission to pastoral leadership.

An example of authority changing the direction of a local church is found in I Corinthians 11, when Paul tells the church to stop having those daily suppers at the church and eat at home.

In a nutshell, Scriptures are telling us that New Testament deacons, as well as early church deacons, had their work delegated to them by the Apostles and later the pastors. There is not one Biblical shred of evidence that it was vice versa. Nowhere in the Bible is it stated concerning the deacons, that they were a board with weekly, monthly, or quarterly meetings. Early church writers also gave no hint of a board of deacons mapping out strategy for the church spiritually or physically. Remember, the council in Acts 15 was made up of Apostles, missionaries, evangelists, and pastors. History and Scriptures do show, however, that deacons did work by pastoral direction. The people recommended, then the pastor would accept their recommendations and lay hands on them in prayer and delegate work to these men as the need would arise.

Since I am a Baptist, allow me a chance to hit some of my pastor friends directly between the eyes. If you disagree with the following, I trust you will not throw

out this entire book based on this one disagreement. There are churches who are Baptist in doctrine, but are dropping the name "Baptist." Some refer to their churches as a "Bible Church." As stated earlier, we have a good historical heritage, and we should be honored to carry the name; however, some pastors view these churches without Baptist in their name or deacons in their churches as a non-church. Some Baptist churches will not accept their baptisms. But if that non-Baptist pastor is directing people to serve tables while he gives himself to study, he may be more Scriptural than you. Some of these Baptist churches have deacons that do not meet the qualifications as outlined in Acts 6 and I Timothy 3. Some of our Baptist pastors are more accountable to the board rather than the Lord, instead of the board being accountable to the pastor. Some of us have to prepare monthly defenses of our decisions. My brothers, be slow to speak, bite and devour.

The work of a deacon in the New Testament era was basically benevolent. As a matter of fact, it is hard to find Scriptural directives in any area for deacons besides benevolence. They could not decide what they wanted to do against the will of the pastor. A deacon can and should act in the authority designated to him by the pastor, just as the pastor acts in the authority designated to him by God. The deacon has as much right to go against pastoral instruction, as the pastor has to go against God's instruction.

Perhaps the best way to understand this is to tell you how I approach this in my own church. The following are actual examples.

I gave a deacon authority to go to our bookkeeper to ask any questions he wanted, and to review any or all of our books. At any point I could have pulled him off that detail. If I had, he would have stopped at that point. Of course, I did not call off this trusted man.

I gave two deacons authority to question our ladies concerning the Mother-Daughter Banquet, just to be sure funds were being used wisely. They reported back to me, but understand, they had the authority to check it out.

I know very little about construction. We were going to remodel our church. I knew what I wanted, but I did not know how to do it. After seeking counsel, I placed a deacon in charge of carrying out the business. He telephoned contractors, inspected work, and organized volunteers. He would come back from time to time to ask if we could spend money for something, and he kept me abreast of what was happening. He had the authority to talk to people and make decisions. I would have spent little time in prayer if I had not assigned him this work. He had authority, yet he was an errand runner.

I have a deacon that is in charge of constructing a living Christmas tree in our choir loft each year. For two days our men and ladies come together and build this beautiful tree. He is the foreman. He tells them what to do. It would be just as wrong for a member to disobey the authority designated to this deacon by the pastor, as it would be to disobey the pastor (Hebrews 13:17).

In meeting with my board, I allow them to make some decisions. For example, if we add new missionaries, buy a bus, repave the parking lot, add a roof or an expensive improvement, then they make that decision. The deacons also determine my salary and that of anyone related to me.

There are decisions I make of which our deacons are only informed. For example, our Christian school orders thirty to forty thousand dollars of books each year. Because they work their own jobs, the deacons do not know enough about purchasing books to make this decision. I make the decision on health insurance for our employees. I also make decisions on salaries. Again, I know the weekly workings, and cannot have a group of men meeting one or two hours a month make decisions of this magnitude.

