

of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching” (2 Timothy 4:2). Preaching is a serious undertaking because a preacher affects not only his own soul, but the souls of his hearers as well. Therefore, the Bible urges preachers and teachers to be cautious (James 3:1) and also prescribes a remedy to remove impenitent false teachers from their sphere of influence (Romans 16:17-18).

The infant church of the first century was armed with an array of miraculously inspired religious instructors: “*And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ*” (Ephesians 4:11-12).

The apostles no longer walk the face of the earth; the temporary, miraculous, but partial knowledge has been replaced with written revelation (1 Corinthians 13:8-13; James 1:25), and inspired prophets are also extinct today. However, pastors (elders), preachers (evangelists, ministers) and teachers equipped with the Bible are still charged with “*the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.*”

Conclusion

The differences in organization between the church about which one can read in the Bible and contemporary churches are striking. Yet, few souls seem aware of these vivid contrasts. Divine name, divine origin, and divine organization are each crucial, identifying marks of the blood-bought, divine church (Acts 20:28). The one true church of the Bible also practices a divinely given worship, as well as divine doctrine. All of these are key fingerprints of the church Jesus built. The churches of Christ today practice first-century Christianity in the present century by imitating the divine characteristics of the early church.

We plead with all who would follow Christ to turn back to the New Testament pattern, and to follow only what is written in Scripture.

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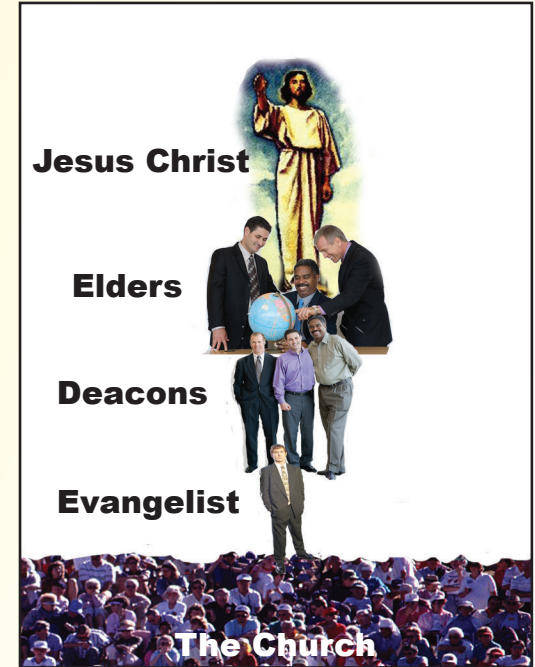
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The New Testament Church Is Divine in Organization

Louis Rushmore



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Unlike many contemporary churches, the New Testament church has no chain of command through which newly formed dogma filters down to the masses. It has no clergy, earthly headquarters or human creed. Each congregation is autonomous and independent from every other congregation. The New Testament church is governed in matters of doctrine solely by God's Word, overseen by elders, served by deacons, taught by preachers and teachers, and supported morally and financially by all its members.

Heavenly Headquarters

Instead of an earthly head or a select group heading the church, the Lord's church is headed by Jesus Christ alone. Jesus has all authority in heaven and on earth (Matthew 28:18 NKJV). Further, the Lord is the Head of the body, the church (Ephesians 1:22-23). Jesus Christ has not surrendered His throne, but is ruling now (1 Corinthians 15:24-28). Not on earth, but from a heavenly headquarters, Jesus exercises His Headship over the church (Ephesians 1:3; Philippians 2:9-11; 20-23; Hebrews 8:1; Acts

7:55). The degree of and place from which Jesus Christ demonstrates His authority is concisely noted in Ephesians 1:20-23: *“Which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come. And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.”*

Plurality of Elders

Two or more elders were appointed over each fully organized church in New Testament times (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5). Scripture always refers to a plurality of elders serving a single congregation and only the church over which they were appointed. Appointment of elders was not regarded lightly, but men were carefully chosen to oversee a church only after the congregation ensured those candidates complied with divinely mandated qualifications (1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-11). Noting that Christ is the Head of the church and the qualifications for elders are enumerated in Holy Writ, elders may not make new doctrine, only see that the New

Testament is faithfully practiced in their congregation. In matters not addressed by Scripture, elders and the church may exercise liberty (e.g., time of services, place of assembly). Inspiration also calls these men “bishops” (1 Timothy 3:1), “the presbytery” KJV or “eldership” NKJV (1 Timothy 4:14), “pastors” (Ephesians 4:11), “overseers” (Acts 20:28) and “shepherds” (1 Peter 5:1-4).

Deacons: Special Servants

Though every member of the church may and should minister to the needs of brethren and non-members alike, deacons are special servants of the church. Unlike the elders, their degree of responsibility is departmental and lies in service areas. For instance, different deacons may direct benevolence, the treasury, maintenance of facilities, evangelism, the Bible school or some other area of concern requiring special attention. Deacons also are chosen after determination that they meet divinely given qualifications (Acts 6:1-6; 1 Timothy 3:8-13).

Preachers and Teachers

Gospel preachers (Romans 10:14-15), also called evangelists (Ephesians 4:11; 2 Timothy 4:5) and ministers (1 Corinthians 3:5), are charged to *“Preach the word! Be ready in season and out*