I know the question that is jumping around in your head like a pin ball- what about the accountability of a pastor? Can he steal us blind? In our church we have a

double-entry bookkeeping system that was implemented at my direction. Our deacons are given a monthly financial report. In addition, we have an outside CPA who does a monthly compilation report. The deacons are allowed to ask me or the bookkeeper about any discrepancy. This does not give them authority over me to direct me in the use of these things, but it provides for things honest. If they did see something fraudulent, then they would definitely need to begin corrective measures, even to the point of pastoral removal if he had been stealing.

What about a dictatorial pastor or one in false doctrine? What is the deacon's responsibility?

Before answering those questions, understand this first. Any position, be it pastor, deacon, Sunday school teacher, maintenance worker, music or youth worker, or bus monitor, is a position in which its privileges and authorities can be misused, abused, and become a vehicle for criminal activity. Many safe guards can be established, but no earthly device is fail-proof.

"Love thinketh no evil," and "to the pure, all things are pure." There comes a time when we must commit people and position to Jesus thfist and trust **Him** to keep the purity. Christians cannot continually mistrust each other or listen to those that would bring doubt upon others constantly.

"But what if we have a crooked pastor? Don't we need to make the position accountable to the deacon board?" Put the question on the other foot. What if you get a bad board? Should there be a group they meet with monthly to be accountable for their actions? Remember the Scriptures! Matthew 23:1-4 and Acts 23:1-5 both portray bad leaders, and yet the Biblical injunction is to obey them for their office sake.

Our church constitution, and most church constitutions, provide for a way to remove a pastor. I Timothy 5:19, 20 tells us not to receive an accusation against an elder unless it is presented by two or three witnesses who have witnessed or can prove the charge. Verse 20 then instructs us to "...rebuke before all, them that sin that others may fear." Verse 20 being in the same context of verse 19 would then use the word them to refer to elders or a pastor. We do not pretend that adultery, stealing, and drunkenness are not there when they are. We are to remove such a one, and yet do it in love seeking to restore them (Galatians 6:1). This is to be done not to restore the office, but the right relationship in Christ.

Perhaps at this point you ask, "What is the point of a pastor meeting with his deacons?" Simply stated it is to inform them of needs and to instruct them in carrying out that which would take the pastor away from God's Word. A pastor meeting with his deacons was **never-ever**

intended to be a time for a board to instruct him or to hold him accountable for decisions he made that month. Scriptures are our guide, and not one time do we see in Scripture a group of deacons usurping pastoral authority.

A famous radio commentator states emphatically, "words mean things." Overseers, which always refers to the pastor in regard to local church, and "errand runner", which refers to deacons, are words that say what they mean and mean what they say. A pastor needs men ready to work when he meets with them; rather than men who are always raising questions, or are ready to complain because they do not make decisions. Perhaps one of the reasons so many have "run ins" with deacons, is because in the New Testament early church, the pastor met only when there was a need, and only with the men he needed.

Those meetings seemed to be centered on decisions about relief and missions. The New Testament and the early church never places administrative authority for funds and other actions involving deacons on an equal level with Apostles or with pastors. "Boards" are modern inventions that took on the structure of modern industry. This was not God's plan for the church. I know that there are those reading who would disagree. My only response is - show me Scriptures that show deacons are the authority and not the errand runners. Show me the Scriptures that show board meetings.

(Please note: Acts 15 is a meeting of Apostles not deacons.) There are other denominations that take the word **baptize** to mean "sprinkle", when it clearly means to immerse. I am afraid some are doing the same thing with the word **deacon**.

It may be that one of the problems of today is that deacons are being selected by their position in life. Some own their own business. Others are very successful in their field of vocation. Still others are well-educated. There is nothing wrong with having these lots in life; however, sometimes it is harder for these men to be good deacons. They are used to giving orders and having them followed, or they do jobs their own way. They are not used to having their way turned down or not being the authority. In Numbers 16, the Levites, Korah, Dathan, and Abiram are Old Testament equivalents of New Testament deacons. They carried the ark, put the tent up and took it down, and they had the responsibility of maintenance in the outer court. Then they wanted equal authority with Moses and Aaron. In the New Testament, a deacon took offerings, kept behavior and order in the church, visited the sick and fatherless, and attended to benevolent needs. His authority was not pastoral. In Number 16:8,9, Moses tells the sons of Levi that it is not a small thing that they have been separated from the congregation to do the work they do. Their work is important. In like manner, it is not a small thing to be an errand runner. God has separated deacons from the

congregation to do this very important work. That indeed is a good degree. In God's sight, it is more important that a deacon look to the welfare of the widows, than to vote on spending fifty thousand dollars. That is, **God's eyes**, not man's.

Some may say, "You want the deacon to hang his brains on the hat rack before coming into the meeting?" No! a thousand times No! A deacon should have the brains to trust the Scriptural outlay I have shown you, rather than to think he has a better plan than God for the operation of a local church.

Deacons should be flexible, agreeable men, but not necessarily "yes men." A "yes man" cannot only be a "yes man" to the pastor, he can be a "yes man" to another deacon. That other deacon can sway his vote every time. He is almost a puppet in the other deacon's hand. I think it is necessary to define a "yes man" because it means different things to different people. A "yes man" is someone who will hear something that goes directly against Scripture, or is morally wrong, but will not oppose it because that is where the pastor stands. If a deacon sees a real problem he needs to mention it. On the other hand, a deacon must understand that there are diversities of administrations, and this is where the word **flexibility** comes into play.

My dad pastored for nineteen years before me at Central Baptist. I took his place. We are doctrinally in sync. However, he would administrate differently than I do. That does not mean I am wrong or he is wrong. It simply means God has given us differing gifts of administration. The deacon is not to oppose administration, but he is to oppose sin.

If a deacon does not agree with a pastor because his administration is different than the last pastor, and he is set to stand against the new pastor; he may then have a demon spirit of opposition and rebellion. Since Satan is a deceiver, the deacon will probably not be aware of it.

This does not mean that a deacon cannot make suggestions or give a pastor reasons why he thinks something will not work. In my pastorate, I have been thankful for men that do speak up. A pastor would be foolish not to listen to suggestions and other input. The main thing to do is avoid anger if the pastor does not receive your suggestion.

One that critically looks for wrong or undermines the pastoral decision making on a consistent basis may have a greater problem with humbleness and a servant's attitude. To be effective in this world, the church should be united with a spirit of unity. The pastor needs to lead the flock as we fight against the gates of Hell.

The government in Daniel's day tried to pass a law banning prayer. In Peter's day, the government tried to tell the church it could not witness. Today there is a move to take authority from the church as it was outlined in the Scripture. The government wants boards to lead the church instead of pastors. The question we must face is the same one Peter faced- Is it right to obey God or to obey man when their orders conflict? In Biblical church government, **we must obey God before the state.**

Satan's goal is to divide us and devour us. He wants to take away our joy and peace so we do not serve the Lord with gladness. Remember this! You may disagree with another's viewpoint, in church, or on the job, or at home. There is nothing wrong with having a difference of opinion. If it leads to contention, strife, division, and the matter is not doctrinally or morally wrong, then the Lord has provided a chain of command, and we must defer to the delegated authority above us. God delegated authority that there be not wars among us when we disagree. Ours is to learn a submissive attitude toward their decisions. Look at your differences with someone over you. If they are not moral or doctrinal, and you are wrestling with bitter feelings and bad thoughts; realize Satan is attacking you to bring anger, wrath, division, discord, and judging of one another's motives.

Now let us go back to the Scriptures and view some of the work I believe was carried out by deacons.

II Corinthians 9:5 tells of sending brethren before Paul's coming to take a collection. These men, I believe, are deacons. They did not decide to take the offering, nor how it was to be designated. They went as they were sent. It is impossible to read anything else into that portion rightly.

Keep in mind, the deacon was originally brought in to settle strife, not to create it. They were given specific directives by the Apostles and later the pastor. What they did in Acts 6 is the same things deacons do today on fellowship days at church. In Bible days these gatherings were nearly every day. The pastor would give authority to a deacon to direct others in this work. They would act in this delegated authority.

If I were to walk into traffic and try to direct it, some would obey. If anyone did not obey, there would be little I could do about it. But if I have a law enforcement uniform, and I have been deputized, then I can do something about it; because now I am acting in the designated authority of the law. This is what a deacon does; however, nowhere in Scripture are they ever delegated by God as the final authority in matters of physical, social, or financial in the church.

Now I have given you both the Word of God and historical precedent of the early church. I did that to show the reader that this is not some new doctrine or

private interpretation. Yet in a large number of churches across this land, many would not be convinced. In our church we have blue carpet. Someone might want to argue and say it is black. No matter how much they argue, or how convincing the theory, the carpet is still blue. On Sunday, I will preach a salvation message. People will walk out without Christ. That does not change the truth—they only reject it. In like manner, I can only present Biblical truth; the accountability is up to the hearer. Dear Reader, you may say, "You haven't convinced me" or "I don't care what you say." You are not rejecting me, you are rejecting the counsel of God's Word.

I do not have an axe to grind, or a score to settle. My purpose in writing this book is to instruct in doctrine and righteousness in order that we may learn to submit ourselves to God and one another; and that we may carry on the battle in unity and love as we seek the church's goal to evangelize, baptize, and teach to observe whatsoever **He** has commanded. Remember, our enemy is not flesh and blood. You may not like your new pastor's personality, but remember he is God's gift to your church (Ephesians 4:11-12).

Chapter 4

Conclusion

Every part of the body is important. We do not look at our appendix everyday and give it a lot of attention or thought; but let it rupture instead of doing its job, and you will be aware of its need. There are many members in the body, and they are all important. This is true of the physical body, and it is true of the local church. Although some parts receive more honor, every part is important.

You may be called of God to do janitorial work in your church much the same as Bezaleel was called to do construction work in Exodus 35-37. If you are called to be a janitor, you would be stepping down to preach.

Our responsibility is to understand that God wants order in the church. He designed the order. The reason for God giving this order as outlined in this book is so the church can concentrate on its mission instead of "who is in charge."

When the Lord said, "A new commandment I give unto you," he was placing it on the level of the Ten Commandments. To break it is just as bad as breaking one of the Ten Commandments. That commandment was to love one another. That will include submitting

ourselves each to the other. It will include placing yourself under the authority of a pastor, or under the authority of a deacon who has been delegated authority by his pastor.

Our need is to concentrate in unity on Christ. The world and the spirits working in governmental agencies are trying to strangle the church every day with either legislation, more immorality, or humanistic teaching. It is important that we trust the way God has set up the government of the local church, and proceed to fight the fight God wants us to fight. As James says, "From whence come wars and fightings among you?" Our battle is not with one another; yet if Satan can keep the house of the local church divided, we will never attack the gates of Hell.

We have a mission. **Every** Christian is to evangelize and then edify. We must allow for diversities of administration. I believe God brings in other men to prove whether or not we are following the Lord or a man.

Some can teach Sunday school. Others can work in a ministry. Still others can do yard work, or repair work and general maintenance. There are those who are elderly who can no longer go on visitation or teach because they are often sick. What can these people do? God has given them a great ministry of prayer. Prayer for

their pastor, prayer for their deacons, prayer for their church.

Here is one of the purposes of this book: By understanding church government, we will cease to war among ourselves and carry on the mission of the church. In Acts 2, they met for prayer, doctrine, and fellowship. They went house to house. May we endeavor to do the same in **one_a_c_cord**. As more local churches of the last days "heap to themselves teachers having itching ears," let us be faithful and unified with the church that preaches sound doctrine and seeks to be a glorious church without spot, wrinkle or any such thing.

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